

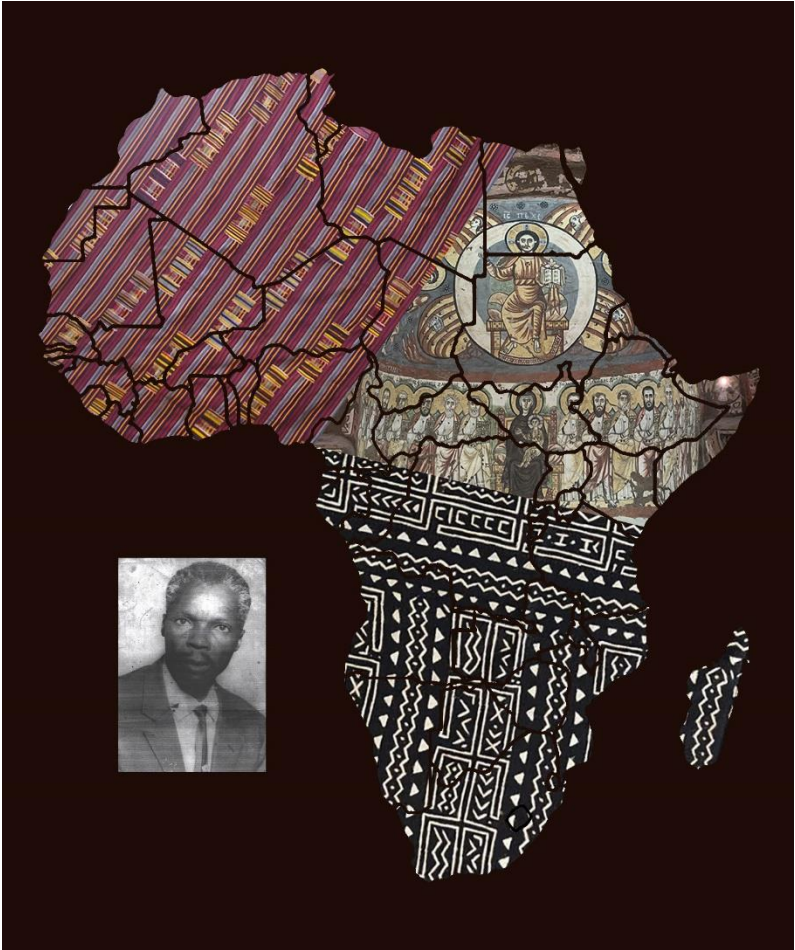
JOURNAL OF
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Vol. 10, No. 1 (Jan. 2025)

BILINGUAL VERSION*

Focus: **Pioneers and Perseverance:**

Musa Abdullahi Yousif Sha ed Din
(Sudan); *Njoko David (DRC) EN / FR,
Prophetess Natholomoa Jehu-Appiah
(Hannah Barnes) (Ghana)



A publication of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*

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Table of Contents

Introduction: Pioneers and Perseverance: The Cost of Bearing the First Fruits of God’s Mission by Michele Sigg, editor	1
The Spiritual Pilgrimage of Musa Abdullahi Yousif Sha ed Din by Michael Parker	4
Njoko David : The Tree that Hides the Forest by Mihala Donatien ...	16
_Version française : Njoko David : L’arbre qui cache la forêt par Mihala Donatien.....	26
The Unsung Co-founder: The Pioneering Role of Hannah Barnes in Establishing the Musama Disco Christo Church by Carine Amo-Nyampong	35
Article Excerpt: “Jesus in the Dumping Sites” by Stephan de Beer ..	433
Recent Print and Digital Resources Related to Christianity in Africa compiled by Beth Restricks, Head, BU African Studies Library.....	477

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Njoko David Mabumba, photo taken in 1962 in Léopoldville, DRC

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Pioneers and Perseverance: The Cost of Bearing the First Fruits of God’s Mission

By Michele Sigg, editor

I recently returned from a trip to Cairo, Egypt where I was invited to teach a DACB workshop for biography writers focused on the legacy of Egyptian Christian forebears at St. Athanasius Theological Seminary. St. Athanasius is one of a number of schools that are part of the Alexandria School of Theology in the newly created Anglican Diocese of North Africa.¹ While there I had many conversations with the students—an irenic group of Coptic, Evangelical / Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and Anglican Christians living in a Muslim-majority country. I was deeply touched by their stories—their hopes, their challenges and above all, their resilience.

I visited ancient monuments—the pyramids of Giza, nearly 5,000 years old—and early Coptic churches such as the Hanging Church (5th-6th century). I drank from the same well where it is said that Joseph, Mary, and Jesus stopped on their three-year journey through Egypt. These were awe-inspiring historic places. But it was the last site I visited that left an indelible impression on me.

In Cairo’s eastern suburb of Manshiyat Nasser, nestled at the base of the Muqattam Plateau lies Muqattam Village, where one can find “the Cave Church,” part of a network of seven churches or chapels inside the mountain. The two largest churches can accommodate respectively 6,000 and 20,000 worshippers. While the Cave Church was officially established only recently by the Coptic Church, it is built on the site of the Monastery of St. Simon the Tanner (St. Sama’an in Arabic) that commemorates an ancient Coptic event. In the late 10th century, in the court of Caliph Al Muizz, Coptic Patriarch (or Pope) Abram had the upper hand during a religious debate. This angered the Caliph. He challenged Abram to prove the veracity of his religion by enacting Jesus’s saying “if you have faith even as small as a mustard seed, you will be able to move mountains” or face death for himself and all Coptic believers. Abram prayed and fasted for three days during which the Virgin Mary revealed to him that he must seek the guidance of a tanner named Simon to perform this miracle in the presence of the Caliph. On the appointed day, instructed by Simon, Pope Abram raised his hands towards the mountain and prayed three times crying “Lord, have mercy.” The mountain was then lifted up, revealing the sky behind it. According to some sources, the Caliph later converted and became a monk.²

In addition to this ancient heritage, the Cave Church has another extraordinary backstory—its location. The Cave Church is in Muqattam Village, which is otherwise known as “Garbage City,” home to currently 50,000 Coptic Christians called the Zabbaleen (meaning “garbage collectors” in Arabic). Originally the Zabbaleen were

¹ Rev. Dr. John Ashley Null is the newly appointed bishop of the diocese.

² Sources disagree on the details of the story.

economic migrants from Upper Egypt who settled near Cairo in the early 20th century. Being illiterate, unskilled, and Christian, the Zabbaleen were relegated to the margins of the city and many of them began to earn their living by collecting garbage.

But in 1974, a Zabbaleen asked a businessman from whom he collected garbage to tell him the story of the gospel. He was captivated by what he heard and immediately asked the businessman to come and teach a Bible study in Garbage City. Within a few years, thousands of Zabbaleen embraced Jesus's message of salvation. In response, the Coptic Church decided to officially establish a church in that place. The people to chose as their priest the very businessman who had loved them so well. Fr. Samaan was ordained and served the community for the next fifty years, exercising a gift of supernatural healing in addition to his teaching ministry.³

As a result, beginning in the late 1970s, the Zabbaleen community began to be transformed. Garbage City had been the poorest, most dangerous area of the capital, where people lived among the garbage and the filth—a place plagued by disease and overrun with drugs and alcohol. There were no services, businesses or churches, no schools for the children, no electricity or water or medical care.⁴ But now the Zabbaleen live in the upper floors of the buildings in modest apartments, separate from the filth, and they have markets and stores of all kinds. Their children go to school. What is more, in Muqattam Village, Coptic Christians enjoy religious freedom not available to them in the rest of the country where one can easily be targeted and persecuted—even killed—just for being a Christian. As Father Samaan says, “When Jesus appears somewhere that changes the whole society.”⁵ Here is an extraordinary manifestation of God's mission at work in Egypt: the Cave Church is now the largest church in the Middle East—a church that ministers to a community of humble garbage collectors.⁶

Fr. Samaan died last year (2024) after fifty years of devoted ministry to his beloved Zabbaleen—a people “outside the gate” like Jesus who was crucified on the outskirts of Jerusalem.⁷ It is this transformation of new life, hope, healing, reconciliation, and renewal of creation that is the heart of the gospel, the heart of mission. It is the fruit of faithful perseverance in the face of adversity.

The biographies in this issue of the Journal illustrate the theme of “Pioneers and Perseverance” and the special challenges of first generation Christians in different contexts. Fr. Samaan pioneered a church among a community of outcasts whose suffering for religious, political, and economic reasons was, and continues to be,

³ This is the testimony of my Egyptian guide, Viola, who told me that some Sundays, one could see mountains of wheelchairs discarded by those healed from their infirmities.

⁴ Lynn Hybels, “When Jesus comes, everything changes: An Advent experience in Cairo,” *Huffington Post Religion*, 2010, viewed February 10, 2025 from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lynne-hybels/a-stunning-transformation_b_799138.html

⁵ Hybels, “When Jesus comes.”

⁶ See the excerpt of Stephan de Beer's article in this issue—“Jesus in the Dumping Sites”—for further information and theological reflection.

⁷ Stephan de Beer, “Jesus in the Dumping Sites: Doing theology in the overlaps of human and material waste,” *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* (2014) 70(3), Art. #2724, 8 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i3.2724>.

tremendous in Egyptian society. By allying himself with the Zabbaleen, he took on their stigma and their pain.

The first biography in this issue highlights the life of Sheikh Abdullahi Yousif Sha ed Din and his large family in the Muslim-majority country of Sudan. Their story, authored by Michael Parker, is an exception in the history of Christian evangelism in the Sudan where there are virtually no instances of whole families coming to Christianity. Parker describes their story as “a strange one, filled with accounts of dreams, visions, prophecies, odd occurrences, persecution, and even a quest for the lost Ark of the Covenant.”⁸ Since Sheikh Abdullahi’s death, his family has continued to faithfully practice their Christianity despite ongoing marginalization and hardship.

Next, from the pen of Mihala Donatien, a student in the 2023 Kinshasa (DRC) biography workshop, we have the story—in English and in French—of Njoko David, a pioneering leader at the Mukedi Mennonite mission station belonging to the Congo Inland Mission. Finally, Carine Amo-Nyampong, a student of the 2024 Ghana workshop for writers of women’s stories in Akropong, Ghana, brings us the story of Hannah Barnes, the “unsung co-founder” of Musama Disco Christo Church, whose perseverance and selfless service were crucial to the founding of the church.

The pioneers featured here persevered in their witness to the gospel at the risk of their lives and wellbeing. They exhibited what World Christianity scholar Andrew Walls calls “the quality of discipleship,” which is foundational to Christian leadership and is tested by suffering.⁹ May the stories of these faithful African witnesses offer us guidance and inspiration for our daily journey with Jesus in whom we live and move and have our being.

⁸ <https://dacb.org/stories/sudan/abdullahi/>

⁹ Andrew F. Walls, “The Cost of Discipleship: The Witness of the African Church” in *Crossing Cultural Frontiers: Studies in the History of World Christianity*, edited by Mark R. Gornik (Marknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 80.

The Spiritual Pilgrimage of Musa Abdullahi Yousif Sha ed Din: How One Man Led a Muslim Clan to Faith in Christ¹⁰

By Michael Parker

In a large dilapidated house in Gereif, a southern section of Khartoum, an extended family of over a hundred members occupy a space probably intended for less than ten. The house fairly buzzes with the noise of women cooking, men conversing, and children playing. These are poor people, who live from day-to-day working in the *suugs* and on the streets of Khartoum as vendors and simple laborers. Among them is Musa Abdullahi Yousif Sha ed Din, a beloved family patriarch, referred to affectionately as Father Abdullahi. Presiding serenely on a rope bed in the center of the family courtyard where he is habitually ensconced, Abdullahi speaks with unflinching poise and good humor. Despite the many hardships and setbacks he has experienced, his faith in himself and the goodness of God seem entirely unshaken. Moreover, a revered spiritual leader, Abdullahi regularly dreams dreams, sees visions, and speaks boldly for the God that he has faithfully served throughout his sixty-eight years.

In the largely Muslim nation of Sudan, there have been many lone individuals who have braved ostracism and persecution in order to become followers of Jesus Christ, but instances of whole families, villages or communities coming into Christian fellowship have been rare if not nonexistent. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, when Sudan became open to Western influences and Christian missionaries, the conversions that have occurred have largely taken place in the southern part of the nation, populated not by Muslim Arabs but rather by black Africans who practiced traditional folk religions. An exception to this dour record of evangelism is the story of Abdullahi and his family. By Western standards, their story is a strange one, filled with accounts of dreams, visions, prophecies, odd occurrences, persecution, and even a quest for the lost Ark of the Covenant.

The Hawara of Jaraad and the Legend of the Ark

Though the family traces its origins from more than one source, within Sudan it originates from the small rural village of Jaraad, located in the state of Kordofan. The villagers there live quite simply in little straw huts known as *rakubas* and *guliyas*. Though a lorry now traverses this area twice a week, travel between villages is usually still done on foot, or by camel or donkey. Being far from the Nile, the villagers rely entirely on well water for cleaning and drinking. They graze sheep on land that for most of the year appears to be a semi-desert. Yet, the rainy season between May and August makes possible annual crops of *dura* (wheat), sesame, and *fuul Sudani* (peanuts). The rainy season even produces a wondrous crop of wild watermelons. Lush and ponderous, they rest incongruously on the unlikely and forbidding soil.

¹⁰ Dates: 1928-2005; Affiliation: Independent; Country: Sudan.

The lives of the people of Jaraad have remained largely unchanged from the lives that their ancestors must have led centuries before. Modern communications, travel, education, agricultural techniques, and conveniences such as electricity and plumbing are all absent from the village. Though nominally Muslims, the villagers seem to have no clear understanding of Islam – let alone Judaism or Christianity. Consequently, their Islamic faith has been largely syncretized with traditional superstitions and their own unique tribal stories. In this preliterate society, one where the religious truths of the outside world are only dimly perceived, dreams and visions play a potent role in the lives of its people, as they do throughout Sudan.

The inhabitants of Jaraad are part of the Hawara tribe, which, according to oral tradition, arose originally in Yemen and did not arrive in Sudan until the sixteenth century. Hawara is an Arabic word, but they believe that it is derived from the Jewish name Hur. As the interpretation of their name suggests, the Hawara believe themselves to be descended from the Jewish people. They trace their ancestry back to King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. In a story that closely parallels the Ethiopian tradition of Memmion, the Hawaras believe that Solomon and Sheba were married and had a son, whom they named David (the Ethiopian Memmion). Determined to preserve his own royal line outside of Israel, Solomon sent David home to Yemen with his mother. Moreover, he gave to him the Ark of the Covenant and many other things as well, so that they might be kept safely against the day of Israel's destruction.

Sometime in the sixteenth century, the tribe's legendary ancestor, Sha ed Din, led his six brothers from Yemen into southern Egypt, and finally south through Sudan. At that time the people of Sudan lived near the Nile, and therefore the area of Kordofan was unpopulated. Sha ed Din selected two sites not more than about five to seven miles from the present location of the village of Jaraad. One site was to be used for a family cemetery. Also, family treasure was to be buried there for safekeeping. The second site, about a half mile from the first, was to contain the body of Sha ed Din's grandfather, which he had brought with him from Yemen even as the Israelites had carried Joseph from Egypt to the promised land. Sha ed Din directed that no other body was to be placed in this area, and he constructed a small wooden temple on the site so that people could come and worship God there. Also, he directed his people that when they should come to the cemetery to honor their ancestors, they must first visit the cemetery of their grandfather and worship God there. From that day to the present, the people of the tribe have regularly come to this site to worship.

The people living in the village of Jaraad near the cemeteries have over the years witnessed many strange occurrences associated with the cemetery of Sha ed Din's grandfather. They regularly see strange lights at night coming from the area, and most believe that there are angels protecting the two sites. Some, on the other hand, believe that jinn protect the sites because, according to Islam, angels only protect the prophets. One of the most remarkable stories regarding the area occurred at about the time of Abdullahi's birth. A father and son were worshipping on the site of Sha ed Din's grandfather's grave, hoping that God would reveal to them the location of the treasure in the other cemetery. After they had worshipped for one month with nothing yet revealed to them, they decided to start digging in the other cemetery. At this time they saw in the cemetery of Sha ed Din's grandfather the shape of a man. He was very tall,

perhaps as tall as a house, and his head was like the sun. Then this strange man started running toward them, and the father and son quickly fled back to the village of Jaraad and informed the people of what had happened.

Abdullahi's Youth and Emergence as a Prophet

Abdullahi was born in Jaraad in 1928 – the specific date is unknown. Though lacking any formal religious training or any formal education at all, as a young boy he seems to have enjoyed a rich spiritual life. Sometime in the 1930s, he vividly remembers having a dream, which in retrospect suggested his subsequent career. In his dream there was a box in front of him with a cloud hovering directly above it. He saw himself inside the box, which was spinning in place. Eventually it transported him to Jerusalem, where he heard a voice from a great height coming from between two mountains (perhaps Sinai and Zion). The voice said, “Mercy to God.” Then the box started spinning again, and he flew up into the sky, and he saw beside him in the box a man whose name was Honest. Together they came to a room in the sky, and the man stepped out. Then Abdullahi stepped out of the box and entered the room, leaving Honest behind him. He found a man sitting on a chair in the room. The man, who never spoke, gave him seven keys. And then Abdullahi woke up. The character Honest suggests a later guardian that Abdullahi would encounter in his life; and the seven keys, Abdullahi believes, are symbols for seven prophecies of Kush that are to come true in the latter days.

As a young man in 1948, Abdullahi began to urge his people to religious reform. He specifically attacked the Muslim tradition of *zakat* as it was practiced in his town and in the neighboring towns and villages. The sheikhs were supposed to make an annual collection for the poor; but, instead of distributing the money to the poor, they were keeping it for themselves. The common people were afraid to object to this abuse of *zakat* because the sheikhs were considered to be people of great spiritual power, able to bring rain, make women fertile, and heal the sick. Abdullahi opposed all of these practices. In addition to his pronouncements against the sheikhs, he also urged his people to stop worshipping idols and swearing by their fathers and other pagan practices such as making sacrifices on grave sites. He told them to leave all of these things and go back to the way of God. In all his pronouncements, however, he never recommended a specific religion that his people should follow.

In November 1948 Abdullahi began to come to the place established by Sha ed Din for worship, his grandfather's cemetery near Jaraad. Abdullahi worshipped there each Saturday for eight Saturdays. On the eighth Saturday he saw a vision of a man coming from Jerusalem. He was wearing Sudanese clothes - a *jalabiya* and a *tobe* crossed over his body. The man paced eight steps and with the ninth step he arrived in the town of Wad Medani, which is now in the center of Gezira State. The man said to him, “Meet me here, Abdullahi.” Later he saw the vision a second time. Then he told his parents what he had seen, interpreting the vision to mean that he should meet the man on the following Saturday. His father thought that he was just dreaming and that he should not believe it, but his mother encouraged him to go.

This was the first time for Abdullahi to leave his village and to travel to other

towns. After arriving in Wad Medani, he waited three days for the man in his vision to arrive before concluding that it had just been a dream after all. Dejected, he went to the railroad station and was prepared to return home when he felt someone touch his shoulder. He turned and saw the same man that he had seen before in his vision. The man said that he was indeed the person Abdullahi had seen in the vision. And, in fact, the two men seemed to know each other, though they had never met before. They discussed many things together, and Abdullahi learned that the man was five hundred years old and had stayed close to his family as a kind of guardian since they first arrived in Sudan in the sixteenth century. Abdullahi believes that the number five hundred may actually be symbolic and that the man, or more likely angelic being, is in fact much older. One day while seated on the ground Abdullahi's strange new friend picked up the Qur'an. Tying the book up with a piece of cloth, he set it aside, saying, "The Qur'an is not consistent with my nature." Then, pausing, he added forcefully, "The Bible is my book."

During the fifteen years following his first encounter with the five-hundred-year-old-man in 1948, Abdullahi attempted to evangelize his people in the villages of Jaraad and Nail and the city of Um Rawaba. He was constantly on the move, traveling between Jaraad and Um Rawaba and Gezira and Khartoum, meeting with both political and religious leaders. This was no doubt the most active period of his life, yet it was also a time in which he continued to meet with the five-hundred-year-old man and to experience a variety of dreams and visions. The message he proclaimed to the Muslim people was that they should continue to follow the Qur'an because it also promises the coming of Christ and points to his divinity. Nevertheless, he argued that the people of the Bible are the preferred people of God and that Christianity has not been superseded by Islam but in fact will continue to be a valid religion until the end of the world. In addition to the strictly religious message Abdullahi promulgated, he also advanced a social agenda. He advised people to allow their children to attend school, to treat their animals more gently, and, for men, to marry only one woman unless special circumstances (such as incapacitating illness) justified polygamy. Lastly, he advocated freedom of speech for all people.

Despite his dictums on monogamy, Abdullahi would eventually have three wives. He married women in 1956, 1957 and 1960 and had children by each of them. The first two wives were from different tribes. In each case, when the bride's family discovered that Abdullahi was not an orthodox Muslim, members of the family came and took the woman back into their fold. Finally Abdullahi married a woman from his own tribe. Later, in the 1960s, the first two wives returned to live with their husband. Not wanting to be a hypocrite but seeing no other honorable course to follow Abdullahi accepted them back and eventually had a brood of sixteen children from his three devoted spouses.

Abdullahi Persecuted in Em Rawaba

Not long after Abdullahi had experienced such turmoil in his private life, many people in the towns that he was attempting to evangelize began to talk about him, and he soon became the center of a broader controversy. Some said he was pretending to be a

prophet, which is a capital offence among Muslims because there is not supposed to be any prophet after Mohammed. Others accused him of having heretical ideas about Islam, and still others accused him of being a Christian and of leading others to Christianity. For anyone of these offences, Abdullahi could face imprisonment or death. On September 11, 1963, Abdullahi appeared before a judge in Um Rawaba to answer questions about his religious ideas. After three days of hearings, the judge ordered Abdullahi to remain in his house, and he sent all of the pertinent documents of the case to the High Court in Khartoum to be reviewed by the Chief Justice. Also, the Mufti in Khartoum, the highest religious authority in Sudan, reviewed this material. Together they concluded that Abdullahi was a Christian. The chief justice then directed the judge in Um Rawaba to give Abdullahi three days to reconvert to Islam or to appear before the court for sentencing. This was now a very serious matter, for hanging is a possible punishment for all converts to Christianity from Islam. Abdullahi remained in his house during this time as a prisoner, refusing to convert.

In the early morning of the third day the judge notified Abdullahi that he had received a telegraph from a person he described as a "high authority" who directed him to disregard all the orders he had received from the chief justice and the mufti regarding his case. He said that Abdullahi should be set free and that the government should protect him from any retaliation by the local people. Several days later, Abdullahi heard on the radio that the President of the country, Ibrahim Abboud, had fired the chief justice and mufti. Later, he also learned that it was the president who had sent the telegram and overruled the chief justice and mufti. Whatever official reasons for the dismissals may have been offered, the people of Um Rawaba, because it was so rare for anyone to defeat the government in a case of this sort, considered Abdullahi's victory to be nothing short of a miracle.

Most of the people in the city respected Abdullahi and his family and bore them no ill will. Though they were Muslims, they did not feel threatened by his religious convictions. Nevertheless, the judge asked Abdullahi to remain in his house because feelings were running so high against him among a small minority of people that the judge did not feel that he could be adequately protected. Abdullahi agreed with the judge, concluding that visiting people would only endanger them too. So Abdullahi decided to remain in his home, except for rare occasions when he needed to visit sick relatives in the hospital or for similar exceptional reasons. This was in 1963, and to this day Abdullahi has remained for the most part in his home, though he has changed residences many times. However, in part because of the trial, Abdullahi found that he had become a minor celebrity and that both Christians and Muslims were now visiting him in order to hear his opinions. Consequently, he concluded that he no longer needed to travel extensively in order to spread his ideas.

Baptism by the Catholic Church

In 1970 Abdullahi feared for the safety of his family in Um Rawaba, whose people seemed to be growing increasingly hostile. Finally, he decided to move his family to Wad Medani. In this same year the Catholic Church in Sudan recognized Abdullahi as a leader in his community and a potential Christian leader in Sudan. The church had

been aware of Abdullahi since the 1960s, when newspaper stories about him had been frequent. The church contacted him with the desire to establish good relations, averring that they should be friends and in fellowship together. This was the first time that Abdullahi and his family had had any contact with Christians. In fact, until this time they had never even seen a Bible, and no one had ever preached to the family, neither Christian, nor Muslim, nor Jew. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s many had concluded that Abdullahi and his family were already Christians. Yet, remarkably, the only spiritual leadership that the Sha ed Din family had received until this time was from Abdullahi.

When the family first read the Bible in the early 1970s, they discovered that many of their traditions were similar to those of the ancient Israelites. This is especially true of dietary rules. Unlike other tribes in Sudan, the Hawara forbid the eating of camel and rabbits, both of which Moses also forbade. Also they reserve Saturday rather than Friday as a holy day, which they refer to as a “green” day; that is, a day of peace. On this day, members of the tribe do not travel but simply remain in their homes. Work is forbidden on Saturdays, and the people are not even allowed to clean their houses. They were very surprised to read of similar restrictions on the Jewish people recorded in the Bible, and they concluded that their own traditions were no doubt rooted in a Jewish past.

In February 1974 the local parish priest in Wad Medani baptized Abdullahi and his entire family – around one hundred people. The local priest, afraid of government reprisals, expressed his concern to church authorities in Khartoum. The church contacted Joseph Largo, the Vice President, who spoke with President Numeiri about the matter. Numeiri asked if the people had come on their own for baptism and confirmation, or if the church had evangelized them. When he discovered that it was the former, he allowed the religious ceremonies to go forward. On February 24 the archbishop of Sudan conducted the sacrament of confirmation for the family.

Persecution of Abdullahi and His Family in Wad Medani

In the last quarter century the family has suffered much harassment and even persecution for its Christian faith. Between 1970 and 1982 it was forced to move from eight different homes by intolerant Muslim homeowners, who, once they discovered that their tenants were Christians, would order the family to leave and cancel the rental agreement. The family was also persecuted in other, and more deeply personal, ways. After 1974, when it was clear that the family was Christian and not Muslim, six Muslim families who had previously allowed their daughters to marry into Abdullahi’s family then sought divorces in legal courts. The courts granted the divorces in every case. Three of the women decided to remain with their husbands, and eventually they too became Christians. However, the other three women returned to their parents’ families, taking their children with them and re-entering the Muslim world.

The family continued to live in Wad Medani until 1994 when government action finally precipitated their departure. This began on July 14 at 5:00 in the evening, when government security forces suddenly invaded the house and arrested Abdullahi and three other family elders. Later that night the security forces returned and arrested

four young men, but after an hour or so they were released. The elders, however, remained in custody. There was no apparent reason for the arrests except the religious convictions of the family. Yet the family had not been actively evangelizing, and Abdullahi had remained at home almost continuously since 1963. For two days following the arrests, the family heard nothing about the fate of their elders. On Friday, the day following the arrests, several members of the family informed the Christians in the city about what had happened, and the Catholic Church provided an advocate to defend the prisoners. Finally, on Saturday at 12:00 noon the men were brought before a judge and accused of having converted from Islam to Christianity, a capital offence under Article 126 of Sudan law. The judge asked the old men when, where and why they had become Christians. They remained before the judge for four or five hours that day answering questions, but the issues were not resolved. The advocate provided by the church proved to be of little help. When he inquired of the judge who the accusers of the families were, he was told that this was a secret of the court. Then he was told that he could remain in the courtroom, but that he would not be allowed to speak.

During the next two days, the men remained in jail. At different times two or three policemen visited in order to encourage them to recant their Christianity and re-embrace Islam. They informed the men that if they said, "There is only one God, and Mohammed is His prophet," the judge would release them. Also, during the time of their incarceration, the family home was raided daily, usually late at night. Officials confiscated Bibles and family documents, such as birth and marriage certificates and letters. They also took the family newspaper clippings about Abdullahi from the 1960s and 1970s. Later the family learned that the government burned all of these books and documents.

On Monday at 4:30 pm, the judge walked the short distance from his courtroom across the courtyard to the jail. There he ordered one of the policemen to whip Abdullahi and Muhanna (another elder), because they were the oldest and the leaders of the family. He ordered the policeman to give each prisoner eighty lashes. Muhanna was taken from his cell first. He was placed in the center of the courtyard where about 150 to 200 people had gathered, mostly family members but also members of the Christian community. There were also several hundred more people who had gathered outside the courtyard area and were looking in. Muhanna stood without any props as he was beaten by a camel whip through his *jalabiya*, which was quickly shredded. At the end of the ordeal, he collapsed senseless to the ground and was left there. No medical treatment was provided. During Muhanna's beating, Abdullahi was also taken out of his cell. Abdullahi told the judge, who was standing nearby to observe the proceedings, that he had high blood pressure and that he was not well. "You are a liar," the judge said, "and I will have you beaten until you know the name of Mohammed." The policeman laid five lashes on the sixty-four-year-old man, but he then passed out.

At that point the crowd quickly closed in to see what had happened. The policeman raised his whip and was about to continue laying lashes on his fallen victim when a soldier from the crowd grabbed the whip in mid-air. Then the crowd began to shout questions at the judge: "Why are you whipping this man?" "There is freedom of religion in Sudan, so why are you treating these people like this?" The judge, fearing for his safety, ordered the police to arrest the people who were inside the courtyard

threatening a disturbance. The policemen asked each individual they captured if he was a Christian or a Muslim. All of the Muslims were immediately released, and forty-eight Christians were imprisoned. The judge also ordered the release of Abdullahi and Muhanna but told the police to obtain a “strong guarantee” from them that they would present themselves before the judge whenever required. As the police continued to arrest members of the unruly crowd, the judge quietly retreated out the back of the courthouse. Twenty minutes later, the judge returned and ordered the release of the forty-eight prisoners. Family members took the two beaten men to the hospital. Muhanna spent two days there recovering, but Abdullahi was sent home after only thirty minutes.

Because of continuing police harassment, the family decided to leave Wad Medani in August 1994. They were advised by relatives and friends to move to Khartoum where the presence of many foreigners and human rights organizations makes it more difficult for the government to act in disregard of its own stated commitments to basic civil liberties and to international standards of human rights. Since the family has been in Khartoum, it is convinced that the government has continued to watch them. So far, however, no officials have contacted them and the persecution has ceased. The family fears, however, that the government may not yet be finished with them. They continue to work and move freely in the city, but they fear for the future.

Secrets Buried in a Graveyard

The story of Abdullahi now comes full circle, ending where it began with the mysterious cemeteries established about four centuries ago by Sheik Sha ed Din. The people living in the area continue to see a bright light emanating from this spot, though they do not know what it represents; and, throughout Abdullahi’s lifetime, the cemeteries have continued to be associated with strange events. Once, according to local legend, the people buried a man from another tribe in one of the cemeteries, and the next day they found his body outside the grave. This, and similar events, continue to inspire fear in the people living in the area. Consequently, they are respectful of the cemeteries and faithfully follow the tradition that no one be buried in the cemetery of Sha ed Din’s grandfather, and that no one be buried in the other cemetery except the Sheik’s descendants.

Sometime during the 1960s Abdullahi came to the conclusion that the cemetery of Sha ed Din’s grandfather was actually the site of the lost Ark of the Covenant. He claims to have received no direct revelation, dream or vision on the subject. Nor does he claim that the five-hundred-year-old man has revealed this to him. Rather, he professes having only had a strong feeling that the supposed burial of Sha ed Din’s grandfather was a ruse and that the actual content of the box carried from Yemen to Sudan in the sixteenth century was none other than the fabled ark. Yet, he believes that the feeling itself is a divine revelation.

It is not difficult to imagine how he came to this conclusion regarding the cemetery. His growing awareness of the Hawara tribe’s Jewish ancestry, his possible knowledge of the Ethiopian story of the ark and its parallels with the Sha ed Din story,

the five-hundred-year-old man's role as a guardian of the family, the light emanating from the cemetery site and the other mysteries surrounding it, and his own childhood vision of a box that would fly him high in the sky into the very presence of the divine are all mysteries that, in his mind, might easily converge on the site of the ancient cemetery and point to something beyond the burial of a revered ancestor. Still, Abdullahi kept his own counsel and did not reveal his belief to anyone. Reasoning that God had entrusted the care of the Ark to his family, Abdullahi concluded that he had the right and duty to reveal the mysteries concealed by Sha ed Din but that the time was not yet right to do so.

This situation changed following the persecution of the family in 1994. Sometime in the period from the beginning of December 1994 through the end of January 1995 Abdullahi concluded that the time had arrived to announce the location of the Ark of the Covenant and to reveal it to the world. Not long after he began to speak about it, a small but dedicated research party was formed, made up mostly from members of Abdullahi's family.

The journey to Jaraad and the nearby cemetery site is alone a tribute to the fortitude of this group. It is a six-hour trek from Khartoum to Um Rawaba on a bus that is ancient, cramped, hot, and reeking of humanity. The researchers would then ride in an open lorry from Um Rawaba to Jaraad, which takes an additional two hours. The lorries to Jaraad are simply flatbed trucks, where the women huddle on the floor in the middle of the bed (often amid sheep), and the men sit with reckless abandon on the surrounding guardrail. In the meantime the truck lurches along at top speed on a deeply rutted sandy road, the driver fearing to stop or even slow down for danger of sinking in and becoming immobilized. The passing countryside is truly the land that time forgot where transportation is by camel, homes are made of thatch, and men dress uniformly in *jalabiyas*, sandals and *immas* (traditional Sudanese head covering). The final leg of the trip from Jaraad to the cemetery, which takes another two hours, is made on foot, with a donkey carrying supplies and equipment. It is a difficult journey over parched dry ground, which is liberally sprinkled with sheep droppings. Sheep are regularly run through the area despite its meager foliage, and the resulting superfluity of excreta causes the air to be thick with flies, a torment to man and beast. Fortunately, the hardy watermelons that thrive in the area provide a good source of liquid refreshment and an occasion for much-needed respites along the way.

The cemetery site, which is just a sandy indentation in the land, can be spotted from a distance by the three trees that mark its location. Upon arriving at the spot, the villagers insist that "the ground whereon we walk is holy ground," and so visitors to the area must stoically remove their shoes to brave scorpions and searing sand. The research party eventually made several trips to the cemetery site; and, after working all day in temperatures that often exceeded 45 degrees Celsius, it was always an exhausted but alert group that returned at night to the village, watchful along the way for serpents that move in fields alive with fleet and wary mice. During these trips, the group carefully surveyed the area with a magnetometer, looking for magnetic anomalies beneath the surface of the earth that might suggest a hidden box. The magnetometer revealed three anomalies. The origins of two of them were eventually discovered (a large metal pan and a flashlight battery), but the third was never found

and remains a mystery. Members of Abdullahi's family have since made several additional attempts to dig up the Ark at the suspected location of the third anomaly, but without success. To date no evidence of an Ark in the area has been found, and no material evidence whatsoever has come to light to substantiate this part of Abdullahi's story.

Death of Abdullahi

Abdullahi died on June 18, 2005. According to a family spokesperson, at that time some 200 members of the Sha ed Din clan were Christians. By 2015 this number had increased to 700, but there may be as many as 300 others who are secret followers. Although Abdullahi never became an adherent to a specific Christian denomination, different members of his clan have loosely affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church and the Seventh-Day Adventists. Thirty-five members of the clan have attended the Gereif Bible School, ten have attended Nile Theological College (a non-denominational seminary), and four have pursued masters studies. Sadly none of these graduates is currently employed because of the discrimination against Christians that exists in Sudan. Though clan members are convinced that the government is watching them closely, they remain faithful to Christ and continue to engage in evangelism

As evangelists, they are able to utilize both rational and mystical ports of entry into the hearts and minds of their people, for they stand as a bridge between two cultures. Respectful of traditional techniques of evangelizing Muslims, they are not limited to them. Rooted in Sudanese folk religiosity, they are nevertheless disciplined by a growing commitment to the authority of the Scriptures. Influenced by Western rationalism, they can often take a discerning view of dreams and visions, yet without losing touch with the spiritual vitality and worldview that produced them. For them spiritual truth is not an abstract statement of faith or a static conception of reality but an ongoing quest that does not side step the mysticism of leaders such as Abdullahi but runs directly through it. They stand, not at the end of history, but in the midst of an apostolic age.

It was just such a group in 1998 that, deeply disappointed about their inability to locate the Ark, wearily returned to Jaraad one evening from the cemetery site. On a moonless night, with myriads of stars twinkling overhead in the clear desert air, the group turned to look once more in the direction of the cemetery. There, far off on the horizon, beckoning but elusive, a light shone in the darkness! It glowed as bright as a city but where no city exists. The group would see it many more times during their trips, but they were never able to approach it; for when they lingered at the site after nightfall the light would not appear.

And, so, the quest continues...

Michael Parker

Bibliography

I interviewed members of the Sha ed Din family, including Abdullahi, over many hours and traveled with them to Jaraad on two occasions in 1998 in order to learn more about them and to participate in their ongoing digs at the cemetery described in the story. The account that I have given here is generally descriptive rather than interpretive. In other words, I wanted to tell their story as they would tell it, not as an anthropologist or sociologist would render it. This article originally appeared under the title “Guardians of the Ark” in my collection of short stories, *Children of the Sun: Stories of the Christian Journey in Sudan* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 115-132. I updated and slightly revised the article for this publication.

Note: For those living on this side of the Enlightenment, Abdullahi’s story will no doubt immediately raise a number of epistemological concerns – as well it should. There are obvious dangers of error and deception in an uncritical acceptance of mystical experiences. Abdullahi, while a good man and a moral and spiritual leader, did not seem to possess any special wisdom or insight into worldly events, nor did he become a particularly learned student of the Scriptures when he discovered their existence in the early seventies. Rather, he seems to have led almost entirely by intuition. The great spiritual authority he possessed over his family derived from his absorption into a world of dreams and visions, a world that his family shared with him. What was truly disconcerting about Abdullahi’s spiritual leadership was that he seemed to take his dreams and visions entirely at face value, without apparently attempting to scrutinize their origin or to judge them against any outside authority. At times, one member of the family reluctantly admitted, this practice led to messianic delusions.

Still, Western rationalists ought not to dismiss the mysticism of other cultures too quickly. The American philosopher/psychologist William James, writing in his classic work *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, showed that the dreams and visions of mystics break down the confident assumptions of our rationalism and reveal the possibility of, what he called, “other orders of truth.” Rationalism, James reminds us, is only one type of consciousness, and by its own standards cannot disprove the possibility of non-rationalistic forms of consciousness. Therefore, the dreams and visions of mystics may be ignored by rationalists, but they cannot be overthrown. Moreover, James avers, “The supernaturalism and optimism to which they would persuade us may, interpreted in one way or another, be after all the truest of insights into the meaning of this life.” This latter point seems particularly pertinent in the case of Abdullahi. While Abdullahi’s spiritual pilgrimage may make enormous claims on the readers’ credulity, what cannot be doubted is that he succeeded in slowly leading a small but growing band of followers from their semi-traditional/semi-Muslim beginnings into a mature and deepening Christian faith, a faith that has stood the test of severe persecution and ongoing difficulties that do not yet seem to have an end in sight. Moreover, this is a faith perfectly attuned to the premodern worldview of the vast majority of Sudan’s population, which, despite an awareness of modern technology and science, continues to retain a healthy respect for and often an active involvement

in the world of dreams and visions. See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: New American Library, 1958), 323-328.

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* * *

Update on Sheikh Abdullahi Yousif Sha Ed Din's family (email, January 2025):

His large family still practices their faith in various churches. They have given birth to children who breathe the breezes of the spiritual life of the previous fathers amidst hope for divine promises for them and their future generations. However, amidst all this spirituality, hope and firm faith, the family lives with its different generations in the midst of these challenges a difficult life of social deprivation and hardship in a society that rejects them.

With the continued war in Sudan, the family has suffered from displacement and a need for asylum. Most of them are refugees in Egypt or Uganda. Some members continue to live in the midst of war-torn Sudan because they cannot leave the country. Some have died from displacement, illness, hunger, or lack of health care.

Please pray for the family of Sheikh Musa Abdullahi Yousif Sha Ed Din.

Njoko David : The Tree that Hides the Forest¹¹

By Mihala Donatien



Introduction¹²

Njoko David (born Mabumba Agadibu) was a courageous, self-confident young man who became one of the main architects of the Mennonite mission station at Mukedi. Mukedi was the mother station of the Congo Inland Mission (CIM) – which later became the Communauté mennonite au Congo (CMCo) – in the present-day administrative province of Kwilu.

Mabumba Agadibu was born in Nioka Kakesa around 1888, when the Belgian King Leopold II had just begun to administer the Congo Free State. He was the eldest son of Gadibu of the Gambembo clan, and of Kake. Both his parents were farmers from the Gatunda (Gatundo) *groupement* (village group) in the Lozo sector, in the Gungu territory, Kwilu province. Mabumba was the eldest in a family of five children, including four boys and a girl.

The family name Mabumba, which has unfortunately fallen into obscurity, comes from the Pende verb *gubumba*, meaning to unite or to group or pack together. It applies especially to potters, who work clay into the shape of a pot, jug or other vessel. Mabumba would become such a gathering and unifying figure in his relations with foreigners, traditional and state authorities, and Protestant missionaries.

From Mabumba to Njoko – a spiritual rebirth

Mabumba became Njoko through a spiritual rebirth that took place following unfortunate historical circumstances.

At the time of the registration of the Pende customary chiefs in the Kilembe region, the colonial administrator sent the policeman Matwanyi to inform the population in the Gatunda *groupement*, which was under the reign of the great customary Chief Gisongo of the village Nzaji. During the event, Gisongo spoke out against the policeman. He described to the crowd how this situation evoked for him the bitter experience of the Pende in Angola in the 16th and 17th centuries, at the time of the black slave trade inaugurated by the Portuguese. For Chief Gisongo, the envoy's speech was an empty gesture. And when, to show his superiority, the policeman slapped Gisongo in the presence of his subjects, the chief was furious and humiliated. He called on his people to avenge him. They seized the policeman and tortured him at length until he succumbed to his injuries.

¹¹ Dates : ca. 1888-2003 / Affiliation: Communauté mennonite au Congo (CMCo) / Country: Democratic Republic of Congo

¹² Photo from 1962, Leopoldville.

In response to the lack of hospitality shown by Gisongo and his people, the colonial authorities in Kilembe felt the need to invite missionaries to preach the love of neighbor.¹³ They entrusted this task to the Protestant missionaries of the Congo Inland Mission based in Djoko Punda in Western Kasai, but already present among the Pende in Nyanga.

Ironically, Djoko Punda is located in the Luebo region, where the correctional prison for all the Pende of Kilembe was built. This prison kept insurgents away from their home communities, in order to discourage those who did not obey the colonial order. The local Kasai population welcomed the sending of missionaries to Gisongo's country. They hoped it would help pacify the remaining Pende and reconcile them with the colonial presence.

As soon as they were informed of this request, the missionaries sent their emissary Songamadi, a Luba catechist in Nyanga. Songamadi was chosen because of his mastery of the Kipende language, which he had learned as an evangelist in Nyanga. Songamadi arrived in Mukedi in 1920.¹⁴

In 1921, Mabumba met Songamadi in Mukedi. He was very interested in the message coming out of his preaching. Mabumba naturally became Songamadi's ally.

One day, he accompanied the evangelist to Djoko Punda. On the way, Mabumba fell seriously ill. Songamadi, dismayed and emotionally disturbed, began praying to God on his knees for the sick man's recovery. With a prolonged sigh, Mabumba recovered and asked his companion where he had come from and where he was going. He kept wondering inwardly what had happened. Eventually, he asked Songamadi about his surprise recovery. Songamadi replied, "The God we worship is the one who acts on the basis of prayers that are addressed to him. That's why you were healed." And so, convinced of the extraordinary power of the God preached by Songamadi, Mabumba converted to Christianity even before he reached Djoko Punda.

Mabumba remained at Djoko Punda for about two years in a state of celibacy without any accusations of misconduct. During this time, he took the name Njoko to mark the setting of his spiritual rebirth. The CIM missionaries took an interest in him, and he benefited from their generosity and favors. Pastor Henry Moser, in particular, was very fond of him. He mastered the Tshiluba language as a result of his social interactions with the indigenous Luba. All these factors motivated the foreign CIM missionaries, including the Mosers, to come and settle in Gisongo's country with him.¹⁵

Mabumba and Songamadi made their trip to Djoko Punda at a time when modern means of communication (telephone, two-way radio) did not yet exist in the Congo.¹⁶

¹³ Phumbu Frédéric, aged around 92, former merchant and layman from the CMCo Mukedi district, interviewed by the author on May 31, 2023 in the Kanzamba district of DR Congo. Phumbu Frédéric told us that this motivation on the part of the colonial authorities was distinct from the missionaries' concern to evangelize this hitherto pagan region.

¹⁴ Barkman, Gerald J. "The Founding of Mukedi Station in the Belgian Congo." Term paper presented to John A. Lapp, Goshen College, 1974. Mennonite Historical Library, Goshen, Indiana, p. 13.

¹⁵ Njoko Léonard Ngula Getshi, septième fils de Mabumba, interviewé par Mihala Donatien le 7 mai 2023 à Kikwit en RD Congo.

¹⁶ Two-way "phonie" or citizen broad band radios would later become an important medium of

Thus, his family had no news from him. As time passed without any information, they concluded that Mabumba was no longer alive. All the members of his family began to weep and became inconsolable. They observed the customary mourning ritual, then buried the rest of Mabumba's belongings and the crossbeams from his bed. Mabumba's story was over. They began to refer to him with the posthumous designation *mujimba*, which means "poor" or "regretted."

A year later, his stay in Djoko Punda completed, Mabumba returned to Mukedi in the company of Joseph Songamadi and Pastor Moser to begin activities in the region prospected by Songamadi. Mabumba's entry into his homeland was an occasion of joy like no other. For some, he was a ghostly returnee, especially as he was accompanied by a white man. To his family, he was their legitimate son come back to life. The joy was immense for the whole village.

Modern school, baptism and marriage

As a child, Mabumba had already received a traditional upbringing focused on initiation into practical life. His father was a blacksmith, and the family expected Mabumba to follow the same path, as three of his brothers had already done. Now, to continue his life alongside the whites, Njoko chose to attend a modern school, even against his father's wishes.¹⁷ In 1927, he completed the second grade in the CIM elementary school in Mukedi. That same year he was baptized by the Reverend Archie Haller and became Njoko David. He was the first to be immersed in water among the eight baptized that day. Because of this, he is considered Mukedi's first Pende Christian.

On June 30, 1929, Njoko married Kwangu Rebecca. He met his future wife at the girls' convent, a boarding house where missionaries gathered young girls for schooling and preparation for married life. God blessed the couple with ten children: Gifundo Njoko Norbert (b. 1930, already deceased), Manesa Njoko Louis Bremy (b. 1934, deceased), Malamba Njoko Joseph (b. 1936, deceased), Etienne Christophe Njoko (b. 1939, deceased), Kake Njoko Joséphine (b. 1942), Giamana Mukuta Njoko Boniface (b. 1944), Ngulagutshi Njoko Léonard (b. 1946), Musubuludi Njoko Pierre (b. 1949), Mihua Njoko Véronique (b. 1952), and Marthe Njoko (b. 1954). (See accompanying photo where 9 appear; only Marthe was not yet born).

Catechist and advocate for the village of Lozo-Munene

After completing Bible school in Mukedi in 1932, Njoko was assigned as a teacher-catechist in Lozo-Munene, a village 25 km from the Mukedi mission.¹⁸ In this

long-distance communication for those living on mission stations in Belgian Congo.

¹⁷ "Typical Biographies I: David Njoko," *Congo Missionary Messenger* 5, no. 4 (March 1934): 99.

¹⁸ Beleji Mwatha Jackson, "Ndjoko David, un des premiers chrétiens du district de Mukedi," in *100 ans de mission Mennonite en République Démocratique du Congo : témoignages des apports locaux 1912-2012*, ed. Rod Hollinger-Janzen, Nancy J. Myers, and Jim Bertsche (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2012), 86–87,

https://anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/images/f/f5/NDJOKO_David.pdf.

community, he abstained from drinking raffia and palm wine, and did not smoke tobacco. In this, he was following the teachings of the Mennonite missionaries who had settled in Mukedi, for whom drinking and smoking could lead to excesses and misbehavior among Christians. His lifestyle, know-how and interpersonal skills were appreciated by the villagers, who overwhelmingly embraced the gospel he preached. In short, the couple was a model of good life and morals.

During his time in the village, a cholera epidemic ravaged the population. Njoko had to plead the village's case through the missionaries. His intervention prompted the colonial authorities to dispatch a medical team to treat the many sick in order to eliminate the epidemic. Unfortunately, during the carnage his daughter Ndungo Zibeth died. This unexpected loss upset him greatly. So, faced with a job offer from the Compagnie du Kasai et de l'Equateur (CKE), he left Lozo-Munene in 1934 to become a merchant at Lac Matshi. However, after a few years in this position, he decided to return to Mukedi to follow the pedagogical apprenticeship course. He obtained his teacher's diploma in 1940 and began teaching at the second-level school in Mukedi.

In 1943, because of his exceptional qualities as a man of God, the CIM missionaries at Mukedi recalled Njoko to take on the role of *kapita* or overseer of the girls. He worked under the supervision of Reverend Vernon Sprunger. Under this open-ended contract, he received a salary of forty francs.

In 1955, Njoko became a Kipende Bible translator. This time it was Mr. James Bertsche who employed him.

Njoko, farmer at Kayala

When Njoko David was on the eve of retirement, the missionaries advised him to buy a farm to prepare for his old age. Around 1951, he bought a farm at Kayala, in the Hala bush between Mukedi and the village of Mbombo.

While he was working on raising small livestock and poultry, jealous villagers – especially the courtiers of the traditional grand chief Nzamba a Munyingu – accused him of plotting against customary power. Apparently, a courtier of the grand chief Nzamba, Mukhunji in Gamanda, had drunk too much wine and gone mad in Chief Nzamba's courtyard. He reportedly said that Njoko David, a descendant of Chief Gisongo who had abdicated power, was preparing to usurp the power of Grand Chief Nzamba from his Kayala farm.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the chief of the Gisongo *groupement* fabricated another lie against Njoko to the colonial authorities. He claimed that if Njoko had placed his farm in the bush, it was because he was preparing a village that would rival Mukedi and rebel against the colonial administration.

The state post at Kilembe sent out its agents. Accompanied by a few villagers jealous of Mukedi, they clandestinely set fire to Njoko's houses and small livestock sheds. Everything was consumed, and Njoko almost lost one of his sons, a baby named Njoko Pierre.

¹⁹ Njoko Pierre, son of Njoko David, aged 76, interviewed by Mihala Donatien on May 14, 2023 at Mukedi Kakese.

With the support of the missionaries, poor Njoko identified the criminals who were in collusion with the Kilembe administrator. At the express request of Njoko's allies, the administrator was transferred from Kilembe to another post outside Gungu territory.

Njoko returns to Mukedi

After the Kayala disaster, Njoko had no choice but to return to Mukedi. After roaming far and wide, he returned to Mukedi to fulfill the mission that had been predestined for him: to serve his ancestral homeland as a light in the midst of darkness. God's mission for Njoko was not yet complete.

Njoko's former home in Mukedi no longer existed, as it had been built from local materials. All that remained was the tree ("Kamba" or "Kambala") that he had planted in front of his house. Because of this, and to avoid another misunderstanding with the customary authorities, Njoko moved to a new neighborhood on the northeast border of the CIM mission. He called this new area *Mukedi Kakese* (little Mukedi). In this way, the Tshiluba word *kakese*, meaning "small", was introduced into the local Pende language.

All Njoko's biological brothers came to build their homes in this new subdivision.²⁰ There were also several former students of the missionaries and other Mennonite Christians. At Mukedi Kakese, their morals and way of life were similar to those on the mission station. Their lives were irreproachable. Pagan practices were forbidden. Palm and raffia wine were not allowed. Traditional dances and other ancestral ceremonies were not permitted. Smoking, drumming, marrying two or more women, carving statues and weaving masks were the prerogative of neighboring popular districts that remained attached to pagan customs, such as the Gihe and Nzaji hamlets, but not of this new neighborhood.

The demographic explosion in this "civilized" neighborhood of *évolués* gave rise to others, including Kanzamba (initiated by Gidinda Daniel, Phumbu David and Mukedi Philidor) and Kayombo (initiated by Givule, younger brother of Njoko David, Gitugu Jacob and Mabula Matthieu).²¹ All these neighborhoods are adjacent to the CIM mission and have a geocultural and sociological landscape that mimics the Christian West.

What a master stroke! Njoko David wanted to spend the rest of his life in the bush on his farm, but providence brought him back to Mukedi to shape newborn human beings, both spiritually and materially.

²⁰ Njoko Pierre, interview.

²¹ Editor's note: The term "évolués" was used in the Congo by both colonial authorities and Africans to refer to a Europeanized, Christianized, educated, urban African middle class that emerged in the decades of the colonial era following the Second World War. Official "évolués" were issued with a card attesting to their status and granting them certain privileges, but the term was often used loosely to refer to Europeanized Africans more generally. For a discussion of the phenomenon of "Christian villages" during the colonial era, see also David Maxwell, "Remaking Boundaries of Belonging: Protestant Missionaries and African Christians in Katanga, Belgian Congo," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 22, no. 1 (January 2019): 59–80.

Njoko David as a model husband, responsible father and respected advisor

Njoko David was a model husband. Any conflict with his wife Kwangu was settled by peaceful means. His children's upbringing was centered on advice, stern remarks and tailor-made punishments. Njoko had great regard for human beings. His anger was limited to biting his finger and gnashing his teeth.²² He took a lot of time to converse with and, above all, to teach his children how to be good Christians. A teacher at heart, he ensured that almost all his children were able to get an education. As a result, they now enjoy socio-economic stability.

As a creature of God, Njoko also had weaknesses. For example, he advised his sons not to marry women from outside his Pende tribe or village. His discrimination went so far as to regard any unconverted or pagan person as an enemy.

Being of a charitable nature, Njoko was sensitive to the various social concerns of those around him. He sympathized morally and materially with the many situations of happiness and misfortune that befell members of his community. Through his personal efforts as a great livestock breeder, he was able to actively support the training of many young people without financial means. For example, he sent his brother Gabate André Gadibu to Bible school. He also supported pastors Gaphenda Jean and Mukhuphi Onesphore. Njoko was a member of the Association of Protestant Christians in Mukedi, and voluntarily paid a monthly lump sum to support evangelical work and the creation of new church entities.

Njoko maintained good relations with those around him. His strengths lay in his ability to forgive and counsel wrongdoers. With respect to the Protestant missionaries, Njoko was more than a friend. They socialized, regularly shared meals together, and discussed social issues.

In his role as advisor, he was the "church" in the middle of the village. Many people came to consult him and benefit from his advice. Even the traditional grand chief Nzamba a Muyungu, Njoko's rival in traditional politics, constantly sought his advice in the event of conflict with his officials, the local population or his other chief friends. He liked to call him *muntu wa Nzambi* ("man of God"). Because of Njoko's renown in this respect, he was awarded a bronze medal by the colonial authorities in 1956.

During the Mulele rebellion from 1963 to 1965, Mukedi was occupied by the rebels. All the inhabitants abandoned the village to take refuge in the neighboring areas of Khondo and Kandale. Njoko and his family fled like all the other villagers. Immediately after the rebellion, everyone returned to their neighborhoods and homes.

The territorial authority of Gungu recognized Njoko as a worthy Christian and an impartial man of peace. In 1969, he was nominated judge of customary affairs. However, Njoko turned down the offer. He felt that such a career would be

²² Njoko Léonard, son of Njoko David, interviewed by Mihala Donatien on May 7, 2023 in Kikwit.

incompatible with his role as a man of God because of the corruption, witchcraft, and other evils that surrounded the judge's role.

Njoko David, singer and composer

Njoko remained at Mukedi Kakese until his death. In his old age, he remained active in the church. He spent all his time serving the Lord, and drew strength from his faith in the Almighty God.

In addition to his work as a teacher, evangelist, *kapita* for girls, and translator of the Bible into Kipende, Njoko was also a singer of religious songs. He composed hymns 92 and 159 in the book *Ngimbo jia Gutumbuisa n'ajio Nzambi*. Hymn 92, *Yesu udi n'ame masugu Asue*, says, "Jesus is with me every day. In sorrow as in joy, he is a faithful friend, he will be with me wherever I go." Song 159, entitled *Yesu ngavua mbimbi ya ngutame gene*, says, "Jesus, I hear your voice calling me to purify myself, for you died for me. I come to Jesus, I come now..."

His children heard him sing these songs every day. He taught his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren to sing. Today, in the church at the historic Mukedi station, the main worship leaders are his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, both boys and girls.

Njoko David's death

Njoko David died a gentle death on May 4, 2003 in Mukedi hospital at the age of 115. During the last days of his life, on a certain Wednesday, he asked his son Njoko Pierre, who was at his bedside, to open his suitcase and prepare the shirt his grandson Muyima Njoko Osée had sent him. He said he was going to travel on Sunday. His son replied, "The doctor hasn't said a word yet about being released from the hospital, so how can we schedule the trip for Sunday?" It was like a dialogue of the deaf; they couldn't understand each other. Thursday, Friday and Saturday passed without a sign of distress. On Sunday morning, Pierre went to the pharmacy to get his father some cough medicine. When he returned, he found his father's lifeless body lying on his bed. Then he remembered the long Sunday trip his father had spoken of when asking for his clothes.²³

When he died, Njoko left behind more than a hundred grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He was buried in front of the CMCo church building in Mukedi as one of the first black Christians and artisans of this historic Mennonite station. Future generations will remember him when they see his tomb in front of the church, right at the center of the mission.

Mihala Donatien

²³ Njoko Pierre, interview.

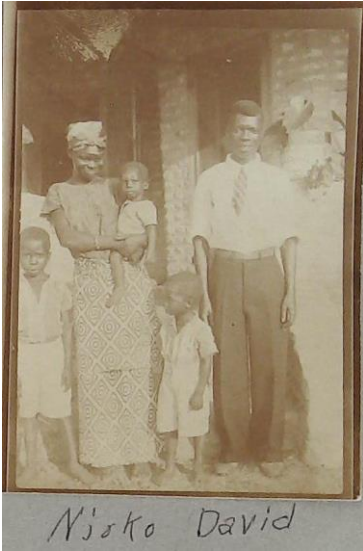
Sources:

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- Minutes of the Mukedi ecclesiastical district councils of 1971 and 1977. Documents kept at the office of the Mukedi ecclesiastical district secretariat, consulted by the author in 2022.

Mihala Ganzaji Donatien – born in Kinzamba (Gungu Kwilu) in 1957 – is the youngest of ten children. He holds a degree in History from ISP Kananga (1986) and is a doctoral candidate in History. He is currently administrative and financial secretary of the West Conference (Kikwit) of the Communauté Mennonite au Congo (CMCo – 27th community of the Church of Christ in Congo) in Kwilu. He is married with seven children.

Photo Gallery

Galerie Photos



Caption. Ndjoko David, his wife Kwangu Rebecca, and their three eldest sons: Gifundu Norbert (left), Manesa Louis Bremy (standing between his parents) and Malamba Joseph (in his mother's arms), in Mukedi circa 1937. *Source:* Archives of the Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission in Elkhart, USA.

Légende : Ndjoko David, son épouse Kwangu Rebecca, et leurs trois premiers fils : Gifundu Norbert (à gauche), Manesa Louis Bremy (debout entre ses parents) et Malamba Joseph (dans les bras de sa mère), à Mukedi vers 1937. *Source :* Archives de la Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission à Elkhart, États-Unis.



Caption : Ndjoko David and Kwangu Rebecca around 1952 with their first nine children, Gifundo Ndjoko Norbert (born 1930), Manesa Ndjoko Louis Bremy (born 1934), Malamba Ndjoko Joseph (born 1936), Etienne Christophe Ndjoko (born 1939), Kake Ndjoko Joséphine (born in 1942), Giamana Mukuta Ndjoko Boniface (born 1944), Ngulagutshi Ndjoko Léonard (born 1946), Musubuludi Ndjoko Pierre (born 1949), and Mihua Ndjoko Véronique (born 1952). Their last child, Marthe Ndjoko, was born in 1954.

Légende : Ndjoko David et Kwangu Rebecca vers 1952 avec leurs neuf premiers enfants, Gifundo Ndjoko Norbert (né 1930), Manesa Ndjoko Louis Bremy (né 1934), Malamba Ndjoko Joseph (né 1936), Etienne Christophe Ndjoko (né 1939), Kake Ndjoko Joséphine (née 1942), Giamana Mukuta Ndjoko Boniface (né 1944), Ngulagutshi Ndjoko Léonard (né 1946), Musubuludi Ndjoko Pierre (né 1949), et Mihua Ndjoko Véronique (née 1952). Leur dernier enfant, Marthe Ndjoko, naîtra en 1954.

Version française : Njoko David : L'arbre qui cache la forêt²⁴

Par Mihala Donatien



Introduction²⁵

Njoko David (né Mabumba Agadibu) était un jeune téméraire et convaincu de ses actes qui est devenu un des principaux artisans de la station missionnaire mennonite de Mukedi. Mukedi était la station-mère de la Congo Inland Mission (CIM) – devenue plus tard la Communauté mennonite au Congo (CMCo) – dans la province administrative actuelle du Kwilu.

Mabumba Agadibu est né à Nioka Kakesa vers 1888 au début de l'administration de l'État indépendant du Congo par le roi belge Léopold II. Il était le fils aîné de Gadibu du clan Gambembo, et de Kake. Ses deux parents étaient paysans du groupement Gatunda (Gatundo) dans le secteur Lozo, au territoire de Gungu, province du Kwilu. Mabumba était l'aîné dans une famille de cinq enfants dont quatre garçons et une fille.

Le nom de famille Mabumba, malheureusement tombé dans les oubliettes de l'histoire, vient du verbe *pende gubumba*, qui signifie réunir, regrouper, ou entasser. Il s'applique surtout au potier ou à la potière : la personne qui travaille l'argile en lui donnant la forme d'un pot, d'une cruche ou d'un autre récipient. Mabumba deviendra un tel rassembleur et unificateur dans ses relations avec les étrangers, les autorités coutumières et étatiques, et les missionnaires protestants.

De Mabumba à Njoko – une renaissance spirituelle

Mabumba est devenu Njoko lors d'une renaissance spirituelle qui a eu lieu suite à des circonstances historiques fâcheuses.

En effet, à l'époque de l'enregistrement des chefs coutumiers *pende* dans la région de Kilembe, l'administrateur colonial avait envoyé le policier Matwanyi pour sensibiliser la population dans le groupement Gatunda, qui était sous le règne du grand chef coutumier Gisongo du village Nzaji. Pendant cet événement, Gisongo a pris la parole pour s'opposer au policier. Il a décrit à la foule combien cette situation évoquait pour lui l'expérience amère des *Pende* en Angola aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècle à l'époque de la traite des noirs inaugurée par les Portugais. Pour le chef Gisongo, le discours de l'envoyé était un coup d'épée dans l'eau. Et lorsque, pour montrer sa supériorité, le policier a giflé Gisongo en présence de ses sujets, le chef était furieux et humilié. Il a demandé à sa population de le venger. Celle-ci a saisi le policier et l'a longuement torturé jusqu'à ce qu'il succombe à ses blessures.

²⁴ Dates : ca. 1888-2003 / Affiliation : Communauté mennonite au Congo (CMCo) / Pays : République Démocratique du Congo

²⁵ Photo datant de 1962, Léopoldville.

En réaction au manque d'hospitalité de la part de Gisongo et de son peuple, les autorités coloniales établies à Kilembe ont ressenti la nécessité d'inviter les missionnaires à prêcher l'amour du prochain.²⁶ Ils ont confié cette tâche aux missionnaires protestants de la Congo Inland Mission installés à Djoko Punda dans le Kasai Occidental, mais déjà présents à Nyanga chez le Pende.

Ironie du sort, Djoko Punda se trouve dans la région de Luebo où était construite la prison correctionnelle de tous les Pende de Kilembe. Cette prison éloignait les insurgés de leurs milieux d'origine afin de décourager les insoumis à l'ordre colonial. La population locale du Kasai a accueilli favorablement l'envoi de missionnaires dans le pays de Gisongo. Ils espéraient que cela contribuerait à pacifier les Pende restants et à les réconcilier avec la présence coloniale.

Aussitôt informés de cette demande, les missionnaires ont envoyé leur émissaire Songamadi, un catéchiste luba à Nyanga. Le choix Songamadi était motivé par le fait qu'il maîtrisait la langue kipende qu'il avait apprise sur le terrain d'évangélisation. Songamadi est arrivé à Mukedi en 1920.²⁷

En 1921, Mabumba a rencontré Songamadi à Mukedi. Le message qui sortait de ses prédications l'intéressait beaucoup. Mabumba est devenu automatiquement son allié.

Un jour, il accompagnait l'évangéliste jusqu'à Djoko Punda. En pleine route, Mabumba est tombé gravement malade. Consterné et troublé d'émotions, Songamadi s'est mis à prier Dieu à genoux pour que le malade soit guéri. Avec un soupir prolongé, Mabumba s'est rétabli et a demandé à son compagnon d'où il venait et vers où il partait. Il n'a cessé de se demander intérieurement ce qui s'était passé. Après ce questionnement intérieur, il a fini par extérioriser la question autour de sa guérison surprise. Songamadi a répondu, « Le Dieu que nous adorons est celui qui agit à partir de la prière lui adressée. C'est pourquoi tu as été guéri ». Alors, convaincu du pouvoir extraordinaire du Dieu que prêchait Songamadi, Mabumba s'est converti au christianisme avant même d'atteindre Djoko Punda.

Mabumba est resté à Djoko Punda pendant environ deux ans dans un état de célibat sans aucune accusation de méconduite. Pendant ce temps, il a pris le nom de Njoko qui était tiré du milieu de sa renaissance spirituelle. Les missionnaires de la CIM se sont intéressés à lui et il bénéficiait de leurs largesses et de leurs faveurs. Le pasteur Henry Moser, en particulier, le portait dans son cœur. Il maîtrisait bien le tshiluba à la suite de ses relations sociales avec les Luba autochtones. Tous ces éléments ont motivé les missionnaires étrangers de la CIM, dont les Moser, à aller s'installer dans le pays de Gisongo avec lui.²⁸

²⁶ Phumbu Frédéric, âgé d'environ 92 ans, ex-commerçant et laïc du district de la 27^e CMCo Mukedi, interview par l'auteur le 31 mai 2023 au quartier Kanzamba en RD Congo. Phumbu Frédéric nous a révélé que cette motivation des autorités coloniales était distincte du souci d'évangélisation qu'avaient les missionnaires dans cette région, jusque-là païenne.

²⁷ Barkman, Gerald J. "The Founding of Mukedi Station in the Belgian Congo." Travail de session présenté à John A. Lapp, Goshen College, 1974. Mennonite Historical Library, Goshen, Indiana, p. 13.

²⁸ Njoko Léonard Ngula Getshi, septième fils de Mabumba, interviewé par Mihala Donatien le 7 mai 2023 à Kikwit en RD Congo.

Mabumba et Songamadi ont fait leur voyage à Djoko Punda à une époque où les moyens de communications modernes (téléphone, phonie) n'existaient pas encore au Congo.²⁹ Alors, sa famille n'avait aucune nouvelle de sa part. Au fur et à mesure que le temps passait sans informations, la famille a conclu que Mabumba n'était plus en vie. Tous les membres de sa famille se sont mis à pleurer et devenaient inconsolables. Ils ont observé le deuil d'après les règles coutumières, puis ont enterré le reste des biens de Mabumba et les traverses de son grabat. Désormais l'histoire de Mabumba était finie. Pour le désigner à titre posthume, on l'appelait *mujimba*, c'est-à-dire « pauvre » ou « regretté. »

Une année plus tard, son séjour à Djoko Punda achevé, Mabumba est rentré à Mukedi en compagnie de Joseph Songamadi et du pasteur Moser pour commencer les activités dans la région prospectée par Songamadi. L'entrée de Mabumba dans le pays natal était une joie sans pareil. Pour certains, c'était un revenant, d'autant plus qu'il était accompagné d'un homme blanc. Pour sa famille, c'était le fils légitime revenu à la vie. La joie était immense pour tout le village.

École moderne, baptême et mariage

En tant qu'enfant, Mabumba avait déjà reçu une éducation traditionnelle centrée sur l'initiation à la vie pratique. Son père était forgeron et la famille s'attendait à ce que Mabumba suive la même voie, comme l'avaient déjà fait trois de ses frères. Maintenant, pour continuer sa vie à côté des blancs, Njoko a choisi de s'instruire à l'école moderne, même contre la volonté de son père.³⁰ En 1927, il était détenteur d'un bulletin délivré par l'école primaire du deuxième degré de la CIM à Mukedi. La même année il a été baptisé par le révérend Archie Haller et est devenu Njoko David. Il était le premier à être plongé dans l'eau parmi les huit baptisés de ce jour-là. À cause de cela, il est considéré comme le premier chrétien pende de Mukedi.

Le 30 juin 1929, Njoko a épousé Kwangu Rebecca. Il a rencontré sa future épouse au couvent des filles, une auberge où les missionnaires regroupaient les jeunes filles en vue de les scolariser et de les préparer à la vie conjugale. Dieu a béni le couple avec dix enfants : Gifundo Njoko Norbert (né en 1930 et déjà décédé), Manesa Njoko Louis Bremy (né en 1934, décédé), Malamba Njoko Joseph (né en 1936, décédé), Etienne Christophe Njoko (né en 1939, décédé), Kake Njoko Joséphine (née en 1942), Giamana Mukuta Njoko Boniface (né en 1944), Ngulagutshi Njoko Léonard (né en 1946), Musubuludi Njoko Pierre (né en 1949), Mihua Njoko Véronique (née en 1952), Marthe Njoko (née en 1954). (Voir photo en annexe où neuf apparaissent ; seule Marthe n'était pas encore née).

Catéchiste et défenseur du village Lozo-Munene

Après avoir terminé l'école biblique à Mukedi en 1932, Njoko était affecté comme

²⁹ La phonie était un système de communication par radio émetteur.

³⁰ "Typical Biographies I: David Njoko," *Congo Missionary Messenger* 5, no. 4 (March 1934): 99.

instituteur catéchiste à Lozo-Munene, village situé à 25 km de la mission de Mukedi.³¹ Dans cette localité il s'abstenait de boire du vin de raphia et de palme, et ne fumait pas de tabac. Dans cela il suivait l'enseignement des missionnaires mennonites installés à Mukedi, pour qui la boisson et le tabac pouvaient conduire à des excès et méconduites chez les chrétiens. Son savoir-vivre, savoir-faire et savoir-être étaient appréciés des villageois qui adhéraient massivement à l'évangile qu'il prêchait. Bref, le couple était un exemple de bonne vie et mœurs.

Pendant son ministère dans ce village, une épidémie de choléra a ravagé la population. Dans ces circonstances, c'était Njoko qui devait plaider la cause du village en passant par les missionnaires. Son intervention a amené les autorités coloniales à dépêcher une équipe médicale pour soigner les nombreuses malades afin d'éliminer l'épidémie. Malheureusement, au cours de ce carnage sa fille Ndungo Zibeth est décédée. Cette perte inattendue l'a beaucoup troublé. Ainsi devant une offre d'emploi de la Compagnie du Kasai et de l'Equateur (C.K.E.), il a quitté Lozo-Munene en 1934 pour devenir vendeur de marchandises au Lac Matshi. Mais après quelques années dans ce poste, il a décidé de revenir à Mukedi pour suivre le cours d'apprentissage pédagogique. Il a eu son diplôme d'instituteur en 1940 et a commencé à enseigner à l'école du deuxième degré à Mukedi.

En 1943, à cause de ses qualités exceptionnelles d'homme de Dieu, les missionnaires de la CIM à Mukedi ont rappelé Njoko pour assumer la fonction de *kapita* ou de surveillant des filles. Il travaillait sous la supervision du révérend Vernon Sprunger. Avec ce contrat à durée indéterminée il recevait un salaire de quarante francs.

En 1955, Njoko est devenu traducteur de la Bible en Kipende. Cette fois-ci c'était M. James Bertsche qui l'employait.

Njoko, fermier à Kayala

Alors que Njoko David était à la veille de sa retraite, les missionnaires lui ont conseillé d'acheter une ferme pour préparer sa vieillesse. Il a ainsi acheté une ferme vers 1951 dans la brousse Hala entre Mukedi et le village de Mbombo, précisément à Kayala.

Pendant qu'il développait l'élevage du petit bétail et de la volaille, les villageois jaloux – surtout les courtisans du grand chef coutumier Nzamba a Munyingu – l'ont accusé d'un complot contre le pouvoir coutumier. Il paraît qu'un courtisan du grand chef coutumier Nzamba, Mukhunji à Gamanda, après avoir bu trop de vin, aurait perdu le nord dans la cour du Chef Nzamba. Il aurait raconté que Njoko David, descendant du chef Gisongo qui avait abdicqué le pouvoir, se préparait à usurper le pouvoir du grand Chef Nzamba à partir de sa ferme de Kayala.³² De son côté, le chef de groupement de

³¹ Beleji Mwatha Jackson, "Ndjoko David, un des premiers chrétiens du district de Mukedi," dans *100 ans de mission Mennonite en République Démocratique du Congo : témoignages des apports locaux 1912-2012*, sous dir. Rod Hollinger-Janzen, Nancy J. Myers, et Jim Bertsche (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2012), 86–87,

https://anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/images/f/f5/NDJOKO_David.pdf.

³² Njoko Pierre, fils de Njoko David, âgé de 76 ans, interviewé par Mihala Donatien le 14 mai

Gisongo a inventé un autre mensonge contre Njoko auprès de l'autorité coloniale. Pour lui, si Njoko plaçait sa ferme dans la brousse, c'est qu'il préparait un village concurrentiel à Mukedi et rebelle à l'administration coloniale.

Le poste d'État de Kilembe a envoyé ses agents. Accompagnés de quelques villageois jaloux de Mukedi, ils ont incendié clandestinement les maisons de Njoko et ses abris de petit bétail. Tout était consumé, et Njoko a failli même perdre un de ses fils alors bébé du nom de Njoko Pierre.

Avec le soutien des missionnaires, le pauvre Njoko a repéré les malfaiteurs qui étaient en complicité avec l'administrateur de Kilembe. À la demande expresse des alliés de Njoko, cet administrateur a été muté de Kilembe pour un autre poste hors du territoire de Gungu.

Njoko de retour à Mukedi

Après le désastre de Kayala, Njoko n'avait plus de choix que de rentrer à Mukedi. Après avoir erré çà et là, il est revenu à Mukedi pour accomplir la mission qui lui avait été prédestinée : celle de servir sa patrie d'origine comme une lumière au milieu des ténèbres. La mission de Dieu pour Njoko n'était donc pas encore terminée.

L'ancienne habitation de Njoko à Mukedi n'existait plus, parce que c'était une maison construite en matériaux locaux. Il ne restait que l'arbre (« Kamba » ou « Kambala ») qu'il avait planté devant sa maison.³³ Pour cette raison et afin d'éviter un autre malentendu avec le pouvoir coutumier, Njoko s'est installé dans un nouveau quartier à la frontière nord-est de la mission CIM. Il a appelé ce nouveau terrain *Mukedi Kakese* (petit Mukedi). De cette façon, le mot tshiluba *kakese*, qui veut dire « petit », est venu enrichir la langue pende du milieu.

Tous les frères biologiques de Njoko sont venus construire leurs maisons dans ce nouveau lotissement.³⁴ Il y avait aussi plusieurs anciens élèves des missionnaires et d'autres chrétiens mennonites. Là, leurs mœurs et leur mode de vie étaient pareils à ceux de la station missionnaire. Leur vie était irréprochable. Les pratiques païennes y étaient interdites. On ne pouvait pas y tirer le vin de palme ou le raphia. Les danses traditionnelles et les autres cérémonies ancestrales n'y étaient pas permises. Fumer, tambouriner, épouser deux ou plusieurs femmes, tailler les statues et tisser les masques étaient l'apanage des quartiers populaires voisins qui sont restés attachés aux coutumes païennes, tels que les hameaux Gihe et Nzaji, mais pas de ce nouveau quartier.

L'explosion démographique dans ce quartier des « évolués » a donné naissance à d'autres, qui sont Kanzamba (initié par Gidinda Daniel, Phumbu David, et Mukedi Philidor) et Kayombo (initié par Givule, frère cadet de Njoko David, Gitugu Jacob et Mabula Matthieu).³⁵ Tous ces quartiers sont voisins à la mission CIM et ont un paysage

2023 à Mukedi Kakese.

³³ Ce gros et géant arbre existe toujours, derrière le bureau de l'École Primaire Gatundo.

³⁴ Njoko Pierre, interview.

³⁵ Ndlr: Le terme « évolués » a été utilisé au Congo à la fois par les autorités coloniales et par les Africains pour désigner une classe moyenne africaine européanisée, christianisée, éduquée et vivant en milieu urbain, qui a émergé dans les décennies de l'ère coloniale qui ont suivi la Seconde

géoculturel et sociologique qui imite l'occident chrétien. Quel coup du maître ! Njoko David voulait terminer sa vie en brousse dans sa ferme, mais la providence l'a ramené à Mukedi pour forger des hommes nouveau-nés spirituellement et matériellement.

Njoko David en tant qu'époux modèle, père de famille responsable, et conseiller respecté

Njoko David était un époux modèle et paisible. Tout conflit avec Kwangu son épouse était réglée par des moyens pacifiques. L'éducation de ses enfants était centrée sur les conseils, les remarques sévères et des punitions taillées sur mesure. Njoko avait beaucoup de considération pour la personne humaine. Sa colère se limitait à mordre son doigt et à grincer les dents.³⁶ Il prenait beaucoup de temps pour causer et surtout pour enseigner ses enfants comment être de bons chrétiens. Enseignant de la première heure, il a scolarisé presque tous ses enfants. C'est pourquoi ils bénéficient aujourd'hui d'une stabilité socio-économique.

Comme créature de Dieu, Njoko avait aussi des faiblesses. Par exemple, il conseillait à ses fils de ne pas se marier avec des femmes en dehors de sa tribu pende ou de son village. Sa discrimination allait jusqu'à considérer toute personne non convertie ou païenne comme ennemie.

Étant de nature charitable, Njoko était sensible aux différentes questions sociales de son entourage. Il compatissait moralement et matériellement avec de nombreuses situations de bonheur et de malheur qui arrivaient aux membres de sa société. Par ses efforts personnels de grand éleveur il réussissait à soutenir activement la formation de plusieurs jeunes dépourvues de moyens financiers. Par exemple, il a envoyé son frère Gabate André Gadibu à l'école biblique. Il a aussi pris en charge les pasteurs Gaphenda Jean et Mukhuphi Onesphore. Njoko était membre de l'Association des chrétiens protestants de Mukedi, et il versait mensuellement et volontairement une somme forfaitaire d'argent pour soutenir l'œuvre évangélique et la création de nouvelles entités ecclésiales.

Njoko entretenait facilement des relations avec son entourage. Ses points forts étaient de pardonner sans cesse et de conseiller les fautifs. En ce qui concerne les missionnaires protestants, Njoko était plus qu'un ami. Ils se fréquentaient, partageaient régulièrement les repas ensemble, et discutaient des questions sociales.

En sa qualité de conseiller, il était « l'église » au milieu du village. Beaucoup de personnes venaient le consulter et bénéficiaient de ses conseils. Même le grand chef coutumier Nzamba a Muyungu, quand bien même rival politique coutumier, ne cessait de lui demander conseil en cas de conflit avec ses notables, sa population ou ses amis

Guerre mondiale. Les « évolués » officiels recevaient une carte attestant de leur statut et leur accordant certains privilèges, mais le terme était souvent utilisé au sens large pour désigner plus généralement les Africains européanisés. Pour une discussion du phénomène des « villages chrétiens » pendant l'ère coloniale, voir aussi David Maxwell, "Remaking Boundaries of Belonging: Protestant Missionaries and African Christians in Katanga, Belgian Congo," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 22, no. 1 (janvier 2019): 59–80.

³⁶ Njoko Léonard, fils de Njoko David, interviewé par Mihala Donatien le 7 mai 2023 à Kikwit.

chefs extérieurs. Il aimait l'appeler *mntu wa Nzambi* (« homme de Dieu »). À cause de la renommée de Njoko dans ce contexte, il a été décoré d'une médaille de bronze par les autorités coloniales en 1956.

Pendant la rébellion Muléliste de 1963 à 1965, Mukedi était occupé par les rebelles et tous les habitants l'ont abandonné pour se réfugier dans les secteurs voisins de Khondo et Kandale. Njoko et sa famille ont pris le chemin de refuge comme tous les autres villageois. Juste après la rébellion, chacun a regagné son quartier et son domicile.

Reconnu comme un chrétien de grande valeur, étant impartial et un homme de paix, Njoko a été nommé juge des affaires coutumières en 1969 par l'autorité territoriale de Gungu. Mais Njoko a décliné cette offre, car il trouvait que cette carrière était incompatible avec son rôle d'homme de Dieu à cause de la corruption, de la sorcellerie et d'autres maux qui entourent le métier d'un juge.

Njoko David, chanteur et compositeur

Njoko est resté à Mukedi Kakese jusqu'à sa mort. Pendant sa vieillesse il est toujours resté actif dans l'Église. Il passait tout son temps à servir le Seigneur, et il puisait sa force dans sa foi dans le Dieu tout-puissant.

En plus de son travail d'enseignant, d'évangéliste, de *kapita* des filles, et de traducteur de la Bible en kipende, Njoko était aussi chanteur de chants religieux. Il a composé les cantiques 92 et 159 dans le livre *Ngimbo jia Gutumbuisa n'ajio Nzambi*.³⁷ Le chant 92 est intitulé « *Yesu udi n'ame masugu Asue* ». Le chant dit, « Jésus est avec moi tous les jours. Dans les peines comme dans la joie, il est un ami fidèle, il sera avec moi partout où j'irai ». Le chant 159 s'intitule « *Yesu ngavua mbimbi ya ngutame gene* ». Il dit « Jésus, j'entends ta voix qui m'appelle pour me purifier, car tu étais mort pour moi. Je viens à Jésus, je viens maintenant... ».

Ses enfants l'entendaient chanter quotidiennement ces chants. Il apprenait à ses enfants et à ses petits-enfants et arrière-petits-enfants à chanter. Aujourd'hui dans l'église de la station historique de Mukedi, les grands animateurs des cultes sont ses petits-enfants et arrière-petits-enfants, garçons et filles.

La mort de Njoko David

Njoko David est mort d'une mort douce le 4 mai 2003 à l'hôpital de Mukedi vers l'âge de 115 ans. Pendant les derniers jours de sa vie, un certain mercredi, il a demandé à son fils Njoko Pierre, qui était à son chevet, d'ouvrir sa valise et de lui apprêter la chemise que son petit-fils Muyima Njoko Osée lui avait envoyée. Il a dit qu'il allait voyager dimanche. Son fils lui a répliqué, « Le médecin n'a pas encore dit un mot déclarant la sortie de l'hôpital, comment alors programmer le voyage pour dimanche ? » C'était presque un langage des sourds, car ils ne se comprenaient pas tous les deux. Jeudi, vendredi et samedi sont passés sans un signe de désespoir. Dimanche

³⁷ *Ngimbo jia Gutumbuisa n'ajio Nzambi* [Chants pour glorifier Dieu, en kipende]. Kinshasa : CEDI, 1991 (avec éditions antérieures en 1944 et 1961).

matin, Pierre était parti lui procurer un antitussif à la pharmacie. À son retour, il a trouvé le corps sans vie de son père étendu sur son lit. Il s'est alors rappelé du long voyage de dimanche dont lui avait parlé son père en lui demandant ses habits.³⁸

À sa mort, Njoko a laissé derrière lui plus de cent petits-enfants et arrière-petits-enfants. Il a été enterré devant le temple de la CMCo à Mukedi comme un des premiers chrétiens et artisans noirs de cette station historique mennonite. C'est sous forme d'un mausolée que les générations futures se souviendront de lui quand ils verront un tombeau en plein centre de la mission devant l'église.

Mihala Donatien

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Njoko Léonard, 87 ans, septième fils de Njoko David, ancien de l'église 27^e CMCO, district ecclésial de Kanzombi, interview par l'auteur le 7 mai 2023 à

³⁸ Njoko Pierre, interview.

Kikwit.

Njoko Pierre, 76 ans, huitième fils de Njoko David, agent à l'Institut de Conservation de l'Environnement et président des laïcs du district de la 27e CMCO à Mukedi, interview par l'auteur le 14 mai 2023 à Mukedi Kakese.

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L'auteur de cette biographie, reçue en 2024, est Mihala Ganzaji Donatien, né à Kinzamba (Gungu Kwilu) en 1957 et cadet d'une famille de dix enfants. Licencié agrégé en Histoire à l'ISP Kananga (1986), il est chef de travaux (doctorant) en Histoire. Actuellement il est secrétaire administratif et financier de la Conférence Ouest (Kikwit) de la Communauté mennonite au Congo (CMCo – 27e communauté de l'Église du Christ au Congo) au Kwilu. Il est marié et père de sept enfants.

The Unsung Co-founder: The Pioneering Role of Hannah Barnes in Establishing the Musama Disco Christo Church³⁹

By Carine Amo-Nyampong

Introduction

Hannah Barnes is regarded as the “pillar behind”⁴⁰ the Musama Disco Christo Church, which has flourished for a hundred years; a remarkable feat for an autochthonously founded church. From contributing to Ghana’s independence to establishing a self-sustaining city called Mozano, no achievement of the Musama Church is complete without recognizing the contributions of Hannah Barnes. Yet, many historical accounts have failed to category recognize her as a co-founder.⁴¹ Prophetess Natholomoa Jehu-Appiah, as she officially came to be known, co-founded the Musama church by her faithful dedication and selflessness. In fact, her prophetic gift was the basis on which the movement made pivotal decisions including her marriage to Egyanka Appiah and the birth of their son who became the leader of the movement.

Background

Ghana was known as the Gold Coast, a name given by Portuguese explorers, the first Europeans to arrive on her shores. It was not until March 6, 1957, that Ghana gained its independence from British rule and changed its name. Western influence had by then embedded itself deeply into nearly every facet of life. On the religious front, many Ghanaians still practiced African indigenous religions. However, with colonialism came Christian missionary activity, which often operated in tandem with colonial authorities, each reinforcing the other's influence. As the desire for independence and African self-determination grew, a religious awakening swept through the land, sparking a mass consciousness that sought to reclaim autonomy, cultural heritage, and spiritual identity from the grip of colonial and missionary forces.

Amid this growing agitation for independence, a spiritual revival was also taking root in the form of prophetism—that is, new religious movements that directly challenged the authority of the established mission churches.⁴² These movements rejected the imposition of Western lifestyles and values on new converts, embracing

³⁹ Hannah Barnes, a.k.a. Prophetess Natholomoa Jehu-Appiah; dates: 1902 – 1979; Musama Disco Christo Church; Ghana.

⁴⁰ A term used by Jonasoma Sammy Efulful Jehu Appiah in a personal interview.

⁴¹ For example, in Amy Cox, “The Historical Exodus of the Musama Disco Christo Church” In *African Diaspora ISPs* 38. 2002. *Accesses February 8, 2025.* https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/african_diaspora_isp/38, only Egyanka Appiah is recognised as the founder.

⁴² C. G. Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana* (London: SCM Press Ltd) 1.

instead a form of Christianity that made use of indigenous medicine and mother-tongue languages for liturgy. This was a radical departure from the practices of historic mission churches, which had long enforced English or other European languages in worship and sought to suppress traditional African spiritual practices. For many, these new movements were a breath of fresh air because they offered a faith that resonated with their lived experiences and cultural heritage.

It was within this setting of resistance and revival that the Musama Disco Christo Church (MDCC) emerged. The MDCC stood in defiance of both colonial and missionary dominance. Yet it was not only Joseph William Egyanka Appiah, a former Methodist catechist, whose vision shaped the church. It was also the extraordinary faith and resilience of his second wife and co-founder, Prophetess Natholomoa Jehu-Appiah, that made the MDCC a formidable spiritual force. Together, they crafted a uniquely Ghanaian expression of Christianity that broke away from the foreign mold, embracing instead the familiar African spirituality and identity. They stood against the tide of colonial and missionary imposition, proclaiming a gospel that spoke directly to the hearts of the people in a way the mission churches could not. The MDCC was more than just a church. It was a movement, a cry for spiritual self-determination, and a return to roots in an era of profound transformation.

According to the historical record, the MDCC emanated from a prayer group led by Egyanka Appiah in 1919. Despite this, it inaugurated its peace festival on August 24, 1924 with the birth of the second Akaboha (King), the first son of the founders. The peace festival, a week long celebration, is the most important event of the church. August 24, 2024 marked the MDCC's hundredth year of celebrating peace festivals and of the church's formal organization as an independent movement.

A Woman with Many Names

Abena Baawa was born in 1902 in Gomoa Ogwan, a small town that is steeped in tradition and ancestral beliefs, one of two sisters who shared the same day name, "Abena," given to female children born on a Tuesday. As the younger sister, she was affectionately called "Abena Kuma" (similar to her contemporary Afua Kuma⁴³) to mark her place as the junior sibling. Born to traditionalist parents, Opanyin Barnes and Maame Midia Okwan, she was raised in a world far removed from the influence of Christian missionary schools, even though such schools were in nearby towns. She received no Western education but was meticulously trained by her parents in the customs and expectations of womanhood—a foundation that would later prove invaluable in her remarkable life. She never sat in a classroom or went for confirmation classes—she was illiterate. There are no known records of anything peculiar about her childhood or teenage years.

By the 1900s, the historic mission churches had made significant inroads into the indigenous society of the Gold Coast, firmly labelling those who had not converted to Christianity as pagans. Abena Kuma, unbaptized and unfamiliar with the church, was

⁴³ Sara Fretheim, *The Story of Afua Kuma and Her Praises*, DACB African Christian Forebears series, ed by Michele Sigg. 6.

thus labelled a pagan because her parents are not recorded as having converted to Christianity. Yet, she found herself inexplicably drawn to the ministry of Joseph William Egyanka Appiah, a man whose growing reputation for spiritual power and prophetic insight had begun to captivate the people of Gomoa Ogwan.

Subsequently, on May 30, 1920, at the age of about eighteen, Abena Kuma experienced a life-altering moment when she attended the Egyanka Appiah revivals out of curiosity. These revivals were prayer meetings held apart from normal meetings of the Methodist Church in Gomoa Ogwan. The prayer group was called Faith Society. Overcome by what was later described as the arresting power of the Holy Spirit, Abena Kuma fell into a trance that lasted for five hours. This strange and profound occurrence has since been recounted in each generation. During this mystical experience, she is described as having seen a vision in which there was a ladder stretching between heaven and earth with seven angels descending. One of the angels handed her a Bible and told her that she was to carry the message of the gospel to the ends of the earth, alongside Egyanka Appiah.⁴⁴ That day marked her conversion to Christianity. She was baptized by the prayer group of Egyanka Appiah—who was a Methodist catechist at the time—and given the name Hannah Barnes. Hannah was a biblical name and Barnes her father's surname. Consequently, May 30, 1920 marks her baptism and conversion to Christianity.

Abena Kuma Baawa became known by the Christian baptismal name Hannah Barnes, yet she would become known by still another name. In 1922, two years after her baptism, as she deepened in commitment and devotion to her newfound faith in Christianity, she had another spiritual encounter. It was revealed to her that she would be crowned as the queen of all the female members of the rapidly expanding movement. With this revelation came a new name: “Natholomoa,” which means “Queen.” This was the very first of many divine names that would come to define the prayer ministry which eventually became the MDCC.

Meanwhile, Egyanka Appiah faced criticism from the Methodist Church and fled from Gomoa Ogwan to Onyaawonsu in 1923. That same year, he officially sought Hannah Barnes' hand in marriage. Hannah Barnes, who was twenty-one years old at the time, became the wife of Egyanka Appiah in his second marriage. Their first act as a couple was to go on a fast for forty days, seeking God's blessings and guidance for their lives, the people around them, and what would eventually become the MDCC kingdom.

However, this marriage was not without its trials. Egyanka Appiah's first wife annulled their marriage, refusing to abandon her Methodist roots for the new religion her former husband had founded. Yet the union between Hannah and Egyanka seemed predestined, a divine confirmation of one of the visions she had received during her five-hour trance three years earlier. Still, it was not an easy path for Hannah.

In his book, Jonasoma Sammy Eduful Jehu Appiah describes his grandmother as petite in physique, while her husband was nearly a decade older and physically imposing. To overcome this perceived disparity, she undertook a spiritual retreat, confining herself to a room for thirty days. On the final day, when she came out of

⁴⁴ C. G. Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana*. 32.

confinement, her body was said to have been miraculously transformed and had become plump, matching her husband's physique.⁴⁵

A year after her marriage to Egyanka Appiah he too, received a divine name. The couple became Jemisimiham and Natholomoa Jehu-Appiah, united not only by marriage but also by their spiritual mission. Natholomoa was known for her exceptional ability to engage in prolonged fasting and prayer as she sought to hear directly from God. She was also the first MDCC member to receive a divine name. Together, they had six sons, Mathapoly Moses Jehu-Appiah, who became the second Akaboha, Rev. Joda-Ott Jehu-Appiah, Prophet Cyiata Attona Jehu-Appiah, Rev. Adam Mataduka Jehu-Appiah, Rev. Swilu Larcoma Jehu-Appiah and Rev. Jeresim Offa Jehu-Appiah.⁴⁶

The final name by which Hannah Barnes is known holds special significance within the MDCC. Hannah Barnes and Egyanka Appiah were named "Ayemidi-Kusidi" by the Holy Spirit, a name which translates to "double-pointed sword." This powerful name indicated their joint mission as a divinely ordained force for the work ahead. It preceded their formal titles as "Akaboha" and "Akatitibi,"⁴⁷ which translates as "King above all earthly kings" and "Queen above all earthly queens," respectively. These titles were only adopted after their marriage and the birth of their heir and first child. The names became official on July 3, 1925 according to the history of the church.⁴⁸

In May 1925, Faith Society was officially recognised as the Musama Disco Christo Church which is translated into English as the Army of Christ Church. Its undisputed founders, Natholomoa and Jemisimiham Jehu-Appiah, were acknowledged by the adherents and other leadership members.

Expressions of her spirituality

Among many remarkable spiritual feats, Hannah Barnes went on a seven-day fast during which she was sustained by an angel from heaven who fed her with a white substance.⁴⁹ The period was marked by other supernatural happenings as she possessed the ability to discern those with evil intentions and could predict calamities before they occurred. Additionally, she prophesied that Egyanka Appiah would be taken up to heaven for three months to be fortified for the task ahead. However, the congregation, gripped with fear, pleaded, and the prophecy did not manifest. Subsequent unique

⁴⁵ Jonasoma Sammy Eduful Jehu Appiah, *Mathapoly Moses: A Servant of God*. 19.

⁴⁶ Records available name these six sons. However, the source interviewed mentioned that the Prophetess had seven sons.

⁴⁷ The title "Akatitibi" has come to refer exclusively to Prophetess Natholomoa, as the MDCC at the time permitted polygamy and did not regard it as a moral sin. So the MDCC allowed subsequent Akabohas to have more than one Akatitibi. This practice led to various complications and the title was eventually discontinued for subsequent wives. Today, "Akatitibi" refers only to the first wife, Natholomoa, while the title "Akaboha" continues to be held by the incumbent leader. The current leader is Akaboha IV, a direct descendant of Natholomoa.

⁴⁸ Jehu Appiah, *Mathapoly Moses: A Servant of God*. 8.

⁴⁹ Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana*, 33.

occurrences and trances manifested through Hannah Barnes strengthened the faith of the people and significantly increased the population of the MDCC.

Equally, Hannah Barnes herself was taken up to heaven in physical form.⁵⁰ She vanished from the midst of a praying group and reappeared in a miraculous manner. The circumstances frightened everyone present, except for Egyanka Appiah. At this gathering, Hannah declared that God had given her as a helper to the nascent movement for its growth and expansion. This disappearance occurred a second time and during this celestial journey, she received the revelation that she would give birth to a son who would lead the new church she and her future husband were establishing. This event was widely talked about because she vanished on a Good Friday in 1922 from Egyanka Appiah's room in the presence of others and reappeared at the church altar on the Sunday, with vivid descriptions of heaven and a message for the earthly followers.

Jonasoma Jehu Appiah corroborates the spiritual journey of his grandmother and states that Natholomoa was taken up into heaven where she saw a bald-headed man riding in a stone palanquin. There she was given a vision of the future leader of the MDCC who would be her son. This prophecy was unique because it included precise details about the birth of her child, even though she was not married at the time. She was told that her child would be born at noon on August 24, 1924, approximately two years before the given date. After the eventual birth of her son, she was also given the details of the child who would become his wife. She later anointed her son as the second Akaboha after the death of her husband, the first Akaboha as the leader of the MDCC. All these things came true just as she had prophesied.

A Selfless Woman

Hannah Barnes made her home open to those in need and her heart was expansive enough to welcome all who sought shelter, comfort, and guidance. She was blessed with profound wisdom, capable of resolving the most complex issues. Her remarkable gift of prophecy allowed her to foresee events in the lives of her children and church members with astounding accuracy. Although she gave birth to six sons⁵¹, she adopted and raised many more, creating an extended family that received both physical and spiritual nurturing under her care.⁵²

Hannah Barnes' hospitality was unmatched. Despite the fact that she never sat in a classroom, she dedicated herself to ensuring that every child under her care had the opportunity to receive a formal education as long as they were willing, in stark contrast to her own upbringing. Though considered illiterate, she astounded those around her by reading the Bible in her mother tongue with miraculous fluency. She not only read the Scriptures but also interpreted them with clarity and passion, offering both sermons and personal counsel that were rich in spiritual insight. Jonasoma Jehu Appiah testifies

⁵⁰ While this story was documented by C. G. Baeta in *Prophetism in Ghana*. I confirmed with my informants if this was true and they responded in the affirmative.

⁵¹ Six sons are named according to the literature available.

⁵² According to Jonasoma Sammy Eduful Jehu Appiah whom I interviewed on August 27, 2024 during my visit to Muzana.

that he once skipped school but unfortunately ran into his grandmother while gallivanting about. Her reprimand sent him packing back to school without hesitation.⁵³

Her commitment to the empowerment of women was extraordinary because it was not the norm during her time. Hannah Barnes encouraged all the women in her congregation to become financially independent, believing that economic autonomy was vital to their well-being. She led by example by learning a trade herself and teaching it to other women. This enabled many of them to support themselves and their families. Her efforts created a community where women found safety, support, and purpose. Her example shaped a church that was dominated by strong, resilient women who looked to her for guidance and inspiration.

In essence, Hannah dedicated herself to the work of God without neglecting her responsibilities as wife and mother. While the MDCC flourished, her home thrived as well.

A Legacy of Indigenous Wisdom and Spiritual Leadership

Prophetess Natholomoa's immunity from formal Western education became a powerful asset, allowing her to pass on indigenous and divine knowledge to her children and grandchildren. She insisted that both her biological and adopted children develop their innate, God-given abilities. In the MDCC, nearly all prophets and prophetesses trace their spiritual growth back to her inspiration. She was not confined to one place. As the church expanded, she travelled to different branches, bringing assurance and heavenly blessings. Often, she made these journeys with her husband, Akaboha I, and her son, Akaboha II, strengthening the bonds within the growing church community. In this way, she became the strongest "pillar behind" the growth of the MDCC.

Even though Hannah Barnes had no other profession, she found innovative ways to provide for her family. Her husband, who left his job as a Methodist catechist to answer his spiritual calling as Akaboha, no longer had a regular income. Undeterred, Hannah eventually turned to producing kenkey and pastries, which she sold within the community.⁵⁴ It has become a tradition practiced to this day by the "Natholomoa band"⁵⁵ at Mozano.

Hannah Barnes passed away on June 22, 1979. Today, the Natholomoa Band continues to bring women together to learn homemaking skills modelled after her life. Her former residence at Mozano is preserved as a healing temple, a testament to her enduring spiritual impact. The reverence given to prophetess Natholomoa can be summed up in the words of Jonasoma Sammy Eduful Jehu Appiah: "Most of the prophecies about the church were given through Prophetess Natholomoa Appiah. I

⁵³ Jonasoma Sammy Eduful Jehu Appiah claims to be the first Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon trained pastor of the MDCC and attributes this feat to his grandmother's nurturing.

⁵⁴ Kenkey is a type of dumpling made with fermented cornmeal, wrapped in banana leaves and steamed.

⁵⁵ A women's group named in her honor akin to a women's fellowship in other churches.

don't know, maybe it was God's strategy on shaping our minds about women... God is able to use any vessel that He has created to promote His will..."⁵⁶

Carine Amo-Nyampong

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Informants

Mr. S. P. Ankra and Mrs. Felicia Ankra gave their home for the interview by Carine Amo-Nyampong, August 27, 2024, Sueduro, Mozano and also gave information during the interview.

⁵⁶ Jonasoma Sammy Eduful Jehu Appiah. Interview by author, August 27, 2024. Sueduro, Mozano, tape recording.

This biography, received in 2024, was researched and written by Carine Amo-Nyampong, an independent researcher and pastor at the Power of God Pentecostal Church, Adjeikojo-Ashaiman, Ghana. She was a participant of the July 2024 workshop for writers of women's stories held at Akrofi-Christaller Institute in Akropong, Ghana, supervised by Dr. Michele Sigg and Dr. Dorcas Ini Dah.

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Jesus outside the city

Dumping sites are prophetic signs of what is wrong with our society – they are places where humans are discarded as waste together with toxic materials, dirty needles and wasted food; and a sign of the grossest possible failure of creation in its most vulnerable state – unsustainable both ecologically and in terms of human well-being.

This is the place ‘outside the city’ where waste, lepers, criminals and outcasts have found co-habitation since the earliest times. It is in stark contrast to the capitalist city in all its flourishing, found in corporate headquarters and shopping malls and security estates, and in equally stark contrast to the religions of popular culture, with their successful branding, following the methods of the past empire.

In its position of stark contrast, the place ‘outside the city’ potentially represents another movement, often invisible, often discarded, often hidden behind piles of waste; but sometimes vocal, sometimes vigilantly resistant, sometimes boldly provocative; inviting us to discover another face of Jesus, another theology, another ecclesiology, and a different city.

It was outside the walls of the city that Jesus suffered death and where Peter suggested Jesus followers should be in solidarity.

Orlando Costas (1982) writes, in *Christ outside the gate*, about missions beyond Christendom – speaking of Jesus who encountered suffering and death outside the city, in solidarity with human and material waste. Costas evokes the reader to mission, in line with Peter’s suggestion, that will follow Christ outside the gate of the city, there to be found in solidarity with all those discarded beyond the city’s walls, finding new expressions of faith and community outside traditional theological, ecclesial and urban institutions.(...)

Discovering vocation: From garbage collectors to evangelists: The story of garbage collectors in Cairo

Zabbaleen, in Egyptian Arabic, literally means garbage people. Today it refers to the 50–70 000 informal garbage collectors living in seven settlements across Cairo. The largest and most well-known of these ‘garbage neighbourhoods’ is the Mokattam Village with about 20–30 000 people, 90% of whom are Coptic Christians (Assad 1998). When you enter the Mokattam Village it leaves an overwhelming and lasting impression on all your senses: here is a sprawling urban neighbourhood with almost 30 000 people. Through narrow alleyways you have to compete with little trucks collecting garbage, children on their bicycles, women and men crossing the streets, and various activities related to a vast recycling operation performed daily by the

Zabbaleen. On the ground floor of their properties the collected garbage is sorted, and the space is shared with pigs that form an integral part of the whole recycling system, and in the apartments above this the people themselves live. (...) living conditions remain hazardous with high infant mortality rates of 117 deaths per 1000 births, compared to 45.6 deaths per 1000 births in the rest of the country (cf. Fahmi & Sutton 2006:814).

It is a community outside the gate of the city which is, so to speak, stigmatised for consisting of the garbage collectors of the city, who are destined to be this and nothing else.

But, says Father Samaan, priest of the St. Simon Coptic Orthodox Church in the Mokattam Village: 'When Jesus appears somewhere that changes the whole society' (Hybels 2010). Hybels (2010) writes that '[h]e is not speaking theoretically. He's describing what he's seen'.

Initially these settlements were far more informal than they are today. It is said that only after the establishment of the Coptic Church in the Mokattam Village, in 1975, the people started to build with more permanent materials, 'such as bricks, for their homes' (Assad 1998). Today there are seven beautiful cave churches built into the Mokattam Mountains. The largest church, which also happens to be the largest church in the Middle East, is the Monastery of St. Simon the Tanner, which consists of an amphitheatre with the capacity to seat 20 000 people (Iskander 2010). Once you leave the dense settlement, where the Zabbaleen reside, you enter through gates into the terrain of the Monastery of St. Simon – and you are immediately greeted by immense beauty and tranquillity. This is one of the largest churches in the world, and most beautiful; built for, with and by a community of garbage collectors in a predominantly Muslim country.

Initially bathed in shame, indignity and exclusion, the saturating presence of Coptic Christianity in the Mokattam Village slowly transformed this village from shame to dignity, from exclusion to vocation, from garbage collectors to evangelists, and from rejects to God's agents. This was through the patient care of Father Samaan and others, as an embodiment of a loving God.

One garbage collector, still collecting garbage in the surrounding neighbourhoods of Cairo, says of himself: 'I am not a garbage collector anymore; I am an evangelist now.' Largely unknown outside of Cairo the story, of the Zabbaleen and the Coptic community in Mokattam, has become one of the most profound expressions of the Christian faith; yet it is too often hidden behind layers of garbage, prejudice and theological colonialism. Theirs is a spiritual vocation (evangelists of the city), an environmental vocation (caring for the oikos of Cairo) and an ecclesial or communal vocation (building a healing community of faith), practiced from the bottom up, from outside the gate pushing its way back in on donkey carts.(...)

The gift of informality: Indigenous solutions, communal well-being

A further discovery is the gift of informality. There is not enough space in this article to reflect on the nature of informality in great depth. But informal settlements, informal enterprise and informal educational infrastructure, often offer gifts to society

at large and to the most vulnerable members of society in particular, that are not able to be offered by formal society. Formal society and its structures are generally too disconnected from the city outside the gate to make sufficient sense of it, to be qualified or able to imagine, and therefore construct the kinds of innovations that could set free those living outside the gate. It requires the gift of agency from within those living outside the gate, often in partnership with those going beyond the gate in prophetic solidarity.

Unparalleled track record of the Zabbaleen community: Towards a radical green economy

The people of the Zabbaleen community have been internationally recognised for their unparalleled successes with recycling waste in the city of Cairo. They are able to recycle 80% of garbage that they collect, in comparison to the 20% – 25% recycling that is effected by sophisticated western operators (Fahmi 2005:158; Fahmi & Sutton 2006:820). Their way of collecting and recycling garbage is culturally aligned to the neighbourhood practices in and around Cairo, and is economically much less costly for both the city and the citizens of the city. Environmentally, economically, culturally and from the perspective of social inclusion the Zabbaleen model is difficult to compete with by any other community. And yet, despite these highly successful efforts by the Zabbaleen community, municipal authorities in Cairo in 2003 decided to undermine this community and award contracts worth \$50 million to three multinational garbage disposal companies from Spain and Italy (Fahmi & Sutton 2006:821; Rashed 2003a, 2003b). This was a clear denial of the activity of the local people and their particular asset and gift to the city.

When the multinational corporations, with their sophisticated and advanced infrastructures, started to collect garbage from local neighbourhoods, they were only able to recycle 20% of what they collected, as opposed to the 80% recycling rates of the Zabbaleen. Instead of door to door collection as is carried out by the Zabbaleen, central garbage containers were provided, which often inconvenienced residents, in terms of access. In some cases narrow alleyways were not accessible to the mechanised equipment of the multinationals, which meant that they had to subcontract the Zabbaleen to ensure garbage collection. This did not work out in the end because the Zabbaleen were underpaid, earning much less from being subcontractors than from collecting the garbage from the same streets themselves. Also the cost of collection increased significantly in comparison to the service rendered by the Zabbaleen. Once these contracts were awarded, the Zabbaleen were not compensated for loss of income, which obviously affected the sustainability of the Zabbaleen enterprise (Fahmi & Sutton 2010:1772; Rashed 2003a, 2004). Environmentally, culturally, economically and socially, the entry of multinationals from the global North, into the reality of Cairo, negated the local gift of the Zabbaleen and increased the vulnerability of an already vulnerable community significantly.

Koyama (1974:62–70), 40 years ago, spoke of the inefficient God and the technological efficiency of our age, and the shifts from ox-cart to supersonic aircraft or, as in the Zabbaleen people, from donkey carts to sophisticated multinationals. And

yet it becomes clear that efficiency does not necessarily equate to effectiveness or impact, neither environmentally nor economically or socially. A tension developed between universal technological advancement and forms of local culture, society and religion. The Zabbaleen community finds itself in the middle of this tension, and bids us ask critical questions of an uncritical set of models of efficiency that seem, at face value, to be advanced. Yet, in terms of building humane cities, inclusive and owned from below, this might prove to be to the contrary in their inability to embrace vulnerability, to mediate justice, or to foster earthfriendly practices. (...)

Recent Print and Digital Resources Related to Christianity in Africa

Compiled by Beth Restrick, Head, BU African Studies Library

Janzen, John M., Harold F. Miller, John C. Yoder (editors). **Mennonites and Post-Colonial African Studies** (ISSN) 1st Edition. (February 28, 2021). \$41.24 (pbk) www.amazon.com. ISBN-13: 978-0367527693

Description: This book examines the evolution of post-colonial African Studies through the eyes of Africanists from the Anabaptist (Mennonite and Church of the Brethren) community.

The book chronicles the lives of twenty-two academics and practitioners whose work spans from the immediate post-colonial period in the 1960s to the present day, a period in which decolonization and development have dominated scholarly and practitioner debate. Reflecting the values and perspectives they shared with the Mennonite Central Committee and other church-sponsored organizations, the authors consider their own personal journeys and professional careers, the power of the prevailing scholarly paradigms they encountered, and the realities of post-colonial Africa. Coming initially from Anabaptist service programs, the authors ultimately made wider contributions to comparative religion, church leadership, literature, music, political science, history, anthropology, economics and banking, health and healing, public health, extension education, and community development.

The personal histories and reflections of the authors provide an important glimpse into the intellectual and cultural perspectives that shaped the work of Africanist scholars and practitioners in the post-colonial period. The book reminds us that the work of every Africanist is shaped by their own life stories

Oduro, Thomas, Jonathan P. Larson, & James R. Krabill (editors). **Unless a grain of wheat: a story of friendship between African Independent Churches and North American Mennonites**. Langham Creative Projects, Carlisle, Cumbria, 2021. \$18.42 (pbk) www.amazon.com. ISBN-10: 1839732717 ISBN-13: 978-1839732713

Description: “For six decades, North American Mennonites have walked alongside African Independent Churches (AICs) as they have navigated their faith journey between the ancient traditions of the ancestors and the newer claims of Christ upon their lives. The story of these relationships is a fascinating pilgrimage in partnership, offering hope for a mutuality that slips the knots of colonialism and testifies to the unifying power of the Holy Spirit. Beginning with a historical overview by missiologist Wilbert R. Shenk, this volume contains the reflections of over fifty AIC and Mennonite colleagues concerning the significance and impact of this long-standing partnership. Their stories illustrate the disparate threads of a sixty-year experiment in shared endeavor, while offering insight into the history of the church and missions in Africa. This book is a powerful account of mutual learning, forgiveness, and growth.

It is an excellent resource for lovers of story, students of post-colonialism and indigenous Christianity, and all those concerned with building relationships across cultural and racial divides.” -- From publisher's description

Ross, Kenneth, et. Al. **Christianity in North Africa and West Asia**. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2022. \$25.01 (pbk) www.amazon.com. ISBN-10:1683072871, ISBN-13: 978-1683072874

Description: Combines empirical data and original analysis in a uniquely detailed account of Christianity in North Africa and West Asia. This comprehensive reference volume covers every country in North Africa and West Asia, offering reliable demographic information and original interpretative essays by indigenous scholars and practitioners. It maps patterns of growth and decline, assesses major traditions and movements, analyses key themes and examines current trends. Key Features: Profiles of Christianity in every country in North Africa and West Asia including clearly presented statistical and demographic information. Analyses of leading features and current trends written by indigenous scholars. Essays examining each of the major Christian traditions (Anglicans, Independents, Orthodox, Protestants, Roman Catholics, Evangelicals, Pentecostals/Charismatics). Essays explore key themes such as faith and culture, worship and spirituality, theology, social and political engagement, mission and evangelism, religious freedom, gender, inter-faith relations, monastic movements and spirituality, displaced populations and ecclesiology.

Open Access Resources

Cox, Amy. **The Historical Exodus of the Musama Disco Christo Church African Diaspora ISPs**. 38. Spring 2002.

https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/african_diaspora_isp/38

Abstract: The Musama Disco Christo Church (MDCC) is a Christian church founded in 1922 under the direction of the Holy Spirit in the Gold Coast, or what is today known as Ghana. In its early history the members of the church were confronted with skeptics, ridicule, and hardships. The initially small group that grew into a healthy congregation was forced to relocate four times before they finally found peace at their current home, Mozano via Gomoa Eshiem. This history of the Musama Disco Christo Church focuses on their exodus, starting with the founder's first prophecy and continuing on their journey of trial and faith, until reaching their current and final home.

Kustenbauder, Matthew. **Prophetic movements: Western Africa**. In *New Encyclopedia of Africa* 4, ed. By John Middleton and Joseph C. Miller, 273-279. Detroit: Thomson/Gale, 2008. <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/5332856>

From the Introduction: “Prophetic movements have not dominated the landscape in western Africa to the same extent as they have in eastern and southern Africa. Nevertheless, a number of prophetic movements did emerge from around 1920 onward, marking the most dramatic growth of Christianity in twentieth-century West Africa. It has been noted that the growth was uneven – prophetic churches are abundant

in Nigeria and Ghana. Côte d'Ivoire recognizes the prophetic Harrist church, together with Islam, Protestantism, and Roman Catholicism, as one of four official religions. But in other West African countries such as Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Mali, prophetic churches have made little impact. This no doubt has to do with the dominance of Islam in these countries, but it is also likely that colonial policies and the presence of Roman Catholicism produced a buffering effect. All across Africa, and indeed within Christianity as a whole, prophetic movements have been more likely to spring from the Protestant churches.”

Straehler, Reinhold. **Conversions from Islam to Christianity in the Sudan**. MA Thesis, Theology, 2009. University of South Africa (UNISA).

<http://hdl.handle.net/10500/2438>

Abstract: This research project focuses on conversions from Islam to Christianity in the Sudan. It first gives a biblical and theological understanding of conversion and then introduces the sociological and psychological understanding of such a change in religious affiliation. It discusses conversion as a spiritual decision process and develops a spiritual decision matrix for evaluating conversion processes of Muslims. The heart of the study is an analysis of the conversion processes of six converts with a Northern Sudanese background from different Muslim tribes. The interviews that were conducted with these converts are analysed in terms of five parameters: reasons for conversion; factors that led to conversion; stages in the conversion processes; problems encountered during the conversion processes; and results of the conversion. These parameters are compared with existing data from six studies of Muslims in other geographical areas who also converted to the Christian faith.