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ARTICLE

The 1943 West African Editors' Press Delegation to the United Kingdom: Mediating the Metropole from World War II Nigeria

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Abstract

The 1943 Tour of Eight West African editors to London formed a major event in World War II United Kingdom–West Africa relations. The tour is often understood in terms of the symbolic importance of Azikiwe's landmark Memorandum on the Atlantic Charter. This article argues that we should reappraise our understandings of the tour and pay closer attention to African actors and networks beyond the Colonial Office. We must understand Britain as a periphery to a West African social, cultural, and political centre. The tour reveals how Britain was mediated in West African terms. Existing historiography focused on Azikiwe's Memorandum or decision-making within Whitehall has ignored both the importance of the tour in West Africa and the diversity of Africans in Britain involved in the tour. The present article focuses on African responses to the tour and, drawing on the historiography of print culture and wartime African mobilities, prioritises African-authored sources. Cumulatively, it situates the tour within an evolving historiography of global mobilities in WWII Nigeria. Rather than simply seeking to unite the metropole and colony in a single field, the article suggests that we must consider more deeply the ways that Africans provincialized the metropole, while centring African colonies.

Keywords: Nigeria; Britain; World War II; subaltern travel; African mobilities

In summer 1943, eight West African editors embarked on an unprecedented tour of the United Kingdom. Focusing on Nigeria, this article argues that the editors' visit must be understood as a West Africa–centred engagement with Britain.[1] To demonstrate the significance and breadth of this African focus, it decentres imperial institutions, arguing that the editors treated England as a site for the maintenance and enforcement of West African social relations.

Commencing on August 2, the editors' tour included official and unofficial itineraries. At an official level, the journalists followed a gruelling Colonial Office–designed itinerary that took them to London's House of Commons, St. Paul's Cathedral, the Imperial Institute, as well as Birmingham, Epsom, Oxford, and military installations in Kent and Essex.[2] But

[1] J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 260; R. L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), 56; G. O. Olusanya, *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria, 1939–1953* (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 1973), 57.

[2] The National Archives, London (henceforth, TNA), Colonial Office (CO), 8755/9/22, Report by Niven, "Visit to England by West African Editors," August 1943.

at an unofficial level, and away from British supervision, the newspapermen met Africans living in wartime Britain. The editors came from the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone, as well as the three dominant linguistic regions of Nigeria. Our particular focus is on the Nigerian contingent, including Nnamdi Azikiwe of the *West African Pilot*, Mallam Abubakar Imam from the Hausa *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo*, and Isaac Babalola Thomas, editor of the Yoruba *Akede Eko* (Lagos Herald).[3]

The tour is best known in Imperial historiography for Azikiwe's presentation of his Memorandum on the Atlantic Charter, signed by six of the eight editors, to Whitehall. His document demanded self-governance for Nigeria within fifteen years, and a lesser category of representative government within ten.[4] Less well-known was Abubakar Imam's visit to Lord Lugard's Surrey home to discuss the future of northern Nigeria, an important episode beyond the scope of this article.[5]

Away from high politics, few historians have accounted for a key area of the editors' lives in Britain: their social networking with England-based West Africans, and the way the newspapermen placed the lives of this diasporic community in dialogue with social life back in Nigeria. We argue that these events are key to the tour because they reveal how Great Britain formed the "periphery" to Nigeria's "centre": the United Kingdom served as a space in which relationships primarily centred in West Africa could be preserved, documented, and maintained. Indeed, reframing the tour in this way reveals the range of African actors involved in it, revealing a far greater ethnic, gendered, and occupational mix than admitted in colonial governmental sources, which largely document only the editors' "official" itinerary.[6]

This article does not simply unite metropole and colony in a common analytic field.[7] Rather it demonstrates how the imperial metropole itself constituted a "periphery" for actors whose primary social, political, and cultural reference points remained anchored in Africa.[8] Understood in this way, the editors' tour can be understood as an African-centred instance of international colonial mobility.[9] It enables us to ask what form a transimperial mobility might take that looks to Africa as its "central" point of reference and avoids placing colonial institutions at the centre of its analysis.[10] The networks and connections mobilised during the tour were based on the African continent. Far from representing an imperial centre, England constituted a peripheral location within these

[3] Olusanya, "Second," 92; TNA, CO, 875/9/22, Achimota to S. S. Colonies, 16 July 1943; TNA, CO, 875/9/72, Nigeria to S. S. Colonies, 17 July 1943; "Three Nigerian Ambassadors," *West African Pilot*, 23 June 1943.

[4] Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, 56.

[5] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 29 December 1943; A. Mora, *The Abubakar Imam Memoirs* (Zaria: N. N. P. C., 1989), 77–89.

[6] J. E. Flint, "'Managing Nationalism': The Colonial Office and Nnamdi Azikiwe, 1932–43," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 27:2 (1999), 143–58; M. Reeves, "'Free and Equal Partners in Yours Commonwealth': The Atlantic Charter and Anticolonial Delegations to London, 1941–3," *Twentieth Century British History* 29:2 (2018), 259–83.

[7] F. Cooper and L. Stoler, (1997), "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Culture in a Bourgeois World*, ed. F. Cooper and A. Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1–58.

[8] A. Dirlik, "Performing the World: Reality and Representation in the Making of World Histor(ies)," *Journal of World History* 16:4 (2004), 391–410, 409; R. Drayton and D. Motadel, "Discussion: The Futures of Global History," *Journal of Global History* 13 (2018), 1–21.

[9] A Mbembe, "Afropolitanism," *NKA: Contemporary African Art* 46 (2020), 56–61.

[10] D. Simo, "Writing World History in Africa: Opportunities, Constraints and Challenges," in *Global History, Globally: Research and Practice Around the World*, ed. S. Beckert and D. Sachsenmaier (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 235–50, 239–43; P. Zeleza, "Banishing the Silences: Towards the Globalization of African History," 2017, http://erepo.usiu.ac.ke/11732/1163, accessed 23 July 2024; J. Depelchin, *Silences in African History: Between the Syndromes of Discovery and Abolition* (Dar Es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota, 2005).

connections. Time and again, the article reveals how the editors' and their contacts understood social networking on British shores as chiefly of importance because of how it reinforced social, cultural, and commercial relations primarily grounded in Nigeria.

To understand how this African mediation of wartime Great Britain was possible, we situate the events of the tour in relation to recent historiography on the African use of "sociable print" during the 1940s, as well as practices of mobility and cross-cultural mediation in the interwar African press. It then proceeds to consider several dimensions of the 1943 tour, including Nigerians' apprehension regarding the tour in Nigeria, the degree to which the tour offers a window into West African diaspora society within wartime Britain, and, finally, to West African interpretations of British society emerging from the tour. The article draws on colonial sources, including the files of the British Council, and the Colonial Office, as well as material relating to the Colonial Film Unit (CFU), where these are of critical explanatory importance. However, it prioritises African-authored sources in its analysis, particularly the Nigerian pronationalist *West African Pilot*, and Azikiwe's major ninety-five-instalment serialised narrative of the tour published in that newspaper.[11]

Situating the West African Editors' Tour and Its Reception within WWII Nigeria

Only a very limited range of African actors are reflected in dominant understandings of the tour. This is partly a result of the analytical questions that historians have asked of the tour, which have focused on the symbolic importance of the Memorandum. This article briefly surveys these accounts, before turning to two concepts in the recent historiography of colonial African print culture, which we argue are more useful in shedding light on the tour. The relatively few extant accounts of the tour tend to focus on Westminster politics. Flint explores policymaking in the Colonial Office, and the degree to which Azikiwe's Memorandum influenced civil servants' planning.[12] Reeves examines colonial subjects in a comparative perspective, relating it to a wider body of "[Atlantic] charter talk," and contrasting Azikiwe's mobilisation of the charter with Burmese nationalist U-Saw's earlier delegation to London.[13] Adi's far briefer account, by contrast, contextualises the delegation in relation to wartime London-based African nationalism.[14] The tour has received less attention in the historiography of African nationalism; Adi's comprehensive account of West African politics in Britain makes only passing reference to it.[15] Before considering the importance of "print culture," it is worth stressing a rarely acknowledged quality of the Memorandum: the degree to which it failed to represent the will of all the editors and was hardly the product of consensus between them. The document was substantively prepared by Azikiwe a year before the tour. The ideas contained within it were not the product of shared negotiation between the editors, who were merely briefed of its contents by Azikiwe onboard the ship to Liverpool, but were instead first laid down by Azikiwe and his Nigeria Reconstruction Group during the preceding year.[16] Two editors dissented from signing it, with another only doing so with many reservations.

[11] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 20 October 1943; G. Padmore, "Editors ... Demand W. African Self-Government," *New Leader*, 23 October 1943.

[12] Flint, "Managing Nationalism," 152.

[13] Reeves, "Free," 278; M. West, "Ndabaningi Sithole, Garfield Todd and the Daya School Strike of 1947," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18 (1992), 299–316.

[14] Reeves, "Free," 278; H. Adi, *West Africans in Britain 1900–1960* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998), 112.

[15] Adi, *West Africans in Britain 1900–1960*, 112.

[16] Ibid.

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The 1943 tour can be better understood in relation to two ideas in the historiography of print culture: "sociable print" and cultural mediation. Once framed in this way, our understanding of the tour moves away from a focus on the symbolic role of the Memorandum. Instead, the role of a diverse range of Africans becomes visible; their priorities focused on Africa and not England. The tour is thus closely related to the increased elite African mobility of the 1940s, this is particularly apparent in the careers of newspapermen. In this context, James has demonstrated the trans-Atlantic linkages of West African journalists, and their engagement in a transnational anti-colonial radicalism.[17] Azikiwe fits closely into this trans-Atlantic context, as Coates has argued, directly documenting and performing his North American connections in his journalism.[18]

First, the concept of "sociable print" advanced by historians and literary scholars of African "print culture" enables us to explore a history of African engagement in the 1943 tour that remains absent from colonial sources. Sociable print analyses a common discursive practice in 1940s journalism where writers documented their social contacts or networks in print, often at seemingly tedious length.[19] Colonial African journalists deployed culturally specific understandings of clientage networks and social currency, including notions of "respectable" Christian middle-class identity, and "wealth in people" notions of social capital in their documentation of these relationships.[20] Jones has explored sociable print at length, and demonstrates that this strategy did not simply describe social contact but also actively performed these links for the benefit of readers. The resulting style was one where writing was "informed not by … the visuality of the travel narrative," but instead by the author's "social relationships" and contacts.[21] It was often digressive or even banal, and historians have tended to too often view this quality as a simple obstacle to empirical research. The US consul in Lagos unwittingly identified such qualities when he criticised Azikiwe's serialisation of the tour as "seemingly never-ending" and rather bombastic.[22] In fact, historians can critically analyse sociable print journalism to reconstruct the social networks of key journalists which otherwise remain largely absent from colonial archives. Azikiwe's voluminous pen-portraits of diaspora contacts in Britain constitute an indispensable guide to the editors' social itinerary.

Second, cultural mediation and translation are of indispensable relevance to the tour's history. They reveal how Africans mediated the metropole in relation to African cultures. This key element of African colonial travel writing and reportage was bound up with recounting foreign lands in terms familiar to continental readerships. This included attempts by the traveller to actively craft their self-image as a trusted intermediary who could relate the details of strange lands to their African readership.[23] Ochonu argues

[17] L. James, "The Flying Newspapermen and the Time-Space of Late Colonial Nigeria," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60:3 (2018), 569–98; L. James, "Blood Brothers: Colonialism and Fascism as Relations in the Interwar Caribbean and West Africa," *American Historical Review* 127:2 (2022), 634–63.

[18] O. Coates, "'His Telegrams Appear to Be Hysterical, but He Is Very Astute': Azikiwe's Spectacular Self and the 1945 General Strike in Nigeria," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 30:3 (2018), 227–42; S. Newell, "Life Writing in the Colonial Archives: The Case of Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904–1996) of Nigeria," *Life Writing* 13:3 (2016), 307–21.

[19] R. Jones, "The Sociability of Print: 1920s and 1930s Lagos Newspaper Travel Writing," in *African Print Cultures: Newspapers and their Publics in the Twentieth Century*, ed. D. R. Peterson, E. Hunter, and S. Newell (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 102–24.

[20] J. I. Guyer and S. M. E. Belinga, "Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa," *Journal of African History* 36:1 (1995), 91–120, 91.

[21] Jones, "The Sociability of Print," 104.

[22] Reeves, "Free," 278; I. Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); R. Jones, *At the Crossroads: Nigerian Travel Writing and Literary Culture in Yoruba and English* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2019), 61.

[23] D. Newman and R. a. R. al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826–1831)* (London, Saqi, 2004; H. Mukasa and S. Gikandi (1998). *Uganda's Katakiro in England* (Manchester: Manchester

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that emirs who travelled from northern Nigeria deployed "an epistemic enterprise utilizing ethnography" in their efforts to communicate travels in Europe and Saudi Arabia back to Nigerian readers. This included appeals to "the power of experience," and observation, as well as "studious probing, and commentary."[24] Writers actively framed or interpreted the country under description, in this case Britain, in terms of the culture consuming the account in northern Nigeria. Abubakar Imam's experiences in Britain, Ochonu contends, did not have automatic "semiotic resonance in northern Nigeria," and instead he had to appeal to "his audience's culture of telling and consuming stories."[25] Considerable social status was claimed by the individuals undertaking the act of cultural translation. Such an act supposed that one had the material resources or patronage to travel in addition to a certain degree of education to better comprehend other cultures.[26] This process of cultural mediation formed an integral aspect of the editors' work, and one that ultimately recreated wartime Britain in West African terms.

The 1943 Tour as Seen in Nigeria

Clear evidence of African interpretations of the tour being anchored in Africa rather than Britain can be found in those perceptions of the tour that were developed, circulated, and debated on the African continent itself. Prior to the delegation's departure, African observers articulated their own perceptions of the tour, which have largely remained absent from existing historiography. These offer an unexamined archive of African understandings of the tour. They reveal a complex range of responses, including uncertainty over the business survival of Azikiwe's press empire, conflict between the editors themselves, and outright opposition to the tour. Cumulatively, they challenge the contention that "Azikiwe trumpeted the announcement of the tour as an answer to his own calls for such a visit."[27]

Nigerian Opposition to the Tour

A key body of opinion opposed Azikiwe's departure. Before the editors sailed for England, the tour had already attracted significant opposition from multiple quarters. This opposition reveals Nigerian suspicion of British malfeasance, as well as the affective burden that dangerous wartime travel placed on the editors, their families, and associates.

Nigerians feared British foul play. Many understood that the British Council was a key part of the British Government's "soft power" globally, and thus questioned its motives.[28] Azikiwe described how "with only a negligible exception, [the] majority [of Nigerians he contacted] were opposed" to the tour.[29] This included the Onitsha Improvement Union at Sapele; similar views were expressed at Warri, Onitsha, and Port Harcourt "where public opinion was ... against the idea [of the tour] in its entirety."[30] Suspicion of the British colonial government was a key motivator behind this opposition. This was justified by two factors: Azikiwe's historic brushes with the colonial legal system—namely, in his 1936

University Press, 2004); D. Jones, *An African in Imperial London: The Indomitable Life of A.B.C. Merriman-Labor* (London: Hurst, 2018).

[24] Ochonu, "Emirs," 7.

[25] Ibid., 70.

[26] James, "The Flying Newspapermen"; James, "Blood Brothers," 634.

[27] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 21 October 1943; TNA, B.W. 8/5, British Cultural Propaganda, Dundas to White, 26 October 1942, "Note on West Africa"; Reeves, "Free," 275.

[28] A. J. S. White, "The British Council: The First 25 Years, 1934–1959," HMSO London, 1965, 30.

[29] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 28 October 1943.

[30] Ibid.

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sedition trial on the Gold Coast—and by the unprecedented colonial government intervention into Nigerian society occasioned by wartime.[31] Azikiwe had supported the Allied war effort as a way to counter Nazi racism, but he was increasingly vocal in his demand for eventual self-rule for Nigeria.[32] One belief resurfaced time and again: that the tour was "an attempt [by the British] to get [Azikiwe] out of the war."[33] Some contended that this allegedly devious British plot matched a prior pattern of behaviour in which officials were believed to have killed off African critics, one example of such suspicions being the long-standing theories blaming the United Kingdom for the death of Ghanaian intellectual Kwegyir Aggrey in 1927.[34]

Fears about the inherent dangers of wartime mobility constituted a further group of concerns. Apprehension regarding the perils posed by U-boats placed a significant emotional strain on observers. Its veracity became only too clear when the Luftwaffe attacked the editors' convoy off the Canary Islands on their way to Britain, an event described in detail by both Azikiwe and Abubakar Imam.[35] A proleptic vision of these risks was provided when one woman consulted an African religious practitioner, identified by Azikiwe as a "Juju Priest," who advised against sea travel, attempting to intercede on Azikiwe's behalf to ensure his safe passage.[36] Ultimately the tour, and thus the removal of Azikiwe and the other editors from West Africa, was understood as a malign effort to get the newspapermen out of the local political landscape and, at worst, to secure their destruction. Azikiwe explicitly framed his rationale for deciding to depart on the tour in terms of Allied war effort rhetoric, drawing on a wider body of Nigerian mobilisation of war propaganda.[37] He argued that he could not avoid leaving because he had "urg[ed] young Nigerians … [to] play their part in the defence of world freedom" during World War II.[38]

These perceived dangers potentially explain the extensive outpouring of public relief when the editors returned from Britain. International travel was rare during wartime, and, in any case, had been inaccessible to all but the wealthiest Africans during the interwar years. On board ship, Azikiwe received correspondence from across West Africa, such as one letter from Lome, which congratulated the delegation.[39] In Nigeria, this public interest and elation was considerable. Some of these letters did not focus on the ideological objectives of the Memorandum but rather on thanking divine providence for protecting the correspondents on the high seas. Azikiwe reported receiving around three hundred telegrams and cablegrams from across the colony, most of which reportedly gave "thanks to God for having given me protection in my voyages."[40] On returning home, Azikiwe's eldest son questioned him "a thousand and one" times on the journey, and conceived the slogan "Papa who went to the land of the white man has returned!"[41]

[31] S. Newell, *The Power to Name: A History of Anonymity in Colonial West Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2013), 82–4.

[32] C. O. Nwanunobi, "The Second World War," in *Azikiwe and the African Revolution*, ed. M. S. O. Olisa and O. M. Ikejiani-Clark (Onitsha: Africana FEP Publishers Limited, 1989), 137–53.

[33] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 28 October 1943.

[34] Ibid.; R. Jenkins, "William Ofori Atta, Nnamdi Azikiwe, J. B. Danquah and the 'Grilling' of W. E. F. Ward of Achimota in 1935," *History in Africa* 21 (1994), 171–89, 183; A. Roberts, "The Awkward Squad: Arts Graduates from British Tropical Africa Before 1940," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 44:5 (2016), 798–814, 809.

[35] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 9 November 1943; Ochonu, "Emirs," 74.

[36] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 29 October 1943.

[37] E. Mordi, "What If the Huns Come? Imperial Britain's Attitude Towards Nigerians' Enthusiasm for Military Service During the Second World War, 1939–1942," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 56:6 (2019), 838–57.

[38] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 8 February 1944.

[39] Ibid.

[40] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 7 February 1944.

[41] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 8 February 1944; "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 7 February 1944.

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At an October 24 service in Bishop Tugwell Memorial Church in Lagos, Azikiwe and his family gave thanks for the safe return of the delegation.[42] Some responses emphasised the political content of the tour, although it is not clear that these focused on the Memorandum, rather than a more general renewal of relations between West Africans and Britain. One letter remarked that the visit had "given [West Africans] courage to look forward to a better day."[43] This sentiment still differs markedly from Azikiwe's systematic connecting of the tour to a "a new consciousness in the relations between Britain and British West Africa," as well as to more general plans, such as the establishment of a West African University.[44]

The Threat to Zik's Press: The Business Impact of Azikiwe's Absence

Observers believed that the tour would threaten the very survival of Azikiwe's nascent newspaper business: the imited liability company Zik's Press. The Press had been a path-breaking business, providing enterprises such as printing for individual or corporate clients, as well as pioneering chain title ownership, with a series of subordinate newspapers.[45] The *Pilot* had a major social and professional impact on the newspaper industry in Nigeria. A stint working at the newspaper provided training to over fifty reporters during Azikiwe's tenure.[46] However, substantial opposition to the tour existed within the Zik's Press company. At one meeting, prior to Azikiwe's departure, four of the five senior figures in the company opposed the tour, including C. M. Gardner, the managing editor of the *Southern Nigeria Defender*; Mobolaji Odunewn, subeditor of the *Pilot*; T. B. Freeman, officer manager; and G. O. Agbadiuno, foreman of works. Only J. O. Okwonsogn, business manager of the paper, favoured Azikiwe's departure for England. Okwonsogn's opinion appears to have been very much in a minority at the *Pilot*, where members of business, editorial, and technical sides of the paper all opposed his departure.[47]

Zik's Press came close to collapse during Azikiwe's absence. A key executive took advantage of the situation to try to create a rival company, poaching clients directly from the Press. During the tour, the Press was presided over by his father, O. C. Azikiwe. At this time, Azikiwe's business manager used the reporter's absence to start his own business, apparently writing to regular readers of the *Pilot* to encourage them to support his new venture instead of Zik's business.[48] The scale of the crisis only became apparent to Azikiwe when he docked at Takoradi and was briefed by a delegation of *Pilot* readers. An internal enquiry was subsequently held by Zik's Press including his office manager, editor, circulation manager, and foreman of works.

Although unclear, it appears that the unrest at the Press during the period of Azikiwe's absence on the tour split the company along occupational and potentially class lines. After Azikiwe regained control of the company, he felt the need to praise the technical staff of the paper for sticking with the Press despite "sabotage" efforts.[49] Azikiwe also had to remind workers that the Press had been a member of the Industrial Welfare

[42] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 9 February 1944.

[43] "Ambassadors of Goodwill" [Editorial], *West African Pilot*, 12 February 1944.

[44] Ibid.

[45] I. Daramola, *A History of the Press in Nigeria from 1859 to 2015 and the Origins of the Nigerian Broadcasting and Film Industry* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2015), 75.

[46] Ibid.,76.

[47] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 27 October 1943.

[48] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 8 February 1944; "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 7 February 1944.

[49] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 8 February 1944..

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Society of England since 1942.[50] For our purposes the key point is that Azikiwe's departure on the tour enabled these complaints to come to the surface and presented a threat to the company so grave that Azikiwe felt the need to hold an enquiry on his return. This predicament, no matter how brief, contrasts with Azikiwe's own assertions about the popular and harmonious nature of his company. In his own account of his efforts to restore the loyalty of the Press's staff, Azikiwe would present the surviving employees as a "mosaic of West Africa" including the "different tribes of Nigeria" and bound by "what was being done in Africa and for the Africans" by the *Pilot*.[51]

"The People of Northern Nigeria… Sent Me": Abubakar Imam's Dissenting Voice

Significant differences existed between the Nigerian editors. The tour particularly provoked a major dispute between Azikiwe and Abubakar Imam, and this dominated discussion of the trip in the Nigerian press during the rest of 1943. A comprehensive exploration of Imam's experience of the tour lies outside the scope of this article, and we chiefly focus here on his account of African networks in Britain and his interactions with Azikiwe.[52] The debate has been largely ignored in the historiography of the tour, although Ochonu has examined Abubakar Imam's travel writings, including his account of the tour *Tafiya Mabudin Ilmi* or "travelling is the key to knowledge."[53] The case reveals a wider point: the editors were not a united front, and imbalances of power existed between them. Azikiwe held control as he had designed the ideas of the Memorandum months before, and only presented it to the other delegates on board ship between West Africa and Britain, who were merely asked to be signatories to the completed document across several plenary sessions.[54]

Abubakar Imam perceived his role on the tour as representing the views of northern Nigerians. He was reluctant to undertake any action for which he felt there was insufficient support amongst northern opinion. Azikiwe's Memorandum with its trenchant criticism of colonial rule was deemed far too radical, particularly for the tastes of conservative northern emirs. "The people of Northern Nigeria," Abubakar Imam claimed, "chose me, and sent me to England, that I should be a shepherd to them, not to let the ship go astray."[55]

Azikiwe and Imam's conflict demonstrates the strategic and false nature of Azikiwe's claim that the Memorandum represented the will of all the editors. The controversy, we contend, decentres any understanding of the tour that exclusively focuses on the Memorandum and its political aims. Instead, it makes visible not only the competing aims of the delegates but also the contrasting understandings of the tour present *within* Nigeria.

Azikiwe returned from England with little taste for dissent amongst his colleagues. West Africans could not afford, he argued, "the expensive luxury of being disunited due to internal factions."[56] He warned former *Pilot* colleague and National Youth Movement politician Ernest Ikoli that "interminable petty squabbles and factions" aimed at "disunit[ing] well-meaning patriots" menaced Nigeria.[57] Azikiwe lamented

[50] Ibid; G. Cross, "Vacations for All: The Leisure Question in the Era of the Popular Front," *Journal of Contemporary History* 24:4 (1989), 599–621, 613.

[51] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 8 February 1944.

[52] "Mallam Abubakar Imam's 'Explanations,'" *West African Pilot*, 26 November 1943; "Mallam Abubakar 'Takes Up His Pen & Writes a Defensive-Offensive Article,'" *West African Pilot*, 29 December 1943.

[53] Abubakar Imam, *Tafiya Mabudin Ilmi* (Zaria: Gaskiya Corporation, 1945).

[54] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 16 November 1943.

[55] "And Southerners: 'Why Did You Not Sign, Mallam?'" *West African Pilot*, 9 November 1943.

[56] "Ambassadors of Goodwill [87]," *West African Pilot*, 3 February 1943.

[57] Ibid.

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how "such an intelligent and young leader and compatriot" as Imam could have found "himself in a maelstrom from whose clutches it appears impossible to be released."[58] All of this meant that Abubakar Imam's "refusal" to sign the Memorandum, which would "revolutionise the political, social, and economic life of Nigeria," appeared inexplicable. "Why," Azikiwe asked, "did [Abubakar Imam] not submit an alternative paper of his own preparation," and why wait until returning to Nigeria before publicising the matter?[59]

Azikiwe explicitly challenged Abubakar Imam's presentation of himself as representative of northern Nigeria as a whole and as a "Hausa or Fulani delegate."[60] He claimed, somewhat disingenuously, that the British Council had chosen the editors regardless of ethnicity. More broadly, Azikiwe challenged Abubakar Imam's legitimacy as a delegate on the tour at all: "certainly if a 'shepherd' was required for the 11,000,000 people of Northern Nigeria, a 'shepherd' other than the Editor of an official bulletin, could have been found."[61] With such observations, Azikiwe attempted to portray the *Gaskiya* editor as a mere stooge of British rule. When Abubakar Imam serialised the reasons for his disagreement with the Memorandum in the pages of the *Gaskiya*, and this was translated for the pages of the *Pilot*, the piece was titled "Editor of Gaskiya Expresses Satisfaction with Present Order in Northern Nigeria."[62] This claim relied on misinterpreting colonial officials' tendency to elide geography and generalised ethnicity; the colonial government indeed searched for a "northern" or at least a Hausa-speaking delegate.[63] As we will see in the next section, a sense of his northern Nigerian identity had been a key dimension of Abubakar Imam's critique of the tour during his West African Students' Union (WASU) speech. It shaped his explanation of why he refused to sign the Memorandum.

Framing Britain in Nigerian Terms: Diaspora Social Networks, and the Sociability of Print

The editors' interacted closely with Nigerians in the British diaspora. These engagements have largely been ignored in accounts that focus on Azikiwe's Memorandum. They represent the maintenance on British soil of relationships formed in Nigeria and later mediated in print for the benefit of a Nigerian readership. The newspapermen engaged with distinct socioeconomic groups that included but extended far beyond the nationalist leadership of the WASU.[64] These consisted of factory workers, airmen, students, doctors, and lawyers, and individuals based beyond London, including from cities such as Leicester, Bristol, and Durham. Such social networks were assiduously documented and performed in Azikiwe's journalism. This in turn enacted a form of "cultural translation" that helped to make the editors' time in Britain more legible and accessible to West African readers.[65]

[58] "Mallam Abubakar 'Takes Up His Pen & Writes A Defensive-Offensive Article,'" *West African Pilot*, 29 December 1943.

[59] "Mallam's Explanations Evoke Much Comment," *West African Pilot*, 11 November 1943.

[60] "Mallam Abubakar Imam Misinterprets Object of His Mission to Great Britain," *West African Pilot*, 16 November 1943.

[61] "Mallam Abubakar's Imam's Defence," *West African Pilot*, 10 November 1943.

[62] "Editor of Gaskiya Expresses Satisfaction with Present Order in Northern Nigeria," *West African Pilot*, 10 November 1943.

[63] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 28 October 1943.

[64] A. D. Nzemeke, "Contradictions Between Policy and Practise On the Road to Nigerian Independence: Britain and the West African Students Union, 1930–1945," *Africa: Revista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 46:4 (1991), 593–600.

[65] Ochonu, "Emirs," 7; N. Green, "Among the Dissenters: Reciprocal Ethnography in Nineteenth Century Inglistan," *Journal of Global History* 4:2 (2009), 293–315, 293.

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These interactions reveal that it was Africa and not Britain that formed the key interpretative reference point in the editors' writing about the United Kingdom.

Much of the editors' contact with other Africans occurred beyond government control. Colonial officials organised the editors' official schedule in minute detail, including visits to monuments, cities, and military installations. They assigned Niven as the official chaperone for the trip, who reported back in detail to government on the editors' activities, and penned a report on the tour. Yet officials only understood the vague outlines of the African editors' social itineraries, which occurred in their own time and outside of their officially planned itinerary. Niven later remarked on how "the visit had been accepted as a cheap way of doing [the editors'] own business." This, he contended, ultimately resulted in them being "overwhelmed with ... private affairs," having "many letters of introduction," "previous contacts," and "business appointments," with some Africans "pester[ing] them even in the fastness of London's Hyde Park Hotel."[66] Azikiwe himself wrote of how he found this informal schedule too much, and, at one point, begged Olu Solanke not to "ring me up on the 'phone to remind me [of an appointment]!" This predicament was echoed in Niven's remark that "Azikiwe ... prayed for a room without a telephone."[67] Many are only documented in the pages of the *Pilot*, where they were extensively performed and curated for the benefit of the newspaper's Nigerian readership, in an elaborate manifestation of "print sociability." The editors' activities in Britain accorded considerable importance to maintaining West African social connections and strayed far beyond the confines of Whitehall.

There are few exact figures on the number of Black people resident in Britain at different points in the war, and fewer still that differentiate between African migrants by colony of origin. At the outbreak of war, some 7,000 permanent non-white residents lived in Britain's port towns, but these numbers swelled to some 150,000 Black people living in Britain in 1944, of whom as many as 130,000 of these are likely to have been African American servicemen, by 1948 the number of Black residents had fallen to 20,000.[68] The editors interacted extensively with Britain's African diaspora during their tour. Some individuals within this community came to Britain with official support, for example as RAF cadets, but others had travelled independently, arriving either before the war, or as stowaways on English-bound vessels.[69] Several prominent West African intellectuals were engaging this diaspora community at the time. Bankole Awoonor-Renner researched living conditions among Africans in wartime Britain as part of a more general survey of the country, while Nigerian Bristol University student Prince Adelumola Ibikunle Akitoye addressed a Newcastle audience of the Society for the Cultural Advancement of Africa on "West Africa in World History" in 1943.[70] Cumulatively, the editors' diaspora interactions demonstrate that we cannot afford to relegate their time in Britain to the official itinerary set out for them by the government.

[66] TNA, CO, 875/9/22, Niven "Visit to England by West African Editors," August 1943.

[67] Ibid.; "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 17 September 1943.

[68] D. Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (London: Pan Books, 2016), 467; W. Webster, *Mixing It: Diversity in World War Two Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 8; I. Spencer, "World War Two and the Making of Multiracial Britain," in *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two Britain*, ed. P. Kirkham and D. Thomas (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), 209.

[69] Mora, "Imam," 57; D. Killingray, "British Racial Attitudes towards Black People during the Two World Wars," in *Colonial Soldiers in Europe, 1914–1945: "Aliens in Uniforms" in Wartime Societies*, ed. E. Storm and A. Tuma (London, Routledge, 2016), 107–9.

[70] "West Africans Are All One," *Eastern Nigerian Guardian*, 4 October 1943; "Young Prince Calls Britons," *Eastern Nigeria Guardian*, 7 September 1943; "Prince Akitoye Commends His Supporters," *West African Pilot*, 3 February 1944.

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The Editors and Britain's African Diaspora

London was a major centre for the African diaspora and served as the pivotal hub of the editors' African social itinerary.[71] The wartime African diaspora in London had attained a complexity unrivalled elsewhere in Britain: the city boasted a series of institutions catering specifically to West African migrants, including WASU, Aggrey House, the League of Coloured Peoples, and, from March 1943, the Victoria League Club, run by the League's Colonial War Services Committee, which provided African newspapers, social events, and welfare resources to African servicemen.[72] Sufficient was Azikiwe's reputation that Africans in Britain travelled to London from as far afield as the northeast of England in order to meet him. Although Azikiwe's contacts with London African nationalists, such as Solanke, are well known, his meetings with factory workers, lawyers, students, airmen, and seamen remain obscure. Indeed, these groups risk being marginalised by accounts that focus purely on colonial or nationalist elites. To analyse the social diversity of diaspora networks, we group the editors' connections broadly by occupation.

Students figured prominently in the editors' social itinerary. Wartime African student life in Britain, as Adi demonstrates, was marked by political activism, for example at the WASU study group and in the union's 1942 resolutions.[73] Azikiwe reported meeting Adelymole Akitoye, a student at Bristol University; Ondo native B. Wilson Akinmoladun, at the London School of Economics; and Lawrence Anionwu, soon to read law at St. Catherine's College, Cambridge.[74] Some of these figures were well known to other diaspora Londoners: Ghanaian graduate Seyki Djang, who had recently finished law school, earned the moniker of "Professor of Akanology" at WASU.[75]

A further group of Africans worked in commerce of different types. Mr J. C. de Graft Johnson, employed by the Commercial Bank of Scotland, discussed West African economics with the editors after travelling from Edinburgh.[76] Others did factory work for the war effort, such as S. B. Akpata, from Leicester, who worked at a wireless engineering factory, and Bristol student Akitoye, who had a job in a war factory.[77] A certain Mr Asinobi was the proprietor of a West End nightclub, where, Azikiwe observed, "American Negro soldiers, Africans, and Europeans fraternise … every night."[78] A final group included legal professionals, many of whom also pursued political careers. Barrister Kobina Kessie was nephew of the Asantehene Prempeh II and had authored a pamphlet campaigning against the alleged British plan to hand over its West African colonies to Germany, a widely believed conspiracy theory in early World War II West Africa.[79]

[71] M. Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press. 2015).

[72] P. Garrigue, "The West African Students' Union. A Study in Culture Contact," *Africa* 23:1 (1953), 55–89; Nzemeke, "Contradictions," 593; Lambo, R.. "Achtung! The Black prince: West Africans in the Royal Air Force, 1939-46". Africans in Britain. D. Killingray. (London, Cass, 1994), 145-163,158.

[73] H. Adi, "West African Students in Britain, 1900–1960," in *Africans in Britain*, ed. D. Killingray (London: Frank Cass. 1994), 107–28; J. Keith, "African Students in Great Britain," *African Affairs* 45:179 (1946), 65–72; H. Adi, African and Caribbean people in Britain: a history. (London, Allen Lane 2022).

[74] D. Whittall, "Creating Black Places in Imperial London: The League of Coloured Peoples and Aggrey House, 1931–1943," *London Journal* 36:3 (2011), 225-246, 3; "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 18 November 1943.

[75] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 18 November 1943.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

[79] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 24 November 1943; E Kissi, "Caught between the Union Jack and the Nazi Swastika. African Protests over Ambiguous Status under British Imperialism and Potential Transfer to Nazi Colonialism," *Journal of African History* 64:1 (2023), 62–79.

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Military personnel inevitably figured prominently among the editors' contacts. This group in wartime Britain has been the subject of only a relatively thin historiography.[80] The RAF was particularly heavily represented, although only around fifty West Africans were recruited during the war.[81] The editors met serving airmen and cadets. Their own vessel had carried eight RAF cadets from Nigeria, who subsequently met the African reporters in London.[82] Azikiwe later claimed to have encouraged one cadet, T. A. B. Oki, to aspire to high ranks within the RAF, and met with Nigerian airman Peter Adeniyi Thomas, who became the first West African to be commissioned in any of the British armed forces.[83] RAF airmen expressed political interests, although they often expressed these in terms of African contributions to the war effort. One Nigerian cadet, T. Solarin, who had met Azikiwe at Yaba before enlisting, wrote to him following their meeting in London, allegedly asking him to help the British public "appreciate what contemporary Africa is thinking." Solarin, who gave Azikiwe a copy of Churchill's "The End of the Beginning" as a memento of their meeting, asked that his "sacrifice will not have been made in vain."[84]

Merchant seamen constituted a further major group of West Africans in the editors' social calendar.[85] Based in port cities such as Glasgow, Newport, and Cardiff, West African sailors worked on hazardous Atlantic convoys as well as routes to West Africa, with many suffering pay discrimination that meant African employees of Elder Dempster Lines were paid wages about 20 percent lower than Europeans.[86] Seamen had their own transatlantic social networks, which in some cases connected to broader pan-Africanist and radical political formations.[87] Seamen R. O. Effanga and Mr Thomas Howard recalled Azikiwe's meetings with West African students from their time in the US.[88] Others were of relatively high rank in the Merchant Navy, including Second Engineer seaman D. G. Imokewho who had travelled to Narvik, Trondheim, Murmansk, and Lisbon.[89] At Liverpool, Azikiwe was visited by two seamen, including an old Urhobo acquaintance Samuel Oker, who had lived for twenty years in Britain. During their meeting Azikiwe gave Oker a copy of the *Southern Nigeria Defender*, while answering his questions on Warri affairs.[90] He also met a Lagos acquaintance who had served in Merchant Navy convoys, and who had sent "articles full of quotations from Shakespeare's plays" to the *Pilot* in its early issues, earning a reputation as a Lagos "authority" on Shakespeare.[91]

[80] D, Killingray, "Rank and Race in the British Army in the Twentieth Century," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 10:3 (1987), 276–90; Lambo, "Achtung," 160.

[81] Lambo, "Achtung," 160.

[82] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 2 December 1943; "8 Nigerians to R.A.F. in U.K.," *West African Pilot*, 7 July 1943; "Those Eight Nigerians," *West African Pilot*, 8 July 1943; "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 18 November 1943; "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 26 November 1943; "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 29 November 1943; Lambo, "Achtung," 199.

[83] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 26 November 1943; Lambo, "Achtung," 150.

[84] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 29 November 1943.

[85] R. Costello, *Black Salt: Seafarers of African Descent on British Ships* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012); S. Milne, "Accounting for the Hostel for 'Coloured Colonial Seamen' in London's East End, 1942–1949," *National Identities* 22:4 (2020), 395–42.

[86] F. Diane, *Work and Community Among West African Migrant Workers Since the Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 62; N. Evans, "Regulating the Reserve Army: Arabs, Blacks and the Local State in Cardiff, 1919-45," *Immigrants & Minorities* 4:2 (1985), 68–115.

[87] L. Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 49–54.

[88] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 18 November 1943.

[89] "Ambassadors of Goodwill "*West African Pilot*, 24 November 1943.

[90] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 25 November 1943.

[91] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 26 November 1943.

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Seamen's welfare figured in the tour, with the editors visiting separate initiatives occurring in both London and Liverpool. In London, Azikiwe visited Colonial House, a hostel focusing on "social welfare work" for African merchant seamen, but also including Caribbean and Asian sailors. At the hostel Azikiwe answered questions on "post-war reconstruction and the colour bar."[92] One sailor from Abonnema complained to Azikiwe about his experiences of racism, with the Editor promising to pursue his grievances.[93] In Liverpool, which had long been a major centre of West African maritime trade, he visited the home of Pastor Daniels Ekarte, a churchman originally from Calabar, Nigeria, who worked with the local government to house abandoned children.[94] At Ekarte's house, he was introduced to the Liverpool "African social worker" Edward Sankey, who had studied at St. Gregory's College, Lagos, and then at Manchester College of Technology.[95]

The editors' fundamental roots in West Africa rather than Britain are clear. Azikiwe's frequent and instrumental use of his relationship with Africans residing in Britain served to make the United Kingdom comprehensible in terms of Nigeria-based social networks. His use of these relationships questions how far the editors' entanglements with British Africans can really be understood without primary reference to Nigeria. It was this latter country and not Britain which was key to determining the meaning and importance of these relationships. T. O. Ogbe, a former customs employee at Port Harcourt and a Warri native, performed war work in London and dined with Azikiwe in Hammersmith before the latter returned to Liverpool.[96] Azikiwe specifically shared with his readers details of Ogbe's Lagos sporting achievements. Relaying his London dance-floor exploits with Ogbe to *Pilot* readers, Azikiwe specifically reminded them that Ogbe's "terpsichorean repertoire (for which he was famous at Lagos and Port Harcourt)" was "incomparable."[97] The Port Harcourt and Lagos social prominence and dance-floor prowess of Azikiwe's London acquaintance is thus integral not only to Azikiwe's presentation of the relationship but also to the way in which he seeks to communicate his activities in Britain. A further example can be seen in his meeting with Asinobi, who was explained to readers in terms of his brother who was a chief residing in Port Harcourt, living next door to the offices of Azikiwe's *Eastern Nigeria Guardian.* These connections were not limited to Nigeria, and some presented relationships from Azikiwe's time in the Gold Coast in the mid 1930s, such as the former bantamweight champion of Nigeria Jordan Tarrone, who visited Azikiwe in London and had originally met him in Accra in 1935.[98]

Ethnicity and Gender in the Editors' British African Diaspora Networks

Ethnicity and gender were key elements both in how the editors experienced wartime Britain, and how they chose to communicate their experience to readerships back in Africa. These key dimensions have remained largely invisible in current historiography.

[92] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 25 November 1943.

[93] Ibid.

[94] D. Frost, "Ethnic Identity, Transience and Settlement: The Kru in Liverpool since the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Africans in Britain*, ed. D. Killingray (London: Cass, 1994), 86–108; L. Schler, *Nation on Board: Becoming Nigerian at Sea* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016), 27–9; "Govt. Endows Blacks' Home," *West African Pilot*, 21 October 1943; Killingray, "British Racial Attitudes," 111; M. Sherwood, *Pastor Daniels Ekarte and the African Churches Mission* (London: Savannah, 1994).

[95] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 25 November 1943.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid.

[98] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 30 November 1943; "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 18 November 1943.

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They complicate any attempt to understand the tour solely in terms of the Memorandum and Westminster politics.

Significant geographical and ethnic divisions existed amongst Nigerians within Britain's West African diaspora.[99] These are difficult to discern because they tend to be ignored in Colonial Office sources, and Azikiwe also often chose to gloss over these disputes in his journalism. One clue to their existence can be found in *Gaskiya* editor Abubakar Imam's observation that there was not a single northern Nigerian at the WASU, a key institution for African political organising and networking in Britain during the period.[100] He recalled that the experience "impressed … upon me the great distance … still to be travelled by the North."[101] Such ethnic and regional divisions are credible because they were apparent elsewhere in the wartime diaspora. In 1944, a specifically "Ibo Union" was formed at Cambridge University, and a serious divide occurred between Igbo and Yoruba students in WASU.[102] Imam used his address to WASU during his visit to London to warn against what he perceived as southern Nigerian misunderstandings of northerners. His observations illustrate the distance that he apparently felt from social networks in which his colleague Azikiwe felt at home and warn against too homogeneous an account of the editors' African social networks.[103]

Women played a central role in the editors' diaspora social networking. Their presence remains absent within the existing historiography of the tour, despite the fact that, as historians of West African nationalism and gender have shown, women's activism and engagement played a significant role in nationalist thought.[104] Editors were struck by the important role that women in general played in the war effort, as they recounted in a Lagos lecture after returning from the tour. Azikiwe deliberately penned detailed descriptions of female African professionals in Britain.[105] The editors met Olu Solanke in addition to their better-known meeting with her husband and nationalist Ladipo. Azikiwe declared that "Mrs Olu Solanke is W.A.S.U. and W.A.S.U. is Mrs Olu Solanke."[106] Solanke even acted as Azikiwe's barber during the tour, while he described her to his readers as an example of a successful businesswomen and of a "type … destined to revolutionize Africa."[107] The editors met African women studying in British universities, including Bisi Alakija who was studying law at Sheffield University while also keeping term at the Middle Temple.[108]

Our full appreciation of the role of women in the tour is obscured by the prejudices of the male-authored sources available. Azikiwe, for example, commented that Solanke spoke about economics with as much as ease as when "she switches off electricity when ironing," while other women, such as the wife of seamen's hostel proprietor, are simply described as subordinate to their husband's role.[109] Nonetheless their key presence, including within nationalist circles at WASU, serves to complicate any understanding of

[99] Adi, "West African Students," 120.

[100] G. O. Olusanya, *The West African Students' Union and the Politics of Decolonization, 1925–1958* (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1982).

[101] Mora, "Imam," 57.

[102] Adi, "West African Students," 120.

[103] Mora, "Imam," 57.

[104] C. Ray, "Interracial Intimacies and the Gendered Optics of African Nationalism in the Colonial Metropole," *Journal of West African History* 5:2 (2019), 57–84, 61; J. Byfield, *The Great Upheaval: Women and Nation in Postwar Nigeria* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019).

[105] "Mr Harold Gibson Treats Four Aspects of Britain's War Effort," *Nigerian Daily Times*, 30 October 1943.

[106] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 29 November 1943.

[107] Ibid.

[108] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 19 November 1943.

[109] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 29 November 1943.

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the tour as exclusively male. African women became incorporated into Azikiwe's print sociability in distinct ways, sometimes being the objects of patronising stereotypes, but at other times being accorded a centrality that is lacking in Colonial Office sources.

Ultimately, diaspora networks constituted a major dimension of the editors' tour. The editors' social calendars, though based on British soil, were oriented towards a West African centre of gravity. Azikiwe's journalism, with his stylistic listing of contacts and his pen-portraits situating diaspora Africans' accomplishments in terms of their prior careers in Nigeria, serves as a clear example of this.

Britain Interpreted in West Africa: The Editors, Cultural Mediation, and Subaltern Travel

The editors were cultural mediators tasked with actively interpreting Britain to West African readers. Their work here belonged to a wider body of "texts and authors," who, as Ochonu contends, "saw their role as mediating the delicate relationship between coloniser and colonised."[110] This activity was implicit in the hope of figures such as Azikiwe that the tour would promote understanding between Britain and Africa, and that the editors themselves were "Ambassadors of Goodwill." Despite its centrality to the tour, this labour of cultural translation, one recognised by scholars of colonial mobility to be central to African travel of the period, has remained obscure in many accounts focused on the Memorandum.[111] One exception to this is Ochonu's discussion of Abubakar Imam's account of the tour within the longer-term context of his career at the *Gaskiya*. Here we focus solely on the editors' interpretation of Britain to Nigerians. We consider Nigerian reportage, as well as commentary on the largely unexamined film and still photography of the tour created by the CFU for dissemination in Africa; we do not examine the large and unexplored body of British journalism about the visit.[112]

Critiquing Racism in Wartime England

The editors reported on the social attitudes of wartime Britain, and in particular race and racism.[113] Their reportage fitted into a more general debate around racial discrimination or the "colour bar" in African and diaspora commentary on Western societies during the 1930s and 1940s.[114] Even as guests of the British Government, the editors, like Africans in general, still faced routine discrimination in hotel accommodation.[115] In fact, the Colonial Office perpetuated these assumptions: one official lamented the difficulty of finding "a hotel where … somewhat primitive people would be properly looked after."[116] Officials at the Colonial Office also feared contact between the West Africans and the approximately 12,000 African American troops based in Britain, arguing against inviting them

[110] Ochonu, "Emirs," 4.

[111] M. Ochonu, "Colonial Itineraries: Muhammadu Dikko's Metropolitan Adventures," *Journal of African History* 61 (2020), 179–200.

[112] "West Africans Entertained," *Birmingham Mail*, 12 August 1943; "W. African Editors in Birmingham," *Evening Despatch*, 11 August 1943.

[113] D. Killingray, "'To Do Something for the Race': Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples," in *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, ed. B. Schwarz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 51–70.

[114] J. Flint, "Scandal at the Bristol Hotel: Some Thoughts on Racial Discrimination in Britain and West Africa and Its Relationship to the Planning of Decolonisation, 1939–47," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 12:1 (1983), 74–93; "America & Race Problems," *West African Pilot*, 7 October 1943.

[115] Killingray, "British Racial Attitudes," 108.

[116] TNA, CO, 875/9/22, Niven, "Visit to England by West African Editors," August 1943.

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to visit the Americans.[117] The pervasiveness of racism in contemporary Britain was commented upon by West African intellectuals; during the editors' visit to WASU, Awoonor-Renner had warned of "untold suffering of racial discrimination levelled against us here."[118]

Azikiwe encouraged his Nigerian readers to directly challenge the racism and degradation of African and diasporic culture in British cultural institutions. At Madame Tussaud's waxwork gallery in London, he informed his readers of "apparent racial discrimination" at the venue, which had "definitely ignored" "outstanding people of African descent."[119] In remarks that likely fed into growing interest in African American culture inside West Africa, he noted key absences including "Josephine Baker … Fats Waller, and other Aframerican celebrities."[120] It was not only Azikiwe who identified these absences—they were widely commented on among the "African students and war workers" who visited the gallery alongside him. Some pointed out that only "Mahatma Gandhi and [the] Emperor Haile Selassie" were present from Asia and Africa, and even these were "portrayed as very fragile."

Azikiwe proactively urged African students to solve the situation themselves by creating their own cultural resources. His position can be compared to his earlier emphasis on African cultural self-reliance, for example in his 1936 work *Renascent Africa*.[121] These included a waxwork exhibition "of the great African men and women … as Madame Tussaud had done for her race."[122] In an ensuing discussion Azikiwe urged the students to create African cultural institutions and publications. Suggesting a hypothetical African Madame Tussaud's gallery, Azikiwe populated it with Nigerian artists including Akinola Lasekan, Benedict Enwonwu, and Alna Onabolu.[123] This project would have direct political implications, Azikiwe argued, as artistic endeavours aided the "crystallization of national consciousness."[124] Critiquing depictions of Africans in "Hollywood and Elstree" film studios, as well as in literary representations, which "portray[ed] the African as an inferior being to the outside world," Azikiwe suggested concrete steps to remedy the situation. An African periodical could be published in London, he argued, with the mission of "interpreting correctly the African, his way of life, his psychology, his philosophy," and current affairs.[125] Azikiwe promised to consult with the board of Zik's Press to establish a London-based African publication after the war, "so as to wage our own battle, right in the heart of the Empire."[126] He actively framed the marginalisation of African cultures in London's cultural spaces in ways that were comprehensible to his West African readership,

[117] TNA, CO, 875/9/22, Robinson, 15 June 1943; P. Rich, "The Black Diaspora in Britain: Afro-Caribbean Students and the Struggle for a Political Identity, 1900-1950," *Immigrants and Minorities* 6:2 (1987), 151–73, 167, figure for late 1942.

[118] TNA, CO, 875/9/22, Speech delivered in London by Councillor Bankole Awoonor-Renner at the reception given by the West African Students Union of Great Britain and Ireland to the West African Press Delegation to the United Kingdom on August 25, 1943.

[119] "Ambassadors of Goodwill [50]," *West African Pilot*, 18 December 1943.

[120] Ibid; Coates, Oliver. "African American Journalists in World War II West Africa: The NNPA Commission Tour of 1944-1945." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 57, no. 1 (2022): 93-112.

[121] N. Azikiwe, *Renascent Africa* (London, Frank Cass, 1968).

[122] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 18 December 1943.

[123] S. Ogbechie, *Ben Enwonwu: The Making of an African Modernist* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2008); M. Lecznar, "Weathering the Storm: Ben Enwonwu's Biafrscapes and the Crisis in the Nigerian Postcolony," *Tate Papers*: 30, https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/30/weathering-the-storm, accessed 30 December 2024 (2018); C. Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria* (Durham. N.C.: Duke University Press, 2015), 39–70.

[124] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 18 December 1943.

[125] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 20 December 1943.

[126] Ibid.

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while leveraging his critique to imagine new spaces that were affirmative of African and diasporic cultures.

Azikiwe's critique of racism in Britain also prompted a more general analysis of race prejudice within Nigeria itself. During the editors' tour, the *Pilot* ran a series of articles publicising racism in Britain. This included republishing a series originally written for *WASU Magazine* by West African Cambridge University alumnus K. I. Little.[127] In an editorial, the *Pilot* connected the problem with racism inside Nigeria, particularly that of Europeans towards Africans. It revealed how "only the other day" a European serviceman "refused to light a cigarette [for a man on a bus] ... simply because he the other man was not white."[128] The problem was not solely conceptualised as concerning Europeans. Elsewhere, attention was drawn to anti-African discrimination in Syrian-owned cinemas in Kano and Kaduna.[129] Discrimination in Britain became part of the editors' narrative of social mores in that country. It also served as a springboard for commentary and analysis of racial divides within Nigeria, and of imaginative projects of cultural affirmation, such as Azikiwe's prospective youth museum. British attitudes were therefore closely integrated into Nigerian social reality.

West African Analyses of British Filmic and Photographic Representations of the Tour

Africans mounted their own analyses of British photography and film of the tour, as well as the media culture of Britain. Photographs were becoming increasingly common in the West African press at the time, but printing such images was still expensive and technically demanding.[130] Azikiwe and other editors made pointed critiques of the British press's stereotyping and prejudice. He explicitly identified the potential of film to transform perceptions of West Africa and disseminate "the ideals of democracy," as well as "interracial co-operation": "There is no reason why British audiences should not be shown films of certain aspects of life and thought of British West Africa, thereby tending to inculcate in such audiences a sense of oneness and friendship."[131] The tour itself became a centre of fascination within the British press at a national and provincial level, as well as being filmed and photographed by the CFU.[132] The CFU carefully researched its engagement with African audiences. These visual records of the tour were closely mediated by metropolitan media institutions, whether governmental or private.

Africans mediated and interpreted British images and, in doing so, translated them into terms centred on West Africa, not Britain. Press photographers of the tour became a key target of the editors' critiques. Press photographers, Azikiwe complained, made the editors look like "a bunch of ignoramuses gazing at the wonderful achievements of the great Big White Chief and his Braves!."[133] While the press had "expected to find a brigade of multi-coloured, badly dressed in weird and bizarre and barbaric costumes," stereotyping the editors as "Native Journalists" who were "babel-tongued, shy-looking,

[127] "Colour Prejudice in Britain," *West African Pilot*, 30 August 1943; "Colour Prejudice," *West African Pilot*, 2 September 1943.

[128] "Colour Prejudice," *West African Pilot*, 2 September 1943.

[129] "Discrimination at Cinemas!" *West African Pilot*, 15 September 1943.

[130] I. H. E. Coker, *Landmarks of the Nigerian Press: An Outline of the Origins and Development of the Newspaper Press in Nigeria, 1859 to 1965* (Lagos, Nigerian National Press, 1968), 37.

[131] "Ambassadors of Goodwill" [Editorial], *West African Pilot*, 2 February 1944.

[132] R. Smyth, "The British Colonial Film Unit and Sub-Saharan Africa 1939–1945," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 8:3 (1988), 285–98; T. Rice, *Film for the Colonies: Cinema and the Preservation of the British Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022).

[133] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 17 November 1943.

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and uncultured ignoramuses!"[134] "Sensational papers," in particular, "naturally thought we were a bunch of saps who spoke 'Pidgin' English and that we would be dazzled by the atmosphere of 'civilized' England, in contrast with 'uncivilized' West Africa."[135] Some British reporters were surprised by the editors' command of English. They even, Azikiwe observed, "invented situations and reported imaginary interviews."[136] Arriving at Paddington station, the editors faced considerable British press interest, posed "at almost every conceivable angle," and finding that some press photographers "appeared disappointed for they expected to find museum specimens who would satisfy their stereotyped ideas," of Africans as "childish, stupid, barbarous and Hollywoodesque."[137]

The editors situated British behaviours from a West African perspective. African perspectives were privileged as a central reference point against which British prejudice could be translated and revealed as ignorant. When Abubakar Imam became angry after a Liverpool newspaper published fabricated criticisms, Azikiwe interpreted the episodes from Abubakar Imam's viewpoint.[138] The *Pilot's* African readers were presented with an account which centred Imam's viewpoint, rather than that of the British press. "He made certain remarks in Hausa," Azikiwe related, "which although I can translate yet I think it is unprintable either in the King's English or in 'English' as it is spoken at Billingsgate."[139]

Azikiwe and Abubakar Imam both challenged the Orientalist stereotyping of West African Muslims prevalent in Britain at the time. Abubakar Imam was described by one journalist as "photogenic" due to his "his Fulani costumes" and "appeared Arabesque."[140] These reactions persisted, despite the fact that previous Nigerian travellers had worn local dress, including Adegboyega Edun during his 1913 visit.[141] The *Cambridge Daily News* commented on how all the editors had an "Oriental diet" involving coconuts and yams.[142] Azikiwe challenged these attitudes by joking to one Birmingham journalist that Abubakar Imam was in fact the "Maharajah of Poona," thereby creating a putative South Asian identity for the Hausa journalist.[143] The episode was recounted for West African readers on separate occasions by Azikiwe and by Abubakar Imam.

Although British government institutions produced images and film of the tour, these were later circulated in West Africa, inspiring African analysis, and commentary. Multiple images of the tour later appeared in the West African press, often documenting the editors as a collective group in strategic locations along their official itinerary, such as Oxford. The CFU made two films of the tour, one a standalone film *West African Editors* (1944), and a second film fragment for integration into a newsreel anthology.[144]

[134] Ibid.
[135] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 18 November 1943.
[136] Ibid.
[137] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 17 November 1943.
[138] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 18 November 1943.
[139] Ibid.
[140] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 17 November 1943.
[141] A. Pallinder, "Adegboyega Edun: Black Englishman and Yoruba Cultural Patriot," in *Self-Assertion and Brokerage: Early Cultural Nationalism in West Africa*, ed. P. F. de Moraes Farias and K. Barber (Birmingham: Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham, 1990), 11–34, 13.
[142] "Five English Journalists Give Impressions of the West African Press Delegation," *West African Pilot*, 4 November 1943.
[143] Ochonu, "Emirs," 84; Mora, "Imam," 62.
[144] "New Films," *Colonial Cinema*, December 1943; "New Films," *Colonial Cinema*, January 1944; Smyth, "British Colonial Film Unit," 285; Rice, *Film for the Colonies*, 141–2.

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Azikiwe praised the CFU in comparison to the British media more generally as "more intelligent in [its] ... approach."[145]

Nigerians directly engaged with these media products about the tour, and interpreted them in their own terms. They were aware of the CFU's work, as it had already been active in showing agricultural and other films in the colony.[146] One Magnus Okulenu of Lagos asked for the Nigerian Government to plan for the CFU film of the delegation to be screened locally. Citing the degree to which the public were reading Azikiwe's *Ambassadors* serials, Okulenu wanted a film of the tour shown in Nigeria and across British West Africa.[147] "A majority of" West Africans, Okulenu contended, "have never visited England," and were unfamiliar with British place names. Okulenu envisaged film of the delegation's tour that would resemble news reels, and which would bring people nearer to war-time Britain.[148] The CFU's film was also shown widely in other African countries, and its magazine *Colonial Cinema* ran an account of African reactions to a screening of the film.[149] Even if the film did not live up to Azikiwe's hopes for cross-cultural communication, it nonetheless secured the approval of the editors, and the interest of non-elite Nigerians, who were deeply curious about the tour.

Conclusion

The importance of the West African editors' 1943 delegation ranged far beyond the submission of Azikiwe's Memorandum. This focus misses significant dimensions of the tour, which was the product of new forms of connection, articulation, and mobility specific to the colonial modernity of the 1940s.[150] It was the product of a boom in what Korieh has termed "wartime intellectualism": the development of global commentary and travel among West Africans during the World War II.[151] Like other elite travellers in colonial Africa, the editors enacted practices of mediation and translation, interpreting Britain in terms that appealed to West African readers.[152] Specifically, the African editors mediated their time in the United Kingdom back to African readerships in terms of social networks and cultural references that were located not in Britain but in Nigeria.

Throughout three distinct areas, this article has argued that it was Nigeria and not Whitehall that constituted the central cultural reference point for many actors surrounding the tour. To make this analysis, it has drawn on the scale and complexity of African perceptions and social networks apparent in the Nigerian press. This analysis has been restricted to Nigeria, but it has shown that any treatment of the tour must account for African regional specificity, including divisions between different areas of the same colony.

[145] "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 18 November 1943; "Ambassadors of Goodwill," *West African Pilot*, 17 November 1943.

[146] "Colonial Film Unit Will Show Africans Film on Farming Methods in the U.S.S.R.," *West African Pilot*, 4 January 1944.

[147] "Newsreel Made on Visit of Press Delegation to England Will Be Screened in West Africa," *West African Pilot*, 11 April 1944.

[148] Ibid.

[149] T. Rice, "About Colonial Cinema," *Cinema St. Andrews*, Centre for Film Studies, University of St. Andrews, n.d.; "West African Editors," *Colonial Cinema* 1:7 (September 1943).

[150] F. Bernault, *Colonial Transactions: Imaginaries, Bodies, and Histories in Gabon* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2019), 2; M. Osborne, "British Visions, African Voices: The 'Imperial' and the 'Colonial' in World War II," *Itinerario* 44 (2020), 287–315, 287.

[151] Korieh, Korieh, Chima. *Nigeria and World War II: Colonialism, Empire, and Global Conflict.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2020, 99–100.

[152] Ochonu, "Emirs," 12.

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More generally, the tour demonstrates the degree to which we must rebalance our understanding of metropole and periphery. We must not be content to simply join them together in the same frame. It is true that the actors examined in this article were enmeshed in itineraries and entanglements that criss-cross between Africa and Europe. However, to fully understand the tour, we must recentre our analysis of events in Britain towards an African centre of gravity. In other words, we must understand the metropolitan centre as a space peripheral to the colony.

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