

Harri Englund, *Visions for Racial Equality: David Clement Scott and the Struggle for Justice in Nineteenth-Century Malawi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (hb £75 – 978 1 316 51400 9). 2022, xvi + 317 pp.

At first glance, the new biography of an ‘exceptional’ missionary in late nineteenth-century Malawi presents a jarring proposition – resurrecting, in a new progressive guise, the colonial genre of ‘white missionary saves Africa’. Tackling these anxieties head on, Harri Englund makes a compelling argument for the dissenting politics of David Clement Scott, uncovering how the Scottish missionary challenged white supremacist ideas just as they were being popularized. Scott failed. One of the earliest people to argue that Rhodes must fall, he was ushered out of colonial Malawi by the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) on the basis of ill health in 1898, never to return. His political and philosophical projects died with him in 1907. If occasionally reverential, *Visions for Racial Equality* is significant explicitly because it is awkward, confronting in detail how the CSM failed to defend racial justice at the turn of the century.

A prize-winning student and prodigious polymath, Scott became head of the CSM’s tiny Blantyre Mission in 1881. Although employed as a missionary, Englund demonstrates that Scott should be understood – first and foremost – as a linguist and philosopher. By 1892, he had already completed his *Cyclopaedic Dictionary of the Mang’anja Language*, a study of ideas and poetry as much as vocabulary. The Blantyre Mission, which would grow into the basis of Malawi’s second largest city, became his domain (known locally as *Pa Scott*). St Michael’s and All Angels Church, a beautiful Byzantine structure designed by Scott and built by hundreds of Malawian workers, remains a key landmark. Through his sermons and the pages of the mission magazine, *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, Scott emphasized a common humanity, the imperative of reversals (‘the last shall be first’) and, above all, the openness of the ‘risen Christ’. Just as the disciples had to relearn their love and knowledge of a stranger after Jesus’s Easter resurrection, Scott’s close clan of Scottish friends and family had to learn from Malawians in order to save themselves: ‘the native may be saved without us, but we doubt if we here can be saved without the native’ (p. 3).

Envisaging Chimang’anja as a future ‘universal’ lingua franca, accessible to all and equal to Greek in terms of expression, Scott became an enthusiastic proponent of local concepts. He was most taken with the elastic, unhurried process of diplomacy known as *mandu* – the ‘appeal to right and sufficient reason’ – which became integral to his work (p. 22). He insisted on the mutuality between missionaries and chiefs, writing in 1891, ‘we in the country are with the chiefs as associated chiefs under arrangements of associated co-option’ (p. 63). ‘Inter-racial communion’ was explicitly conducted in Chimang’anja, and intimate friendships with William Koyi, Mungo Murray Chisuse and Harry Kambwiri Matecheta gave Scott insights into divine service and love as sacrifice. Funerals and music showed sorrow and rhythm to be universal experiences. Precolonial wars and migrations were conceived as ‘epic’ history – ‘nowhere is there found the thick darkness which one is taught to look for’ (p. 55).

Scott and his missionary colleagues had been early proponents of colonial annexation, but vociferously opposed the land grabbing and punitive taxation that followed the

declaration of the British Central African Protectorate in 1891. Scott was ultimately successful in opposing Cecil Rhodes' imposition of company rule, but as many of his clan died from disease, they were replaced by a new generation of missionaries who rejected his vision. By 1897, Scott was embroiled in a bruising series of clashes with the CSM over his alleged financial mismanagement, 'high churchism' and autocracy. Although he was ultimately vindicated, the formal inquiry brought into stark focus the three distinct political lineages that now fractured Blantyre's white community. Alongside Scott's dwindling clan of visionaries were white liberal paternalists led by Alexander Hetherwick, Scott's eventual successor, who struggled to think beyond racialized differences and ascribed the Chimang'anja language to a distinct group of people. Robert Hynde, a former CSM teacher, in turn, became editor of the *Central African Planter*, disseminating white supremacist ideas within and beyond the missionary community. After 1901, services at the Blantyre church were segregated between white and black.

Englund is damning about the CSM's subsequent failings – its focus on white settlers, its conservative 'anti-Africanism' in the 1950s, its complicity with Hastings Banda's dictatorship. But for all his opposition to Rhodes, Englund sidesteps how Scott was an ardent exponent of commercial capitalism and waged labour. Many struggled to understand his ideas. The lack of acknowledgement that Scott gave to his Malawian assistants in published works blemishes Englund's narrative of mutual recognition. Desperate to make a financial success of his new Kenya posting from 1901, Scott bought up swathes of land, and insisted on arduous physical labour as a path to self-improvement. In 1907, the year of his death, crops rotted, finances collapsed and there was only a single convert.

Englund sets out his intervention as a philosophical one. Scott's universalist ideas about epistemic justice ('mutual recognition between different knowers') are contrasted with recent scholarship emphasizing epistemic freedom and distinctive African cultures (p. 16). Scott's understanding of mutuality, nevertheless, also recognized significant differences of power, and in recovering the fleeting development of a dissenting whiteness among a small clan of missionaries, *Visions for Racial Equality* makes an important contribution to new 'unreasonable' histories of race in Africa. Envisaging the Blantyre congregation as a living African church, Scott insisted on preaching to all in Chimang'anja, championed *mlandu* as a universal concept, and maintained that '[m]utual respect is the lesson we so much need to learn at this time'. Lessons were not learned. Instead, Scott's vision sank into tragic oblivion.

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Lesley Nicole Braun, *Congo's Dancers: Women and Work in Kinshasa*. Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press (hb US\$79.95 – 978 0 299 34030 8). 2023, 201 pp.

Braun claims a space for dancers whose role, place and contribution to popular culture and music scholarship have not received adequate attention in African cultural studies.