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THE UBUTWA SOCIETY IN EASTERN SHABA AND NORTHEAST ZAMBIA TO 1920*

By Mwelwa C. Musambachime

> This is an attempt to enter one unexplored [layer] of institutional landscape, the relics left behind by a set of beliefs once acceptable. They were held by men [and women] who were socially and intellectually respectable and who prided themselves, often, on their grasp of public affairs. They are ideas now generally thought to be nonsense, but they were once effective and influential. Moreover they were often elaborately articulated. — J.M. Roberts[1].

> Societies . . . flourished more or less continuously [for centuries]. They have given odd twists to the various important developments right up to the present day. In their unique and generally clandestine social, political . . . way(s), they have contributed powerfully to [political and social] events. — Wilfred Blythe[2]

The study of any ethnic group in Central Africa or elsewhere is like an archaeological excavation, which, as one digs deeper, exposes a profile of layers. On top are modern, postcolonial socioeconomic and political institutions. Below are layers shaped by colonial institutions and the introduction of Christianity. Under them are precolonial layers of migrations, settlement, and interactions with other societies at the levels of trade and the exchange of ideas. There are also layers reflecting the traditional religions and various societies that permeated the whole fabric of village life. Whereas many of these layers have been studied in varying

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* My thanks go to all informants who gave me their time. I want to particularly single out Reverend James Kakonko Lenderng'oma, Muyembe Besa, Mulenga Chisanga; Ntondo Walima, Headman Kasulwe, and Chief Chipungu and his brother Musonkanya for taking me in their confidence to discuss Ubutwa.

This study began as a seminar paper presented to the Department of History, University of Zambia, in 1989. I benefitted a great deal from the comments of seminar participants, who included Roy Willis. While on a visit to the United States I had discussions with Jan Vansina in Madison and Bruce Fetter in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I have also benefitted from a discussion I had with Allen F. Roberts. None of the persons mentioned above is responsible for errors of fact or judgement.

[1] J.M. Roberts, *The Mythology of Secret Societies* (London, 1972), 1.

[2] Wilfred Blythe, *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya* (London, 1969), 1.

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detail, that of societies has only received little attention from a few missionaries, administrative officials, and scholars.[3]

In this study, the term "society" refers to a group of people coming together voluntarily to form an organization that serves a common purpose and satisfies a common interest. In precolonial Central Africa, there were many such societies, which varied in intent and purpose. Some were for professionals such as smelters of iron or copper, blacksmiths, hunters, fishermen, leatherworkers, musicians and herbalists, popularly referred to as guilds. Others served one gender group, such as those dealing with the circumcision of boys and the initiation of girls into adulthood. Some societies were open to both men and women and served a variety of interests. Whether closed or open, all societies were self-perpetuating, and members cooperated in matters of the profession, such as recruitment, initiation, training, performance, and the maintenance of standards.[4] Some of the societies operated in small local areas; others operated in larger regions, attracting members from several ethnic groups. Some societies were prominent and influential in people's lives; others were less significant. In most villages, a number of societies existed and operated side by side. Each recognized and respected the role, function, and authority of the others, while individual members sometimes belonged to several different societies, depending on interest and acquired skills.

All societies were esoteric in nature, organization, and operation. All employed particular rituals, symbols, signs, identification marks and other forms of knowledge regarded as a special source of power. Whatever the composition, each society had, apart from secret rituals, a binding oath of loyalty that provided the individual with a social background and body politic in miniature, through which he found authority, protection, assistance, a sense of kinship and some measure of contentment. In certain situations, influential societies might effectively replace the family, village, or clan for a particular member.

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[3] See for example Dugald Campbell, "A Few Notes on Ubutwa: An African Secret Society," *Man* 14, 28 (1914), 76-81, and also his *In the Heart of Bantuland* (London, 1928), 96-117; Pierre Colle, "Le Butwa (Secte secret nègre)," *La Revue Congolais* (1912), 195-99, also in *Le Baluba (Congo Belge); Collection de monographies ethnologique*, II (Brussels, 1913), 527-627; Nicholas Julien Ferber, "Le Butwa," Rapport administratif No. 140/route/ Just, dated 2 November 1934 in the Archives de sous-Tanganyika - Albertville (Kalemie) (ASRT/A/K); J. Vanden-Bossche, "Sectes Secrètes et associations indigènes au Congo Belge," *Force Publique: Edition Confidential du Bulletin Militaire* (Leopoldville, 1954); Anonymous, "Secte Secret de Butwa," Rapport administratif No. 37/Route/POL: Mupundja, dated 8 October 1934, in Archives du Sous-Région du Tanganyika, Administrateur de Kasenga (ASRT/AT/AK); Cullen Gouldsbury and Hubert W. Sheane, *The Great Plateau of Northern Rhodesia* (London, 1911), 259-62.

[4] Interviews: Paulo Chisanga, Mununga, May 1970; August 1971; July 1972; Muyembe Besa, Chisenga Island, 13 May 1975; Reverend James K. Lendeng'oma, Kazembe, 18 April 1975; Ntondo Walima, Kazembe 16 April, 1975.

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In spite of their esoteric nature, the existence and general purpose of each society was known to the general public. Similiarly, the officials and the members of each society were known or knowable. But all members were bound by the oath of secrecy not to reveal the affairs of the society to non-members or to the colonial authorities—hence the application of the term "secret" to these societies. The strict secrecy associated with European, American, Chinese, Japanese and Afrikaaner "secret societies" cannot be applied to those found in Central Africa,[5] where they combined aspects of being esoteric, secret, and open in their activities.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the role and function of Ubutwa, an ancient society that operated in Eastern Shaba Region of Zaire and North East Zambia in the precolonial and early colonial periods. It covered an area stretching in the north from Kalemie (formerly Albertville) on the western shore of Lake Tanganyika to the Luvua, then moving south to Lake Mweru, then along the Luapula River to Lake Bangweulu, the swamps, and along the lower Chambeshi River. (See the map on the next page.) The Ubutwa society was embraced by the following ethnic groups: Tabwa, Lungu, Bwile, Shila, Zela, Bwilile, Ushi, Batwa, Unga, and Bisa. In each area, it operated in a decentralized fashion with autonomous lodges operating among clusters of villages located along the shores of the lakes and the banks of rivers and inland to a distance of 40 to 64 kilometers.[6]

Origins

Etymologically, the term "Ubutwa" comes from the root *twa*. In the Bemba-related languages, spoken in both Eastern Shaba and North East Zambia, the term means to be "sharp" as in the case of a knife, axe, or hoe, or to pound something using a mortar and pestle. The difference in meaning was deduced from the manner in which prefixes were added to the root-word to form a new word. The addition of prefixes showed whether the word was a verb (*ukuutwa*, to be sharp, or *ukutwa*, to pound), or an adjective (*yaatwa*, a state of being sharp); or a noun (*ubutwa* , an organisation of *ubutwa*; *umutwa,* member, or *abatwa* , members, of the Ubutwa organization or society).

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[5] This was a common feature in all societies, whether Chinese, Japanese, Irish, or African. See Blythe, *Chinese Secret Societies*, 1; T. Desmond Williams, ed., *Secret Societies of Ireland* (Dublin, 1975); Fe-ling Davis, *Primitive Revolutionaries of China: A Study of Secret Societies of the Late Nineteenth Century* (London, 1976); J.J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York, 1959).

[6] See F.W. Butt-Thompson, *West African Societies: Their Organisation, Officials and Teaching* (London, 1929), *passim.* The reference to Butwa in Angola, in reality, although he does not acknowledge Dugald Campbell's work, refers to the area of Lake Bangweulu.

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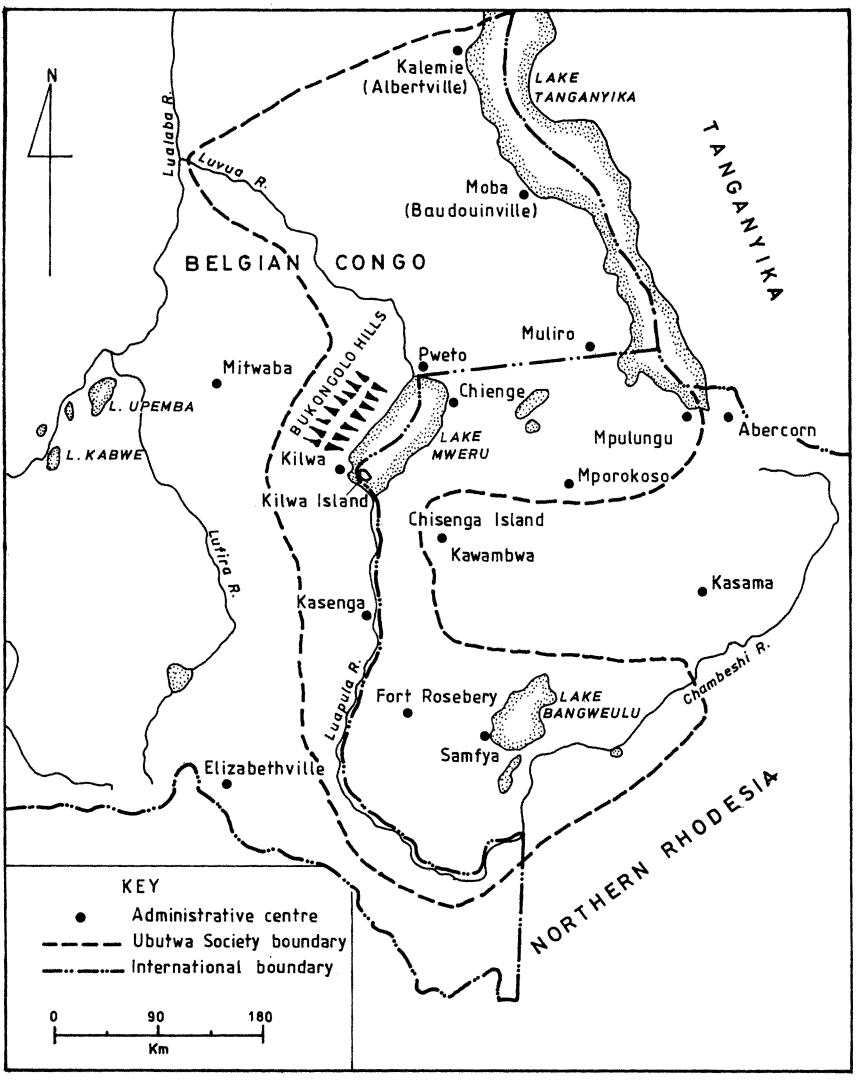

THE AREA IN WHICH THE UBUTWA SOCIETY OPERATED BEFORE 1920

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In addition, the term "Abatwa" or simply "Batwa" is used to identify pygmy groups living in the equatorial forests of the Republics of Congo, Zaire (in Eastern Zaire they are also referred to as Batembo), Burundi, and Rwanda. It is also used to identify Bantu groups living in isolated swampy areas of the Lukanga and Bangweulu swamps in Zambia, and parts of South Africa.[7]

Oral informants interviewed in various parts of the region were all agreed that the origins of the society can be traced to stone-age pygmies who lived in what is today the Lower Luapula Valley and Lake Mweru area. The pygmies were described as being copper-colored in complexion and short in height, with unusually large heads. They are credited with having planted the natural groves of oil palms found in isolated areas in the study area. From the fruit they made oil which they applied on their bodies.[8]

Ubutwa was one of the societies existing in their midst. Its members organized regular and annual dances that went on for days, looked after the sick, and arranged for the burial of dead members. Although it was a rather loose organization, it was accepted by all pygmy groups. Kilwa, an island on the south-west corner of Lake Mweru, was the headquarters, and Kabeke, the local leader on Kilwa, was accepted as the supreme leader.[9] In the dry season, groups of pygmies came to Kilwa for their annual dance. Here, with their bodies painted in zebra stripes, they initiated new members and made some schematic paintings in the Membo Cave.[10]

In the course of time, acephalous Bantu groups from Shaba called Abena Bwilile began to settle in the study area. They befriended the pygmies and were introduced to Ubutwa; many became members and traveled to Kilwa each year for their annual dance. On one occasion, when a Bantu group led by Kaponto came to attend the annual dance, one person in his group started a fire accidentally. As the grass was dry, the fire spread rapidly, burning everything in its way. Many pygmies perished, including Kabeke . A few were saved by the Bantu.[11] Kaponto assumed the leadership of Ubutwa and moved to settle on Kilwa Island where he continued the tradition of annual dances. In the passage of time, some

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[7] M.W.D. Jeffreys, "The Batwa: Who Are They?" *Africa* 23, 1 (1953), 45-54.

[8] Interviews, Kaponto, Kilwa, 12 May 1975; Kasulwe, Chisenga Island, 17 May 1975; Chisanga, Besa.

[9] Kaponto; Besa; Chisanga. See also Bashila Elders (assisted by Edmund Labreque), "Bashila: The History of the Shila People, Aborigines of the Luapula-Mweru along with their Fishing and Hunting Customs, Folklore and Praisewords," deposited in the Archives Missionaries of Africa, Ilondola Mission, Chinsali 2 - 6.

[10] According to informants, these were similar to modern clubs. This also applies to other societies in Europe. See Desmond, *Irish Secret Societies*, 1.

[11] Interviews, Kaponto; Besa.

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pygmies intermarried with the Bantu, while others died off or moved to settle in new areas. Under Kaponto, the Ubutwa society became an important custodian of Bwilile traditions, customs, beliefs, folklore, myth, and history, and regulated people's lives. Some members who visited other areas along the lower Luapula River or the Lake Mweru area, opened new and autonomous lodges, which also recognized Kaponto as the leader of the society. Gradually, Ubutwa spread along the lower middle and upper Luapula to Lake Bangweulu, the swamps, and lower Chambeshi River.[12]

Sometime in the seventeenth century, a group of Bemba uprooted from the Lubemba plateau by Chitimukulu's Luba, and led by Nkuba Mukuka, arrived in the area and settled among the Bwilile. They were introduced to Ubutwa and many became members and participated in its functions. As time passed, they intermarried with the Bwilile and their off spring were called Abashila. Gradually, Nkuba established a political state, on the strength of a Bemba and Shila alliance. He defeated Kaponto and other Bwilile leaders and became the new leader of the society. His capital was on Chisenga Island in the Mofwe Swamps just south of Lake Mweru. This also became the new headquarters of Ubutwa. Through trade and other contacts Ubutwa spread among the Bwile, Zela, Tabwa, and Lungu.[13]

In 1740, the Lunda of Mwata Kazembe arrived in Luapula valley and defeated the Shila and Bwilile groups. As a sign of his defeat, Nkuba accepted Lundahood, including such symbols as a skirt, cowbelt, and diadem, and was referred to as Kazembe's ritual wife.[14] Kazembe did not take over the headship of Ubutwa because he was the head of Ubushika, an exclusive Lunda society similar to Ubutwa. Under Lunda domination, Ubutwa became even more important, providing the Shila and other dominated groups with a secret ritual and a binding oath of loyalty. Within the organization, members wielded their own disciplinary codes and authority. This measure of independence was expressed in songs and praises exalting Nkuba.[15] For the Ushi and Shila people, Ubutwa was the focal point of resistance to Msiri's Yeke invaders from the 1880s until 1891 when their power collapsed. In some ways it was also used by the Tabwa to resist Arab-

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[12] Kaponto; Besa. According to informants, this fire was followed by heavy rains, which quickly flooded the marshy plain and transformed it into a shallow lake called Umwelu-Mukandanshe, "the open space of water which can not be crossed by locusts." The first word is now corrupted and appears as Mweru.

[13] Kaponto; Besa; W.V. Brelsford, *Fishermen of Bangweulu Swamps,* Rhodes-Livingstone Paper No. 12 (Manchester, 1946), 41; Campbell, "Ubutwa," 80.

[14] BaShila Elders, Bashila 1-2; M.C. Musambachime, "Changing Roles: The Development and Disintegration of Nkuba's Shila Kingdom to 1940" (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1976), 21-23.

[15] Bashila Elders, Bashila, 2-4; Musambachime, "Changing Roles," 21-23; Lendeng'oma; Walima; Mwata Kazembe, *Ifikolwe, Fyandi Nabantu Bandi.* (London, 1961), 40-42.

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Swahili domination in the Marungu as well as in the neighborhood of Nsumbu and Kabuta, where Teleka and Abdullah Ibn Suliman established their posts.[16]

Organization

Ubutwa was not a religious cult, having no shrines or priests. It was just a voluntary organization organized like a club with an open membership that transcended kinship, family, or clan ties and ethnic boundaries. In each area where the society operated, there existed a lodge that grouped together a cluster of villages. Within each lodge, membership was graded, including initiate, junior, senior, and higher grades. The members in the higher grades were envied, admired, and feared by the junior members and the initiates. To gain a place in the senior grade was the ambition of many members. Promotion from one grade to the other was usually a matter of age and seniority. However, in some cases, it was by selection and in others, the honor was bestowed after some payment, in form of beer, calico, hoes, and beads.[17]

Each lodge was governed by a council composed of an elected number of men and women from the senior grade. Out of this council, one of the most senior and respected members was elected as leader of the lodge. He held the non-hereditary title of *shingulu* (father of the spirits) for a man or *nangulu* (mother of the spirits) for a woman. The use of these term in no way referred to spirit possession. The holder of the title had to be an adept in magic (*ubwanga*), which he used to protect members from witchcraft and harm from known or unknown enemies. The magic was never used to harm or kill people, however.

Each *shingulu* or *nangulu* (equated to a bishop by informants) paid allegiance to Nkuba, the paramount chief of the Shila. In the eyes of the members of Ubutwa, Nkuba was the father figure of the organization, equal in rank to a pope. He was also believed to be the most skilled in terms of magic. This respect and regard were expressed in songs and praises. Neighboring *shingulu*s or *nangulu*s visited each other to consult; to learn new tricks, songs, and dances; or to arrange joint ceremonies where this was possible.[18]

Ten leaders assisted assist Shingulu or Nangulu, five men and five women who held titles as follows:

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16 Besa; Kasulwe; Lendeng'oma; Walima. Interviews Chief Chipungu Chikoti, Chipungu, 8 September 1972. On the Arabs and Swahili, see Andrew Roberts, *A History of the Bemba* (London, 1973), 185-292.

17 Besa; Kasulwe; Interview, Abel Chinyanta, Kazembe, 16 April 1975.

18 Besa; Kasulwe; Walima; Lendeng'oma.

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Men	*Women*
Katumpa	Buyamba
Chumundu	Katempa
Shinini	Chabo
Luongo	Ngobola
Kasumpa	Lubuta

These titleholders were knowledgeable in the practices of Ubutwa and served as guardians of the society. Under the guidance of each of these titleholders, known as *tata lya bwanga* (father of magic) for men or *nyina lya bwanga* (mother of magic) for women, were a number of initiates and junior members known collectively as *abana ng'anga* (children of the teacher). The relationship between them was that of parent and child. It was their responsibility to instruct initiates in all matters relating to the society. For this they received payments in form of beer, cassava or millet meal, meat, fish, or tools.[19]

Role and Function

All members of Ubutwa regarded themselves as belonging to one family which transcended family kinship and ethnic lines. They assisted each other in agricultural and other tasks. They looked after the sick members and organized burials for the dead members. Before burial the corpse was washed and painted with white kaolin soil (*impemba*) and a white conus shell was put between the teeth. After the farewell rituals, which included killing of a chicken and sprinkling the blood on the corpse, eating the meat, and a lot of dancing, the corpse was borne to the graveyard followed by the members, who sang the following song.[20]

Bemba	*English*
Umunensu nasuma mu mpande	Our friend has beaten a
Ilya mumwikete	conus shell
Musendeni bwino	While you carry him gently
Ku mashamo	to the graveyard.

Non-members, whether close relatives or not, were not supposed to take part in the burial of the members of the society.

Ubutwa also provided entertainment for the members. They held regular meetings where dancing, singing, and the playing of the special guitar, *ichansa* (a guitar with many strings similar to the West African kora) featured prominently. To emphasize their difference from non-members, all members were encouraged to

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[19] Lendeng'oma; Besa.

[20] Campbell, "Ubutwa," 80; Besa; Lendeng'oma.

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learn a cryptic language known as Ulubendo. The ability to speak it was according to informants a "much covered acquisition."[21]

Ubutwa was an important institution of social control. In some cases, depending on the leadership, chapters often used intimidation, force, and violence to maintain internal solidarity and uphold their position. They were able to carry out acts of vengeance and punishment, as well as to exact fines on those who erred without fear of retribution from the chief or the victim of the kin.

Disputes involving the members of Ubutwa were settled within the society itself. Decisions passed by the local leadership were not appealed or reversed. The members were quick to enforce the decision. In some cases, depending on how assertive the local leadership was, Ubutwa was a law into itself.

Ubutwa was also an important institution in the retention of many forms of oral literature relevant to the regime. Nkuba (as both Kabeke and Kaponto before him) was the supreme leader both of the political unit and the society, and his name was revered in many songs and praises. Often, members accompanied the chief on his tours. Wherever they camped, they gave public dances and sang a wide variety of songs in praise of the ruler and his predecessors and spoke of their achievements.

The society had its own history. Members with good memories were both given special training in traditional lore and given esoteric knowledge of the society. Eventually a person who trained in this way attained high office or grade within the society and helped train new initiates.

Membership in Ubutwa was a prerequisite to the holding of high political office. This meant that the ruling house as well as councillors all belonged to the society. Sons and nephews of chiefs underwent ceremonies of initiation and advancement toward high Butwa office just as the chief underwent separate investiture ceremonies as part of their progress towards achieving full powers. Each chief became a patron of the society in his area which is the reason why the Ubutwa members were sometimes called "children of the chief," or Abana ba Mfumu.[22]

In *Primitive Rebels,* Hobsbawm identifies four elements that are common to any society.[23] These are periodic meetings, initiation ceremonies for new members, practical rituals, and symbolism. Let us see how each of these operated in Ubutwa.

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21 Walima; Lendeng'oma.

22 Walima, Lèndeng'oma, Interviews, Mwaba Muteti; and Samuel Mpanga, Kazembe, 21 April 1975.

23 Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels,* 150-51.

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Periodic meetings

After the harvest the society's leadership met to arrange for the annual ceremony that took place between July and September at the time of the full moon. Once arrangements were finalized, the members met to build a hall called Mulumbi or Lutembe in which the ceremony took place. It was located in the bush some distance from the village. The building was rectangular or oblong in shape, mostly facing north, varying in size but large enough to hold between fifty and a hundred members. The entrance was on the eastern side. One structure seen by Stephane Kaoze at Mpweto in 1914 was estimated to be about eighteen meters long and six meters wide, with a large roof and no windows. Completely enclosed, it was well decorated both inside and outside. The entrance was on the eastern side and participants passed through three doors or barricades before entering the main hall. Mulumbi was out of bounds to non-initiates.[24]

The Initiation Ceremony

Each society held its own initiation ceremony for new members at regular or irregular times.[25] Each ceremony was a rite of passage, containing a complex set of messages and varying in duration and elaboration.[26] Initially, a person wishing to join approached either a senior member or leader. If accepted, he paid a fee, which varied from place to place; it might be a chicken, a goat, a hoe, a basket of fish, beans, millet, or cassava meal, or a piece of cloth. Once received, the fee was passed on to the leader, who decided whether to share with other members of the council, send it to Nkuba, or use it during the initiation ceremony, which varied from three weeks to three months.[27]

Before the ceremony began, a lot of food and beer were prepared by the female members and transported to the Mulumbi/Lutembe. On the agreed day—usually when the moon was full—the ceremony began with the assembly of those intending to be initiated. The initiates were divided into groups, each under one of the ten leaders or members who had attained a senior grade. Each leader led his group into the hall. After entry, the initiates were painted white with the white kaolin soil (*impemba*) signifying the importance of the rite and function.[28] Next,

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[24] Chinyanta, Lendeng'oma; Besa; Chisanga.

[25] Colle, "Ubutwa" 195-96; Gouldsbury and Sheane, *The Great Plateau*, 206-11; Lendeng'oma; Chipungu; Interview, Katai Mwenge, Pweto, 11 September 1972.

[26] Archives du Diocese le Kalemie-Moba: Evoché de Kalemie (ADKM-EK), Stephane Kaoze, "Culte et Superstitions des Batabwa," unpublished manuscript, 1942. Also "Histoire des Bena Malungu," unpublished manuscript, 1946.

[27] Lendeng'oma; Walima.

[28] Besa; Walima; Mpanga.

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each initiate was asked to make an oath. He/she did so while placing the right hand on the head and the left hand on a contraption called *ubwanga bwakwa Kalunga* (the fetish of a hunter). This contraption, which instilled a lot of fear in the initiate, was made of two horns—a large one from a roan antelope and a smaller one from a duiker placed inside it. It was smeared with clay mixed with a variety of herbs and decorated with human teeth in a close, bead-like pattern. The small horn contained bits of human nails, hair, bone, sinews, and flesh. The larger one contained, apart from herbs, bits of the claws and heart of an elephant, hide of a hippo, an eye of a vulture, heads of deadly snakes such as cobra, black mamba, and puff adder; a python; hair of a dead chief, piece of a tree struck by lightning, a nose of a crocodile, brow of a hyena, teeth of field rat, and powder extracted from a meteorite.[29] All these bits were believed to contain living properties of the living species and a hot meteorite, which, if the oath was broken would attack the culprit with speed and ferocity, leaving him dead, crippled, seriously injured, or mad.[30]

After taking the oath, each initiate was asked to drink from a cup, pot, or gourd, a special brew of intoxicating beer, mixed with herbs, bits of pulverized quartz crystals; feet of a crocodile, tortoise, and scorpion; and camwood powder (*inkula*). This brew had a variety of names: *malwa* among the Lungu, *malawa* among the Unga and Bisa, *mwebe* among Chilubi inhabitants, and *chibolo* among the Tabwa, Bwile, Shila, and Ushi.[31] The drinking signified acceptance of the rules and tenets of Ubutwa and what it stood for. Soon after drinking, the initiates were made to dance. With the excitement and the effects of the strong brew they became intoxicated. Some went to sleep, others appeared as if possessed or went into a kind of frenzy, grunting and howling. When this was going on, a choir of women members began to sing welcome songs, accompanied by *ichansa* , a banjo-like guitar with several strings. One of the songs was the following:

Bemba	*English*
Mwe iseni munwe	You come and drink,
Mwebana iseni munwe	children come and drink.
Uleshala mwana wa musha	Anyone who remains is a child of a slave.
Lekeni abe	Let him remain.

When the initiates were fully recoverd, they and older members painted their bodies with white kaolin (*impemba*), making either spots or zebra patterns. Others were

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[29] Gouldsbury and Sheane, *Great Plateau* 261-62; Chisanga; Lendeng'oma.

[30] Walima; Chisanga; Mpanga; Muteti.

[31] Lendeng'oma; Besa; Campbell, "Ubutwa," 77.

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rubbed with camwood powder. They then began feasting, accompanied by songs and dances. One song was

Bemba	*English*
We chansa chandi	My guitar makes
ni kasansaika	Irresistable music
Chansa Kapingila	It drives people
Kutobo	with ecstacy
Kabungululu ee	It attracts all
Nkuba elele	Praise be to Nkuba
or	
Mung'anda yandi	In my home
Tamubula fyakulya	There is lots of food
Nyina Choba	Mother of the ferry man
Leta fyakulya tulye	Bring food for us to eat
Chorus:	
Nyina Lyabwanga	Mother of the initiate
Leta fyakulya tulye.	Bring food for us to eat.
or	
We ushabumbwa na Lesa	Bring food for us to eat
Butuka Kalaye	You, who are not a
Ushinguluke Kayanda	creature of God,
We uno labila	Run and seek permission
Toma malwa	Go round the house and say
Nkushenge	Drink beer to your fill.
or	
Mwebenda nshila	Travellers,
Umfweni ulwimbo	listen to the song
Mwisonta inshila	Do not point to the way
Ubutwa bwalamilanga	Ubutwa will show/ or guide you

These types of songs were sung throughout the night, accompanied by dancing and drinking of beer.[32]

The following morning, each initiate was given a name by which he was to be known among the members of Ubutwa. This was followed by the making of a visible mark or emblem as a sign of membership. The most common signs were

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[32]Colle, "Le Butwa," 197; Gouldsbury and Sheane, *Great Plateau*, 261; J. Vleugels, "Moeurs et coutumes principales des Batabwa," *Bulletin du Centre d'Etude des Problemes Sociaux et Economiques* , 98-99 (1973), 23; Lendeng'oma; Walima.

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cicatrices of "keloid scars, blackened and rendered prominent." These were cut in a V shape pointing either upwards or downwards across the chest and the back. In some cases scarification was across the forehead. These served as identity marks as well as marks of full membership.[33] Once these marks were made, the remaining days were spent in teaching the initiates Butwa songs and praises, the folklore related to Ubutwa, and the secret language and various signs to be used to identify oneself or others when one was away from home. During this time, new initiates were free to join drummers, singers, or guitar players. The best ones were chosen to lead. When the ceremony was over, the members returned to the village to resume their normal lives. [34]

The impact of the society varied from one area to another. In some areas, belonging to the society engendered some form of pride and dignity. In others it carried real social and political power. Among the Bisa, for example, this power was "felt in every relationship in [the] life of the people."[35] Many felt that the society gave them protection, strength, and self-confidence, but above all a sense of belonging reflected in reciprocal actions. These were then the main attractions for non-members.[36]

The functions of Ubutwa depended on the state of security prevailing in a given area.. When there was war, it was practically impossible to conduct regular dances, annual ceremonies and carry out other roles and functions. This was the situation between 1870 and 1890 when the study area went through a series of disturbances caused by Arab and Swahili traders by the Yeke wars and Bemba incursions in Itabwa and Biza areas. In this period, the activities of Ubutwa were either scaled down or abandoned altogether and resumed when peace was restored. This was the situation when the European Missionaries began to arrive in the 1880s.[37]

Missionary Enterprise

Between 1870 and 1910, three missionary groups came to operate in the study area. The first to arrive were the London Missionary Society, who opened their first station at Mtoa, north of Kalemie, in the 1870s. They later moved south, opening stations at Niamkolo on the southern shore of Lake Tanganyika in the 1880s and

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[33] Lendeng'oma.

[34] Colle, "Le Butwa," 196-97; Gouldsbury and Sheane, *Great Plateau*, 261; Allen F. Roberts, "Tabwa Tegumentary Inscription," in Arnold Rubin, ed., *Marks of Civilization: Artistic Transformation of the Human Body* (Los Angeles, 1988), 137-43; Walima; Mpanga; Chinyanta.

[35] Lendeng'oma; Gouldsbury and Sheane, *Great Plateau*, 261.

[36] Fred, K.A. Tatford, ed., *Light Over the Dark Continent* (Bath, 1984), 442.

[37] Mwenge, Chipungu; Muteti, Lendeng'oma.

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Mbereshi close to Kazembe in 1900. The second were the White Fathers, who opened their first station at Mpala, south of Kalemie, in 1885. From here they opened other stations at Lubanda in Moba, Muliro, and Mpweto. The third were the Plymouth Brethren, who opened Luanza mission in 1893 and Mambilima in 1897. At the time the missionaries arrived, they found the Ubutwa societies flourishing. Pierre Colle, a Belgian White Father who worked among the Tabwa living in Kalemie, Moba, and Kapulo Districts, reported that the Ubutwa societies were well established. This was confirmed by Nicholas Julie-Ferber, a Belgian administrative official, who also confirmed that the societies operated across clan and ethnic boundaries. Other Belgian officials found strong evidence of its existence at Kasenga, Kashobwe, and Mpweto. On the Zambian side, between 1893 and 1912, the Plymouth Brethren reported its presence at Luanza, Luapula Valley, and along the shores of Lake Bangweulu. The London Missionary Society based at Kawimbe, Mporokoso, and Mbereshi reported nothing on Ubutwa in their areas of operation.[38]

Right from the beginning of missionary enterprise, missionaries displayed a biased attitude towards African culture and institutions. They did not take time to study the material culture of the African peoples among whom they operated to enable them to understand the function and role of certain societies and institutions. The superficiality and dogmatism imbedded in their training gave them little intellectual flexibility to place specific moral issues in a social context. In their view, there was no question of grafting the Christian message on to traditional African culture. As far as the missionaries were concerned, the whole culture had to be uprooted in order to save the African from their "heathen, surrounding . . . unbridled lust and [the] pernicious influence of heathen life." In order to be saved, the Africans had to convert wholesale, to Christianity.[39]

African conversion to Christianity was very slow because it meant a fundamental and profound transformation, requiring them to abandon what had been their beliefs and practices for centuries for some new ideology they little understood.[40] In many instances Africans were hesitant to adopt something new. Fred K. Tatford gives an example of the experience of a missionary at Mambilima

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[38] A.F. Roberts, "Like a Roaring Lion: Tabwa Terrorism in the late Nineteenth Century," in Donald Crummey, ed., *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa* (London, 1986), 79-81; also Roberts, "Fishers of Men: Religion and Political Economy among Colonised Tabwa," *Africa*, 54, 2 (1984), 49-70; Mwenge, Chisanga, Chipungu.

[39] H.C. Nutter, "African Awakening: The Dawn of the Christian Consciousness as Seen in Africa," *Chronicle of London Missionary Society* [hereafter CLMS], 2 (1914), 71-72; Archives of the World Council of Missions, London Missionary Society: Central Africa: William Freshwater, "Annual Report for Mbereshi Mission, 1914"; also "A Story of a Short Tour," *CLMS* 13, 149 (May 1904), 117.

[40] Lendeng'oma.

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Mission. He reports that during the efforts to convert the local people, the church meetings were well attended and medical work attracted a large number of people, but no converts resulted. After years of fruitless labor, the missionary called a meeting of chiefs and headmen and told them that he was thinking of moving elsewhere. When he finished, an old chief (probably Chief Mulundu) stood up and said:

> Teacher, whiteman all you say is true. You have lived and worked among us for many years and none of us believed. You do not know everything. Do you know that when you came here, we had near your mission station the headquarters of Ubutwa . . . Society?
>
> . . . as a result of your teaching [the headquarters] no longer exists and [Ubutwa] practices have ceased. No, do not leave. Stick to us and when we understand your teaching, we shall believe.[41]

Such kind of talk, and the hesitancy, ambivalence, and slow acceptance of Christianity displeased the missionaries. Naturally they suspected that there was a force behind it all. These suspicions fell on Ubutwa, which was seen by missionaries as a strong rival and competitor. If conversion of the local people to Christianity was going to succeed, then Ubutwa had to be eliminated.

Among the Bemba-speaking groups in Eastern Shaba and North East Zambia is an old proverb, "Ba ngoshe babili tabalala iculu cimo: Two cobras cannot live in one location." Similarly, the arrival of missionaries in areas controlled by Ubutwa Societies created conditions of rivalry and competition for the control of territory and people. Although Ubutwa, as an organization, was not a religious body and did not pose any challenge to the missionaries in its operations, it was nevertheless seen as a strong rival by the Christian missionaries because of its widespread influence. If the missionaries were to succeed in spreading Christianity and winning new converts, Ubutwa had to give way.

To root out Ubutwa, the missionaries adopted a five-pronged strategy. First, based on information collected from the non-local Africans who served as catechists and evangelists (or local "renegades" who for fear of punishment by the leadership of Ubutwa, decided to become Christians as a way of seeking protection and security for themselves and their families), the missionaries condemned the Ubutwa as immoral. This condemnation was based on the following reasons:

> a)the seclusion of the members in the Lutembe or Mulumbi for up to three weeks was illegal and was against the wish of some members;
> b)too much beer was consumed during the ceremony and this in itself was a sin;

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41 Tatford, *Light over the Dark Continent,* 442.

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c)the songs sung had a strong sexual content;
d)judging from the length of time spent in seclusion,there was reason to believe that adultery (or better put, sexual orgies) was a common practice during the ceremonies. (Missionaries refused to believe that all participants in the ceremony were, like in other societies such as smelters and hunters, strongly obliged to observe strict sexual abstinence as part of their moral conduct. Where this code was transgressed, punishment was swift); and
e)the leadership were all well-versed in witchcraft.

On the basis of these reasons, the organisation had to be condemned.[42]

Second, missionaries placed a ban on Ubutwa dancing and initiation ceremonies in areas where they operated. In the area west of Lake Tanganyika, two enthusiastic priests—Victor Roelens (later appointed vicar-general in Upper Congo) at Lubanda in Moba, and Leopold-Louis Joubert at Mpala in Kalemie ensured that the ban was strictly observed. Members and leaders of Ubutwa were ridiculed, harassed, flogged, and even imprisoned to scare off the faint-hearted; Mulumbis (or Lutembes) were burned, and neighboring villages were strongly warned or punished.[43] Similar measures were carried out by Daniel Crawford at Luanza and Dugald Campbell at Mambilima.[44]

Third, all Christian converts were forbidden to participate in Ubutwa practices. Those who disobeyed were excommunicated, ostracized, and publicly ridiculed . Fourth, missionaries offered protection and security to the new converts by constructing Christian villages at mission stations and sub-centers. Here missionaries offered more or less the same functions as the Ubutwa—helping the converts with gifts of salt, paraffin or candles, and clothes, looking after the sick, undertaking communal work, and burying the dead in specially marked graveyards. The new members stood a chance of becoming church elders, catechists, and evangelists. These aspects proved very attractive to new converts—especially to widows and former slaves who were in need of assistance and fellowship. Fifth, those married to Butwa members were encouraged to seek divorce. If this was not possible, they were encouraged to leave their spouses and villages and move to the Christian villages where protection was provided.

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[42] Chisanga; Besa; Interview, Kashiba Elders, 11 April 1975; Kambwali Elders, 7 June, 1979.

[43] Roberts, "Like a Roaring Lion," 79-81; also "Fishers of Men," 49-70. See also Roberts, "Social and Historical Contexts of Tabwa Art," in A. Roberts and E. Maurer, eds., *The Rising of a New Moon: A Century of Tabwa Art.* (Ann Arbor, 1986), 81-94.

[44] Campbell, "A Few Notes," 79; also *In the Heart of Bantuland,* 161.

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The results of this strategy varied from area to area. Naturally those areas closest to the mission stations and sub-centers felt the impact most and were in some cases forced to go underground and operate in the strictest secrecy.[45] Areas far from the stations were negligibly affected and continued to function as before except when the missionary was on tour or passing through. Though the Ubutwa was shaken, it was not eliminated.[46]

The Colonial Period

After the Berlin Conference in 1885, the area west of Lake Tanganyika became part of the Congo Free State while that east of Lake Mweru and the Luapula River became part of North East Rhodesia in 1891. The western side joined the Congo Free State after the death of Msiri. In May 1894, the Rhodesia-Congo border was formalized.[47]

Even though Ubutwa clearly presented no security risk to the state, a crusade was mounted against it on the basis of the missionaries' opposition. In the Tanganyika region, the crusade was spearheaded first by Emile Storms, followed by Julien Ferber.[48] The two employed the dreaded Force Publique, composed of Batekela and Bangala soldiers, who were known to be ruthless and merciless in their jobs.[49] In areas where they operated, they left a trail of burning villages, beatings, rape, and even murder. Affected members of Ubutwa fled en masse to the Northern Rhodesia side to seek safety. Here attacks on Ubutwa were subdued.[50] But even here, the functions of Ubutwa were discouraged. From time to time, Mulumbis were burned down, and Ubutwa leaders were arrested and fined. Rather than contest the charges, which would have led to divulging secrets, many elected to plead guilty and pay the fine.[51] Harassment forced the movement

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45 Lendeng'oma; Walima; Besa; Kurt W. Wolff, ed., *The Sociology of George Simmel* (Toronto, 1950), 345.

46 Chisanga; Chipungu; Mwenge.

47 Colle, "Le Butwa," 173: Campbell, *In the Heart*, 161; Roberts, "Fishers of Men"; F.A. Arnot, *Garanganze or Seven Years' Pioneer Mission Work in Central Africa* (London, 1899); Daniel Crawford, *Thinking Black* (London, 1914), 324-27.

48 Besa; Chisanga; Chief Chipungu.

49 Lendeng'oma; Besa; Chisanga; Walima; Interviews: Kashiba Elders, 21 April, 1975; Kambwali Elders, 7 May, 1979.

50 M.C. Musambachime, "Military Violence against Civilians: The Case of the Congolese (Zairean) Military in the Pedicle 1890-1988," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 24, 4 (1990), 643-64.

51 For a detailed discussion of the flight, see M.C. Musambachime, "Escape from Tyranny: Flights across the Northern Rhodesia, Belgian Congo Border 1900-1930," *Transafrican Journal of African History* 18 (1989), 147-60; also "Protest Migration from Mweru-Luapula 1900-1940,"

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to reduce its activities and go underground. The last remembered ceremonies at Mambilima were in 1906, and at Mpweto and the Lake Bangweulu area in 1914.[52]

In spite of the stringent measures taken, the societies were not completely eradicated. They remained active—though surreptitious in several areas.[53] In Mpweto, Kapulo, Muliro, and Moba, the societies operated in a covert manner—hence the application of the term "secret society" by Colle and Ferber. In North-east Rhodesia a similar situation obtained. In 1906, the native commissioner for Abercorn (now Mbala) expressed surprise at "discovering" that Butwa ceremonies were conducted at the Boma and the western part of the district close to the southwest shore of Lake Tanganyika. His greatest shock was to find that the African policemen on whom he depended for the security of the district were in fact the leaders. He immediately summoned the erring policemen, chiefs, and headmen in the affected areas to a meeting. He warned those attending of the "evils" that were bound to result from engaging in Ubutwa such as the "spread of venerial diseases, constant quarrels, idiocy and degeneration." He warned that those found to be indulging in Ubutwa would be severely punished.[54]

In 1907, the same native commissioner made a short report to the district commissioner on the Ubutwa. He noted that although large villages could be free of Ubutwa, he believed that its activities continued in small villages beyond the reach of European administrators and their agents—the messengers and police. He admitted that:

> It is known that sometimes the Malwa [referring to Butwa members] take themselves to the forest and build a temporary camp to carry on their festival.

In his view, the Ubutwa was the "most disgraceful offence perpetuated at present in this district," implying clearly that the society was still functioning.[55]

In 1913, the native commissioner of Mporokoso had a similar shock in finding that policemen were involved in Ubutwa. Those found were prosecuted

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African Studies 47, 2 (1989), 19-34; also AWCM/LMS/CA: Nutter, Annual Reports for Mbereshi Mission, 1907, 1912, 1919; Kaoze, "Culte et Superstition," 46, 56; and his "Histoire," 51; ASRT: Assistant Territorial, Administration du Kasenga, "Secte secret de Butwa," 8 October, 1934; Ferber "Enquête sur les Bena Tanga." On fines, See NAZ/NE/KTL1/1: Kalungwishi Civil Cases, Numbers 38/1904, 103/904, 204/1905.

[52] Muteti; Chisanga; Lendeng'oma; Walima.

[53] Interview, Chief Mulundu, 7 April 1975; Besa; Walima; Chipungu; Interview Chief Chikungu, Kasenga, 8 April 1972; Kapapi Chimbuyu; Chisamamba Kasenga, 10 August 1972.

[54] National Archives of Zambia (NAZ) KTN 1/1, Abercorn District Notebook, I, 280.

[55] National Archives of Zambia (NAZ) KTN/1/1 Abercorn District Note Book Volume 1, p. 280. See also NAZ/2A7/1/3/4: Annual Report for Abercorn for the year ending 31 March 1913.

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and sentenced to six months with hard labor. All along, he had been of the opinion that Ubutwa "had died" as the result of stringent measures taken against the society in the early 1900s. He expressed displeasure at finding those people who were expected to help the administration stamp out the society, were in fact not helpful at all. And in examining the penal code, Cullen Gouldsbury found that in actual fact belonging to Ubutwa was not a crime at all. In spite of this he urged the administration to enact special legislation under which Ubutwa could be suppressed. He went on to warn that although the society was on the wane in his district, it could be revived if strong measures taken were relaxed.[56]

A series of other factors contributed to the decline in the activities of the Ubutwa societies. The first reflected the demands of a colonial economy that relied on cheap migrant labor. After the opening of mining activity in Katanga (now Shaba), hundreds of men were recruited. Many were also recruited to work in the mines of South Africa and Zimbabwe.[57] Others worked for local European traders and administrative officials. Each African male had to pay a hut tax and district officials took annual tours for purposes of collection. Those who defaulted absented themselves from the villages when the tour was on—usually in the dry season, which coincided with the time the annual ceremonies were held.[58] The absence of a large percentage of men reduced the numbers of those participating. Returning migrants were, in most cases, not interested.

The second was the provision of education in village schools by Protestant and Catholic missionaries. In areas far from the mission stations, education was offered in the dry season. Those who excelled in school were sent to mission stations for further training and later appointed as teachers and evangelists.[59] Many of the "educated" Africans opposed Ubutwa societies because of the seclusion, and their suspicion that adultery was going on in the Lutembwe or Mulumbi. Katai Mpweto recalled that:

> As Christians we refused to join and dance Ubutwa because of the immoral things which went on. The bad thing is that when you were drunk, you danced with anybody—even your mother—in the presence of many people. The songs which were sung were shameful. Very obscene.[60]

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[56] NAZ/ZA7/3/1: Annual Report for Tanganyika District for 1913.

[57] NAZ/ZA7/3/1: Annual Report for Mporokoso for the year ending 31 March 1914.

[58] Lendeng'oma; Besa; Walima.

[59] Lendeng'oma; Interview Headman Mukamba, 19 April 1975; Bilken Mukoshi, Kafulwe 27 August 1972.

[60] Interview, Mwape Katai, Mpweto, Mukamba, 9 May 1975.

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And Reverend Lendeng'oma put it more simply. In order to keep their new jobs and status as teachers and evangelists, they avoided any form of association with Ubutwa. Excommunication for belonging to Ubutwa was, in his view, treated by the missionaries as being worse than adultery.[61]

The third factor was the outbreak of the First World War. Thousands of men were recruited to serve as soldiers and porters. Hundreds more were mobilized to carry foodstuffs and war material to the war front in Abercorn (now Mbala). Even women were mobilized for short distances. The period of absence varied from a few weeks to six or twelve months. During this time, it was impossible to hold Ubutwa ceremonies in most areas. On return, a number of men lost interest in the societies.[62] Ubutwa societies remained a refuge for a few traditionalists—without authority or control—who were unwilling or unable to fit in the new colonial structure as migrant workers, or as workers at missions or administrative stations.

Post-war Period

The administrations of Belgian Congo and Northern Rhodesia were not totally convinced that Ubutwa was completely eliminated after the First World War. They kept looking for tell-tale signs to indicate its presence or camouflage.[63] The native commissioner for Abercorn thought Ubutwa manifested itself in the new Mbeni dance introduced from East Africa by war veterans. The leaders of the dance were also suspected of organizing Ubutwa since they assumed military titles, presided over the sharing of food, organizing funerals for members, providing accommodation to new labor recruits, and arranging reciprocal assistance for the members. These suspicions were heightened when some leaders of Mbeni began to articulate anti-European and missionary sentiments in their songs and satire. Even though he did not know whether Mbeni was more "immoral" than Ubutwa, the native commissioner for Abercorn summoned leaders of Imbeni to warn them against singing "Objectionable songs." If they disobeyed, they would be jailed.[64]

In Shaba, Africans responded to the vicissitudes of colonial capitalism by forming burial associations which also looked at the interests and welfare of their members. They organized the storing of food, rations, and looking after the sick, and also arranged weekend dances to break the boredom. In some quarters, these ordinary activities were linked to the revival of Ubutwa. The Union Minière du

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61 Lendeng'oma; Interview, Kawandami, Mbereshi Mission, 5 May 1975.

62 Lendeng'oma.

63 Lendeng'oma; Walima. Interview, Fisto Mulonga, Mutamina, 7 August 1972.

64 NAZ/ZA7/3/1 Annual Report for the year ending 31 March, 1920. On the origins of Mbeni, see T.O. Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa* (Los Angeles, 1975).

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Haut Katanga and other employers accused the burial dance and other social societies formed by workers from Luapula Valley and the Tanganyika region (referred to as *amicales)* working in Elisabethville (Lubumbashi), Kolwezi, Kambove, and Jadotville (Panda-Likasi) of reviving Butwa practices.[65] Similar accusations were levelled at the leaders of the movement to resist retrenchment and forced repatriation of workers following the depression of 1930, which resulted in a series of strikes in 1931. They were also repeated in 1941 following another strike by the Africans.[66]

In the mid-1920s in Northern Rhodesia, suspicion of the revival of Ubutwa was linked to the Watch Tower Society. Because it indulged in mass baptisms, frequently emotional all-night meetings and prayers, and indulged in communal activities to help their members, the Society was believed to be a revival of Ubutwa. In 1924 William Freshwater, a missionary at Mbereshi Mission reported that "the worst of all these [Watch Tower Society] immoralities, . . . if true, are equal to the old 'Ubutwa' Ceremonies now put down by the Government."[67] Although these suspicions were not substantiated, they were, nevertheless, echoed later by missionaries, administrators, and academics in Northern Rhodesia and Katanga.

Conclusion

Many secret societies flourished throughout Central Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[68] Some have attracted study by missionaries and administrators, while others have not. Some have survived the onslaught of colonialism and continue in a modified form.[69] Many have been wiped off the face of the earth, including Ubutwa societies.

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65 Bruce Fetter, "African Associations in Elisabethville 1910-1935: Their Origins and Development," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaine*, 6 (1974), 207-10; Vanden-Bosche, "Sectes secrètes."

66John E. Higginson, "The Making of the African Working Class: The Union Minière de Haut Katanga and the African Mine Workers 1907-1945" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Michigan, 1979).

67 A CWM/LMS/CA: W. Freshwater, Annual Report for Mbereshi Mission for 1924.

68 For example, Nyau among the Chewa of Malawi and Bumbudye among the Luba of Northern Shaba. See W.J.J. Rangeley, "Nyau in Kotakota," *Nyasaland Journal* II, 2 (1949), 35-49; Chipungu; Mwenge.

69 Mapopa Mtonga, "The Drama of Gule Wamkhulu: A Study of Nyau Practiced by the Chewa of Eastern Zambia" (M.A. thesis, University of Ghana, 1980); Ian Linden, *Catholics, Peasants and Chewa Resistance in Nyasaland* (London 1974), 117-30; W.F.P. Burton, *Luba Religion and Magic in Customs and Belief* (Brussels, 1961); M. Schofeleers and Ian Linden, "The Resistance of the Nyau Societies to the Roman Catholic Missions in Colonial Malawi," in T.O. Ranger and Isaria Kimabo, eds., *The Historical Study of African Religions* (London, 1972), 232-73.

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Ubutwa as an intra-ethnic organization, each with a local lodge, was widely accepted by the people in the study area. It operated for centuries because of what it had to offer and the benefits derived by the members. Ubutwa was commented upon by missionaries and administrative officials in their ethnographic writings and reports. Unlike Malawi where both missionaries and administrative officials themselves studied Nyau,[70] none did so in the case of Ubutwa. Their opinions were based instead on biased information received from non-members or renegades seeking the protection of missionaries and administrators. On the basis of this insufficient information, Ubutwa was condemned and accused of being an "immoral" organization.[71] If Ubutwa were immoral and "sinful," as was claimed by missionaries, it would not have attracted the large intra-ethnic support it had enjoyed for centuries. There were, definitely, good attributes in it which members sought and found satisfying.

Admittedly, a study of secret societies—whether in Europe, Asia, Americas or Africa—is not easy. This is because the members who are informants are under an oath of secrecy or are afraid of discussing issues openly.[72] Ian Cunnison, a social anthropologist with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute who carried out extensive research among the Lunda of Mwata Kazembe between 1949 and 1951, reported that "It was almost impossible to get information" on Ubutwa.[73] Another scholar, John Weatherley, reported experiencing an "almost impenetrable Secrecy" in his attempt to study the spirit cult of Sar in Karamoja, Uganda.[74] Informants are afraid to discuss closely guarded secrets with total strangers for fear of sanctions, or distortion. This is why information on Ubutwa from missionaries or administrators is biased because it did not come from the only credible source—participating members of the society.[75]

Unlike Eastern Nigeria where societies similar to Ubutwa organized resistance to colonial rule and had to be subdued by use of military force, Ubutwa

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[70] For example, the celebrated paper on Ubutwa arriving among the Bisa by Campbell was based, in his own words, on "a paper written for me in a native language by an ex-witch-doctor." Campbell, *In the Heart*, 100.

[71] Williams, *Secret Societies;*; Blythe, *Chinese Secret Societies*; 1.

[72] Ian G. Gunnison, *The Luapula Peoples of Northern Rhodesia* (Manchester, 1969), 204.

[73] John Weatherley, "The Secret Spirit Cult of Sar in Karamoja," *Africa* 58, 2 (1988), 210.

[74] Lendeng'oma. Even in the 1970s, this fear was exhibited by many of my informants. Many agreed to talk to me because my late grandfather and his father were known in Butwa circles for their abilities to dance and sing.

[75] See Ogbu U. Kalu, "Colonial Government and Secret Societies in South East Igboland 1920-1956," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 9, 1 (1977), 73-90.

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did not in any way oppose the advent of colonial rule.[76] The organizational structure of Ubutwa crumbled in the face of attacks by missionaries and administrative officials. No effective organization emerged to replace these pre-colonial structures.[77] Again unlike Nigeria where three European anthropologists were admitted into the Ogboni society and allowed a reasonable degree of access to society secrets, or in Malawi where Roman Catholic priests were allowed to watch Nyau dances, none of these happened in Zambia. None of the missionaries who later wrote authoritatively on Ubutwa ever attended Ubutwa dances or ceremonies. Their information was based on what they "heard" from converts seeking new security and status or those charged with some offenses, or when they "read" what was written for them by some people. They did not have the time to crosscheck anything. They merely accepted what came their way as facts and formed their opinions about Ubutwa. To missionaries and administrators fighting to secure control of territory and people (as well as their souls), the control exercised by Ubutwa over its members was seen as an impediment. In this context, missionaries and administrative officials agreed that if they were to succeed at all, then Ubutwa had to be obliterated as a functioning organization. And they succeeded in destroying it.

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[76] Peter Morton Williams, "The Yoruba Ogboni Cult in Oyo," *Africa* 30, 4 (1960), 362-74; Linden, *Catholics,* 117-30; Rangeley, "Nyau," 19-33.

[77] Campbell, *In the Heart*, 100. Colle, "Le Butwa," Gouldsbury and Sheane, cite H.T. Harrington, native commissioner for Fort Rosebery (now Mansa) from 1903 to 1912 as the source of their information on Ubutwa. Gouldsbury and Sheane, *Great Plateau*, 260-61. See also an addendum on page 273 informing the reader that Father Foulon, a priest in the order of White Fathers who served on Chilubi Island for many years, informed Hubert W. Sheane that the "Instruction" given by the Ubutwa officials "was not wholly immoral, but designed to impart to the initiates extraordinary powers such as that of invisibility at will." Whereas this was part of "magic" known and practiced by some members, it was not the primary function of the organisation. It shows how misinformed the missionaries and administrative officials were on matters relating to Ubutwa.

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