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Fig. 1: ‘The Carpentry Department’, Church of Scotland Mission, Kikuyu Station, c.1910. In Photographic Collection of Dr John William Arthur, Edinburgh University Library, File: ‘Phot ill. 93’.

Missionaries, the State, and Labour in Colonial Kenya c.1909–c.1919: the ‘Gospel of Work’ and the ‘Able-Bodied Male Native’ by Tom Cunningham^{ID}

THE COLONIAL MISSIONARY IN THE WIRE CAGE

During three days in mid September 1917, in a wire-fenced holding pen in South Nyeri District, East Africa Protectorate (or ‘Kenya’ as it was renamed in 1919), Dr Horace Philp of the Church of Scotland Mission carried out medical examinations on thousands of African men. Philp related the events for *Kikuyu News*, the Mission’s fundraising magazine, in a 1918 article titled ‘The Wire Cage’.¹ It was wartime and the colonial government was intensifying its drive to recruit the colony’s ‘able-bodied male natives’ for the Carrier Corps, the body that supplied porters for British forces in German East Africa.² In a week of frenzied activity, Philp wrote, the thirteen chiefs of South Nyeri District, together with their headmen and the tribal police, plundered their locations, seizing 9,000 men. The

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men were taken to a military camp composed of temporary shelters and a massive barbed-wire cage. Over the next three days, the men were corralled into the cage, 1,000 at a time, where they sat on the ground in columns under the watchful eyes of police guards. One by one, they were ushered into a large grass shed. In the shed they met Dr Philp.

'Their blankets were thrown to the side', wrote Philp, and the men – many of whom 'had never even seen a stethoscope before' – were 'compelled to submit to examination'. Those who tried to escape were 'suddenly pounced on' by the guards. 'It was fatiguing work', Philp wrote, 'at times the pressure of the stethoscope in one's ears got beyond endurance.' In the end Philp inspected 7,112 men. He certified 2,283 of them as 'fit men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five' and therefore suitable for the Carrier Corps. They were despatched, on foot, to the military depot. Over 3,000 Philp rejected as 'totally unfit for work of any kind'. They were deemed too old, too young, or too frail. Hundreds were badly afflicted with yaws, a chronic and debilitating tropical disease. Philp's hospital assistants dressed their ulcers. The worst cases were detained and taken to Tumutumu mission hospital for further treatment. The remaining 2,000 or so fell into the category of too unwell or too old for the military, but strong enough for farm work. They were passed on to a labour transit camp where they faced recruitment to work on the private estates of the colony's settlers.

It is perhaps not surprising that at the centre of this coercive, extractive state exercise to compel Africans into work there stood a missionary doctor; after all, the role European Christian missionaries played globally in the extension of colonialism and capitalism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is well established. Yet there remains something intriguing, uncomfortable, and remarkable about the missionary's presence in the wire cage and, specifically, the interaction between his work of medical healing and the violence of this situation. Moreover, when it comes to the historiography on labour, settler capitalism, and colonial state power in Kenya's central highlands in particular, curiously little attention has been paid to missionaries.

This article is a study of the work the Church of Scotland Mission performed to shape and maintain the labour system that emerged in colonial Kenya at the start of the twentieth century. More broadly, it is about the complex relation between 'healing' and 'harming' in the colonial setting, examining how an ostensibly benign, 'gentle' programme of Christian 'improvement' became entangled in a colonial network of incarceration, coercion, and abuse.³ Our focus is the decade between from about 1909 to about 1919, the second decade of formal British colonial presence in Kenya's central highland interior, or 'Gikuyuland'. This was a period which saw the intensification of settler-capitalism in the colony, the escalation of labour demands upon the country's 'able-bodied males', and the augmentation of the colonial state. What follows traces the Church of Scotland Mission's role in these transformations. It is a story of how, in pursuit of their promise to enhance and 'uplift' human life, the missionaries of the CSM ended up maintaining and perpetuating a labour system they knew was violent, destructive, and exploitative.

The CSM's role was by no means limited to this single episode of labour recruitment during a wartime state of exception. After initial remarks on the historiography on labour and the state in colonial Kenya, this article provides a focused study of the CSM, turning first to the Mission's particular conception of bodily salvation and its ideology of work. Second, it offers an examination of the Mission's government-funded technical apprenticeship scheme which was aimed at converting Gikuyu boys and men into not only modern Christian subjects but imperial citizens and skilled workers: men who, with their 'healthy', 'productive', bodies and obedient and industrious dispositions, contribute to the development of a productive colony. Third, the article turns to how the Mission sought to influence colony-wide labour legislation, explaining the series of legal-political interventions it made to convince the colonial government to regulate the settler-capitalist economy, improve working conditions, and expand biomedical provision to Africans. Finally, the article considers the critical moment in 1919 when the Mission gave institutional support to controversial colonial legislation making labour compulsory for the colony's 'able-bodied men'.

As early as the start of the twentieth century Gikuyuland had a reputation for the horrors of its social structure.⁴ Like the rubber-producing regions of Belgian Congo and the mines of southern Africa, Kenya's highlands have enduring notoriety for the scale and intensity of state control and labour scandal. The history of labour in this region has received a great deal of scholarly attention, including studies that have been foundational in Africanist historiography more widely.⁵ The prevailing concern of this scholarship has been the punitive, extractive character of the Kenya colonial state and its relation with the colony's settler capitalist economy. Seminal in this regard were the 1979 and 1980 essays by John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman which underlined how the imperial state's promise to 'protect' and 'develop' what was termed 'native life' was routinely undermined by its reliance upon a settler economy structurally set up to exploit Africans.⁶ David Anderson and others have since provided detailed social histories of settler capitalism in Kenya's highlands, examining the horrendous working conditions, poor rates of pay, and violence intrinsic to its functioning.⁷

This literature corroborates Frederick Cooper's broader observation that, while in Europe in the early twentieth century states and employers were taking an active interest in promoting the welfare and health of labour, such concerns were not at this time integral to the workings of labour regulation in Africa.⁸ As Ben Scully and Rana Jawad have remarked of colonial states in Africa in general, the Kenya colonial state chronically under-invested in social policies – in health, education, housing, and welfare. Instead, the state pursued 'anti-social' policies, such as taxation and land dispossession, aimed at *reducing* the security of the population to compel them into wage employment.⁹

The Kenya colonial state was unusually well-developed when it came to imposing labour demands on the population, identifying and recruiting labourers, and punishing those who tried to evade the system.¹⁰ But its power was largely coercive: not so much subtly diffused throughout the population as constituted by sudden moments of action and sporadic, often violent, campaigns.¹¹ It is for this

reason that Lynn Thomas has contended that ‘colonial power in Kenya alternated between extreme brutality and minimalist control’.¹² To borrow Ranajit Guha’s famous phrase, the Kenya colonial state had ‘dominance without hegemony’.¹³ Its signature was the barbed-wire holding pen – that spartan but effective architecture of incarceration which Philp found himself in, in September 1917, and which would be redeployed on an unprecedented scale during the British counter-insurgency campaign against Mau Mau in the 1950s.¹⁴

This is where missionaries become important to the story. The Kenya colonial state remained, to borrow Cooper’s imagery, on the ‘outside’, maintaining law, order and security, with ‘weak instruments for entering the social and cultural realm’, and displaying little interest in organizing the inner lives of its subjects.¹⁵ The state, as Lonsdale put it, ‘wielded force outside daily life rather than persuasive power within’.¹⁶ The missionaries of the CSM undertook to occupy the spaces in which the state was absent. They strove to situate themselves between the colonial state and the colonized population. Seeking to alter internal dispositions and instil new habits, they attempted to have a much closer, more intimate relationship with colonized subjects than the official state agencies. The missionaries of the CSM endeavoured to establish their stations as key social institutions in Kenya, operating within and below the official state to legitimize imperial rule and to legitimize the new economic relations inherent to settler capitalism. They *were* interested in promoting health, productivity, education, and welfare. These were core facets of their Christian mission and underpinned their involvement in the labour system.

Kenya’s missionaries have not been ignored by historians. In ‘The Moral Economy of Mau Mau’, Lonsdale alerted us to the importance of mission stations as settings where deep conversation between a modern Protestant ‘work ethic’ and an older, pre-colonial labour theory of value took place. More than ‘mineshafts or factory floors’, mission schools – Lonsdale argued – were Kenya’s “‘class’-rooms’.¹⁷ But Lonsdale’s concern was principally with African political imaginations.¹⁸ He only gestured to the role missionaries played in histories of labour compulsion; we catch only fleeting glimpses of the missionaries’ role in darker histories of state power and colonial violence. The textured empirical account which follows can be read against the backdrop of a recent wave of new colonial histories of missionaries elsewhere in Africa which positions missionaries as important – if ambivalent – agents of colonial power. The CSM’s mission stations in Gikuyuland were locations for a distinctive register of colonial power, where there was a complex relationship between protection and subjection, improvement and control, healing and violence.¹⁹

TAKING THE GOSPEL OF WORK TO COLONIAL AFRICA

To understand the role the CSM came to play in Kenya’s colonial labour system, it helps to consider first some aspects of the ideas and mentalities that animated their Christian mission. A helpful place to start with this is Dr Philp’s first article for *Kikuyu News*, written in March 1910, when he first arrived in East Africa Protectorate – seven years before the episode in the wire cage. Stepping across the threshold of the Kikuyu mission station for the first time, Philp wrote to readers in

Scotland, he was struck by *'the contrast'* (his emphasis) between what he saw within and 'what one sees outside its boundaries'. In the villages surrounding the station, Philp wrote, one sees 'native women toiling up the hills' with huge loads of firewood and maize while 'young warriors' paraded around 'with their spears and clubs, very much the dandies' and old men lounged like 'lords and masters', holding 'parlays and drinking'. Inside the station, meanwhile:

you find not only the Gospel of the Grace of God being taught morning and night of each day, but also on six days of the week *the Gospel of Work*, which is as needful as the other. You see men and boys learning to use the plough [...] to plant a vegetable garden [...], to fell trees, and quarry stones [...] It is just this kind of work which has *given this Mission the grip* which one feels it has.²⁰

Several aspects of this passage are important. First, and most broadly, we catch a glimpse of the fact that Philp and the missionaries who populated the CSM at this time shared a conception of Christian salvation which was physical and bodily as much as it was idealistic and spiritual.²¹ They carried from Scotland to Gikuyuland established Christian conceptions of the human body as simultaneously sacred and profane. It needed to be beaten into submission and trained, its urges and desires disciplined and tamed. To honour the body was to master it, refine it, and maintain its purity. To do this was to honour God.²² These inherited ideals were calibrated and reworked through modern nineteenth and early twentieth-century biomedical, industrial, and capitalist notions of physical fitness and (re)productivity.²³ Philp was one of a cohort of missionaries who joined the CSM around this time, including several missionary women. These missionaries were modern Scottish Presbyterians. They were doctors, nurses, teachers, and artisans; they were outdoor enthusiasts, athletes, and teetotallers.²⁴ Among them were Scottish rugby international, mountaineer, and medical doctor John Arthur (who headed the mission from 1911 to 1937) and bicycle enthusiast Marion Scott Stevenson. They believed that to be Christian was to honour and maximize one's anatomical endowment and (re)productive potential; it was to be 'manly' (read: industrious, responsible, hard-working, productive) and to be 'womanly' (read: modest, obliging, maternal, reproductive); it was to be 'healthy' and 'hygienic' as determined by modern biomedicine. Dr Arthur, Dr Philp, and Marion Stevenson became leading figures in the campaign to outlaw the practice of 'female circumcision' in Kenya in the late 1920s, a campaign which drew heavily on biomedical discourse.²⁵

'Work', as Philp makes explicit, occupied a central, sacred place within the Mission. As popularized by Victorian reformers in mid nineteenth-century Britain, the 'Gospel of Work' enjoined Christians to invest their worldly labours with religious energy. By working they simultaneously improved their selves and the wider body politic, materially and spiritually. The kind of 'work' that the Mission valued involved the acquisition of technical skill, the use of tools, the application of effort; they valued work that was instrumental and conscious,

performed to a plan and a schedule; and they valued work which could generate profit for employers within a capitalist economic order. This ethos was engrained in the CSM's heritage. Philp and his peers consciously saw themselves as part of a Scottish and Protestant mission that was over a century old and which strode the globe, modernizing the 'backward races' through labour, allowing them to enter the modern world.²⁶

By the time Philp landed in 1910 this intoxicating future was only just beginning to make its presence felt in the region. Although Kikuyu station had been established twelve years previously, in 1898 (the first mission station in Kenya's highland interior), the project had yet to get off the ground. Scottish missionaries had first arrived in 'Kenya' a generation earlier in the late 1880s, as officials in the Imperial British East Africa Company: the spiritual and the secular had been combined from the start.²⁷ Their initial ventures sought to replicate the Scottish mission enterprises initiated by David Livingstone in Bechuanaland and Nyasaland in the mid nineteenth century.²⁸ But both failed. Their first scheme, a commercial coffee plantation at the railway trading post of Kibwezi, failed because the site turned out to be malarial. The second was a settler-style cash-crop estate at the more temperate site of Kikuyu. Under the leadership of old Nyasaland hand David Clement Scott, the mission planted wattle and potatoes for export, offering tenancy to African men and their families in return for their labour and, Scott hoped, conversion.²⁹ When Clement Scott died in 1907, however, the crops had rotted, the mission was in financial ruin, and there existed only a single convert.³⁰

Philp's arrival narrative occludes Kenya's white settler economy which was in 1910 rapidly expanding. There had been 600 registered 'Europeans' in the colony in 1906; by 1911 there were 3,175.³¹ The colonial government, meanwhile, was establishing a boundary around Gikuyuland, converting it into a 'native reserve'. This was conceived as an 'African area' segregated from the neighbouring 'white highlands', overseen by a spartan field administration of British officials and run by a network of government-paid chiefs and headmen.³² Unlike their nineteenth-century predecessors, the missionaries of the 1910s worked in a colonial context characterized not by open frontiers and concessionary companies, but by a territorial, administrative colonial state. The 'Kikuyu reserve', then, was hardly the 'untouched frontier' as presented in Philp's arrival narrative. It was a modern technology of demarcation and control, employed to levy labour. Chiefs and District Officials – the men who embodied the state in the reserves – were empowered to call upon the labour of any adult male 'native' who was not in wage-employment in order to work locally, unpaid, on 'government works' projects, such as path-cutting, bush-clearing, trench-digging or as porters.³³ In 1906 a hut tax of three rupees per hut had been introduced in the Kikuyu reserve with the express intention of 'encouraging' men out into 'voluntary' employment for wages.³⁴ By the end of 1910 as many as a third of the Gikuyu men living in Kiambu had spent some time in paid employment: for the government, as carriers or in railway construction, for example; on sisal plantations at the coast; or on farms in the highlands, as tea-pickers, labourers, or 'houseboys'.³⁵

Also obscured in Philp's account is Gikuyuland's precolonial labour history. During the two centuries before Europeans started arriving in Gikuyuland, migrants from throughout eastern Africa had been making their way to the region. With crowbars and axes they had hacked living spaces out of its fertile wilderness and established a 'forest-economy', mixing hunter-gathering with pastoralism and settled agriculture.³⁶ These small communities generated a distinctive labour theory of value, in which certain kinds of work were accredited with moral virtue: '*wira*' connoted 'good work' which enabled social reproduction and enhanced the fertility of people, livestock, and land.³⁷ Before missionaries landed and started preaching the 'protestant work ethic', there was an established (though not uncontested) normative social order in Gikuyuland which assigned status to men who, through their sweated labour and self-mastery, disciplined the unpredictable wilderness, accumulated wives, herds, and land, produced children, and redistributed their wealth to the needy.³⁸

Although several of the missionaries of the CSM were to become extremely knowledgeable about this history, they also tended to share the general colonial perception of Kenya's highland interior as a space that, until their arrival, had existed outside history, home to a people who were, as such, barely social beings. 'The natives have no conscious philosophy of life', wrote the CSM's ethno-linguistic expert Arthur Barlow, 'the great Ascent of Man through this life to a higher existence they know not of. Their horizon is bounded almost entirely by their immediate animal needs.'³⁹

But if Philp's arrival narrative is useless as an ethno-history, it is illuminating as to the CSM's mentality. The 'Gospel of Work' was understood as something that would be applied to the 'raw native' who inhabited the domain the missionaries called 'the village' – a catchall term to describe life beyond the boundary of their stations within the Kikuyu reserve. 'The village' was, to the missionaries, a corrupting environment. It was home to a social order which, although the inhabitants did not realize it, was blocking them from fulfilling their moral and physical potential. In missionary eyes 'the village' was in the grip of a superstitious, gerontocratic, social order which encouraged 'communal' identities and the slavish adherence to custom, rendering inhabitants passive and inert.⁴⁰ The productive capacities of children and the reproductive power of young men and women were controlled by a lethargic class of senior elders.

'The village', from the missionary point of view, impeded the formation of industrious habits and 'able-bodies'. To the clinical gaze of the missionaries, its living spaces were 'ill-ventilated', 'overcrowded', and 'insanitary'; they were taken as both evidence of native docility and its cause.⁴¹ Dark and smoky family huts smothered individuals, preventing them from recognizing their selves, also spreading debilitating diseases such as yaws, intestinal parasites, and phthisis (TB).⁴² The Mission's aim was to make a series of material and spiritual interventions in 'the village', advancing capitalism, medicine and Christianity to 'emancipate' Gikuyu people from the tyrannous grip of custom and nature, turning them into 'transformers of their environment' rather than subjects of it.⁴³

AN APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME

The 'boys' Philp saw quarrying stones and learning to handle a plough when he arrived at Kikuyu station in 1910 were 'technical apprentices', enrolled on a training programme designed and funded by the colonial government. There were nine such apprentices at Kikuyu station in that year, training to be carpenters, stonemasons, or '*shamba* boys' (farm hands). They were sharing the 'boys' dormitory' (at that time a commodious stone outhouse with windows, but no electric light; blankets, but not yet individual bunk-beds) with five hospital trainees, six teacher apprentices, and twenty-four other 'boys', some of them in their twenties and thirties, whom the missionaries deemed not yet ready to be enrolled on a formal apprenticeship programme.⁴⁴ Among them was Kamau wa Ngengi who, half a century later as Jomo Kenyatta, would become the first President of independent Kenya. Then aged perhaps thirteen, Kamau was an orphan with a breathing affliction Dr Arthur diagnosed as tuberculosis. He was treated in the mission hospital and primed for an industrial apprenticeship; but he declined this option, choosing instead to take up paid work in Nairobi for a European employer.⁴⁵ During the 1910s most of the CSM's 'boys' had little prospect of acquiring wealth, health, or self-mastery.⁴⁶ They had sought out the mission as a refuge, a place of healing, and an entry-point into the emergent wage-economy.⁴⁷ It was also a place where they could lay claim to masculine adulthood by undergoing the CSM's medicalized version of an initiation ceremony, circumcision by a hospital assistant under the supervision of church elders beside the Nyongara river which cut through Kikuyu station.⁴⁸

Launched in 1909, the apprenticeship scheme was an explicit exercise in collaboration between the Mission and the government. For the government, the scheme saved it from the work of actually delivering the kind of 'applied', 'rural', 'skills' education it believed Africans needed. For the CSM, the scheme provided an opportunity to authorize their 'Gospel of Work' by linking it to the official machinery of the colonial state. It was an opportunity for the Mission to carve out an influential role in the emergent labour system producing and supplying skilled workers. The mission's primary function would no longer be as a commercial venture, as under Clement Scott, but as a training institution. It continued to generate some revenue from cash-crops but principally its funding now came from three sources: government grants, donations from *Kikuyu News* subscribers, and the endowment fund of William Mackinnon, founder of the Imperial British East Africa Company.⁴⁹

Through the apprenticeship scheme the Mission envisaged their stations as crucial nodal points within the network of colonial development, connecting the state to the ground and linking the reserves to the settler economy. As the CSM's Henry Scott declared at a ceremony to mark the opening of the scheme: 'By means of a sound religious education along with industrial training and discipline, our young men will be prepared for their future life's work as useful citizens of the colony' (Figure 1).⁵⁰ While they saw their teacher and hospital apprentices primarily as future educational, medical, and evangelical agents in the Kikuyu reserve, the 'technical apprenticeships' were intended for the most part to

supply private settlers with skilled workers.⁵¹ Dr Arthur put it like this: 'The missionary can help the settler'; the settler can tell the missionary 'what type of workman is in request'; the missionaries, who had 'in their hands, the moulding of the mind and of the conscience while still in the plastic stage', would know which 'boy can be most safely recommended' and 'do much towards meeting [the settler's] demand'.⁵²

The missionaries embraced their role as agents of the colonial state. They explicitly regarded their work as providing crucial legitimacy for the governing structures of British colonial rule in the reserve. They seized opportunities for their stations to broadcast British power.⁵³ Take, for instance, the 1910 ceremony to launch the scheme, which centred on laying the foundation stone for the school building. The missionaries invited Chief Kinanjui and his headmen, who brought with them two hundred guests. The missionaries attempted to awe their visitors through technological prowess: the pelton wheel turbine; piped water; electric light; telephone; two-storey buildings. The Union Jack was on display. In his sermon Dr Arthur spoke about 'our Sovereign' King George V and his Governor Percy Girouard.⁵⁴ In 1912 the Provincial Commissioner, forty prominent settlers, and several chiefs with their entourages attended the ceremony at Kikuyu station to mark the opening of the Mission's carpentry workshop.⁵⁵ In 1916 the Governor of the colony, Henry Conway Belfield, on a visit, singled out the mission's 'industrial' endeavours for special praise.⁵⁶

The apprenticeship scheme was based on the premise that Africans occupied a lower stage of development than Europeans and needed the external intervening agency of Europeans to stimulate them into productive work. On Kenya's plantations this belief was giving rise to excited settler fantasies about the exploitability and expendability of African labour.⁵⁷ Among the missionaries of the CSM, by contrast, it generated a conception of Africans as in need of protection, improvement, and salvation.

When the apprenticeship scheme was established there were already five prisons in the Kikuyu reserve.⁵⁸ Institutions which aspired to 'train' and 'cure' were only just beginning to appear. They were all in the hands of Christian missions. Of these, only the Anglicans in the Church Missionary Society came close to matching the CSM's enthusiasm for government-backed programmes in technical work.⁵⁹ A 'carceral' logic was central to the operation of these schemes. Like prisons, they operated on a basis of confinement, registration, and hierarchical authority. The government scheme dictated that technical and hospital apprentices, for the duration of their three years of study, were formally indentured to the Mission. They were indentured under the provisions of Master and Servants legislation, introduced in East Africa Protectorate in 1906. It made their absconding from the mission a criminal offence, punishable by flogging, fine and/or imprisonment.⁶⁰

For each apprentice indentured the Mission received £2 from the government, plus a further £5 for each who passed the annual government exam.⁶¹ The missionaries were aware that this scheme might be seen by home supporters in Scotland as a contravention of the Mission's promise to 'liberate' Africans from

'slavery'. Master and Servants legislation had been phased out of British law in the metropole during the late nineteenth century.⁶² But the missionaries framed the enforced deprivation of liberty through indenture as a necessary initial intervention in their longer-term project of 'freeing' Africans. In particular, the system of indenture was envisaged as imparting a first lesson in European time-work discipline. As Philp himself explained in 1911, after taking up his post as superintendent of the CSM's newly established Tumutumumu station, sixty miles further north into the Kikuyu reserve:

it gave a certain assurance that six months ahead, perhaps in a specifically busy time, [...] these boys won't suddenly say, as the majority of natives working for Europeans say at sometime or other, 'I want a rest', and off they go, just as they are beginning to learn things, for an indefinite holiday.⁶³

Separated from 'the village' and contained on site, apprentices were subjected to a regime intended to dramatically transform their bodies and minds. Upon being admitted to the dormitory a new scholar was issued with a uniform and soap.⁶⁴ Their heads were shaved and their ear lobes – commonly pierced and elongated as part of initiation rites of childhood – were stitched up.⁶⁵ Every school day began with a bugle call followed by drill before washing, prayers and breakfast with its lessons in table etiquette.⁶⁶ There were regular medical examinations where the apprentices were measured and weighed; they were provided with three daily meals.⁶⁷ It was compulsory to bathe once a week.⁶⁸ The Mission endeavoured to inculcate in their apprentices a new awareness of the body as a *trainable*, productive instrument: an object that should be managed by keeping fit and healthy.

Further, the missionaries endeavoured to stimulate in their adherents new material wants from which would emerge a desire to work for wages. They sought to encourage their apprentices to understand themselves as 'liberated' through their self-subjection to God and to empire. Apprentices received three hours of classroom schooling – in the history and geography of the British Empire, in arithmetic, and in reading and writing in English, Swahili and Gikuyu, which the missionaries were in the process of codifying. English was the language of instruction, for English, as Dr Arthur explained, was the 'business and commercial language' of the colony.⁶⁹ Apprentices then proceeded to the hospital, the junior school, the quarry, the workshop, or the farm for training in their assigned 'vocation'. The formal training for the technical apprentices comprised three hours per day, five days per week, according to a syllabus laid out by the government's Public Works Department which occasionally sent inspectors to the mission stations.⁷⁰ Training focused on basic skills: planing wood, operating a band-saw, making furniture, cutting and chiselling stone, laying out building foundations, pruning coffee plants, ploughing a field with an ox-cart, and so on. Two evenings a week were reserved for football; two for evangelistic tours in the surrounding villages.⁷¹ Apprentices were enrolled into the catechumenate, undertaking a three-year course of Christian instruction in preparation for baptism.⁷² They were also inducted into the Boys' Brigade: three

evenings a week they would don their uniforms, hoist the Union Jack, practise marching formations, and sing '*ngaĩ wa gwatha thi munene witu*' (God Save the King).⁷³

The story of the technical apprenticeship during its first decade of existence is one of grand ambitions but humbling frustrations. The missionaries found they could not impose their will upon their scholars so easily. The apprentices would not handle tools the 'proper way'; European farming methods were not easily transferable to the soil of Kenya's highlands.⁷⁴ Although their numbers increased, the Mission struggled to attract the kind of boys and men they most desired. The most 'able' were seeking wages elsewhere; in the villages parents refused to release their children from household production.⁷⁵ In moments of candour some missionaries even aired their suspicion that the dingy, homosocial setting of the boys' dormitory was not conducive to 'proper manliness'.⁷⁶ By December 1919 the missionaries in Kikuyu had produced only twenty-two fully qualified carpenters, fifteen masons, and twenty-three agriculturalists, and at Tumatumu even fewer.⁷⁷ Of the fifty-nine apprentices turned out at Kikuyu station, three had died. Three were out of employment, judged by Dr Arthur to be 'useless specimens'. Of the fifty-three in employed work (thirty-five on European estates, nine working for themselves, nine in mission employment, four in government employment) many were doing menial work or work unconnected to their trade, as labourers, cooks, servants, or clerks. More significantly, the CSM's belief in the inherent dignity of labour was being called into question by Kenya's growing settler economy. And young Gikuyu men were learning fast that entering the colonial labour system, as missionary technical apprentices or otherwise, was rarely empowering.

THE BID TO CONVERT THE COLONIAL STATE

Within a few years of the establishment of the apprenticeship programme, the missionaries were coming to regard the nascent colonial labour system with growing unease, increasingly alarmed that it was not just the 'customary' environment of 'village life' that was a hindrance to the 'Gospel of Work'. In May 1912 sixty young men died from malaria within a two-mile radius of Tumatumu station, from a disease new to the region.⁷⁸ In 1913 the Kikuyu reserve was hit by a cerebro-spinal meningitis epidemic, another new disease which entered the region through young men returning from migrant work. It 'swept through Kikuyu country', wrote Dr Arthur, 'like a devastating wave of death, carrying off in its train thousands of young and useful lives'.⁷⁹ Two CSM apprentices died from it.⁸⁰

The Mission's ethical project of Christian uplift thus came also to encompass a series of interventions aimed at modifying the colonial labour system at large. Their project was carried out not only on a 'micro' level within the mission stations, aimed at converting Africans into productive labourers; it was also a 'macro' project directed at transforming the colonial state itself. Seeking to introduce principles of restraint, regulation, and welfare to the labour system,

the Mission aspired to convert the colonial state from its minimalist, utilitarian, condition, into a more totalizing, more invasive apparatus.

The Mission's first interventions of this order came in the testimonies provided by Dr Philp and Arthur Barlow to the government's *Native Labour Commission* of 1912–13. When this mobile commission arrived at Tumutumu mission station on 5 March 1913, to collect oral testimonies from Philp and Barlow, it had been on the road for five months, gathering evidence from over 200 employers, colonial officials, and dozens of African workers.⁸¹ The inquiry was uncovering widespread labour abuse. The Commission heard evidence of labour recruiters preying on the elderly, the infirm, or children, and of workers being herded into overcrowded trains like cattle.⁸² They heard of workers being starved into skeletons by employers, or being beaten so thoroughly their 'flesh was hanging in ribbons'.⁸³ A medical officer described working conditions for migrant Gikuyu workers on the Swahili coast as 'inferior to what was provided for slave labour a generation ago'.⁸⁴ Whether they were landed English aristocrats or impoverished Boers, many of the country's white immigrant farmers had been attracted to Kenya by the promise of freedom from government interference. Though they may have relied on state intervention for their land and their labour, their farms and estates were regarded as private domains where, as one critic put it, 'they could do as they liked'.⁸⁵ Some of the settlers who gave evidence to the Commission declared confidently that Africans were inherently inferior to Europeans.

Philp and Barlow, by contrast, were forthright both in their condemnation of the abuse of African labour and in their plea for tighter state regulation. They framed the labour system as not just morally wanting but also economically wasteful. The Mission shared the widespread settler fear of a future labour shortage and agreed that the apparent unwillingness for African men to engage in wage-labour was a problem. Their proposed solutions to these problems, however, were quite different insofar as they essentially entailed making the system both more humane and more regulated.

Barlow reckoned 'the maximum amount of labour' was being obtained from the area around Tumutumu station with 'a great proportion of the able-bodied men of this part' out working for Europeans 'for at least six months out of the year'. The demand for male labour, he said, was demoralizing the social structure of 'village life': it was placing an extra burden on wives and children who were having to perform more work to maintain households in the reserves. To pay hut tax, some fathers were sending even their youngest sons out to do wage work; very young boys were having to perform heavy manual labour on European estates, Barlow said, which was damaging their 'bodily development'. Alluding to sexual promiscuity, he warned the Commission of 'the problems that arose when fathers and sons' absented themselves from the home.⁸⁶

Coercive methods of labour recruitment on their own were insufficient, costly, and potentially destructive, Barlow told the commission. Settler mistreatment of employees and employers defaulting pay were undermining the Mission's effort to inculcate a 'work ethic' among Africans, he said. Barlow called for a reform of

the taxation and labour recruitment systems, to reduce arbitrary abuse. He wanted British officials to have a greater presence in the reserves. Further, he advised government to invest more in missionary schooling: 'Christian education, with its precepts of diligence and its ennoblement of labour', he contended, would be 'a great factor in increasing the wants of natives.' 'As they learnt to read and write and appreciate better ways of living', African desire for 'clothes, books, lamp-oil' and other goods would increase, and 'as their needs multiplied so would their call for employment become stronger.'⁸⁷

Philp, meanwhile, estimated that forty percent of the adult male population of Nyeri District had become 'incapacitated by disease' – not only with yaws, which had long been endemic, but new conditions: scabies, phthisis, dysentery and malaria.⁸⁸ Deaths from these conditions amounted to 'murder', Philp argued, because they were 'absolutely preventable'. Preventing these deaths by draining malarial swamps and carrying out a systematic yaws vaccination programme, he maintained, 'would be an enormous gain to the labour market'. Like Barlow, he emphasized the instrumental value of mission schooling which, with its invocations to discipline and fitness, made Africans 'easier to handle by Europeans and [...] much readier to see the reason for taking quinine'. Philp further recommended an array of state initiatives: the establishment of a native medical department staffed by a cadre of well-paid government medical officials; for all Africans to be medically examined before engaging in employment; medical checkpoints on labour transit routes where migrant workers could be 'doused with quinine' as they entered or left the reserves; the lifting of import duty on drugs, dressings and surgical instruments.⁸⁹

Philp and Barlow were not, of course, criticizing settler capitalism as such, still less colonial rule. To the contrary, they were seeking to augment the colonial state and enhance the settler-led economy. Their ambition was to legitimize the new economic order: to close the gap between rulers and ruled; to make government more present on the ground in the reserves; and to tame the exploitative excess of settler capitalism in Kenya so as to ensure the country's survival and growth.

WAR

Before the colonial government could act on any findings of the Commission it was engulfed by the war in German East Africa. The war intensified colonial exploitation of African labour and exacerbated devastation in the Kikuyu reserve. There was a labour emergency as the government sought to compel thousands of African men into labour: as porters supporting British forces in Tanganyika, or on settler estates to bolster food production. The Native Followers Recruitment Ordinance, introduced in 1915, provided for the compulsory conscription of 3,000 labourers per month for the Carrier Corps. The Ordinance sought to support the settler economy by exempting from conscription any African male engaged in registered employment on European farms; this proved an effective mechanism for directing Africans into settler employment.⁹⁰

During the war the Mission become further entangled in the colonial system. Philp was seconded to the role of chief medical officer for Kikuyu Province. Part

of his brief was to gauge the extent of available labour in the colony, and to evaluate the overall health and fitness of the labour pool. But, as he emphasized in his first annual report for the government, published in February 1917, Philp was overwhelmed by the scale of this task. Titled 'The Labour Problem', this report was a blistering attack on the spartan, punitive, character of the colonial state.⁹¹ Given there was so much demand for African labour, why, he wanted to know, was there nobody 'in the country who can give an adequate estimate of the amount of labour required?' He called for the creation of a government statistical service.⁹² Why was it a 'common thing to hear a person say that "there are millions of Kikuyu in the country: what does it matter if some of them are killed off?"' he asked.⁹³ 'In Europe', Philp wrote, 'every effort is made to check the mortality from disease and to maintain a fit population'. In the East Africa Protectorate, meanwhile, 'efforts in this direction are so meagre, as far as the native population is concerned, as to be almost negligible'. By failing to secure and nurture African well-being, the government was in fact damaging the labour pool. It would lead to the 'inevitable financial failure of the firms that have large sums of British capital invested in them'.⁹⁴

Wartime labour recruitment propelled the colonial state into a more invasive relation with its subjects and drove the extension of a new colonial regime of visibility over the colonized population.⁹⁵ Philp in his new role played a key role in this, carrying out thousands of 'compulsory *en masse* examinations' like the one detailed at the start of this article. By July 1917, two months before the episode with which we began, he had examined 16,754 adult men; by February 1918 he reckoned he had examined 'in the most thorough manner', the entire 'native male population' of Nyeri District (about 30,000).⁹⁶ Enclosed and exposed within barbed wire cages, subjected to the stethoscope, Africans were in these exercises made visible to the state in terms of their capacity to perform productive labour.

During these examinations, Philp became accustomed to the 'appalling amount of physical incapacity for work', rejecting as 'unfit' more than half the men he examined.⁹⁷ The 'finest and fittest' men meanwhile were dying, disappearing, starving, or contracting serious illnesses, while serving in German East Africa. Philp's Mission colleagues at Kikuyu station established relief hospitals for returning carriers and were overwhelmed by cases of fever, dysentery, malaria, and pneumonia.⁹⁸ The worst was still to come. The rainy season anticipated in late 1917 did not come and between January and August 1918 the Kikuyu reserve, already stretched to maximum productive capacity, was hit with a devastating famine.⁹⁹ Just as this was abating the global influenza pandemic struck: the missionaries reckoned that as many as 100,000 Gikuyu died between 1917 and 1919, roughly ten percent of the population.¹⁰⁰

THE QUESTION OF COMPULSION

On 7 August 1919 General Sir Edward Northey, the recently appointed Governor of the East Africa Protectorate, paid a visit to Kikuyu mission station together with his wife and son.¹⁰¹ They were joined by Chief Kinyanjui, Chief Kioi and

the chiefs' headmen. Everything, Dr Arthur wrote in *Kikuyu News*, was 'spick and span'. The Boys' Brigade greeted Northey with a guard of honour. Marching into the station grounds, they gave him the General Salute and sang the national anthem. After inspecting the boys Northey was taken on a tour where he watched a display of apprentices at work in the workshop. Northey gave a speech announcing his pleasure 'at the good work being carried on by the Mission'. He was, he said, 'glad to notice that the bodily needs of the people were being attended to in addition to the educational and religious teaching'. Northey planted a tree in the schoolyard and was presented with an ornamental table produced by the carpentry apprentices. Three cheers were given for the Governor.

Beyond the station's boundaries the reserves lay in ruin, the colony's roads and railways were in poor repair, and settler farms in the highlands were depleted. The missionaries, though, were relieved at recent policy developments. The war had altered the character of the state in Kenya. At the end of 1918 the government created a Native Affairs Department which contained four labour inspectors empowered to enter settler workplaces and initiate prosecutions against negligent employers.¹⁰² A 1919 amendment to the Masters and Servants Ordinance gave the Governor the power to introduce minimum standards for rations, housing, and medical provisions at workplaces; introduced legal restrictions on how much weight a porter could carry; and prohibited employment of boys under sixteen in heavy manual work.¹⁰³ All these measures were consistent with Philp's earlier recommendations. In 1920 a Department of Medical and Sanitary Services was established, five government hospitals opened in the Kikuyu reserve, and extra government funding was issued to medical missions. Philp remarked: 'the Government of East Africa awoke to the need of doing more for the natives in their own Reserves'.¹⁰⁴

'Improvements' in the reserves were part of a tightening of colonial control. The steps taken to make the labour system more humane were accompanied by other, more draconian, initiatives aimed at asserting colonial power and strengthening the settler economy. The 1919 Registration of Natives Ordinance introduced fingerprint identity cards for all able-bodied male natives engaged in wage-employment; these were essentially labour passes which detailed their employment history.¹⁰⁵ The missionaries of the CSM supported the measure, seeing it as an initiative that would regulate labour. In 1914 Arthur Barlow had even suggested to his District Commissioner that if such a system were to be introduced then the men should also be provided with tin canisters in which they could contain and preserve their documents.¹⁰⁶ The pass, or '*kipande*', was to become one of the most loathed impositions of colonial rule.¹⁰⁷

Northey, who took up his role in February 1919, made no secret of his ambition to make the settler economy the basis of postwar recovery, however inconsistent it might be with the League of Nations' emphasis on 'developing' African agriculture. Northey's ex-soldier resettlement scheme, which offered discounted land to British soldiers, was to contribute to an influx of Europeans to the colony: there were 4,016 at the end of 1919; by the end of 1921 there were 9,051.¹⁰⁸ Northey oversaw hut tax increases and a new system of detention camps

specifically for those unable to pay tax, which served as labour pools for government works or private labour recruiters.¹⁰⁹ To steer African men into settler employment, a 1919 amendment to the Native Authority Ordinance increased the number of days per annum men not engaged in wage-work could be called upon to perform ‘public works’ for government, from twenty-four to sixty.¹¹⁰ Northey called it ‘legislation to prevent idleness’.¹¹¹

More controversially, on 23 October 1919, Northey issued a labour circular ordering colonial officers in the reserves to do all they could to encourage African men, women and children, to go out to work for Europeans.¹¹² This bid to turn the state into an agent for capital triggered outcry among more of Kenya’s colonial officials and humanitarian groups in Britain, and caused a crisis in the Colonial Office.¹¹³ For such critics, the prospect of British officers *personally* acting as private labour recruiters was a step too far. Northey was reprimanded, the circular reworded, and in August 1922 Northey was moved on to a new role in Zanzibar.

Among the dissenting voices in the metropole were churches and missionary organizations, including the Church of Scotland’s Foreign Missions Committee in Edinburgh. But on the ground in Kenya’s highlands, the missionaries of the CSM tried to strike a more conciliatory tone, offering their qualified support for Northey. In a document contemporaries dubbed the ‘Bishops’ Memorandum’, published in the *East African Standard* on 8 November 1919, Dr Arthur along with two Anglican bishops announced support for Northey’s endeavour. ‘Much in this memorandum is good and indeed necessary’, they stated:

Compulsory labour is not in itself an evil, and we would favour some form of compulsion, at any rate for work of national importance [...] We believe that ideally all labour should be voluntary. We recognise that, at present, this is impossible, and that some form of pressure must be exerted if an adequate supply of labour necessary for the development of the country is to be secured.¹¹⁴

Any compulsion of labour, the three missionaries argued, should be ‘confined to able-bodied men’, with ‘women and children left out of it’. The duration of employment should be ‘limited and defined’. Working conditions should be ‘proper’. Ideally, compulsory labour would be reserved for ‘Government work’; but they did not wish to rule out compulsion ‘for work on private estates’.¹¹⁵

The CSM’s qualified support for Northey’s compulsory labour measure caused consternation among their allies and supporters in Britain.¹¹⁶ But when officially censured by the Church of Scotland Foreign Missions Committee, Arthur was unapologetic. He emphasized the power of the settler lobby, something, he suggested, ministers in Scotland did not understand. His defence also perpetuated the image of the inactive Gikuyu male native, echoing Philp’s arrival narrative from a decade earlier about the Christian imperative to advance the Gospel of Work: ‘Protesting against [Northey’s] policy’, Arthur wrote, would have:

made the breach between missionary and settler, which we have been trying to heal, more acute and militated against any common desire to work for the

good of the country [...] [We] agree with the settlers that the young male natives are infinitely better out at work under proper safeguards than loafing about the Native Reserves, dressing themselves in paint and feathers and dancing their immoral dances, to the detriment of themselves and the younger women, and therefore of the tribe.¹¹⁷

The missionaries of the CSM sought to temper the rapaciousness of colonial rule. But they did believe in the necessity of an interventionist, authoritarian, paternalistic colonial state that would compel men into work. Their position was that Christianity, capitalism, and colonialism could be mutually enhancing enterprises. Their aim was to integrate their ethical project of Christian uplift with the emerging systems of compulsory labour and colonial control. As Dr Arthur put it in May 1920, during the most intense phase of the Northey forced labour crisis: 'The principle has been that we believe every native ought to work, and that work is a necessary part of Christian character. To Christianise natives, to educate them, to make them work, are surely not conflicting but complementary principles.'¹¹⁸

CONCLUSION

This article began with the missionary doctor, Philp, inside the wire cage, performing the work of bodily healing, biomedical evaluation, and careful enumeration amid a violent, coercive state exercise to recruit labourers for war. The episode with the wire cage serves as a useful metaphor for the broader role the Mission played within Kenya's labour system. It is illustrative of how their ethical project of Christian uplift became entangled within a coercive system of colonial control. To explain that entanglement this article has demonstrated the complex unity of the Mission's role both as humanitarian campaigners for African welfare and as supporters of draconian colonial mechanisms designed to compel Africans into work. In so doing it has made a case for the influence these missionaries exerted within Kenya's colonial state, drawing attention to the work they performed to augment the colonial state, to legitimize the settler-capitalist economy, and to create integrative links between rulers and ruled.

The missionaries, I have argued, were convinced that salvation lay in the disciplined, trained, body: a body which could be counted in a statistical survey; a body which was biomedically pure; a body which was, in the case of men, technically skilled and industrially productive. The missionaries were, furthermore, unwavering in their belief in the uplifting power of work, specifically regarded as instrumental and conscious, performed according to a plan and a schedule; this concerned not only manual work, but also skilled wage-work in general: carpentry, building, farming, nursing, teaching. Much was invested in the Mission's faith in the 'Gospel of Work': it would raise living standards, liberate social and economic relations, induct African boys and men into a more refined, vigorous mode of manliness, and lift Africans to a higher stage of development.

Colonialism arrived in Kenya's highlands as an enterprise that linked commerce with Christianity. Then, in the 1910s, the CSM hitched their evangelical project to the official apparatus of British colonial rule. In the process, they also

put it to the service of Kenya's emergent settler economy. As well as being sites for a concentrated programme of Christian conversion, the CSM's mission stations were nodal points of imperial power in the Kikuyu reserve and conduits within an emergent labour system. Sustained in part by government funding, and settings where the pageantry of imperial power played out, the CSM's mission stations were also expressly configured as locations which would take in 'raw natives', train them into new colonial modalities of work, and turn out skilled workers who would drive the East Africa Protectorate's economic development.

The story of the CSM is important, for it complicates any straightforward account of colonial power and offers a fresh perspective on the history of labour in Kenya's highlands. From the vantage point of the missionary archive, we catch clear sight of the violence and negligence that characterized colonial rule in general, but in the Mission's approach to labour we confront a colonial project that was all about 'development' and 'improvement' – a project that was carried out in the name of 'uplift'. In pursuit of this the CSM came to act like, indeed on behalf of, the British government on the ground within the Kikuyu reserve, carrying out close, intimate, tactile work aimed at integrating Africans into Christian and imperial subjecthood and linking the settler economy to the economic development of the reserves. Moreover, the missionaries infiltrated the colonial state and strove to influence it. They lent their institutional support to officialdom, throwing their weight behind British rule. They also sought to alter and shape the nature of that rule, encouraging a more thoroughgoing, more total, mode of colonial governance. Ultimately it would soon become apparent to the Mission that they were holding out a promise of progress and a model of imperial power that went much further than the colonial government could ever offer, and which settlers would never want to see.

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