A HISTORY OF THE
MWEEMBA
CHIEFTAINCY,
1850-1995

BY

TEDRO CHIKUTA MOONO

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HISTORY RESEARCH REPORT


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UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA
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HISTORY DEPARTMENT

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this document to all my children, Muzyamba, Choolwe, Nchimuya, Buumba, Simudenda and Luyando. It is a pity I was not there when you needed me guys.
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INTRODUCTION

The Mweemba chiefdom is situated on the Upper Zambezi region of the Gwembe Valley in Sinazongwe District in the Southern Province of Zambia. According to Fisher’s tour report of 1962, the Chiefdom is the largest in the valley.¹

The institution of chieftaincy is very old in Zambia. The institution is associated with the Luba-Lunda migrations which led to the spread of kingship and chieftaincy in Central Africa². The two types of political systems namely, centralized and decentralized were introduced by the Bantu who migrated into this region. Societies such as the Lunda of Mwata Kazembe, the Bemba of Chitimukulu and the Chewa of Undi had well established centralized political systems which clearly defined the process of succession in the event of a king’s death. However, other societies such as the Tonga and Tumbuka were decentralized, meaning that they did not have kings or paramount chiefs but were loosely organised by independent chiefs who were mainly answerable to the council of elders of the area. It is to the latter category that the Mweemba chieftaincy belonged.

Like any other decentralized society in Zambia, the origin and establishment of the Mweemba Chiefdom is very difficult to establish. The chiefdom was established at a time when the Africans living in the area had no capacity to remember well all the events that happened in the area. Even the sources for writing the history of the Mweemba chiefdom are uneven and often hard to access. If we look for certainties, we shall often be baffled and frustrated by the great deal of inconsistencies of the information given. In this case, conjectures will be inevitable. It is however, important to note that the Mweemba Chieftaincy has a very old history.
The first known reference to the chiefdom occurs in the accounts of the mid
nineteenth century travellers\(^3\) and hunters\(^4\). However, these accounts do not provide
adequate information on the origin and establishment of the chiefdom. We are therefore
left to work from within the available oral traditions of the people.

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

There has been no information on the history of the Mweemba Chiefdom. It is
not known where the Chiefdom originated from and how it was established. There is also
the problem of succession disputes whose background is not clear.

**OBJECTIVES**

The following are the objectives of this study: to write about the history of
Mweemba Chiefdom; to investigate the effects of colonialism on the chiefdom and to
find out what caused succession disputes in the Mweemba Chiefdom.

**RATIONALE**

The study will contribute to the political history of Zambia, particularly that of
traditional authority. It is also hoped that the study will provoke further scholarly
interests in the history of traditional authority in Zambia.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

There is no sufficient literature on the Mweemba Chieftaincy. The literature
available so far shows that the chieftaincy was well established in the pre-colonial period.
Colson states that as early as the 1860s the Mweemba chieftaincy had already been in
existence\(^5\).

This view is also supported by Matthews who shows that the chieftaincy was
already in existence in the 1850s when Livingstone passed through the area\(^6\). This
literature helps us to know that the Mweemba chieftaincy was already in existence long before the whites came to Zambia. In an interview with Johane Ng’andu Syamayuwa in 1974, Matthews was told that even at the time of the famous eclipse of the sun in 1835, the Mweemba chiefdom was already established and Chiyalá was then the chief\(^7\). However, the literature is silent on the origin and development of the Chiefdom and does not mention any possibility of conflicts then.

There is also literature that shows how colonial rule could have influenced the pattern of chieftaincies today. Chipungu argues that colonial rule and the introduction of indirect rule created hostilities and conflicts between the chiefs and their subjects, especially the elite who resented the chief’s new role as a paid state functionary\(^8\). He further argues that some chiefs were deposed by colonial masters and were replaced by colonial favourites\(^9\).

This interference in the succession of chiefs continued in the 1940’s and thereafter.

But before the coming of colonial rule, the situation was different. In the article, “Succession Wrangles Taint Status of chieftainships” featured in the *Sunday Mail* of December 12, 1999\(^10\), a sociologist at the University of Zimbabwe, Claude Mararike argues that succession wrangles have always been there in society, but added that it was the magnitude of the wrangles which have now gone to worrying levels.

According to Mararike, before colonialism, succession wrangles were caused by the marriage patterns, where a father married about five wives and the senior wife gave birth to a baby boy years after the other wives had done so. He also argues that there were cases where a father married a woman with a child from her first marriage and this
child would claim the chieftaincy when he grew up\textsuperscript{11}. Tagart also argues that the succession to a vacant chieftaincy could only be contested by candidates of the royal clan fighting for the place, and these would be put under the surveillance of an older generation which would eventually side with the candidate most likely to meet the requirements of the position.\textsuperscript{12} This situation was later to change because of colonialism. Mararike argues that after the colonization, the disputes in the chieftancies were caused by whites that imposed candidates of their choice on the people. He emphasizes that the whites even went a step further to dress the chief with the regalia, which, as a symbol of authority added further incentive for discontent on the part of those who vied for the throne hence, the wrangles which continue to haunt our society\textsuperscript{13}. Tagart puts emphasis on the fact that the coming of the colonial government and its involvement in the traditional politics of chieftaincies greatly undermined the institution, especially that the chief was made to rule on behalf of the white master\textsuperscript{14}. These articles are very important because they all confirm the colonial involvement in traditional authority; and so they will help us to suggest how colonial education led to the creation of an elite class in the Mweemba chieftaincy.

Another relevant source is O’Brien’s article, “Chiefs of rain - chiefs of ruling”\textsuperscript{15}. In this article O’Brien classifies the Tonga chiefs into two categories, “The chiefs of ruling (bakulela) and those of rain (bamvula)\textsuperscript{16}. He distinguished between those chiefs whose powers came from the government and was directed to the taking of census and collection of tax, and those whose powers came from the spirits (hasangu) of the region and was directed to rain making and curing of illness. Although O’Brien does not mention which chiefs were of reign and which ones were of rain, apart from chief Monze,
the literature is important to our study because it provides the types of chiefs the Tonga had. It also helps us to point out the fact that there were chiefs who were appointed by the colonial government specifically for reign and the others were spiritual chiefs and belonged to a particular clan.

The bulk of literature on the Tonga society mainly provides structural organizational information but is silent on the origin and development of Tonga chiefdoms. In her book, *The Social Organisation of the Gwembe Tonga*¹⁷, Colson describes the political and organisation of the Tonga of the Gwembe Valley and explains the position of traditional chiefs before and during colonialism. In her article “From Chief’s Court to Local Court” Colson gives again background information about colonial rule and African Chiefs¹⁸.

The available literature on the study does not give much information on the possible origins of the Mweemba Chieftaincy nor does it give the causes of succession conflicts in the chiefdom.

**METHODOLOGY**

The principle sources for this study were the oral traditions of the people of Mweemba, and some sources written by missionaries and Colonial administrators who worked in or visited the area. However, a major setback in these oral traditions is the fact that the people of Meemba made few and late contacts with the world of letters. Therefore we have few eye-witness accounts or testimonies for events earlier than the lifetime of the oldest men alive today. None of the men and women interviewed could confidently give an accurate account of their past history, let alone dates.
Fieldwork for this research was not easy. There were quite a number of problems encountered. The most serious problem that I faced was born out of the research topic itself. I did the research at a time when there was a very serious succession conflict in the chiefdom. Most members of the royal clan were divided into camps and were so apprehensive to give information, especially to a person they did not know well. It took time for me to establish agents who would take me round to meet the right people. Even when I got to those people, I met a lot of hostility. I finally decided to use their own children, who were at the school where I teach, to introduce me to their parents.

ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

The paper has two chapters. The first chapter deals with the origins and development of the Mweemba chiefdom. The second discusses colonialism and its contribution to the succession conflicts in the Mweemba chiefdom.


3. *The Life and Explorations of Dr. Livingstone*, London Adam 4 Co. 300.


7. Mathews; "The Historical Traditions of the peoples of the Gwembe Valley".
   22-26.


10. *Sunday Mail of Zimbabwe*, December 12, 1999 “Succession Wrangles taint status of chieftainships”


14. Tagart, “The African Chief under European Rule” 64

15. Dan O. Brian, “Chief of rain-chief of ruling: A Reinterpretation of Pre-Colonial Tonga (Zambia)


CHAPTER ONE
THE ORIGIN OF THE MWEEMBA CHIEFTAINCY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the origin of the Mweemba chieftaincy, it identifies the chieftaincy with the Baleya clan, the goat clan. The chapter also discusses the theories of origin of the chieftaincy. Three theories will be discussed. The chapter discusses and analyses the establishment of the chieftdom up to the time of colonialism. It also discusses the emergence of three important families which were to influence the pattern of succession to the Mweembaship.

The Mweemba chieftaincy belongs to the Baleya clan. Before the Baleya population increased any member of the clan could aspire to take up a vacant position of a chief anywhere, where the chiefdom belonged to the Baleya. However, with the increase in population of the clan members, it was no longer possible that any Muleya person could assume power. There were differences that emerged together with the rise in population. Within the Baleya people of Mweemba, some belong to Mukowa (close clan members) and others belong to Luzubo or Sibungabunga (extended and loosely related members of the clan or people who were brought together by virtue of being Baleya). As a result of the differences between Mukowa and Luzubo, only close members of the (Mukowa) were allowed to contest the chieftainship in the case of death of a chief. No none Muleya members would be allowed to vie for the throne or even be allowed to act as care taker, except one with ties either through marriage or by birth, with the Baleya.
Theories of the Origin of the Chieftaincy

According to the oral traditions of the people of Mweemba there are three possible theories of origin of the Mweemba chieftaincy. These theories have been given by different members of the royal clan that claim the right to succession of the chieftaincy. One group argues that the Baleya clan, which provides the succession line of chiefs came from Kazuka in Mukuni area near Livingstone. The leader of the group was Kayuni, the first Mweemba.

According to the theory, Kayuni had two brothers, Sing’unde and Chiyala and six sisters: Mweembe Munkombwe, Nasisoola, Mukasicimwanya, Mukasindele and Mukanyumbwe. They left Kazuka because one of Kayuni’s sisters, Munkombwe was captured by the Makololo and this forced Kayuni, together with his relatives to move away to Lusowa. For unknown reasons, the group did not stay long at Lusowa and moved further east to a place called Dundu-Mweenze in Siasikaboie area. There they settled for sometime.

It was at Dundu-Mweenze that the Baleya clan began to expand following the marriages of Kayuni’s sisters to the local people and bore many children. Being a matrilineal group, all the children of Kayuni’s sisters were Baleya. The children of Mukasicimwanya were Sikalele, Moono, Mukasyandima, Kambale, Sialama, Sibuntibe and Chiinga. It is not clear of what sexes these children were. Mukasindele’s children were Sikoswe, Bbuba, Munyina-Bbuwa, Mwanaasibwibwi and Nakaumpa. The other sister, Mukanyumbwe had only one child, Mukavuuka. These children were born from
different marriages and at different places because the *Baleya* moved from place to place at different times.

From the time the *Baleya* clan moved from Kazuka to Dundu-Mweenze, they experienced a lot of raids and wars from other people who were better organised than them. While at Dundu-Mweenze, Kayuni and his group were attacked by Masoli. However, it is not known where the Masoli came from but in this battle another sister of his called Mweembe, was captured. This invasion forced Kayuni to again move eastwards into the Gwembe Valley where he found a good hiding place at Maluli in the Siameja area. It was at this place, according to the theory, that Kayuni founded the Mweemba chiefdom around 1780. His people are said to have been the first to settle in the Siameja area. Kayuni died at Siameja and was succeeded by his brother Sing’unde. The settlement at Siamenja probably took place during the late eighteenth century.

The other theory states that the Mweemba Chiefdom originated from Siameja and not anywhere else. The Tonga of the Gwembe Valley are said to have come from the east and settled around Siameja where they grew in number and later set up the Mweemba Chiefdom. The founder of the Chiefdom is said to have been Kayuni Maanza, a *Muleya*. According to this version, Kayuni ruled the Chiefdom from Siameja for a long time and died. He was succeeded by his young brother Sing’unde.

The third theory states that the Mweemba chieftaincy traces its origin from Zimbabwe. It is argued that the people of Mweemba crossed the Zambezi river below the Batoka Gorge and settled at Siameja where Kayuni, their leader, founded the first Mweemba chieftaincy. They came from a dynasty which was believed to be of the *Baleya* clan. Their reasons for the movement from Zimbabwe to the Gwembe Valley are
not clear but over population is given as one. According to this theory, Singunde, Chiyala and Mujuku were Kayuni’s nephews and not brothers as other theories say. They settled at Siameja before 1800.9

From the three theories two aspects stand out distinctively; the first one is that Kayuni is accepted by all to have established the first Mweemba chieftdom.10 It is also accepted that Kayuni was succeeded by Sing’unde. The other aspect is that of the relationship of Kayuni, Singunde, Chiyala and Mujuku. There was a close blood relationship of these people which made it easy for Sing’unde, Chiyala and even Mujuka to succeed the throne whenever it fell vacant.

When Sing’unde took over the throne, he decided to shift the settlement from Siameja to Kasuwa Kambeba(Mbeba Island) on the Zambezi because Siameja was constantly under attack from the Makololo who raided the area for cattle and women. Mbeba Island provided a good hiding place for the people. Other than providing a hiding place, the soils at Mbeba Island were very fertile and the people of Mweemba could cultivate their crops twice a year. With the availability of plenty of food, the population of the chieftdom rapidly increased. Sing’unde attempted to bring closer to him the important female relatives, probably with a view to strengthen his position and also to be assured of possible successors from the women’s children. Sing’unde died at Mbeba Island and during his reign the Mweemba chieftaincy was firmly established. He was succeeded by Chiyala another very close relative of Kayuni. It is not known when Chiyala took over power but by 1835 during the famous eclipse of the sun, he was already chief.11
It was during Chiyala’s reign that the whites began to make regular contacts with the Mweemba people. It is generally said by the people of Mweemba that when Chiyala heard of the presence of white people in his area, he got scared and went to hide at Mbeba island, and instructed his slave servant, Mucumba, to find out what these whites were looking for. When Mucumba met the whites, he was asked who the chief was and was told that the whitemen wanted to meet the chief in person. This even scared Chiyala more since he was not clear of the wishes of the whites such that he, together with his close family members, agreed to present Mucumba as Mweemba to the whites. However, while it is generally accepted that Mucumba became chief in about 1895, Mujuku who is said to have succeeded Chiyala only died in 1909. It is possible that Mujuku was appointed as Chief after Chiyala during Mucumba’s time because Mucumba was after all just a figure-head. But after the death of Mujuku, Mucumba took full control of the chieftaincy until his death in 1963. As Mucumba began to age, he attempted to hand back the chieftainship to the rightful owners, but those who were appointed to rule were found to be incapable and so it bounced back to him. Those who failed were Jeli and Syainga. A caretaker, Johane Syamayuwa was then appointed to help the old chief to rule. After the death of Mucumba in 1963, James Syamayuwa was brought in to take over the throne and he did so in August 1964 and ruled until his death on 29th August 1995.

Justification of the theories

When critically examining these theories, a few observations can be made about each one of the three. It could be true that the Baleyu clan of the Mweemba chieftaincy came from Mukuni’s area because wars and raids which Kayuni is purported to have
experienced were also experienced by chief Mukuni\textsuperscript{15}. But it may probably be correct to argue that both the Leya of Mukuni and the Valley Tonga (\textit{Ba-we}) were one group. Clark and Fagan have argued that about A.D. 90, the first agricultural peoples arrived on the banks of the Zambezi River.\textsuperscript{16} These were later to be called the Leya people from whom the \textit{Baley}a clan of Mweemba were to emerge.

It is important to note that the Zambezi River banks include parts of Mukuni area. The characteristics feature that distinguishes the earliest settlers of Mukuni area was pottery, decorated with narrow bands of parallel channeled lines which adorn the necks of many of their globular vessels.\textsuperscript{17} Whether it was locally made or obtained through trade, this pottery is not alien to the people of Mweemba. Therefore we could use this well identified artifact of the Leya people of Mukuni to help trace the origins of the \textit{Baley}a of Mweemba.

The other argument is that the founder members of the Mweemba chieftaincy could have come from the Zimbabwean side of the Zambezi. This argument is augmented by the religious connection between the Mweemba people and the Tonga of Zimbabwe. Matthews argues that one of the large chieftaincies resulting from the Rozwi migrations was named Chireya or in Tonga, Sileya.\textsuperscript{18} The Chireya was a Shona dynasty ruling over a basically Tonga majority. He further points out that this particular dynasty was firmly in existence in the late eighteenth century, when there is record of the Chireya trading in ivory with the Portuguese.\textsuperscript{19} The Leya clan in the Upper River, like many other Gwembe clans, have a tradition of migration into the Gwembe from Rhodesia. In fact the area of origin has been identified as Lubu which is situated around the Lubu river within
the sphere of Sileyas paramountcy. It is of this that the Leya clan of the Upper River are sometimes known as the 'banakoosileyā', (the children of Sileyā).20

At Lubu, there lived a famous rain-makers known as Kalebi, who had a sacred pool in the middle of some rocks where the water never dried up.21 He belonged to the Chireya dynasty. Even after the migration to the Upper River, the Mweemba's people continued to send emissaries to this shrine at Lubu. This really coincides with the argument that when there were problems of diseases or drought in Mweemba's area, the chief sent his representatives to consult the shrines at Nacibulo along Lubu river in Zimbabwe.22 Only when there was no help from the Nacibulo shrines did Mweemba send his people to consult the Monze shrines. It is because of this religious aspect that the Mweemba people are said to have come from Zimbabwe. While this may be so, it is also possible that there was continued migration from Mukuni area into the Gwembe valley and across into Zimbabwe, hence the need to maintain their original contact, as was the case with Monze who is generally believed to have come from the Gwembe valley.

The third theory simply states that the chiefdom of Mweemba originated from Siameja. This could be based on the fact that Kayuni, the founder chief of the chiefdom, first established himself at Siameja.

The slave factor in the history of succession to Mweembaship

Once the chieftaincy was established, the aspect of slave keeping becomes predominant especially during the reign of Chiyala. Chiyala was blamed for keeping a lot of slaves around the palace.23 Unlike Sing'unde who settled slaves away from the island, Chiyala allowed slaves to settle even on the island. Probably he was influenced to do this by the way slaves were acquired. The Valley Tonga were not slave raiders or
traders but acquired slaves in a peaceful manner, just like the plateau Tonga did. Slaves were obtained through exchange for food. Because of the double harvest at Mbeba island, the people of Mweemba, particularly the successful chiefs, had enough food to sell even to outsiders. In this way they acquired slaves. Sometimes flimsy accusations and charges were given to a person so that he could give his relative as payment to the accuser. If one stole someone else’s item and was caught, he would be taken as a slave. There were many other instances that led to enslaving of other people but the most common one was need for food.

The acquired slaves did not live all their lives under slave status. They were quickly assimilated into the social cultural, political and religious activities of their masters. After some time, the slaves were adopted as part of family members and could be assigned to do important functions on behalf of the family. This was possible because the Tonga people would generally assimilate an alien into their system easily.

Colson states that any alien could settle and rise to full membership in a new community if he found acceptance among its people. It is only recently that the distinction of an alien has been important to the Tonga. It was for this reason that even slaves had, with time, risen to ordinary status and sometimes were even allowed to marry from the master’s home. To bring slaves closer into the family, terms like “basizilongo”, “bamukowa” or even “baluzubo” were used to refer to them.

**EMERGENCE OF NEW MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY.**

The case of some people of Mweemba to be called slaves is an attempt to distort the history of the chiefdom. This is because there has emerged over time, new families into
the royal family and apparently it is these families that are fighting for the chieftaincy using accusations and counter accusations just to disqualify one another.

At the meeting held at Siabaswi, at Mweemba on 16th May, 1998, Levy Syamayuwa observed that the problem concerning the Mweemba chieftainship had other motives rather than the issue of chieftainship. At the same meeting, one of Levy’s representatives argued that in 1948, Mucumba, the slave chief, gave the chieftaincy to Levy as a gift because both Chiyala and Syamayuwa were one family. However, this same representative refers to the other group as “The owners of the chieftainship” meaning that the Syamayuwa family were not royal members of the chiefly clan. The other group, represented by Shamu argued that they were the people responsible for burying the chiefs in Mweemba. They referred to the other chiefs who ruled in the last half of the 20th Century as caretakers.

They further argued that there was no blood connection between Mucumba and them, and even stated that the relationship between Mucumba and Syamayuwa was that they were both slaves. If the latter’s argument is correct that they were grave keepers of dead chiefs, then it becomes even more difficult to reconcile this with the claims for chieftainship.

It is important to keep in mind that Shamu’s group comprised Shamu himself and his nephews who were direct descendants of Syainga, and also the group of Isaac Syacamweka, his brothers and nephews who were direct descendants of Jeli. This is important to note that both Syainga and Jeli were the people to whom the chieftainship was handed back by Mucumba on the grounds that they were the rightful owners but failed to rule. The later development within these two groups was of great interest.
When Shamu was disqualified as a candidate for the Mweembaship, Syacamweka became the alternative candidate to contest against Levy Syamayuwa.

When Syacamweka was finally installed as chief Mweemba on the 16th June 1999 by the area member of parliament Syaceyeye Madyenkuku, Shamu’s group protested, arguing that Syacamweka was not a true member of the haleya family. Ackson Simichelo, Shamu’s nephew, argued that Jeli’s grandmother was just brought into the royal family by Chiyala. Syacamweka’s mother was a blood sister of Jeli and therefore Syacamweka, a nephew of Jeli did not qualify to be chief. But Syacamweka’s group and even that of Syamayuwa were strongly objected to Shamu or his nephews becoming chiefs because they were not true members of the royal family. Shamu’s grandmother was called from Zimbabwe to come and live at Mweemba’s court because her mother, Shamu’s grandmother was once used by Sing’unde to perform certain rituals at the palace and at shrines. In fact they argue that Shamu was born in Zimbabwe in chief Sikalenge in Binga District.

The information above relates very well with findings made by the Gwembe District Commissioner on 1st May, 1953 when he discovered that the actual family line of Kayuni was almost extinct. He observed that the administration of the chieftaincy of Mweemba was greatly influenced by three important families which were not originally of the royal family, but which later acquired such importance during the past hundred years. As such they were considered to be part of the Mweemba royal family.

Their importance was inherited from three women who were friends or even servants in the households of the chiefs and came to be regarded as part of the families concerned. According to the District Commissioner the women were Siachela,
Munasiachanga and Siabumba. Each of these women had an interesting history and we shall briefly discuss each of the three.

Siachela was originally a servant in the household of Mweomba Mujuku, but later assisted him in the worship of ancestral spirits. Through this she obtained power and certainly considerable importance. Her daughter, Mangoye, and the latter’s children were held in high regard by the present chief. Munasiachanga ran away with Mweomba Sing’unde after Mweomba Kayuni was slain at the battle at Siameja\(^2\).

It is not clear whether or not she helped Sing’unde to escape but it is certain that she lived in close association with the royal family and in this way, came to be regarded as one of them. Her grandchildren like Jack Mukupa could be considered for the chieftainship. As for Siabumba, she originally came from Zimbabwe, the southern part of the Zambezi to assist Mweomba Kayuni to worship the spirits. After the battle at Siameja she escaped across the Zambezi, but because she had won power and importance with the old chief, she was later recalled to live as one of the family in Mweomba Sing’unde’s household. Her grandchildren, such as John Ngandu could be chosen to act as chief.\(^3\)

It is from these families that claimants of the Mweomba chieftaincy came from. Because the proper royal family line could not easily be made, the power to rule spilled over to the closer relatives, especially those who were privileged to know a little more than the others. The chieftaincy matters became prone to manipulation. This was not unique to the Mweomba chieftaincy. Similar experiences are found in the chieftaincies of Macha, Sianjalika, Mwanacingwala, Moyo and Mwenda.

In these chieftaincies it is common to find that the contender to a chieftaincy has ancestors who were rescued slaves or were servants in the royal household. It is therefore
difficult to convince anyone about the true and proper royal family of the Mweemba chieftaincy. The District Commissioner even noted that none of the three women discussed above had any relationship by blood or marriage to any of the Mweembas. Their acceptance and importance as members of the royal family has compounded the complexity of the problem of choice of a chief.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated that the Mweemba chieftaincy was first established at Siameja by Kayuni, the first Mweemba. After the death of Kayuni, the chieftaincy was taken over by Sing’unde who decided to escape to Mbeba island on the Zambezi. It was from here that the chiefdom developed. The chapter has also noted that when the colonial government was establishing itself it found the chiefdom intact and that Chiyala had just given the chieftaincy to his servant, Mucumba. Those who were tried from the so called rightful owners were found to be inadequate by Borne, the District Commission. This opened the race to the new entrants in the royal family.
END NOTES


2. Interview 23, December 1999 chief Levy Syamayuwa., Mweemba Village;


5. Brief Family-Tree of Mweemba Chieftainship submitted by Levy Syamayuwa.


8. Interview with Joe Siakalonga, Village Kukalya (Kanyemma), 23 December 1999.

9. Interview with Enoch Syabbalo.

10. Interview with Ackson Simicheloo, Bbombo primary School, 13 March 2000.


12. Interviews with Levy Syamayuwa, Enoch Syabbalo.

13. Interview with Enoch Syabbalo.


15. J.D. Clark and B.M. Fagan, “The Iron Age and the Native Tribes”


20. Matthews, The Historical traditions of the peoples of the Gwembe Valley,” 125

22. Interviews with headman Siazanga Village Siazanga, 26 December 1999 and Enock Syabbalo.

23. Interview with Siakalonga.


25. Basizilongo- These are family members with whom you help each other performing important duties e.g. at ceremonies.

Baluzuko- These are people who are brought closer into the family because either they belong to the same clan, or they are born of the said clan.

Bamukowa- These are close family members of a clan.

26. Recordings of the proceedings on the succession dispute for senior chief Mweemba, held at Siabaswi shopping Centre on 16 May, 1998 in Sinazongwe district.

27. Recordings of the proceedings on the succession dispute for senior chief Mweemba, held at Siabaswi shopping Centre on 16 May, 1998 in Sinazongwe district.

28. Interview with Ackson Simichelo.

29. Interview with Ackson Simichelo.

30. NAZ, KTE, 2, Gwembe District Notebook 1902-1963, "The Mweemba chieftainship."


32. NAZ, KTE, 2, Gwembe District Notebooks 1902-1963.

33. NAZ, KTE, 2, Gwembe District Notebooks 1902-1963.

34. NAZ, KTE, 2, Gwembe District Notebooks 1902-1963.
CHAPTER TWO

COLONIALISM AND THE ELITE IN THE HISTORY OF SUCCESSION TO THE MWEEMBASHIP.

Introduction

This chapter discusses colonialism and the elite in the context of the history of succession to Mweembaship. The chapter is divided into two sub-sections; colonialism and the elite.

Although Livingstone sited the Mweemba area in the mid 1800s, frequent visits by Europeans to the chiefdon occurred in the 1880s when Fr. Depelachin, Fr. Tenearde and Br. Vervanne arrived at Mweemba’s village, on the Zambezi from the Wankies. The primitive Methodist Missionaries also visited the area in 1897 and set up the Sicoba Mission in 1901 and the Mundodoli Mission was opened in 1907.

However, the Mweemba chieftaincy was brought under the colonial administration by the Lochner Treaty of 1890 that gave the British South African company exclusive mining rights and the right to administer North-Western Rhodesia.

Colonialism and the Mweemba chiefdom.

Effective Company rule began around 1900 when the company administrative structure was finally worked out and implemented. How the company was to rule Northern Rhodesia was enshrined in the charter that authorized the formation of the Company.
Tagart observes that one of the clauses in the charter of the B.S.A. Co states that in the administration of justice to the said people or inhabitants, careful regard shall always be had to the customs and laws of the class or tribe or nation to which the parties respectively belong. This in principle implied that the colonial administrators were going to respect the tribal or ethnic organisations and institutions that had already been in existence and were promoting natural justice, equity and good governance for the people. There was supposed to be always careful regard to the laws and customs of the concerned people so that there would be continuity in the lifestyles of the Africans.

It was with this kind of consideration that the Mweemba chieftaincy was to be regarded. However, the colonial administrators were less willing to deal with illiterate and unprogressive chiefs. Instead, they manipulated the old traditional systems in order to make effective their administrative system. It was in this same manner that the centralizing power by Monze was fragmented by the new administrators. The chiefs and headmen were given new roles that were to be performed in the interest of the company. The officials usually preferred traditional leaders that were at least educated or could articulate issues well. This became a very serious problem in the administration of the Mweemba chieftaincy. To start with, Mucumba, the chief with whom these Europeans were to deal with was not only uneducated, but was in fact a slave servant.

One of the contestants for the Mweemba throne argued that Mucumba was able to rule for a long period of time despite being illiterate because he got a lot of support from some of the influential female relatives of Chiyala, who urged their children and other relatives to accept him as chief until the time of his death.
The influence of colonial administration on the Mweemba chieftaincy was exerted first by Native Commissioners and later by District Officers and District Commissioners. In the choice of chiefs and headmen, recommendations were made by Native Commissioner’s office at Gwembe. When headman Simasengele of Masengele village in Siameja became blind, for instance, he nominated his nephew to act in his stead. The Native Commissioner had to ratify the appointment after getting the satisfaction that the candidate nominated at least met the minimum required qualities. The same happened when Sialunga, headman under sub-chief Siameja died in September 1917, Siagolio’s appointment as headman had to be ratified by the Native Commissioner at Gwembe. Such appointments and ratifications were very common during the colonial rule.

The change of administration from company to colonial office in 1924, brought to Northern Rhodesia a different pattern of administration; Indirect rule. This method of administration meant that the chief and headmen had to assume and perform certain functions that made them appear to be supportive of the colonial rule. Chipungu quotes Iliffe who argues that indirect rule meant the creation of an officially favoured group in each tribe and society which generally acquired and monopolized benefits which are from improvement. Such a group usually had preferential access to education, special treatment by traders and with the European support, these tribal leaders could often impose their views over the people in a more authoritarian manner than before colonial rule. Since the position of authority had acquired added prestige, there was now more competition for the position of chief, especially from the elite.

Mucumba began aging and so got tired to run the chieftaincy effectively. In 1948 he decided to hand back the chieftaincy to the rightful owners to appoint a successor, and
Syainga was appointed but within a short time he was deposed by the District Commissioner for Gwembe, for allegedly playing drums and unruly behaviour.\textsuperscript{11}

In his place, Jeli was appointed chief in 1949 he ruled for about three years before he was also dropped by Borne, the District Commissioner for Gwembe for alleged insubordination and dagga smoking.\textsuperscript{12} After the Jeli saga in 1953, the family decided to summon Elifas Mbozi who was then Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance. Mbozi refused and instead he recommended Syabonde Syacamweka to be chief or at least his elder brother, Enock Chijolo. But this time the influence of the elite began to be felt. Syabionde and Chijolo were not educated and so they were rejected by the elite who demanded to have an educated chief.\textsuperscript{13}

**The Local Western Educated Elite and the Succession to Mweembaship.**

One of the achievements of western education in the Mweemba chiefdom was the formation of the elite group. Missionary education was a major factor in the social differentiation which began in the BSA Company period.\textsuperscript{14}

Missionaries and their agents influenced the composition of the small educated elite whose influence was also felt in matters of religion, education and traditional rule. The influence of the western educated elite in the Mweemba chiefdom was most felt in the 1950s when they began to influence the choice of chiefs.

Among the first elites in the Mweemba chiefdom were Rev. Joel, B.G. Njase, Jona Nchite Syamayuwa, Rev. Sialuzu, and Ronald Simunchebvu.\textsuperscript{15} These demanded to have an educated chief. Their argument was that Jeli and Syainga had failed to rule because of illiteracy. Meanwhile when Jeli and Syainga failed to rule, Mucumba
appointed Levy Syamanyuwa in 1949 to be successor, but Levy was still young and in employment as a teacher. Because of the elites’ demands, Johane Syamayuwa, a teacher, was appointed as caretaker chief in 1953, a move that angered Jeli who went to protest to Borne, the District Commissioner at Gwembe. But Borne explained that Johane was allowed to act as chief despite not being a pure Muleya because he was married to a Muleya woman.

The elites learnt the whiteman’s methods of acquiring wealth and power, and began to grow in large numbers and their influence on chiefly matters could no longer be ignored. Tagart argues that in African chiefdoms, the elite believed that they were delivered from the cruelty and oppression of their chiefs in the past by the white man. Therefore, if ever they agreed to be put under the chief’s control, they would seek to change the manner of choosing and installing a new chief. They demanded that a more democratic method be used to choose a chief. In the Mwecemba chiefdom, the educated elite influenced the choice of a chief by introducing a new and strange way of appointing a new chief: use of elections.

In 1964 elections were used for the first time to choose a chief and this saw James Syampande Syamayuwa being elected as senior Chief Mwecemba.

This is a clear manifestation of the influence of the elite, who, instead of following the usual royal family system of choosing a successor, resorted to holding elections in order to make the institutions appear democratic. The election system only favoured the enlightened and so, the manipulation of the illiterate and ignorant masses became inevitable.
After the death of James S. Syamayuwa in 1995, Levy Syamayuwa, Ackson Simichelo and Alexander Siatwiinda contested the throne. Although Levy Syamayuwa won the election, other members of the royal family rejected him and obtained a court injunction to bar him from taking up the throne. The injunction brought a lot of revelations about the anomalies that had gone unabated for along time in the chiefdom. While it was agreed by the royal family to present Mucumba as chief, his successor James Syamayuwa was a product of the elite. James Syamayuwa was rejected as having been a full chief, but a regent because he belonged to the family of former slaves. His election in 1964 was objected by Jeli who strongly believed that James was imposed on the Mweemb throne by UNIP which was a stronger and popular nationalist political party in the area.

Conclusion.

This chapter has argued that the establishment of colonial rule in Zambia undermined the African traditional authority. The state was concerned about the calibre, ideology and even the performance of the Native Authority staff. It installed or attempted to install chiefs, and in the case of succession and recognition of chiefs, the state, represented by district officers, cadets and district commissioners, often supported claimants with appealing promise and personality. This situation often encouraged the educated elite to participate in the choice of a chief. Usually the elite would rally behind a claimant that was educated and would understand the requirements of the colonial administrators. That is how James S. Syamayuwa, who was a retired senior police officer in the colonial police force, was favoured to take up the Mweembaship, having been a member of the royal family.
END NOTES

1. NAZ, KTE2, Gwembe District Note Book 1902-1963 (Missions)

2. Peter Snelson, *Educational Development in Northern Rhodesia 1883-1945*  
   (Second edition); Lusaka: Kenneth Kaunda Foundation, 1974), 54.

   (Manchester, University of Manchester: 1958), 49


7. Interview with Ackson Simichelo, a losing Candidate to the Mweembaship.

8. NAZ,KDB1/5/2 Native Affairs: Appointment of Chiefs and Headman,  
   September 1914-December 1934.

9. NAZ,KDB 1/5/2 Native Affairs, 1914-1934.


11. Interview with Enoch Syabbalo, a renowned writer and researcher at Kanchindu.


17. Minutes of the meeting at Siabaswei on May 16, 1998.
CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes the discussion on the history of Mweemba chiefdom. It summarizes the discussions in the preceding chapter of this study. The conclusion also addresses the issue of slavery and emergency of new members of the royal family.

It has been pointed out in chapter one that the founder members of the chiefdom came from the Katanga region of Zaire, (New Democratic Republic of Congo). This is the place of origin of all Bantu chieftains in Zambia. However, it is not established when these people could have settled the valley or the areas to the north of it.

It is for this reason that even the history of the Mweemba become very difficult to reconstruct. Probably the best way of studying the history of the chiefdom is to have an archaeological study. However, for this study, the information was mainly collected from oral narrations of the people from the area, of course taking into account of some of the problems of oral data. Interviews were conducted with people living in and outside the chiefdom. The other sources of data were the University of Zambia Library and the National Archives of Zambia, all in Lusaka. The only problem encountered during the research of this study was mainly having limited resources which hampered wider coverage of the study area.

Besides, there was also the problem of the sensitivity of the topic of study at the time of my research. People were less willing to co-operate because they feared that the information they were to give could cause then serious problems. Finally and after using tactful approaches, they were able to give information which has been used to come up with this document. I owe them a lot.
The literature review has shown that there is very little information which is
directly provided on the Mweemba study. There is no data on the origins and established
of the chiefdom. The only scanty information is first a mention here and there about the
already established Mweemba chiefdom. Colson’s works, though she mentions the
Mweemba quite so after, does not give a historical background of the area. The only
source so far, attempting to find out where the Mweemba people came from, is that of
Matthews work. At least he gives us a crew about the possible dates when certain events
could have taken place in the chiefdom.

In chapter one, we have come up with three theories of origin of the Mweemba
chieftaincy. It has been established that the Mweemba chieftaincy belongs to the Baleya
clan and that other chiefdoms such as that of Mukuni in Livingstone, Monze in Monze
and Mwanza chieftaincies are also under the baleya clan. This shows that the baleya
people had good ability to organise and give leadership to many people in a locality,
The other assumption would be that the baleya could come from one place and only
spread to other places to create chieftaincies.

At least Monze is said to have originated from the Mweemba chiefdom.\(^1\)
(O’Brian) If this assumption is to hold, then we can as well argue that the Mweemba
chiefdom could have originated from the Mukuni. The other possibility could be that the
Baleya people could have originated from Zimbabwe but first settled in the Mukuni area
before diffusing to other places. But finally the Mweemba chieftaincy was established at
Siameja by Kayuni the founder chief.

From Siameja, the chiefdom was moved to Mbeba island where it was firmly
established by Singunde. Here Singunde attempted to call female relatives who had
performed important functions in the royal household or at shrines. This led to the emergence of new members of the royal family, even when they were mere servants at first. These female relatives were Siachela, Munasiachanga and Siabumba. Each of these had an interesting history. From these women, we have today’s claimants of the chieftainship and because there is no more proper line of the royal family, the power to rule has been taken over by people who may not be directly related with either Kayuni or Chiyala. Even Mucumba who had been brought up by Chiyala had recommended Levy Syamayuwa for the throne considering the fact that at that time all had become one clan. But the refusal by the other families to accept other families as their equal clan members has come probably because of the advantages which are now attached to the reign.

The study has also discussed the possible contributions of colonialism and the elite to the succession of the Mweembaship. It has been established that the coming of colonial rule to Northern Rhodesia had brought about a change in the administration of traditional institutions: Chiefs had become more or less puppets of the government.

They had become collectors of revenues for the colonial administrators. This created conflicts with either their subjects for collaborating with the whites, or with the whites for failing to perform according to their expectations. Some chiefs were even deposed and replaced by those who had promising character. The elite were also another social group that emerged as a result of western education and values. The elite had also greatly affected the traditional institution by demanding that they reform, or they are discarded. With regards to chiefly matters, the elite were not willing to be led by an illiterate chief. Even the manner of choosing a chief was greatly modified. Elections were introduced as a modern way of choosing or replacing a chief.
Therefore, in order for us to understand the current problems of the Mweemba chiefdom, it is first important to trace them from the colonial period. It was during this period that the struggle for chieftaincy took a new turn because there were several social benefits that were attached to the position. The political leaders in the Mweemba area and the elite have always wished to have as chief, a person who understands their perception of things. They had in the past, wished to have a person who would easily understand the whiteman’s likes and dislikes. While some people have argued that this was necessary in order to foster development in the chiefdom, but others have argued that it was necessary for the blacks to use their chiefs in the campaign for freedom. How far this argument is correct is yet to be proved.
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