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PART 2

International Resonances

Imperial Entanglements of the Congo/African Institute, Colwyn Bay, Wales (1889–1911)

Robert Burroughs

Introduction: Britain's Congo Free State

'Britain's' Congo Free State? My starting point might sound like counterfactualism, but I hope it makes a provocative point about Britain's position of power and influence in a colony beyond the formal bounds of its own empire. Both scholarly and popular histories have often failed to capture the many connections of Britain to the early colonial Congo, and twenty-first century remembrances tend to fall back on oversimplified understandings that square Britain's imperial role in Central Africa with humanitarianism. After establishing a critical perspective on Britain's part in the early colonial history of the Congo, my chapter will focus on a study of the Congo/African Training Institute, a school for young Africans in late nineteenth-century north Wales. Situated in a rural part of Britain, in a principality that has its own conflicted relationship to British imperialism, I explore how this institute mediated questions of race, nationality, religion, politics, and ideas about the imperialist-civilising self in general, and consider how and to what effect this case history of Britain's past entanglements in the Congo has been represented in more recent remembrances.

In its inception, the Congo Free State (1885–1908) was an international endeavour, drawing colonial administrators, traders, soldiers, missionaries, and more from throughout Europe (Belgium, Britain, France, Greece, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, and elsewhere) and the United States (see Pierre-Philippe Fraiture's chapter in this volume). Britons were at the fore of initial developments. The early years of military and environmental infrastructural advance into the Upper Congo was overseen by the Welsh American Henry Morton Stanley, and supported by several young British officers known personally to Stanley. Britain was foremost among the nations that approved Leopold II's rule of Central Africa after he promised that the imperial powers might practise free trade and religious instruction there. British businesses and missions gladly entered the region, pledging to help Leopold banish slavery and overcome Islamic influence

from the east. To build its railway and to grow its armed forces, the early colony also relied on imported labour from other colonies in western and eastern Africa. Thousands of British colonial subjects from West Africa migrated to labour in the Lower Congo in the late 1880s and early 1890s, many of them joining, or being conscripted into, service in so-called wars of pacification in the Central African interior.

As Leopold sought to increase his personal profits, other trading interests were squeezed out of the Congo. Migrant labour was deprioritised and new methods of working the region's own populations were established. Many peoples of the upper-river basin were enlisted unknowingly into systems of debt bondage, to be repaid through menial labour under a threat of violent reprisal that was all too often realised. The monarch's actions soured relations between the Congo administration and its European supporters as well as with the various parties, who identified themselves as critics of Leopold. Economic interests fused with humanitarian concern as reports emerged of extraordinary violence exacted on peoples of the Upper Congo in pursuit of rubber and ivory. A Congo Reform Movement arose in Liverpool, spearheaded by the journalist E. D. Morel and the consul Roger Casement. Much of this movement's thrust came from Britain, though it, too, quickly became international in scope, as recently emphasised by Dean Pavlakis.¹ This campaign connected brutal methods of colonialism to Leopold's drive towards monopolies on trade. As Morel once indignantly quipped, in reference to the bodily mutilations for which the colony would be remembered, for both the rubber gatherer and the independent trader the Congo now meant 'hands off!'.²

Both scholarly and popular historians have often charted Britain's founding role in Congo colonialism and its shift to humanitarian watchdog.³ They generally delineate too clear a transition, however, neglecting to note that Britain remained invested in the Congo. This is literally the case for businesses and missions whose stay in the region began before or outlasted Leopold's rule. The notorious Anglo-Belgian India Rubber Company, for example, was founded with British capital and maintained British shareholder investment until 1898, by which time its violent stranglehold on the peoples of the Lopori-Maringa river basin was established.⁴ A number of British- and American-based Protestant missionary societies had built chains of stations up the river by this time, too. The cautious response to an unfolding scandal by mission leaders, and some rank-and-file evangelists, reflected a desire to maintain their footing in the face of mounting Catholic mission interest and competition.⁵

British 'investment' also existed in the sense of the nebulous cultural fascination in the region, as a site of colonial adventure and enterprise (even utopian thinking, as Stephen Donovan has examined), of scientific experimentation

and of general interest in the supposedly exotic.⁶ Even as a popular campaign petitioned the British government to impose itself on Leopold, in the hope of humanitarian relief of his colonial subjects, Britons applauded scientists from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine whose findings from their sleeping sickness surveys of 1903–05 effectively exonerated the colonial regime of its part in an epidemic outbreak, a view challenged by later scientists.⁷ While British audiences turned out in large numbers to see Congo Reform lantern lectures displaying maimed Congolese bodies, British audiences flocked to see exotic performances by Ituri Forest ‘pygmies’ laid on by Colonel James J. Harrison, a defender of Leopold’s regime, as they toured Britain between 1905 and 1907.⁸ Though reports of colonial violence and the ensuing controversy infiltrated numerous British cultural fields, others were insulated from – resistant or oblivious to – the iconography of atrocities and ‘red rubber’. Emphasis upon humanitarian reaction in recent research conceals numerous ways in which sectors of British society and culture remained absorbed, often complexly and paradoxically, in a region coming to be defined by its colonial atrocities.

Acknowledging the interweaving of British imperial interests in another nation’s atrocious regime is valuable for a few reasons. Without losing sight of those who were most responsible for bloodshed – a king and an international cast of officials, officers, and soldiers – this focus incorporates those lesser-known ‘beneficiaries’ in distant societies and cultures that gave licence to violent acts before and even amid overseas humanitarian outcry. As Bruce Robbins observes, the history of humanitarian thought has permitted privileged onlookers’ indignation at the suffering of others without always requiring that those onlookers consider too deeply how their own privileges are rooted in the suffering of distant others.⁹ Locating Britain in the Congo’s past calls for a more multifaceted understanding of the relations between humanitarianism and imperial violence, as well as history and memory. In Britain today, the Congo Free State represents a part of the past in which well-informed, critically minded readers, including those who wish to encourage better engagement with Britain’s own colonial history, still routinely cite Adam Hochschild’s *King Leopold’s Ghost* (1998) and its account of British and American ‘heroism’ and Belgian ‘greed’ and ‘terror’.¹⁰ To train a spotlight on those who distantly profited from the crimes of the Congo challenges this simplistic narrative, and reminds us of the difficulties of extracting the ‘good’ from the ‘bad’, and the perils of the ‘balance sheet approach’.¹¹ The often unacknowledged status of the distant beneficiaries of colonialism is a measure of how far historians have been willing or able to go in understanding the full complexity of the past, and of the ways in which simple designations of ‘perpetrator’ or ‘witness’ status have been emphasised over time to ideological and political ends.

This chapter reflects upon the submerged position of Britain as beneficiary of Congo colonialism, and how this positioning affects historical knowledge and memories of the relations between these two countries. Owing to limitations of space my discussion will centre on a single case study, emerging out of Britain's evangelical interests in the colony, the Congo/African Training Institute, Colwyn Bay. Besides recovering a little-known instance of British involvement in Leopold's colony in the late 1880s and 1890s, my aim is to analyse how this school was entangled in wider debates connecting imperial Britain to Congo. Further, drawing on recent historical writings and other creative interventions, I consider how scholarly and other accounts have been shaped by the prevailing narrative of Britain's opposition to Leopold, as a result of which the Congo/African Training Institute has been regarded benignly to exist outside of wider debates on humanitarianism, violence, and African agency under colonial rule. By situating the institute in contexts of residual evangelical concerns for Central Africa, recent historical accounts and acts of memory have failed fully to discuss some of its arguably more progressive entanglements, such as its connections to histories of nascent pan-Africanism in Britain and West Africa.

The Congo/African Training Institute, Colwyn Bay

Between 1890 and 1911, the small town of Colwyn Bay, a holiday resort in north Wales, played host to an unusual experiment in imperialism, charity, and race relations. The school known initially as Congo House, or the Congo Training Institute, and later rebranded the African Training Institute, was the invention of Rev. William Hughes, a Baptist pastor who had served as a missionary in Central Africa in the early years of its colonisation by Europeans. Hughes's spell in the Congo was defined by the death of colleagues, his own sickness, and his struggles to preserve and extend a fledgling group of youths whom, he felt, were amenable to Christian instruction. Ill health forced him to abandon his mission station, and with it, so it transpired, his missionary career. But he took two youths with him from Africa. Once returned to Wales with these boys, Hughes struck upon an idea to import young Africans for practical education and religious training in what he regarded as the medically and morally healthier climes of his native north Wales. By preparing his students both as catechists and as artisans, he expected them to return to their homelands as self-supporting missionaries who could spread the word of God without recourse to financial backing from Britain's mission bodies. By 1890 he had formed a committee to oversee his work and to help attract support from subscribers, upon whose generosity his plans depended. He founded a school in a large residential build-

ing, which he renamed Congo House. In 1891 he secured patronage from the two most eminent figures in the European partition of Central Africa, Henry Morton Stanley and King Leopold II. His ideas clearly chimed with these figures' explanations of colonialism as a means of civilising philanthropy.

Hughes was greatly influenced by pervading images of Central Africa as a place of cultural and religious desolation, and he went further than many contemporary missionaries in concluding that it would be impossible for Europeans to convert Africans to Christianity on African soil. He felt that the negative influences there were too many and too great. Europeans were frequently degraded by their exposure to the climate, while elder generations of Africans could not, in his view, be saved. They 'were in such profound ignorance and darkness, that they could not thoroughly grasp anything that was said to them'.¹² His attempts to distance children from their communities were thwarted, a problem he repeatedly explained in terms of 'ignorant and superstitious' mothers.¹³ The only way 'to get proper hold of the young people', as he saw it, was to 'separat[e] them as much as possible from former friends, old superstitions, and other injurious influences'.¹⁴ Young Africans therefore were best removed entirely from their home environment. Kinkasa, the youth whom Hughes reports mysteriously to have 'found' on his way to his mission station, and taken with him, had shown the way for Hughes.¹⁵ Moved far from his own mother, Kinkasa's loyalty was secured free of her interference. At around age ten, he was taken overseas along with one other boy, the eight-year-old Nkanza, whose mother had agreed to his departure after Hughes had paid to redeem him from enslavement.

Besides the influence of bestselling narratives of Central Africa such as Stanley's, Hughes was inspired by a work on British social reform – itself directly informed by Stanley – William Booth's *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890).¹⁶ The title of Hughes's book about his own scheme, *Dark Africa and the Way Out* (1892), acknowledges this debt. From Booth, Hughes drew a belief in the morally and materially restorative benefits of the British countryside where, in 'farm colonies', the destitute might be redeemed through honest labour and devotional practice. Congo House was Hughes's project in Christian redemption through extreme relocation. In Colwyn Bay, Hughes planned a 'farm colony' of his own populated not by the British labouring poor but by Africa's so-called heathens. In drawing equivalences between metropolitan squalor and African savagery, Hughes's scheme takes its place among several other cultural developments of the fin de siècle, through which the line between imperial and domestic space became blurred, in part as a means of justifying colonialism in terms of European development. Located in north Wales, a part of Britain long identified as both part of the metropolitan centre and yet peripheral ('England's

oldest colony', as it is sometimes described), Hughes's school for Africans was situated in between apparently opposed spheres – colonial and imperial, metropolitan and urban, African and European, politics and religion, domestic and international, and more – allowing or demanding that those who took interest in it situate themselves in the same nexus.

In his reminiscences, Hughes attempts to instil confidence that he had gained the consent of his young recruits. Depicting their families, in particular mothers, in terms of an incorrigible 'darkness' helped Hughes and his readers believe in his strategies as labours on behalf of a higher authority seeking the salvation of innocent young souls. On the earthly plane, in taking Kinkasa and Nkanza, Hughes acted on little authority other than his own. He had taken the children while employed by the Baptist Missionary Society, but his exit from Africa effectively signalled his retirement from this organisation. If short of institutional backing, however, Hughes's actions had considerable historical precedent. There had been a steady flow of educational migrants from Africa to Britain in the nineteenth century, many under mission auspices. As an example of the potential benefits of his plans, Hughes pointed to the story of the Yoruba Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who, as a child, had been rescued from the middle passage by HMS *Myrmidon* and educated in Sierra Leone and Britain before returning to Africa as a pioneering missionary, later becoming the first Black bishop of the Church of England.¹⁷

From the Congo Free State, too, educational migration had become common. The Catholic White Fathers had established the Institut des Jeunes Noirs in Malta in 1881, which received at least five pupils from the Congo plus more from other African territories. Dozens of pupils, boys and girls, arrived at Abbot Van Impe's Institut St.-Louis de Gonzague in east Flanders between 1888 and 1900.¹⁸ In Britain, too, Baptist missionaries, including individuals known to Hughes, brought their young charges from the Congo to Europe on periods of furlough in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Further afield, Congo-born students were enrolled in institutions created primarily for African American education. A handful of young male intakes at Wayland Seminary, Washington corresponded with the students at Congo House, while in Atlanta, Georgia, Spelman Seminary received young women sent by the American Baptist Missionary Union.¹⁹

Missionaries believed that exposure to 'civilisation' would be of benefit to African trainees. Their time overseas was usually carefully circumscribed, and confined to limited roles. Often employed as personal servants, they were also involved in publicising the work of the mission to audiences of potential donors. As well as sometimes receiving schooling themselves they could help missionaries in learning African languages and in preparing printed language texts.

Despite this productivity, and the modesty of the opportunities availed to them, however, the travels of young mission converts were a source of anxiety among mission leaders of various denominations, including the baptists with whom Hughes was closely affiliated. Subscribing to racialised ideas about the moral infirmity of Africans, they speculated that exposure to European civilisation might lead individuals to become conceited and proud, unable to reintegrate among their own people as productive parts of society.

When outlining his own relocation scheme, Hughes conceded that too often earlier generations of young converts had been spoiled by the hospitality they received in Britain.²⁰ Nonetheless, Nkansa and Kinkasa travelled in north Wales with Hughes. They participated in his public lectures and sermons as specimens of African life and as examples of the potential of African youth for education and Christianity. They recited hymns in their own language, Welsh, and English, danced to African music, and wore African dress over the top of their suits. They were thrust into a public spotlight, though there is little sense from the available reportage that they were overly indulged by Hughes or their hosts. Their experiences should be situated in the wider context of colonised peoples' performative communication of colonial and racial ideologies, and their time as what Sadiah Qureshi terms 'peoples on parade' seems to have been laborious.²¹

However generic and stereotypical, the students' performances of African culture and customs took on specific meanings in the context of north Wales. In parading the benefits of his scheme before Welsh audiences, Hughes's students not only reflected upon the 'Dark Continent' but also the communities that received them. If lectures on the missionary movement in Africa had become a standardised means by which the British public established its evangelical credentials, then the presence of young Africans among British congregations, praying and participating in alms alongside one another, disclosed with unusual explicitness that the goal of civilising 'others' was intimately bound up in the mission to civilise the British self, in all its social, cultural, and geographical diversity. Their presence among the Welsh flocks spoke to ideas about exceptional zeal among the people of north Wales for the church and the missionary movement. The school's appeal, in other words, also was constituted by how the British, and in particular the Welsh, saw themselves, and in promoting the specific tonic of residence in north Wales, Hughes's school entered implicitly into a debate on the civilisational fitness of Britain, and the need for social uplift in British society.

Between 1888 and 1893, European missionaries sent a further nine students to north Wales from the Congo, as well as some from the Cameroons with connections to missions in the Lower Congo. By then, the school had been established in Colwyn Bay, and the pupils' lives became more sedentary. Schoolwork

became routine, and many of the male students were entered into apprenticeships with local tradespeople. Some of the youths from this period emerged as star pupils who were keenly supported by the local community during their stay and in preparation for their return to Africa. Frank Teva Clark kept up correspondence with Hughes as well as other families in Colwyn Bay after his successful four-year residence in Wales, at the end of which Teva Clark voyaged on to Central Africa for a new career as missionary. His achievements were among the stories of success fondly recalled by Hughes in public writings seeking to attract support for the scheme.²² His time in the limelight was explained as the natural consequence of personal qualities, which marked him out as a potential trailblazer for Christ in Africa. Individuals such as Hughes successfully negotiated the demands and expectations made upon the students to appear as living proof of redemptive power of cultural transformation in line with the same ideologies and race and empire that justified Europeans' violent acquisition of African resources.

But not all students experienced Colwyn Bay in this way. Life there imposed specific, racialised behavioural expectations on the students, and where they did not conform to these, British society judged them harshly.²³ Those students who won less local support, whose spell in Wales ended with little fanfare, have left behind a scant archival record, the quietness of which speaks suggestively of the demands placed upon Black migrants to Britain in this context. Time in Congo House was further significantly gendered.²⁴ The few female students were more closely associated with family life, and their educational experience channelled them towards futures as missionaries' wives. While the male students received donors' gifts that prepared them for professions – writing equipment or formal clothing, for example – Ernestina Francis, one of the female students, received 'sewing things' among her presents.²⁵ Hers was the longest of all residences at Congo House, one which was ended finally by marriage to another student, the African American Joseph Morford. Having arrived in 1891 at age eight, Ernestina Francis embarked to join Morford in West Africa in 1906.

Congo House was also a place of illness and death – for Hughes's own family as well as for his students. Among the students who died while in Colwyn Bay was both Kinkasa, whose death at age twelve was, according to a local surgeon, owing to a residual bout of sleeping sickness in 1888, and Nkanza, who succumbed to heart failure on 3 April 1892, aged fifteen.

In spite of the hardships, surveying the achievements of Nkanza, Teva, and other students, Hughes felt able to declare his plans a success by 1890.²⁶ Almost immediately, however, he was forced to acknowledge that his plans were in peril owing to political developments in the Congo and the Cameroons.²⁷ While relations with the independent churches in the Cameroons would continue in

spite of German rivalries, the Congo Free State authorities' ban on educational migration from the Congo, also affecting the schools in Malta and Flanders, soon thwarted the recruitment of students from its European missions.²⁸

After initially drawing all his intakes from the Congo, in 1893 Hughes established recruitment depots in the German-occupied Cameroons, the Republic of Liberia, and the British Niger Coast Protectorate. In other parts of British West Africa, including Sierra Leone, Lagos, and the Gold Coast (Ghana), African supporters of Hughes's venture formed subcommittees that provided financial assistance and publicity, and helped select new trainees. The subcommittees also subscribed (in all senses) to advancing their own interests through the narrative of civilisational uplift via imperial education.

In the 1900s the catchment of Congo House expanded further to include small numbers of arrivals from southern Africa, the United States, and the Caribbean. Brought together by their shared racial heritage, this student body was quite diverse in terms of social and cultural background, age, and place of origin. Backed by wealthy patrons or parents in Africa, these students often regarded Congo House as a kind of finishing school to prepare them for university study. While some would enter into clerical careers, others moved on to careers in industry, teaching, medicine, and law. When resident in Britain, some pursued short careers as what Hakim Adi describes as 'student politicians', petitioning the authorities and the public on colonial injustices that affected them and their compatriots.²⁹ Where these appeals won support from donors of Congo House, they can be said to have shifted the focus of humanitarian culture. Traditional depictions of 'darkest Africa' at times made way for more progressive accounts, by the students themselves, of their progress and their aspirations, often in spite of hostile attitudes and official policies. Some of the later arrivals would be associated with early Ethiopianist and pan-Africanist organisation in Britain, of a kind that continued to attract support from much the same people as had backed the school in its earlier phase.

In total, eighty-seven students, including three girls and young women, attended Congo House, according to lists published by Hughes. However, the overall number is debatable, as Hughes seems both to have overlooked individuals and to have nominated others whose relations to the institute were ambiguous.³⁰ This indeterminacy is significant because of what it suggests about Hughes's own practices. The school collapsed in 1911 amid racist uproar in the British press concerning the 'black scoundrel' John Lionel Franklin, a man with a chequered past registered as a student, who had fathered a child with a White woman in Colwyn Bay.³¹ Hughes claimed libel, and the subsequent trial exposed his own questionable bookkeeping under severe financial pressure over several years. Hughes had falsified some accounts, misled donors

on details of student registrations, and even misappropriated the bequest of one of the female students. The trial ruined Hughes. In 1917 he sought to return to Africa for a third time, this time as a missionary in the Cameroons.³² Ironically, he inverted the logic of his earlier scheme, positioning himself as one in need of redemption from those to whom he had previously imagined himself to offer it. Despite some of his old students coming to his aid, the plan was soon aborted. He died in the Conwy workhouse in 1923, leaving relatively few traces of his endeavours.³³

Remembering Congo House

The school disappeared. Beyond the local milieu, few remembered Hughes, or Congo House. The fictional statue 'of the great Welshman (1856–1924) who sacrificed himself for the planting of Christianity in Darkest Africa', which watches cold-eyed over the events of the Guyanese author Denis Williams's experimental novel set in Wales, *The Third Temptation* (1968), seems not only to resemble Hughes but also to capture the obsolescence of his story in the midtwentieth century.³⁴ That story would be recovered, albeit briefly, in major studies of the historic Black presence in Britain.³⁵ Substantial academic studies appeared in the 1980s and early 1990s, moreover, including research by the Congolese Belgian historian Mathieu Zana Aziza Etambala.³⁶ These have been recently supplemented by accounts by local historians in Wales, including Christopher Draper and John Lawson-Reay's *Scandal at Congo House: William Hughes and the African Institute, Colwyn Bay* (2012).³⁷ But while the latter are replete with anecdotal detail and local history, they are largely based around defensive accounts of Hughes's actions, which are cast as progressive in comparison to the opinions of his contemporaries. Hughes's story is furthermore foregrounded at the expense of his students or their African supporters. As a result, *Scandal at Congo House* risks a 'white saviour' optic in which Hughes's actions are key to the fates of his students, while, as individuals, their significance to him is as walk-on actors in a rise-and-fall narrative that means little to their lives. For example, when weighing up the success of Hughes at the end of the book, the authors of *Scandal at Congo House* dubiously point to some of the later achievements of the students as evidence of the value of Hughes's venture.³⁸

The story of Congo House has been deftly woven into a more critical discussion of British society and its imperial past, *Sugar and Slate* (2002), by the academic and author Charlotte Williams. In a number of publications and initiatives, Williams has enriched understanding of Wales's multicultural past. *Sugar and Slate*, which won Wales Book of the Year in 2003, is a memoir of growing up

as a mixed-race child and young adult in Wales, Guyana, and Africa. As a work of life-writing, *Sugar and Slate* consciously takes an imaginative approach to its historical source materials. Bonds of kinship are sought with earlier generations not literally but creatively, in the acts of remembering and writing that traverse the time and space of the Black Atlantic. For Williams, '[w]hen I visit the graves of the Congo boys I feel just like those pilgrims to the slave fortresses at Elmina in Ghana who stand in ancestral spaces and recreate the past in the present'.³⁹ In contrast to the straightforward reproduction of a paternalistic image of Hughes, Kinkasa, and Nkanza on the cover of *Scandal at Congo House*, Williams 'studie[s] the old photos to see if I could see anything of the spirit of the boys.' Though unable to penetrate their 'bland and lifeless' faces, she does identify personal connections: 'The Reverend stands between them in the picture looking like my Uncle John'.⁴⁰ Identifying herself with Hughes, rather than the boys, at this juncture, Williams situates herself between histories and identities.

Exploration of the self, rather than the archive, leads this writer to claim of Hughes's pupils: 'I feel that I know something about their voyage across the Atlantic'.⁴¹ Williams is of course also informed by the work of local historians, in particular her friend Ivor Wynne Jones, which perhaps encourages her particular focus upon Kinkasa and Nkanza, 'the Congo boys.' And just as the photograph of Hughes recalls her British affiliations, there are times when the language used by Williams repeats that of her local informants, and even their nineteenth-century sources. Of an early reference to the 'Dark Continent', of her speculation as to the 'pigmy' identity of Nkanza, and of her statement that Kinkasa and Nkanza 'carried the memory of the power of their witchdoctor deep inside them long after they reached Wales,' it might be said that the desire to understand their inner lives beyond their 'bland and lifeless' portrait photographs leads Williams ambiguously to deploy the same exoticising language as characterises many nineteenth-century sources on the subject.⁴²

In certain passages this text betrays further affinities to the White patrons who had originally taken interest in the Congo boys. A literal echo of Hughes himself is apparent in one passage, which begins by borrowing his words. In his book *Dark Africa and the Way Out*, Hughes had observed of Nkanza that '[t]he idea of going home grew in his heart as he grew'.⁴³ Williams repeats and elaborates on this idea:

As Nkanza grew, so the desire to return to his homeland grew in his heart. The edges of his dreams were fringed with sadness. As he slept his spirit roamed the forests listening to the roar of the lion in the distance, he heard the hum of the songs of his ancestors on the lips of the huntsman, he heard the women's stories as they planted manioc and he yearned for home.⁴⁴

While Williams's memoir incorporates the story of Congo House into a wider, imaginative pan-African framework, one in which British racism and the violence of imperialism are explored, and the personal histories of the author mediated, it also betrays some of the same deference to essentialising nineteenth-century sources as is evident in local historians' accounts. These parts of *Sugar and Slate* are symptomatic of deep, cultural ensnarement, which other parts of the book consciously diagnose. Williams's focus, moreover, is largely upon the early, Congo phases of the school, despite her having spent part of her childhood in regions of Nigeria, which would become one of the largest suppliers to Congo House in its later years (the Nigerian territories are omitted from Williams's list of places from which Hughes drew students⁴⁵). In this sense, too, her book takes its cue from earlier historical perspectives on the school.

Connections between Africa and Wales, past and present, have also been forged through the work of Norbert X. Mbu-Mputu. Mbu-Mputu moved to London as an asylum seeker, having been arrested for investigating political corruption in Congo-Kinshasa. Having previously visited this European capital as part of a successful career, which included work for the United Nations, he found himself homeless. Eventually immigration services relocated him to Wales, where he continued his career as a journalist, activist, researcher, and charity worker.⁴⁶ Serendipitously, the move to Wales provided Mbu-Mputu with a connection to his homeland. He is from the same region of Congo as the first recruits to Congo House, a connection which enables him to pursue extraordinary knowledge of their lives. Working between Britain and Africa, he has investigated the historic links between Wales and Congo. On a journey to Colwyn Bay, he spoke to the locals, found the graves of the African students, and learned of their stories. With support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Mbu-Mputu led a project to help young people in south Wales explore the shared heritage of Congolese and Welsh communities. One outcome of this work was his book *Bamonimambo (the Witnesses): Rediscovering Congo and British Isles Common History* (2012), which draws upon oral sources to further document Congo House and its students.⁴⁷ At each turn, Mbu-Mputu's work has forged opportunities for sharing and understanding across the divides of community, race, age, and language. With support from community historians, he has been involved in a visit by a delegation from the Democratic Republic of Congo's UK Embassy to Colwyn Bay and to Bangor, where the largest archival holding for Congo House is kept.⁴⁸ These encounters inspired another delegation from the same embassy to travel to Colwyn Bay for a day of celebration, in which the graves of the Congo boys were reconsecrated. Moving amateur footage of this event is available on YouTube.⁴⁹

For much of the 2010s, local historians continued to recover the history of Congo House as part of an African Institute Research Group. Their work con-

tinues in much the same spirit established by Mbu-Mputu: seeking to connect communities across continents through shared history. While much of this work is admirable, a film made by members of this group in association with Crefft Media, *The Remarkable Reverend William Hughes and the African Institute of Colwyn Bay* (2018), is too uncritical and apologetic in its discussion of Hughes and his motives to be of use to students and researchers.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Looking across these recent retrievals of the story of Congo House, there has been a general focus on local history, and a reluctance to delve into critical frameworks of colonial history. A concentration on those initial voyagers from Central Africa, as opposed to later arrivals from western and southern Africa, and further afield, is another noticeable element of this historical framing. In many ways this emphasis is understandable. (My own discussion is similarly focused on the Congo, of course.) The early years of Hughes's venture are the better documented ones. Many of Hughes's own accounts cater to popular interest by recalling his encounters with Kinkasa and Nkanza, and by highlighting the successes represented by the likes of Frank Teva Clark. As later generations arrived in greater numbers, they received rather less individual coverage. And because those later arrivals travelled from parts of Africa that had, and would continue to have, several other points of connection to Britain and British history, their stories are less central to those nations' diasporic histories in Europe than is the case for the 'Congo boys' of Colwyn Bay. That Congo House is a rare but rich chapter in relations between Britain (or Wales) and Congo is precisely the claim of much of the recent coverage.

However, the focus upon the early years of the school does of course shape our understanding of it in significant ways, and is linked to the anodyne and apologetic tone of recent coverage. The recruits from Congo are in fact distinct among all the students of Congo House (excepting a small number of early recruits from the Cameroons) in that they were brought to Europe exclusively under the auspices of European missionaries. Later generations secured their place with important patronage from members of the 'mediated classes' of Africa, in particular leaders of the African-initiated or Ethiopianist church movement. Recent coverage loses sight of the ways in which Congo House changed over time under these forces, catering to its supporters from among the African elites by rethinking its own evangelical aims in favour of enabling matriculation for young Africans bound for university education and professional careers in medicine and law. It is instructive to situate the prospects

of those Congo-born youths who survived their time in Colwyn Bay, each of whom moved on to mission service, alongside those alternative career paths afforded to later arrivals. It is also important to note, as Hazel King does in her excellent scholarly accounts, that in bringing together educated young people from across Africa, the school briefly became an early pan-African meeting ground.⁵¹ Some of the Congo-born intakes remained in north Wales to share their experiences with classmates from western Africa, and eminent visitors such as the independent church leader Mojola Agbebi, a follower of E. W. Blyden, though this aspect of their lives is obscured by the focus on Hughes, White patrons, and evangelical networks.

While the African supporters were navigating their own identities vis-à-vis colonial discourses on darkness and enlightenment, and perhaps problematically conforming to European racist ideals of civilisational difference, just like Hughes's Welsh patrons, it is important to give full consideration of their outlooks, which were also complex and which could differ from European mission agencies in important ways. It can be said that the Ethiopianist convergence on Colwyn Bay in the early 1900s did expose not only the students but also their audiences to different lines of Christian and imperialist thought. Placing the spotlight on the Congo travellers, then, emphasises the White evangelical networks through which paternalistic authority was maintained, at the expense of knowledge of the Afrocentric networks, which provided not only students but also financial support for and interests in Hughes's scheme. In de-emphasising Black patronage of Congo House, one of the truly unique aspects of its history, recent accounts have underemphasised African agency in British humanitarian culture. The inaccessibility of these pan-African networks to Congolese owing to particularly oppressive education policies in the early colonial period also becomes apparent when the historical lens is broadened.

Besides the early history of pan-Africanism, it is possible also for the past voyages of Congolese to late nineteenth-century Britain to be placed in the more critical framework with which I began this paper, that of Britain's ongoing imperial relation with the Congo Free State. Students of Congo House show how a charity and its small community of donors, organisers, and aid recipients existed at the same time as, but largely avoided crossing over with, the emerging debate on human rights in Central Africa. Indeed, the ban on Congolese educational migration to Europe was a symptom of the mounting oppressive character of colonialism, which Hughes responded to by looking further afield for his students. But Hughes did not abandon support for Leopold, and Hughes continued to court the monarch's favour even after serious concerns about the Congo Free State were raised in the British press.⁵² The lives of the early, Congo-born intakes of his school were shaped by Britain's formative role in the

founding of that colony, as well as those channels that maintained links between it and Britain even as humanitarian concerns grew.

It was possible for Hughes and his school to coexist with the scandal in the Congo because Congo House was founded in a residual alternative version of humanitarianism based around evangelistic, paternalistic deference to a higher authority. Even if some progressive voices in Britain were considering alternatives to this form of rule, many instead, or nonetheless, remained invested in the old ways of seeing Africa. This bifurcated understanding of Central Africa has allowed historians to neglect that residual strain of evangelical humanitarian culture, instead attending to, and even celebrating, the Congo Reform Movement as ushering in a new and more secular understanding of human rights. Whether or not it did so, it was those contemporaneous, traditional forms of evangelism that marked the lives of the students of Congo House, as well as other Congolese travellers to Britain in this period. The fact that Congo House continues to be remembered apologetically in an evangelical framework, while British contributions to Congo reform are lionised, suggests Britain's understanding of its past investments in the Congo remains bifurcated. In recovering the evangelical side of Britain's past relation to the Congo Free State, it is vital to think critically about it, and to situate the lives of the 'Congo boys' outside of it, including in pan-Africanist networks of the time.

Notes

- The author thanks Yvette Hutchison, Pierre-Philippe Fraiture, and Norbert X. Mbu-Mputu for commentary on an earlier draft of this chapter.
- Dean Pavlakis, *British Humanitarianism and the Congo Reform Movement* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 157–74.
 - E. D. Morel, *King Leopold's Rule in Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1904), p. 295.
 - Scholarly accounts include S.J.S. Cooley, *Britain and the Congo Question, 1885–1913* (London: Longmans, 1968); Roger Anstey, *Britain and the Congo in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1982). Popular accounts include Adam Hochschild's hugely influential *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998); Dan Snow's *History of Congo*, dir. Robin Barnwell (BBC Northern Ireland: This World, 2013).
 - Robert Harms, 'The World Abir Made: The Margina-Lopori Basin, 1885–1903', *African Economic History*, 12 (1983), 125–39.
 - For a discussion of how this caution shaped an individual missionary's life, see my article, which is forthcoming in *Cultural and Social History*: 'The Redeemed Life of Lena Clark, Christian Missionary and Humanitarian in the Congo Free State'.
 - For an array of European cultural interests in the Congo, see 'Europe Made in Africa: The Congo Free State in Literature and Culture, 1885–1920', a special issue of *English Studies in Africa*, 59.1 (2016), 1–86, ed. by Stephen Donovan, which includes Donovan's article 'Congo Utopia', 63–75.
 - Maryinez Lyons, *The Colonial Disease: A Social History of Sleeping Sickness in Northern Zaire, 1900–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
 - Jeffrey Green, 'Edwardian Britain's Forest Pygmies', *History Today*, 45.8 (1995) <<https://www.historytoday.com/archive/edwardian-britains-forest-pygmies>> [accessed 18 December 2020].
 - See Bruce Robbins, *The Beneficiary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).
 - I refer to the subtitle of Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa*.
 - Alan Lester, 'Time to Throw Out the Balance Sheet Approach', *Snapshots of Empire*: University of Sussex, 26 January 2016 <<https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/snapshotsofempire/2016/01/26/time-to-throw-out-the-balance-sheet/>> [accessed 18 December 2020].
 - William Hughes, *Dark Africa and the Way Out; or, A Scheme for Civilizing and Evangelizing the Dark Continent* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1892), p. 98.
 - Ibid.*, p. 39. See also pp. 41–43.
 - Ibid.*, p. 8.
 - Ibid.*, p. 90.
 - General [William] Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (London: Salvation Army 1890); see Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 170–98.
 - Hughes, *Dark Africa*, p. 5. For a pertinent discussion of this African cleric, see V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press; London: James Currey, 1988), p. 49.
 - Barbara A. Yates, 'Educating Congolese Abroad: An Historical Note on African Elites', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 14.1 (1981), 34–64 (38). Mathieu Zana Aziza Etambala, *Des Écoliers congolais en Belgique 1888–1900: Une page d'histoire oubliée* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 2011).
 - Mathieu Zana Aziza Etambala, 'Congolese Children at the Congo House in Colwyn Bay (North Wales, Great-Britain), at the End of the 19th Century', *Afrika Focus*, 3.3–4 (1987), 237–85 (238–39); Hughes, *Dark Africa*, p. 27; Burroughs, 'Redeemed Life'.
 - Hughes, *Dark Africa*, pp. 25–26.
 - Sadiah Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). See also Pascal Blanchard et al, eds. *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).
 - For example, Hughes, *Dark Africa*, pp. 106–08.
 - I detail a racist backlash against one of the students in the national press in Robert Burroughs, 'The Racialisation of Gratitude in Victorian Culture', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 25.4 (2020), 477–91.
 - For a more detailed discussion of discussion of gender, education and Congo colonialism, see Burroughs, 'The Redeemed Life'. For wider context, Victoria K. Haskins and Claire Lowrie (eds.), *Colonization and Domestic Service: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2015).
 - [William Hughes], *Report of the Congo House Training Institute for African Students, Colwyn Bay, N Wales* (Colwyn Bay: Rev RE Jones and Bros [1893]), p. 60.

26. [William Hughes], *Report of the Congo House Training Institute for African Children, Colwyn Bay, North Wales* (Colwyn Bay: H.W. Powlson, 1890), p. 9.
27. [William Hughes], *Report of the Congo House Training Institute for African Students, Colwyn Bay, North Wales* (Colwyn Bay: H.W. Powlson, 1891), p. 54.
28. Yates, 'Educating Congolese Abroad'.
29. Hakim Adi, 'Bandeles Omoniyi: A Neglected Nigerian Nationalist', *African Affairs*, 90 (1991), 581–605 (581).
30. Eighty-seven names are listed in the final Annual Reports for the school, which are the most authoritative records available. These are the basis for the list in Christopher Draper and John Lawson-Reay, *Scandal at Congo House: William Hughes and the African Institute, Colwyn Bay* (Llanwrst: Gwasg Carreg Gwelch, 2012), pp. 214–17. At other times, however, Hughes claimed that '[u]pwards of a hundred students have now passed through the Institute and gone their ways'. [William Hughes], *Annual Report of the British and African Incorporated Association, Otherwise Known as the African Training Institute, Colwyn Bay, North Wales* (Colwyn Bay: African Training Institute, 1909), p. 12.
31. 'A Baptist Mission Scandal. II', *John Bull*, 23 December 1911.
32. [William Hughes], *Third Visit of the Rev. W. Hughes, Colwyn Bay, to the West Coast of Africa, brief Account of the Cameroons, the Native Hymn and Tune Book, and the Native Churches of that Land* (Wrexham: Hughes and Son, 1917).
33. Draper and Lawson-Reay, *Scandal at Congo House*, pp. 265–67.
34. Denis Williams, *The Third Temptation* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2010), p. 43.
35. Congo House is noted in Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), p. 438, for example; and Jeffrey Green, *Black Edwardians: Black People in Britain 1901–1914* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 139, 141, 232, 241, 265.
36. Yates, 'Educating Congolese Abroad'; Hazel King, 'Mojola Agbebi: African Church Leader', in Rainer Lotz and Ian Pegg (eds.), *Under the Imperial Carpet: Essays in Black History 1780–1950* (Crawley, England: Rabbit Press, 1986), pp. 84–108; Hazel King, 'Cooperation in Contextualization: Two Visionaries of the African Church: Mojola Agbebi and William Hughes of the African Institute, Colwyn Bay', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 16.1 (1986), 2–21; Etambala, 'Congolese Children at the Congo House'.
37. Draper and Lawson-Reay, *Scandal at Congo House*. See also Neil Evans and Ivor Wynne Jones, 'Wales and Africa: William Hughes and the Congo Institute', in Charlotte Williams, Neil Evans, and Paul O'Leary (eds.), *A Tolerant Nation? Revisiting Ethnic Diversity in a Devolved Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015), pp. 106–27.
38. Draper and Lawson-Reay, *Scandal at Congo House*, p. 278. I am attempting a study focused on the students' experiences in a forthcoming monograph, *Black Students in Imperial Britain: The African Institute, Colwyn Bay, 1889–1911* (Liverpool University Press).
39. Charlotte Williams, *Sugar and Slate* (Ceredigion: Planet, 2002), p. 26.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 26, 27.
43. Hughes, *Dark Africa*, p. 114.
44. Williams, *Sugar and Slate*, p. 32.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
46. 'Building Bridges', Croeso I Gymru, BBC Wales <http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/audiovideo/sites/yourvideo/pages/norbertx_mbumputu_01.shtml> [accessed 18 December 2020].
47. 'Young Africans Explore Congo Roots', BBC Local: South East Wales <http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/southeastwales/hi/people_and_places/arts_and_culture/newsid_8234000/8234119.stm> [accessed 18 December 2020]; Norbert X Mbu-Mputu et al., *Bamonimambo (the Witnesses): Rediscovering Congo and British Isles Common History* ([Newport]: South People's Projects, 2015).
48. 'Town Council Welcomes Congolese Delegation', Bay of Colwyn: Town Council <<https://www.colwyn-tc.gov.uk/town-council-welcomes-congolese-delegation/> <<https://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/local-news/bangor-universitys-historic-congo-link-11569154/>> [accessed 18 December 2020].
49. 'Minutes of a Meeting of the Bay of Colwyn Town Council [...] on Monday 17th October 2016' <<https://www.colwyn-tc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/MIN-Council-17.10.16.pdf>> [accessed 18 December 2020]; Black History Month North Wales <<http://www.bhmnw.com/index.asp?pageid=580958>> [accessed 18 December 2020]; '19 11 16 Return of the Congolese', YouTube <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dph4jBhQlZx0>> [accessed 18 December 2020].
50. *The Remarkable Reverend William Hughes and the African Institute* (Llangefni: Crefft Media [2018]).
51. King, 'Mojola Agbebi'; King, 'Cooperation in Contextualisation'.
52. Hughes to Leopold, 18 May 1903, rpt. in Draper and Lawson-Reay, *Scandal at Congo House*, pp. 161–62.

