

Rumours of *Mau Mau* in Northern Rhodesia, 1950 – 1960

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In 1950s Northern Rhodesia, present day Zambia, rumours abounded amongst the African population intimating that the white settlers and administration were extensively involved in witchcraft, cannibalism and blood-sucking. In turn, members of the white settler community believed very much the same with regard to the African population of the territory. The development of nationalist politics and the increasing unionization of African workers in colonial Zambia led to agitation that was matched with increasing disquiet and fears on the part of white settlers. The emergence of 'Mau Mau' in Kenya and rumours of 'Mau Mau' in Northern Rhodesia served to underscore European settler fears in Northern Rhodesia. Based on research in the National Archives of Zambia and Great Britain, this paper explores the manner in which public rumour played out in Northern Rhodesia and gave emphasis to settler fears and fantasies in the territory.

Key words: Mau Mau, Northern Rhodesia, colonial rule, rumours, Zambia

Introduction

In the 1950's widespread rumours of *Mau Mau* in central Africa served as a catch-all that could be used by both coloniser and colonised, to enthuse and inspire, or frighten and threaten. This paper seeks to draw out and trace the emergence of rumours regarding *Mau Mau* in Northern Rhodesia in the 1950s. It seeks to provide a background for these rumours by describing the context within which they emerged. As such the paper is divided into three sections of which the first describes the changed political setting that emerged within the British Empire following World War II. A changed political setting that saw the views of Colonial Office bureaucrats increasingly at odds with those of British settlers in the Empire. The social scientists employed by the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute (RLI) in Northern Rhodesia belonged to neither the settler nor the African communities in that country. As such they were in a unique position to provide commentary on the wide variety of contrasting perspectives presented by people in the territory. In particular the RLI scientists provided stark evidence on the extensive racism that pervaded society as well as the manner in which it was sanctioned by the colonial state.

The second section of the paper describes the social consequences associated with the establishment in 1953 by white settlers of the short lived Central African Federation (CAF), which consisted of Northern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and

Nyasaland (Malawi). The paper describes and discusses how the CAF was established in blatant opposition to the African inhabitants of the territories concerned. As the CAF came to be established the most incredible and fantastic of rumours came to circulate through the territory of Northern Rhodesia. However, far more than being merely idle and innocuous gossip without any real impact on the day to day lives in Northern Rhodesia, the rumours had a serious and sustained impact on the people's behaviour. Even though the colonial state sought by all manner of means to disprove the rumours, this involvement merely served to increase the validity of the claims being made in the rumours. The widespread opposition to the CAF which, it is argued, was manifest in the spread of rumours that claimed that all Africans were to be eliminated by being fed poisoned food-stuffs, came to be channelled in the early 1950s into overt political opposition to the CAF in the form of the African National Congress.

In the final section of the paper events elsewhere in the British Empire are linked to socio-political developments in Northern Rhodesia. In the British colony of Kenya a series of disturbances coupled with armed unrest developed into a broadly supported insurrection against settler rule which came to be known as *Mau Mau*. Within Northern Rhodesia news of events in Kenya triggered all manner of reactions ranging from disgust and rejection, to support and inspiration. The paper shows how events elsewhere in the British Empire, and Kenya in particular, came to encourage and enthuse Africans living in Northern Rhodesia. The central concern of this piece in dealing with rumours of *Mau Mau* in Northern Rhodesia, is not so much the objective validity of the rumours, but rather their intended and unintended effects.

Changed Imperial Policy

The landslide election victory in 1945 of the British Labour Party led by Clement Attlee brought about radical change in Britain, and initiated long-term and irreversible changes in Northern Rhodesia and the British Empire as a whole. Desperate for capital to fund its war time debts and the emerging welfare state, the British government began the process of divesting itself of those parts of the empire that it could no longer afford to hold, whilst seeking to encourage economic development in those parts of the empire that held promise. Little more than two years after taking office, the Labour government oversaw the partition and independence of 'the jewel in the crown', India. At the same time the newly established Colonial Development Corporation and Overseas Food Corporation envisaged economic promise in proposals that included, amongst others, the establishment of enormous groundnut schemes in Tanganyika and the possible settlement of white settler farmers on the Nyika plateau in Nyasaland.¹ Further afield the tin mines and rubber plantations of Malaya were considered to be of vital importance to Britain's post-war economic reconstruction. In the interests of economic efficiency that would benefit Britain, it was envisaged that federations be established within the Empire in the West Indies, the Far East, East Africa, and the

1 The "Groundnut Affair", has come down to us in history as one of the most striking examples of failure in development schemes (Wood 1950).

Rhodesias. A Colonial Office mandarin informed the United Nations in 1947:

“The fundamental objectives in Africa are to foster the emergence of large-scale societies, integrated for self-government by effective and democratic political and economic institutions both national and local, inspired by a common faith in progress and Western values and equipped with efficient techniques of production and betterment.” (A.H. Poyton in Ferguson 2003: 357-8).

Though many may not have believed it at the time, the granting of Indian independence signalled to colonial subjects the inevitable dissolution of the British Empire and the ending of colonial rule. The independence and partition of India held within it the promise of independence for all colonial territories in the Empire. Henceforth the possible existence of independent African territories ceased to be a pipe-dream entertained by fantasists and dreamers. Although it would take another twelve years before Harold Macmillan would deliver his ‘Winds of Change’ speech to an unbelieving settler audience in Pretoria, the eventual independence of African territories under majority rule had been decided upon by Whitehall mandarins in 1948.

In February 1948 a number of ex-servicemen who had served the Empire in Burma were shot and killed by police in Accra as they sought to make their protests known to the British governor of the Gold Coast. In the aftermath of the killings and the disturbances that followed, the British government appointed a commission, “to enquire into and report on the recent disturbances ... and their underlying causes”.² Commenting on the political causes that had led to the violent confrontation, the commission noted a failure on the part of the government to recognise that, “the spread of liberal ideas, increasing literacy ... closer contact with political developments in other parts of the world, [and] ... [t]he achievement of self-government in India, Burma and Ceylon had not passed unnoticed in the Gold Coast”.³ The Commission recommended that various political amendments, “be adopted for a period of ten years”.⁴ Although the British government in its official reaction emphasised “that it is not possible to lay down in advance the pace of political development”, and sought to retain a hold on the course of change, within ten years of the report having been written the Gold Coast had gained its full political independence as Ghana.⁵ In the same way that India, Burma and Ceylon had inspired Ghanaian independence, so too events in the Gold Coast and the rest of the world inspired those seeking majority rule elsewhere in Africa.

Classically schooled civil servants may have recognised the inevitable decline and fall of the British Empire, yet it was another matter altogether for many of the British

2 Colonial Office, Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances in the Gold Coast 1948, London 1948, p. 4. The report is commonly referred to as the Watson Report. See also National Archives, Kew, Colonial Office, CO 96/795/6, Strikes and Disturbances: Riots after Parade of Ex-Servicemen in Accra.

3 Watson Report, pp. 7-8.

4 Colonial Office, Statement by His Majesty’s Government on the Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances in the Gold Coast 1948, London 1948, p. 9.

5 Statement by HMG on Watson Report, p. 9.

settlers who had sought to establish themselves with hopes for a prosperous future in the empire's far-flung territories. In addition, as the world staggered into the 'Cold War' geo-political issues and military interests came into conflict with African nationalism, and fuelled and inflamed settler myths and fantasies.

The Colonial Setting

"Union policy reacts on Central African policy – many of the Europeans in Central Africa are South African by birth and sympathy – and the entrenchment of a caste system in the Union fortifies racialism in Central Africa, tending to prevent any increase in racial inclusiveness there also." (Wilson & Wilson 1945: 156).

Anthropologists of the Rhodes Livingstone Institute commented upon the racism that they encountered when they started working in Zambia in the 1940s. This came most explicitly to the fore in the mining towns where the concentration of large numbers of white settlers allowed for the open expression of racism in everyday life. To put it bluntly, colonial officials, many of whom were stationed at some distance from large settler communities, could ill afford to let their racism dominate their daily lives. Many of these men, particularly prior to World War II, were Oxbridge graduates who, by dint of their education and background were not necessarily dependent upon the colour of their skin for job security. District commissioners, if they wished to continue to govern and administer effectively, could not allow their racial prejudices to gain the upper hand in their day-to-day dealings with the Northern Rhodesian population. This is not to deny that a number of these officials were strongly prejudiced or that many of their activities could not be deemed to be extremely patronising and paternalistic. The circumstances, which determined a modicum of consideration on the part of colonial administrators, appeared not to apply to the white immigrants who worked in the mines in Northern Rhodesia, many of whom came from South Africa.

By 1940 the colonial state was firmly established in Zambia, and the cities and mines were increasingly being filled with settlers who soon soaked up and shared the sentiments of white South Africa. Stark anecdotal information provided by Peter Fraenkel sheds light on these views.⁶ Fraenkel describes how, whilst driving to the European quarter of Ndola, the bus made a short stop to drop off Fraenkel's African colleague. This resulted in a discussion in the bus led by a young white Rhodesian and a "red-faced and pimply" young man with an English north-country accent:

*"What's this building?" asked the young Rhodesian.
 'African hotel, just newly built,' said the elderly European. He seemed to have an Italian accent.
 'What!!!' The young man was aghast; 'we go to the compound to drop a kaffir first?'
 'Hotel á la Bantu,' sniggered the north-country youth.*

...

⁶ Fraenkel was closely associated with the Rhodes Livingstone anthropologists, even to the extent of later marrying one of them, Ms. Merran McCulloch. (see: Fraenkel 1964; Fraenkel 2005; MacCulloch 1951).

‘Well, I don’t know what this country is coming to ...’ grumbled the Rhodesian.

‘I’m a Rhodesian, born and bred in Umtali,’ he continued, ‘and I think it’s all wrong.

It’s those fellows in England ...’

The young Englishman hastened to ingratiate himself: ‘Yeah, they don’t know what things are like here. I came out to Southern Rhodesia three years ago and I can tell you, when I first got out I also thought “Treat them like human beings” but now ... well, now I know them. Baboons, straight off the trees. Do you think this could have happened in the South?’”.

(Fraenkel 1959: 74-75; see also: Fraenkel 2005: 184-5).

Max Gluckman, anthropologist and director of the RLI, had emphasised time and again that the inhabitants of Northern Rhodesia, white immigrants as well as Africans, were all members of a single social unit. Yet the only RLI researcher to actually seriously study aspects of the white community of Northern Rhodesia was Hans Holleman. He undertook commissioned research at the request of the Northern Rhodesian Chamber of Mines on the “attitudes of white mining employees towards life and work on the Copperbelt and at Broken Hill”. Holleman’s research, which was finally published after he moved to the Netherlands, makes for interesting and, at times, humorous reading. The opening words of his study display a dry and appealing sense of humour:

“One of the intriguing aspects of the swift turn of African history in the late ‘fifties and early ‘sixties has been the inability of the white communities fully to comprehend the speed and magnitude of impending political change. Nowhere, perhaps, was this more evident than in the mining centres of Northern Rhodesia – now Zambia – where the expatriate white minorities, living in closed communities in the vastness of underdeveloped Africa, proudly (if sometimes recklessly) pursued what they believed to be the distinctive and superior values of the ‘European way of life’. Sustained by a protective employment structure and a general affluence probably unequalled in any other white community in Africa, they succeeded in creating for themselves exclusive spheres of social refuge (and of mental escape) from the African world around them.”

(Holleman & Biesheuvel 1973: vii).

Protected by racist legislation, communities of people were able to establish lives for themselves in the mining towns of Northern Rhodesia that would have been virtually impossible elsewhere. What is particularly disturbing about the Northern Rhodesian situation is that so many of these people believed that this was their natural right. Holleman described the life and noted:

“As the industry prospered and the mining communities grew more and more affluent, the pursuit of wealth and comfort soon became the established dogma of a prevalent and highly materialistic faith. [...]

This very largely immigrant community came from many countries, overseas and in the south, [62% of all male employees came from South Africa] where most of these values were to a greater or less extent the privilege of the upper strata of society. The vast majority of mining employees

did not derive from these strata, but were working-class people to whom the acquisition of these values was tangible evidence of having made good in the new society. Naturally their ambitions were directed toward achieving these aims. In the Copperbelt employment structure even semi-skilled men could earn as much as, and sometimes more than, academically trained persons.” (Holleman & Biesheuvel 1973: 35).

Holleman’s work describes a situation in which boorish and racist behaviour in the workplace and the social setting were sanctioned and appeared to be rewarded by the administration. That this behaviour extended to the very pinnacle of settler society is made abundantly clear by the exasperation expressed by the British colonial official Greenall who whilst serving as District Commissioner in Broken Hill noted the ridiculous nature of colonial rule:

Some of them [master and servants litigation] were outlandish in the extreme, such as the occasion when Mrs Welensky [wife of the future prime minister of the Central African Federation] filed a formal complaint with the police that one of her ‘houseboys’ had stolen a slice of Christmas cake. (Coe & Greenall 2003: 96-7).

It cannot be considered surprising that in these circumstances the work and conduct of those who rejected the racist stereotypes of settler society were considered to be suspect.

The activities of Arnold Leonard (Bill) Epstein as a young anthropologist in Northern Rhodesia provide us with insight into the relations -such as they existed- between the RLI researchers and the colonial milieu at the time. Epstein, who by this stage had completed a law degree, served in World War II, and travelled from his native Ireland to Sri Lanka, modestly described his arrival in Zambia in 1950 in the following manner:

I was at the time a rather naïve young man with no experience, and certainly little appreciation, of the nature of a colonial settler society, and I had conceived of my study as a purely academic exercise – what I hoped would prove to be a contribution to the anthropology of law. I was very quickly disabused of this idea. (Epstein 1992: 2).

For although Epstein believed he was no threat, to many living in Northern Rhodesia at the time he did indeed pose a threat, particularly to those who owed their positions and careers to racial prejudice.

In later years when reflecting on conditions in Northern Rhodesia in the early 1950s, Epstein noted that the atmosphere of the time was “quite nightmarish” (Yelvington 1997: 293). As the nationalist movement developed in Zambia in opposition to plans for a Central African Federation dominated by white settlers in Southern Rhodesia, politics in Northern Rhodesia became ever more heated. The cold war and the spectre of communist fifth columnists did little to calm the situation. The enforced establishment of the Federation in direct opposition to the wishes of the majority of the African population

led to a very volatile situation in Zambia. Indeed, as the nationalist movement gained in strength, opposition between “whites and blacks” became more the norm, and those, such as the RLI researchers, who chose to oppose and not participate in these charades in which stereotypes as opposed to people dominated, were further alienated from settler society. As Epstein noted, “if ever there was a situation that was made for paranoia, that was it” (*idem*).

Poisoned Sugar, tinned Human meat, and Vampires

“But to me all this was no laughing matter. I knew that the Mau Mau in Kenya had been launched with [a] ‘ridiculous’ rumour...”. (Fraenkel 1959: 199).

The establishment of a federation in Central Africa comprising Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland was central to the maintenance of white settler rule in Central Africa, and in keeping with ideas formulated by the colonial office in the immediate aftermath of the war in 1945. Although the idea of federation was enthusiastically supported by European settlers in Southern Rhodesia, the same did not hold true for the African populations of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. In Southern Province in late 1951, District Commissioner J. E. Passmore noted in his monthly ‘public opinion report’:

*“The general attitude of Africans is one of intense suspicion [sic] that the Europeans are plotting to take away their land. Every political move or development proposal is viewed in this light. The political [sic] minded have easily been able to take advantage of and increase this feeling to whip up opposition to Amalgamation and Federation [...]. The educated Africans without exception regard partnership as a plot to work the African into a position where he cannot oppose federation. They will have no difficulty whatever in bringing the village Africans round to this view. [...]. Mr. Harry Nkumbula is the leader of the opposition to political developments proposed; he found the fear of loss of land ready-made for him to work on; he has done so very successfully in spite of a very large measure of personal unpopularity particularly amongst the educated Africans.”*⁷

The American anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker arrived in Zambia, Northern Rhodesia, in September 1953, shortly after the formal inauguration of the Central African Federation.⁸ Powdermaker noted that the Federation had come to be established despite widespread opposition manifest in “speeches, motions and protests”, and that:

“When I began my field work, the meaning of the new political union became quickly apparent to me because the fear of federation and the loss of land was dragged into almost every interview and conversation, regardless of context or relevancy.” (Powdermaker 1962: 63).

7 National Archives of Zambia, (NAZ), SP 1/3/3, ‘District and Provincial Intelligence Reports’, 1947-55. J.E. Passmore (DC, Namwala), ‘Monthly Report: Public Opinion’ Namwala, 4 Dec. 1951 (‘Secret’), NAZ, SP 1/3/3. With thanks to Giacomo Macola for generous access to his archival notes.

8 For a partisan view of the Federation see Welensky (1964).

Although she never specifically interviewed on the subject of federation, “most Africans, with or without education, young and old, appeared to have a compulsive need to talk about it and the related fear of losing their land” (*idem*). What struck Powdermaker forcefully was the repeated reference by African informants to the loss of land and the ultimate fate of the North American Indian populations (*ibid.*: 64).

African fears regarding the loss of land and domination by white settlers, were not unfounded. In a visit to Lusaka in 1949, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, Arthur Creech-Jones, stated not unreasonably that “Permanent white settlement needs to be controlled. Because Northern Rhodesia is a Protectorate, the Africans have been guaranteed certain inherent rights and therefore in agricultural development there are certain definite restrictions so far as Europeans are concerned”; hardly controversial it would seem, but in the context of settler society in Central Africa at the time the statement by Creech-Jones had explosive consequences (Welensky 1964: 33-4). On the following day Welensky, the settler prime minister of Northern Rhodesia, thundered that should the British Government wish to implement its wishes:

“It will have to bring troops to this country to carry it out. The European community will not under any circumstances recognise a paramountcy of African interests. I am prepared to work in partnership with the African people – and for as long as I can see, in that partnership we will be the senior partners – but I will never accept that Northern Rhodesia is to be an African state.” (Welensky 1964: 34, *emphasis added*).

Sir Godfrey Huggins (later Viscount Malvern), the prime minister of Southern Rhodesia, summed up white settler ideals when he commented, “Yes, it will be a partnership – such as exists between a horse and its rider” (Coe & Greenall 2003: 100). Welensky’s clear statement of intent coupled with numerous and equally jarring comments, “If the Africans don’t come in with the Europeans, they will face the fate of the Red Indians in North America”, served to ensure that the African inhabitants of Northern Rhodesia were at all times opposed to the establishment of the federation (Welensky 1964: 57). However the manner in which this opposition came to be expressed, did not necessarily dovetail neatly into European settler or Colonial Official perceptions of what constituted opposition to the envisaged federation.

Peter Fraenkel, the young broadcaster and close friend of the Rhodes Livingstone anthropologists, described how he stumbled upon Africans engaged in the clandestine printing of anti-federation pamphlets. However, in contrast to the strident rhetoric commonly associated with political pamphlets, the flyers being illegally stencilled on a Roneo machine in the offices of the Northern Rhodesia Broadcasting Services, entitled, “Private Circular to Africans only!”, noted, in the summarised words of Fraenkel:

“That on the 28th October the ‘House of Laws’ in London had decided to put poisoned sugar on sale to Africans, commencing on February 8th of next year, 1953. This would have the effect in the case of women, of causing their children to be born dead, and with men of making them impotent.

The sugar would be recognised by the letters LPS on the packets. All Africans were warned to beware of such sugar". (Fraenkel 1959: 197).

In seeking to understand the background to the circular, Fraenkel spoke to Africans whom "I had known since I was a child", and in discussing the rumour:

"Time and again they brought up the name of Welensky. Didn't I know that he had said he would kill all natives? Didn't I know that the same had been done in America?" (ibid.: 199).

At a public meeting held by the African National Congress in Lusaka in early 1954, speakers following up on Welensky's comments stated "that the African population would be wiped out like the Red Indians and aborigines of Australia if they did not take action". In addition speakers expressed their belief that "Europeans doctored African beer to induce sterility among Africans".⁹

In 2000 Luise White, following up and developing on the earlier works of Musambachime and Brelsford, published an interesting and wide-ranging study of African beliefs regarding occult beings in central and east Africa. Referring to the formidable and distinguished American anthropologist, Hortense Powdermaker, White (2000) noted that:

"She reported the stories without reference to the dates involved or the writing on the packets, and she interpreted them in terms of witchcraft poisonings. For the anthropologist, this was not a rumor, but what happened when 'the rational fear of Federation moved into the realm of the supernatural'."

For its part the colonial administration of Northern Rhodesia had its own take on the 'poisoned sugar'. In the monthly 'public opinion reports' (which in the run-up to federation as of June 1953 became 'intelligence reports') colonial administrators discussed the rumours and sought to develop a more sinister approach to the rumour. In a report drafted in early 1953 it was noted that the District Officer in charge of Kalomo had come upon a letter written by Harry Nkumbula that dealt with "Mr. Welensky's 'Red Indian' speech", " 'vampire men', and the disappearance of Africans".¹⁰ Gervase Clay, acting provincial commissioner for Southern Province, wrote:

"The origin of the 'poison sugar' rumour cannot be in doubt. There is strong suspicion that a quantity of drugs capable of causing abortions which was stolen from Kasenga Mission earlier in 1952, came into Nkumbula's possession. If Nkumbula is in possession of these drugs he may have succeeded in causing a number of abortions. The occurrence of these abortions would give a

9 NA, DO 35/4778, Northern Rhodesia Political Intelligence Report, February 1954, paragraph 10. Hereafter this report is referred to as "NRPIR" followed by the month, year and paragraph or section number.

10 NAZ, SP 1/3/3, G. Clay (Acting PC, SP), 'Monthly Report on Public Opinion December 1952', L'stone, 20 Jan. 1953.

colour of truth to the rumour which is now being circulated. The District Officer in charge Kalomo believes that Nkumbula has considerable interest (or influence) in an African tearoom in Lusaka. Again, if Nkumbula still has these drugs the District Officer in charge considers it not impossible that Government may be faced with a staged 'discovery' of sugar which has been poisoned in some store or other place. The effects of such a 'discovery' can be imagined."¹¹

In September 1952 K.M. Chittenden, the District Commissioner for Namwala, Harry Nkumbula's home district, had written to the Provincial Commissioner Southern Province and suggested:

"I cannot help thinking that a little publicity carefully put around about his private life might be advantageous although I appreciate the difficulties in so doing."¹²

In the event, the person suspected of having misappropriated the drugs and who was as a result dismissed from her position, was Nkumbula's mistress. Although the colonial authorities sought to blame Nkumbula, by insinuating that his mistress through carrying out abortions, had somehow initiated the poisoned sugar rumours, the missionary in charge of Kasenga dispensary, wryly commented that:

"Ergot is a black liquid of distinct odour and filthy taste. Its uses in poisoned sugar therefore might be rather limited."¹³

The exasperation on the part of colonial administrators in attempting to rationally deal with rumours and gossip that threatened and essentially ridiculed their administration is illustrated by the frustration expressed by Roy Welensky in his bitter overview of the federation:

"The fear-laden stories grew wilder as the months went by: I had ordered the Africans' sugar to be poisoned, so that African women might miscarry and African men become impotent; tins of meat contained human flesh, poisoned to break African opposition to federation."
(Welensky 1964: 55).

In a desperate attempt to break these rumours a district commissioner and his trusted African assistants consumed contaminated tins in public, only to have the whole exercise backfire spectacularly. Instead of disproving the rumour, the public display of the District Commissioner and his assistants only served to emphasise the power of their magic (Welensky 1964: 55; Esptein 1992: 174-5).

11 NAZ, SP 1/3/3, G. Clay (Acting PC, SP), 'Monthly Report on Public Opinion December 1952', L'stone, 20 Jan. 1953.

12 K.M. Chittenden to PC (SP), [Namwala], 2 Sept. 1952.

13 NAZ, SP 1/3/3, K.M. Chittenden (DC, Namwala), 'Public Opinion Report: Namwala District, February 1953', Namwala, 26 Feb. 1953 ('Secret'), NAZ, SP 1/3/3.

Particularly frustrating for the British Colonial administration were the persistent reports of ‘vampire men’ or *Banyama* (people of meat i.e. cannibals), rumours whose fantastic nature meant that they were impossible to deal with rationally. Central Africans believed that their society was being terrorised by occult beings who slaughtered innocent humans for their flesh, body parts, fats and fluids. To the exasperation of colonial officials, Africans accused the colonial government of complicity in that it either actively abetted or at the very least did nothing to protect people from these attacks. The fact that in living memory murders for ritual purposes or that acts of cannibalism had occurred and had been admitted to under oath in the colonial courts of law only served to underscore the fear of Africans and belie the protestations of the colonial administration.¹⁴ In the absence of colonial government protection against witchcraft, a concept which in the mindset of the colonial administration did not exist other than that it was an expression of primitive superstition, murder in retaliation for acts of witchcraft were common throughout the period of colonial rule. Max Marwick, who conducted research into sorcery in its social setting in Northern Rhodesia in the 1950’s noted:

*“Most informants among the Cewa are aware of the fact that whites disapprove of beliefs in sorcery. They tend, therefore, not to relate incidents implying such beliefs unless they are sure that their listener will take them seriously, will not try to eradicate them, and will be generally sympathetic. ... I might add that, even with ideal rapport, informants usually become reticent when they remember, not only that it is a criminal offence to impute witchcraft (including sorcery) to others, but also that, by doing so, they may arouse the hostility and precipitate the vengeance of those to whom they impute it.” (Marwick 1965: 18).*¹⁵

The witchcraft ordinances of the colonial administration forbade any accusation of witchcraft by any authority, which, as Hugo Hinfelaar noted, “in reality left the people without any legal sanctions and without any recourse in their fear” (Hinfelaar 1994: 143). In the absence of government protection and in the presence of such a blatant threat people sought to take the law into their own hands:

“In Mufulira the finding in the early hours of the 23rd of November of a heap of abandoned clothing near a deep pit created a “banyama”(vampire) scare and stones were thrown at two caravans parked nearby and occupied by Europeans. In the afternoon a large crowd of Africans gathered near the caravans and stoned a police party called out to restore order.” (NRPIR December 1953, §3).

14 On earlier references to *Banyama* and colonial complicity see: Gann (1969: 231-2). National Archives, Kew, CO 795/77/3 The Natives Affairs Report for 1934 p. 33 reports that in the Kalabo district:

“three old hags ... dug up a human corpse and ate portions of it. They were convicted of desecrating a grave, cannibalism not constituting a criminal offence under the laws of NR.”

15 In addition Marwick referred to the Northern Rhodesia, Witchcraft Ordinance, No. 5 of 1914 as amended by No. 47 of 1948.

As Musambachime, Brelsford and White have noted in their respective studies, Game rangers and Tse tse fly guards were seen by the populace as being complicit in Banyama. As such the intelligence reports for the 1950s make extensive references to game guards, who were wont to stroll through the bush, being obstructed in their work, attacked and accused of witchcraft (NRPIR December 1953, §14).

In western Zambia people developed kaliloze guns, magical guns fashioned from human tibia that were used to execute witches.¹⁶ In 1956 there was a spate of murders in which “the victims had been shot at fairly close range with short-barrelled homemade muzzle-loaders, commonly known as *Kaliloze* night guns” (Reynolds 1963: 11). In the event, in little more than a year thousands of people were arrested and interrogated and 1,212 cases dealt with by district officers in Kalabo, Mongu, Senanga and Sesheke (*ibid.*: 139). Following confessions “by murderers and information subsequently obtained” people were arrested and found to be in “possession not only [of] *kaliloze* guns but also human skulls, limb bones and, in a few cases, reputedly human flesh” (*ibid.*: 11). In addition a number of people were taken into protective custody after having been accused of, and in some cases having admitted to, cannibalism (*ibid.*: 24-7).

British Government ideas regarding the Central African Federation

Following the formal establishment of the Central African Federation in August 1953, Northern Rhodesia *Political Intelligence Reports* were submitted monthly to the Dominions Office in London. These reports, and in particular the comments written in the margins by Whitehall mandarins, make for extremely interesting reading, particularly as they were not intended for public consumption, and as such opinions were voiced and expressed which would normally have been unheard of. A four page brief drafted by W.S. Bates for the Minister in October 1955 illustrates this point very clearly. Referring to the *Intelligence Report* for September 1955 Bates noted:

“In general, I must confess that for me this whole report makes depressing reading. Here in a survey covering only a month we have reports of:-

- a) An African National Congress campaign against law and order...*
- b) A further series of stone throwing incidents...*
- c) A concerted attempt to drive European traders from the Copperbelt fish markets;...*
- d) Mr. Van Eeden’s¹⁷ overwhelming victory at Kafue...*
- e) Various threats of violence against Europeans.”¹⁸*

Bates was hardly the type to be alarmist or to exaggerate a situation. He noted, “it

16 Many would allege that the execution of witches by *Kaliloze* guns continues in contemporary Zambia. A manuscript on the topic is currently being prepared by the author, for previously published material see, Barrie Reynolds (1963: 79-88).

17 Van Eeden was a politician who sought a closer alliance with apartheid South Africa.

18 NA, DO 35/4778, comments drafted by W.S. Bates 28 October 1955.

is true that that these security reports inevitably underline the black spots and tend to ignore the patches of light”, nevertheless, after “reading them month after month, it is impossible to avoid the impression that race relations in Northern Rhodesia ... seem to be getting steadily worse instead of better”.¹⁹ Indeed, whilst white settlers in the federation continued to fool themselves with the idea that the federation would hold, Bates noted that unless the federal government went out of its way “to win over the African population” the federation would collapse. In addition, for those supporting federation, Bates noted:

*Nor is it any use their deluding themselves that time is on their side. It is true that within the next generation Kariba and the industrial development flowing from it will bring within the reach of many thousands of African a standard of living at present beyond their dreams, and that these benefits will be the direct result of Federation. But the tide of African nationalism cannot be held in check while these new forces are harnessed. The emergence of the Gold Coast and of part at least of Nigeria to full self-government, [...] will provide a fresh impulse.*²⁰

Bates warned that unless things changed the coming years would “see an enormous expansion” in “Congress parties” and that “the whole tenor of their policy and propaganda [would] be anti-European and anti-Federation”.²¹

Mau Mau Settler Fear

“Sir Godfrey [Huggins] is, I know, concerned that suitable action is taken for he realises the potential danger of these African Nationalist movements. One need only look 500/600 miles North of the Federation’s Northern borders to see what can happen. It is now spreading to other tribes.”²²

In the course of 1951 discriminatory legislation, self-fulfilling fears, the hubris of elders and authorities, coupled to widespread dissatisfaction and bruised youthful pride and aspirations all combined to initiate a series of ever more violent incidents that eventually snowballed into an historical sequence of events that has become known to us as Mau Mau. It is a term that has come to carry a broad range of morally laden historical meanings; for many it is a movement of incipient revolutionary warfare, for others a striking example of primitive African brutality. Whatever the current historical understanding of Mau Mau, it was, for settler society of the 1950s, the epitome of colonial society gone wrong; the opposite of the world as it should be.²³ Mau Mau was the shadow under the bed, the dark forces that came out at night and fulfilled the wildest fears, dreams and

19 NA, DO 35/4778, comments drafted by W.S. Bates 28 October 1955.

20 NA, DO 35/4778, comments drafted by W.S. Bates 28 October 1955. Emphasis added by JBG.

21 NA, DO 35/4778, comments drafted by W.S. Bates 28 October 1955.

22 NA, DO 35/4778, Security Liaison Office, Salisbury to Ian MacLennan, Salisbury, 15 June 1954.

23 There is a welter of publications that relate to Mau Mau, its origins, its existence, and its effects. A good introduction to the swathe of literature would include the following: (Edgerton 1989; Lonsdale 1992; Cooper 1988; Kershaw 1997; Bates 1987).

fantasies of settler society.²⁴ As the brutalities and atrocities meted out by combatants in Kenya came to inspire and disgust both colonized and colonizer, *Mau Mau* came to be an effective and shared shorthand for discussing and debating the morality and validity of colonial rule in late colonial southern and central Africa.

For many Northern Rhodesian Africans *Mau Mau* was an exhilarating slogan, a concept and a constantly morphing mental image that clearly troubled the colonial authorities and settlers in particular. The unexpected power that lay behind the invocation of a conflict that lay more than a thousand kilometres away in Kenya (and at times eight thousand kilometres away in Malaya) inspired Zambian nationalists and greatly troubled those tasked with administering Northern Rhodesia. Events in Malaya and Kenya, where Northern Rhodesian troops had been deployed in active combat, served to inspire Africans in Northern Rhodesia.

In early 1954 a young man living in Ndola who bore the nom de guerre Morris Malaya “mentioned privately that he would like to form a communist party branch” and that he “wanted Communism because it provided a better government for people who were poor like Africans” (NRPIR April 1954, §3). At the same time intelligence reports noted that “at various ... Congress meetings at Lusaka there have been threats against the police and wild talk about attacking them” (NRPIR, February 1954, §10). These calls were not limited to the rank and file of the African National Congress, there were increasingly militant calls emanating from within leading positions of Congress. Thus in early 1954, police informers reported to the colonial authorities that Wellington (sometimes known as Whittington) Kakoma Sikalumbi (Chief Clerk at Congress head office) had “said that the time was close at hand for action and fighting” (NRPIR, February 1954, §10). A month later Sikalumbi re-appeared in the monthly intelligence report in which it was noted that:

“Wellington [...] Kakoma Sikalumbi Congress Chief Clerk, [...] said at a meeting that in future all congress ‘Police’ should wear a uniform of black trousers, white shirt and black bow tie, with a red and black armband, towards the cost of which they should each contribute \$1. He claimed that the Action Group – the ‘police’ – now number 200 and he forecast that it would take a strong line in the future, but he did not say what this line would be. There is evidence that these ‘Police’ have been in action. At the executive meeting of Congress held at Lusaka on the 20/21st of March they checked on all persons to ensure that no members of the Northern Rhodesia Police were present.” (NRPIR, March 1954, §12).

In July of 1954, as the Central African Federation increasingly became enmeshed in daily life, the hitherto peaceful protests of Nkumbula’s African National Congress in the absence of success appeared to run out of steam. Instead there were increasing calls for militant action, thus it was reported that:

24 In one instance the idea of *Mau Mau* inspired a young colonial official in Tanzania to undertake two tours through his district that owed nothing to actual verifiable *Mau Mau* activities in his district, but all the more to a misguided romantic reasoning that could have been drawn from a close and intensive reading of *Boys Own*. John Cooke, *Memoirs of a Reformed Imperialist Africa Since 1951 to the Present Day Manuscript* in author’s possession.

“Speeches and letters by those Africans who remain in the left wing of the Congress make increasing references to Mau Mau. Another indication of the militant views of this group is one reported instance of the training of uniformed women members of the movement.”
(NRPIR, July 1954, §2).

More specifically, intelligence reports noted that ANC committee members had stated that if “Africans did not get self Government, plans which might lead to bloodshed had been prepared by Congress in both Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland and these would force the issue” (NRPIR, July 1954, §17). It was reported that at a meeting held in Lusaka in July 1954 Congress official Simon Tembe Yobi had claimed:

“That plans had been made to safeguard Africans against ill treatment by Europeans and these might mean that Mau Mau might come to Northern Rhodesia.”
(NRPIR, July 1954, §18).

In addition it was reported that Rambhai Devabhai Patel, President of the British Indian Association, had “advised one of the Nyasaland African Members of Parliament to tell his people to give up their lives for their country as the Mau Mau were doing in Kenya” (NRPIR, July 1954, §18).

British colonial officials were worried by the, “increasing frequency of reports mentioning threats of violence and references to Mau Mau activities in the utterances of the hot-headed and the young” (NRPIR August 1954, §12). In particular comments that the “African people should be prepared to sell their lives as the Mau Mau are doing in Kenya” (NRPIR August 1954, §184). As time went by the calls for militant action coupled to disquieting activities that included the wearing of uniforms and military drilling did not diminish. That these new policies were part and parcel of Congress is indicated by the overt presence of all at the conference of the Northern Rhodesia African National Congress which was held in Lusaka from 17-20 August 1954. The conference was policed by “Congress ‘police’ guards”:

“These guards were [...] dressed in a uniform consisting of a khaki bush shirt with a red and black congress badge on the left breast and home-made epaulettes on each shoulder, a red fez, khaki shorts and stockings, and black shoes.” (NRPIR August 1954, Appendix A).

Intelligence reports indicate that Harry Nkumbula, president of the African National Congress, was well aware of the parallels that existed between Congress militants and Mau Mau. Nkumbula allegedly stated “that the Northern Rhodesia Government had interpreted agitation by Congress against Federation as a threat of terrorism similar to Mau Mau and had made complete plans to meet any terrorist action” (NRPIR August 1954, Appendix A).

In spite of the threat of government action as intimated by Nkumbula, the conference delegates did not mince their words. At the close of the conference party organiser Nephas Tembo called for direct action and that “threats should be made to induce the government to comply with the wishes of Congress” (NRPIR August 1954, Appendix A). This call for action, in the context of the conference, was opposed by Harry Nkumbula. However, later in a private meeting at the house of Rev. Dr. S.J. Tladi, of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Nkumbula, clearly unaware that his words were being recorded and reported by informers of the Northern Rhodesian police, “warned those present against talking about killing”. However, in this instance, Nkumbula noted, in the words of the intelligence report, “that their friends in Kenya had made their plans long before fighting started without the Government being aware of them, which was why they were still able to continue fighting” (NRPIR August 1954, Appendix A, p.3, §8). Spoken as they were in the context of Mau Mau and what might come to pass in Northern Rhodesia, these words most certainly rattled the colonial authorities – particularly in the light of what happened in the following months. Intelligence reports for December 1954 noted that:

“At a beer-drink near Chinsali Boma an African lorry driver reported that seven Mau Mau leaders had been dropped by parachute on the Copperbelt and were teaching the Africans how to run a war successfully against the Europeans. He also explained how easy it was to steal arms and ammunition from the houses of Europeans – at which point local Congress leaders told him to be silent.” (NRPIR December 1954, §84).²⁵

Although it would turn out to be the case that the claims being made were untrue, they did give an indication as to the extent to which the ideals and dreams of “Mau Mau” had taken hold of large sections of the population. In the context of beer drink camaraderie fantastic rumour expressed a desire that fellow drinkers understood and subscribed to: the successful defeat of European rule in Northern Rhodesia. However, although there were certainly no Mau Mau parachutists on the Copperbelt, the rumours did contain an element of truth. Intelligence reports from December 1954 made mention of “two persons, a man and a woman alleged to be Kikuyu, who claim adherence to Mau Mau”. In addition these two “are alleged to have said that they have been sent to this Territory to instruct Africans in Mau Mau methods” (NRPIR January 1955, §17). In contrast to what one might have expected:

“Investigations confirmed the authenticity of the reports and the two persons have been deported as undesirable immigrants.” (NRPIR January 1955, §17).

Anxious to contain the situation, which included an ongoing strike on the Copperbelt and the threat of Mau Mau like violence, the colonial authorities swiftly moved to contain the situation. In early January 1955 Harry Nkumbula and Kenneth Kaunda, Presi-

25 The well found recurrent fear of settlers that their servants would steal their fire-arms is an issue that bedevils each and every settler society. For a later example see Davis (1987: 137).

dent General and Secretary General of the African National Congress, were taken into custody and charged with having prohibited publications in their possession. Being in possession of what the sentencing magistrate referred to as “cheap, disreputable and scandalous literature of a political nature”, Nkumbula and Kaunda were convicted as charged and sentenced to two months imprisonment each (Rotberg 1965: 272; NRPIR January 1955, §18). Congress offices were raided across the territory leading to the arrest of Dominic Mwansa (Provincial President) and David Chitambala (Branch Secretary). Being less well known nationally these men, in contrast to Kaunda and Nkumbula, were sentenced to jail terms of six, and not two, months for being in possession of prohibited literature (Rotberg 1965: 273; NRPIR January 1955, §18).²⁶

Although the arrest of the Congress leaders may have come as a surprise to the African population of Northern Rhodesia, it did not, as the authorities may have expected, bring to an end the increasingly militant calls for violent action. Instead, far from being cowed, Congress supporters argued that “all leaders of national liberatory [sic] movements have, in the past, suffered imprisonment before they achieved their aims” (NRPIR January 1955, §19). Some Congress leaders expressed themselves more forcefully. In a meeting held in Ndola, following the arrests and raids, Justin Henry Chimba (Western Province Provincial Secretary) who would later address another meeting along the same lines in Lusaka- and Jovu Hiyanda (Acting Treasurer General) called on followers to “support a campaign of murder against Europeans, commencing in the farming areas” (NRPIR January 1955, §19). This was particularly disconcerting for the colonial authorities in the context of what was known about Mau Mau:

“All present at the meeting were required to take an oath of secrecy regarding the matters discussed and of support for the campaign when instructions were received.”
(NRPIR January 1955, §19, emphasis added).

In addition, in the Northern Province of Northern Rhodesia, Congress made common purpose with the Lumpa Church of Alice Lenshina. Congress leaders, Simon Kapwepwe, Robert Makasa and John Sokoni, in conjunction with the Lumpa Church encouraged militant action against the colonial authorities. The orders of chiefs and district commissioners were disobeyed, official cooperatives were boycotted, and in a particularly symbolic act “a tree that had been planted to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II” was torn from the ground (Rotberg 1965: 273). By 1956 the activities of congress supporters, which included highly symbolic activities such as those described above, indicated that little was needed for symbolic action to become armed insurrection. Whilst colonial authorities pondered what to do, they will have taken little heart from statements by Congress officials such as Sikalumbe, who had moved up through the ranks of Congress to become its Vice-treasurer general, yet continued, true to form, to express extremely militant opinions. In the wake of the arrests of Congress officials Sikalumbe

26 Rotberg refers to David Chitambala as Frank Chitambala. On appeal Chitambala’s sentence was reduced to two months, whilst Mwanza’s sentence was upheld.

warned that, “Congress would go underground if stopped by Europeans”, in addition intelligence reports mentioned that “the possibility of introducing Mau Mau is alleged to have been discussed at committee meetings”.²⁷

Concluding remarks

This paper has sought to place events in Northern Rhodesia within the wider framework of the end of empire. The development of Mau Mau in Kenya had direct consequences for the manner in which politics came to be conducted in Northern Rhodesia. Political activists in Northern Rhodesia opposed to white minority rule actively used the example of Mau Mau to put pressure upon the colonial administration and its settler population. Particularly disconcerting for the colonial administration was the fact that as the 1950s progressed and social relations within Northern Rhodesia deteriorated, the rumours of war became ever more real. That is, although solid evidence regarding the development and training of an armed insurrection along the lines of Mau Mau in Kenya was never found in Northern Rhodesia, rumours regarding the development of a ‘homegrown’ Mau Mau insurrection in the territory grew ever more adamant and in no small measure contributed to political change and the eventual dissolution of the CAF. In effect the rumours of Mau Mau, consistently emphasised, as rumours of war, what would happen should political change not be realised. That is, in the absence of an objective armed insurrection in Northern Rhodesia, the rumour of such an insurrection was sufficient to initiate and maintain political change and eventual independence in Zambia.

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