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1996-07-22
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SEMINAR PAPER
TO BE PRESENTED IN THE RICHARD WARD BUILDING
SEVENTH FLOOR, SEMINAR ROOM 7003
AT 4PM ON THE **22 JULY 1996**.

TITLE: **"Tribes" and the People who read Books: Managing History in Colonial Zambia**

BY: **KATE CREHAN**

NO: 402

'TRIBES' AND THE PEOPLE WHO READ BOOKS: MANAGING HISTORY IN COLONIAL ZAMBIA[1]

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22 JULY 1996

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[1]The title refers to an interview I had in 1988 with an elderly Kaonde man who when telling me about Kaonde history said at one point: 'You people who read books know those chiefs who are half Kaonde and half Lamba. The only real Kaondes are those three [ie. Chief Kibala, Chief Kasempa and Chief Mushima], they are the owners of this land.'

'TRIBES' AND THE PEOPLE WHO READ BOOKS[2]

> The tribe is at once the only bulwark we have against anarchy and the only foundation on which to build progress in local government.
> Annual Report on African Affairs North-Western Area, Sec 2/135, 1951-1952

> One's conception of the world is a response to certain specific problems posed by reality, which are quite specific and 'original' in their immediate relevance.
> (Gramsci, 1971:324)

To say that the language and concepts we use *about* realities help *shape* realities is scarcely contentious. The question is: what is the nature and extent of that 'help'; and what are the mechanisms involved? This paper takes one of the fundamental categories of colonial anthropology, 'the tribe', and looks at the some of the ways it was used in a particular time and place, the British colony of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), during the period of indirect rule from 1931 to Independence in 1964. The paper is concerned with three different groups: the professional anthropologists of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, colonial officials in the field, and those defined by those two groups as tribal, rural Africans. It explores the topography occupied by the concept of 'the tribe' within a set of different, but overlapping and often intertwined, sets of meanings. Through an examination of this complex three way dialogue, in which different usages informed and shaped each other, we can begin to trace out the substantive and complex nature of the category of 'the tribe' in colonial Zambia, and how it shaped, and was shaped, by the untidy and dynamic realities which it was supposed to explain. The first section of the paper focuses on the Rhodes Livingstone Institute and its anthropologists.

Human Problems in British Central Africa and the Role of Anthropology

> In the rural areas under British rule, each tribe is an organized political unit, with a complex internal structure. At its head, in Central Africa at least, there is usually a traditional chief, with a traditional council of elders, and a system of villages and other political units.
> (Gluckman,1965:292-293)

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[2]A slightly different version of this paper will form part of a chapter of *The Fractured Community: Landscapes in Power and Gender* (Crehan, forthcoming).

The Rhodes-Livingstone Institute (RLI) was founded in 1937 in Northern Rhodesia with a dual mission. On the one hand, it was to generate 'scientific' knowledge about the subjects of British colonial rule in Central Africa; following the procedures of the rapidly professionalising discipline of social anthropology. On the other hand - and this was a crucial argument in its claim for official funding - it was to provide the colonial state with useful information which would facilitate the smooth and humane operation of colonial rule. It was, however, to be an independent institution free of direct control by the colonial authorities. The vital role of anthropology (and the social sciences in general) in solving 'social' problems was stressed by the Institute's first director, Godfrey Wilson[3]. The range of the RLI's aims under its second director, Max Gluckman, was reflected in its different publications. There was the scholarly *Journal of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute*, produced for an academic audience; but there was also 'provision for presenting the results of scientific research to laymen' (Gluckman, 1945:28) in the journal *Human Problems in British Central Africa*, while *Communications from the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute* provided the 'detailed data beyond what the sociologist customarily publishes' that 'Government often requires' (*ibid*:28).

The colonial authorities themselves were distinctly ambivalent about the value of anthropological research. The complicated relationship between the RLI, and particularly its first director, Godfrey Wilson, and the colonial state is analyzed by Richard Brown in an essay in *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (Asad, 1973). Brown's argument is that it is a gross oversimplification to see, as certain critics of colonial anthropology do, anthropologists like Wilson as 'the handmaidens of colonialism'. The question with which this paper is concerned, however, is a rather different one. How far do theoretical concepts and particular problematics in themselves embody, quite independently of the explicit aims of those who use them, specific ways of looking at the world that have implicit in them their own political claims?

The colonial setting of the RLI reveals with a particular clarity the embeddedness of the academic pursuit in various power

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[3]In a hearing in 1940 to decide whether he should be granted exemption from military service as a conscientious objector, Wilson argued for the vital role of his research at the RLI, the lack of such research being, as Wilson saw it, one of the reasons why Europe was now at war. An argument that was met with some scepticism by at least one member of the exemption board who remarked that he did not see how, 'a study of the native laws of Bantu society would solve many of Europe's social problems' (ZNA, Sec 1/1650, V.I)

relations. But while the specific character of the embeddness in this case may be peculiar to a specific moment in British colonial history, a location caught between the sometimes conflicting demands of 'pure' and 'applied' science is, I would argue, the normal location of the academy. By academy here I mean those sites where 'recognised', 'legitimate', 'authoritative' and so on, knowledge is produced, and which have as their primary purpose the production of such knowledge. The specific topography of such sites varying at different historical moments. Social scientists in particular are always presented with questions that arise out of the economic and political realities - often profoundly contradictory - of the context within which they work. It is this context that shapes the basic problematics which define what are seen as the 'significant', 'important' and so on, questions. There are always a number of competing problematics, but all of them, in however complex and mediated ways, are the product of particular historical moments. Although it is important to stress that this does not mean that the *answers* produced by those labouring in the groves of academe can simply be read off from the historical context - and it is in terms of these answers, I would argue, that we can legitimately demand and assess 'objectivity'. These answers may indeed lead beyond the paradigm, may even subvert and ultimately overturn it. Indeed, the tensions within Godfrey Wilson's own position as director of the Rhodes Livingstone Institute, viewed as he was with increasing suspicion by the colonial authorities, led to his resigning as director only three years after his appointment.

Max Gluckman who succeeded Wilson as director played a key role in shaping the RLI as its emphasis became increasingly scholarly and academic, linked to the world of academic anthropology rather than colonial administration. Links that were strengthened when Gluckman left to take up the new chair in social anthropology at Manchester University in Britain. Here he gathered round him a group of young anthropologists, including among others, Victor Turner, Clyde Mitchell, A.L. Epstein, William Watson and Norman Long, who had all done, or were to do, fieldwork in Northern Rhodesia through the Rhodes Livingstone Institute. The group, which became known as the Manchester school, produced an impressive body of work in the 1950s and early 1960s. Despite significant differences between the individual anthropologists who made up the Manchester School, they all worked within a shared problematic, and a problematic which had been developed within the context of the British colonial state in Central Africa and the Rhodes Livingstone Institute.

A key feature of the colonial state in British Central Africa from the late 1920s was its commitment to the principle of Indirect Rule. A principle which combined a cheap form of administration, that used locals to police its lower tiers, with a comforting illusion of local autonomy. For Indirect Rule to work, however, both at the ideological and the practical level, it was essential

that everybody involved - or at least everybody whose voice was likely to be heard - believed that rural African society did indeed in some essential sense, retain its old pre-colonial structures of authority and forms of social organisation. It is true that in many areas a genuine *de facto* colonial presence was slow in establishing itself, but nevertheless, I would argue, *analytically* the imposition of colonial rule is a moment of fundamental rupture. One of the great silences underpinning the British colonial state's understanding of itself in the area of Indirect Rule in sub-Saharan Africa, was the unspoken denial of the basic reality that the establishment of *Pax Britanicus*, and of the colonial power as the ultimate authority over land, law and so on, necessarily stripped away the power base on which pre-colonial political authority rested. It is against this silence that the project of understanding and controlling the colonised society takes shape; a project which was at the heart of the Rhodes Livingstone Institute studies.

Central to this project was the concept of 'the tribe'. When fledgling anthropologists arrived at the RLI to carry out their first fieldwork, they were first dispatched on a preliminary trip to a particular 'tribe'. Clutching a bundle of RLI index cards, they were expected to plot out the basic structures of this 'tribe'. A characteristic piece which resulted from one of these first forays, was an article by William Watson (who went on to write *Tribal Cohesion in a Money Economy: a Study of the Mambwe People of Zambia*) entitled 'The Kaonde Village' (1954). They would then return to the RLI and set out for their main fieldwork in some other area. Whatever the topic of their research ended up being, the starting point was always a particular 'tribe'; for instance, for Victor Turner the Ndembu, for Watson the Mambwe, for Elizabeth Colson the Tonga. The unquestioned assumption was that for rural Africans the basic unit of social life was the 'tribe'. To trace out something of what lay behind this central concept for the RLI anthropologists, I have chosen to focus on a single text by Gluckman, *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society* (hereafter *Politics, Law and Ritual*).

There are several reasons why I choose this particular text. Firstly, the dominating role played by Gluckman within the RLI and in the anthropology of Central Africa. Secondly, this is a book written as a teaching text for undergraduate anthropology students in Britain, and as such concerned with laying out what Gluckman saw as some of the fundamental concepts in the discipline. Finally, *Politics, Law and Ritual* was written in 1964 (although published in 1965) at the precise moment when Northern Rhodesia was gaining Independence as Zambia, and the book can be seen as representing a summation of one variant of colonial anthropology. The fact that this brand of functionalist anthropology was already beginning to come under attack as ahistorical, as for instance in Leach's *The Political Systems of Highland Burma* (1954), means that Gluckman is anxious to defend his (Gluckman's) approach and consequently is

careful to explain very precisely what that approach is.

Gluckman describes *Politics, Law and Ritual* as 'a statement of how one social anthropologist, working in the full tradition of the subject, sees *the general problem of rule and disorder in social life.*'(1965:xxiv, emphasis added) A formulation which surely echoes a central concern of the colonial state. The particular area *Politics, Law and Ritual* deals with is that, 'of political struggle and order, of law and social control, and of stability and change in tribal societies.' (*ibid*:xxi) Gluckman explains his choice of the term tribal as follows:

> By 'tribal society' I mean the kind of community which was once described by the term 'primitive society', a term now rightly rejected. Others call this type of community 'pre-literate' or 'pre-industrial'. These are appropriate terms, but I prefer 'tribal', since 'tribe' was used to describe most of the communities of Europe, virtually up to feudal times. And forms of social organization akin to those communities, are what I am dealing with.

Gluckman goes on to define the characteristics of tribal society,

> Basic to a tribal society is the egalitarian economy, with relatively simple tools to produce and primary goods to consume. The powerful and wealthy use their might and goods to support dependants; for they are unable to raise their own standard of living with the materials available.
>
> (*ibid*:xv)

He explicitly distinguishes tribal societies from peasant societies.

> [O]n the whole I judged that the study of peasants was another field. The study of tribal society has stimulated, and been stimulated by, the study of peasants. It would have produced a far more superficial book had I tried to draw on the wealth in this somewhat distinctive field, even though many of the social processes with which I am concerned are represented there.
>
> (*ibid*:xxv)

We are not told, however, *what* it is that is specifically different; significantly there is no entry in the index under 'peasant'.

For Gluckman the category 'tribe' is essentially descriptive and unproblematic, referring to a straightforward 'fact' of colonial life. Taking the passages I have quoted, we can summarise the basic characteristics of Gluckman's category 'tribe' as follows. Firstly, 'tribes' represent a distinct type of social organisation, and one that was characteristic of an earlier, pre-

feudal stage of European history. Secondly, this social organisation is based on an 'egalitarian' economy. Since this egalitarian economy can also have hierarchies of wealth and power, its egalitarianism would seem to refer to the fact that the wealthy and powerful 'are unable to raise their own standard of living with the materials available' and instead, 'use their might and goods to support dependants'. Thirdly, its technology is that of 'relatively simple tools' producing 'primary goods'. Much of the meaning of this model of the tribe is to be found, I would argue, no so much in its explicit features, but in its silences; the questions with which it is not concerned. It is on some of these I want to focus, and on their significance within a colonial context.

Although 'tribal' social organisation is located as a particular stage within the development of Europe, the question of *how* 'tribal' societies become transformed into non-tribal societies is not addressed. The question of history, in the sense of non-reversible change, is for Gluckman, as for other functionalist anthropologists, not the business of anthropology. 'Anthropologists analyze a society as if it were in a state of equilibrium.' Equilibrium here being, 'the tendency of a system after disturbance to return to its previous state.' (*ibid*:279) In this context Gluckman goes on to explain, 'While we are concerned with tribal societies it is easier to make this kind of analysis [ie assuming a tendency to return to equilibrium] because they were restricted in their external relations and their economies were stationary.' (*ibid*:281) 'Tribal' economies therefore are not only outside history, they are self-contained entities which can be analyzed in isolation from the wider colonial economy. By the time Gluckman was writing *Politics, Law and Ritual* he was sensitive to the developing criticism of the functionalist paradigm, criticism which he saw as essentially misguided, insisting that, 'Every study of a particular tribe that I have cited in the course of this book, *after analysing the tribal equilibrium*, considers the tribe's position since it came under European domination. (*ibid*:285, emphasis added) A formulation which merely emphasises that the key entity to be analyzed is 'the tribe', and that although colonisation may have brought changes, this basic entity, 'the tribe' persists. A particularly problematic assumption given that Gluckman's definition of tribal social organisation defines it in terms of particular *economic* structures. Even if we accept 'simple' technology and the lack of the possibility of direct economic accumulation as features of pre-colonial African economies - and this is questionable in itself - these are characteristics which are likely to be profoundly effected by incorporation into a wider colonial economy; we certainly cannot simply assume that they will persist.

Just as Gluckman's model of 'the tribe' is silent as to how a 'tribe' might cease to be a 'tribe', so too is it silent as to the history of how this form of social organisation developed.

The very nature of the model represses questions about how the structures of the rural areas in British Central Africa have come to have the specific form they have at this particular historical moment. However much the turbulent history of nineteenth century, or even eighteenth century, Africa may be acknowledged, there is an implicit, unspoken assumption that all this history *happened to* some basic entity, 'the tribe'. Individual 'tribes' may have disappeared and others come into being, and all may have been subject to that favourite process of functionalist anthropologists, 'fusion and fission', but in some essentialist sense 'the tribe' as a form of social organisation persisted.

It was this implicit assumption that enabled the RLI anthropologists, to assume so confidently that it was possible to uncover the 'tribal equilibrium' of peoples whose structures of political life had undergone a radical transformation little more that a generation previously. The British South Africa Company had gained control of most of what became Northern Rhodesia in 1899. A crucial dimension of the Yao peoples' economy, for instance, prior to the imposition of *pax Britanica*, was slave raiding, similarly the pre-colonial Lozi state depended to an important extent on tribute labour. Yet Clyde Mitchell, who wrote about the Yao (1956), and Gluckman himself, who wrote about the Lozi[4], nonetheless treated these 'tribes' as if these radical changes could be ignored and the continuing Yao and Lozi tribal structures, surviving since pre-colonial times, could be discovered through research on contemporary communities living under colonial rule. The point here is not that such a claim is *ipso facto* false, but that neither Mitchell nor Gluckman - nor the other RLI anthropologists - felt it necessary to demonstrate *why* this continuity could be assumed.

As I have stressed, Gluckman's brief definition of 'tribal society' is not concerned with distinguishing this form of social organisation from such other forms, those characteristic of peasant society for instance, or with explaining why 'tribal society' can be treated as an autonomous entity despite its embeddedness within a colonial state. Essentially, the model is a descriptive rather than a theoretical one. I would argue that why Gluckman, as it were, can get away with this as an adequately 'scientific' and rigorous model, is because standing behind it, and providing it with its real substance, is a powerful 'common sense' (using this term in a Gramscian sense, see for instance Gramsci, 1971:223-233) or popular concept of 'the tribe'. A common sense 'fact' within colonial discourse - a 'fact' that survives remarkably unscathed within current popular discourse about Africa - is that the basic set of social relations within which Africans live is 'the tribe';

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[4]Gluckman wrote a number of monographs and articles about the Lozi, one of the most influential being *The Judicial Process among the Barotse of Northern Rhodesia* (1955)

it is the nature of 'tribal customs' that explain Africans' identities and behaviour. Ultimately, the definition of 'tribe' is simply the units in which Africans live. What *Politics, Law and Ritual* is concerned with, is exploring aspects of an *empirically* given entity, 'the tribe'. And the empirical reality within which the category 'tribe' assumed its particular African meaning was that of colonialism and the problems of colonial 'rule and disorder'. The reality was that there were colonised peoples among whom order had to be maintained and disorder avoided. Part of what the category 'tribe' does is to demarcate the colonised not in terms of a power relation between them and their colonial overlords, but in terms of a separate world which they, but not their colonisers, inhabit; a way of seeing colonial society which helps obscure the nature of its real power relations.

Not all Africans were rural Africans however. The economy of Northern Rhodesia, for instance, depended on its mines with their armies of African workers; and throughout the rural areas of central and southern Africa migrant labour was a basic fact of life. In a number of regions at any one time it was common for 40 to 60 percent of able-bodied men to be away working as migrant labourers. It might be imagined that the notion of Africans isolated within their separate tribal world would be undermined by the reality of Africans in town, but the stereotype of the 'tribal' African who did not 'belong' in town was also invoked as a way of dealing with this uncomfortable reality. Although, at one and the same moment, this lack of fit can be seen as underlying some of the profound anxiety 'Africans in town' aroused in the colonial mind. Recently James Ferguson has questioned the whole model of cyclical labour migration in colonial Zambia, with its assumption of firmly rural based migrant workers who come to town for strictly limited periods, and return regularly to their rural homes. Ferguson argues that in fact this model is something of a colonial artifact and that there has been a 'persistent inter-penetration of the rural with the urban that has characterised town life on the Zambian Copperbelt from its very beginnings right through to the present.' (1990:621)

Gluckman's use of 'tribe' in the urban context is interesting. On the one hand, he argued that once Africans move to town they may well start identifying with different entities, such as those based on class, but then they cease to be tribesmen (1961). On the other hand, in *Politics, Law and Ritual*, he also uses tribalism in a far looser, essentially metaphorical sense, which would seem to have little to do with the definition of 'tribal' I quoted above. He writes, for instance,

> Tribalism acts, though not as strongly, in British towns: for in these Scots and Welsh and Irish, French, Jews, Lebanese, Africans, have their own associations, and their domestic life is ruled by their own national customs, insofar as British law and conditions allow. But all may unite in political parties

> and in trade unions or employers federations. Tribalism in the Central African towns is, in sharper form, the tribalism of all towns.
>
> (*ibid:*292)

One of the things this cosy invocation of British municipal life achieves is effortlessly to insert tribal identities, and tribal organisation into those colonial spaces, the towns, which are precisely the spaces defined by the colonial state as those where Africans do not belong. And to insert them in a way that is totally unthreatening. Once again the trick is only possible because 'the tribe' exists as an apparently straightforward, if vague, common sense category in popular discourse. But if 'scientific' categories gain resonance and power through their unspoken links with lay or popular categories, so these in turn gain authority and credibility through their links with 'scientific' discourse. In the second section of this paper I want to look at a particular group of colonial officials, those stationed in what is now North-Western Province, and at how they made use of the notion of 'the tribe' in the reports they wrote.

Admistering 'Tribes'

> Kasempa was real, the outer world but a shadow, and letters from it, from ghosts. It made many Europeans terribly assertive. One acted one's part upon an enormous empty stage: the "compleat man" was untrammelled if unseen. Grey of Falloden feeding pigeons, Gladstone hewing at trees, even Dr Watson with a brisk manner and a bottle of iodine. One could play out such fantasies in real life with real people.
> (A colonial official stationed in North-Western Province in the 1950s, Short, 1973:56)

Northern Rhodesia had originally become part of the British sphere of influence more or less by accident. The region came under the control of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) in 1899, but as one historian of Zambia put it, 'Northern Rhodesia was simply an awkwardly shaped piece of debris resulting from Rhodes's failure to obtain Katanga' (Roberts, 1976:175). Until 1924, when the British Colonial Office took over the region from the BSAC, the Company's focus of interest remained its southern territories. Even the development of a huge copper mining industry in the 1920s, which by 1945 had made Northern Rhodesia one of the world's major copper producers, produced little in the way of revenue for the colony itself. Throughout the colonial period the administration was always looking for ways to reduce expenditure, particularly on the rural areas, which in general were seen primarily as labour reserves whether for the colony itself, or for the mines and other industries of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. This concern with cost cutting made the idea of Indirect

Rule, with its co-option of local authority figures as an extremely cheap lower tier of colonial administration, very attractive to the colonial state, meaning as it did that the number of vastly more expensive British colonial officials could be kept to a minimum.

The situation of British colonial officials stationed in rural districts, and particularly those in the more remote districts like those of what is now North-Western Province, had a very particular character. Such an official was one of a tiny band of Europeans made up of a handful of other officials - all male - together with some wives and families, set down in the midst of a sea of Africans, often with a couple of hundred miles or more of dirt road between them and the nearest other Europeans. The same official from whom I quoted at the beginning of this section, captures the sense of being a tiny beleaguered band, but a band that was, to echo J.M. Barrie, engaged in 'an awfully big adventure'.

> Administrative officers looked upon Kasempa as something of a punishment station. "Coming men", even then the bane of a Service whose ideal was a "band of brothers", did their best to avoid such a posting. It put character before cleverness.
>
> (*ibid*:29)

Their job involved being both a clear and unambiguous symbol of the might and authority of an Empire beyond challenge; and managing the practical day-to-day realities of colonial law and order, collecting taxes, punishing criminals and so on. The mental and physical boundaries between colonial officials and the colonized world over which they were set, were always fraught and dangerous. On the one hand, the maintenance of their position as awe inspiring symbols of Empire - and indeed their security as isolated individuals usually far from much tangible imperial might - demanded that they maintain a proper distance between themselves and the colonized. Their own psychological wellbeing too tended to demand this, particularly since the social conventions of colonial society were severe on those who strayed across this boundary, and in such small isolated communities ostracism was a powerful sanction. The danger of 'going native' was always one of the structuring fears of European colonialism. This is one of the collective nightmares that underpins Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and gives it much of its power. On the other hand, the need to be effective administrators demanded that colonial officials *should* 'penetrate' the mysteries of the colonised society; their 'effectiveness' depended on their understanding of local realities. Then too there was the psychological need to impose some kind of conceptual order, and to be able to explain, at the very least to yourself, *why* so much of what you were trying to do, such as implement the various colonial schemes for 'development', were not working. The colonial official therefore, had simultaneously to 'get to know', *and* remain aloof from the colonised. One result of this is a knowledge structured around

essential, unalterable difference. This difference ultimately explaining why 'we' (the colonising power) have a 'natural' right to rule 'them' (the colonised).

For British colonial administrators in sub-Saharan Africa the central concept in which this notion of difference was gathered together was that of 'the tribe'. The basic unit of rural society was 'the tribe'; and 'tribes' were the primary actors in rural life. The people they were charged with administering were 'tribal' peoples living according to 'tribal' norms. The 'tribe' was both a comfortingly familiar and yet 'scientific' category. It should be remembered that almost all these colonial administrators were the product of an education system in which the classical authors of Greece and Rome loomed large; accounts of barbarians, Germanic tribes and ancient Britons formed a basic part of their mental furniture. This was how Europeans themselves had lived in some distant past. The familiarity of the concept meant that its meaning did not have to be spelt out, what 'tribal' actually meant could be simply taken as self evident, which removed any need to look too closely at just what it was that differentiated the colonised from the coloniser. It could function as a marker of difference, but a marker which also apparently explained that difference.

F.H. Melland who was a colonial official for more than twenty years and spent eleven years in northwestern Zambia in a Kaonde speaking area, illustrates how parallels from the Ancient World appeared to offer lessons on the nature of 'tribal society'. In the book he wrote about the Kaonde, *In Witch-Bound Africa: An Account of the Primitive Kaonde Tribe and Their Beliefs*, he gives the following 'historical digression'.

> One of the most close parallels to our rule in tropical Africa is furnished by the Romans in Britain. For some time the Romans thought of nothing but law, order and discipline. Boadicea's rebellion taught Rome a lesson, and under a more enlightened policy ... the Britons were taught to build houses instead of huts, to cultivate, to start industries, develop mines, export their produce, and so on: result, progress and peace. ... That Roman policy laid the foundations of a progress that made those despised savages advance further than any advance dreamt of by the Romans.
>
> (1923:304)

The concept of 'the tribe' was used both to explain Africans in general, *all* Africans were 'tribal' and shared certain characteristics which marked them out from Europeans; and to explain differences between Africans. As Melland put it in the preface to his book, explaining how although it focused on the Kaonde, he hoped it would be useful for,

> all who are going to live and work among similar Bantu peoples, even if far from the BaKaonde; for, while their customs, habits, and beliefs differ there is, still, a great similarity in these matters ... To acquire an insight into one tribe helps one to understand others.
> (*ibid*:8)

And it was 'the tribe' that was the basic unit in the system of Indirect Rule, even if the uncomfortable reality that some 'tribes' did not seem to conform to the stereotype would insist on complicating things from time to time. As one official complained,

> The difficulty in the Kasempa district is that the Kaonde have little or no tribal organisation ... the idea of sitting together in a Court, is extremely repugnant to them. As one elderly petty chief ... put it to the writer, "I am a lone elephant bull, I wish to walk alone", and this is the attitude taken up by the majority of petty chiefs which is not conducive to the success of native courts as at present constituted.
> (ZNA/7/1/13/6 Provincial Annual Report Kasempa 1930)

Within the basic category there were different 'tribes' with different 'tribal customs', and within the colonial discourse there developed an extensive repertory of tribal stereotypes. The Annual Reports and District Notebooks which colonial officials were required to keep, reveal the major role played by these stereotypes, and the way the different characteristics of different tribes were evoked to explain what was happening in particular areas. Each official would tend to have his own favoured tribe, or tribes, and his own *bete noires*. In northwestern Northern Rhodesia two groups of people who were continually contrasted were the Kaonde, and the Luvale and Chokwe people. Kaonde speaking people had moved into this region from the North, during the three centuries prior to colonisation, while Luvale and Chokwe speakers originally from Angola and the west of the Zambezi River were moving eastwards and settling in 'Kaonde' areas during the colonial period. The two groups had, and still have, agricultural systems organised around different staples; for the Kaonde sorghum, and for the Luvale and Chokwe cassava. The tribal stereotypes used in the District Notebooks and other official documents, however, go far beyond any simple difference in cultivation patterns, as the following quotations demonstrate.

In 1940 we find one official writing,

> The Kaonde are naturally of fine physique being often six feet or more in height and well proportioned. As these people have no cattle largely owing to tsetse fly their physical condition must it is presumed be largely due to the high dietic qualities of the kaffir corn.
> ZNA Sec 2/936 Kasempa Tour Reports 1940-47, Tour Report

no 2, 1940

While in 1948, another writes,

> [T]he two elements in the population present a contrast in health and fitness which one cannot but ascribe to diet to some considerable extent. The immigrant element in the population [ie Luvale and Chokwe] are well fed, and cheerful, whilst the Kaonde are under nourished morose, and diseased. Not one was free from some deformity and I can only say that they represented about the lowest ebb of humanity that I have yet seen in Northern Rhodesia. They had no nuts, cassava, or goats at their villages, and were short of the kaffir corn which is their staple diet. "We are Kaonde: we don't grow groundnuts or cassava or keep goats, we leave that to the Chokwe and Lwena [Luvale]" which was the invariable rely heard over and over again on this tour, epitomises the inertia of the Kaonde who would prefer to remain under nourished and diseased rather than expend a little more energy in cultivation and adopt new practices.
> ZNA Sec 2/936 Kasempa Tour Reports 1940-47, Kasempa Tour Report no.2 1947 [C.M.N. White]

Ten years previously, another official, more enthusiastic about Kaonde 'potential' had noted, 'As a whole the Kaonde build good villages with well thatched huts and kitchens attached and should form a fairly fertile soil in which to start a movement for village improvement.' (ZNA Sec 2/934 Tour Reports Kasempa 1933-1939) A view echoed in 1948, 'I was disappointed in the living conditions amongst the immigrants [ie Chokwe, Luvale, Luchazi, Mumbunda]. Their villages were, on the whole, extremely dirty with poor houses. The Kaonde villages had large, well built houses and were usually much cleaner.' (ZNA Sec 2/939 Tour Reports Kasempa District 1949) A view not shared by one official in 1957, 'Village housing is, generally, good amongst the Chokwe, who take a pride in their houses,.. and poor among the Kaonde, who prefer to spend their money upon bicycles rather than sound houses.' (ZNA Sec 2/947 Kasempa Tour Records 1957, Tour Report no 2/1957) About the same time, another official, who clearly did not have much faith in Kaonde 'potential', wrote, 'The Kaonde as a whole are not a tribe which believe in a vast amount of exertion and it is, therefore, here that one finds the element of self-help less well developed than in some other parts of the Province.' (ZNA Sec 2/137 North-West Province Annual Reports 1954-5)

These comments on physique and housing are particularly illuminating about the role of 'tribal' stereotypes in that ostensibly they are concerned with straightforward, observable 'facts'. The officials who saw either, Kaonde of 'fine physique', 'often more than six feet tall'; or 'under nourished morose, and

diseased' Kaonde, all of whom had 'some deformity' and who 'represented about the lowest ebb of humanity... in Northern Rhodesia' were observing the same population. Just as those who saw 'good' or 'poor' Kaonde housing had travelled through the same villages.

There are also more obviously subjective comments.

> [W]e visited one Mbundu village and one Lovale village. Apart from the fact that they have grown groundnuts and the Kaonde do not, I could see nothing of worth in these two villages; they have few children, are very dirty, and their housing standards are poor. *They were obviously more primitive and less manly than the Kaonde who treat them with considerable contempt.*
> ZNA Sec 2/940 Kasempa Tour Reports 1950-51, Tour Report no 7 of 1950 (my emphasis)

Quite often, as here, the concept of 'the tribe' shades into that of 'the race'. The notion that humankind is divided into distinct 'races', each with their own specific characteristics passing from generation to generation, had become increasingly dominant in nineteenth century discourses not only around colonialism, but around history in general. As with 'the tribe', the notion of 'the race' was used both in academic and 'scientific' discourse[5], and in that of popular everyday life. The kind of entity 'race' was seen to be in the inter-war period is captured in the first edition of the enormously influential *Cambridge Ancient History*, published in 1924, and quoted by Martin Bernal in *Black Athena*,

> Ancient peoples come upon the stage of history ... in a certain order ... each with a make-up congruous with the part they will play ... history presupposes the formation of that character, ... in the greenroom of the remoter past: and the sketch which follows ... is intended ... to describe how men came by these qualities of build and temperament...
>
> (Bernal,1987:389)

As with the concept of 'the tribe', much of the explanatory power and persuasiveness 'race' as a category was, and indeed still is, its combination of being apparently 'scientific,' describing what seem to be undeniable 'facts' (such as that there are inherited physical differences between people), and at the same time including a shifting range of highly subjective psychological traits and propensities. The 'scientific' authority providing

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[5]Martin Bernal in *Black Athena* (1987) explores in careful detail the development of the nineteenth century concept of race and its structuring role in the various academic disciplines that grew up around the study of the ancient world.

credibility to the purported mental characteristics. The power of these porous grab bags of mental and physical qualities, that makes them so impervious to specific challenge, depends on them being both ordinary 'common sense' terms whose meaning is shared within a particular culture, and being inherently vague. Take a quality like 'manliness', used in the quotation above, for instance. We can assume that in the culture of colonial officials everybody 'knew' what 'manliness' meant, but at the same time would probably have been hard put to explain in any precise way just how you could measure 'a tribe' on the scale of manliness 'scientifically'. As with the predictions of astrologers, terms which seem to say something but which can be so stretched as to fit almost anything, can be profoundly reassuring. In the cloudy soup of tribe or race, as Raymond Williams puts it, 'Physical, cultural and socio-economic differences are taken up, projected and generalized, and so confused that different kinds of variation are made to stand for or imply each other.' (1983:250) A comment by one District Commissioner is particularly revealing of the way 'tribe' and 'race' could merge with one another.

> Administratively, the only thing which these people [ie Luchazi, Chokwe and Mbundu immigrants] understand is firm control without any compromise... Discussion is fatal... They have remarkable resemblance mentally to another immigrant race so well known in the medieval and modern world.
> ZNA Sec 2/941 Kasempa Tour Reports 1951, Tour Report 9/1951

A statement which is also revealing of a pervasive undercurrent of anti-semitism in the shared culture of British colonial officials; it being assumed here that the reference to Jews will not only be obvious but that it can be taken for granted that 'we', i.e. those reading this report, will share a basic stereotype of what Jews are like. Lacking such an assumption, it is difficult to see any particular resemblance between the Angolan immigrants and Jews beyond their shared position as objects of a particular kind of racist stereotyping.

So far I have looked at the concept of 'the tribe' as it was used by the Rhodes-Livingstone anthropologists, and by colonial officials in the field. I want now to look briefly at how the subjects of the anthropological monographs, and of the colonial state, themselves used the term 'tribe'.

The Administered

> We are not here to discuss matters of precedent or to discuss totems. We have heard about the Barotse and the Bemba tribes; we must throw away the totem barriers and be one people. We must be proud to be called Kaonde.

(ZNA, NR 4/529 Courts of Appeal and Meeting of Kaonde Chiefs, 1951)

Did local people in North-Western Province see themselves as belonging to 'tribes'? Clearly at one level they did. As in the quotation on P.13, people would refer to themselves as 'We Kaonde', or 'We Luvale', and so on, and local interpreters used the term tribe when writing up court cases in English for the records. Similarly, there were ready answers when the District Officer, or a visiting anthropologist, asked about 'tribal' law, or 'tribal' customs. But the meaning of this concept, 'the tribe', and the resonances it had, were not necessarily the same for those who belonged to 'tribes' as they were for the colonial officials or the Rhodes-Livingstone anthropologists. To illustrate this let me take the example of the north-western people I know best, the Kaonde, and look at some of the way in which they may have defined themselves.

The people who are today referred to as Kaonde, originated in what is now southern Zaire, migrating south from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries partly in response to emergence of the Luba and Lunda states. It was during this period that the Kaonde language evolved as a distinct language, and it is the Zairian languages, Sanga, Luba and Hemba to which it is most closely related (Wright, 1977:109). When I was collecting oral traditions in the late 1970s, many people would begin their account of Kaonde history with the formula, '*Atweba twi baSanga* (We are Sanga people)'. Indeed, prior to the imposition of colonial rule, it is unclear to what extent the Kaonde constituted any kind of political entity. In the previous half century or so, certain Kaonde headmen had managed with the help of guns, ivory and slaves, to raise themselves and their lineages above those of their fellows, and it seems as if some kind of a centralised power structure was beginning to emerge, but things were still very fluid when the imposition of colonial rule froze a particular moment in a continuing and turbulent power struggle. The largest political unit seems to have been a groups of clans. It was as leaders of senior lineages within particular clans that chiefs seem to have emerged and began to amass power, gradually gaining dominance over a whole clan. In time certain clans were established as royal or chiefly clans, with power over other clans, which with the emergence of a royal clan became commoner clans.

The Kaonde term for clan is *mukoka*, and interestingly the only printed Kaonde dictionary (Wright, 1985), gives as one of the translations of 'tribe', *mukoka* (pl. *mikoka*). The other translation of tribe it gives is *mutundu* (*mitundu*), a very general term which can be glossed as kind, or type, and can be applied to people, animals, plants as well as inanimate objects. The point here is that there is no term in Kaonde which refers to a particular kind of political organisation, 'the tribe'. There were, and are, only *mikoka*, and actual empirical entities, the

Kaonde people, the Lunda people, the Europeans, who may constitute a distinct entity in many different ways. They may be a language group, may have a common historical origin, or share a particular agricultural system. The quotation on p.13 illustrates this sense of what it means to be Kaonde, "We are Kaonde: we don't grow groundnuts or cassava or keep goats, we leave that to the Chokwe and Lwena [Luvale]." The only common factor being that these are groups that perceive themselves, or in some cases, are perceived by others as constituting entities in which membership is normally through birth. In the 1980s those Europeans connected with a primarily German funded Integrated Rural Development Project, not all of whom were German, were seen by many local people in Chizela, one of the districts in North-Western Province as part of a common entity, *Magermans*, and people were sometimes puzzled to discover that not all *Magermans* spoke the same language. *Magermans*, however, did indeed share a common culture, the culture of 'the development expert' and foreign aid worker, and although this is by no means a homogeneous and uniform culture, from the perspective of northwestern villagers it was just as much of a distinct group as 'the Kaonde' or 'the Luvale' were.

It may be doubtful whether the Kaonde constituted a distinct entity at the beginning of the colonial period, but during the colonial period they certainly learnt that in the world of colonial administration Africans were organised in 'tribes' and it was primarily as 'tribes' that claims could be made on the colonial state. And this is why by 1951 we find the Kaonde chief quoted at the beginning of this section saying, 'We have heard about the Barotse and the Bemba tribes; we much throw away the totem barriers [i.e. think in terms of 'tribes' rather than clans] and be one people. We must be proud to be called Kaonde.' Essentially, the only language which the colonial state, and its representatives at the local level, were prepared to listen to claims by local people was a language of 'tribal' law and 'tribal' customs; a language which assumed that these laws and customs derived from an ancient and unchanging past. In other words, that they were 'traditional'. And since the model of 'the African tribe' whether that of anthropologist, or colonial official, presupposed homogeneity within 'the tribe', the question of just which interests within 'the tribe' were reflected in 'tribal' law and custom, did not arise within the colonial discourse.

Conclusion

Having explored some of the many different ways in which the shifting category of 'the tribe' was used by professional anthropologists, colonial officials and Africans, I want to end by returning to the question with which I began. To what extent, and in what ways, did the concept of 'the tribe', as it was used in colonial Zambia, help shape the realities of that time and place?

As regards the anthropologists associated with the RLI and the colonial officials, the concept of the tribe helped structure the reality of the colonised world, in that it gave a particular shape to what they saw as the problems of 'law and disorder' in British Central Africa. As when struggles around working and living conditions on the mines, for instance, was seen as a problem of rural 'tribesmen' becoming 'detribalised', rather than, say, struggles between labour and capital. For those categorised as 'tribal', this powerful naming also had effects. At one level, Africans were inescapably enmeshed in the reality of institutions based on the category of 'the tribe', such as the Native Authorities of Indirect Rule. In addition they were also enmeshed within an overarching colonial hegemony with at its heart a notion of irreducible difference - and not only difference but inequality. What this difference consisted of in Africa was above all a difference between the modern, the civilised, the developed, and the tradition bound 'tribe'. 'Tribes' being condemned by their very 'tribal' nature to slumber in a sleep of superstition and indolence until awakened by the kiss of the colonial prince. Those Africans who had the temerity to awaken on their own to any of the new opportunities offered by the new colonial world were dismissed as dangerously 'detribalised'.

> The miscalled 'mission boy', the worker on the mines and on farms, the house boy (all equally anathema to the chiefs and headmen), pick up bits of knowledge, lose their old tribal and religious checks and become and disintegrating, destructive element.
>
> (Melland, 1923:305)

'The tribe' helped provide those engaged in the colonial enterprise with a morally justifiable gloss explaining why colonial rule was necessary. Africans were 'tribal' and therefore simply could not handle the economic or political institutions of 'modern' society. At the same time, the notion of 'the tribe' helped those engaged in running the colonial state to feel that they understood the world of the colonised, that they knew where the roots of colonial 'law and disorder' lay, and that their little world of busy administration had some purpose and function. The fear that the whole colonial enterprise might in the end be absurd and meaningless, and ultimately doomed is one of the basic fears underlying many novels of colonial life, from Conrad to Orwell and Foster.

The concept of 'the tribe' contained Africans, freezing them in homogeneous communities, *gemeinschaften*, remote both from the workings of the world capitalist economy and from history, ruled by 'tribal law and custom' which had been handed down from a past lost in the mists of time. In line with the principle of Indirect Rule, questions of the role and nature of the state and its relation to individual colonial subjects, were deflected onto the role and nature of 'the tribe', which for the African *was* the

state. Similarly, in as much as major realities such as the development of a hugh copper mining industry in Northern Rhodesia - at the time of Independence copper accounted for 95 percent of the country's exports (Davies, 1971:114) - were pushed to the sidelines of analysis while the spotlight shone on 'the tribe', the notion of the tribe *did* alter the landscape that was seen; particularly the landscape as seen by the colonial state and the anthropologists of the RLI. Just as their stereotypes of 'manly' or 'diseased' Kaonde affected how they saw the villagers in the villages through which they travelled.

But given that the concept of 'the tribe' helped map out the colonial terrain, there is still the question of just *how* are concepts like this produced, where do they come from? It would be quite wrong for instance, to see them as the conscious creations of a colonial state intent on mystification. Rather, they come into being through - to use a term from Mikhail Bakhtin - social dialogue[6]. The categories we use to order and manipulate reality do not float above the material world in some airy and self-contained empyrean; they are an inextricable part of material reality. Meanings are continually struggled over, albeit often in an implicit, unacknowledged way, as groups and individuals strive to have their version of 'reality' accepted. And these versions do not have to be radically different, even subtle shifts in emphasis stretch and change categories. The relationship between categories and the realities they point to, is like that between maps and the physical topography to which they refer. Just as particular maps take particular forms depending on what they are to be used for, and are judged ultimately on how 'useful' they are, so too in the case of categories that attempt to map social reality. There is always a dialogue between signifier and signified as, concepts and categories in hand, we attempt to chart our way through the ever shifting maze of social life.

Let me finish with a couple of brief thoughts as to what hegemony means. One measure of hegemony is the degree to which the conceptual maps of dominant groups manage to maintain their

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[6] The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it - it does not approach the object from the sidelines.

(Bakhtin, 1981:276-277)

unassailable authority for subordinated groups even in the face of a clear lack of fit between those subordinated groups *experience* and how this experience is explained to them. The problem for the subordinated being, how do you move from a sense that you cannot trust the maps and even though you may pack them in your rucksack, it is best not to use them, to a confidence that not only can you make your own maps, but you are prepared to assert their superiority to the existing maps? And this shift is not only about confidence, hegemony is also about power over the conditions within which struggle takes place. Another measure of hegemony is the degree to which a ruling group is able, through its *practical* control of institutional structures, to confine the challenges of subordinated groups within a terrain mapped out by the dominant group. However creative Africans might have been in 'imagining' their social relations, and however perceptive as to the real relations underpinning colonial society, they were confronted with a colonial order which in very concrete ways demanded that demands or claims put forward by Africans use the discourse of 'tribes'. In a recent piece exploring the contested and complex nature of the invention or imagining of ethnic identities Terence Ranger has stressed that, 'it was one thing to invent boundary markers and another to fill them with imaginative meaning' (Ranger, forthcoming). My concern in this paper has been to shift the emphasis of this comment; that is, while I am in complete agreement that it is important to acknowledge the complexity and richness of the processes whereby boundary markers are filled, we also need to pay close attention to the precise nature of those empty boundary markers (such as 'tribe') themselves, and who it is who hews them.

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