

TO THE BOTTOM OF THE HEAP:
EDUCATIONAL DEPRIVATION AND ITS SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS
IN THE NORTHWESTERN PROVINCE OF ZAMBIA, 1906-1945

by Paul David Wilkin

ABSTRACT

The vast area of Northern Rhodesia that later became the Northwestern Province (NWP) was part of an even larger colonial backwater. This area and this fact provide the framework for studying the NWP's colonial society. The NWP's educational system in turn evolved from this anachronistic society.

In the 1880s Britain through the British South Africa Company (BSAC), King Leopold through his Congo Independent State, and Portugal competed vigorously for the NWP and the much vaster geographic region of which it forms a part. A series of chance decisions fixed new international boundaries and left the NWP at the point of congruence and on the periphery of their three empires. Then another series of chance decisions by Britain and the BSAC left the NWP economically stagnant. Consequently, despite vast mineral resources, the NWP was consistently neglected during the twentieth century. By 1945 it had become known as the cinderella province of Northern Rhodesia.

While this negative setting transformed African education, the new colonial society did not regard it as meaningful. Thus Christian missions laid the foundation for the modern educational system. Since large mainstream societies found the NWP unappealing, conservative evangelical missions operated all educational programs. Small and poor, they maintained only feeble religious schools that had little appeal to the African population. Only one

missionary, George Suckling, tried to organize a systematic program, but was unsuccessful until the mid-1930s and early 1940s when government policy became more progressive. With this change, Suckling and other educators improved their educational programs. These improvements came too late. By 1945 the NWP was so far at the bottom of the heap, educationally as well as developmentally, that it could never catch up.

Part One analyses traditional African society and the impact of colonialism. Part Two narrates more chronologically the growth of the new educational system. Sources for this study came from living and working in Zambia during 1963-79 which afforded wide access to written materials and key individuals. British and American archival materials were also utilized.

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by

PAUL DAVID WILKIN
B.A., Ashland College, Ashland, Ohio, 1960
M.A., Case-Western Reserve University, 1962

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Paul J. Marshall

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PREFACE

Educational systems do not develop in a vacuum. Instead they reflect the societies of which they are an intrinsic part. Such is the case with the seriously defective educational system that emerged in the NWP during the colonial era by 1945. It mirrors the NWP's colonial society that consisted of a powerful, albeit miniscule, white elite and a powerless African populace.

The primary and secondary reasons for this educational deficiency--which clearly lie outside the realm of formal education--indicate the general constraints on, and inadequacies of, this society. The primary cause for the NWP's defective educational system was the uneven economic development that took place in south-central Africa during the first half of the twentieth century. This development in turn had been instigated by events that occurred in an earlier era. In the late nineteenth century three large imperial powers created both new colonial societies and new international boundaries to separate them. Thus, they

transformed this region of Africa into the Belgian Congo, (Portuguese) Angola, and (British) Northern Rhodesia.

These powers slowly imposed upon the area their own economic systems, all based upon an emerging industrial capitalism concerned with efficiency and profits. Much of the region they considered a poor risk for investment and development. So while modern industrial economies flourished in the copperbelts of the Congo and Northern Rhodesia, most areas languished. As the new boundaries severed traditional east/west trade routes and cultural and political ties, these regions became increasingly divorced from the old society without being positively incorporated in the new.

Northern Rhodesia's northwestern corner, an isolated and remote segment of Anglophone Southern Africa that eventually became the NWP, was one of the extreme examples of neglect by the new economic, political and social order. Britain did not believe educational development was crucial in such a peripheral part of its world empire.

Because they were most interested in government economy and efficiency, the British literally dumped the matter of African education into the lap of the Christian missions. In the NWP this action contributed to a far more visible, though much less important, secondary reason for the defective educational system. On the whole, large missions believed that the NWP was not a prime mission field. Except for the Zambezi Valley, the area lacked

effective transportation and communications systems and had a small population. Hence, prior to World War II, the NWP attracted only two relatively poor evangelical missions; missions moreover possessing only a marginal interest in secular education. Because these small missions failed to provide a high quality of western-oriented education, the region became an educational as well as an economic backwater. By 1945 it was a forgotten little corner of the world.

Reflecting the economic, political, and social order that they are a part of, the western-oriented academic world also has ignored the NWP. Little has been written about it except for a few excellent micro-studies by anthropologists: F. M. Melland (on Kasempa District), Victor Turner (on Mwinilunga District), C. M. N. White and, more recently, Arthur Hansen and Anita Spring (on Zambezi District). Pre-colonial historical studies by Dick Jaeger (Kasempa), Robert Papstein (Zambezi) and Robert Schecter (Mwinilunga) supplement this work. Only Benson Kakoma has written about the colonial era. Works focusing on the whole territory and nation, such as Richard Hall's Zambia and L. H. Gann's History of Northern Rhodesia, have ignored the NWP with very minor exceptions prior to 1981. Only Fergus Macpherson's new work does not make this error of omission. In like manner, the main works on the so-called 'development' of education in the territory, especially those of John

Ragsdale and P. D. Snelson, focus on other provinces where the new educational system grew much more rapidly. {1}

The reason for this neglect is simple. In the colonial era this northwestern corner of the territory was undramatically, almost placidly, yet devastatingly converted into an uninteresting backwater of the modern world. And the western academic world, which includes many scholars at African universities, generally has not examined such backwaters. {2}

Both consciously and unconsciously, scholars have traditionally worked as a part of or an extension of the western elite. In order to obtain academic employment and funding for research and in order to make themselves heard

{1}For full information on the authors cited in this brief review, consult the bibliography. Besides these scholarly works on the NWP, works by three Zambian nationals are useful: Simon Chibanza, Thomas Chinyama, and Mose Sangambo. For other important educational works on the territory as a whole, see John Mwanakatwe and Trevor Coombe. In addition, R. I. Rotberg's book on Christian missionaries still contains perceptive material. Fergus Macpherson's new work deserves special notice. I could obtain this work only in June 1982 just before completing the final version of this work. This analytic study totally refutes the assertions of Gann and most other western scholars, who maintain that British rule under the BSAC was established and sustained rather painlessly. It could properly be subtitled "African Misery and Suffering under the BSAC." Despite differences in method, emphasis, and style, my research and this dissertation support his major findings and assertions. Although unable to quote him in the text, I have made extensive cross-references to this brilliant new historical interpretation.

{2}A few scholars today are consciously trying to break out of this mold. An example with regard to Zambia is Maude Muntemba's dissertation on the economic history of Kabwe Rural District.

through the media, scholars have had to do one of two things. They have had to either openly glorify and support, or 'constructively' criticize and analyze, the movement of international capitalism and imperialism that has controlled the rest of the world in the twentieth century. The works of L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan do just this, especially Burden of Empire. Failing this first course, scholars could instead choose to study the exotic, dramatic, and flamboyant. Glorifying imperialism and capitalism has flattered wealthy sponsors; constructive criticism has soothed consciences; and the sensational has its own obvious appeal to buyers of books. Other approaches would not sell so well. Certainly relatively few readers either in the West or in Africa have wished to identify their own complacency and responsibility in quietly subjugating pre-industrial peoples. They do not wish to admit their own part in turning the people of self-sufficient, independent African societies with unique cultures into dependent, powerless peasants within a capitalist economy. {3}

Despite its undramatic history, the transformation of the NWP has a valuable message for everyone, namely that the capitalist, imperialist devastation of over half the world has been truly efficient, and dramatic episodes--such as those of stoic resistance portrayed by T. O. Ranger and

{3} These strong statements are not political statements for or against the East or Soviet/Chinese forms of communism. In Africa, these nations have been largely irrelevant, at least directly, until recent years.

George Shepperson--are the exceptions, not the rule. Much more common has been the very quiet and efficient conversion or subversion of peoples into modern-day peasants who remain powerless within the world's economic, social, and political systems. If the stories of these nonwestern peoples and places are ever told, they will parallel the tale of the NWP. {4}

My friends in the NWP are especially asked to place these statements concerning my dissertation in the following context. Between 1963 and 1979 I lived and worked in, or was closely associated with, the NWP. During that time two truths became apparent to me. First, despite its vast potential mineral wealth, good soils, and small population, the NWP truly has been Zambia's 'cinderella' province, a land of perpetual future prosperity whose future never seems to come. Second, its modern education system has been and still is weak. Since Independence in 1964 the examination pass-ratio for NWP students has remained among the poorest

{4}My broad assertion on the "capitalist, imperialist devastation" may have been compromised by Goran Hyden's new work, Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and an Uncaptured Peasantry (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980). Unfortunately, I located a copy of this work too late to fully absorb his line of argument and make any changes here.

in the nation. {5}

These two truths and the evidence that supports them became the focus of countless personal and professional discussions. While they agreed on the facts, most people hotly disputed the causes that created them. These obviously lie in the past. But as noted below, history can be an amorphous grab bag, useful for groping into and hurling out answers pleasing to some and displeasing to others.

My discussions included people from all segments of society: politicians, missionaries, and so-called ordinary people. The last often spoke with great emotion about the colonial government's policy of neglecting the province and about the parallel failure of the missions to organize an adequate system of education, especially when missions in other provinces, such as the Church of Scotland in the Northern Province, did so much more. The missionaries replied with sadness that they and their predecessors had given their lives to the people and region. Yet they took the blame for the failure of education and for a situation they did not create. The colonial government, in deciding to 'rule on the cheap', had required the missionaries to educate the people but had not financed them with the

{5}The term "cinderella" has great emotional meaning to people within the NWP. It came into common use during the period of the Central African Federation after 1954 and has been used by numerous politicians. Frequent use has raised awareness of the deprivation, but has not led to much long-term, positive change. Hence the term connotes ever-increasing frustration, at least up to 1979.

amounts of money they needed to do the job properly. Everyone had expected too much of missionary agencies and their voluntary supporters overseas. They could not provide money for all social services in the area. The new Zambian officials also joined the debate. They repeatedly said that the national government provided an equitable number of places in school in comparison to the rest of Zambia. The poor results produced by the educational system lay not in Lusaka but within the province.

Each group was at least partially correct, both in its historical self-vindication and in its accusation of others, because each viewed the present situation from the perspective he had inherited from the past. Education, especially the 'little school in the bush', had been a potent symbol to their predecessors and it still retained its potency.

If anyone was wrong, I was. In the 1970s while collecting written records and oral narratives relating to the past and present educational system, its teachers, its pupils, the number of schools, and the like, I largely ignored the wider message that everyone was sending to me. Only distance in time and place from my adopted home in the NWP has enabled me to see that the problems raised were not only historical, but wider and deeper than I realized--extending much beyond the formal educational system. While I was lost in the trees, each from his own perspective was telling me about the forest.

As a result, the scope of this study has altered since I first began. In place of extensive pedagogical details, I now tackle the different attitudes, viewpoints, perceptions, and assumptions of the interacting social groups. In the first part, the words 'schools' and 'education' are employed infrequently, because this portion focuses first on these concepts, second on the African people and the region, third on international events relating to the NWP, and fourth on the elements that comprised the NWP society, a distinct provincial variant of Northern Rhodesian colonial society. Even the last part contains far less narrative and detailed description of individuals than I originally anticipated. Instead, I try to place the basic facts about the foundations and evolution of the present educational system into the wider framework of the emerging colonial state. Furthermore, I now end the narrative in 1945 instead of 1968. For while after 1945 the same general neglect continued, complex new policies began to unfold. Certainly this approach will not please everyone. But it will, I hope, help to clarify a shadowy historical era and area that few historians and social scientists have charted.

I cannot thank all the people on three continents who have assisted me. The Bibliography lists individuals I have interviewed. These 'informants'--as academics use the term--include some of my dearest friends and adopted relatives. I thank all of them collectively; to pick out and repeat any names would show an unfair partiality.

I would also like to acknowledge other individuals not mentioned in the Bibliography: Robert and Marion Molteno in London; Wim and Romana Hoppers in the Netherlands; Felix Mukuka and Peter Njovu in Solwezi; Karen Szymanski and Marcia Harrington in Syracuse; and my advisors at Syracuse University, Roderick J. Macdonald, Robert G. Gregory, Alan K. Smith, James L. Newman, and Peter T. Marsh. The Gqomo 'clan' in Port Elizabeth in South Africa and New York City and the Wilkin and Gutridge 'clans' in Ohio and Canada have given me continual moral support which I greatly appreciate.

The staffs at several institutions have assisted me in my research. These include the Evangelical Church of Zambia (AEF) in the NWP and Lusaka, the University of Zambia Library, the National Archives of Zambia, the British Museum, the SAGM (AEF) Headquarters at Wimbledon and Reading in England, and Christian Missions in Many Lands (CMML) at Spring Lake (New Jersey), Union Theological Library (NYC), Yale Theological Library, and Bird Library (Syracuse University).

Lastly, I must thank Miriam Zindi Gqomo Wilkin for

her enduring encouragement and confidence.

As most of the people cited both here and in the Bibliography know very well, history lives in the NWP! I am aware that historical topics dealt with here are extensions of current realities, especially those concerned with 'tribal' history and those concerned with mission/church relations. An effort has been ^{made} to deal carefully and with sensitivity to topics relating to living individuals connected in the past or at present to the NWP. Professional integrity, however, has set limitations. Hence, I have no doubt that while some readers mentioned herein will be pleased, others will not be so happy. In either case all are invited to write to me regarding my general interpretation or specific handling of individuals, organizations, and groups to clarify any misunderstandings. For the indefinite future, write to me as follows:

Paul D. Wilkin
% Daniel Wilkin
485 Linnville Road
Newark, Ohio 43055

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Special Terms and Abbreviations in the Text

(N.B. Whenever possible, this study uses the terms and abbreviations that were current during the period discussed. The major exception is the NWP. As noted below this is used as a geographic identifier. The following are terms that might cause confusion.)

Boma is now part of normal English usage in Anglophone Africa and is not underlined. While specifically referring to local government headquarters and offices, boma is frequently used to include small district townships that have grown around these government headquarters.

Boundaries is a common western term indicating fixed and rigid divisions of land. The concept was transferred to Africa during the colonial era and has much importance today. It stands in contrast to frontiers, more fluid divisions of space.

Brethren has been chosen to incorporate the loose grouping of autonomous missionaries that are also called Christian Missions in Many Lands (CHML), Garenganze Mission (late nineteenth century), and Plymouth Brethren (PBs). The British clearing house for these missionaries is in Bath, England. When not capitalized brethren refers to church members in local congregations.

BSAC is British South Africa Company, also called the Company. Referred to frequently, the title is seldom fully written out. I do not use BSACompany.

DC means District Commissioner. For much of the colonial and post colonial era, this acronym has been used in place of the much longer two words. It is used in the same way in this text. The following, less common, terms are normally not abbreviated except in the footnotes: Native Commissioner (NC), Provincial Commissioner (PC), and the adjective Acting (Ag.).

Education is used very broadly to include formal and informal training that individuals receive(d) for life in modern (western-initiated) or traditional (African-initiated) society.

Educational Program refers to the individual mission stations' educational work. In the early days these were autonomous.

Educational System refers to the modern educational systems and also to the collective programs of mission

stations that anticipated this modern system.

Fisher, Dr. Walter remains the doctor in much of the northwestern part of Zambia. Because the title and the man became synonymous, this is the only individual referred either by title or by name. No other titles are used in the text except for essential identification. Walter became the patriarch of a large number of Fishers and these are identified by both surname and Christian names.

LLLC is my own creation. It refers to the increasing ethnic-type cluster of African peoples designated as Lunda, Luvala, Luchazi, and Chokwe. Today they are largely located in eastern Angola, southern Zaire, and northwestern Zambia.

Matrilineal peoples claim their descent through their mothers and not through their fathers, in contrast to Hebrew and European custom.

Migration has two uses: rural to rural, and rural to urban migration. The first refers to the more traditional movement of African peoples over long, or more commonly, short distances often to maximize land use. The latter is connected to the colonial and post-colonial era in which labor moves towards new economic centers to earn money.

NAZ means the National Archives of Zambia. Called also the Zambia National Archives (ZNA).

NWP is a modern term especially used after 1954. It is used throughout this text, however, to represent today's boundaries. It encompasses the more historical regions of Kasempa Province/Kaonde-Lunda Province and Balovale District of Barotseland. The following are all acceptable spellings for the province: North Western, North-Western, and Northwestern.

SAGM was the most common short way of saying the South Africa General Mission. Today the name has been changed to Africa Evangelical Fellowship (AEF), with the local church in Zambia being called the Evangelical Church of Zambia (ECZ).

School(s) has been frequently used as a synonym for particular educational programs or systems. When used in my own analysis, it refers to a particular place where formal learning takes place.

Symbols suggest something else by reason of association, convention or accidental resemblance. Thus seemingly simple objects have multiple symbolic meanings, especially to different groups within a

modern society. In this study, such symbolism is especially important in relation to education and schools, and also medicine and the hypodermic needle for injections.

Tribe/tribal connotes colonial and post-colonial groups of African peoples. Today it overlaps with the term ethnic.

Note also the following:-

1) Throughout the text single quotation marks are used for terms that have a religious and/or linguistic meaning for a particular group in society. Double quotation marks are seldom used except for quoted material.

2) Footnoting has been done solely by paragraph. If only one citation is given and the paragraph contains a quotation, the citation is for this material.

Historical and Modern Place Names

Prior to 1945-

Balovale
Bancroft
Barotseland
Belgian Congo
Broken Hill
Elizabethville
Katanga
Leopoldville
Mankoya
Northern Rhodesia
Nyasaland
Southern Rhodesia
Western (Province)

In 1983

Zambezi
Chililabombwe
Western (Province)
Zaire
Kabwe
Lumumbashi
Shaba
Kinshasa
Kaoma
Zambia
Malawi
Zimbabwe
Copperbelt (Province)

SOUTHERN AFRICA

