

Africans on the Vanguard: Historicizing the Origin of Anglicanism in Akamba of Kenya

Stephen Muoki Joshua

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3091-9822>

Pwani University

pastastevo@yahoo.co.uk

Christopher Mutati Ndunda

Pwani University

cmutati@yahoo.com

Abstract

The establishment of Anglicanism in Ukamba during the 19th century was by default as far as Church Missionary Society (CMS) activities were concerned. Despite its 1844 presence in the neighbouring Coastal region, it was not until the close of the century that CMS-affiliated congregations started to emerge in Ukamba. Contrary to Africa Inland Mission's (AIM) Peter Cameron, who on 12th December 1895 went straight into Ukamba and bypassed the Coast, Church Missionary Society's Ludwig Krapf repeatedly failed in establishing a Christian Mission Station in Ukamba. Consequently, Kamba converts in the Coastal region returned home as evangelists and established *kitoro*¹ (defiant) Churches independent of missionary support. Activities by these Kamba evangelists in successive years are undocumented and untold in London Missionary reports. Oral narratives in the custody of family and friends are fast fading away. These include those of Jeremiah Muti, Joshua Muoka, Nathaniel Kamusa, Paul Muyu and James Muthoka. The article relies on oral history and archival materials to reconstruct the story of early Anglicanism in Ukamba. The story of Jeremiah Muti, key among Ukamba early Anglican evangelists, is a critical case in highlighting the untold African agency in the early missionary enterprise.

Keywords: Church Missionary Society; Kenya, Akamba; Anglicanism; history

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- 1 In line with the usage of *Kitoro*, a Swahili word for defiant, the concept of *Kitoro Christianity* has been used to describe the religion of fugitive slaves of East Africa paralleled to the Krio Christianity of the recaptives of West Africa. See Mark Shaw. 1994. "The Kingdom of God in Africa: Or How to get Africa into the Western Church History Curriculum Africa," *Journal of Evangelical Theology* 13(1):13–25.

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Introduction

This article attempts to reconstruct and at least appraise the contribution of Africans in early church missionary work in Ukamba,² which, to a large extent, has been muted in historical reporting and academic writing. The Anglican case will be a reference point. In this article, I argue that at least five unique forces precipitated African pioneering work in the Christianization of Ukamba. These are (1) the presence of Akamba on the Coast at the arrival of CMS in the 1840s, (2) the slave trade and the agency of freed slaves in spreading the Gospel Message, (3) the role of Akamba early church evangelists and their establishment of Ukamba *kitoro* churches, (4) the construction of the East-Africa railway line which passes right through UKamba land, (5) and the Akamba leadership in the *Tukutenderesa Yesu* East African revival movement. These forces made it possible for Africans to birth Anglicanism in Ukamba in a rather ‘unorthodox’ and random manner.

The article relies on archival work and oral history methodologies to answer key questions. Who started Anglicanism in Ukamba? What was the role of African evangelists in Christianizing Ukamba during the 19th and 20th centuries? What was the relationship between the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and local evangelists in Ukamba missionary work during the late 19th century and early 20th century? Was there a *kitoro* version of Christianity in Ukamba?

The Context of Ukamba Missionary Work

The CMS activities in Kenya started in the coastal city of Mombasa in 1844 following the arrival of a German missionary, Dr. Ludwig Krapf.³ Although Krapf himself did not manage to establish most of his visionary “chain of mission stations,” apart from Freetown, Rabai and Ribe, his successors were more robust at the close of the 19th century with missions, such as John and Annie Houghton at Golbanti in 1886,⁴ by Graffetey Smith at Jilore in 1890 and by Miss Florence Irene Deed at Kaloleni in 1904.⁵ Alongside white missionary Christian establishments, there were African-led Christian

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- 2 Ukamba describes the area occupied by the Akamba people of Kenya. It forms part of the former Eastern Province of Kenya. Also rendered as Ukambani (literally the land of the Akamba people), it is currently divided into three counties: Kitui, Machakos, and Makueni. Their language is categorised as part of the Bantu Speaking group, and it is popularly rendered as Kiikamba.
 - 3 Rev Dr J Ludwig Krapf, *Travels, Researches and Missionary Labours during an Eighteen Years' Residence in Eastern Africa* (Routledge, 2013).
 - 4 The church was actually started by Rev. William During, an African Christian from Sierra Leone, in 1883. However, the Methodist Missionary Society wanted mission stations to be headed by white missionaries and hence sent John and Annie Houghton. See Shel Arensen's "Missionaries Murdered at Golbanti," Old Africa Stories blog, Jan 9, 2009. <https://oldafricamagazine.com/missionaries-murdered-at-golbanti/>
 - 5 Reuben Shukuru Katite, "A History of Kaloleni Mission: Establishment, Development and Influence of the Church Missionary Society to the Giriama Community between 1904 AND 2004" (Pwani University, 2022).

communities on the East African coast, what others have named *Kitoro*⁶ Christian communities.⁷ Similar African evangelist initiatives were realised in different parts of interior Kenya, especially after the construction of the Kenya-Uganda Railway in 1909.⁸ Therefore, the failed mission work by Dr Kraft to establish a centre in Kitui,⁹ aided by the Kamba chief and trader, Chief Kivoi wa Mwendwa, in the mid-19th century, was accomplished by Kamba converts who had come to Mombasa for work and trade. For instance, Nzimbi came from Mombasa and started CMS work at Syongila. From Mombasa came Paul Muyu, who started CMS work in Wathini, and James Munyao in Kithangathini. Both were attending worship at Mukaa Mission, which had initially begun as CMS Anglican Mission in 1903 but was given up to Africa Inland Mission (AIM). From Mombasa, Mukuva, who had moved from Kitui and was brought up in Kirinyaga, came and started CMS work there. From Mombasa, Harrison and James Mbotela came and started CMS work in Kamuthanga, Machakos, where Joshua Muoka became a pioneer of the CMS church.¹⁰ Like the above missionaries, Jeremiah Mute's encounter with the CMS began at the Coast of Kenya. Joseph Kanuku, the second bishop of Machakos Anglican diocese, observed that:

Jeremiah Mute was the pioneer of the Anglican church in Kamba land. He joined the World War veterans who had known about the Anglican Church as they served in the King's African Rifles. He organised to start the first Anglican Church at Ukia, and from there served early churches like Kithangathini, Wathini, Wautu, Kyakatoni, Syongila in Kitui and Yata. He also preached in Kajiado and Kikuyu land.¹¹

Crediting the establishment of the Anglican Church in Ukamba to Reverend Canon Jeremiah Mute is a little overstatement. Indeed, Mute stood on the shoulders of many local pioneers who collaborated with European missionaries under the Church Missionary Society to establish Anglican work in Ukamba. These pioneers may be dated from when Dr Krapf started Anglican work in Mombasa in the 19th Century to Mute's period when Ukamba became a parish.

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- 6 Kitoro is a Swahili word that means disobedience, signifying the fact that these communities were defiantly different both as unique African expressions of the Christian faith as well as a collection of refugees, most of whom were freed or runaway slaves from Muslim-Arab masters.
 - 7 Steve De Gruchy and Sophie Chirongoma. 2007. "Elements of African Ecclesiologies", *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church*, 291–305.
 - 8 Tom Cunningham. 2022. "Missionaries, the State, and Labour in Colonial Kenya c. 1909–c. 1919: The 'Gospel of Work' and the 'Able-Bodied Male Native'" *History Workshop Journal*.
 - 9 Kitui Town is currently the headquarters of Kitui County, one of the three predominant Kamba counties. Others include Makueni and Machakos. These comprise the Ukamba region, dominated by the Akamba Bantu people. This region encircles the country's coast area, a factor that set Akamba as the most populous long-distance trader with Arabs and other ancient coast visitors.
 - 10 Salome Mbevi Mute, Digital Recording, Interview by Christopher Mutati Ndunda at Machakos Town on 22nd March 2022.
 - 11 Charles Ndingi and Lilian Dhahabu. 2016. *The Life and Moments of Bishop Joseph Mutie Kanuku: A Biography*, Unpublished Manuscript, Nairobi Kenya.

Indeed, the CMS was a latecomer in Ukamba. Whereas from 1844, CMS concentrated on the Coast, and only some made historic visits to Ukamba, the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) bypassed the Coast and went straight for Ukamba. On August 17, 1895, Peter Cameron Scott and the first part of the A.I.M. missionaries left New York harbour for Mombasa, arriving two months later to a warm welcome by their Anglican counterparts. Immediately, Cameron traversed the dangerous route hinterland, a one-month walk journey, and having planted the first A.I.M. station at Nzaui on 12th December 1895, he reported home, “Now the first stepping stone has been laid inside the gate”.¹² The growth was exponential. “During the following year, Peter Cameron Scott walked 2,600 miles: he established three more A.I.M. stations in Ukamba at Kikai, Kilungu and Kangundo and welcomed a second missionary party of eight, including his parents and a younger sister”.¹³ Within ten months, ending in October 1896, four stations were established, six buildings made of brick were erected, and six other ‘good grass dwelling houses’ were set up by Hotchkiss in Sakai, Krieger in Kilungu and Severen at Kangundo.¹⁴

However, It is clear that the historiography of the church in East Africa has over-emphasised the role of the white missionary at the expense of local evangelists and the agency of other local leaders. Understandably, the white missionaries reported to their sponsors and superiors abroad and hence did not see the need to mention the names of locals. However, this trend has continued far into later writings. For instance, Richard Gehman’s 2004 masterpiece, *The Africa Inland Mission: Aspects of Its Early History*, hardly mentions any Akamba by name despite an elaborate coverage of AIM’s early expansion in Ukamba.¹⁵

Contrary to the case with AIM, whose white missionaries maintained a physical presence in Ukamba during the first decade of the 20th century, the CMS and, by extension Anglicanism, was marked by African Kamba evangelists who, after their conversion at the Coast, went back to establish churches. According to Canon Tei Mawioo, Jeremiah Mute supported the claim that locals started the Anglican Church in Ukamba:

He told me that the Anglican Church in Ukamba was not started by missionaries. People like him who had experienced Anglicanism from the towns where they worked and loved it started the churches which were being run by evangelists.¹⁶

12 *Hearing and Doing* (Volumes I-XXI, 1898–1916. Mission Periodical of AfricaInland Mission), I, 1, 1896:3,4.

13 Richard J Gehman. 2004. “The Africa Inland Mission: Aspects of Its Early History” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 23(2): 115–44.

14 Gehman.

15 Gehman.

16 Mbevi, Salome Mute. 2019. *Rev. Jeremiah Nzesi: Memories of My Dad*. Unpublished Manuscript, Nairobi.

In contrast to Cardinal Lavignerie's statement that the "missionaries must therefore be mainly initiators, but the lasting work must be accomplished by the Africans themselves, once they have become Christians and apostles,"¹⁷ African evangelists initiated Anglican work in Ukamba under CMS. It was only later supported by white missionaries. They became Christians and apostles as they planted *kitoro* churches and made disciples, heralding the coming of Jeremiah Mute, who served as the first Anglican Kamba priest.¹⁸

By 1910, CMS Anglican work in Ukamba villages was growing tremendously, but the region had not yet produced a priest among them. In 1914, Joshua Muoka, who worked with a freed slave, invited Mbotela, a freed slave himself, and together they established an Anglican church in Kamuthanga village. He later defected and renamed it *The New East African Church* following abandonment by white missionaries due to World War I. Nathaniel Kamusa, the other most promising lay minister from Kilungu, trained at Divinity School for ordained ministry but did not reach the priesthood. The priestly work was done by visiting clerics, mainly from the Gikuyu community, such as Obadiah Kariuki, Elijah Gacanja and Daudi Mukinyo.

Meanwhile, a Kamba Evangelist and Lay leader, Jeremiah Mute Nzesi from Thui Hills of Nthongoni, well known among the East Africa Revival brethren as well as among Kamba elders as one able minister who had pioneered Anglican work in Ukamba, had gone to Tanganyika for studies and had been ordained.¹⁹ He was a priest in the diocese of Central Tanganyika and was famed as a man of deep piety and integrity committed to missionary work. The Akamba indigenous Christian leadership requested, through the Archbishop of East Africa, Leonard Beecher, to have Mute returned home to lead the Ukamba Church.²⁰

Akamba Presence on the Coast and Early Encounter with White Missionaries

The history of the Anglican Church in Ukamba can be traced back to 1844 when the Church Missionary Society sent a Lutheran missionary, Ludwig Krapf, to the East African coast. Dr. Johann Ludwig Krapf (1810-1891) was the pioneer missionary on the coast of East Africa (Onyango 2016, 2). On the coast, among the tribes he found

17 Joseph Louis Perrier and Charles Martial Allemand Lavignerie. 1992. *Vent d'avenir: Le Cardinal Lavignerie; (1825–1892)*. Editions Karthala.

18 Salome Mbevi Mute, Digital Recording, Interview by Christopher Mutati Ndunda at Machakos Town on 22nd March 2022.

19 Retired Bishop Kanuku of Anglican Church Diocese of Machakos, digital recording, interview by the author at Machakos Town on 14 July 2022.

20 Vuva, Mututu. 2015. An oral interview on Canon Jeremiah Mute was conducted by the researcher at Nthongoni Village, at Vuva's Home, on 14 August 2015.

were the Akamba. Several historians' commentaries confirm the presence of Akamba on the coast. Ndege (2012) writes:

Some Akamba living along the coast were converted to Islam, and the volume of trade increased between the interior of Ukamba and coastal towns. Inter-marriage between some Akamba and Arabs happened and this contributed to the growth of the Waswahili community at the coast.²¹

From this commentary, we see that some Akamba had already converted to Islam, the dominant religion at the Coast, by 1844. We also see their involvement in trade and the development of the Waswahili community through inter-marriage with Arabs.²²

Akamba were long-distance traders. Two main trade items from the interior of Kenya during the long-distance trade were ivory and slaves. Some Akamba traders were directly or indirectly involved in the slave trade, a very unfortunate chapter in the history of the tribe. Arabs who had moved into the hinterland had established slave posts to buy and sell slaves and match them to the coast, where they were sold to wealthy Arabs and others shipped to the Zanzibar market and then abroad. Chief Kivoi wa Mwendwa was a famous trader in ivory and slaves. He used to walk to the coast along a route that Krapf and Rebman established as a CMS station at Rabai. The mission lay on a slave-trading route (Kiriama et al., 2008). Here, Kivoi met Krapf, and on "1949 November 1st, Krapf proposed to visit a Kamba chief whom he had met in Mombasa "(Hildebrandt 1996, 124). Kivoi, who had seen Rabai's mission, accepted to have Christian work established in Ukamba, Kitui especially.

Krapf's statement of his missionary objective was met with a sincere welcome: "I fully understand your purpose and you shall have all your requests," said Kivoi. He invited Krapf to go with him into the interior, returning to the coast in four or five months (Groves 1954, 104–105).

Already, Arabs had established Kitui as a slave market post. By virtue of taking Krapf to Kitui to start Christian work, Kivoi wa Mwendwa played an indirect pioneering role in the starting of the Anglican mission in Ukamba. While interacting with the Akamba on the coast and in the hinterland, he did linguistic studies and developed Kikamba's writing. Jonathan Hildebrandt dates his project of studying Kikamba to around 1844. He wrote,

On July 1844. Mrs. Krapf died. At the time of his wife's death Krapf was very sick with Malaria, but he recovered. He then set about learning Kiswahili. He already knew German, English, Amharic and Arabic. He learned Kiswahili so quickly that he had

21 Ndege, J.K. ed. 2012. *KCSE KNEC Past Papers 1996–2011 History and Government Paper 311/I & 311/2*, 6th Edition. Nairobi: Global Link Publishers

22 Vuva, Mututu. 2015. An oral interview on Canon Jeremiah Mute was conducted by the researcher at Nthongoni Village, at Vuva's Home, on 14 August 2015.

translated the New Testament into that language within two years. At about this time, he began to learn Kikamba as well (Hildebrandt 1996, 124)

Concerning the CMS work that Krapf went to start in Kitui, Mark Shaw wrote:

The Kamba seemed to respond positively to his message and also to receiving him. Through their help Krapf and his team were able to establish a station in Ikutha which later was taken over by the Leipziger Mission (Shaw 1996, 188).

A very unfortunate incident happened and cut short the Anglican work that Krapf had started in Kitui. Kivoi, Krapf and a group of men then set out for the north since Krapf wanted to see the Tana River. Like David Livingstone, Krapf hoped to find a big river that could be used as a ‘highway’ for missionaries travelling inland. However, before the party could reach the Tana, it was attacked by a band of more than a hundred robbers. Kivoi and some of his men were killed; Krapf and other men escaped, going in different directions. After many hardships, Krapf returned to Kivoi’s village and told what had happened. Some of the people in the village thought Krapf should be killed since Kivoi had died, but others thought he should be allowed to return to the coast. Some men escorted him to Mombasa. (Hildebrandt 1996:125-126).

The disappointed Krapf now realised it was hopeless to begin a mission station in Ukamba under the existing circumstances. The perilous route and distance would make regular communication next to impossible. He reluctantly concluded that the projected mission must be postponed, though he hoped not to be abandoned (Groves 1954, 107). The fruit of Krapf’s missionary labours culminated in the translation of St. Marks’s gospel, which was the first translation of the Bible into local languages in Kenya. He also left a legacy of the name Kitui and Kenya. Kaloki links the etymology of Kitui to Krapf.

Kitui draws its name from a Pre-colonial community water well that supplied the outlying villages. When the Rev. Dr Ludwig Krapf, the first European visitor, was told by the local people that the well was called *Kitui Kyaũnyithya*, translating as “a pivotal well for watering people and animals”. So he called the place Kitui and later administrative location became Kyangwithya, a corruption of *Kyaunyithya* (Kaloki 2013, 24)

As Krapf left Kitui, he observed that “due to Kamba movements and interaction with other tribes, they [the Akamba] would be best suited to carry the gospel” (Muiu 2011, 15).

Slave Trade and the Agency Of Freed Slaves

It is important to relate Ukamba hegemony to the contextual evil of the slave trade in East Africa. Ndege’s summary is helpful.

Slaves were exchanged for manufactured goods from abroad. Some captured as slaves were prisoners of local wars captured and sold to slave dealers. Others were lonely travelers who were kidnapped, and others were captured during raids. Some local rulers would sell their subjects whereas others were obtained through treachery by being enticed then sold as slaves. Those who could not repay debts were also taken in as slaves (Ndege 2012, 229).

In East Africa, the British Government fought hard to stop the slave trade. Those slaves who were rescued were settled in Frere town in Mombasa. Here, they were trained by both missionaries and returnee African freed slaves from India, also known as Bombay Africans. Among those trained were Akamba, who promoted Anglican work with their descendants. In 1873, Sir Bartle Frere, governor of Bombay, visited East Africa on behalf of the Archbishop of Canterbury to report on the Ribe and Rabai missions. He found eight people in Rabai and 40-50 worshippers at Ribe. They were Galla, Miji-Kenda and Akamba (Onyango 2016, 6). This evidence of Akamba converting to Christianity by 1873 supports the view that there are Akamba pioneers of Anglican Christianity on the Coast.

One of the descendants of the freed slaves who pioneered Anglican work in Ukamba (Kamuthanga) was James Mbotela.

James Juma Mbotela was one successful case of an enculturated African freed slaves. Tom Mbotela was the only child and son of Mbotela. Tom Mbotela was therefore the first generation descending from the freed slaves. He attended the local primary school in Freretown and the Freretown divinity school and proceeded to Buxton high school. He remained in the missionary school under the guidance of J. E. Harrison of the Freretown. He played an important role in the mission activities in Machakos (Lilechi, Nyanchoga & Muchoki, 2020: 649).

Mbotela came as a teacher at East African Mission School, established by missionaries Rev. Harrison and his wife in Kamuthanga (Newman 1974). Mbotela and Harrison worked with Joshua Muoka and started a place of worship. The building is still there today.²³

Another C.M.S. pioneering work by freed slaves was the Mothers' Union. The Mothers' Union's founder was Elizabeth Mitchell, daughter of Florence Wellington. Other Pioneer members were May Watts and Rose Cromwell, whose parents were freed slaves of Kamba origin (Lilechi, Nyanchoga & Muchoki, 2020:650).

Akamba Early Church Evangelists and Ukamba Village Churches

The establishment of the Anglican church in Ukamba was begun by Akamba, who went to the coast and, after converting to Anglican, convinced missionaries among them to

23 Vuva, Mututu. 2015. An oral interview on Canon Jeremiah Mute was conducted by the researcher at Nthongoni Village, at Vuva's Home on 14 August 2015.

return to the villages and start village Anglican churches. Some of these local missionaries were sent from Mombasa by their brethren, and the first church they started was Paul Nzimbi, who returned to Ukamba and started a church in Kitui. Years later, the Kitui Diocese was born.²⁴ In 1925, the young Paul Nzimbi wa Munuve went to Mombasa, where a relative, Samuel Mutisya Ileli, hosted him. Nzimbi worked as a kitchen staff member for an Asian family. During this time, he visited a nearby CMS centre, where he was baptised and confirmed. In the evenings, he would study the word of God privately after being taught how to read and write by CMS missionaries. The Akamba Christians who worked on the coast wanted to see Ukamba evangelised. They wanted CMS work initiated in Ukamba. With time, they got together and chose Nzimbi to become a missionary in their hometown of Kitui. In 1932, he wedded Martha Nditi at Mulango AIM Centre and went on to serve with the mission. However, he was dismissed by AIM in 1937 on account of infant baptism. Contrary to the beliefs and ordinances of AIM and in keeping with his Anglican Tradition from CMS, Nzimbi had let Rev. Elijah Gacanja baptise his children.

After leaving AIM in 1937, Nzimbi started a native Anglican congregation at Kwa-Kithumu and later relocated to Kwa-Kanuku. Finally, he settled at Syongila, where the congregation grew to the present-day famous Syongila Mother Church. A year later, he started a congregation in his backyard. Later, he asked the congregation to move from his compound. The congregation moved to Ithookwe. He also started the native Anglican Church in his home area under a Kyundua Tree, which later moved to a nearby village called *Unyaa*. He was a great evangelist. Through him, the church spread to Kavoko, Ikanga, Kalawa, Katheka, Yatta, Kiusyani, Ulungu, Mutuni, Nthakame (Kwa Ndonga) and Kyanika. Some of the elders who worked with him were Ayubu Velele, Benjamin Mutunga, Jemmy Mutulu, James Kitheka, Damaris Lua Ndunda, Munyasya Samuel, James Kasanga, James Mbeu, Phillip King'onde, Mary Vata, Samuel Kavota and others.²⁵

In 1903, at Mukaa in Kilungu, C.M.S work started by missionaries and was shortly abandoned, and the premises were handed over to the African Inland Mission (Mwandi, 1993). After that failed attempt to start an Anglican church in Kilungu, Paul Muyu and Joseph Munyao started Anglican churches separately at Wathini and Kithangathini, respectively. Another distinguished person is Mukuva, who went to Kirinyaga and started a work that would grow into the Mount Kenya diocese. Some of the sons of these local pioneer African missionaries later became Archbishops of Kenya. The Son of Paul Nzimbi became the Archbishop, whereas the Son of Mukuva Gitari also became the Archbishop of Kenya.

24 William Kimuyu and Josephine Kimuyu, digital recording, interview conducted by Christopher Mutati Ndunda on 6 August 2015 at their Katheka Kai, Kenya.

25 Gibson Muyu, digital recording, Interview conducted by Christopher Mutati Ndunda at the interviewee's home in Wathini, Kenya, on 20 May 2015.

One of the lasting legacies of British rule in Kenya is the construction of the Kenya-Uganda Railway. Ndege et al. (2012, 189) give a beautiful commentary on the purpose of this project:

The British built the railway so that it can facilitate the movement of troops to suppress resistance, to transport the administrators into the interior for effective control of British East Africa, to promote the development of legitimate trade and abolish slave trade, to transport raw materials from interior to the coast and manufactured goods from the coast and to exploit the resources in the interior.

Before the British came to East Africa, a Kamba seer prophesied the construction of the railway line. Richard Geihman, a scholar and a missionary, documented this:

Akamba prophets were famous for their ability to predict unusual and distant events. Syokimau for instance, prophesied that the white men would come, that there would be snake stretching from Mombasa to Lake Victoria and that people would carry fire in their pockets. The snake turned out to be the Uganda railroad and the fire in the pockets referred to the matches. Prophets such as Syokimau did predict unusual events in the indefinite future (Gehman 1987, 68–69)

When this project started in Mombasa, many Kamba men found their way to the Coast looking for employment. Mombasa was the most prominent urban centre at the time. There are reasons why Africans went to urban centres. Social amenities attracted them. Towns offered higher job prospects and better wages. Others went to escape hut tax and forced labour, and the more enterprising ones wanted to open up businesses in towns (Ndege 2012, 235).

Not willing to be left behind, the young Muti went to Mombasa to look for employment. He was employed as a houseboy for a Colonial Railways Official and was later promoted to cook (Mbevi 2005, 1). Later, he was recommended to work for East Africa Railways Harbers, where he was trained to drive the machine that took workers to repair and check on the railway line (Mbevi 2005, 1). Working with the railway company gave him employment. It became an avenue for him to encounter the East Africa Revival movement that brought him spiritual renewal and awakened him to begin his lay ministry, which he executed for many years until he resigned to join full-time ministry.²⁶

Tukutenderesa Yesu, The East African Revival Movement

Jeremiah Mute became a believer in 1937 but did not fully understand salvation until the East African Revival movement arrived (Mbevi, 2005). This movement is also known as *Tukutendereza*. The word “Tukutendereza” is a Luganda word that was used in a famous hymn sung in the East Africa Revival movement, “Tukutendereza Yesu”,

26 William Kimuyu and Josephine Kimuyu, digital recording, interview conducted by Christopher Mutati Ndunda on 6 August 2015 at their Katheka Kai, Kenya.

which means “We Magnify Thee Jesus” (Hastings 19..., 598). In Kenya, the revival became particularly strong among the Anglicans of the western region and the Presbyterian and Anglican Kikuyu (Langley and Kiggins 1974, 194). It began with a Kenya Keswick Convention at Kikuyu in 1938, during which Ruanda Revival Speakers held a meeting that left a strong atmosphere of spiritual awakening.

Towards the end of 1938, a second Revival team visited Kenya from Ruanda, holding even more successful preaching at the Pumwani C.M.S station in Nairobi (Barret et al. 1973, 113). When the movement started spreading like wildfire, Mute was caught up by it, and it possessed him completely. This revival was characterised by a willingness to give public testimony to what Christ has done to their lives and be willing to make restitution to anyone who had been harmed by their sins (Nzimbi 2009). At that time, he was a member of the African Inland Church (AIM then), where he had been baptised and married. AIM sent him away when he started sharing his testimony and evangelising (Mbevi, 1998).

The context in which Mute became a Christian in the late 1930s shows that the church needed some serious spiritual awakening. Richard Gehman (1986, 38) says, “A state of prevailing spiritual declension.” In Ukamba, as in many East African societies, there was “Drunkenness, immorality, concubinage, continuing belief in witchcraft, and the power of the spirits of the dead” (Katarikawe & John n.d, 29). In the East African missionary churches, drinking, immorality, and witchcraft continued to be a snare to Christians, even the evangelists and church leaders; Christianity seemed superficial (Gehman 1986, 38–39)

Apart from the criticism that the “The railway meant a definite end to Kamba trade, and also involved expropriation of UKamba Land along the proposed line, without compensation” (Ndambuki 2016, 102), The development of Kenya Uganda railway line helped a great deal by making transport easier and faster into the interior (Muiu 2011, 160). And not just that: The building of the Uganda Railway greatly influenced the inland push of missions in Kenya (Hildebrandt 1996, 196). Because he travelled with the East African Railways and Harbors, Mute came into contact with this revival movement. He experienced a deep spiritual renewal that changed his life forever and was evident in his entire career and ministry.²⁷

The East Africa Revival Movement promoted Lay involvement (Gehman 1986, 49). When Mute joined C.M.S. after he had left AIM, which did not tolerate the elements of the East Africa Revival Movement, “Clericalism was compatible to the church patterns of the Church of England (Anglican) where the priesthood of all believers was not stressed, but the revival movement reaffirmed the responsibility of the laity in the church” (Gehman 1986, 49). Mute understood his responsibility as a layperson well and

27 Gibson Muyu, digital recording, Interview conducted by Christopher Mutati Ndunda at the interviewee’s home in Wathini, Kenya, on 20 May 2015.

did not have to wait to be a clergyman to fulfil the Great Commission. He began preaching and sharing testimonies in Anglican churches, Revival fellowships, and conventions. The Rev. Canon Tei Mawioo recalled how Mute told him of his zeal in preaching as a lay minister:

Rev. Mute told me how he would go preaching in Limuru every weekend. He would return to Nairobi Monday morning on Lorries, which brought cabbages to the wholesale market. He would change at Muthurua where he had a house and go to work at the Railways. He met many Kikuyu friends and learned to preach fluently in their language (Mbevi 2019, 39)

Later, this ability to speak Gikuyu led him to be sent to Handeni in Tanganyika at a Mau Mau camp to serve among the detainees. On 20th August 1950, Jeremiah Mute was licensed as a Lay Reader by the Rt. Rev. R. P. Crabbe, the Bishop of Mombasa Diocese, which covered all of Kenya at the time (Mbevi 2005)

Apart from the well-deserved criticism that the “*Tukutendereza* group was sometimes stubborn and conservative in outlook bordering on narrow-mindedness” (Ndangi and Dhahabu 2016, 38), this movement should rightly be credited for the contemporary manifestations of evangelical characteristics in the spirituality of most Kenyan Anglican churches (Chemengich 2019, 184), including Ukamba.

Most ordained clergy ascribed to the *tukutendereza* movement in Ukamba had no theological training (Ndangi and Dhahabu 2016, 37). These clerics only came to Ukamba much later. Mute was the first ordained priest in Ukamba and a very prominent leader in the East Africa Revival Movement.²⁸ Whereas it may have been easier for the untrained clergy to be in the Ukamba Anglican system, a trend that has continued to date with little regard to education, for Jeremiah Mute, it was different. He was an experienced lay preacher in Anglican and *Tukutendereza* circles but had no formal education.²⁹

When he went to Mombasa, Jeremiah went for adult education with permission from his colonial master for three grades. He completed his education with beautiful handwriting and the ability to read Kikamba, his tribal language, and Kiswahili (Mbevi, 2005). However glamorous, Mbevi appreciates Mute’s basic literacy, fervent spirit, and zeal to serve as a lay preacher. However, Mute was never ordained until sufficiently trained to serve the Ukamba church.³⁰

28 Gibson Muyu, digital recording. Christopher Mutati Ndunda conducted the interview at the interviewee's home in Wathini, Kenya, on 20 May 2015.

29 William Kimuyu and Josephine Kimuyu, digital recording, interview conducted by Christopher Mutati Ndunda on 6 August 2015 at their Katheka Kai, Kenya.

30 Gibson Muyu, digital recording. Christopher Mutati Ndunda conducted the interview at the interviewee's home in Wathini, Kenya, on 20 May 2015.

Despite the high demand for a Kamba priest, which Alfred Stanway had noted as the Archdeacon of Nairobi and had requested that Mute be ordained and assigned to work in the Ukamba Missionary area under Nairobi Archdeaconry, the church authorities refused because he had no formal education (Carey 2017). Swallowing the bitter pill, Jeremiah Mute Nzesi continued undeterred, serving as a lay leader at the East Africa railways, hoping an opportune time would come and he would be ordained. (Mbevi 2005). His services were recognised by the Anglican Church and East Africa Revival Movement brethren, and he was licensed to be a Lay Leader. Generally, Akamba Anglicans remained on the coast and served the Anglican churches in the coastal region, while Ukamba remained neglected with a dire need for a priest in the community. It was not until Alfred Stanway was promoted to bishop of Central Tanganyika Diocese that he called Mute for training and ordained him to be the first Kamba Anglican priest.

Conclusion

The story of Reverend Mute largely encapsulates Anglican missions to Ukamba. Anglicanism was established by returnee railway workers from the Coast region. These persons' names are conspicuously missing in white missionary reports. In addition, the local memory of their contribution is quickly disappearing. In this article, I argued that the missionary work of CMS among coastal tribes of East Africa between 1844, the presence of the Akamba people on the Coast on account of their distant trade habits and the construction of the East African Railway in 1909 created a conducive environment for the development of a Kitoro Christianity in Ukamba. Powered by the East African Revival Movement, the *Tukutendereza* Anglicanism in Ukamba was a pleasant surprise to the CMS and yet not warmly received news for some white missionaries who found the churches unorthodox. However, for quite a long time, the churches lacked trained personnel, missionary funding and general acceptance among CMS circles. More importantly, the founders of these churches who contributed immensely to the present establishment have hardly been celebrated or recognised in missionary reports and historical documentation. Nevertheless, archival evidence and oral memory are overwhelmingly marked by their efforts. This article attempted to bridge this gap by reconstructing the story of early Anglicanism in Ukamba.

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