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“Literate Ethno-History” in Colonial Zambia: the Case of *Ifikolwe Fyandi na Bantu Bandi*¹

Giacomo Macola

I

Most pre-colonial African states were characterized by a manifest disparity of control between centre and periphery.² This was certainly true of the kingdom of Kazembe – founded as a result of the collapse of the Ruund colony on the Mukulweji River towards the end of the seventeenth century and the subsequent eastward migration of an heterogeneous group of “Lundaized” title-holders.³ A set of flexible institutions and symbols of power helped the rulers of the emerging kingdom to maintain a degree of influence over much of southern Katanga and the westernmost reaches of the plateau to the east of the Luapula River. But in the lower Luapula valley, the heartland of the polity from about the mid-eighteenth century, eastern Lunda rule impinged more profoundly upon the prerogatives of autochthonous communities and hence called for the

¹ My stay in Zambia and fieldwork in Mweru-Luapula between September 1998 and August 1999 were made possible by the generous award of a ‘Fees Only’ Postgraduate Studentship from the British Academy and a Research Student Fellowship from the School of Oriental and African Studies. I was further assisted by small grants from the Central Research Fund of the University of London and the SOAS Scholarship Committee (Additional Award for Fieldwork). All these financial aids are thankfully acknowledged. I am also indebted to Professor Andrew Roberts and Pedro Machado, for their comments on an early version of this paper, and Professor Ian Cunnison, who allowed me to consult the bulk of his undigested fieldnotes, 1948-51.

² E.g., I. Kopytoff, “The Internal African Frontier: the Making of African Political Culture”, in id., ed., *The African Frontier. The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1987), 29.

³ For a detailed discussion of the spread of Ruund influences between the Mukulweji and the upper Lualaba River, see J.J. Hoover, “The Seduction of Ruweji: Reconstructing Ruund History (The Nuclear Lunda: Zaire, Angola, Zambia)”, 2 vols, PhD, Yale University, 1978, 244-270, and R.E. Schecter, “History and Historiography on a Frontier of Lunda Expansion: the Origins and Early Developments of the Kanongesha”, PhD, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1976, chapters 2 and 3.

elaboration of legitimizing devices of a special kind.⁴ In this latter context, the production and diffusion of an account of the prestigious beginnings of the *Mwata Kazembes'* dynasty, its early dealings with the original inhabitants of the area and later evolution served the dual purpose of fostering a dominant and discrete Lunda identity and cementing the links of subordination between foreign conquerors and local lineage or sub-clan leaders.⁵ This paper is an extended commentary on *Ifikolwe Fyandi na Bantu Bandi*,⁶ a mid-twentieth century offshoot of this royal tradition and a fine example of vernacular "literate ethno-history".⁷

Nowadays, *Ifikolwe Fyandi* is first and foremost the "tribal Bible" that shapes the ethnic consciousness of eastern Lunda royals and aristocrats and stifles the emergence of alternative historical discourses. *Ifikolwe Fyandi*, however, is more than yet another manifestation of the "ubiquity" of "feedback",⁸ for its local hegemony is mirrored by its pervasiveness within the historiography of the eastern savanna of Central Africa. Owing mainly to the existence of an accurate English translation of the original Bemba text,⁹ the eastern Lunda ethno-history figures prominently in most monographic studies of the eastern savanna's pre-colonial history. Yet, with one or two unheeded exceptions shortly to be mentioned, scholars have overlooked the

⁴ See G. Macola, "A Political History of the Kingdom of Kazembe (Zambia)", PhD, University of London, 2000, 76-108.

⁵ I. Cunnison, *History on the Luapula. An Essay on the Historical Notions of a Central African Tribe*, Rhodes-Livingstone Paper 21, (Cape Town, 1951; reprinted Manchester 1969), 23-26; A.D. Roberts, *A History of the Bemba. Political Growth and Change in North-Eastern Zambia before 1900*, (London, 1973), 21-22.

⁶ E. Labrecque, ed., *Ifikolwe Fyandi na Bantu Bandi* [My Ancestors and My People], (London, 1951; **reprinted ...**).

⁷ "Literate ethno-history" can be defined as "a half-product, halfway between such traditions and reminiscences as operate within a strictly local frame of reference, on the one hand, and scholarly argument, on the other." W. van Binsbergen, *Tears of Rain. Ethnicity and History in Central Western Zambia*, (London and New York, 1992), 60.

⁸ D. Henige, "Truths yet Unborn? Oral Tradition as a Casualty of Culture Contact", *Journal of African History*, XXIII (1982), 395.

⁹ I. Cunnison, ed. and tr., *Central Bantu Historical Texts II. Historical Traditions of the Eastern Lunda*, Rhodes-Livingstone Communication 23, (Lusaka, 1962).

circumstances and context of its compilation. As a result, the real nature of the text has been missed, and the treatment of the historical data contained therein has suffered accordingly. The purpose of this article is to discuss the principal problems associated with the fruition of *Ifikolwe Fyandi* and to spell out the restrictive conditions under which historians can still turn to it as a source of genuine evidence about the pre-colonial past. In order to accomplish this aim, I now proceed to examine the editorial, political and social history of the text; the broader implications of my approach are sketched in the concluding section of the paper.

II

Since the publication of *Historical Traditions of the Eastern Lunda*, a few scholars have questioned the “purity” of the eastern Lunda royal tradition in its written form. On the one hand, its composite character has been stressed: it being, in Cunnison’s own words, a collective undertaking which “brought in the use of historical criticism, the comparison of the various traditions, which is quite foreign to indigenous histories [...]. The Lunda written history [...] is more than one man can remember.”¹⁰ On the other, Roberts has wondered about the extent of the role played by Father Edouard Labrecque, the editor of the Bemba text and an indefatigable organizer of culture throughout the whole of colonial North-Eastern Zambia.¹¹ Following Cunnison’s remarks, it has

¹⁰ Cunnison, *History on the Luapula*, 5-6. This is how Cunnison described in 1950-1 the still unpublished typescript – “History of the Baluunda People” – which was then being edited by Fr. Labrecque.

¹¹ Apart from being directly involved in the editing and publication of the official eastern Lunda ethno-history, in the 1930s and 1940s, Labrecque compiled or helped to compile tribal histories and ethnographies of the Bemba, Bena Mukulu, Ushi and Shila: E. Labrecque, “La Tribu des Babemba: I, les Origines des Babemba”, *Anthropos*, XXVIII (1933), 633-648; id., “Les Origines des Babemba de la Rhodésie du Nord (Zambia)”, *Annali del Pontificio Museo Missionario Etnologico*, XXXII (1968), 249-329; id., ed., *History of the Bena Ngoma (Ba-Cungu wa Mukulu)*, (London, 1949); id, ed., “The Story of the Shila People, Aborigenes of the Luapula-Mweru along with Their Fishing, Hunting Customs, Folklores and Praisewords”, typescript, n.d. (but 1947 (?)), White Fathers’ Archive-Zambia (WFA-Z), Lusaka, Section 1: Manuscripts. At first sight, B. Chimba, *A History of the Baushi*, (Ndola, 1943; reprinted in 1945 and,

been commonly believed that in 1942 Labrecque was present at the meetings during which Shadrack Chinyanta Nankula, Mwata Kazembe XIV, and some of his title-holders spelled out the patrimony of historical data which they had inherited from previous generations.¹² What worried Roberts was the possibility that Labrecque might have interpolated within *Ifikolwe Fyandi* his own knowledge of the broader regional history. Of particular relevance was the suggestion that Labrecque's likely familiarity with some of the published literary sources relating to pre-colonial Kazembe could have led him to impress upon the Lunda narrators the need for consistency between the contents of these literary sources themselves and the royal history which they were reconstructing.¹³

Thanks to a thorough archival and philological examination, it is now possible to prove beyond dispute the fundamental validity of this intuition and follow closely, almost step by step, the modalities of Labrecque's intervention. Somewhat surprisingly, a search of the relevant White Fathers' records shows that the first – and subsequently lost – draft of what was later to become *Ifikolwe Fyandi na Bantu Bandi* was written between 1942 and 1944 *without* Labrecque being involved at all. At that time, in fact, as the Lufubu's Cahier des Mutations and Mission Diary demonstrate, Labrecque was nowhere near the lower Luapula valley. He only joined the Lufubu mission's staff in February 1945, after spending the first half of the 1940s in Kayambi and Chilubula missions.¹⁴ It was only in 1946 that the Canadian missionary began to display an interest in the manuscript that Chinyanta Nankula and his brains trust had completed two years previously.

with some modifications, in 1949), seems not to have anything to do with Labrecque. In fact, it is now certain that Chimba's work is nothing but a revised version of E. Labrecque, "Milandu ya Kale ya Baushi", typescript, 1938 (see Labrecque to Verbeek, 15 April 1981, in L. Verbeek, *Filiation et Usurpation. Histoire Socio-Politique de la Région entre Luapula et Copperbelt*, (Tervuren, 1987), 361).

¹² Cunnison, *Historical Traditions of the Eastern Lunda*, iii.

¹³ Roberts, *A History of the Bemba*, 10, n. 48; 53, n. 39; 96, n. 10.

¹⁴ The Lufubu's Cahier des Mutations et Etat Civil du Personnel can be consulted in the WFA-Z, Section 5: Zambia White Fathers. The Lufubu's Mission Diary is to be found in the Archive of the Generalate of the White Fathers, Rome.

Having enquired with the Mwata Kazembe himself at the beginning of February, Labrecque was informed that a manuscript indeed existed – “Yes”, wrote Chinyanta, “I have got a copy of the full Lunda history which were made by the Lunda elders, important men and myself in 1943-44, which is a very correct one” – and that the king appreciated Labrecque’s idea to “have it printed for us with some more particulars which you collected from some books made by old European Travellers who visited my fore grand-fathers long time ago.”¹⁵

Two years after Labrecque’s letter to Chinyanta Nankula, the first fruits of the missionary’s work started to appear, and the latter was in a position to forward to the Director of Information in Lusaka his English “A Summary of the History of the Ba-Luunda”, a typescript – so Labrecque explained – which had “been made from the MS written by a Committee of Lunda Elders under the Chairmanship of Mwata Kazembe himself; I have made use also of some other historical Documents and of controlled oral traditions.”¹⁶ In the same communication to the Director of Information, Labrecque noted that the king was “earnestly wishing to have the History of the Lunda people published in English and Bemba Literatures”, and that, “with regard to his MS in Bemba”, he was “helping him in view of publication by the African Literature Committee.” Shortly afterwards, the revised Bemba typescript – “History of the Baluunda People”¹⁷ – was also

¹⁵ Chinyanta Nankula to Labrecque, 16 February 1946, encl. in E. Labrecque, “A Summary of the History of the Ba-Luunda. The Kazembe of Lwapula (Kawambwa District)”, typescript, 1948, WFA-Z, Section 1: Manuscripts.

¹⁶ Labrecque to Director of Information, 7 January 1948, encl. in E. Labrecque, “A Summary of the History of the Ba-Luunda. The Kazembe of Lwapula (Kawambwa District)”, typescript, 1948, Archive of the History Department of the Livingstone Museum, Livingstone, TH 2/17, box 1.

¹⁷ On its second page, the undated (but 1948-9) typescript bears the French title “Histoire des Ba-Kasembe (Baluunda)”. A copy of the “History of the Baluunda People” was donated to Cunnison during his fieldwork (Cunnison, *Historical Traditions of the Eastern Lunda*, 131, n. 23) and is still enclosed in his fieldnotes. Although the second existing copy of Cunnison’s fieldnotes has disappeared from the library of the former Rhodes-Livingstone Institute for Social Research (now Institute of Economic and Social Research) in Lusaka, a copy of the “History of the Baluunda People” is still

completed. The “History of the Baluunda People” is doubtless the immediate predecessor of both *Ifikolwe Fyandi* and Labrecque’s slightly differing “Histoire des Mwata Kazembe”.¹⁸

To sum up: between 1942 and 1944, Chinyanta Nankula and his most knowledgeable local historians produced an early draft of eastern Lunda royal history. This text – which has subsequently disappeared – was purely a collection of oral traditions and reminiscences. No literary sources were employed in composing it. From 1946 Labrecque began to work on this manuscript with the explicit aim of enriching it by means of nineteenth-century published sources. Labrecque’s early editorial efforts resulted in the production of two unpublished typescripts; of these, the vernacular “History of the Baluunda People” is surely the most significant, as the published *Ifikolwe Fyandi* stemmed directly from it.

But “A Summary of the History of the Ba-Luunda” is also important, for it reveals very clearly the principal literary sources with which Labrecque was conversant. The text includes ample quotations from Lacerda, Pinto, Baptista and Gamitto’s travel diaries as translated into English in *The Lands of Cazembe*.¹⁹ Livingstone’s *Last Journals* and Giraud’s *Les Lacs de l’Afrique Equatoriale* are also cited.²⁰ Furthermore, some unspecified “Belgian writers” are said to have helped the author to sketch a basic chronology of the Yeke kingdom of Msiri.²¹ Labrecque’s extensive quotations disappear from subsequent versions (partial exception made for the “Histoire

miraculously to be found there in the file “Luapula Province. Historical Manuscripts”. Throughout this paper, I will employ Mr. Victor Kawanga Kazembe’s English translation of the “History of the Baluunda People”.

¹⁸ E. Labrecque, ed. and tr., “Histoire des Mwata Kazembe, Chefs Lunda du Luapula”, *Lovania*, 16 (1949), 9-33; 17 (1949), 21-48; 18 (1951), 18-67.

¹⁹ R.F. Burton, ed. and tr., *The Lands of Cazembe*, (London, 1873),

²⁰ D. Livingstone, ed. H. Waller, *The Last Journals of David Livingstone*, (2 vols.: London, 1874); V. Giraud, *Les Lacs de l’Afrique Equatoriale*, (Paris, 1890).

²¹ Labrecque, “A Summary of the History of the Ba-Luunda”, 6-8, 12, 14, 16-18. (This pagination refers to the copy of the text held in the Archive of the History Department of the Livingstone Museum. For the copy housed in the WFA-Z, see pp. 13-16, 25, 28-29, 33-35).

des Mwata Kazembe”), but this simply serves to highlight the need to look for the more disguised manner by which literary data have worked their way into the final eastern Lunda ethno-historical account. A good case in point are the many dates which figure in both the “History of the Baluunda People” and *Ifikolwe Fyandi*. The reader, for instance, may be surprised to learn that Chibangu Keleka, Mwata Kazembe III Lukwesa Ilunga’s son and future Mwata Kazembe IV, was born in Tabwa country in 1779.²² The mystery behind this astonishing chronological precision is not hard to solve. In February 1799, Pinto wrote in his travel diary that “Muenebuto”, the heir designated to Lukwesa Ilunga’s throne, “care[d] only for amusement, and his age – twenty years – permit[ted] nothing else.”²³ Plainly, Labrecque never took into account the possibility that Pinto’s estimation of the age of the then holder of the *Mwanabute* position could have been mistaken, or that the heir designated in 1799 might not, after all, have been that same Chibangu Keleka who succeeded to the throne a few years later.

The interpolation of dates obtained from literary sources is easy to identify, but there are more subtle forms of influence. After crossing the Chambeshi River in September 1798, Lacerda and his party passed through the villages of the Bisa (“Muizas”) leaders “Chinimba Campeze” and “Chipaco”. These two chiefs’ subjection to Lukwesa Ilunga, the reigning Mwata Kazembe, was duly recorded by the Portuguese explorer.²⁴ Now, according to both the “History of the Baluunda People” and *Ifikolwe Fyandi*, the holders of the *Mwinempanda* title, whose capital lay on the Kabundi stream, were the territorial representatives whom Lukwesa Ilunga had deputed to administer the plateau to the south-east of the lower Luapula valley. But while the “History of the Baluunda People” is rather vague about the boundaries of the colony of the *Mwinempandas* and certainly does not name any of the Bisa leaders placed under them, “Chinyimba” and “Chipako” are described in *Ifikolwe Fyandi* as being two of the three Bisa chiefs over whom the holders of the

²² Labrecque, “History of the Baluunda People”, 29; id., *Ifikolwe Fyandi*, 53.

²³ Burton, *The Lands of Cazembe*, 125.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 94-96.

Mwinempanda ruled.²⁵ Although the absence of the names of the two Bisa chiefs from the “History of the Baluunda People” may be due to nothing more than a casual omission, it is more tempting to relate it to Labrecque’s belated realization of the possibility of combining the Lunda story-tellers’ version with that of Lacerda. The following sequence may thus be hypothesized. The text prepared by Chinyanta Nankula and his brains trust before 1944 simply asserted that one of the first *Mwinempandas* supervised the south-eastern borders of the heartland of the kingdom from his capital on the Kabundi. This same statement was repeated in the “History of the Baluunda People”. While Labrecque had already begun to supplement the original manuscript with literary sources, at the time of the composition of the “History of the Baluunda People”, he had not yet realized that Lacerda’s travel diary offered him the opportunity to be more precise – if less faithful to the original Bemba version – about the territory of the holders of the *Mwinempanda* around the end of the eighteenth century. Before the final publication of *Ifikolwe Fyandi*, a revision of Lacerda’s writings must have finally prompted the missionary to alter the initial and much less specific statement .

It may not be entirely out of order to expound the principal conclusions of this brief survey of the editorial trajectory of *Ifikolwe Fyandi*. Historians employing the eastern Lunda ethno-history would do well to rely as little as possible on the similarities between the latter and most published travellers’ accounts relating to pre-colonial Kazembe and North-Eastern Zambia. By so doing, they will avoid the risk of mistaking mere repetitions for genuinely independent confirmations. Also, the unpublished – but admittedly harder to come by – “History of the Baluunda People” ought to be preferred to *Ifikolwe Fyandi*, since, as suggested by the foregoing example, the relationship between the “History of the Baluunda People” and the original, pre-Labrecque manuscript is probably closer than that between the latter and *Ifikolwe Fyandi*. The fact that some details which Labrecque could not have gleaned from nineteenth-century published sources are included in the “History of the Baluunda People” and missing from *Ifikolwe Fyandi* also points in this direction. Again, the solution of the riddle is not hard to find, if one bears in mind that Labrecque had complained to the

²⁵ Labrecque, *Ifikolwe Fyandi*, 65.

Director of Information that the “several compilations of oral traditions [*which formed Chinyanta Nankula’s original manuscript*] are so considerable that we have to reduce them in order to not [*sic*] publish a too voluminous book.” Whereas, for instance, the “History of the Baluunda People” mentions the clan affiliation of most of the local leaders with whom the conquering Lunda came in contact in southern Katanga and Mweru-Luapula, only the (often more flexible and artificial) tribal identity of these same leaders appears in *Ifikolwe Fyandi*. Only last example will make the point sufficiently clear. According to the “History of the Baluunda People”, the incoming army of Mwata Kazembe II Kanyembo Mpemba was outsmarted by the tricks of both “Cisamamba-Kampombwe” and “Cisamamba-Cibale”, two Bena Ngoma representatives dwelling on the western bank of the Luapula River.²⁶ Curiously, the first Chisamamba encountered by the Lunda disappears from *Ifikolwe Fyandi*, which only deals with Chisamamba Chibale and his ruse.²⁷ Two Chisamambas and two corresponding tricks resurface in the French “Histoire des Mwata Kazembe”.²⁸ Presumably, unlike the African Literature Committee, the editors of *Lovania* did not impress upon Labrecque the need for concision!

III

The preceding section has been concerned with the most fundamental bias brought about by Labrecque’s editorial intervention. But our task of disentangling the “safe” from the “unsafe” historical evidence in the “History of the Baluunda People” cannot be held to be complete until the likelihood of a very different set of distortions having entered the eastern Lunda ethno-history is also taken into account. The “History of the Baluunda People”, in fact, was not only a product of the Lunda aristocrats and Labrecque’s erudition; it was also a fruit of colonial circumstances. And colonized Africans had often some compelling reasons to present a partial view of their history.

²⁶ Labrecque, “History of the Baluunda People”, 21.

²⁷ Labrecque, *Ifikolwe Fyandi*, 37-38.

²⁸ Labrecque, “Histoire des Mwata Kazembe”, 17, 25.

Above all, one needs to look closely at the realm of inter-African relationships in the first half of the twentieth century and consider the multiple ways in which the memory of the past became a political tool to be employed to foster corporate interests in the course of the struggle for supremacy precipitated by colonial administrative practices. Although one cannot go so far as to speak of the emergence of an entirely “new historical tradition [...] as a result of colonial administrative procedures”,²⁹ the eastern Lunda ethno-history was clearly informed by the competitive context of its compilation.

As a matter of fact, it seems that the driving force behind Chinyanta Nankula’s decision to set up an historical committee in 1942 was his resentment over the “many mistakes and exaggerating words [...] lies and words of exalting themselves” that “our fellow neighbours the Bemba Chiefs made [...] in their history before some White Fathers at Chilubula Mission.”³⁰ Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the rivalry between eastern Lunda and Bemba was kept very much alive by the colonial government’s decision not to award to the *Mwata Kazembes* the same title – “Paramount Chief” – as the *Chitimukulus*. In 1947, for instance, the District Commissioner, Kawambwa, was forced to tour the unruly Bena Mbeba section of the Lunda Native Authority to dispel “widespread rumours that [*Mwata Kazembe Chinyanta Nankula*] was no longer a senior chief [*and*] that he had now been put under Chitimukulu.”³¹ As late as 1954, Brown Ng’ombe, Mwata Kazembe XV, wrote

²⁹ R.J. Papstein, “The Transformation of Oral History under the Colonial State: the Case of the Upper Zambezi Region of Northern Rhodesia, c. 1906-1964”, *Zambia Journal of History*, 2 (1989), 4

³⁰ Chinyanta Nankula to Labrecque, 16 February 1946. It is likely that the king was referring to *Ifyabukaya: Fourth Bemba Reader, Fathers Tanguy and van Sambeek’s* “first comprehensive Bemba history in the vernacular, a school reader published in 1932 at Chilubula mission, near Kasama.” (Roberts, *A History of the Bemba*, 9.) The historiographical controversy between eastern Lunda and Bemba may have begun in 1930, the year in which Ponde Chitimukulu “sent a delegation to Kazembe XII to listen to Lunda history.” Cunnison, *Historical Traditions of the Eastern Lunda*, ii; Labrecque, “History of the Baluunda People”, 1.

³¹ E.C. Thomson, Kawambwa Tour Report, 16 September – 30 September 1947, National Archives of Zambia (NAZ), Lusaka, SEC2/874.

to the then DC to remind him of his kingdom's "very long history" and of the government's unfulfilled promise that "the name of a Paramount be proclaimed on me as it was in the past before Europeans came in this country."³² Given this background, the historian cannot be blamed for looking at the Lunda-Bemba relationships as depicted in the "History of the Baluunda People" with a robust degree of scepticism.

A direct consequence of the internal and external wars which shook the kingdom of Kazembe in the latter part of the nineteenth century was the settlement of foreign communities in the lower Luapula valley. British officials, with their successive efforts to perfect the administrative layout of the area, often upset the delicate balance between these circumscribed communities and the eastern Lunda élites. Insofar as the East Africans of Kilwa Island at the south end of Lake Mweru are concerned, this set of local tensions can be shown to have had an unequivocal effect upon the official eastern Lunda ethno-history.

In the late 1880s, a group of coastal and Nyamwezi traders under the leadership of Shimba settled on – and gained control of – Kilwa Island after granting Nkuba Bukongolo VII Chipenge the military help that he had requested against Msiri's Yeke. Between 1893 and 1894, Belgian forces from Lofoi tried at least three times to cut the Kilwa raider's career short. Their attacks were repulsed and, following Shimba's accidental death, Kilwa was occupied by British South Africa Company troops from Kalungwishi in 1895.³³ According to a source very near the events, the then Kashinge, the Lunda governor of Kilwa, fled his village on the island during one of the ill-fated Belgian attacks.³⁴ Following the British recognition of "Waswa", Shimba's son, as chief of Kilwa, Kashinge, who had in the meantime returned to his old village, tried repeatedly "to sever any

³² Brown Ng'ombe to DC (Kawambwa), 9 August 1954, encl. in DC (Kawambwa) to Provincial Commissioner (Northern Province), 10 August 1954, NAZ, NP2/6/10.

³³ For fuller details, see Macola, "A Political History", 153-156, 162-166, 172, and H. Legros, *Chasseurs d'Ivoire. Une Histoire du Royaume Yeke du Shaba (Zaire)*, (Brussels, 1996), 131-132.

³⁴ "Kilwa Island", n.d. (but between 1913 and 1918), Chiengi District Notebook, I, 199-200, NAZ, KSW2/1.

connection with Simba [II] and to set himself up as chief of the island.”³⁵ In December 1904, the then Kashinge and Chishite were charged by the Kalungwishi magistrate with disobedience of the chief’s orders (they had refused to pay their taxes to Waswa) and with trying to “entice men from Kilwa Is. to the Congo Free State Territory.” The two men were sentenced to six months imprisonment with hard labour.³⁶

The dispute between the holders of the *Kashinge* title and the successors of Shimba I dragged on throughout the colonial period (and is still largely unresolved to this day). No doubt, the bone of contention was the loyalty of the inhabitants of Kilwa. In 1930, Nshimba III – who had recently been appointed at the head of an independent Native Authority and Court – laid a complaint in the DC’s Court in Kawambwa against 27 islanders who had refused him tribute labour to build a hut. One of the accused, Dauti, defended himself and his companions by asserting that they had already “perform[ed] ‘mulasa’ for Kashinge.”³⁷ The dispossessed *Kashinges* seem to have continued to resort to the strategy of fomenting migrations to Congo. In 1935, for instance, ‘a number of natives left Kilwa Island for the Congo mainland [...]. They gave as a reason the lower rate of tax in the Congo, but their exodus would appear to be due mainly to differences with Chief Nshimba.’³⁸ At about this time, the then Kashinge was temporarily expelled from Kilwa for carrying out “subversive activities against Nshimba.”³⁹

The study of the twentieth-century conflict over the fate of Kilwa Island suggests an explanation for the discrepancies setting the eastern Lunda ethno-history apart from other, more reliable versions of the same events recorded in the early decades of colonial rule. According to the

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Kalungwishi Criminal Record, 41, 1904, NAZ, NE/KTL1/1/1.

³⁷ Kawambwa Criminal Case Record, 21, 1930, encl. in M.J.B. Otter, Kawambwa Tour Report, 10 February – 22 February 1930, NAZ, ZA7/4/17.

³⁸ W. Stubbs, Kawambwa District, Annual Report on Native Affairs, 1934, encl. in PC, Northern Province, Annual Report, 1934, NAZ, ZA7/1/17/4.

³⁹ H.A. Watmore, Kawambwa Tour Report, 7 December – 17 December 1939, NAZ, SEC2/873.

“History of the Baluunda People”, the then Kashinge fought the Yeke alongside Shimba and Nkuba Bukongolo Chipenge. Following their victory over the Yeke, Mwata Kazembe X Kanyembo Ntemena granted Shimba permission to settle on the island. Some years later, while Kashinge was away visiting the royal capital, the British landed on Kilwa and mistook Shimba for the real chief of the island.⁴⁰ If the then Kashinge – as stated in the Chiengi District Notebook – had really fled the island during one of the Belgian expeditions against Shimba, the Lunda narrators’ reluctance to relate the episode is hardly surprising, as it would have undermined their attempts to reassert the *Kashinges*’ rights of governance over Kilwa.

Apart from the rich documentary evidence which allows the historian clearly to identify both the blatant manipulation in the eastern Lunda account and the twentieth-century tensions which made it expedient, there is nothing exceptional about the foregoing events. The conflict with Shimba I and his descendants, in fact, was merely one of the many disputes in which the eastern Lunda élites found themselves enmeshed soon after the inception of European rule. Given that all these local conflicts can be assumed to have left their mark upon the Lunda historical consciousness as reflected in the “History of the Baluunda People”, a sophisticated treatment of the pre-colonial data contained therein ought to begin by examining the *colonial* political and administrative background as a source of likely historical distortions. Although this exercise will presumably result in the rejection of considerable sections of the “History of the Baluunda People”, it will still be worth pursuing, in my opinion, as a necessary step towards the salvaging of the historicity of the eastern Lunda “tribal Bible”.

IV

If the production of the “History of the Baluunda People” cannot be divorced from its political context, it must also be located within the framework of the social history of the lower Luapula valley in the middle colonial period. The setting up of an historical committee in 1942 was a

⁴⁰ Labrecque, “History of the Baluunda People”, 56.

defensive response to the demands of the inter-ethnic competition precipitated by colonialism, but, as will be presently suggested, it was also an instrument of internal social cohesion – a cohesion threatened by the increasingly manifest confrontation between culturally exclusive aristocrats (*bacilolo* and *bakalulua*) and emerging social actors whose claims to prominence depended less on their inherited status than on their personal qualities and educational achievements.

In the 1930s, Lunda *bacilolo* and *bakalulua*, albeit forced to renounce most of their direct territorial responsibilities along the eastern bank of the lower Luapula River,⁴¹ retained an influential position in the royal capital, Mwansabombwe. Not only did they sit in what colonial officials referred to as the “Electoral College”, responsible for the selection and installation of each new incumbent to the kingship, but they also monopolised the salaried posts of councillors and assessors in the *Mwata Kazembes’* Superior Native Authority and Court, respectively. Meanwhile, the foundation by the London Missionary Society of Mbereshi Girls’ Boarding School (1915) and Boys’ Boarding School (1926), where pupils could reach up to Standard VI, was fostering the emergence of a self-conscious, English-speaking élite, the members of which alternated periods of local employment as mission teachers and evangelists with periods of clerical employment in the colonial administration or the southern labour centres.⁴² Missionary-educated commoners resented the privileges of a restricted number of aristocratic descent groups and regarded their initial exclusion from the Lunda Native Authority (LNA) as a failure to appreciate the value of their capabilities. As early as 1930, they were said to be hostile to Mwata Kazembe XII Chinyanta Kasasa’s First-Class Court.⁴³

⁴¹ Macola, “A Political History”, 214-222.

⁴² S.F. Morrow, “Some Social Consequences of Mission Education: the Case of Mbereshi, 1915-1940”, *History in Zambia*, 11 (1981), 10-23; id., “‘No Girl Leaves the School Unmarried’: Mabel Shaw and the Education of Girls at Mbereshi, Northern Rhodesia, 1915-1940”, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, XIX (1986), 601-635.

⁴³ J.B. Thomson, Kawambwa Tour Report, 7 November – 28 November 1930, NAZ, ZA7/4/26.

The death of Chinyanta Kasasa late in 1935 presented this embryonic pressure group with a chance to vent its dissatisfaction and articulate its modernizing demands. Throughout December 1935 and January 1936, the competing claims of the numerous candidates to the throne were weighed by the aristocratic Electoral College. The contrast between the two main contenders could not have been greater. If Chinkonkole, in common with his predecessors, had no educational attainments,⁴⁴ the much younger Shadrack Chinyanta Nankula was a “smartly-dressed, well-educated native who wrote an intelligent, neatly-typed letter giving a family tree of the Kasembes and urging his own appointment.”⁴⁵ While Chinyanta Nankula, who at the time was still working as a clerk in the Union Minière du Haut Katanga in Jadotville, could count upon the support of the most advanced sections of the large Mweru-Luapulan community in southern Katanga, *bacilolo* and *bakalulua* favoured the elderly Chinkonkole, who – they knew – would not have challenged the continuity of their influence in Mwansabombwe. Once it became clear that Chinyanta’s bid for the throne had failed, his partisans wrote to the DC, Kawambwa, to declare their firm opposition to Chinkonkole. Significantly, the core of their argument revolved not so much around the new king’s personality – although he was alleged to be “senseless” and a “drunkard” – as around his being short of the necessary educational prerequisites. “We are very sorry here in Belgian Congo to understand that Kaniambo Chinkonkole he is on the throne of chief Kazembe. But we here we are indispensable a son of chief who was at School, KINIANTA SHADRICK, c/o U.M.H.K., Jadotville, Belgian Congo.”⁴⁶ Arguably, emerging Luapulan élites sensed that they stood a better chance of working their way into the LNA, if this latter were to pass under the guidance of Chinyanta Nankula – a man who, in many respects, must have seemed to them to be one of their number, having been enriched, just as they had been, by mission education and lengthy work-experiences in the cosmopolitan environment of the mines of southern Katanga.

⁴⁴ Acting PC (Northern Province) to Chief Secretary, 27 March 1936, NAZ, SEC2/1192.

⁴⁵ DC (Kawambwa) to PC (Northern Province), 15 May 1936, NAZ, SEC2/1192.

⁴⁶ “800 People in the Congo” to DC (Kawambwa), 6 April 1936, NAZ, SEC2/1192.

After the death of Mwata Kazembe XIII Chinkonkole in 1941, the Electoral College could not prevent the ascent of Chinyanta Nankula, who was now openly backed by local British officials. Chinyanta ruled until 1950. His reign coincided with a decade of unprecedented local economic development and general administrative reformism.⁴⁷ It also marked a decisive stage in the clash between the aristocracy and the missionary-educated intelligentsia. By the end of the 1940s, the latter had completely ousted the former from the reorganized Lunda Superior Native Authority. Although they retained control of Mwata Kazembe XIV's Superior Court, hereditary title-holders were now deprived of all residual executive functions in the colonial administrative scheme.⁴⁸

Despite his commitment to modernization and strong links with western-educated commoners, the new king did not wish altogether to alienate the aristocracy, who still possessed the power to exclude his descendants from the eastern Lunda throne. Indeed, the production of the pristine version of *Ifikolwe Fyandi na Bantu Bandi* can be seen as the result of Chinyanta Nankula's determination to grant *bacilolo* and *bakalulua* a room for self-assertion and demonstrate his respect for the past heritage that they incarnated. But the eastern Lunda ethno-history was a culturally hybrid product: whereas the preservation of the memory of the past was the exclusive domain of the aristocracy, its presentation in a written form would have been inconceivable without the contribution of the emerging élites, represented on this occasion by the three "writers" (*tulemba*; sing. *kalemba*) – Isaiah Chiko Mukunku, Joseph Lutina Chifumanda and Bell Duncan Katapa – who sat in the 1942-4 committee alongside the holders of hereditary titles, such as the then Chibwidi, Kabimbi and Shakadyata.⁴⁹ From this perspective, then, Chinyanta Nankula's initiative

⁴⁷ See M.C. Musambachime, "Development and Growth of the Fishing Industry in Mweru-Luapula, 1920-1964", PhD, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1981, 175-179; K. Datta, "The Policy of Indirect Rule in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), 1924-1953", PhD, University of London, 1976, chapters 4 and 5.

⁴⁸ For a survey of the composition of the LNA after 1948, see Macola, "A Political History", 228-230

⁴⁹ Labrecque, "History of the Baluunda People", 1.

became an opportunity to draw together the modern and traditionalist factions in the lower Luapula valley and the separate cultural symbols and skills which defined their antagonistic identities.

V

We have shown *Ifikolwe Fyandi na Bantu Bandi* and its immediate antecedent to have been many things at the same time: a missionary-influenced adaptation of an old royal tradition, a political weapon to be brought to bear on a situation of enhanced inter-ethnic competition, a bulwark against the social tension which threatened the stability of the kingdom of Kazembe in the middle colonial period. This plurality of meanings and its repercussions upon the historical evidence contained in *Ifikolwe Fyandi* would never have emerged if the latter had been approached as an uncomplicated collection of traditions stemming from the pre-colonial era. In order to tease out the multi-faceted nature of the text, it has been necessary to set it firmly in the colonial context and examine it in light of the colonial documentation.

As suggested by Fr. Labrecque's own wide-ranging editorial career, *Ifikolwe Fyandi* is far from being an isolated example. While waiting for a broad study of the cultural and political movement which accompanied the mushrooming of vernacular historical publications in colonial South-Central Africa, historians will have to develop an appropriate set of guidelines which, without denying the local specificities of these texts, will allow them to handle the latter with a degree of uniformity and respect for the basic principles of source criticism. Our tripartite reading of *Ifikolwe Fyandi* may perhaps claim to be a small contribution in the direction of this undertaking – which undertaking is made all the more urgent by the consideration that the relative importance of colonial ethno-historical literature as a source for the study of pre-colonial history is destined to increase in the future as a result of the ongoing erosion of oral tradition in contemporary Africa.

