

**COLONIAL CINEMA ON THE COPPERBELT: ASPECTS OF AFRICANS'
CINEMA EXPERIENCES IN NORTHERN RHODESIA, 1928-1964**

**BY
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**A dissertation submitted to the University of Zambia in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History**

UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

LUSAKA

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DECLARATION

I, Jacob M'hango, hereby declare that this dissertation represents my own work, has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other University and does not incorporate any published work or material from another dissertation. All work from other scholars has been duly acknowledged.

Signature.....

Date.....

APPROVAL

This dissertation of Jacob M'hango is approved as fulfilling the partial requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in History by the University of Zambia.

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ABSTRACT

The scope of this study revolves around Africans on the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt and their colonial cinema experiences from 1928 to 1964. Using archival sources and oral interviews (qualitative methods), it describes how Africans on the Copperbelt engaged with colonial cinema in a segregated environment, discusses some issues that contributed to the desegregation of cinema and describes how Africans experienced colonial cinema in a desegregated environment. The spread of cinema to Northern Rhodesia was due to the emergence of the copper-mining industry on the Copperbelt where colonial administrators and mine owners felt that African migrant labourers needed to be exposed to a 'civilised' form of leisure to help them recreate to be more productive on the job. The first film showing on the Copperbelt came in 1928. Cinema shows became very popular among Africans in those days, especially among the young ones. Also, while Africans watched films, they paid attention to the shortcomings of the Europeans as portrayed in some of the films. Realising that there was barely any difference for the Africans between films and reality, the Film Censorship Board (FCB) made sure to cut out from the films to be shown to Africans parts that demeaned in any way the station of the Europeans. Africans increasingly became aware of the work of the FCB and the clear separation between their cinema halls and those of the European colonialists and began to agitate for equality in cinema viewership. And the opening of the first multiracial cinema in Lusaka in 1957 only strengthened the resolve of the Africans on the Copperbelt on this front.

The study argues that colonial cinema quickly became an important and effective tool for the spread and entrenchment of propaganda as well as cultural and political dominance. The Northern Rhodesia Information Service (NRIS) embarked on an outreach with mobile cinema vans in rural areas. Many studies have focused on a detailed analysis of individual films or film genres as independent entities while those that have given some attention to Africans portray them as helpless victims of colonial cinema. However, this study helps to illuminate the complex articulations between African audiences and colonial cinema on the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt. The study argues further that while the Northern Rhodesia Government (NRG) used colonial cinema to channel and advance propaganda, African audiences on the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt used colonial cinema in a way that advanced them as a people socially and politically.

DEDICATION

To my wife Christine, and my daughters Tukuza and Alisa.

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I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Dr H.D. Chipande, my supervisor, for his unwavering guidance, support, and attention to detail for the length of this study. It must be noted that this study was first set in Lusaka. However, when primary sources were hard to come by and I was on the verge of giving up on the study, my supervisor encouraged me to not give up and suggested instead to set the study on the Copperbelt. Fortunately, the Copperbelt yielded ample primary sources to complete this study.

Many thanks also to members of the Department of Historical and Archaeological Studies for their insightful fine-tuning of the proposal, which in turn led to this work. Thanks more especially to Dr A. Tembo for going out of his way to contribute some invaluable pieces of literature to the study.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACF	African Consolidated Films
BC	British Council
CFU	Colonial Film Unit
FCB	Film Censorship Board
NAZ	National Archives of Zambia
NRG	Northern Rhodesia Government
NRIS	Northern Rhodesia Information Service
NRLC	Northern Rhodesia Legislative Council
NRR	Northern Rhodesia Regiment
ZANIS	Zambia National Information Service
ZCCM-IH	Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines Limited Investment Holdings

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction and Historical Background

The start and end dates for this study are so in that the first film showing came in 1928 on the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt, whereas 1964 denotes the end of British colonial rule in Northern Rhodesia. The study is situated within the context of popular culture under the larger rubric of leisure as shaped by colonialism.

The first screening of film was conducted by Auguste and Louis Lumière in Paris, France, in 1895. The Lumière brothers then started sending teams around the world to spread film.¹ It is equally important to note that the coming and spread of cinema to Northern Rhodesia was as a result of the emergence of the copper-mining industry on the Copperbelt where colonial administrators and mine owners felt that African migrant labourers needed to be exposed to a 'civilised' form of leisure to help them recreate to be more productive on the job. The first film showing, as earlier stated, came in 1928 and later spread. In the same vein, Hortense Powdermaker states that these:

were a commercial “package” purchased by the mine Welfare Department from a film company in South Africa. The package was much the same at each showing: a cowboy film (old and grade B), *British News*, *The Northern Spotlight* (Northern Rhodesia News), an animal cartoon (*Kadoli*), *The African Mirror* (incidents of African life), an adventure serial such as *Superman*, and, occasionally, a very old American slapstick comedy.²

By the mid-1930s, cinema shows had become commonplace for tens of thousands of Africans who lived in municipal townships and in mining company residential compounds.

¹ Michael Chanan, 'Cinema in Latin America,' in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (ed.), *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 427.

² Hortense Powdermaker, *Copper Town: Changing Africa – The Human Situation on the Rhodesian Copperbelt* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 255.

Even though the British and American silent films had dominated the shows, the drop in the distribution of these films forced the mining authorities to introduce sound. There was then the spread of cinema shows across the British Empire in the wake of the Second World War; these cinema shows were under the auspices of the Colonial Film Unit (CFU) which, through film, sought to garner support from the colonies for the war effort. 1942 saw the Northern Rhodesia Information Service embarking on an outreach with a mobile cinema van in the rural areas. Approximately 17,000 Africans in the municipal and company residential areas watched films each week while in the same year the mobile cinema van reached about 80,000 people in the outskirts.³ According to Dele Jegede, the mobile cinema vans in English- and French-speaking Africa generated such excitement that people abandoned their evening chores to come to the vans. He further states that it was worse in the rural areas where the entry of a mobile cinema van marked the beginning of clouds of dust as people ran after the van and loud music could be heard blaring from its big speakers often interspersed with a public invitation to the evening's show.⁴

By 1947, in addition to 650 titles in the film library, there were six mobile cinema vans and fifteen outdoor theatres that showed films in Northern Rhodesia. Moreover, there were seventeen private exhibitors who showed films from time to time. The 1950s, therefore, saw a growing number of Africans who were watching films and an established audience of African filmgoers had asserted itself in the urban areas. The commercial indoor theatres in Northern Rhodesia, however, were the preserve of the European filmgoers, and regulation barred even private cinema showings that allowed the coming together of Europeans and Africans in the same space.⁵

³ Charles Ambler, 'Popular Films and Colonial Audiences: The Movies in Northern Rhodesia,' *American Historical Review* 106, 1 (2001), 87.

⁴ Dele Jegede, 'Popular Culture in Urban Africa,' in P. M. Martin and P. O'Meara (eds.), *Africa*, 3rd Edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 283-284.

⁵ Ambler, 'Popular Films and Colonial Audiences,' 87-88.

It must be noted that despite the different ways in which European nations exercised their rule on the African continent, colonialism was first and foremost a system whereby a technologically advanced foreign minority forcibly imposed political, economic, and cultural domination on an indigenous majority. The system of 'colonialism justified itself largely through ideologies which asserted the superiority of the coloniser and the inferiority of the colonised.'⁶

The evolutionary ideas of Darwin, Spencer, Morgan, and Marx formed the foundation for the justification of conquest and eventual colonisation of Africa. The theories implied that all societies that were not formed within the framework of the nation-state and industrial capitalism represented the most backward form of human organisation, which assumptions European colonialists and imperialists argued as having given them the right, even the duty, as 'higher' civilisations to subjugate the 'lower' civilisations so as to spawn prosperity and advancement in the whole world. The colonised peoples were seen as the 'White Man's Burden,' or as societies that were so backward that they needed 'civilising,' a task which 'naturally' was to be carried out by European colonisers. This worldview was reinforced by racial theories that bolstered the putative biological superiority of the 'white race' over the 'black race.'⁷

Therefore, the belief in the biological and moral inferiority of Africans was widely and religiously accepted by the Europeans outside Africa and those who had settled in the African colonies. In accordance with this belief, it is not strange that the idea of 'natives' as employed by European colonialists represented a backward, uncivilised collection of people who were incapable of ruling themselves.⁸ In the same vein, Fanon, in his diatribe against colonialism describes the way the coloniser viewed 'the native':

⁶ Sheldon Gellar, 'The Colonial Era,' in Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara (eds.), *Africa*, 3rd Edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 140.

⁷ Gellar, 'The Colonial Era,' p. 141.

⁸ Gellar, 'The Colonial Era,' p. 141.

As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation the settler paints the native as the quintessence of evil....The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but the negation of value.⁹

This kind of thinking would then shape the way colonialists interacted with the colonised peoples. Therefore, colonial cinema – as earlier mentioned – sought to impart to the Africans what was deemed by the colonial administrations to have been acceptable knowledge and way of life under the rubric of European social constructionism. And so, the subject peoples had to be fine-tuned to conform to the European standard of living and to accept their assigned station as an uncivilised and inferior race.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Charles Ambler bemoans how scholars have largely ignored the complex articulations between African audiences and colonial cinema. He argues that researchers have focused their energies on post-independence African film-makers and national cinema and on how and how much Africa has been represented in films, and that, although their works are important, they do not touch upon how Western films impacted communities in the context of colonialism. He further argues that scholarship on cinema in Africa, like most film studies across the world, has focused on a detailed analysis of individual films or film genres as independent entities, an act which effectively demotes the audience as irrelevant or passive recipients of cinema.¹⁰ James Burns adds that, to this day, very few scholars have made the African audiences, in the context of colonialism, the thrust of their investigations.¹¹

To put the concerns of the two aforementioned scholars into perspective, the area of African audiences and their cinema experiences, especially as shaped by colonialism, has

⁹ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1968), p. 41.

¹⁰ Ambler, 'Popular Films and Colonial Audiences,' 83-84.

¹¹ James Burns, 'The African Bioscope – Movie House Culture in British Colonial Africa,' *Afrique & Histoire* 5, (2001), 67.

been understudied and, thus, there is need for more scholars to rise to this challenge. In studies where Africans are given a modicum of attention, they are usually portrayed as helpless victims of colonial cinema. In short, Africans are not shown to be active participants in their own history of cinema.

1.3 General Objective

This study is aimed at exploring aspects of Africans' colonial cinema experiences on the Copperbelt, Northern Rhodesia, from 1928 to 1964.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

1. To describe how Africans on the Copperbelt engaged with colonial cinema in a segregated environment
2. To discuss some issues that contributed to the desegregation of cinema
3. To describe how Africans on the Copperbelt experienced colonial cinema in a desegregated environment

1.4 Rationale of the Study

This study will be invaluable to all students of African history and/or African cinematography, especially those seeking to gain insight into Africans' colonial cinema experiences. African film-makers will likewise find this study illuminating in that it will enable them to develop a balanced hindsight into the social and political articulations that colonial cinema spawned between the colonisers and the colonised. The study will also be of benefit to all Zambians interested in their history and who seek to grasp the way Africans on the Copperbelt, Northern Rhodesia, engaged with colonial cinema. Moreover, apart from

contributing to the historiography of colonial cinema, it is hoped that more research interest will be kindled in this area of study.

1.5 Area of Study

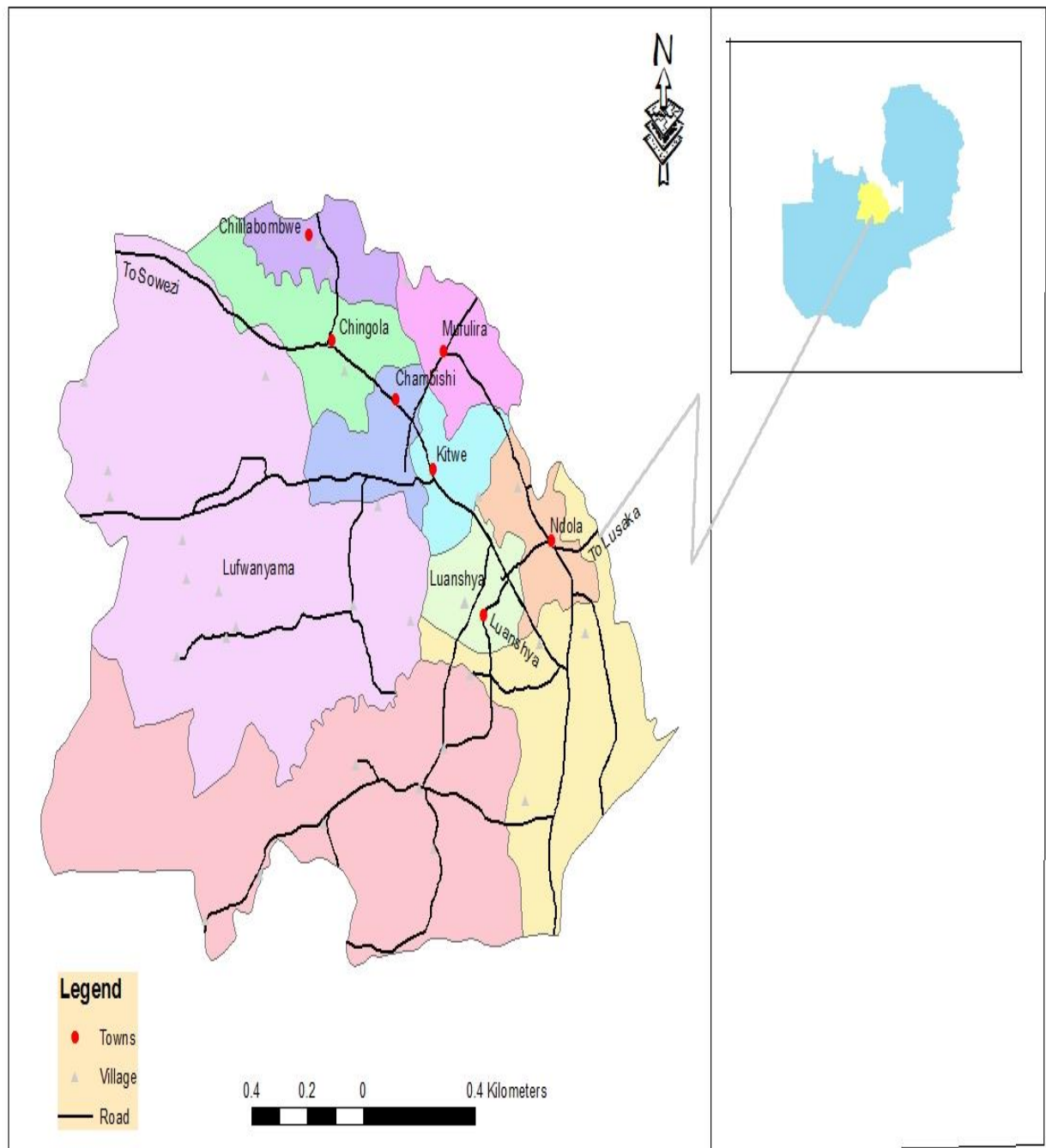


Figure 1. 2: The Copperbelt Mining Towns

Source: Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Cartographic Unit, University of Zambia, 2019.

1.6 Literature Review

There exists a surfeit of literature on cinema across the world, albeit much of it concerns itself with post-colonial periods and descriptions of films, among other sub-topics of less importance to this study. As such, only literature that was germane to the interest herein was reviewed. The review traversed the contours of colonial cinema across Latin America, Taiwan, the sub-continent of India, some countries of sub-Saharan Africa and, finally, Northern Rhodesia. As it will be seen, even this literature did not focus principally on the colonised peoples' appropriation of cinema. It did, however, lend to the study important insights into some aspects of the colonised peoples' articulations with cinema as well as expose lacunae insofar as the study is concerned.

Michael Chanan in his chapter, 'Cinema in Latin America,' in *The Oxford History of World Cinema* wrote about the colonial beginnings of cinema and also about indigenous film-making in Latin America. He described how cinema came to Latin America after the first screening of film by the Lumière brothers (Auguste and Louis Lumière) in Paris, France, in 1895. He wrote that the Lumière brothers then started sending teams around the world to spread film, and that in 1896 they sent two teams to Latin America; one team went to Montevideo, Buenos Aires, and Rio de Janeiro while the other went to Mexico and Havana – and so these were the beginnings of cinema in Latin America.¹²

Chanan stated that early cinema in Latin America first had its audiences in urban areas that were connected by the railways. He added that even in Mexico, where cinema spread very quickly to the rural areas with the help of the itinerant film exhibitors known as *comicos de la legua*, they could only reach very few areas beyond the railway network. It is important to note that Chanan associated the arrival and spread of cinema in Latin America with colonialism, stating further that in the novel by Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred*

¹² Chanan, 'Cinema in Latin America,' p. 427.

Years of Solitude, 'film arrived in the town of Macondo with the same trains that brought the United Fruit Company,'¹³ the company that would later go on to spawn economic colonialism.

Chanan, by stating that the first audiences of cinema were in the urban areas connected by rail, offered to this study a global comparative dimension as regards spread of cinema. Also, his yoking of cinema to the colonial project went a long way in helping the study to pay close attention to how British colonialists used cinema in Northern Rhodesia.

Chanan then described the anger among Latin Americans, especially Mexicans, which led to their protests against their misrepresentation in Hollywood films. Mexicans were depicted as backward, savages, uncivilised. He highlighted, *inter alia*, one film titled *Her Husband's Trademark* in which the heroine was brutally raped by a gang of desperadoes while her husband was out trying to strike a business deal with a Mexican oil company. This state of affairs even prompted the Mexican government to place an embargo on all such films out of Hollywood.¹⁴ This information was important as it attested to the misappropriation of power on the part of those in charge of production of film, going as far as demeaning the cultures and integrity of those on the receiving end while promoting their own.

Misawa Mamie in his article, 'Colony, Empire, and De-colonization,' in which he focused on 'the status of the production and reception of films by the Taiwanese during the colonial period,' wrote that Taiwan was liberated from Japan following the defeat of Japan in the Second World War, and that China which defeated Japan in the war then requisitioned Taiwan from Japan. This put Taiwan in an unprecedented position as it then had to contend with new colonialists (the Chinese), who were once their 'enemies' when Japan reigned over the territory. The Chinese government began instilling fear in the Taiwanese, forcing them to start viewing themselves as Chinese citizens, and using cinema to this end. The Chinese

¹³ Chanan, 'Cinema in Latin America,' p. 428.

¹⁴ Chanan, 'Cinema in Latin America,' p. 429.

government censored films shown to the Taiwanese to hoist and glorify Chinese culture and history while, at the same time, demeaning these two aspects of Taiwanese society.¹⁵

In the rest of the article, Mamie decried censorship as having been responsible for the lacklustre production of Taiwanese films by the Taiwanese themselves compared to production in China and Japan and how these propaganda films flooded the Taiwanese film market. This insight into Taiwanese victimhood owing to how their colonial masters employed cinema, in addition to the global perspective it lent, helped the study to pay attention to the social and political influences that British colonialists in Northern Rhodesia might have employed. This is because even in the case of Latin America as opined by Chanan, those who owned the means of production and were in charge of production sought to promote their own image at the expense of those on the receiving end.

Priya Jaikumar in *Cinema at the End of Empire* tracked historical change over time by throwing light on the interwoven history of British and Indian cinema in the twilight years of colonial rule in India, challenging the all-too-common rubric of national cinema and arguing that film aesthetics and film regulations were linked expressions of radical political changes in the declining Empire and an emerging Indian nation.¹⁶

Further, Jaikumar stated that in 1931 when Winston Churchill spoke to the Council of Conservative Associates in Britain, he expressed his resistance to the idea of granting independence to India by declaring that Britain was not prepared to abandon India to the rule of Brahmins whom he accused of being cruel and negligent to their own people. Churchill painted Britain as a benevolent country that went to India for the primary purpose of protecting Indians from fellow Indians and protecting and preserving their rights and dignity. Jaikumar wrote about propaganda films that the British authorities then showed Indian

¹⁵ Misawa Mamie, "'Colony, Empire, and De-colonization' in Taiwanese Film History," *International Journal of Korean History* 19, 2 (2014), 36, 37.

¹⁶ Priya Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire: A Politics of Transition in Britain and India* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 1.

audiences, such films as *Sanders of the River* (1935) and *The Drum* (1938) which were produced by Alexander Korda who happened to be Churchill's friend and confidant.¹⁷

She further noted that the Indian film industry, in its own right, tried to counterbalance such perceptions of Empire by producing films that sought to promote Indian culture and history as well as portray an egalitarian future for India – one without colonial masters. She forwarded as *locus classicus* Nitin Bose's *Chandidas* (1934), a popular film about two Indian lovers – a man and a woman – who dared to imagine a new India and suffered as a result of the prevailing socio-political conditions of the time which were linked to the British; the two ran into the mountains, and by the film's conclusion a group of Indians surrounded the two, praising them and speaking of a utopian India of the future.¹⁸

Jaikumar made clear that the British colonial administration in India found itself in a queer position as colonialism neared its demise, a situation that saw cinema becoming a battleground of culture and politics, the British trying to push propaganda and the Indians pushing back. Like Chanan and Mamie, Jaikumar illuminates the propagandist nature of cinema in the hands of colonialists. This perspective, along with Jaikumar's overall thesis, proved invaluable to this study especially when it explored Africans' cinema experiences on the Copperbelt, Northern Rhodesia, in the period between desegregation of cinema and independence of the territory.

Laura Fair in her article "They Stole the Show!" argued that Indian films were the most popular films shown in Tanzania from the 1950s to the 1990s and highlighted the importance of the flow of media between nations in the global south.¹⁹ She shined a light on the spectator craze that surrounded the Indian films and actors in Tanzania, stating that:

¹⁷ Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁸ Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁹ Laura Fair, "'They Stole the Show!': Indian Films in Coastal Tanzania, 1950s-1980s," *Journal of African Media Studies* 2, 1 (2010), 92.

By the 1960s, East Africa had grown to become the single largest export market for Indian films anywhere in the world, accounting for 20-50 per cent of total global earnings.²⁰

She further stated that only a handful of the hundreds of people she interviewed mentioned an American actor as their favourite, the rest mentioned Indian actors.²¹ Her study was essentially focused on the large volume of Indian films in Tanzania and how much Africans there wanted to watch them.

She wrote about how thousands of men, women and children flocked to the cinema shows and how difficult it was to buy tickets because of the large numbers of Africans who wanted to attend the cinema shows. She stated that sometimes these Africans physically fought for tickets and that as a way of avoiding such scenes, women sent their brothers or husbands to buy the tickets and those who were smart enough bought tickets beforehand.²²

Fair's was an important study for understanding the popularity of Indian films in Tanzania in the aforementioned period; it also made clear how exciting African audiences found cinema (which information will lend itself to this study), but it does not focus on how the African audiences sought to understand and deal with the phenomenon of cinema. Clearly the focus of her study was different, hence the importance of this study which focuses on the Africans and how they engaged with colonial cinema as a way of completing the narrative.

Odile Georg in his article, 'The Cinema, a Place of Tension in Colonial Africa: Film Censorship in French West Africa,' explored colonial cinema in Francophone Africa in terms of the context in which Africans watched films and the attitude of the French colonial governments to African audiences. He recorded that the colonial governments in Francophone Africa increasingly found cinema to be working against them and hence they moved to create censorship boards which decided if a film should be shown to Africans or

²⁰ Fair, 'They Stole the Show!' 94.

²¹ Fair, 'They Stole the Show!' 94.

²² Fair, 'They Stole the Show!' 98.

not. He further explored the drives behind the censorship of films, Africans' reactions, and subsequent measures taken by the colonial authorities.²³

Like Georg, Vitus Nambigne in his PhD thesis, 'Cinema in Ghana: History, Ideology and Popular Culture,' in which he addressed Ghana's national cinema and the cultural and political transformations that had taken place over time and how they had influenced it from the colonial times to date, attested to colonial censorship of films that were shown to Africans. He stated that in Ghana the British colonial authorities cut and recut films meant for African viewership to remove scenes that portrayed colonialists in a state of degradation, that showed colonialists being abusive towards Africans, and those that showed very close relationships between British men and African women.²⁴

Georg's study, therefore, although based on Francophone Africa, was very important as it also touched a little on African audiences. This was important as, apart from a comparative dimension it might have lent to Anglophone Africa, as in the case of Nambigne's attestation of censorship of cinema in colonial Ghana, it sort of gave a glimpse of what could be expected to come from this study. However, more work needed to be done, especially in Anglophone Africa, on how African audiences engaged with colonial cinema – perhaps more as active participants rather than passive recipients whose role was only reactionary.

Burns in his article, 'The African Bioscope – Movie House Culture in British Colonial Africa,' examined the history of cinema in British colonial Africa, arguing that cinema became a place of social contestations, places where urban filmgoers sought to negotiate and define their identities, places also that were seen by some African elites and Europeans as coterminous with vice and immorality. He wrote of how a fire started in the projection room of the al-Duniya theatre in the city of Kano in Northern Nigeria on 13 May, 1951. Many of

²³ Odile Georg, 'The Cinema, a Place of Tension in Colonial Africa: Film Censorship in French West Africa,' *Afrika Zamani* 15, 16 (2008), 28, 34-35.

²⁴ Vitus Nambigne, 'Cinema in Ghana: History, Ideology and Popular Culture,' PhD Thesis, University of Bergen, 2011, p. 112.

the Africans died in the theatre as the owner of the theatre had locked the door to prevent people who did not have tickets from entering.²⁵ This information attested to the popularity of the cinema houses in British colonial Africa, that if the door was not locked those Africans who did not have tickets would still want to force their way into the cinema.

He further wrote that colonial authorities regarded African audiences as impressionable and sought to use cinema to influence them to continue to regard Europeans highly and to conform to the expectations of the Empire; they also tried to limit all material that they saw as having the potential to push Africans to acts of violence.²⁶ This is important information because it makes one wonder to what extent this fear on the part of the colonial authorities went and whether this fear was justified, considering that there was a lot of violence seen in the cowboy movies that Africans were exposed to.

Emmanuel Akyeampong and Charles Ambler in their article, 'Leisure in African History: An Introduction,' that concerned itself with the historical perspective of leisure activities in African spaces and some of the misunderstandings between Africans and Europeans concerning the nature of what to consider leisure, they agreed with Burns that the popularity of American cowboy films among Africans in colonial British Central Africa raised grave concerns among the authorities as to what threat to public order the exposure of Africans to the violent films might pose. Curiously, the British and some educated Africans wanted to see cowboy films banned. This engendered a debate on the issue that ended up in a federal committee of inquiry in 1959 to find out what exactly the impact of cowboy films was on African audiences. This came in the wake of the 1940s and 1950s which saw an increase in crime and violence in Central African townships. As a matter of course, those who were against viewership of cowboy films by African audiences ascribed the crime and violence to

²⁵ Burns, 'The African Bioscope,' 65.

²⁶ Burns, 'The African Bioscope,' 66.

cowboy films.²⁷ This take on colonial cinema in British central Africa by Akyeampong and Ambler was vital as it gave this study a further task of attempting to find out whether a clear link was established between the violent films and the increased crime and violence that attended the Central African townships in the 1940s and the 1950s, as well as how far in destabilising the social and political spaces this crime and violence went.

Rosaleen Smyth in her paper, 'How War Propaganda "Unsettled the Natives" in Northern Rhodesia during the Second World War,' highlighted the impact of the second-hand experience of war on Northern Rhodesia. She argued that the war caused something of an information explosion as never seen before in the colony, a situation that made the Northern Rhodesian Africans see an urgent need for an African political voice, a situation also that made the colonial administration more willing than before to listen to African public opinion in its quest to mobilise public opinion in support of the war effort. She also noted that African political leaders were now allowed to more freely voice their opinions in the press, government and private, and to engage the colonial administration and settler politicians in political dialogue. She clarified that propaganda in other forms by the Northern Rhodesian colonial government started way before the war, picking as *locus classicus* the 1935 strike by mine labourers on the Copperbelt where a government commission of inquiry blamed the strike on the Watchtower denomination. The inquiry argued that the spread of Watchtower literature in the mine compounds was to blame for the militant nature exhibited by the African miners. It found that this was so because of the subversive nature and opposition to all forms of earthly governments by the denomination. To counterbalance the Watchtower pamphlets, the colonial government embarked on the publication of literature, in simple English and in several local languages (Nyanja, Bemba, Tonga, and Lozi), that championed

²⁷ Emmanuel Akyeampong and Charles Ambler, 'Leisure in African History: An Introduction,' *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35, 1 (2002), 13.

loyalty to the colonial government and proceeded to spread it in mine compounds.²⁸ This sort of information was vital as it opened up more ground for this study to try and find out how, if at all, cinema contributed to industrial unrest and Africans' militancy.

Smyth stated that war propaganda itself was short term and was directed from London where the Ministry of Information was established in 1939 to complement the Empire's military campaigns. The Ministry of Information's task was to initiate propaganda policy and to design and produce propaganda material, and it also had the money to propagate this material; it further gave assistance to colonial information officers who were appointed by the Colonial Office at the start of the Second World War. She further wrote that 'War propaganda for Africans was conveyed by means of radio, film, the press (Mutende and leaflets) and through lectures and talks by European officials.'²⁹ She added that after monitoring the experiment, the Information Office took over from the amateurs in September 1940 and opened a small radio station in Lusaka to ensure closer contact between the government and the people 'and to provide a quicker and more convenient method of letting you know what we are doing.'³⁰

Like Smyth, Alfred Tembo in his PhD thesis mentioned that the colonial administration:

tried to influence public opinion by means of a propaganda campaign involving newspapers, leaflets, talks by District Commissioners, radio broadcasts and cinema shows which were designed to explain the war and account for the economic strains brought about by the hostilities, and encourage men to join the army.³¹

²⁸ Rosaleen Smyth, 'How War Propaganda "Unsettled the Natives" in Northern Rhodesia during the Second World War,' paper presented at an annual conference at the University of Melbourne, 30 August-1 September, 1984, pp. 3-4.

²⁹ Smyth, 'How War Propaganda "Unsettled the Natives" in Northern Rhodesia,' pp. 4, 6. See also Alfred Tembo, 'The Impact of the Second World War on Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), 1939-1953,' PhD Thesis, University of the Free State, 2015, p. 36.

³⁰ Smyth, 'How War Propaganda "Unsettled the Natives" in Northern Rhodesia,' p. 7. In this she quotes Governor Maybin opening the Lusaka radio station on 18 September, 1940, as reported in Livingstone Mail, 27 September, 1940.

³¹ Tembo, 'The Impact of the Second World War,' p. 35.

Then he went on to write about how chiefs and posters in addition to the aforementioned propaganda avenues were used by the colonial administration for the maintenance of a positive public opinion to enable recruitment of African men to fight on the side of the Empire in the war. He further argued that the CFU circulated propaganda material through cinema and that by the end of the war about 80,000 Africans had been reached by the mobile cinema vans in the rural areas of Northern Rhodesia.³²

Wendell P. Holbrook, in 'British Propaganda and the Mobilization of the Gold Coast War Effort, 1939-1945' that highlighted the different channels of communication that helped to spread wartime propaganda, also stressed the importance of cinema vans and cinema in general in this regard. The goal was to change the thinking of most locals who thought of the war as a white man's war and to align the emotions of these Africans with the war effort. Holbrook further stated that the propagandists in the Cinema Section of the colonial project understood the importance of having wartime propaganda endorsed and presented by Africans themselves, and this was reflected in their programming. And with the use of four cinema vans the Gold Coast Information Department operated the most successful wartime mobile cinema propaganda in West Africa, showing films to over 500,000 people by the end of 1941.³³

Rosaleen Smyth, in her article, 'War Propaganda during the Second World War in Northern Rhodesia,' that focused on wartime propaganda in Northern Rhodesia, further argued that the mine owners made heavily-censored cinema shows available to thousands of African miners on the Copperbelt. She mentioned that another way to ensure that Africans enlisted for the Northern Rhodesia Regiment (NRR) was the deliberate making of the 16 mm films to promote the British royal family. The British King was presented as the symbol of

³² Tembo, 'The Impact of the Second World War,' pp. 36-40.

³³ Wendell P. Holbrook, 'British Propaganda and the Mobilization of the Gold Coast War Effort, 1939-1945,' *Journal of African History* 26, (1985), 349, 354, 355. See also Bonny Ibhawoh, 'Second World War Propaganda, Imperial Idealism and Anti-Colonial Nationalism in British West Africa,' *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 16, 2 (2007), 221-243.

Empire, a kind of super demigod to whom all Africans and their traditional rulers owed loyalty. This was achieved via 'a monarchical ideology linking the ruler and the ruled.'³⁴ This article by Smyth as well as her paper, together with both Tembo's and Holbrook's studies, were absolutely useful in illuminating the path of wartime propaganda in Northern Rhodesia. Clearly, however, their focus was not an in-depth, exclusive study of colonial cinema as a wartime propaganda tool for the British colonial administrations. This study sought to completely focus on cinema and attempt to unearth more information on the use of colonial cinema as a wartime propaganda tool, of course from the perspective and experiences of the African audiences themselves.

Powdermaker in her seminal ethnographic study, *Copper Town*, has a chapter titled 'Going to the Movies' in which she observed and recorded how Africans in the Copperbelt mining town of Luanshya interacted with colonial cinema. Hers was not a historical study, thus it did not employ historical analysis. It was, however, as invaluable a piece of work to this study as Ambler's 'Popular Films and Colonial Audiences: The Movies in Northern Rhodesia' – the two scholarly works largely informed this study. Perhaps Powdermaker's study, even though it was ahistorical, was more important as it was the first major study conducted on colonial cinema in Northern Rhodesia and hence blazed a trail for latter works, like Ambler's for example.

Powdermaker made important observations of filmgoers. She wrote of a man who while watching a documentary depicting Southern Rhodesian healthy cattle commented that when such cattle was brought to Northern Rhodesia for slaughter, the meat was sold to Europeans only while Africans were sold thin meat. Another commented on houses that were being dedicated for the aged that such beautiful homes were for Europeans only as Europeans would never build such houses for Africans. He went as far as saying, 'Can you see any

³⁴ Rosaleen Smyth, 'War Propaganda during the Second World War in Northern Rhodesia,' *African Affairs* 83, 332 (1984), 346.

Africans in the crowd listening to that speech? No, these houses are for Europeans.³⁵ Powdermaker left it there, except perhaps it would be more meaningful to add that a sense of injustice seemed to have set in on the part of Africans and that colonial cinema ended up being largely an incessant reminder of that injustice.

Further, Powdermaker took note of the excitement roused by the fighting in cowboy films. She wrote of an educated (secondary school level), responsible man in his early twenties who said:

When people are fighting, I feel as if I am also going to fight someone. My muscles feel it..., and I feel as if I am fighting. I always want to see how strong Jack [hero of the cowboy films] is and whether he can be knocked out early. But I expect the hero, Jack, to beat everyone and to win every time. When the hero doesn't rise up after a fight, it is useless, and I feel discouraged. We don't want Jack to be beaten. He must always rise up after he is hit and the enemy must always run away.³⁶

This feeling was shared by both men and women, who also felt that the fighting skills in the cowboy movies also improved their own fighting skills.³⁷ How far this feeling went and whether it eventually materialised in any meaningful form for Africans was an issue that needed historical investigation.

At best, colonial cinema seemed to have provided an avenue for Africans to engage their colonial masters and vent their frustrations as 'Whatever was seen was commented on, interpreted, criticized. Questions were asked.'³⁸

Powdermaker, however, left a glaring gap that needed filling with more information in order to make full sense, in terms of implication, of her observations relating to how Africans experienced colonial cinema. Her work was not meant to be coloured with a historical perspective, thus the need to delve into this area of study afresh – with the tools of

³⁵ Powdermaker, *Copper Town*, p. 257.

³⁶ Powdermaker, *Copper Town*, p. 260.

³⁷ Powdermaker, *Copper Town*, p. 261.

³⁸ Powdermaker, *Copper Town*, p. 270.

the historian. Powdermaker's work, therefore, needed to be supplemented with historical investigation and interpretation so as to tie some of the loose ends. This study lent itself to this.

Ambler's article, 'Popular Films and Colonial Audiences: The Movies in Northern Rhodesia,' proved absolutely invaluable to this study as it not only allowed one to view colonial cinema through a historical prism but also opened up avenues for further research into how Africans engaged with colonial cinema. Ambler told the story of Africans' contact with cinema, bringing into focus issues that he saw as having defined the way Africans appropriated media images. In short, he explored 'the broad question of the transmission and reception of Western mass culture in the context of colonialism.'³⁹

Ambler made clear that the imperial propagandists sought to invest appropriate narratives and actions in films to foster loyalty to the colonial regime and, thus, censored films that were shown to Africans because they feared that some images and storylines might inspire a desire on the part of Africans to rise against the colonial order, whose shield was the putative superiority of the European race. It was to prove a tall order as the typical cowboy films were characterised by violence. The influence of these movies was evident in how the urban youth conducted themselves in the 1930s and 1940s, forming gangs whose leaders called themselves names such as 'Jeke' and 'Popeye' after their cowboy heroes. He further stated that in the 1940s a group of six young African men, when apprehended, blamed their beating and robbing of a man in the mining town of Mufulira on the violent films they were being exposed to.⁴⁰ It was interesting that Ambler also stipulated that these African audiences could make very little sense of plotlines and, therefore, interpreted and appropriated film

³⁹ Ambler, 'Popular Films and Colonial Audiences,' 82.

⁴⁰ Ambler, 'Popular Films and Colonial Audiences,' 82-83, 85, 100, 101.

images, character motivations and actions in ways which were very different from how audiences in North America and Britain engaged with film.⁴¹

Further, Ambler stated that:

African audiences often disturbed European officials by the ways they used material from films to make judgements about the outside world, the nature of imperialism, and the character of European culture. Seemingly innocuous footage of healthy cattle in Southern Rhodesia, for example, inspired commentary from Northern Rhodesian moviegoers in the 1950s on racial segregation and the inferiority of the diet of Africans in comparison to whites.⁴²

And so it followed that African 'moviegoers sought in films not only entertainment and sources of style but also an opportunity to engage and critique the colonial order...'⁴³

Ambler stipulated that in the twilight years of colonial rule in Northern Rhodesia, some Africans working together with their liberal white allies launched a direct challenge to the censorship of films informed by race as part of the wider assault on the colour bar. He further stated that the opening of a multiracial cinema in Lusaka in 1957 enabled Africans to watch a wider range of films in a more comfortable indoor theatre, but that educated African patrons still risked being turned away if the films were not passed for African audiences. This remained a stark reminder to the Africans that non-racialism in public spaces was still only a dream.⁴⁴ This study sought to show how the opening of the first multiracial cinema in Lusaka in 1957 affected the issues of desegregation on the Copperbelt.

Ambler further stated that in late 1960 on the eve of the legislated desegregation of cinema and all other public facilities in Northern Rhodesia, Roman Catholic bishops vehemently spoke against desegregation and defended racial censorship as follows:

Material reasons like uniformity of treatment, economy, convenience and such ought not to be allowed to weigh against the need to safeguard from evils of the moral order of the

⁴¹ Ambler, 'Popular Films and Colonial Audiences,' 87.

⁴² Ambler, 'Popular Films and Colonial Audiences,' 100. See also Powdermaker, *Copper Town*, p. 257.

⁴³ Ambler, 'Popular Films and Colonial Audiences,' 104.

⁴⁴ Ambler, 'Popular Films and Colonial Audiences,' 102-103.

African people, the vast majority of whom have...primitive ideas of morality affecting public order and decency.⁴⁵

Ambler, however, did not go further to illuminate the actual fears of the Roman Catholic bishops nor show if these fears were realised in the period between the legislated desegregation of cinema and the independence of Northern Rhodesia. It was important in this regard that the narrative be completed or, at least, be clarified. This study further sought to lend itself to this task.

This study, drawing on global, regional as well as national perspectives on the issue of cinema between the colonisers and the colonised peoples, seeks to place itself in the larger conversation on colonial cinema, albeit with leanings that bring the Africans themselves into the limelight. In short, having benefitted from the reviewed literature, the study then seeks to show how Africans engaged with colonial cinema in a segregated environment, some issues that contributed to the desegregation of cinema, and how Africans engaged with colonial cinema in a desegregated environment on the Copperbelt, Northern Rhodesia, from 1928 to 1964.

⁴⁵ Ambler, 'Popular Films and Colonial Audiences,' 103. Here Ambler quoted from Northern Rhodesia Bishops Conference, Secretary General, March 9, 1960, 'Film Censorship: Evidence submitted to Federal Working Party,' NAZ, Sec. 5/15.

1.7 Methodology

This qualitative research combined published and unpublished documentary analysis as well as semi-structured oral interviews as its main methods of conducting the study. In this, therefore, both primary and secondary sources were used.

The consultation of primary and secondary sources was conducted in the University of Zambia Main Library, especially in the Special Collections section. Such primary sources as parliamentary debates were used in collaboration with secondary sources – published and unpublished articles, and books.

NAZ was also consulted – the focus there was on government documents such as letters between government officials, newspapers, booklets, and secretariat files.

ZANIS was consulted as well for primary sources such as the 16 mm and the 35 mm projectors, 16 mm camera, reels, and images from the period of the study.

The ZCCM-IH Archive in Ndola was of immense help to this study as it provided files, newspapers, letters between mine officials, and correspondence between the NRG and mine owners. These primary sources plugged the holes that had previously existed in the research.

The Faith and Encounter Centre Zambia (FENZA) library was also consulted. As it houses volumes of primary and secondary sources on social, cultural and religious issues in the form of magazines, newspapers, books, images, etc., it was hoped that it would provide insight into how the church defined itself and viewed Africans in the socio-political space of Northern Rhodesia with regard to the focus of this study. However, nothing of relevance to the study was found.

To conclude the research, oral interviews were conducted on the Copperbelt. Only willing participants were interviewed. These included Zambians who lived during the period, and within the geography, of the study and had an opportunity to watch films. A voice

recorder was used. It must be noted that the Bemba language is the lingua franca of the Copperbelt and, hence, was the medium of communication in the interviews. Some parts of the responses are given verbatim in this report. Being conversant with the Bemba language, I personally translated the responses into English.

1.8 Organisation of the Dissertation

The study comprises five chapters. It is organised in such a way that chapter one deals with the introduction and historical background before it delves into highlighting the gap in the literature and spelling out methodology, among other things; chapter two touches a little on the beginnings of cinema in Northern Rhodesia, then it begins an exploration of the themes that lend description to Africans' cinema experiences on the Copperbelt in a segregated environment; chapter three unpacks and discusses some of the issues that contributed to the desegregation of cinema in Northern Rhodesia – of course with the Copperbelt as the setting for the contestations that emerged out of these issues; chapter four takes the study further by describing Africans' cinema experiences in a desegregated environment and touches on the nature of the desegregation in question; and chapter five is the conclusion, which summarises the themes and findings from chapters two to four.

CHAPTER TWO

AFRICANS' CINEMA EXPERIENCES IN A SEGREGATED ENVIRONMENT

2.1 Introduction

Cinema was a social spectacle like nothing the Africans had seen before from the British in Northern Rhodesia – moving pictures beamed onto a white sheet by a stream of light from a piece of well-shaped metal. There was an unprecedented African craze around the mobile cinema vans and the African cinema halls and, at once, this new marvel gripped the Africans' imagination as to what was possible with the British. In the same spirit, this chapter describes how – among other themes – the early years of cinema, the use of cinema as a wartime propaganda tool by the NRG, cinema after the Second World War, the popularity of cinema, and the use of cinema to stabilise African labour informed the experiences of Africans on the Copperbelt in the context of colonialism.

2.2 The Dawn of Cinema in Northern Rhodesia

Like Chanan's revelation of the first audiences of cinema in Latin America having been in the urban areas connected by rail,⁴⁶ in Northern Rhodesia the first audiences of cinema – beginning in 1928 – were on the Copperbelt (an urban area). The only difference in this was that the taking root of cinema in an urban area in Northern Rhodesia had nothing to do with the rail line; it had, however, everything to do with the burgeoning copper-mining industry there.⁴⁷

Right before the first film showing on the Copperbelt, the British colonialists had already embraced the suspicion and fear that films might produce criminals who would make the protectorate ungovernable if they were to be shown to natives without being censored. In

⁴⁶ Chanan, 'Cinema in Latin America,' p. 428.

⁴⁷ NAZ, SEC 2/1121, Censorship of Films for Natives in Northern Rhodesia, 1932-1948.

line with Georg's observation of the French in Francophone Africa having found cinema to be working against them and, thus, moved to create a censorship board,⁴⁸ in the same way the British in Northern Rhodesia moved quickly to create a form of censorship that saw the first films shown to Africans being censored by the Criminal Investigation wing of the Police Department. This was so in order to control and influence Africans only in the ways the NRG intended.⁴⁹

It was also conveniently decided at the beginning that, owing to the multiplicity of languages in Central Africa, silent films should be produced. These were to be accompanied by subtitles and microphone commentary in the language required – and this was the situation on the Copperbelt. As regarded certain films which needed to be sounded, sound was added to the footage in the commercial studios of South Africa or the United Kingdom.⁵⁰

2.3 War and the Propaganda Machine

Following the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the Ministry of Information was formed in London for the deliberate purpose of channelling war propaganda in the colonies. The British Colonial Office prioritised the use of cinema as a war propaganda tool in British Africa and – as a result – in 1939 the CFU, a branch of the Ministry of Information, was established to see to this end. The CFU used cinema halls and mobile cinema vans for purposes of recruitment in the early years of the war, and some success in the recruitment process was recorded.⁵¹

In 1943 Northern Rhodesia had one mobile cinema which was operated by the CFU. The cinema van was sent out to reach all rural Africans who were connected by road. Considering the deplorable state of nearly all the rural roads in those days it was quite a

⁴⁸ Georg, 'The Cinema, a Place of Tension in Colonial Africa,' 28.

⁴⁹ NAZ, RC/85, Censorship of Cinematograph Films Exhibited to Natives, 1927.

⁵⁰ NAZ, SEC 2/1148, Joint Film Unit – Central African Film Unit, 1946-1948.

⁵¹ Smyth, 'How War Propaganda "Unsettled the Natives" in Northern Rhodesia,' p. 7.

challenge to reach the villages. However, the mobile cinema managed to reach and show war films to about 80,000 Africans. The object was to garner support for the British war effort by getting African men between the ages of eighteen and forty to enlist for the NRR and to have other Africans show their support by tapping rubber. The money accruing from the rubber exports was to be used by the colonial administration to acquire more weapons and to further contribute to the upkeep of the NRR.⁵²

The CFU ensured that the cinema vans were accompanied by a local commentator to provide commentary on the contents of the 16 mm films after they were shown to Northern Rhodesians in the rural areas. The commentators were usually trained by the CFU itself, and – on almost all occasions – the films were watched by the chiefs and the elders and discussions were had as to the themes of the films before they were shown publicly to the mostly illiterate rural populations. This ensured that the traditional leadership was in agreement with, or at least aware of, the commentaries as made by the commentators. It was a strategy that enabled a seamless transmission and reception of social engineering as well as colonial propaganda. This was the strategy the British employed not only on the Copperbelt but in all their colonies, and it worked largely to their benefit.⁵³

The District Officer would send a messenger to the villages to inform the traditional leadership that the mobile van was on its way. A day or two would pass before the van finally showed up, but when it did arrive it was much cause for fanfare among the mostly illiterate rural populations who very seldom saw vehicles. And the films were a focus of immense fascination as they were usually more detailed and deliberately fun-filled to attract the attentions of the Africans to the glories of joining the NRR.⁵⁴

⁵² Louis Nell, 'The Mobile Cinema in Northern Rhodesia,' in NRG, *Colonial Cinema*, Vol. 6, No. 2. Lusaka: CFU, 1948), p. 43.

⁵³ Louis Nell, 'Commentary and Commentators,' in NRG, *Colonial Cinema*, Vol. 6, No. 1. (Lusaka: CFU, 1948), p. 13.

⁵⁴ Nell, 'The Mobile Cinema,' p. 43.

During the day the villagers would help to clear a bushy area where the show would take place at night. They would then gather on the cleared spot around sunset and wait for the cinema show. The *Kapasos* helped to ensure that there was order before the films could begin, and the African commentator – who was also the assistant to the British operator of the cinema van – would direct the village audience to focus their eyes on the white sheet in front of them, not on the projector. When the reels were run, the Africans could not hide their amazement at what was unfolding before them; they shouted for joy, clapped, and often punched the air. The commentator would explain that the captured Europeans were the Italians whom the British had captured, and this was cause for amazement as the Africans wondered if there were that many Europeans in the world. Other reels would show Northern Rhodesia and some villages to which the villagers would exclaim, 'Good heavens! Look, there is our Paramount Chief!'⁵⁵ (See reels on pages 28 and 29 as well as the 16 mm video camera on pages 30 and 31 that was used for recording films on reels.)



Figure 2. 1: A room with some of the remaining 16 mm and 35 mm reels at ZANIS, Lusaka. Picture taken on 9 April, 2019.

⁵⁵ Nell, 'The Mobile Cinema,' p. 44.



Figure 2. 2: A 16 mm recording reel at ZANIS, Lusaka, the same version used for local productions by the NRIS and CFU. Picture taken on 9 April, 2019.

On one occasion a reel showed Africans collecting rubber to help with the war effort. The commentator explained how important it was for them to collect the commodity as it was going to ensure the financial muscle of the colonial government and see to it that the troops were taken care of financially. Then during the changing of reels one viewer paid close attention to the loudspeaker housed in a black box under the screen and said to his friend that the box sounded like an African. The commentator who had heard the viewer said that he was of course an African just like him. The viewer was utterly astonished and said to his friend that the black box could talk and it said it was an African just like him. The Chief was then invited, at the end of the show, to say something through the microphone. He thanked the NRG for being so kind as to send this form of amazement to his village after which he implored his people to show support to the war effort by joining the army and by collecting

more rubber. More villagers now paid attention to the black box and talked among themselves that it was a remarkable thing that box, for they could hear the Chief's voice clearly from there. 'They accepted that as an integral part of this new wonder, but to hear the Chief's voice! Amazing!'⁵⁶



Figure 2. 3: Front view of the 16 mm video camera that was used by the NRIS and CFU for local productions. Picture taken on 9 April, 2019, at ZANIS, Lusaka.

⁵⁶ Nell, 'The Mobile Cinema,' pp. 44-45.



Figure 2. 4: Side view of the 16 mm video camera that was used by the NRIS and CFU for local productions. Picture taken on 9 April, 2019, at ZANIS, Lusaka.

The next morning the villagers would go to the place where the screen had been erected and look for the spoor of the animals they had seen the previous night, and they always found it disheartening when they could not find any – they felt cheated.⁵⁷

Smyth, Tembo, and Holbrook described the importance of, and avenues for, wartime propaganda – Smyth and Tembo focusing on Northern Rhodesia, whereas Holbrook focusing on the Gold Coast. Holbrook further stated that the propagandists in the Cinema Section of the colonial project understood the importance of having wartime propaganda endorsed and presented by Africans themselves, and this was reflected in their programming. And with the use of four cinema vans the Gold Coast Information Department operated the most successful wartime mobile cinema propaganda in West Africa, showing films to over 500,000 people by

⁵⁷ Nell, 'The Mobile Cinema,' p. 45.

the end of 1941. At once the 80,000 Africans reached by mobile cinema vans by the end of the Second World War in Northern Rhodesia seems a dire pittance. What stood out from the three scholars, however, was that mobile cinema vans were used to align the emotions of the Africans with the war effort so as to have them enlist for the wartime army in a war they increasingly grew to view as their own.⁵⁸

Moreover, it must be noted that wartime propaganda on the Copperbelt – by way of consequence – went beyond simply aligning the emotions of the Africans with the war effort and having them enlist for the NRR. It engendered such a craze that many African men aged between eighteen to forty most of whom, incidentally, were also mine workers decided to trade the mines for the chance to join the NRR. The NRG presented – via 16 mm films – the NRR as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the Africans to work for His Majesty the King of the whole British Empire. In a bid to prove themselves real men, many African mine workers forwarded their names to the NRR for recruitment. These names would then be sent to the mine owners for release. In time, there arose a delicate interplay between keeping copper production on the Copperbelt high and ensuring that the NRR continued to grow – copper, together with rubber, sustaining the financial muscle of the NRG and more Africans enlisting for the NRR in defence of the Empire.⁵⁹

When copper production began to dwindle owing to the many African mine workers leaving the mines for the NRR, the mine owners complained to the NRG. This compelled the NRG to sanction Sunday labour on the Copperbelt mines as a temporary measure to address the shortfall. With the NRR having already caused understaffing in Government Service and the Railways, the NRG became more careful when recruiting African men who were already

⁵⁸ Smyth, 'How War Propaganda "Unsettled the Natives" in Northern Rhodesia,' p. 7; Tembo, 'The Impact of the Second World War,' pp. 36-40; and Holbrook, 'British Propaganda, 1939-1945,' 349, 354, 355. See also Ibhawoh, 'Second World War Propaganda,' 221-243.

⁵⁹ NRG, *NRLC Debates, Hansard No. 43 (Official Verbatim Report of the Debates of 13th – 24th January, 1940)* (Lusaka: Government Printer, 1940), p. 84.

in the service of the mines; these were only recruited after discussions with the mine owners and ensuring that copper production would not decrease as a consequence.⁶⁰

2.4 Post-War Cinema

In the period after the Second World War, there was a noticeable difference in the cinema programmes for Africans. Peace-time cinema had a different focus altogether:

Films cover subjects such as hygiene, agriculture and veterinary work. The policy is to include as much entertainment material in the programme as possible. The rural African has not yet developed a cinematic background; and before the cinema can be used more fully as an educational medium he must be taught to respond to the medium. This can be done by teaching him to regard the cinema as something which brings him pleasure. Once he can associate the cinema with pleasure, he will adopt a more receptive attitude towards educational films.⁶¹

In this case the shows would begin with one or two films of an entertainment nature, then followed by material of local interest such as game or specially made newsreels. Out of ten films five would typically be of an entertainment nature, two of local interest and three of an educational nature. This way, the colonial administration sugar-coated the pill it served to the Africans. And in all of this, programmes shown to these Africans were especially censored to truncate from them scenes that promoted drunkenness, gambling, nudity, or crime. The colonialists made sure that Westerns were not shown to the rural populations as they deemed them as a false representation of the European way of life. Slapstick comedy of the Charlie Chaplin type was shown instead.⁶²

One of the first films produced for African viewership was based on the fictional book, *Ignorance Is No Defence*, written by Mr H. Franklin, who was the Director of Information for Northern Rhodesia. The film described in a funny and sympathetic manner

⁶⁰ NRG, *NRLC Debates, Hansard No. 43*, p. 84.

⁶¹ Nell, 'The Mobile Cinema,' p. 45.

⁶² Nell, 'The Mobile Cinema,' p. 45.

the many legal pitfalls which Africans unfamiliar with urban life faced. The second was a historical film detailing the travels and works of Dr David Livingstone in Central Africa. And by depicting Livingstone's efforts against slavery and his introduction of Christianity, the film sought to impress upon African audiences the blessings of having Europeans as their masters. The other films focused on health and hygiene, the mistakes in traditional systems of agriculture, soil erosion and conservation, fables, hunting, love stories and the operations of democratic governments.⁶³

The plan for the CFU was set out clearly at the beginning: to produce films for Africans, for Europeans in Central Africa, and on Central Africa for overseas viewers. It was also decided that all African cinema halls should have 16 mm projectors, as opposed to the better 35 mm projectors in European cinema halls.⁶⁴(See the 16 mm projector on pages 34 and 35 as well as the 35 mm projector on page 35.)



Figure 2. 5: The 16 mm projector at ZANIS, Lusaka. Picture taken on 9 April, 2019.

⁶³ NAZ, SEC 2/1148, Joint Film Unit – Central African Film Unit, 1946-1948.

⁶⁴ NAZ, SEC 2/1148, Joint Film Unit – Central African Film Unit, 1946-1948.



Figure 2. 6: A broken-down 16 mm projector at Mikomfwa Welfare Centre (now Luanshya Central Recreation Club). Picture taken on 18 May, 2019.



Figure 2. 7: The 35 mm projector at ZANIS, Lusaka. Picture taken on 9 April, 2019.

Whereas during the War there was a clear propaganda-informed tilt towards programming to lure Africans, especially males aged between the ages of eighteen and forty, into joining the NRR and those who would remain behind to tap rubber for the NRG's financial stability, post-War cinema programmes focused on an attempt to create a more curated and obedient population of Africans. Hence, even though the Second World War propaganda campaign via cinema was over, a different brand of propaganda was engineered to work towards the same end – the creation and maintenance of Africans loyal to the British Empire.⁶⁵

The British Council (BC), working together with the mine owners and the NRG through the Film Censorship Board (FCB), ensured that British cultural imperialism was a subtle but potent enough theme in the films that Africans watched. In time, most Africans had firmly modelled their lifestyle on the pictures of Europeans in the films and those of the British in real life as they saw them. Hence it was no surprise that Africans aspired to, among other attributes and choices, British mannerisms, dress sense, speech, and foods and beverages (tea became a household product for Africans, for instance).⁶⁶

2.5 The Popularity of Cinema

Fair wrote about the spectator craze that surrounded cinema in Tanzania, stating that sometimes Africans physically fought for tickets as more and more of them wanted to find themselves in the cinema halls.⁶⁷ With Africans on the Copperbelt, as opposed to physically fighting for tickets, the evidence points to them overcrowding in the cinema halls and those

⁶⁵ NAZ, SEC 2/1122, Films for Africans – African Film Library and Purchasing Committee, 1940-1946.

⁶⁶ NAZ, SEC 2/1122, Films for Africans – African Film Library and Purchasing Committee, 1940-1946.

⁶⁷ Fair, "They Stole the Show!" 94.

who could not enter owing to lack of space loitering outside the halls, waiting for their friends to regale them with the storylines of the cowboy films.⁶⁸

On the same note, Burns described how a fire started in the projection room of the al-Duniya theatre in the city of Kano in Northern Nigeria on 13 May, 1951 and that many Africans died in that fire as the operator of the cinema had locked the door to prevent people who did not have tickets from entering.⁶⁹ No evidence was found of a fire having started in an African cinema hall on the Copperbelt, but the locking of the doors to the African cinema halls was common practice so as to prevent those without tickets from entering. In fact, the NRG saw it prudent to deploy African policemen outside the African cinema halls to maintain order and ensure that Africans outside the halls did not resort to banging on the cinema doors.⁷⁰ (See the pictures on pages 37 and 38 of African policemen controlling the crowd outside a cinema hall. See also on page 39 a crowd of Africans outside a cinema hall.)



Figure 2. 8: *Policemen Maintaining Order outside an African Cinema on the Copperbelt, c. 1959.* (Developed from negative.) Source: ZANIS Photographic Library.

⁶⁸ Interview with Alfred Sunkutu, Mikomfwa, Luanshya, Zambia, 20 May, 2019.

⁶⁹ Burns, 'The African Bioscope,' 65.

⁷⁰ Interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019.



Figure 2. 9: *Policemen Dispersing African Boys Loitering outside an African Cinema on the Copperbelt, c. 1959.* (Developed from negative.) Source: ZANIS Photographic Library.

Some Africans who ended up outside the cinema halls loitering when others were inside watching films, went to these places in order to socialise and revel in the narrations of their friends after the shows. However, it did not always work out for them as the African policemen stationed at these cinema halls often drove loiterers away to maintain order.⁷¹

⁷¹ Interview with Paul Langson Besa, Roan, Luanshya, Zambia, 18 May, 2019.



Figure 2. 10: *Crowd of Africans outside an African Cinema on the Copperbelt, c. 1959.* (Developed from negative.) Source: ZANIS Photographic Library.

Bioscope shows were held weekly in all mine townships and they were very well attended. Sometimes these shows were carried out even between showers. In time, the cinema shows and broadcasts of news from Lusaka were held at the Welfare Centres in the townships. Further, a start was made in Luanshya in April, 1945, on giving occasional bioscope shows to the patients in the Native Hospital. This work fell under the auspices of the Compound Recreation Officer.⁷² The research could not establish for how long this arrangement held out, or if the same was done in other African mine townships.

Recalling with a smile how much fun cinema was in those day, Besa's face lit up as he said, *'Ulya uwaletambisha aleikala mu kayanda umwali projector. Elyo projector*

⁷² ZCCM-IH, 10.7.10C, Compound Monthly and Annual Reports of Operations, 1932-1946.

*yaletambisha ama film kuntanshi pa chibumba.*⁷³ (**My translation:** The person who used to show films [the cinema operator] would be in the projector room. Then the projector would beam films in front on the wall [on the white sheet].) (See the 16 mm projector below.)



Figure 2. 11: This 16 mm projector at ZANIS, Lusaka, would project images through the glass onto the white screen in the cinema, no different from the way it is done in modern cinemas. Picture taken on 9 April, 2019.

2.6 Cinema for Stabilising African Labour

Other than the showing of films to Africans playing an instrumental role in keeping the African audiences on the Copperbelt informed of the NRG's activities and in mass education, mass literacy, development campaigns and a general enlightenment of the peasantry and labouring majority, and in helping to even up the gap between a very small class of 'intelligentsia' and a whole people considered largely illiterate and ignorant of the world,⁷⁴ the mine owners realised the great need to use cinema as an attraction to stabilise African labour.

⁷³ Interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019.

⁷⁴ NAZ, SEC 2/1148, Joint Film Unit – Central African Film Unit, 1946-1948.

As a result, in townships, Municipalities and Town Management Boards cinema halls were set up for Africans. This measure helped to ensure that African labour was stable in the mining areas.⁷⁵

Further, colonial cinema did more than serve as an effective tool for communicating important information to the rural populations in Northern Rhodesia; the British settlers in these areas began to notice that regular monthly shows on or near their estates were helping to keep their African farm labourers from drifting to the towns. Films of an entertainment nature for Africans on the Copperbelt were meant – as the British colonialists saw it – to add some excitement to the drab lives of Africans and to serve as an amenity to keep the African labourers in the rural areas from drifting to the towns in search of entertainment.⁷⁶ Therefore, the cinema vans also helped to stabilise African labour in the rural areas.

Moreover, some African miners met the women who would turn out to be their wives at the Welfare Centres, where cinema shows were held. All this played towards keeping the African miners on the Copperbelt, ensuring that the mines always had an assured reservoir of African labour.⁷⁷

For the African miners, it also only felt right for them and their families to stay on in the mine townships as there they had jobs and entertainment. It was, thus, unthinkable for an African miner to leave the urban area and go to a rural area, where jobs were hard to come by and cinema shows were not as frequent as the weekly arrangement (even twice per week) in the mine townships.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ NAZ, SEC 2/1148, Joint Film Unit – Central African Film Unit, 1946-1948.

⁷⁶ NAZ, SEC 2/1148, Joint Film Unit – Central African Film Unit, 1946-1948. See also Nell, 'The Mobile Cinema,' p. 46.

⁷⁷ Interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019.

⁷⁸ Interview with, Christabel Chanda Kabaso, Kantanshi, Mufulira, Zambia, 21 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019. See also NAZ, SEC 2/1148, Joint Film Unit – Central African Film Unit, 1946-1948.

2.7 The Other Faces of Cinema

The cinema hall was more than just a place where Africans went to watch films, it was also a meeting place for Africans to engage in other fun activities. For instance, gambling became very common at African cinema halls on the Copperbelt as young Africans were sure of meeting other young African gambling enthusiasts there.⁷⁹ (See figure below. The picture on page 43 shows African boys queuing up to buy tickets after gambling, while the one on page 44 depicts more children than adults attending cinema shows.)



Figure 2. 12: *Gambling at the Cinema on the Copperbelt*, c. 1957. (Developed from negative.) Source: ZANIS Photographic Library.

They would flip coins or roll dice and have others guess which sides they would fall on, which answers determined whether they would earn some pennies for themselves or lose them. Some boys would often lose their entrance pennies at gambling and end up loitering

⁷⁹ Interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019.

outside the cinema halls. Indeed, some African boys with sleight of hand would go to the cinema halls for the sole purpose of trying their luck at gambling.⁸⁰



Figure 2. 13: *African Boys Queue to Buy Tickets after Gambling on the Copperbelt*, c. 1957. (Developed from negative.) Source: ZANIS Photographic Library.

More children than adults, it appears, attended the African cinema halls. In the words of one interviewee:

*Abalesangwa sana – three quarters – mu ma cinema bali baice. Abakalamba abengi balisa yamba ukufimwenamo ati fya baice. Kwalesangwa abaice, kuti natila ati aba myaka seven to fifteen.*⁸¹ (**My translation:** Those who used to be found a lot – three quarters – at cinemas were children. Most adults started regarding cinema as something for children. Children were found there, I can say they were aged seven to fifteen.)

⁸⁰ Interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019.

⁸¹ Interview with Banda, 21 May, 2019.



Figure 2. 14: *Too Many Children go to Cinemas on the Copperbelt*, c. 1959. (Developed from negative.) Source: ZANIS Photographic Library.

Sometimes the African cinema halls were places where boys started love relationships with girls, and going there ensured that they always met and spent time together away from their parents and guardians.⁸²

2.8 Cinema Creating Criminals?

There was gangsterism reported in Mufulira in 1948 and it was believed by some quarters of society that this was in no uncertain terms a function of the violence that children were exposed to in films. To strengthen this resolve was a cinema serial shown to children titled similarly to the gang in question.⁸³

⁸² Interview with Justina Chipambala, Mikomfwa, Luanshya, Zambia, 20/05/2019; and interview with Mwewa Amos Banda, Kantanshi, Mufulira, Zambia, 21 May, 2019.

⁸³ NAZ, SEC 2/1121, Censorship of Films for Natives in Northern Rhodesia, 1932-1948. *An extract from the Mufulira Police Report for the month of March, 1948.*

At least twelve European juveniles were suspected by the police in Mufulira of belonging to a gang called 'Black Commando,' conveniently named after a serial that had been shown at the local cinema several weeks ago. The film had depicted the lead character clad in an all-black, tight-fitting suit which also concealed his face. Two of the gang members admitted to having worn similar types of suits made by the mother of one of the members of the gang. They said that they dressed in these garments for the purpose of merely frightening Africans at night. The police, however, suspected that the gang did far more than merely frighten Africans: it also stole from the unsuspecting Africans and Europeans alike. There was strong evidence of this in that a number of shops were reported to have been burgled by unknown persons during the time that the gang was in operation. Case in point was the breaking into Thomas Store on the night of 13 February, 1948, where a number of articles of clothing went missing. A large section of the European community also registered growing interest in the gang as their children often had encounters at school with the violent members of the gang.⁸⁴

This was also seen as a stain on the putative morality of the European community, and the authorities went into overdrive to try and dissociate their race from such social miscarriages that had previously been seen to be the sole preserve of the Africans. Mr A. Stevens, the Secretary of the Mufulira Branch of the Mine Workers Union, went as far as stating that certain films shown to European juveniles had a corrupting effect on their minds, hence causing them to behave in a way that was totally alien to them. Further, he implored the NRG to pay close attention to the FCB so as not to continue exposing European juveniles to the corrupting influences of cinema.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ NAZ, JUS 843/1/271, Prisons: Juvenile Offenders, 1948. *Letter from the Commissioner of Police to the Hon. Secretary for Native Affairs.*

⁸⁵ NAZ, JUS 843/1/271, Prisons: Juvenile Offenders, 1948.

Several months ago, there had also been a small gang of African juveniles convicted of robbery. They said they had seen such acts on the screen and had wished to try out gangsterism for themselves, holding up fellow Africans in the township. It had also come to the attention of African parents that their children were busy tying up each other with rope. This was also put down to the nature of films they were exposed to. Further, five African youths were said to have beaten up an African man and stolen a blanket which he carried in Mufulira in the evening. They all pleaded guilty to the crime once arrested by the police. After court they were asked why they had committed the crime. They replied that they had been to the cinema where they had seen such acts on the screen and they wanted to copy the pictures they had seen.⁸⁶

The African cinema halls were seen by some African elites and some Europeans as synonymous with vice and immorality, in addition to being a breeding ground for criminality.⁸⁷ A Mr Nalumango, an African representative, went as far as asking on the floor of the African Representative Council:

Is Government aware that some of the films shown to African children in bioscopes at present are harmful to their character, more so in places where adults and children go together? If so, what steps is Government prepared to take to stop this danger?⁸⁸

The reply he received from the President was as follows:

Censorship of all films shown to African audiences is in the hands of a Board on which there are four Africans. This Board does not hesitate to ban films or parts of films, which any member of it, European or African, considers to be unfit for Africans to see. Government is aware that opinion on the suitability for African audiences of the 'cowboy' type of film is divided...⁸⁹

⁸⁶ NAZ, SEC 2/1121, Censorship of Films for Natives in Northern Rhodesia, 1932-48. *An Extract from the Mufulira Police Monthly Report for October, 1947.*

⁸⁷ Burns, 'The African Bioscope,' 65.

⁸⁸ NAZ, SEC 2/1121. Censorship of Films for Natives in Northern Rhodesia, 1932-1948.

⁸⁹ NAZ, SEC 2/1121. Censorship of Films for Natives in Northern Rhodesia, 1932-1948.

The question represented the views of the African elite as regarded African cinema halls and the cowboy films, whereas the reply was an attestation to the split opinion on whether the cowboy films corrupted morals or not. Incidentally, it was never the NRG's or the mine owners' official position that the cowboy films corrupted morals or, indeed, encouraged boys and young men, African or European, to form gangs and commit crimes. A return to this position or lack of it, might well have served as an answer to the federal committee of inquiry set up in 1959 to find out what exactly the impact of the cowboy films was on African audiences in British Central Africa.⁹⁰

Akyeampong and Ambler noted an increase in crime and violence in British Central African townships in the 1940s and 1950s.⁹¹ However, this appears not to have been much of an issue among Africans in Northern Rhodesia as only minor gang crimes were recorded – and no deaths at that. The evidence found in the course of this research did not tell of Africans burgling homes and shops or attacking Europeans.⁹²

A return to an earlier time also seemed to absolve cinema of any blame on this front. In line with Smyth, an NRG commission of inquiry found that the mine workers' strike on the Copperbelt in 1935, together with the militant disposition the striking workers exhibited, was caused by the anti-NRG literature the Watchtower denomination circulated in the mine compounds. A cursory or deeper reading of Smyth's description of the account in question did not in any way hint at cinema and the cowboy films as having had a hand in the strike or militancy of the Africans. And based on the commission of inquiry's findings, the NRG employed print media to counterbalance the Watchtower pamphlets; to this end, the NRG embarked on the printing of literature of its own in simple English and in some local languages – Nyanja, Bemba, Tonga, and Lozi – that clearly fostered unflinching loyalty to

⁹⁰ See Akyeampong and Ambler, 'Leisure in African History,' 13.

⁹¹ Akyeampong and Ambler, 'Leisure in African History,' 13.

⁹² Interview with Samson Mukuka, Ndeke, Kitwe, Zambia, 22 May, 2019; interview with Moses Lupupa Mwansa, Dr Damie, Ndola, Zambia, 23 May, 2019; interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019; and interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019. See also ZCCM-IH, 19.2.9A, African Affairs: Welfare, 1955-1957.

the NRG and proceeded to circulate it in mine compounds.⁹³ Ordinarily, it would have been without difficulty to pin the blame on cinema and the cowboy films, but it was not the NRG's position – nor that of the mine owners – following the inquiry.

2.9 Making Merchandise of Africans

Some private companies also took advantage of the facility of the mobile cinema vans to advertise their goods to the African population on the Copperbelt. For instance, in January, 1957, the General Managers of Mufulira Copper Mines, Nchanga Consolidated Copper Mines, Rhokana Corporation, and Roan Antelope Copper Mines as well as the Managers of Chibuluma Mines, and Bancroft Mines received a letter from Mr D.L. Pearson, the Branch Manager of Lever Brothers at Ndola, requesting to show films to the African miners in the townships as a way of advertising the company's products.⁹⁴

The Lever Brothers Film Unit went on to visit the Copperbelt mine townships later that year. The Unit was composed of a mobile cinema van with a European supervisor. It was available to showcase a two-hour programme of general interest and educational films at each of the African mine townships. The main purpose of these Lever Brothers shows, it must be emphasised, was advertising, but it was understood from Mr Pearson that only one or two of the films in the programme would contain a small amount of advertising.⁹⁵ It was made to seem as though the shows were merely an expression of goodwill from Lever Brothers towards the African miners.

There was a film specially made for Africans which dealt with hygiene and contained approximately one-and-a-half minutes of advertising and appropriate Lever Brothers products. Another film emphasised the effects of good cooking and dieting and it carried

⁹³ Smyth, 'How War Propaganda "Unsettled the Natives" in Northern Rhodesia,' pp. 3-4.

⁹⁴ ZCCM-IH, 19.2.9A, African Affairs: Welfare, 1955-1957.

⁹⁵ ZCCM-IH, 19.2.9A, African Affairs: Welfare, 1955-1957.

about a minute's advertising of another of the Company's products. And, indeed, the remainder of the films in the programme had been specially produced and selected for the African audiences and did not contain any advertising.⁹⁶ It would be faulty, however, to limit the advertising in the first two films to only the stated advertising durations as the pith and core of the entire films was advertising, of course only making it obvious at the end with the direct advertising.

There was no charge for the films and Lever Brothers did not require any facilities from the mines. Their mobile cinema van was able to operate in the daylight as the projection of the films was done from behind the screen and was reflected from a mirror, hence forestalling the necessity to wait until nightfall. One of the mine officials who had seen several of these films was of the view that even though the main thrust from Lever Brothers' point of view was to advance advertising so as to get the African mine workers to buy their products, the films were produced in such a way that that they were not only very good entertainment for the African audiences but also had an educational value.⁹⁷

There were several other private exhibitors who latched onto the facility of the cinema van to frequent the African mine townships for purposes of advertising and selling their products. Africans were, therefore, not only viewed as a reservoir of cheap labour but also as a ready market for such products as the European business people made available to them.⁹⁸

2.10 Conclusion

The arrival of cinema on the Copperbelt, in particular, and in Northern Rhodesia, in general, was greeted with much excited wonderment. It was not long before the Second World War broke out and the NRG resorted to using cinema for purposes of enlisting African men for the

⁹⁶ ZCCM-IH, 19.2.9A, African Affairs: Welfare, 1955-1957.

⁹⁷ ZCCM-IH, 10.3.2F, African Employees Welfare, 1955-1957.

⁹⁸ Interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019.

NRR and encouraging those who would remain behind to support the British Empire's war effort financially. Wartime recruitment by the NRR engendered friction between the NRG and the mine owners which, however, was in time resolved amicably. Cinema after the war had a different focus for Africans, albeit it was still about creating and maintaining an African population loyal to the Empire. As this was happening, Africans quickly found other ways to use cinema and the environment it created in ways that fostered social cohesion among themselves. And for a phenomenon like cinema in those days, steering clear of controversy was inconceivable as debate and divisions arose as to the impact of cinema on boys and young men. On this issue, the NRG, the African elite, and the masses of low-ranking Africans could not see eye to eye. Also, while the NRG used cinema to uphold propaganda in support of the colonial project, there were some private exhibitors who, while not opposed to the way the NRG used cinema, had their own motives for bringing cinema to Africans on the Copperbelt. Therefore, cinema had many varying shades that shaped the experiences of Africans on the Copperbelt in the context of racial segregation.

CHAPTER THREE

SOME ISSUES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE DESEGREGATION OF CINEMA

3.1 Introduction

Colonial cinema was not without its fair share of contestation among African audiences on the Copperbelt. This disenchantment among the Africans did not appear from without. Interestingly, these eruptions of African disillusionment with the NRG and the way it rolled out cinema had, in time, a bearing on the desegregation of cinema in Northern Rhodesia. As a matter of course, this chapter discusses some of the issues that contributed to the desegregation of cinema in Northern Rhodesia such as the Central African Federation, the Africans' interpretation and appropriation of cinema, poor service to Africans, Africans' boycott of welfare activities, flawed censorship of films shown to Africans, and Africans feeling relegated to the bottom of the racial ladder.

3.2 The Issue of a False Federation

The establishment of the Central African Federation in 1953 promised to ease the tensions between the Africans and Europeans as it was set up on the supposed principle of partnership between the governors and the governed. However, segregation continued even in the area of cinema. This led to Africans increasingly demanding for equality on the Copperbelt, in particular, and in Northern Rhodesia, in general.⁹⁹ They did not want to continue seeing the racial segregation that had long characterised the cinema halls. (This segregation can be witnessed in the picture on page 52, where Europeans had their own cinema halls separate from Africans.)

⁹⁹ Interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019.



Figure 3. 1: *Europeans Queuing for Cinema Tickets on the Copperbelt, c. 1958.* (Developed from negative.) Source: ZANIS Photographic Library.

What unfolded from 1953 to 1963 in Northern Rhodesia was essentially a continuation of how most British leaders of the Federal Government had felt about Africans even before the formation of the Federation.¹⁰⁰ It was on record that Sir Godfrey Huggins, Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, had dominated the two-day conference of British politicians convened in February 1949 at the Victoria Falls, where he had talked of *partnership* [Emphasis mine] between Africans and Europeans in the proposed Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. He, however, had left no uncertainty in the minds of the Northern Rhodesian delegates about how he felt the Federation was to be run once in effect. His words had been resounding:

For the time being the natives must be ruled by a benevolent aristocracy.... The history of the world suggests that there is a *prima facie* evidence that there is something wrong with the Bantu branch of the family.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Gellar, 'The Colonial Era,' p. 141; and Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 41.

¹⁰¹ Richard Hall, *Zambia* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1965), p. 145. Prime Minister Sir Godfrey Huggins reiterated and reaffirmed the exact words that had appeared in the *Bulawayo Chronicle*, 18 February, 1949.

It followed, therefore, that despite the promises of some form of racial equality in the purported partnership to come with the Federation, there was no sense of racial justice among the Africans. This had even flown in the face of His Excellency the Northern Rhodesia Governor's sentiments to the Africans in the Northern Rhodesia Legislative Council (NRLC) in 1953 shortly after the passing of the Rhodesia and Nyasaland Federation Bill in the United Kingdom Parliament:

I believe that you have everything to gain by giving this scheme a chance. I believe that the more you co-operate, the stronger your case becomes to see that you are *fairly treated* [Emphasis mine].¹⁰²

It could not have been stated more succinctly by His Excellency the Governor of Northern Rhodesia that the Africans had not been fairly treated. Notwithstanding the Federation that had promised fair treatment for Africans, racial segregation continued – Europeans kept their cinema halls, while Africans waited for a partnership that would never materialise.

Perhaps this turn of events did not in any way surprise one African representative in the NRLC who, in reply to His Excellency the Governor of Northern Rhodesia and those who expected the Federation to end racial segregation, had said:

I know this question is a thorny subject. The subject that I am referring to is federation...Government should bear in mind...that they have imposed the scheme against the wishes of the masses of African people in Central Africa. I think the people will watch with very great care whether this is going to work in their interests or in the interests of both people. If not so, Sir, I would advise my fellow Africans that we African people will not stop fighting and struggling until justice prevails in Central Africa. We know that we are a weak race, we have nothing to do with any race. What we want in Central Africa is good race relations and I feel, Sir, that federation has interrupted very much the hope that I had in mind.¹⁰³

¹⁰² NRG, *NRLC Debates, Hansard No. 20 (Official Verbatim Report of the Debates of 25th July, 1953 – 17th August, 1953)* (Lusaka: Government Printer, 1953), p. 13.

¹⁰³ NRG, *NRLC Debates, Hansard No. 20*, p. 83.

Indeed, it turned out that the Federation failed to deliver on its promise of racial justice on the Copperbelt, in particular, and in Northern Rhodesia, in general. Social amenities continued to be racially segregated, and those Africans who had dreamed of entering the beautiful European cinema halls and watching what the Europeans watched were left wondering when racial equality would arrive in Northern Rhodesia, if at all. A deep sense of injustice took root among the Africans, who began to voice their frustrations and demand for racial equality in cinema viewership.

Africans continued to go to their own cinema halls as before, and nothing changed for them.

*Ifwe cinema hall iyesu fwebena Africa yabelele ku residential iya bena Africa. Cinema hall iya basungu yena yabelele ku Top Shops mupepi na ku Mufulira Secondary School. Ifwe cinema hall iyesu yaleitwa ati Chawama Hall.*¹⁰⁴ (My translation: Our cinema hall as Africans was situated in our very own African residential area. The cinema hall for Europeans was located at the Top Shops near Mufulira Secondary School. Our cinema hall was called Chawama hall.)

The Federation, hence, became for the African audiences on the Copperbelt a stark reminder of how unjustly treated they were. In the end, it only served to strengthen their resolve to fight for racial equality in cinema viewership.

3.3 The Issue of how Africans' Interpretation and Appropriation of Colonial Cinema Mimicked how they Interpreted and Appropriated *Kalela* and Football

The undercurrent of disillusionment among the African audiences found subtle, sometimes not so subtle, expression in commentary on what the Africans watched and deemed as shortcomings of the Europeans. It is important to realise that out of several strands of popular culture (social beer drinking, listening to the radio, *inter alia*) on the Copperbelt,¹⁰⁵ *Kalela*

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Kabaso, 21 May, 2019.

¹⁰⁵ See Powdermaker, *Copper Town*.

and football lent to colonial cinema how they were interpreted and used by Africans. *Kalela* was a home-grown traditional dance form that went side by side with locally composed songs and football was a colonial sport – of course introduced by the British. It is equally important to realise that it was from the same crop of Africans that some danced *Kalela* and sang its accompanying songs and some played football; and more importantly, it was from the same crop of Africans that some went to the cinemas. The worldview of these Africans was informed by similar, if not the same, circumstances and frustrations under the umbrella of colonialism. Their engagement with the NRG on different sites of contestation could not have been dissimilar. And, hence, comes in the issue of interpretation and appropriation.

Africans showed to a great extent that even within their stations of subjection in the face of a cultural and political onslaught, they somehow initiated home-grown responses which on the surface may even have appeared compliant with the colonial ideal, yet in their meanings were in keeping with the Africans' own pre-existing models for interpreting phenomena. Moreover, just like the public spaces where *Kalela* performances took place on the Copperbelt, the African cinema halls turned out to be socialising arenas for the colonised peoples, who readily accepted this as they perceived it to be an opportunity to get together and socialise without the dread of censure or penalty from the colonial power structure.¹⁰⁶

Kalela as one of the many strands of the Africans' popular culture on the Copperbelt was used sometimes in ways that confounded the colonialists and threatened to derail, or even subvert, the colonial project. Aside from the entertainment offered by the *Kalela*, the song lyrics were pregnant with meaning, values, norms, and commentary. Some of the verses were potent enough to make political commentary. In this, even when the colonial government seemed to have 'Westernised' the *Kalela*, the Africans still used it to advance their own values as a society, to communicate political messages, and to condemn what they

¹⁰⁶ J. Clyde Mitchell, *The Kalela Dance: Aspects of Social Relationships among Urban Africans in Northern Rhodesia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956), pp. 4, 5; interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019.

deemed as unacceptable behaviour, *inter alia*. At once this seems like the situation in the African cinema halls on the Copperbelt, where the Africans would vent their frustrations by making anti-NRG commentary while watching films and fanned a revolutionary psychology. This atmosphere of victimhood in the cinema halls helped to augment social cohesion among the Africans in their fight against a common enemy – the NRG – who was blind to their plight.¹⁰⁷

Africans' interpretation and appropriation of colonial cinema on the Copperbelt was also like that of football.¹⁰⁸ Football was another interface of colonial perception and local agency. It was a colonial sport that Africans learned and domesticated and through which to some considerable extent, and completely unintended by the colonialists who had introduced it, enabled on the part of Africans expression of social cohesion and identity, hence giving vent to some of their built-up frustrations and disillusionment with the colonial power structure. Football, instead of being seen in line with other historiographies as a colonial sport that Africans copied, must be seen 'as a fertile ground where power, ethnicity, nation, gender, race and other social identities are fashioned, negotiated and contested in people's daily lives.'¹⁰⁹ Completely unintended by the colonialists, the colonial sport ended up giving expression to African agency as:

African footballers and fans created soccer teams and leagues, organised matches, invented their own distinctive styles of play and deployed the sport to rework and to contest new social relations. They further infused football with their own aesthetic meanings inspired by existing competitive dance and music...¹¹⁰

As can be gleaned from the quotation, despite the introduction and spread of football in the colonies having been ineluctably enmeshed with the colonial ideal and the colonisers using

¹⁰⁷ Mitchell, *The Kalela Dance*, pp. 6, 7; Powdermaker, *Copper Town*, p. 260; interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019. See also T.O. Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa 1890-1970: The Beni Ngoma* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019.

¹⁰⁹ W.T. Kalusa, 'Themes and Perspectives in Social History of Football in sub-Saharan Africa: An Overview,' *unpublished paper*, 4.

¹¹⁰ Kalusa, 'Themes and Perspectives,' 16.

football to spread their cultural values and influences in order to turn the colonised peoples into more docile subjects of Empire, the colonised peoples used the sport to advance themselves socially and politically. This is quite like the way Africans on the Copperbelt interpreted and appropriated colonial cinema. In time, like football, it worked only to spur their agency as a people.¹¹¹

On the same note while Africans on the Copperbelt benefitted from wage labour, they used football as a medium for contesting the efforts by the NRG to redefine their engagement with leisure.¹¹² Naturally, the colonialists in turn tried to control African football more tightly as they feared that Africans would use the sport, the space, and the gatherings that attended it to fuel rebellion against the colonial administration. The colonial administration and mine owners, however, 'were never able to completely control African leisure spaces, practices, and beliefs...'¹¹³ In the same vein, colonial cinema – just like football did – enabled Africans to envisage and imagine an alternate view of their societies, which view was not under the control of the mine owners and the NRG. Despite the many ways in which the NRG tried to shape colonial cinema to create the kind of Africans it wanted to see, the African audiences fashioned their own ways to use cinema – ways that confounded the owners of the technology and threatened their hold on power.¹¹⁴ This was a barefaced onslaught on the NRG by the Africans.

Jaikumar noted that even in India in the twilight years of British colonial rule, there was an onslaught from the colonised people on the colonialists. The blatant desire by the Indians – finding expression through various forms of protest –to govern themselves finally

¹¹¹ Interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019.

¹¹² Hikabwa D. Chipande, 'Mining for Goals: Football and Social Change on the Zambian Copperbelt, 1940s – 1960s,' *Radical History Review* 10, 125 (2016), 57, 58.

¹¹³ Chipande, 'Mining for Goals,' 58.

¹¹⁴ ZCCM-IH, 10.3.2F, African Employees Welfare, 1955-1957; interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019.

told on the British colonial establishment.¹¹⁵ This was perhaps because, according to Burns, cinema in the British colonies became a novel site that combined social and political interactions. While on the one hand it was a social space that smacked of colonial rule, it ended up taking on a social role that was not in the least expected by the British colonialists who had introduced it. He further stated that 'Cinema...created new modes of sociability that challenged existing relations of space, gender, and social hierarchy.'¹¹⁶ This was more real on the Copperbelt with the way the African audiences interpreted and appropriated cinema in a way that mimicked the two equally potent strands of popular culture: *Kalela* and football.

3.4 The Issue of Poor Service to Africans

African audiences began to express their anger and frustration at the second-rate films in various forms. They noticed and often discussed with embitterment the heavily censored films they were made to watch, in most cases whose plotlines and storylines could hardly be followed. This bitterness grew, and it was the case across the African mine townships on the Copperbelt.¹¹⁷ It was reported of Konkola cinema in Chingola that:

Some people at Konkola have deliberately slashed and torn the cinema screen. The results of this are that the cinema screen will have to be repaired and shows will be very poor till then. Anyone who gives information which results in the finding of the person who did this damage will be paid...¹¹⁸

It was also reported of Bancroft cinema as follows:

It has been reported that people were banging on the wall of the projector room at Friday's show. If this behaviour continues all cinema shows will be stopped. The cinema is for your entertainment and as such should be looked after by you. The

¹¹⁵ Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire*, p. 1.

¹¹⁶ Burns, 'The African Bioscope,' 67.

¹¹⁷ ZCCM-IH, 19.2.9A, African Affairs: Welfare, 1955-1957.

¹¹⁸ ZCCM-IH, 19.2.9A, African Affairs: Welfare, 1955-1957. *An Extract from the Weekly News Sheet No. 92, July 27, 1957.*

price of admission is very low indeed and respect must be shown by all who go.¹¹⁹

The mine owners seemed to have decided to ignore the real issues in this instance. The Africans were calling for equality in cinema viewership among the races in Northern Rhodesia.

There was also the issue of the repeated failure by the Rhodesian Railways to deliver films from the African Consolidated Films (ACF) via Bulawayo. This would often cause considerable consternation among the African audiences who had by now embraced victimhood; they regarded themselves as being taken for granted by both the mine owners and the NRG.¹²⁰ As far as pacifying the African audiences on the Copperbelt was concerned, it did little – if at all – that the mine owners later agreed upon a new satisfactory system with ACF for delivering films. African viewers remained disenchanted with the providers of cinema as their films, aside from being heavily censored, continued to be of poor quality. Most Africans commented that the Europeans would not themselves have tolerated such films in their own cinema halls. And, indeed, the mine owners and the NRG obtained films for their own viewing not from ACF but from better sources such as Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and 20th Century Fox, among others.¹²¹

There were two sources of films for Africans, namely the NRG and the ACF headquartered in Johannesburg. Films supplied by the NRG were those made by the NRIS as well as those it bought or hired from all possible sources and approved by the BC and the CFU. The Government was particularly wary of the films supplied by the ACF which it regarded as potentially morally corrupting to Africans. Hence, these films had first to be passed by the FCB. Another complaint of the NRG was that these films were also in very

¹¹⁹ ZCCM-IH, 19.2.9A, African Affairs: Welfare, 1955-1957. *An Extract from the Weekly News Sheet No. 92, July 27, 1957.*

¹²⁰ ZCCM-IH, 19.2.9A, African Affairs: Welfare, 1955-1957. *Welfare Monthly Report – August, 1957.*

¹²¹ ZCCM-IH, 19.2.9A, African Affairs: Welfare, 1955-1957. *Welfare Monthly Report – October, 1957*; see also ZCCM-IH, 11.1.6A, Cinema Hall; European – Construction and Operating, 1952-1968.

poor condition, accusing the ACF of only being interested in making profit and not caring about the development of Africans. The Government stated of the AFC: 'It appears to regard Africans as an easy market for Rubbish.'¹²² As far as the African audiences on the Copperbelt were concerned, however, it was the NRG at fault. For they wanted to watch what the Europeans watched, straight from the American and European sources, and they wanted cinema halls just as beautiful as the European ones. They wanted equality in cinema viewership.¹²³

It must be noted that the European cinemas on the Copperbelt were some of the very best in the region: scented, air-conditioned, well-designed spacious auditoriums which gave an impression of coolness, and good on the ear as well as the eye, for the acoustics were excellent, and sat more than 500 in well-cushioned comfort. Moreover, at the opening of one of these grand cinemas at Nchanga Mr W. Marshall Clark, one of the directors of the Nchanga Consolidated Copper Mines, had promised more and better things to come for the European audiences when he said, 'The directors do realise that you have not yet got quite all the facilities and amenities of popular centres of the world.'¹²⁴

In the late 1950s there was a rumour that seeped all the way to the lower rungs of African society on the Copperbelt that Europeans in their cinema halls always watched films of better quality: bigger projectors, bigger and clearer pictures, the best films from sources other than the ACF, their films did not skip scenes and whole storylines could be followed, and the interiors were carpeted and cushioned. This, plus the already clear racial segregation that ensured the Europeans got the best of everything, became a recipe for the unruliness that attended the African cinema halls on the Copperbelt. Noise and anti-NRG chants became rife; some Africans went as far as demanding from the European operators of the Welfare Centres

¹²² NAZ, SEC 2/1148, Joint Film Unit – Central African Film Unit, 1946-1948. See also NAZ, SEC 2/1122, Films for Africans – African Film Library and Purchasing Committee, 1940-1946.

¹²³ ZCCM-IH, 19.2.9A, African Affairs: Welfare, 1955-1957. *Welfare Monthly Report – August, 1957*.

¹²⁴ *The Northern News*, 'New Cinema at Nchanga is one of Territory's Best,' (October 28, 1952), p. 6.

to show them the very films that the Europeans were watching. Increasingly, the operators' work got tougher as some Africans would bang on the projector rooms, demanding better and to be treated the same as European filmgoers.¹²⁵

These disenchanted occurrences of the Africans – albeit sometimes isolated – were reported and the NRG and the mine owners grew fearful as there was no telling what the African audiences would do next. What was clear in all of this, however, was that the Africans were growing bolder in their demands with every act of defiance against the NRG. And, even the NRG knew it, it was only a matter of time before legislation would be passed to placate the disillusioned Africans.¹²⁶

3.5 The Issue of Africans' Boycott of Welfare Activities

There was starting on 30 July, 1956, until around end of August of the same year an organised African withdrawal of labour from the mines that even manifested in the form of boycott of cinema attendance in some mine townships. Although this expression of anger was not wholly successful as some of the Africans in other townships did not work together with their fellows, it was a clear indication to the mine owners and to the NRG that Africans were finally ready to act on their frustrations at being unequally treated. They demanded better conditions of service in their workplaces and better welfare services, using the boycott of not only cinema but also canteens, hobby centres, football (soccer), Western education, community centres, and women's welfare, *inter alia*, to project the message to their masters. Curiously, the beer halls registered normal attendance – and above normal in some cases – as

¹²⁵ Interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Chipambala, 20 May, 2019.

¹²⁶ Interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Chipambala, 20 May, 2019. See also ZCCM-IH, 19.2.9A, African Affairs: Welfare, 1955-1957.

most Africans sought to drink their frustrations away as well as meet with other Africans to bemoan their common condition and how racially relegated they felt.¹²⁷

3.6 The Issue of Flawed Censorship of Films Shown to Africans

The guiding principles for censoring of films to be shown to Africans required the complete banning without restriction of all scenes that depicted women in scanty attire including bathing costume, undue exposure of parts of the naked body, women of easy virtue, manhandling of women, prolonged embraces, fights between women, and crimes readily understood by Africans. Moreover, films passed for showing to adult Africans were also considered suitable for children. And while the FCB stopped the showing of serials such as the ones that featured juvenile gangs in cities and of savages manhandling women, it could not stop the showing of the cowboy films despite the heated discussions engendered by these sort of films. The FCB felt that even though there were gangsters, fights, killings, and frequent tying up of characters in these films, there was also no sex at all. It was felt that heedless of the violence and the shootings, the bad guys always lost in the end and the law emerged victorious. Besides, the cowboy films were almost the only form of entertainment left and removing them would leave only the educational, propaganda and heavy-drama films that could safely be shown to African audiences. Opinion was divided as to whether the cowboy films were morally good for viewership.¹²⁸

In early August of 1945 a horror British News film on the African circuit was shown in Luanshya at the Welfare Centre. It led to an uproar among the adult section of the African audience as children were also without warning exposed to the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps. When the Provincial Commissioner enquired in a letter from the District Commissioner how this had happened in the first place, the latter replied that the

¹²⁷ ZCCM-IH, 19.2.8E, African Affairs – General, 1950 -1960.

¹²⁸ NAZ, SEC 2/1121, Censorship of Films for Natives in Northern Rhodesia, 1932-48.

British operator at the Centre thought that since the film was on the African circuit it had palpably already passed through the African FCB; but as it turned out, it had not. And such was usually the problem with British News films as unlike films from Hollywood and other parts of Europe they did not have any special markings to indicate that they had been censored for African viewing or not.¹²⁹

The matter of the horror film shown to a mixed audience of Africans at Luanshya was raised in the NRLC and the incident was condemned in no uncertain terms. It was clear that the film in question had been passed by the European FCB for European viewing; it was also clear that the European FCB had not passed the film for African viewing as this was to be done by the African FCB. However, the British legislators were agreed that there seemed to be a costly lax on the part of the British operators at the Welfare Centre who took it for granted that once a reel had the seal signifying it had been passed by the European Censorship Board then it was fitting to show it to Africans. They submitted that this way of doing things by the operators had to change and that they had to ensure that the reels had indeed been passed for African viewing by looking out for the African Film Censorship ticket. There was a division of opinion as to whether it was right to show horror films to Africans, but there was consensus that horror films were not to be shown to children heedless of race.¹³⁰

Censoring what was to be shown to Africans was definitely not as easy as the British had expected. There was even disagreement among themselves as to what to remove and what to leave. One male British legislator who had occasion to sit on the African FCB expressed his disappointment regarding parts of a serial that was to be shown to Africans. The first part called 'Junior G-Men' he found incomprehensible to the African as it was

¹²⁹ NAZ, SEC 2/1121, Censorship of Films for Natives in Northern Rhodesia, 1932-48.

¹³⁰ NRG, *NRLC Debates, Hansard No. 94 (Official Verbatim Report of the Debates of 18th March – 16th May, 1958)* (Lusaka: Government Printer, 1958), pp. 77, 125, 139.

replete with Europeans fighting – and fighting some more – and running here and there and confusion after confusion. He wondered as to what picture of the European this painted to the Africans, fearing that the Africans would conclude that that was obviously the normal life of the Europeans. He implored the NRLC to invest in proper censorship of films to be shown to Africans so that they did not end up with the wrong impression of what it meant to be European. He called upon the help of the BC financially and technically in ensuring that the right aspects of British life were portrayed in the films that Africans watched. He counted on the BC as it was the organisation charged with the extension of British culture in the entire Empire.¹³¹

Aside from sometimes showing films to indiscriminate audiences of Africans, there was also the issue of what the ages watching certain films should be. To compound this local conundrum the NRG was faced with, there was also the lack of uniformity between the NRG and Southern Rhodesia concerning film ratings. Usually there was a two-year difference in the film ratings between the two governments; where it was sixteen for the NRG, it was fourteen for Southern Rhodesia – and vice versa.¹³² A member of the NRLC went as far as saying:

...in Southern Rhodesia certain films are barred for children between the ages of four and twelve, whereas in Northern Rhodesia it is six and sixteen, and there may be very good reasons for it – apparently it upset the renters and the cinema moguls – but those concerned feel that a child on one side of the Zambezi should be the same as a child on the other side and that there should be some sort of uniformity.¹³³

¹³¹ NAZ, SEC 2/1121, Censorship of Films for Natives in Northern Rhodesia, 1932-48. Hansard No. 55. 30 August 1946. Column No. 181.

¹³² NRG, *NRLC Debates, Hansard No. 85 (Official Verbatim Report of the Debates of 5th July – 19th August, 1955)* (Lusaka: Government Printer, 1955), pp. 382, 419-420.

¹³³ NRG, *NRLC Debates, Hansard No. 84 (Official Verbatim Report of the Debates of 8th March – 25th March, 1955)* (Lusaka: Government Printer, 1955), pp. 253-4.

In short, the colonial project was not operating smoothly in this regard and, incidentally, Africans bore the brunt of sometimes being exposed to content that would leave them and their children traumatised for some time.

Further, it appeared that censorship of films for African viewership was largely a matter of maintaining the balance of power by the NRG. For instance, the NRG rushed to cut out of the films scenes that demeaned or harmed in any way the station of the colonialists heedless of whether the storyline of the film would break; the same government seemed to find it harmless if some content in the films shown to Africans was of a nature that undermined or harmed the African audiences. Case in point was when Africans complained about a film whose theme and story contained words and situations that undermined the Africans. The FCB replied that the scenes complained about could not be cut out as they ran right through the story. The scenes were of an escaped African male slave being hounded by Europeans with dogs, the general condescending attitude of Europeans towards Africans, and an African male about to be lynched by an infuriated mob of Europeans shouting obscenities at him.¹³⁴

As Chanan described the furore that festered among Latin Americans owing to their misrepresentation in Hollywood films that depicted them as backward, savages, and uncivilised,¹³⁵ it was much the same among Africans on the Copperbelt. They gradually began to feel that the NRG and the mine owners were flagrantly and indiscriminately demeaning their culture, dignity, and integrity.¹³⁶

A parallel can be drawn between Chanan's description of a film titled *Her Husband's Trade* in which a gang of desperadoes was shown raping the heroine¹³⁷ and the horror of the African audiences on the Copperbelt being subjected to watching another African being

¹³⁴ NAZ, SEC 2/1125, Films – Censorship of Films for Natives in Northern Rhodesia, 1948-1949.

¹³⁵ See Chanan, 'Cinema in Latin America,' p. 429.

¹³⁶ NAZ, SEC 2/1125, Films – Censorship of Films for Natives in Northern Rhodesia, 1948-1949.

¹³⁷ Chanan, 'Cinema in Latin America,' p. 429.

lynched by a group of Europeans. In the description given by Chanan, it was a gang of Mexican men portrayed in the worst possible light as barbaric savages who revelled in taking turns on a defenceless woman, while in the film shown to Africans on the Copperbelt an African character was shown as having gone against the wishes and expectations of his European masters and was paying the ultimate price. It appears that any objective inquiry into such scenes would have arrived at a considerable amount of trauma among the viewers.

Mamie wrote of the Chinese, after they had requisitioned Taiwan from the Japanese following the defeat of the latter in the Second World War, as having forced the Taiwanese to start viewing themselves as Chinese citizens and having used cinema to this end. The Chinese government saw it prudent to censor films to be shown to the Taiwanese in order to exult and elevate Chinese culture and history while undermining these two aspects of Taiwanese society.¹³⁸ The NRG, however, did not have to defeat another nation to requisition Northern Rhodesia, but their use of cinema to exult and elevate their culture – through the BC and the FCB – was no different from that of the Chinese in Taiwan.¹³⁹

Jaikumar noted that the Indian film industry, in its own right, attempted to counterpoise British cultural imperialism and show of superiority by producing films whose goal was to champion Indian culture and history.¹⁴⁰ The African audiences on the Copperbelt, however, did not own a share of the means of production. Incidentally, they found other means of protest and imagining an egalitarian future for Northern Rhodesia – one without colonial masters. Their frustrations with the NRG found expression via anti-NRG commentary as they watched films; and more and more cinema became a battleground of

¹³⁸ Mamie, 'Taiwanese Film History,' p. 36.

¹³⁹ Gellar, 'The Colonial Era,' p. 141.

¹⁴⁰ Jaikumar, *Cinema at End of Empire*, pp. 1-2.

culture and politics, the British pushing propaganda and the African audiences pushing back.¹⁴¹

Powdermaker, via her recorded observations in Luanshya, opened an aperture into the frustrations of Africans. She observed that African audiences increasingly began to make anti-NRG commentary on almost everything they watched. This, in time, made even those Africans who had been unquestionably loyal to the NRG to begin to associate all things of high quality with the Europeans and all things of low quality with themselves. Consequently, they began to feel unequally treated and saw the injustice in the governance of the NRG. When they saw healthy, well-fed cattle on the screen they all agreed it was for Europeans; and unhealthy, poorly-fed cattle for Africans. Big, beautiful homes were for Europeans, and the opposite for Africans. Colonial cinema, therefore, became to African audiences on the Copperbelt an incessant reminder of the racial inequalities in Northern Rhodesia and they began to agitate for change as 'Whatever was seen was commented on, interpreted, criticized. Questions were asked.'¹⁴²

3.7 The Issue of Africans Feeling Fourth in their Fatherland

The Africans who had attained a level of European education, together with their liberal white friends, channelled the anger of the African masses who protested their non-admittance to European cinemas such as the Astra, the Rhokana, and the Ndola cinemas, *inter alia*. This disenchantment on the part of Africans grew out of what they saw as unequal treatment of the races. While they were not so eager to protest their non-admittance to European cinemas, it was the admittance of Coloureds to these cinemas that made them voice their disillusionment with the NRG. It became at once clear to the Africans that the NRG's honouring of the

¹⁴¹ Interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019. See also Powdermaker, *Copper Town*, p. 270;

¹⁴² Powdermaker, *Copper Town*, pp. 260, 270.

request from the Coloured Residents Association to admit Coloureds to the Astra cinema was a barefaced relegation of the Africans further down the racial ladder. It was also clear that the NRG considered the Coloureds very well behaved and responsible, whose standard of living and civilization measured up to that of the Europeans.¹⁴³

The admittance of Coloureds to European cinemas on the Copperbelt was seen by the Africans as a far cry from the admittance of Indians who had watched films at the Roan Antelope cinema from 1940. They had grown used to seeing the Indian community mingle with the European community, but something snapped in their collective conscience when the NRG started admitting members of the Coloured community.¹⁴⁴

3.8 Conclusion

Colonial cinema for Africans on the Copperbelt became a window into how they were unfairly treated by the NRG. While the NRG had meant to use the medium as a way to foster propaganda, it worked largely towards embittering the Africans. The Central African Federation, which had promised the Africans some form of partnership with the British, reneged on its promise. This frustrated Africans so much that they began to pay attention to every modicum of unfair treatment against them by the NRG. They increasingly felt betrayed by the NRG and, from a place of frustration, began to lash out at the British administration in spurts of disenchantment that eventually became a thorn in the side of the colonial project. The Africans could not be ignored any more; they were crying out and someone had to listen and take interest in their plight. This combined with other issues – political and economic – from different sites other than cinema and, together, became more than the British

¹⁴³ ZCCM-IH, 11.1.6A, Cinema Hall; European – Construction and Operating, 1952-1968; interview with Banda, 21 May, 2019; interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019.

¹⁴⁴ ZCCM-IH, 11.1.6A, Cinema Hall; European – Construction and Operating, 1952-1968; interview with Banda, 21 May, 2019; interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019.

administration could handle. As a result, the NRG gazetted the Race Relations Ordinance that entailed the desegregation of social amenities in Northern Rhodesia.

CHAPTER FOUR

AFRICANS' ENGAGEMENT WITH COLONIAL CINEMA IN A DESEGREGATED ENVIRONMENT

4.1 Introduction

There was fanfare among African audiences when for the first time equality in cinema viewership, via the passing of the Race Relations Ordinance, was to materialise. This chapter picks up the narrative from this premise and ventures into describing the Africans' cinema experiences on the Copperbelt in the period after the legislated desegregation of social amenities. It navigates the contours of such themes as the Ordinance itself, the continued censorship of films, the perception or reality of gangsterism and crime, the reality or ruse of desegregation, difficulties of the European cinemas on the Copperbelt, and the lack of political will by the NRG. In time, it paints a vivid picture of whether things improved or not for Africans in the arena of colonial cinema.

4.2 The Race Relations Ordinance

With the gazetting of the Race Relations Ordinance by the NRG on 26 August, 1960, advising the coming into effect of the Ordinance on 1 September, 1960, there was apprehension among the Recreation Clubs in the Copperbelt mining towns. Recreation Club Committee meetings were convened. The Roan Antelope Recreation Club Committee held a meeting on 30 August, 1960, to discuss the situation and understand what it entailed. A vote was held, and by three to two votes the Committee decided to reserve an area of the cinema for the exclusive use of club members and their guests, and to allow the general public – heedless of race – to use the remainder of the cinema. This was in effect going to be an

extension of the arrangement which had operated successfully with the Indian community for a period of well over two decades.¹⁴⁵

Following the meeting at which this decision was taken, the Recreation Club Committee met a delegation of club members who made it unequivocally plain that there was among the European members of the club a vehement opposition to the admittance of Africans to the cinema. They spoke of the fear among Europeans of the admittance of Africans as follows:

The delegates stated that Members feared that admittance to the cinema would be the thin end to the wedge for entry to the Bars and Lounges and all other parts of the Club, and that the Club would no longer be able to fulfil its function as a private Club for the European Employees of the Roan Antelope Copper Mines Limited.¹⁴⁶

Nonetheless, the Roan Antelope Recreation Club Committee decided to go ahead with the outcome of the vote. The delegates were told to report back to the European members that the only choice before them was that a section of the cinema be reserved for the accommodation of club members and their guests, while the remainder of the cinema be made accessible to the general public, this was to include Europeans who were not members of the Recreation Club, Indians, and Africans. Out of the Roan Antelope cinema's seating capacity of 540, the Committee's intention was to reserve about 100 seats for the general public. It was agreed that this arrangement would come without any privileges to non-members of the club other than entering and watching films. As was the arrangement with the Indians in the past, 'the general public would enter and leave the cinema without delay and no Club privilege would be accorded to them.'¹⁴⁷

There was a furore among the European members of the Roan Antelope Recreation Club when the stance of the Committee was communicated to them. The furore was so bad

¹⁴⁵ ZCCM-IH, 11.1.6A, Cinema Hall; European – Construction and Operating, 1952-1968.

¹⁴⁶ ZCCM-IH, 11.1.6A, Cinema Hall; European – Construction and Operating, 1952-1968.

¹⁴⁷ ZCCM-IH, 11.1.6A, Cinema Hall; European – Construction and Operating, 1952-1968.

that the Committee's resolve failed. On the coming into force of the Race Relations Ordinance, therefore, the cinema licence was returned temporarily to the authorities and only members and their guests were allowed at the Roan Antelope cinema. The Committee decided to rigidly apply this rule to all shows, including children's matinees. Failure to do so could easily lead to the NRG considering whether the cinema was being exclusively run for club members and their guests only, and violations of this rule could result in the closure of the cinema. The temporary return of the licence to the authorities was because when the Roan Antelope Recreation Club cinema opened in 1934 it was licenced under the Theatre and Cinematograph Exhibition Ordinance, which in theory provided for the cinema to be open to the general public. With the coming into effect of the Ordinance, the Committee sought to find a way around the law so as not to admit Africans. This did not hold for long as in the end some Africans, especially those with liberal white friends, were admitted to the cinema.¹⁴⁸

In due course, the mine owners began to focus much of their attentions on improving facilities in the African cinema halls as a way to confine African audiences to their spaces. They established investigative teams to look into the specific needs of the African cinema halls, the idea being to try and upgrade the African cinema halls to almost the standard of the European cinemas. The bottom line was that the Europeans still found it very difficult to admit Africans into their cinema halls notwithstanding the legislated desegregation of social amenities in Northern Rhodesia.¹⁴⁹

Some Africans had heard about the Race Relations Ordinance and what it entailed. Many Africans, however, did not know about the Ordinance and things for them continued as before – they watched films in their cinema halls and steered clear of European cinema halls. There were stories soon after of some Africans going to European cinema halls. (See picture on page 73.) It was particularly the segregated seating arrangement in these European cinema

¹⁴⁸ ZCCM-IH, 12.3.8F, Mine Recreation Club: Luanshya, 1960-1963.

¹⁴⁹ ZCCM-IH, 18.2.9E, African Townships: Report on Township Facilities Administered by Community Services Department, 1963.

halls that made many Africans to avoid going there. Many Africans found it unacceptable to go and fight for a few rear seats reserved for them in these European cinema halls. For even when it appeared outside that the racial segregation of cinema halls was over, racial segregation still reigned triumphant inside the European cinema halls.¹⁵⁰



Figure 4. 1: *Europeans and Africans Queuing for Cinema Tickets on the Copperbelt, c. 1961.* (Developed from negative.) Source: ZANIS Photographic Library.

It became clear to the African audiences on the Copperbelt that racial equality had not yet arrived in cinema viewership and that the Europeans still regarded Africans in much the same way as even before the Central African Federation. Some of the Africans decided to go where the Europeans did not want them to go, to defy the NRG and the mine owners as a form of protest.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ ZCCM-IH, 12.3.8F, Mine Recreation Club: Luanshya, 1960-1963; interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019; interview with Mukuka, 22 May, 2019; and interview with Mwansa, 23 May, 2019

¹⁵¹ Interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019.

*Ukwisafika mu 1961, ninshi nomba abantu batampa ukulalwisha ubuntungwa. Abengi abantu balibakaka mu fifungo munchende ishalekana-lekana. Icho balefwaya abantu chakutila ati abasungu filya baleikala beka tefyo chifwile chabe iyo – tufwile twabafye pamo-pene.*¹⁵² (My translation: By 1961, Africans had begun fighting for freedom from their colonial masters. Many Africans were arrested in many different places. What these Africans wanted was that the Europeans should not continue to set themselves apart – we should all live together as one.)

4.3 Censorship of Films – Again!

As of 1960 in the run-up to the desegregation of cinema, the NRG had begun to consider a single FCB as desirable. It made clear that any form of censorship would have to subscribe in large measure to the educational and cultural requirements of the European community. It favoured Federal censorship. The new FCB was to have the power to approve films for exhibition on a non-racial basis, or to refuse approval, or to agree to approve subject to such excisions from a film as it thought necessary. The FCB was also to have the power to discriminate on what films may be exhibited to young people. The FCB was also to be free from political influence. It was to follow the film classification of the United Kingdom: U for Universal, A for All except unaccompanied juveniles under sixteen, and X for Exclude all under twenty-one. The FCB was also to handle all types of films, agree special provision in cases of sedition or subversive films as well as to ensure that approved Mine Recreation Clubs were allowed to show films passed specifically for their members, those that may otherwise be unsuited for general public consumption.¹⁵³

There still appeared, heedless of the desegregation of cinema, nothing in sight to guarantee the likelihood that film censorship would be conducted on the same principles for all races and at the same centre in Salisbury in the Central African Federation.

¹⁵² Interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019.

¹⁵³ ZCCM-IH, 11.1.6A, Cinema Hall; European – Construction and Operating, 1952-1968.

Notwithstanding some members of the NRLC being of the view that film censorship needed to be conducted on the same principles for all races and submitting their proposal to the Federal Government at the beginning of September in 1960, nothing happened as the said Government kept promising that it would contact the other two territorial governments over the matter. Reminders were issued but the issue received no actionable attention.¹⁵⁴

Many African viewers between the ages of seven and fifteen, who did not even understand fully how censorship worked, would also notice how quickly some scenes ended in some films. They ended up complaining that some films were difficult to follow. However, they seemed to soon forget about their complaints when scenes depicting fighting came.¹⁵⁵

As a matter of course, there were indeed bound to be fears among the British in Northern Rhodesia concerning the desegregation of cinema. Some could not bring themselves to imagine what would become of their station culturally and as colonisers if the experience of the first multiracial cinema in Lusaka was allowed to spread across the country. Aside from turning back Africans from the multiracial cinema sometimes,¹⁵⁶ one of the dark sides of the multiracial cinema was that censoring what was to be shown to Africans who came there became difficult. One member of the NRLC had bemoaned the sort of content that was shown at the cinema in question, stating:

Now, Sir, here we have, with your permission I will quote from the *Central African Post* of 27th June, a film to be shown at the multiracial cinema and it is described by the critic here as 'one hundred and nine minutes of sex, passion and' – to alleviate apparently – 'comedy.' The film is called 'Three Forbidden Stories'...here is one from the *News Chronicle* – 'It has an assured future, luxury, seduction, suffering, death, drug taking' and then we add 'and comedy.'¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ NRG, *NRLC Debates, Hansard No. 100 (Official Verbatim Report of the Debates of 24th November, 1959 – 3rd February, 1960)* (Lusaka: Government Printer, 1960), pp. 76, 413.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019; and interview with Mwansa, 23 May, 2019.

¹⁵⁶ Ambler, 'Popular Films and Colonial Audiences,' 103.

¹⁵⁷ NRG, *NRLC Debates, Hansard No. 95 (Official Verbatim Report of the Debates of 1st July – 3rd October, 1958)* (Lusaka: Government Printer, 1958), p. 14.

The real concern in the end, it appeared, was not that such a film would be shown to a mixed-race audience and morals would be corrupted but that it would be seen by Africans, and worse in the presence of the European filmgoers. This in and of itself was similar to the British deprecating their own culture and presenting it as immoral to the Africans. This posed a threat to the cultural imperialism that was championed by the BC and, incidentally, not many Europeans could stand for it.

There was another real fear among the colonisers of what some content, once shown to Africans, would entail in the long run – even in the short run – for their colonial hold on the country. Another concern was raised in the NRLC:

There is a film due to be shown tomorrow night at the selfsame multiracial cinema titled 'Simba.' That film was seen by myself here in Lusaka, it was a most terrifying film, it was to *certain people* [Emphasis mine]...a most instructive film; it commenced with what appeared to be an African Clerk riding a bicycle and whistling, he sees somebody lying on the ground, gets off his bicycle, looks around carefully, draws a panga, kills him, wipes the panga, gets on the bicycle and rides off. Other parts of this delectable film show the cook-boy betraying the masters and mistresses, for whom he has worked for years, into the hands of the Mau Mau for mutilation and bloody murder.¹⁵⁸

When it came to the Copperbelt and other parts of the country, it was – as the colonialists saw it – a matter of the microcosm informing the macrocosm, and it seemed at once too much to stomach. Such films depicting colonialists at the mercy of Africans to the extent of Africans spilling European blood were indeed undesirable and a counter to the whole colonial project; it was like instructing Africans in how to get rid of their colonial masters. Hence, that the NRG found the showing to Africans of such films cringeworthy and that they could not yet espouse the idea of film censorship on the same principles for all races was justified – at least from their point of view.

¹⁵⁸ NRG, *NRLC Debates*, *Hansard* No. 95, pp. 14-15.

Georg argued that while watching films African audiences could express their feelings and criticisms of the colonial order, and that this usually resulted in censorship. It then followed that all films that showed resistance to colonial authority or an uprising against colonialists, those that showed colonised people confronting their European masters or scenes that shocked tradition, and those that showed European nudity and sexual acts and debauchery of European women were to be kept away from African audiences.¹⁵⁹ He further argued that censorship in Francophone Africa also worked to try and create corrupt societies of Africans, stating that:

France purposely chose films that would not educate the African masses but would instead pervert them... France was the only colonial power to ban from the screens in Africa any movie which could facilitate Black people's evolution.¹⁶⁰

Georg's description of Africans' interaction with cinema in Francophone Africa was no different from that of Africans on the Copperbelt except, of course, in the quote where he stated that France stood alone in banning from African viewing all films that sought to precipitate an African evolution. This tendency was evident also in Northern Rhodesia where the British administration sought to prevent any sort of African evolution that leaned towards independence. Colonial cinema in the hands of colonial administrators was an important and effective tool for the spread and entrenchment of Western ideology as well as cultural and political dominance. Perhaps one thing to note is that the usage of colonial cinema as a propaganda tool by Europeans was the same, though to varying degrees, in Anglophone, Lusophone and Francophone Africa.¹⁶¹ This was much the same on the Copperbelt, in particular, and in Northern Rhodesia, in general, where the NRG still found it necessary even

¹⁵⁹ Georg, 'The Cinema, a Place of Tension in Colonial Africa,' 28, 34-35.

¹⁶⁰ Georg, 'The Cinema, a Place of Tension in Colonial Africa,' 30.

¹⁶¹ Jegede, 'Popular Culture in Urban Africa,' p. 283; Smyth, 'How War Propaganda "Unsettled the Natives" in Northern Rhodesia,' p. 3; and Ambler, 'Popular Films and Colonial Audiences: The Movies in Northern Rhodesia,' 90.

after the passing of the Race Relations Ordinance to continue with the censorship of films to be shown to Africans.

When it came to the thinking behind the censorship of films to be shown to Africans even in the period when the Race Relations Ordinance should have been truly in effect, perhaps the following quote is the perfect attestation to the NRG's mindset:

Peace conditions will bring many changes in the *modus operandi* of our internal services. A good deal of our local propaganda will no longer be necessary to combat anti-war movements, such as the Ossewa Brandwag and Watchtower, or to counter industrial agitation, Indian Congress sympathisers, rumour mongers, pessimists, wishful thinkers and so on. If properly planned and steadily pursued, post-war propaganda in this colony should be a steadily building up of the 'right ideas' (what the 'right ideas' are is, of course, decided by the local government and the Colonial Office)...¹⁶²

As long as this sort of thinking by the NRG was in place, there was surely not going to be any real racial equality in cinema viewership between the Europeans and the Africans. The 'right ideas' had to be built up, and equal cinema would have taken away from the NRG the power to use the medium to that end.

4.4 Gangsterism and Crime

On the eve of the gazetting of the Race Relations Ordinance, which was to spawn the legislated desegregation of cinema and all other public facilities in Northern Rhodesia, Roman Catholic bishops vehemently spoke against desegregation and defended racial censorship. They unequivocally stated that material reasons like equality of races, economy, convenience and other similar matters needed not to be allowed to outweigh the greater need of safeguarding African audiences from evils of the moral order that came with cinema, especially in the event that – God forbid! – Africans ended up watching exactly what the European community was watching. They feared that Africans had primitive ideas of

¹⁶² NAZ, SEC 2/1122, Films for Africans – African Film Library and Purchasing Committee, 1940-1946.

morality affecting public order and decency as well as a weak moral fibre compared to the Europeans who were riding the crest of morality and civilization.¹⁶³

Basing entirely on the fears of the Roman Catholic bishops, one might suspect that perhaps there was indeed a spike in the amount of crime after the desegregation of cinema. The putative crime should have erupted to cataclysmic proportions on the Copperbelt, and in the whole of Northern Rhodesia, considering that now the censorship of films for African viewership was not as much as before and the Northern Rhodesia Police Force was scaling down as more and more European policemen were leaving Northern Rhodesia on 'early retirement.' Africans, however, did not turn out as the Catholic bishops had feared. Worse would have been expected of a primitive people with a weak sense of morality.¹⁶⁴ In fact, shows continued to be well attended in the townships on the Copperbelt after the coming into effect of the Race Relations Ordinance, and there was no report of social disturbances or crime as a result of the same.¹⁶⁵

While Africans, indeed, imitated what they saw in films, their actions were only an aspect of their play and aspiration to European dress sense. It is true that there were fears among most quarters of the European society as to what criminal degradation would attend Africans if they watched exactly what Europeans watched. But even with those few Africans who accessed European-cinema content, there was no crime to speak of. If anything, as reality showed for itself, the films that Europeans watched would no more corrupt the African audiences than they did the European audiences. Moreover, African audiences did not exhibit intent to hurt others or commit murder as portrayed in some of the films.¹⁶⁶

After watching films, African boys who usually went in groups to the cinema halls would act out the fights they had seen in the cowboy films. They would reproduce fight

¹⁶³ Ambler, 'Popular Films and Colonial Audiences,' 103.

¹⁶⁴ ZCCM-IH, *Mwabombeni Newspaper*, 'Crime Rate Has Not Worsened,' Vol. 1, No. 5 (March 17, 1964), p. 11.

¹⁶⁵ ZCCM-IH, T3.4F, African Welfare in Compounds, 1961-1963.

¹⁶⁶ ZCCM-IH, T3.4F, African Welfare in Compounds, 1961-1963.

scenes and try out some sleek moves of 'Jack,' the main character of the cowboy films. Some boys could be seen running, trying to escape the shackles of the ropes tied around their bodies by other boys. These were ill-fated to end up as 'horses' while the boys who had tied these ropes around their friends were the riders. This was play and imitation, but sometimes it turned a little violent and boys from different sections of the African townships would square off against each other.¹⁶⁷

Some African parents and guardians, especially the socially high-ranking ones, would complain that violent films were turning African boys against themselves – and they feared that their boys would become criminals if this went unchecked. Fortunately, however, these turned out to be only minor skirmishes that the boys themselves never took as seriously as did their parents and guardians. For soon after the fights, the African boys would be seen playing together and laughing.¹⁶⁸

*'Kwena ama-groups ayakutla ati na bantu baishiba ati uku kwena nabepaya umuntu takwali. Kwaleba fye aya kuangala no kusekeshu, noti ifyakutla ati baipaya...'*¹⁶⁹ (**My translation:** There were no murderous groups and people did not hear of news of murder. The groups that were there only had interest in play and not in anything close to killing...)

4.5 Desegregation: Ruse or Reality?

Africans, other than that very few of them accessed European cinema halls, did not notice any significant improvement regarding their cinema halls. There was now some attention rendered to the maintenance of African cinema halls by the NRG and mine owners. Some repairs were conducted. However, all this seemed like a desperate attempt by the authorities

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019; and interview with Chipambala, 20 May, 2019.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019; and interview with Chipambala, 20 May, 2019.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Mukuka, 22 May, 2019.

to confine African audiences to these cinema halls, for nothing improved by way of the films they watched and the censorship the films were subjected to. This got the African masses to convince themselves that the only way there would be equality in cinema viewership was if they themselves took the reins of power in Northern Rhodesia.¹⁷⁰

In Luanshya, it was unheard of for Africans from Mikomfwa to go to the European cinema halls, but it was not unheard of for some Africans from Roan Township to take some of those few rear seats reserved for Africans in the European cinema hall. This was because the Africans from Mikomfwa were considered of a lower social ranking than those from Roan, and this had a root in the working relationships at the Roan Antelope Mine where the Africans from Mikomfwa were supervised by those from Roan.¹⁷¹ (See below a section of what remains of the African cinema hall at Mikomfwa. See also on pages 82 and 83 the outside and inside views, respectively, of the Chaisa Cinema Hall at Roan.)



Figure 4. 2: Remnants of what was once an African Cinema Hall at Mikomfwa, Luanshya. Picture taken on 18 May, 2019.

¹⁷⁰ ZCCM-IH, T3.4F, African Welfare in Compounds, 1961-1963; interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019.

In short, Roan was created for the high-ranking Africans, some of whom had cordial relations with the Europeans. It was these Africans with their liberal white friends who sometimes entered the European cinema hall. It must be stated that they were turned away from the European cinema when the themes in the film to be shown were deemed unfit for Africans. These patrons would then end up watching trashy films with the other disenchanted Africans in the Chaisa Hall at Roan. In time, even these Africans realised that the legislated desegregation of cinema was more of theory than practice and that racial equality was but a dream with the NRG in charge of national affairs.¹⁷²



Figure 4. 3: Outside view of the Chaisa Cinema Hall at Roan, Luanshya. Picture taken on 18 May, 2019.

¹⁷² Interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019.



Figure 4. 4: The inside of the Chaisa Cinema Hall at Roan, Luanshya. Picture taken on 18 May, 2019.

It was even more infuriating for these Africans as while they were sometimes turned away from these European cinema halls, the Indians and the Coloureds continued to be admitted. Incidentally, Africans found themselves at the bottom of the racial ladder. It was very much a case of non-indigenous races taking all the privileges, as the African audiences saw it.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ ZCCM-IH, 11.1.6A, Cinema Hall; European – Construction and Operating, 1952-1968.

4.6 Difficulties of the European Cinemas on the Copperbelt

It becomes difficult to establish if really for most European cinemas on the Copperbelt it was that they started paying lower percentages of their profits to film companies because they were getting second-rate films, or that they got second-rate films as a consequence of having been relegated from A and placed on B, C or D class circuits for paying lower percentages of their profit margins to film companies. As the NRG saw it, the latter seemed to have been the case. The NRG was further of the view – and there was ample evidence to this effect – that the film industry generally was no longer as profitable as before, pointing out the Astra Cinema in Kitwe as *locus classicus* following the introduction of the Race Relations Ordinance.¹⁷⁴

*Ukutampa mu 1962, abasungu bamona ukutula aba abantu balefwaya ukuiteka. Batampa na bamo ukuchita pull out – batampa bamo nokulafuma mu Northern Rhodesia. Ileisa 1963, abengi abasungu nokufuma bafumamo. Ninshi nombapo twatampa nokulasankana na basungu mu ma cinema hall na mufibansa fya bola.*¹⁷⁵ (**My translation:** Beginning in 1962, the British saw that Africans wanted to govern themselves. Some of them even started leaving Northern Rhodesia. By 1963, many Europeans had left. Then, we even started mixing with the Europeans in the cinema halls and in football grounds.)

Beginning sometime in 1963, European cinema halls located in towns away from the mines such as the Astra in Kitwe and the one in Ndola, for instance, started admitting a good number of Africans. (See the picture on page 85 showing Africans selecting a film to watch at a European cinema hall.) It could have been because the number of Europeans going to these cinema halls had reduced drastically, with some of them having left Northern Rhodesia by then and some having resorted to frequenting those cinema halls that were still on the A

¹⁷⁴ NRG, *NRLC Debates, Hansard No. 101 (Official Verbatim Report of the Debates of 1st November – 23rd November, 1960)* (Lusaka: Government Printer, 1955), pp. 93-4.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019.

class circuits situated at the mines and where things were still not as porous for African audiences.¹⁷⁶



Figure 4. 5: *Africans Selecting a Film to Watch on the Copperbelt*, c. 1963. (Developed from negative.) Source: ZANIS Photographic Library.

4.7 The Lack of Political Will

It must be understood that there was no political will on the part of the NRG to practically desegregate cinema and even operate censorship of films on the principle of equality of races. The period from 1960 to 1964 was not a period for attending to the affairs of Africans for the NRG, it was rather a period for seeking the continued stability and well-being of the British

¹⁷⁶ ZCCM-IH, 11.1.6A, Cinema Hall; European – Construction and Operating, 1952-1968; interview with Besa, 18 May, 2019; and interview with Sunkutu, 20 May, 2019.

in the face of an impending eventual loss of political power to Africans. And as such, self-preservation was put before any real racial equality in Northern Rhodesia. It would be safe to state that for the masses of Africans the situation remained the same – when it came to cinema viewership – even after the gazetting of the Race Relations Ordinance.¹⁷⁷

In order to understand further why the Race Relations Ordinance hardly had a bearing on cinema viewership in Northern Rhodesia, it is imperative to note that members of the NRLC continued to filibuster around the issue of censorship of films. The idea was that censorship should be based on the principle of equality of races. Nothing happened. This was despite the sustained pressure piled on by the African members and their liberal British friends, some of whom were also members of the NRLC. As a matter of course, the Federal Government in Salisbury also continued to delay the bringing together of the three governments of Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and Southern Rhodesia to restructure cinema. Consequently, the matter of equality in cinema viewership did not receive any meaningful attention from the NRG even after the dissolution of the Central African Federation. Hence, the desegregation of cinema on the Copperbelt, in particular, and in Northern Rhodesia, in general, turned out to be a ruse.¹⁷⁸

4.8 Conclusion

Having promised the legislated desegregation of social amenities, the Race Relations Ordinance showed its flaws at the first hurdle; it failed to register any real presence insofar as racial equality in cinema viewership was concerned. Hence, for the majority of Africans things continued as before. About a year or two, however, before the end of the colonial period in Northern Rhodesia, when the European cinemas situated in towns on the Copperbelt

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Mukuka, 22 May, 2019; and interview with Mwansa, 22 May, 2019. See also NRG, *NRLC Debates, Hansard No. 10*, p. 94; and NRG, *NRLC Debates, Hansard No. 100*, pp. 76, 413.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Mukuka, 22 May, 2019; and interview with Mwansa, 23 May, 2019. See also NRG, *NRLC Debates, Hansard No. 10*, p. 94; and NRG, *NRLC Debates, Hansard No. 100*, pp. 76, 413.

began to experience financial difficulties as the European clientele dwindled, many more Africans had access to those cinemas. The failure of the Race Relations Ordinance, in the first place, to have a bearing on how cinema was rolled out among the races could be put down to the lack of political will exhibited by the NRG in this regard. In the end for the Africans it was a case of the more things changed, the more they remained the same.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The first public showing of cinema in Northern Rhodesia happened on the Copperbelt in 1928 thanks to the burgeoning copper-mining industry there. The mine owners saw it prudent to introduce cinema to the African mine labourers as a way to add excitement to what they thought were drab lives of their African workers; this was expected, in turn, to spike the productivity levels of the workers. In the early years of cinema it was conveniently agreed by the British colonialists that owing to the multiplicity of local languages in British Africa, silent films should be aired accompanied by commentary in the language of the localities where the shows were held. In no time, colonial cinema panned out to be a social marvel like the Africans had never seen before.

The outbreak of the Second World War saw a shift from cinema being merely a tool for entertainment to being used more in tune with wartime propaganda. This entailed the use of cinema to foster the colonial project. Mobile cinema vans operated by the CFU and the NRIS were sent to rural areas of the Copperbelt, where cinema halls were not available, and an appeal was made on behalf of the NRG. Likewise in urban areas of the Copperbelt, in cinema halls, the appeal to Africans to rise in support and defence of the British Empire was launched. The NRG realised early how important it was that propaganda on this particular frontier be advanced by Africans themselves; and in this, African traditional leaders were used greatly to appeal to the masses of their fellow Africans.

As a matter of course, men aged eighteen to forty enlisted for the NRR. In line with this was the encouraging of those who would remain behind to join the rubber-tapping industry, which product when exported would contribute to ensuring the NRG's financial stability. This then would guarantee that the NRG easily held out the war effort and kept the

troops happy by providing them with a considerable upkeep, considerable enough to make African men prioritise joining the NRR over any other enterprise.

In time, there ensued a rather delicate interplay between the NRG and the mine owners as regarded recruits. The mine owners had complained to the NRG that the production of copper was dwindling following the declining numbers of African mine workers as some of them had become part of a constant stream to join the NRR. The complaints could not be ignored as copper was the lifeblood of the war effort, as the NRG saw it. At the same time the NRR was in dire need of African men. The balancing act, hence, kicked in: the NRG decided to work together with the mine owners insofar as recruiting for the NRR and ensuring that the mines were not starved of the much needed African labour. This saw the NRR sending lists of African mine labourers who had indicated interest in enlisting for the wartime army to the mine owners; the mine owners then released the workers or not depending on the levels of copper production. In this, therefore, the mine owners had the final say.

The end of the Second World War ushered in a new era of colonial cinema on the Copperbelt. There was a shift from film showings that glorified support for the war effort to those whose focus was mass education for the Africans by way of hygiene, literacy, and proper agricultural practices, *inter alia*. This sort of programming was accompanied by local and international news, documentaries, comedy (usually of the Charley Chaplin type), and the cowboy films – which turned out to be the favourite of the African audiences on the Copperbelt. Colonial cinema now had a different focus, albeit to the same end – a social engineering that would ensure that Africans remained loyal to the NRG and aspired to British culture and all things British.

Colonial cinema became so popular among the Africans on the Copperbelt that there was an evident craze about it – African policemen were deployed at African cinema halls by

the NRG to ensure that order prevailed there and that Africans who could not make it into the cinema halls did not try to force their way in or bang on the doors of the cinema halls. Some Africans loitered outside the cinema halls as they did not have entry tickets and opted to wait outside for their friends to regale them with the storylines from the cowboy films at the end of the shows. Often, however, these loiterers did not have it their way as the African policemen would chase them away.

Other than colonial cinema being of entertainment and educational value to the African audiences, the NRG and the mine owners realised that there was another bright side to it. It naturally worked out as a measure for stabilising African labour in the mining areas. It was also realised that in the rural areas where cinema shows were held about once a month on or near the estates of British settlers, African labourers stabilised on those estates. However, in rural areas that saw annual cinema shows African labourers drifted to the urban areas, leaving the settler estates divested of labour. It was, therefore, very important – as the British found out – that cinema shows be made more frequent in areas where African labour was needed. And so it was that colonial cinema, inadvertently, helped to keep African labour from drifting, be it in urban or rural areas.

It must be noted that colonial cinema on the Copperbelt had other faces as well. The Africans found their own ways to use the spaces provided by cinema to socialise and spur social cohesion. These spaces also became platforms for gambling, and – in time – some Africans with sleight of hand would go to the African cinema halls for the sole purpose of luring other Africans into the game. It became a business venture of sorts. The cinema halls were also places where some Africans found their life partners.

Colonial cinema was not without its fair share of controversy insofar as what the impact of the cowboy films was on the African boys and young men. The African elite were unequivocally against the films in question as they believed in no uncertain terms that they

carried corrupting influences which were responsible for the creation of gangs, which in turn was a boon to crime. The low-ranking masses of African parents and guardians, however, were of the view that the films were not in any way responsible for the spurts of gang crimes on record.

Curiously on the same frontier, police monthly reports in 1948 in Mufulira showed that there was a European gang that was terrorising the township and burgling shops. This was perceived by the European community as a dandruff on the scalp – so to speak – of their morality and racial superiority. Worse was that this information was made known to the African community as well. This was in order that they too be aware of this so as to protect themselves from the gang that had already waylaid some Africans to steal from them.

There were also reports of an African gang that had been apprehended for beating up an African man in Mufulira. The members of the gang, when pressed as to why they had committed the crime, responded that the films they were exposed to in the cinema halls were to blame as they were only imitating what they had seen. A few other not-so-serious gang crimes were reported in other mining towns. It was, however, not the NRG's or the mine owners' official position that the films were the influence behind the formation of gangs and the resultant crimes.

The mobile cinema vans became so popular that they were latched onto by some private exhibitors in support of their businesses. In this, the mobile cinema vans were used for purposes of advertising products to the African masses in mine townships. This was some form of merchandising of the Africans who were seen as a reservoir of not only labour but also market for the business sector in Northern Rhodesia. Moreover, there were also some business people who would come to the mine townships from as far as South Africa to advertise and sell their products to Africans.

In time, much as colonial cinema was used by the British to channel and advance propaganda, it also became a fertile site for African agency where African audiences began to contest and negotiate issues of identity and equality. As a matter of course, these disenchanted articulations around colonial cinema rose out of some issues that the African audiences on the Copperbelt could no longer ignore. These issues eventually contributed to the desegregation of cinema in Northern Rhodesia. The African audiences had to be heard and equality in cinema viewership be materialised by the NRG, that was their unyielding resolve.

There was the issue of the Central African Federation which had promised so much by way of partnership (seen as some form of racial equality by the African audiences) and which when it reneged on its promise became a source of contestation for Africans. They wanted to see a Federation that would usher in racial equality and end the segregation in cinema viewership. The Federation, therefore, became a constant reminder of how unequally treated the Africans were.

The issue of how the African audiences ended up interpreting and using cinema became an important step towards the desegregation of cinema. In much the same way they used *Kalela* and football, they used colonial cinema as a platform to air their disillusionment with the NRG and express their desire for an egalitarian future. They used the spaces created by cinema to pass political messages and make anti-NRG commentary. The spaces also accorded them the opportunity to meet in large groups away from the prying watch of the NRG. In these spaces they shared in their common wretched condition under colonial rule and agitated for change in the way cinema was rolled out.

Poor service in the area of cinema was something the African audiences began to pay attention to. They noticed that their cinema halls were not as beautiful as the European cinema halls. It also became a constant pain to the Africans that their films were heavily

censored that plotlines and storylines could not easily be followed. To begin with, these films – as the Africans saw them – were of poor quality compared to what the Europeans watched in their beautiful cinema halls. They also came to know that the films the European audiences watched were not as heavily censored as theirs. In terms of film quality, it is important to note here that what could have informed this was that the sources of films for Africans and Europeans were different. While the films for Africans were obtained from the ACF and the NRG, the films for European audiences were acquired from Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Twentieth Century Fox, *inter alia*. This difference in quality and service became too much for the African audiences who began to vandalise some of the cinema equipment in some mine townships, an act that sent shockwaves to the NRG and the mine owners.

There was also the issue of Africans boycotting welfare activities altogether, including cinema, as a way of protesting their ill-treatment and relegation as a race across the broad spectrum of life on the Copperbelt. This was another burst of African disillusionment with the NRG that could not be ignored.

The issue of the flawed censorship of films shown to Africans was another point the Africans used to influence the desegregation of cinema. The African audiences felt taken for granted when some material in the films turned out traumatising. For instance, there were times when without warning horror films would be shown to indiscriminate crowds of Africans. The African parents and guardians would complain bitterly that at least their children could have been spared. These complaints would reach the NRLC and the FCB. The FCB usually came out in defence of itself that the scenes the Africans complained about ran right through the storylines and, hence, could not be cut out. This became a major point of contestation for the Africans who felt that censorship was skewed in favour of the Europeans who used it only in ways that pleased and benefited them – and the showing of shock material to African audiences must have pleased and benefited them, as the Africans saw it.

Then there was the issue of Africans feeling fourth in their fatherland. This was a function of some European cinemas having started admitting members of the Coloured community. This was very much an insult to the African audiences who had grown used to seeing Indians frequenting European cinema halls. The new trend that saw the Coloureds now following the Indians to the European cinemas was something the Africans were not willing to take, and they fought to be admitted just like the two races. If the Coloureds could be allowed to enter the European cinema halls, they too could be admitted if they pressed harder.

Eventually, the contestations that emerged out of the arena of cinema contributed to other issues – social, economic and political – and helped to influence the gazetting of the Race Relations Ordinance in August of 1960. This entailed the desegregation of social amenities in Northern Rhodesia, of course including cinema. This legislated desegregation of cinema was greeted with much fanfare by the African audiences who expected that now equality in cinema viewership would materialise.

As the African audiences would later find out, however, the Race Relations Ordinance failed terribly to have a bearing on how cinema was rolled out. Things remained the same for the masses of Africans. For some Africans on the Copperbelt there was some change to write about; these were the ones who were considered educated in the European sense and had liberal European friends. They were allowed to take the rear rows reserved for them in the European cinema halls. Sometimes when the themes in the films to be shown in the European cinema halls were deemed unsuitable for Africans, to their dismay these Africans were turned away while the Indians and Coloureds were admitted. Clearly, racial segregation still reigned supreme even after the passing of the Ordinance.

In 1960 before the passing of the Ordinance, the Catholic bishops had expressed resistance to the piece of legislation arguing that the African audiences were all like children and still needed to be taken care of by way of censorship. They argued further that allowing

Africans to mix with Europeans and watch uncensored films together would corrupt the Africans who would turn out as criminal elements. Despite some Africans watching much the same content as Europeans, however, there was no crime to write about on the Copperbelt, in particular, and in Northern Rhodesia, in general. Even in 1963, following the dissolution of the Central African Federation and the retirements and emigration back to Britain of most British policemen, peaceful conditions were commonplace in the African mine townships.

As a result of the emigration of most Europeans following the end of the Central African Federation, the European cinema halls situated in towns away from the mines began to face serious financial difficulties as their takings dwindled. They ended up being relegated from A class to B, C, or D class circuits by film suppliers. This meant that they now received films of poor quality in stark contrast with their glorious pasts. In time, therefore, more and more Africans were admitted to these European cinema halls.

The Race Relations Ordinance failed to usher in real racial equality in cinema viewership as there was a lack of political will on the part of the NRG. The politicians in the NRLC continued to filibuster around the issue of censorship of films based on the principle of equality of races. The Federal Government in Salisbury also continued to delay the bringing together of the three governments of Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, and Southern Rhodesia to restructure cinema. The matter of equality in cinema viewership did not receive any meaningful attention even after the end of the Central African Federation

In all, colonial cinema on the Copperbelt became a novel site that combined social and political interactions and took on a role that was not in the least expected by the NRG and the mine owners who had introduced it. The attendant articulations in this strand of popular culture made it a site and tool that contributed to the frustrations and disenchantment of Africans with the colonial regime. In the end while the NRG leveraged colonial cinema to

channel and advance propaganda, the African audiences leveraged it to channel their frustrations and advance themselves socially and politically.

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