



**M'BONA THE BLACK JESUS
OF MALAWI** EVA CHIKABADWA

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M'BONA THE BLACK JESUS OF MALAWI

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A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art
at Michaelis School of Fine Arts
University of Capetown
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Signature:

Signed by candidate

Date: 29th January 2018

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The Malawi Government

TABLE OF CONTENTS

M'bona THE BLACK JESUS OF MALAWI	9
ABSTRACT	9
ACRONYMS	10
CHAPTER 1	13
Introduction to the M'bona Story	14
<i>The Killing of M'bona</i>	15
<i>The M'bona Shrine</i>	15
<i>Schoffeleers' perceptions of M'bona</i>	16
<i>Why Black Jesus?</i>	17
CHAPTER 2	19
Political and Historical Background of the Man'ganja and Malawi as their country of origin....	19
<i>Ethnic background and land politics</i>	19
<i>First encounters with missionaries</i>	22
<i>Joseph Booth and the M'bona people</i>	22
<i>The South African General Mission and the M'bona faith</i>	23
<i>The Catholic Mission</i>	24
<i>Political Background of the Man'ganja and Malawi as their country of origin</i>	26
<i>Religion and politics</i>	28
<i>The Christian government, the education system and the impact on other religious beliefs</i>	30
Contestation of aspects of Matthew Schoffeleers' research	32
<i>Literature Review</i>	32
<i>Problem statement on Schoffeleers work</i>	34
<i>On the constructed versions I, II, III of the M'bona narrative</i>	39
<i>Conceptual ideas behind my arguments</i>	48
<i>A discussion on my fieldwork</i>	50
<i>M'bona's martyrdom</i>	54
<i>Summary</i>	56
CHAPTER 3	57
M'bona the Black Jesus of Malawi: Practical work	57
<i>Introduction</i>	57
Installation of paintings – A Pictorial Research Project	68
<i>A background to the genesis of M'bona religious beliefs</i>	68

<i>Conceptual framework</i>	70
<i>Problems with interpretation</i>	71
<i>Conclusion</i>	74
Sculpture	75
<i>The Killing of M'bona</i>	78
REFERENCES	87
APPENDICES	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Tables

Table 1: Comparison of characteristics from M'bona narratives.....	56
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Table of Figures

Figure 1: M'bona the rainmaker.....	16
Figure 2: A map of Southern Malawi.....	23
Figure 3: Chief Mbukwa in 1965 at Khulubvi forest.....	38
Figure 4: Chief Mbukwa in 2016 at Khulubvi.....	39
Figure 5: The Alter of God, Jackson Hlungwani.....	62
Figure 6: Cain on the Alter of God.....	63
Figure 7: Hlungwanis two pieces, God and the leg of God and my piece 'We are doomed'.....	65
Figure 8: Witches Sharing meat by Baholo.....	66
Figure 9: Baby Witch Training.....	66
Figure 10: The Nyau mask dancer.....	76

Table of Illustrations

Figure 1: M'bona the Rainmaker	13
Figure 2: A map of Southern Malawi	21
Figure 3: Chief Mbukwa in 1965 at Khulubvi forest.....	36
Figure 4: Chief Mbukwa in 2016 at Khulubvi.....	37
Figure 5: The Alter of God, Jackson Hlungwani	59
Figure 6: Cain on the Alter of God.....	60
Figure 7: Hlungwanis two pieces, God and the leg of God and my piece We are doomed.....	62
Figure 8: Witches Sharing meat by Baholo	63
Figure 9: Baby witch training	63
Illustration 10: The Killing of M'bona (2017)	79
Illustration 11: The Mourners	81
Illustration 12: Lady Salima and M'bona Romancing (2017).....	82

Extracts

Extract 1: The M'bona and the Catholics	25
Extract 2: Evidence of interviews with two conflicting groups.....	36
Extract 3: Information showing sources of interviews	38
Extract 4: Variations in the M'bona traditions by Schoffeleers.....	39
Extract 5: The Cain and Abel version of M'bona.....	44
Extract 6: Rangeley's views about Chapirira.....	45

Extract 7: Virgin birth claims by Chapirira	46
Extract 8: Chief Chapirira as the main source of Christianized versions.....	47
Extract 9: The analogy between the establishment of the church and the M'bona shrine	48
Extract 10: Christianization of African beliefs by the Roman Catholics	49
Extract 11: Chapirira's personal ambitions to claim for M'bona what the whites claimed for Christ.....	52

M'BONA THE BLACK JESUS OF MALAWI

ABSTRACT

This document is an explicatory essay for a body of artworks which are in the form of paintings and sculptures that tell the story of M'bona, the Black Jesus of Malawi. M'bona is a religious icon amongst the Man'ganja clan of Southern Malawi. He is believed to be a rain maker, a god and a prophet. Both the document and the artworks consider colonial and missionary interpretation and representation of M'bona and aspects of African religious practices. My focus on M'bona challenges representations of the faith by Catholic missionary anthropologist, Matthew Schoffeleers. The argument that I present is mainly developed from Schoffeleers' publications and academic documents, and from my field research at Khulubvi thicket in the Nsanje District of Malawi, which is the headquarters of the M'bona religion. The artwork installation expresses my response to the postulation made by Schoffeleers that the M'bona religion owes its genesis to an appropriation of Christian beliefs. The paintings, in particular, proffer my conceptual contest with Schoffeleers' suppositions, while the sculptures play the role of fortifying my alternative view point as one of the vital functions of art in the conservation of cultural heritage.

ACRONYMS

NAC	Nyasaland African Congress
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
CCAP	Church of Central Africa Presbyterian
CDP	Christian Democratic Party
UMCA	University Mission to Central Africa

M'BONA THE BLACK JESUS OF MALAWI

INTRODUCTION

This essay elaborates on a body of artworks submitted for my Master of Fine Art degree. The artworks take the form of paintings and sculptures that tell the story of M'bona, the Black Jesus of Malawi. M'bona is a religious icon amongst the Man'ganja clan of Southern Malawi; he is believed to be a rain maker, a god and a prophet.

Both the document and artworks have been developed from consideration of the publications of Matthew (Jan Mathijs) Schoffeleers (1928-2011), a Dutch missionary anthropologist who wrote books, PhD and Masters dissertations on the M'bona religion, and they also derive from field research that I personally undertook in December 2016. Schoffeleers has been regarded as the leading anthropologist of Malawi and of African religion. A deputy chairman of the African Studies Centre, Leiden, the Netherlands from 1980-1984, Schoffeleers was also an important figure in Africanist research and teaching in Malawi, the Netherlands, and world wide (Van Binsbergen, 2011:455-463).

Part of my field research included a visit to the shrine of M'bona and interviews with elders of the faith, some of whom were also interviewed by Matthew Schoffeleers for his research. In December 2016, I visited Khulubvi thicket in the Nsanje District of Malawi, which is the head quarters of the M'bona religion, where I interviewed advocates of the faith in Chichewa¹.

In both components of this project, I challenge colonial and missionary interpretation and representation of African religious practice through particular reference to the interpretation of the M'bona faith by Schoffeleers. Through my artwork, I express my response to the postulation made by Schoffeleers that the M'bona religion owes its genesis to an appropriation of Christian beliefs. My paintings are intended to convey my contest with Schoffeleers' suppositions, while the sculptures aim to envision an alternative view point. To the best of my knowledge, this body

¹ Chichewa, or Chinyanja, is the most widely spoken language in Malawi.

of work is the first intentionally produced artwork to represent the faith, and to express an interest in embodying and conserving M'bona cultural heritage.

In addition to the texts of Schoffeleers that I refer to, I also review aspects of the writing of W. H.J. Rangeley, a Rhodes Scholar, anthropologist and keen observer of African customs. Rangeley rose from the rank of district commissioner to provincial commissioner between 1934 and 1958 in Nyasaland, now Malawi. He was also a founding member of the Nyasaland Society of Writers, founded in 1946. His works have remained a notable reference for scholars and academicians in Malawi (Pachai, 2000:6-75).

In Chapter 1, I give a brief introduction to the narrative of M'bona, based on the various sources I have referenced, including oral accounts.

This is followed by the historical background to the missionary presence in Malawi. This is to contextualize Matthew Schoffeleers' presence and research, which I engage with in Chapter 2.

Schoffeleers' research, my contestation of it and my field work are also examined in Chapter 2.

The interpretation of the fore mentioned in my artwork is elaborated in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 1

I first heard about M'bona when I was 12 years old and in primary school. I found the story very interesting and thrilling. When I told my grandmother about it, she exclaimed “ndizikhulupiriro zachikunja”. Translated into English, this means: “they are pagan beliefs”. As a Christian, and as I grew out of childhood, I lost this interest in M'bona, or started looking at the narrative in a negative way. Illustration 1 shows a drawing of M'bona performing the rain dance (Malawi Institute of Education, 1985). Many Malawians are familiar with this illustration from a Standard 8 Chichewa primary school book. When I went to college, I once again heard about M'bona through dramatic plays. My interest was revived and I wanted to know more about M'bona. In 2015, I was involved in a German-Malawian art project entitled ‘Myths of Malawi’. By this time, I was considering doing a Master’s degree, and the myths of Malawi, and M'bona in particular, came to my mind as a possible research project. I started reading Schoffeleers’ texts, and discovered a statement that he made comparing the figures of M'bona and Jesus Christ in order to explain the Christian influence he perceived in the M'bona faith: “Although both sons were at first equally powerful, Christ had become the more prominent because the whites were more cunning than the Africans” (Schoffeleers,1992:5). This statement seemed problematic and arrogant, and spurred me to engage with M'bona at a deeper level. I decided to venture into the field, to find out how cunning or crafty the whites have been.

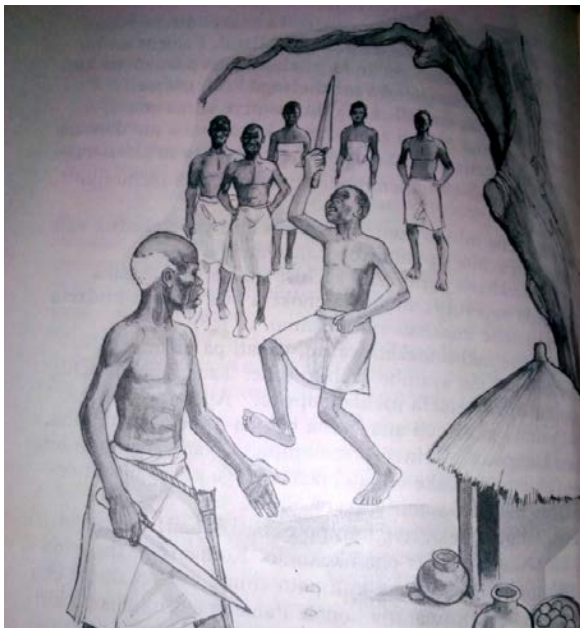


Figure 1: M'bona the Rainmaker

(Source: Malawi Institute of Education, 1985)

Introduction to the M'bona Story

With the coming of the missionaries, most of the Man'ganja people embraced the Christian faith leaving only a few advocates. Despite this development, the Man'ganja clan remains the controlling group². Currently, the M'bona beliefs are only prevalent in Nsanje district with some followers scattered around. According to my field research (December 2016) there are some followers who gather up in Blantyre city but are still affiliated to the headquarters in Nsanje. The Blantyre group is headed by Tate Fred Kwacha who is also the current chief elder by honour rather than duty. I also interviewed or talked to some followers from Zomba who are affiliated to the Blantyre group. Most Malawians including those from other clans are aware of the M'bona story from a Chichewa language primary school book and oral tradition.

Before Christian missionaries came to Malawi in 1859, M'bona had, since 1400 A.D, been a famous religious figure amongst the Mang'anja people as a rain maker, prophet, god and a saviour (Phiri, 2007:26). The Man'ganja originated from Kaphirintiwa in central Malawi – a small outcrop of stone on which the footprints of all kinds of man and animals may be seen (Rangeley, 1953:8). For the Mang'anja, this was a place where God and humankind descended from the sky in a rain shower (Schoffeleers, 1968:7). This information is orally transmitted by elders amongst the Man'ganja and other groups in Malawi, and also recorded in text. It is said that M'bona was a son of Chembe, a sister of Chief Lundu,² and that his father was Cingala (Rangeley, 1953:9). M'bona's history is expressed in two accounts: through the origin of the shrine of M'bona, and through a story of Chief Lundu's killing of his nephew, the prophet M'bona (Schoffeleers,1968:5). In the Man'ganja cosmology, the spirits that affect the land

² Malawi has different clans of people including the Man'ganja clan that is located in the southern part of the country (see the historical background for more information on other clans). The M'bona beliefs are originally associated with the Man'ganja clan though in later developments the Sena clan from Nsanje district became more popular with the beliefs than the Man'ganja themselves.

²Chief Lundu descended from the Phiri chieftaincy of the Maravi group who, according to Matthew Schoffeleers, rose to power in the 16th century. He is also referred to as Lundu Phiri of Mbewe wa Mitengo by Rangeley (Rangeley,1953:8-27). (See historical detail in Chapter 2). Lundu used to be under the kingdom of Karonga (the highest in the hierarchy of Chewa kings) together with other subordinate chiefs like Undi, Chulu, Mwase Kasungu, Changamire, Mkanda, Kanyenda and possibly Kaphwiti, till around the 1600 century. Reports from Father Barreto reveal that Lundu occupied the second position in Karonga's empire. However, he decided to overpower the Karonga and extended his kingdom outside Karonga's Empire. His kingdom was short lived; the Karonga united with other kingdoms like the Mwenemutapa, and the Portuguese, and defeated him in 1635. (Pachai, 1973:8-9).

include God, M'bona and deceased chiefs. According to Rangeley³, all stories agree on the following reasons for the killing of the prophet M'bona by Chief Lundu:

The Killing of M'bona

There was a severe drought, and Lundu summoned all his people to appeal to the spirits of their ancestors to cause rain to fall. The usual ceremonies of rebuilding the tribal kacisi (spirit house), followed by offerings at the kacisi, the gathering of the people and the clapping of hands and beating of drums and appeals for rain then followed, but no rain fell....After the nduna's (counsellors) of Lundu, who organized the rainmaking, had failed to produce rain, M'bona then entered the circle formed by the people and, leaping about and shouting, pointing in all directions and calling upon rain to fall.....the clouds immediately gathered, lightning rent the sky, and copious rain began to fall. The counsellors were furious.....and reported the matter to Lundu, who accused M'bona of having prevented the rain from falling, through his witchcraft, when Lundu's agent had appealed for rain. Lundu challenged M'bona to the test for all witches, the drinking of the poison cup of mwabvi. This M'bona refused to do, saying that he had not prevented Lundu's rain, but that he had a special power from God to bring rain. To refuse to take the mwabvi test is to admit guilt. M'bona fled, and Lundu ordered men to follow and kill him (Rangeley,1953:14).

The M'bona Shrine

By all accounts, it was at the Ndione pool in the Ndindi that Cingala, a relative of M'bona who led the pursuers, killed M'bona and cut off his head (Rangeley, 1953:14).

All accounts agree that before M'bona was put to death, he asked his captors to cut off his head when he was dead, and to take his head to Khulubvi thicket nearby, and there bury his head, and to bury his headless body at Ndione. Nearly all accounts agree that they buried M'bona's body there where they killed him, and some say that, whereas there was no pool and marsh before, forthwith the Ndione pool brimmed full where the body was buried. His

³ The reason I have chosen a text from Rangeley is that he was a colonial administrator and, therefore, it was unlikely that his views would be influenced to favour the views of locals. Rangeley had a skeptical attitude towards the whole M'bona story. In this case, his views should be close to those of Schoffeleers'. Schoffeleers narrates that Rangeley was the first to notice different traditions of M'bona, but instead of treating them as distinctive modes and as precipitates of different political configurations, he tried to combine them into a master version (Schoffeleers, 1992:176). While Rangeley was very skeptical of many things in the narrations about M'bona, his intention was not to follow up on the genesis of the religion.

head they placed in a basket, and these they buried in the Khulubvi thicket, and thereupon, so it is said, it rained copiously for four days without ceasing, and people said "M'bona has started to talk". By some accounts, M'bona had asked his executioners to build a shrine over his head, and this they did (Rangeley, 1953:14).

According to the current elders of the shrine, and to many accounts of M'bona gathered by Schoffeleers (1992:175-255), this was the beginning of the M'bona shrine. Every year, advocates gather to rebuild the shrine and pray for the rains or for other needs; their offerings including beer. A symbolic wife named Salima⁴ is provided by Chief Lundu, her house built next to M'bona's shrine. She is a prophetess of the shrine, and an intermediary between M'bona and the people. M'bona is the intermediary between God and the people.

Schoffeleers' perceptions of M'bona

Schoffeleers perceived the M'bona faith as synonymous with the ministry of Jesus, and as an attempt by the Man'ganja to mimic Christ's philosophy. Therefore, the prevailing interpretations of M'bona practices reflected the perception of deep influences and appropriation of Christian beliefs and practices (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:14-29). This view has been adopted worldwide by many scholars and writers, key examples being the historians, John McCracken and Ranger. However, the actual situation I have found in my field work is that the current advocates of M'bona are not happy with the statement that their religion is an appropriation of Christian beliefs. Thus, Schoffeleers' emphasis on the similarity of the two belief systems, especially his assertion of the Christian influence on M'bona beliefs, is not welcomed by the advocates who claim that Christianized versions of M'bona were a product of a colonial and religious conflict. The quotation below by Schoffeleers is one such direct statement, that the M'bona advocates appropriated Christian beliefs. However, the quotation that follows after that reveals a religious conflict between the missionaries and some of the M'bona advocates. In this second quotation, it is also evident that some of the advocates resorted to creating Christianized versions of the M'bona narrative to safeguard their members from the Christian missionaries,

⁴ Salima means (doesn't plough). The woman is considered to be a queen and everything is done for her so she doesn't have to work. Usually, an old woman past child bearing is chosen for the role of a Salima. No man is allowed to visit her as she is considered the sacred wife of M'bona. She is not allowed to leave the sacred grounds of Khulubvi forest. However, she is allowed to occasionally visit the surrounding village. A maid servant, Chamanga, stays with her but in a separate house close to hers (Schoffeleers, 1992:67).

who had a mission to ensure that the M'bona faith disappeared by withdrawing members from the faith (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:25). It is these versions that led to a generalization of the whole M'bona narrative as an appropriation of the Christian faith.

Contrasted with the High God⁵ shrines of the central Malawi, which had remained a part of the High God network, the M'bona cult had developed a powerful mythology of a historical prophetic figure; of a martyred savior, the shedding of whose blood had liberated great spiritual power. The parallel with the central myth of Christianity was obvious, and we shall see it was exploited in a whole variety of ways (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:16).

Later still, as tensions between blacks and whites, between 'traditionalists' and 'Modernizers', again became acute, the priests of M'bona were able to make use of Christian ideas to strengthen the power of their Black Christ'. (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:17)

The listed beliefs about M'bona that are said to have been copied from the Christian faith include the following: virgin birth, being male, martyrdom, celibacy, being the son of God, and events surrounding the establishment of the Christian church that were likened to events surrounding the establishment of the M'bona shrine (Schoffeleers, 1966).

Why Black Jesus?

My chosen title of "M'bona the Black Jesus of Malawi" may appear to be contradictory to what I aim to convey. I have maintained the name "Black Jesus" for my readers to connect with the position adopted by both Schoffeleers and the M'bona people, who have referred to M'bona as the Black Jesus. The reference is made for different reasons to those espoused by Schoffeleers. To Schoffeleers, the term meant an appropriation of Jesus, while to M'bona's advocates it simply meant saviour or messiah. Both the M'bona and Jesus Christ figures have a profound spiritual significance and influence on the followers of their faiths. I am therefore approaching the belief system of the Black Jesus from an alternative portrayal of M'bona as a messiah whose emergence was rooted in indigenous culture and traditions. It is from this view that I wish to re-

⁵ The High God Shrines were found amongst the Chewa of central Malawi. It is believed that the Man'ganja and the Chewa clan used to be part of the same group (Maravi) before separation (See the historical background-chapter 2)

introduce M'bona as one who was a redeemer and prophet to the Man'ganja people, comparable to what Jesus was to his followers, but with a difference and a personality that is far from Jesus of Nazareth. The name "Jesus" in this context should therefore be understood as interchangeable with "messiah".

CHAPTER 2

Political and Historical Background of the Man’ganja and Malawi as their country of origin

The ethnic background of the Man’ganja, their land politics, and their early encounters with the missionaries or colonialists is described in this chapter to facilitate an understanding of their behaviour towards the missionaries, and to clarify religious and political developments. In addition, an introduction to the political and historical background of Malawi as a country, and how the missionaries are connected to its politics and political development, is intended to aid understanding of the impact on other religious beliefs. This will contextualize the position of Matthew Schoffeleers as a Catholic missionary anthropologist, and why his work was regarded without much inquisitiveness or criticism.

In addition to Professor Matthew Schoffeleers, Dr Desmond Duwa Phiri⁶, Professor John McCracken⁷ and Professor Bridgal Pachai⁸ are important references to this historical background.

Ethnic background and land politics

For many centuries, the M’bona religious beliefs have been linked to the Man’ganja people who occupy the larger portion of southern Malawi. Man’ganja means ‘people who live by the lake side’. They are a group of peace loving hoe cultivators (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1972:73) that formed part of the older Maravi clan that ended up breaking into several groups of the Chewa, Nsenga, the Zimba and others (Pachai, 1973:6). The Man’ganja homeland started from the

⁶ By the year 2004, Desmond Duwa Phiri was a Malawian graduate of the University of London in economics, history and sociology. He is the author of sixteen books, which include history, biographies, fiction and motivational books. His regular and informative contributions to the *(The)Nation*, Malawi’s leading daily newspaper, have, since 1993, gained him recognition by readers and acknowledgement by the University of Malawi, who awarded him an honorary doctorate (Phiri,2004).

⁷ John McCracken was an Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Sterling, Edinburgh until his passing in October 2017 (University of Edinburgh Centre for African Studies, 2017). He was a Professor and head of the department of history at Chancellor College, University of Malawi from 1980 to 1983 and returned as a visiting professor in 2008. He was a past president of the African Studies Association of the United Kingdom, from whom he received the award of Distinguished Africanist in 2008 (McCracken,2012).

⁸ Dr Bridgal Pachai was a Professor of History at the University of Malawi, Chancellor College. He also taught at universities in Ghana, Nigeria and Gambia during the course of his career. In Canada, he held senior positions at universities, cultural agencies, and on government commissions from 1975-1997(Pachai,1973).

southern shores of Lake Malawi to the lower Shire (Phiri, 2004:32). They originally came from central Malawi and were known as the Chipeta from the Chewa Clan (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1972:75). Accounts by D.D. Phiri suggest that the Chewa chiefs from the Phiri Clan – Kaphwiti, Lundu, Tengani and M’bona (the prophet) – agreed to move southward together to the lower Shire after a peaceful agreement to separate, which was initiated by Kalonga Chidzonzi at Maere a Nyangu in Kapirinthiwa, which is part of Dzalanyama in present day Lilongwe (Phiri, 2004:16)⁹.

The Man’ganja were originally matrilineal and uxori-local. However, intermarriages with patrilineal and virilocal groups like the Sena, Lomwe and Yao led their kinship system to be varied (Schoffeleers, 1992:23)¹⁰. By 1972, Nsanje District was dominated by the Sena people, who also form a larger following of M’bona, though the chieftaincies have been maintained in the Man’ganja (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1972:75).

Schoffeleers understands the M’bona religious group to be a “territorial cult” in which the shrine has political influence over the land, apart from its ritualistic duties (Schoffeleers, 1992:7). According to land politics, as claimed by Clyde Mitchell (Schoffeleers, 1992, 7-10) and applied by Schoffeleers, the first people to occupy a virgin land are acknowledged as land owners, and whose ancestral spirits control the land. They also assume all political power over the land unless they are conquered by invaders. Should this happen, the invaders assume political control; however, they still recognize the ancestral spirits of the land, which brings about harmony and collaboration in authority, as the invaders may not exercise ritual control of the land (Schoffeleers, 1992:8).

Oral tradition, as recorded by Schoffeleers, indicates that during the dynasty of Kaphwiti, there used to be two central shrines of the High God of the Man’ganja, with a spirit wife named M’bona, one in Thyolo District and the current one in Nsanje District¹¹(Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:14).

⁹This information is in contrast with what Schoffeleers wrote, that the separation occurred after a conflict he assumed M’bona was the source of, since he claimed to be a son of God (Schoffeleers, 1966:275).

¹⁰ A contradiction in kinship system is one of the main arguments used by Schoffeleers to claim that the M’bona belief system underwent great changes (Schoffeleers, 1966).

¹¹ Nsanje District was known as Port Herald in colonial times (Kalinga, 2012:369).

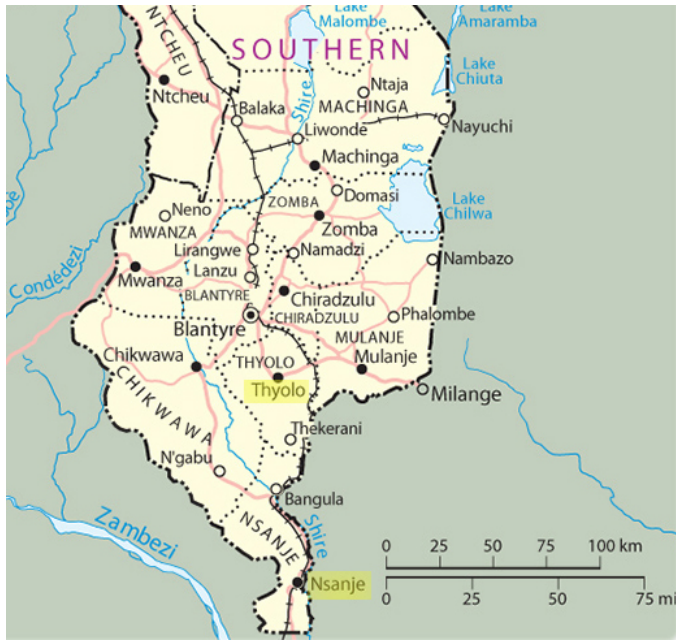


Figure 2: A map of Southern Malawi

A detail from a map of southern Malawi showing Thyolo and Nsanje Districts (Source: Geographic Guide Africa)

According to Schoffeleers, the Phiri chieftaincies of the Maravi group that rose to power during the 16th century, especially one chief named Lundu,¹² were responsible for major political and theological changes in the M’bona belief system, where a female M’bona was replaced with a male one (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:14) after breaking away from the Kaphwiti dynasty (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1992:75). In this new system, the Lundu dynasty took full responsibility for providing a wife for the male spirit (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:14).

From the narrations by Pachai, Chief Lundu was a great warrior (Pachai, 1973:8)¹³. According to Schoffeleers, in his efforts to connect oral traditions to history, there is a strong indication that the period of Lundu’s rise to power was marked by violence lasting for half a century, and he believed that the killing of Mankhokwe – a Man’ganja chief killed during early contact with

¹²Also referred to as Lundu Phiri of Mbewe wa Mitengo by Rangeley (Source: The Nyasaland Journal, Vol. 6, No. 1 (January, 1953), pp. 8-27).

¹³According to narratives by Pachai, it is believed that, using the Zimba warriors, Lundu once conquered the Portuguese and other very powerful kingdoms before 1635(the exact year is not well known), expanding his territory as far as Tete to the Mozambique islands and northwards nearly to Mombasa. The Portuguese had to make a three sided alliance with Karonga, Mazura and Mwenemutapa (Gatsi Rusere) to defeat Lundu in 1635 (Pachai, 1973:8).

Scottish missionary David Livingstone – and M’bona forms part of this pattern (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1972:79).

First encounters with missionaries

The M’bona people’s encounters with the protestant missionaries began with Livingstone when, in 1859, he visited what he called Mbona’s village at Khulubvi forest close to Ndindi marsh, to buy food. Being close to the marsh, the village had abundant food supplies from unseasonal cultivation that provided for pilgrims to the M’bona shrine (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:17). In later stages Livingstone and all other missionaries were despised by the M’bona people for coming with the armed Kololo as servant protectors. The Kololo originated from a Zambian clan named Makololo from Barotseland (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:20). With the use of guns that Livingstone gave them, the Kalolo defeated the Man’ganja Chief Mankhokwe and killed Paramount Chief Lundu (McCracken, 2012:41), who were the political nexus of the two shrines of M’bona. The Kololo took over political control of the lower Shire and forced the Man’ganja inhabitants into slavery (Phiri, 2004:35). From these incidents, all missionaries were viewed as a threat to the Man’ganja political authority and its values regarding M’bona beliefs (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:18).

When Livingstone arrived in 1859, the inhabitants of lower Shire were not ignorant of Christianity (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:17). According to Schoffeleers, the M’bona people’s acknowledgement of Christianity as a religion of the Portuguese settlers in the adjacent areas of Mozambique dates back to the 16th century (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:17). The Portuguese used to visit the lower Shire for trade (Phiri, 2004:202). It has been established that the Roman Catholic missionaries had been present in Mozambique since the 16th century, but only started working in Malawi at the end of the 19th century (Phiri, 2004:176). According to Schoffeleers (Ranger, 1975:17), the M’bona people started learning Christian beliefs from these Portuguese settlers.

Joseph Booth and the M’bona people

Joseph Booth came to Malawi in 1892. Unlike other missionaries, Booth was against government taxation of indigenous people (Phiri, 2004:187) and he thus found favour in the eyes of the M’bona (the M’bona advocates are also referred to as ‘the M’bona’). Booth, together with

John Chilembwe,¹⁴ was the first to take courage and preach at Khulubvi, the headquarters of M'bona in 1894¹⁵.

The reaction of the M'bona people to this encounter was that it was all nonsense because they knew that God had spoken to them through M'bona, and they had no means of knowing whether God had spoken to them through Booth (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:20). Booth also preached the Ten Commandments, to which the M'bona people answered that M'bona too had forbidden killing, but that the white people paid less attention to the commandment, since Livingstone gave the Makololo guns to kill fellow indigenous people (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:21). Booth visited the shrine several times, preaching the Christian word. His motto, 'Africa for Africa', which was against British rule, won him favour amongst the M'bona. They gave him a place to live amongst them because he promised to free them from British rule taxation (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:21). This hope of freedom from taxation was shattered after the deportation of Booth in 1899 (Jacobs, 2014:140) and the killing of John Chilembwe in 1915 (Phiri, 2004:271). Around the same years, in 1918 the European farmers occupied much of the Ndindi marsh and subjected the M'bona people to *Thangata*, a system whereby black people who could not afford to pay "hut tax" were forced to work without being paid on European estates¹⁶. This situation worsened the discontent that the M'bona people had with people of European origin (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:23).

The South African General Mission and the M'bona faith

According to Schoffeleers (in Ranger, 1975:21), in 1900, the South African General Mission led by E. Price established a mission a very short distance from Khulubvi, in Lulwe and then Chididi. In 1912, they were granted permission to build a school in the neighbourhood of the sacred grounds of Khulubvi. In 1914, Price was allowed to preach about Christ at the door of the M'bona shrine by the priest in charge, and according to Schoffeleers (in Ranger, 1975:21), he

¹⁴ John Chilembwe is recognized as a freedom fighter in the history of Malawi. He died in 1915 in a fight against colonial rule, especially the Thangata regime. Read more from footnote number 22.

¹⁵ According to Matthew Schoffeleers, a first encounter between Booth and the M'bona people was not easy. They met with Chief Chataika and headman Mkhucha, who denied them a hearing, and ordered all people to lock themselves up in their huts. Booth and Chilembwe then started singing Chinyanja hymns endlessly till the people left their huts one by one (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:20).

¹⁶ "Thangata" and "hut tax" is discussed in more depth in the following section; *Political Background of the Man'ganja and Malawi as their country of origin*.

said that people were ready to renounce their M'bona faith. It was around the same period, in 1902, that Molin Tengani¹⁷ became a Christian, causing him to refuse the responsibility of rebuilding the shrine in 1936 when he was installed as a chief. This affected the shrine so much that the elders who previously refused to pay tax were now subjected to paying tax (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:24)¹⁸. This event resulted in distrust and conflict between the M'bona and the Christian faiths, giving birth to self defensive behaviour, especially on the part of the M'bona people.

The Catholic Mission

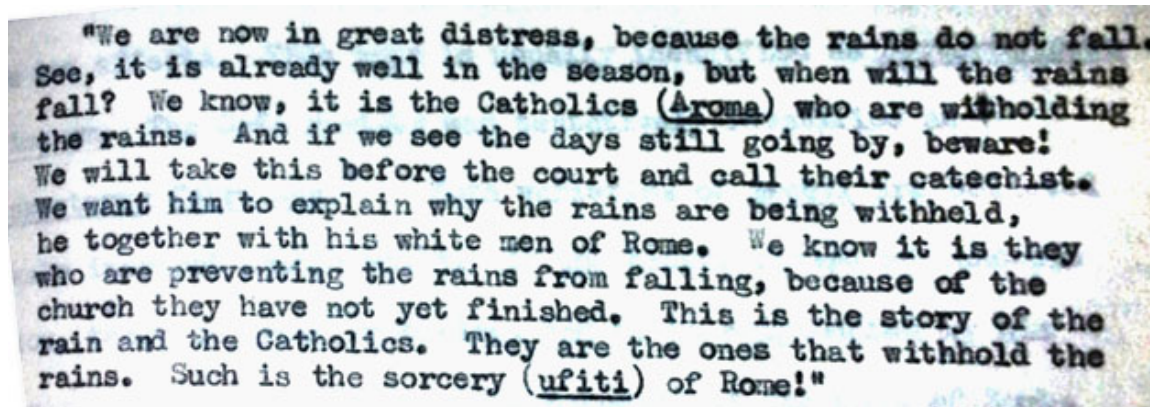
The first Catholic missionaries arrived in 1889 at Mponda in Mangochi district though they did not establish their first station in the area (Mbaya,1997:16). The first Roman Catholic mission in Malawi was the Nzama Mission at Njobvuyalema in Ntcheu district by the Montfort missionaries established in 1901 (The Episcopal Conference of Malawi. n.d). In July 1921, Catholics established a mission on the outskirts of Nsanje township (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:23). Their stated mission was to conquer Africa for Christ. Like the Protestant missionaries, the Catholics were quick to erect schools¹⁹, not just to provide education, but also as a way of gaining power through the brilliant educated (Phiri, 2004:186) who were also being initiated as Catholic catechists and who, later on, would initiate more people (Phiri, 2004:185). A race for village schools emerged between the Protestants and the Catholics (Phiri, 2004:186), and Nsanje, the headquarters of M'bona, was not spared. As observed in discussions to follow, this development affected the education system in Malawi, which became highly Christianized, so much so that the M'bona people had no choice but to be exposed to Christianity.

¹⁷Tengani belonged to a dynasty of senior Man'ganja chiefs whose ancestry went back several centuries. He came to be regarded as a paramount chief after restoration of Man'ganja chiefdoms in 1891, and the Khulubvi shrine was under his control, especially during its restoration, which happened every year as soon as the shrine fell down. The structure is always built in a temporary manner (Schoffeleers, 1992:51).

¹⁸Out of protection from chief Tengani the M'bona sacred village around Khulubvi forests was protected and defended from paying tax. Schoffeleers records that it was rumoured that Tengani's actions had caused the spirit of M'bona to abandon the land and waters of Ndione pool that were usually red with M'bona's blood that had now cleared. (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:24).

¹⁹ The Catholics had erected 105 schools by 1910. By then, Livingstonia Mission had 446 schools, the Dutch Reformed Church had 244 and Blantyre Mission had 121 (McCracken,2012:109).

Roman Catholics were favoured over Protestants by the British government for their non-interference policy on issues concerning the taxation of Africans²⁰ (Phiri, 2004:187), which was detested by the M'bona advocates²¹. While the Presbyterians' close identification with the aspirations of the African people drew them closer to the African people, the Catholics' closer relationship with the government tended to draw them away from the core of the African struggle (Mbaya, 1997:44). The extract below partly reveals a sour relationship between Catholics and the advocates of M'bona.



"We are now in great distress, because the rains do not fall. See, it is already well in the season, but when will the rains fall? We know, it is the Catholics (Aroma) who are withholding the rains. And if we see the days still going by, beware! We will take this before the court and call their catechist. We want him to explain why the rains are being withheld, he together with his white men of Rome. We know it is they who are preventing the rains from falling, because of the church they have not yet finished. This is the story of the rain and the Catholics. They are the ones that withhold the rains. Such is the sorcery (ufiti) of Rome!"

Extract 1: [The M'bona and the Catholics](#)

(Source: [Schoffeleers, 1968:323](#))

When Schoffeleers came to Malawi in 1955, there was already a Catholic mission and schools established close to the M'bona shrine in Nsanje; he was sent to work there as an evangelist in 1959 (Schoffeleers, 1992:4). A missionary colleague informed him of a shrine a few kilometers away dedicated to a rain God named M'bona, and that there was a woman at the shrine who was not allowed to leave the shrine, like a cloistered Catholic nun (Schoffeleers, 1992:4).

According to Schoffeleers, the Catholics:

[F]ar from destroying the cult by their teachings, actually rendered it a signal service by assisting it to adapt to the changing times. The Priests of M'bona were able to give a new pattern to many of the events of M'bona's life along biblical lines. The fact that M'bona's father is not named in his myth – a consequence of the Man'ganja kinship system which

²⁰ For more information on taxation read on the first page of the Historical Background of Malawi

²¹ Infact, the Catholics had a policy of encouraging people to pay tax, even pagans like the M'bona faith people (Mbaya, 1997:33).

recognizes the mother— became positively converted into a myth according to which M'bona was born to a virgin (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:23).

Schoffeleers also points out that their missionary diaries focused on the school war between them and other churches, and ignored the M'bona religion (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:23). As discussed earlier, it is very important to remember that the schools were used to convert people to Christianity, and to note that this point contradicts Schoffeleers' view that the Catholics never tried to destroy the M'bona cult with their teachings. The following statement made by one of the M'bona elders during my field research seems to support my claims: *"Ife sitimapanga kampeni kukopa anthu kuti alowe chipembedzo chathu, azungu ndi amene amabweretsa zakudya ndi zovala kumakopa anthu athu makamaka pa nthawi ya kusefukira kwa madzi"*, meaning - "We did not do campaigns to attract people to join our faith, the white missionaries were the ones that brought food and clothes to entice our people to join their faith." (Interview with Chief Mbangu, on 30 December 2016 at Khulubvi in Nsanje). According to this narrative, and the quotation below by Schoffeleers, it is easy to see that the Catholics, like the other missionaries used catechists to advance their interests.

Throughout this long encounter the missionaries took an exclusively negative view of the M'bona cult. Stewart considered it 'a puerile and debasing superstition'; Rowley characterized it as a painful manifestation of false religion; to Price it was a 'power of Darkness'; and the Catholic catechism described all spirit cults as the 'worship of false gods'. Their desire was to see M'bona cult disappear, and Price requested the fervent prayers of his readers for this purpose. (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:25)

Political Background of the Man'ganja and Malawi as their country of origin

About 75% of Malawians are Christians, 19% Sunni Moslems, and 6% indigenous religion, other beliefs such as Hinduism, or irreligion (WorldAtlas, 2017). The exact percentage of the M'bona population is not known. English is the bureaucratic language, but the majority of Malawians speak Chichewa or Chinyanja, apart from other minor languages like Yao, Tumbuka, Sena, Tonga, Lomwe and others (Kalinga, 2012:2). 80% of Malawians speak Chichewa either as a first or second language, 15% speak Tumbuka, 20% speak Yao, and the remaining percentage other languages (Williams, 1998:n.p).

The first Europeans to come to Malawi were the Portuguese, although Livingstone was the first to record his discovery of the country and give it a name, Nyasaland, in 1859 (McCracken, 2012:38-40). When Livingstone came to Malawi in 1859, the Yao clan was involved in the slave trade, capturing members of the neighbouring clans of Man'ganja, Chewa and Ngoni ethnic groups to sell as slaves to the Arabs along the Mozambican coast (Morris,2016:92). Livingstone was seriously disturbed by the practice of enslavement and appealed to the British to help in abolishing the slave trade (Kalinga, 2012:430).

Following Livingstone's campaign speech at Oxford University in 1857 on the need to introduce Christianity and civilization through legitimate commerce in Malawi, the University Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) led by Bishop Charles Mackenzie came to settle at Magomero in 1861 (McCracken, 2012:38). In 1891, a British protectorate was declared over Nyasaland under the leadership of Harry Johnston (Kalinga, 2012: xx). In 1907, the British Central Africa Protectorate changed its name to the Nyasaland Protectorate (Kalinga,2012:xxi). Johnston easily convinced the Malawian chiefs to accept British governance, since the chiefs wanted protection from the Yao slave traders, and which the British government was ready to provide (Phiri, 2004:210). To provide this protection, the British government introduced the hut tax, whereby every household paid in the form of money, livestock or grains. With coffee commanding high prices on the world market, Johnston capitalized on coffee plantations in the Shire highlands, which required a lot of labour. The European farmers by then had already acquired very big estates, encircling indigenous farmers as tenants. As a result of labour shortage constraints, taxation in the form of labour was introduced to blackmail defaulters into free labour provision. Alfred Sharpe, who replaced Johnston in 1902, doubled the tax from three shillings to six shillings, and introduced a rebate of three shillings for those who would work on European farms for thirty days (McCracken,2012:80). The European planters supported the system and paid hut tax for their tenants in return for labour, which reduced the tenants to a pool of labour. The planters began to refuse any other form of tax but labour. They became abusive, demanding excessive labour and punishing their tenants when not satisfied (Morris, 2016:109).This system, that came to be known as *Thangata* (mentioned above), meaning labour tax or labour rent (McCracken, 2012:128), became a long-term source of resistance and suffering to the Man'ganja and other

clans. Reverend John Chilembwe²², a hero of modern day Malawi and who had formed his own Christian religious group, the Providence Industrial Mission, with the help of Joseph Booth, died as a martyr in 1915 while fighting the *Thangata* system that was seen as a new form of slavery (McCracken, 2012:129).

Religion and politics

The missionaries, especially the Blantyre Church of Scotland and the Anglican Church, played a big role in opening up the country to colonial rule as a consequence of their pleas to the British government to protect them from the Portuguese. However, as the British government gained more authority, the missionaries became unhappy with some of its practices, especially regarding tax and the Federation of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (Zeze, n.d:3).

In 1944, the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC), which began as an association in 1930, had its first conference. Levi Mumba was elected its first president and Kamuzu Banda (the first president of Malawi after independence from colonial rule), who was in England at the time, became its steadfast supporter financially and intellectually (Kalinga, 2012:9). From the 1940s, the proposal of the British government to form a federation of Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Nyasaland became the main concern of the NAC (McCracken, 2012:324). However, Chief Molin Tengani, a Man'ganja paramount chief and an incumbent in the rebuilding of the M'bona shrine, declared himself in favour of the detested imperial federation, and became a stubborn proponent. This provoked more conflict between him and the NAC, besides his conflict with the M'bona people for other similar reasons (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:25). Playing a major role in the downfall of the M'bona religious culture in the 1940s, Tengani was also in support of *malimidwe* (ridge terracing)²³, which people associated with the federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland as it became oppressive.

²² John Chilembwe dominates the Malawian currency as a fallen hero who died in a battle fighting for his country's freedom. He was very popular for the movement against the British rulers known as "the Chilembwe rising", and which only lasted for two weeks. Chilembwe was not happy with the *Thangata* system and with racial arrogance. The 15th of January is a special day in Malawi set aside to remember his martyrdom. The 3rd of February 1915 is an important day in Malawi's history since it is the day when he died fighting (Phiri, 2004:270). Joseph Booth took John Chilembwe to America for training as a reverend, which is where he was exposed to Black American history and politics. From there, he became ambitious to lead his people to independence, just as the Black Americans did. When he returned to the country, he established the Providence Industrial Mission (Phiri, 2004:261-264).

²³In 1948 the District Commissioner of Port Herald (Nsanje), P.C.Lewis, embarked on a district-wide ridge making compulsion following R.W.Kettlewell's Land conservation policy with the help of Molin Tengani and Liva Mlolo

A rumour spread that the terrible drought that engulfed the land in the 1940s was a result of M'bona's spirit leaving the land since the snake spirit²⁴, a key component of the M'bona faith, could not move easily within the ridges of the land²⁵ (McCracken, 2012:321). The British government²⁶ was happy with Tengani and increased his territory in the 1950s, so much that he became more powerful than any other paramount chief in the land (McCracken, 2012:321). To the M'bona people, the British government was synonymous with white people, including all white missionaries and the Christian faith. The Tengani situation gave rise to much contempt for the Christian beliefs. According to Schoffeleers, the M'bona people remained in opposition to Tengani throughout his tenure as a chief (1936-1963), until he died in 1967. The whole conflict took on the form of a contest between M'bona and Christianity, where M'bona was titled the "Black Christ" whose mission was to save the Man'ganja and the black community (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:24-25). On 1 August 1953, the Federation of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland was formed (McCracken, 2012:276) despite resistance from the Nyasaland African Congress and most Malawians, including the Man'ganja people²⁷. Tengani retired in 1963 when the Federation was also ended (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:25).

In 1958, Kamuzu Banda returned from England and was appointed president of the NAC. The NAC became a mass movement leading to the British Government declaring a state of emergency

(the chiefs). Anyone who did not comply was fined five shillings to six months in prison (McCracken, 2012:320-321). Brian Morris, in an environmental history of the Shire, describes this:

[D]uring Colby's administration (1948-1956), eager to both increase agricultural productivity – especially food production after the 1949 famine – and to curb soil erosion (perceived as leading to an ecological disaster) there was a marked intensification of state intervention into peasant farming. The chief architect was the Director of Agriculture, Richard Kettlewell, who has been described as 'fanatical' in his desire to impose soil-conservation measures. These measures came to be known as malimidwe, which simply means farming or cultivation, but in the 1950s the term came to signify the coercive and oppressive government enforcement of the agricultural rules". (Morris, 2016: 302).

Kamuzu and many members of the MCP did not support *malimidwe* (McCracken, 2012:379).

²⁴It is believed that M'bona comes every night in the form of a snake to unite with his symbolic wife, Salima, where he also hears people's grievances and needs. Refer to Illustration 19 on page 85.

²⁵For several years in the early 1940s, peasants in both Chikwawa and Nsanje districts defied the proposition to make ridges on their lands, which was backed by chiefs (McCracken, 2012:320).

²⁶ The British government during this time was bothered by the Scottish missionaries and their constant accusations regarding how they treated Africans.

²⁷The Federation only benefited Southern and Northern Rhodesia; the white and the colored communities in many ways, but Nyasaland and the black communities were highly disadvantaged (Pachai, 1973:264).

in 1959, when Kamuzu Banda was arrested and the NAC banned (Pachai,1973:234). In that same year, the NAC changed its name to Malawi Congress Party (MCP) and had the full support of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) members (McCracken, 2012:366). The Catholics then formed their own party, the Christian Democratic Party (CDP), to counter the NAC (McCracken, 2012:375)²⁸. On the federation issue, from 1953 to 1958, the Scottish missionaries and the CCAP mission sided with the Nyasaland African Congress in the fight against the British government²⁹(McCracken, 2012:357).

Kamuzu was released from prison on February 1, 1961 and became the first prime minister of the independent Nyasaland in 1963. Malawi became fully independent in 1964. In 1966, a new constitution was adopted and Malawi became a republic under the British Commonwealth. In 1970, Kamuzu was declared the life President of Malawi (Kalinga, 2012:xx-xxiv).

The Christian government, the education system and the impact on other religious beliefs

Christian missionaries continued to influence the government of Malawi after independence, and were responsible for a change from a one-party system of governance to a multiparty system, which started with controversial pastoral letters written by Catholic bishops to the president in 1991 (Mbaya, 1997:115-140).

According to Dr W. S. Zeze, there is strong evidence that Christianity was a state sponsored religion in Malawi, and that its influence on the government was undeniable³⁰ (Zeze, n.d.).

Pachai, in his book *The History of the Nation* (1973:168-180), reveals how the educational system in Malawi was dominated and controlled by the Christian missionaries during colonial times. David Bone, a Senior Lecturer at Chancellor College, narrates how the Christianized

²⁸The CDP, led by Chester Katsonga, was formed in October 1960 and received full support from Archbishop Theunissen of Blantyre, despite resistance from fellow bishops. Their manifesto was largely based on safeguarding the Christian faith. This development, which was misinterpreted as an attempt by the Roman Catholics to dominate the world, did not please the MCP, who ended up burning Katsonga's house. However, Kamuzu Banda condemned the undemocratic behaviour and the CDP participated in the 1961 elections (McCracken,2012:376).

²⁹ The Blantyre Synod of the CCAP called publicly for dissolution of the federation in 1958 and Dr Kamuzu Banda was invited to speak at its churches.

³⁰“It is undeniable truth that in the history of Church, Christianity, at times, in some regions or countries, somehow became a state-sponsored religion. Using what had happened in Malawi particularly in the history of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), a critical evaluation is made regarding when, how and why Christianity became a state-sponsored religion in the light of the relation between the Nkhoma Synod and the state between 1964 and 1994”(Zeze, n.d.).<https://www.iclrs.org/content/events/28/751.pdf>.

education system in Malawi sabotaged other religions, including the Islamic faith, even after independence.

The Muslims in their turn overwhelmingly chose to reject the option of western education not because they failed to recognize its value, but because it was for long almost exclusively provided by the various Christian missions who tended to use their schools as a means of recruiting people to their own denominations. Muslim parents justifiably regarded these schools as hostile to their religion and liable to estrange ...
(Bone,n.d:6)

According to Jarhal (2001:9), the old religious syllabus in both primary and secondary schools was Bible-centred and focused solely on Christianity³¹. The M'bona people were not spared from this development. In my interviews with Chief Kombe, an elder at Khulubvi forest headquarters of M'bona in December 2016, Kombe said that; "*Otsatira ambiri a M'bona anawumilizika kulowanso chi Khristu chifukwa sikumaloledwa kuyimba sukulu za chi Khristu popanda kubatizidwa*", meaning: "Many believers of M'bona were forced to embrace Christianity too since it was not allowed to enrol in missionary schools without first being baptized". With exposure to Christian education and faith, many M'bona believers found themselves practising both faiths. Chief Chapirira, a primary informant to Matthew Schoffeleers and who later renounced Christianity, was cited as a very good example of this.

Any religion outside of Christianity was seen as inferior and was dealt with intellectually through a Christianized education system, and there were no checks on the welfare of non-Christian believers. Public Universities like Chancellor College were highly Christianized, including a chaplain's office³² with a cross on the door. I witnessed its removal in 2015. As a student in the Theology Department of Chancellor College from 2005 to 2007, I noticed that the department was dominated by Christians. The fact that the state and the public schools were Christianized gave rise to an overall attitude of ridicule and disregard towards non-Christian religions and

³¹The new syllabus includes what is stated as the three major religions in Malawi: Christianity, Islam and Malawian Traditional Religion (MTR). <http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:375381/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

³²Some of the duties of the Chaplain were to offer spiritual advice to students, organize prayer meetings with students, and to pray during institutional official meetings.

regarding them as fake or baseless, coupled with a general attitude of unquestioning respect for Christianity. This state of affairs left Schoffeleers' writings untouched by criticism. Very few people have had the courage or interest to question Schoffeleers' work. My literature review indicated that L.J. Ndalamas dissertation seemed to be pointing in this direction, although I never had an opportunity to read it as I could not access it.

Contestation of aspects of Matthew Schoffeleers' research

My contestation of Schoffeleers' research will involve comparison of his versions of M'bona with my own field research and research undertaken by other writers, especially W.H.J. Rangeley³³ and Joseph Chakanza³⁴, who did their research around the same period as Schoffeleers. I will also interrogate Schoffeleers' methodology.

Literature Review

Matthew Schoffeleers is the most published writer to have done extensive research on the M'bona religion. Both his Master's dissertation and his PhD thesis focused on this field. He also wrote several books and articles emanating from his scholarly research. Much of the information for this research has been derived from his book *The River of Blood: The Genesis of a Martyr Cult in Southern Malawi, c. A.D. 1600* (1992), his Master's Dissertation: *M'bona the Guardian Spirit of the Man'ganja* (1966), his PhD thesis: *Symbolic and Social Aspects of the Spirit Worship amongst the Man'ganja* (1968), and an article entitled: 'The Interaction of M'bona Cult with Christianity 1859–1963' that he contributed to Ranger's book: *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa* (1975). Schoffeleers' writing is accepted as a basic and reliable source for researchers worldwide with an interest in the M'bona religion.

Steve Chimombo is the next most popular writer on the M'bona story after Schoffeleers. However, he was neutral on Schoffeleers' views, focusing on other issues. Chimombo's version strived to merge the Chewa and the Man'ganja religious beliefs on the basis that the Chewa

³³Rangeley did his research in 1953, 10 years before Schoffeleers started his work. Refer to footnote number 3 in the introduction section.

³⁴ Joseph Chakanza did his research in 1967 when he was preparing for Roman Catholic priesthood. In later years he became a local Catholic Priest and a lecturer in the Theology Department of Chancellor College. Being a Catholic priest like Schoffeleers, his version should not be considered in favour of the M'bona faith. Schoffeleers said the author tried to separate fiction from fact and he is one of the first Malawian seminarians who was trained to take a positive view of their culture (Schoffeleers, 1992:244).

shrine was a mother shrine to the M'bona shrine³⁵ (Chimombo, 1978). He also made an effort to distinguish between M'bona as a rainmaker and M'bona as a python, with the latter being characterized as disastrous, bringing floods, earthquakes and landslides. My understanding of Chimombo's work *The Rainmaker* is that it is written from the perspective of a playwright. His books, *Python! Python!* and *Napolo* were epics which were later dramatized (Chimombo, 1978). The Chanco Travelling Theatre led by a Chancellor College lecturer, Smith Likongwe, was the last to cast plays from *The Rainmaker* before Chimombo died in 2015.

W.H.J. Rangeley's approach was basically historical recording with simple commentary on whether he believed what he heard or not. However, according to Schoffeleers, Rangeley was the first to notice the existence of different versions of the M'bona story (Schoffeleers, 1992: 176). Another writer, B.J. Kathamalo dwelled on rituals at the shrine (Chakanza & Ross, 1998:25), and Alinafe Kalemba, in his dissertation: *M'bona Cult and the Man'ganja Chiefs of the Lower Shire: Their Relationship Then and Now*, focused on the weakening power of the M'bona religion, and on how the chiefs had stopped deriving authority from it (Chakanza and Ross, 1998:25).

Research Limitations of Schoffeleers' scholarly work

It should be noted that there might be other writers on the M'bona story who have contested Schoffeleers' views, but I have not been able to access such material. I consider my exploration of available literature to have been exhaustive. I searched through the libraries of all theological departments in Zomba³⁶ and the main library at Chancellor College (Zomba, Malawi). I enquired from people in the history and sociology departments at Chancellor College. I visited bookshops, including the Kachere series bookshop popular for religious literature, where I found a book entitled *Religion in Malawi: An Annotated Bibliography written by Chakanza and Ross*. This book gave me hope because it has bibliographical information on most religious literature in Malawi, but to my disappointment I could not access dissertation by L. J. Ndalama: *The Impact of Christianity on the M'bona Cult-The Extent of the Impact*, which I thought seemed closer to

³⁵As stated in the historical background, the Man'ganja are believed to have descended from Kaphirintiwa which is believed to be the origin of the Chewa clan too. Close to the same area at Msinja were the High God Shrines of the Chewa people. Mathew Schoffeleers claimed that there are many similarities between the Chewa shrines and the M'bona shrines which indicates that the High God shrines must have been an ancestor to the M'bona shrines (Schoffeleers, 1992:32).

³⁶Zomba has the three largest theological colleges in Malawi including the one at Chancellor College: There is Zomba Theological College affiliated to the Central African Presbyterian Church, The Leonard Kamungu Theological College of the Anglican Church, and the Saint Peter's Major Seminary of the Catholic Church.

my own intentions. I made an effort to contact Joseph Chakanza in the hope of connecting to Ndalama and other writers, but he was too ill to answer to my questions. The work of Thomas Price is also not directly accessible; his views are only found through the literature of other scholars. There is a need to ensure research across Africa is accessible to other scholars, ideally through the internet.

Problem statement on Schoffeleers work

Matthew Schoffeleers claimed that he collected many versions of the M'bona story from documents, incumbents, lay persons of the religion and non-believers for the purpose of retrieving the distant past (Schoffeleers, 1992:140-141). He took this approach partly to address the issues raised by Luc de Heusch (Schoffeleers, 1992:140), who criticized oral tradition theorist Jan Vansina for his overconfidence regarding legendary chronicles which lacked a sufficiently critical review. De Heusch had noticed that the chronicles contained little or no historical information, and therefore had to be treated as no more than the transportation, in pseudo-historical terms, of a pre-existing body of myths rather than legitimate history. De Heusch pointed to the striking similarities among the founding myths of several central African kingdoms, which also paralleled chronicles relating to the first three kings of ancient Rome and which another scholar, G. Dumezil, had declared as non-historical. Schoffeleers noticed some implications of de Heusch's arguments which prevented further investigation of new developments on the existing myths, which Schoffeleers argued *could* be used to read historical developments as well³⁷. In answer to the question of substantiation, Schoffeleers argued that historical reconstruction from oral sources was a circumstantial matter, rather than direct, evidence (Schoffeleers, 1992:140). Based on this approach, conclusive assumptions were made in an attempt to retrieve the distant past without direct evidence, and this I find challengeable. Another major problem I find with his approach is that it makes several conclusive assumptions

³⁷ "I hope to demonstrate the relevance of the historical approach with regard to the M'bona myths-or legendary chronicles, to use de Heusch's terminology-which, like the royal myths of central Africa, exhibit a great deal of variation. It can be demonstrated that they have their roots in different historical periods and that they can be made to yield substantive information about those periods; that taken as a whole, they express a crucial development in people's thinking about social order. If these various claims can be substantiated, the chapter will have performed two tasks: it will have shown De Heusch's skepticism in regard to the historiographical potential of myths in principle to be unfounded, and it will have put his structuralist assumptions under scrutiny" (Schoffeleers, 1992:141).

regarding one issue according to its different oral manifestations, but by the end of the analysis, one conclusion is adopted, which makes it contestable and vulnerable to bias³⁸.

When Schoffeleers began his studies, there were two conflicting groups with different versions of the M'bona story. The first group, mainly led by Chapirira as the main informant, told the missionaries tailored Christianized versions to parallel M'bona with Christ. (See Appendix C). This they did, in my view, in order to defend their beliefs against the missionaries who were actively campaigning to convert the M'bona people to Christianity, and to see the M'bona cult disappear as previously noted in one of the quotations by Schoffeleers.

This self-defensive behaviour by Chapirira and friends was disliked by the second group led by Mbukwa, who rejected the Christianized versions. The quotation below from Schoffeleers reveals this conflict, and Extract 2 confirms that Chapirira belonged to the first group.

My direct contacts with the cult organization date from August 24, 1964, when I was granted a lengthy interview with two of the shrine guardians. At their insistence, our meeting took place at the Nsanje mission station and not in or near the shrine grounds, where they lived. The official reason was that, as a white person, I was not allowed to come near the shrine, at least not without having made a formal application to the cult's principals. As it turned out, however, there was a lot more to it. I realized this only two years later, in October 1966, when I had a chance to interview some of the other officials as well. To my surprise the latter made it a point to contradict virtually everything I had been told by their colleagues, maintaining that I had been lied to by these people who were only "after their personal interests" and who, "being of foreign extraction," had no right to be part of the cult organization. It was thus that I became aware of a rift which ran through the entire organization and which made it difficult to contact one section without arousing suspicion among the others. Apparently, this conflict had led my earlier informants to insist that the interview be held at the mission, since at that place they would not be disturbed by their rivals. (Schoffeleers, 1992:6)

³⁸ For example, Schoffeleers collected many versions of the M'bona story to track down the development of the Christianized versions. However, despite the fact that the non-Christianized versions were more popular than the Christianized versions mainly derived from one chief informant, Chapirira, he reflected the Christianized versions as popular, to substantiate his argument that the M'bona people finally adopted the Christian beliefs as a new development in the history of the narrative, which wasn't the case since most M'bona elders disagreed with Chapirira.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Shire River runs through three valley areas, respectively known as the Upper, Middle, and Lower Shire Vallies. In this study the name Shire Valley refers to the lower valley, which borders directly on the Zambezi.

2. The word *lundu* has the general meaning of “chief” (Scott 1892:294), but in the Shire Valley it refers specifically to the paramountcy of that name, which was officially established in 1969. With regard to the precolonial period, the phrase “Lundu kingdom” will be used. When referring to the king or paramount himself, we shall use the title as if it were a personal name. When it is necessary to specify the incumbent, the latter’s personal name will be added (e.g., Lundu Mankhokwe).

3. Interview, Chapirira and Kumbiwanyati, Aug. 24, 1964.

4. Interview, Mbukwa, Khombe, and Kambalame, Oct. 9 and 12, 1966.

5. I interviewed the medium Josef Thom, locally known as Chambote, on five occasions (Oct. 31, 1966, Dec. 4, 1967, Sept. 5, 1968, Dec. 24, 1971, and April 1, 1972). On two further occasions (Dec. 22, 1967, and Sept. 18, 1972), interviews

Extract 2: Evidence of interviews with two conflicting groups

(Source: Schoffeleers, 1992:259)

However, Schoffeleers ignored the fact that there was this conflict and also ignored what I refer to as non-Christianized or less Christianized versions from the opposing group, views that are similar to those expressed during my field research. Through my field research, I found the very same Chief Mbukwa whom Schoffeleers interviewed (represented in the pictures below); Mbukwa and other elders disclaimed Chapirira’s views, which Schoffeleers adopted as new developments in the history of the narrative of M’bona.



Figure 3: Chief Mbukwa in 1965 at Khulubvi forest

(Source: Schoffeleers, 1966)



Figure 4: Chief Mbukwa in 2016 at Khulubvi

Chief Mbukwa in this recent photo is the man standing next to me in the green T-shirt (December, 2016).

Pa tsiku la 30 December chaka cha 2016, a mfumu a Mbukwa andandiuza kuti Matthew Schoffeleers ndi gulu lake la za kafukufuku anabwera ku Khulubvi ndipo anakambitsana kwa nthawi yayitali za nkhani ya M'bona. Pa tsikuli Mbukwa anamuwuzira Schoffeleers ndi omuthandizira ake kuti zimene anazimva kuchoka kwa mfumu Chapirira asazitengere chifukwa Chapirira anali ndi zilakolako zake zomwe zimamupangitsa kukamba zosiyana ndi anzake. (Chief Mbukwa 2016, personal communication).

On the 30th of December 2016, Mbukwa reported to me that Schoffeleers and his research assistants came to Khulubvi, and they had a long interview with elders of the faith who narrated the M'bona story (Interview with Chief Mbukwa on 30 December 2016, personal communication). He told me that he had explained to Schoffeleers that he didn't have to take Chapirira's versions seriously since Chapirira was only fulfilling his own personal interests.

SOURCES

INTERVIEWS (in chronological order)

1. Chapirira and Kumbiwanyati, shrine guardians, at R. C. Mission, Nsanje, Aug. 24, 1964.
2. B. Nhlane, former district commissioner, Nsanje, at St. Peter's College, Oxford, May 15, 1966.
3. Headman Mbeta, Mbeta village, Malemia chiefdom, Nsanje, Oct. 7 and 19, 1966.
4. Mbukwa, Khombe, and Kambalame, shrine guardians, Mbangu village, Ngabu Phiri chiefdom, Oct. 9 and 12, 1966, and May 4, 1967.
5. Stole Chimbuto (source of Text II/B), retired primary school teacher, Ngabu Banda chiefdom, Chikwawa District, Oct. 18, 1966.
6. Chief Malemia, Nsanje District, at his headquarters, Oct. 20, 1966, Aug. 20, 1967 and Jan. 4, 1980.
7. Chambote (Josef Thom), cult medium, Thole village, Nsanje, Oct. 31, 1966, Dec. 4 and 22, 1967, Sept. 5, 1968, Dec. 24, 1971, April 1, 1972, and Sept. 18, 1972.
8. Rev. Mark Mangeya, St. Michael's Mission, Chikwawa, Dec. 29, 1966.
9. Chief Evans Makosana Lundu, Mbewe village, Chikwawa, May 2, 1967, and July 20, 1969.
10. Fryton Malemia, retired teacher and agricultural instructor, Chipolopolo village, Malemia chiefdom, Nsanje, Aug. 8, 1967.
11. Che Chapalapala (source of Text III/B), Misomali village, Chapananga chiefdom, Chikwawa, Aug. 13, 1967.
12. Che Ngwangwa (source of Text III/A), Kadzumba village, Maseah chiefdom, Chikwawa, Aug. 24, 1967.
13. Headman Chikafu Mbewe, Chikafu village, Lilongwe District, Sept. 16, 1967.
14. Cult officers, Chirenje shrine, Lilongwe District, Sept. 30, 1969.
15. Group interview, Chief Changata (M. K. Mpuka), Anthu-a-pa-mudzi (titular spirit wife, Thyolo shrine), Z. Chisinkha, and headman Mpenda, at Changata's headquarters, Thyolo District, April 13 and 14, 1971.
16. Headman Kadinga Banda (Fredson Demster), Kadinga village, Maseah chiefdom, Chikwawa, Aug. 27, 1971.
17. S. Moshtishu, Chiphwembwe village, Malemia chiefdom, Nsanje, Sept. 21, 1972.

303

Extract 3: Information showing sources of interviews

(Source: Schoffeleers, 1992:303)

Extract 3 above is a list of all Schoffeleers' interviewees who narrated the M'bona story. The list includes a second group led by Mbukwa, and that was in conflict with the first group led by Chapirira. However, only narratives by a group led by Chapirira are featured in

Schoffeleers' book: *The River of Blood: The Genesis of a Martyr Cult in Southern Malawi, c.A.D.1600*. This is a book that tracks the historical developments of the M'bona narrative. In this case, we can say that the developments in the history of the narrative took two directions, but Schoffeleers preferred not to engage with this situation.

On the constructed versions I, II, III of the M'bona narrative

In this section, I present a critique of Schoffeleers' constructions of the M'bona story, which he characterised as 'version I, II and III', reflecting what he believed to be the prevalent versions of the M'bona narrative that he had encountered. Extract 4 is a summary of variations in the three versions by Schoffeleers.

Variation	Mbona I	Mbona II	Mbona III
Homeland	Stateless	Chiefdom	Kingdom
Adversary	Rain priest	Chief	King
Mbona's social status	Adult with several wives	Young man with one wife	Child or childlike person
Manner of killing	With iron weapons	With grass	With grass (and iron)
Founding of cult	Initiative of local population	Mbona's initiative; no cooperation of chief(s)	Mbona's initiative; king ordered to cooperate

Chart 2. Variations in the Mbona traditions

Extract 4: Variations in the M'bona traditions by Schoffeleers

(Source: Schoffeleers, 1992:147)

Though Schoffeleers seems not to support Bronislaw Malinowski's³⁹ concept, his analysis in the immediate quotation reveals that he actually supports it. Malinowski takes myths as political

³⁹Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski, an anthropologist of American and British origin was the first theorist to insist that myth, like any other aspect of culture, be studied in its living context. He pioneered the view of myth as a practical daily force in society (Flood, 2002:xii). He influenced most scholars who studied at the London School of Economics and at universities in Canada. He lived between 1884 and 1942 (Firth, 1959:374).

charters where the origin myths are regarded as post factum constructs designed to legitimate existing privileges and positions (cited in Schoffeleers, 1992:160). For example, a chief may wish to maintain his position as a chief though his tenure has expired. To fulfil his ambitions he may come up with a myth or modify an existing myth to support his wishes. In this case, the created or modified myth becomes a post factum (an after fact) of his end of reign and his wish to continue. His power privilege to change the myth and to have his subjects obey and adopt the myth is what is being referred to as a political charter. In this case, the popularizing of a specific M'bona version by a particular group within the M'bona advocates can be seen as a post factum.

Schoffeleers however, seems to support alternative views raised as concerns on Malinoskian views by some historians that suggest that there is no actual manipulation of mythical ideas at will since myths are not appreciated without a historical value. Such a historical value of myths is protected by strong indirect sanctions by members of a group with special rights. In another way, rather than being manipulative on the myths, the privileged groups are just selective of the historical elements that work to support their rights. Schoffeleers gives an example of what he labelled as text III/A and text III/B to elaborate on the idea. While both copies deal with restoration of the faith, they have different view points. One is from a view point of the court and the other from commonality. Since the interested parties have different positions the manifestation of the traditions differs. While text III/A gives a message that without the king there would be chaos, text B seems to point at the king as a source of chaos by abusing authority and killing M'bona, an important person in the community. In simple terms text III/A seeks to glorify the king and shed off his guilt while text III/B glorifies M'bona and shames the king. For example, Schoffeleers states that text III/A does not mention the king as a predecessor of M'bona in rainmaking powers while text III/B puts emphasis on this. Text III/B is the most Christianised text as it mentions M'bona as the son of Mulungu and born out of virgin birth. What is referred to as text III is actually an amalgamation of text III/A and text III/B by Schoffeleers. The fact that Schoffeleers said that each of the classified texts was specific to a special group of people and totally missing from other groups seems to suggest deliberate manipulation as Malinoski suggested. If it were to be a case of selective history, then perhaps there would be traces of alternative narrations in the non-interested groups.

The point to be made now is that there appears to be a close correspondence between the organizational structure and the ritual cycle on the one hand and the several streams in

the Mbona narratives on the other. Thus, narratives of the M'bona I tradition are found only in the inner circle and more specifically among the family of the chief ritual officer and the group of his immediate associates. Narratives of the Mbona II tradition, on the other hand, are found both in the inner and middle circle. In the latter case they are kept by the Tengani family and associates; in the former case by some of the secondary shrine officials. Finally, Mbona III narratives are typical of the outer circle, where they are the specific property of the Lundu family, but they are also kept by the highest jural authority within the inner circle and by the population at large. (Wim Van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers, 1985:176)

According to the quotation above, the fact that version III is found in the outer circle specifically Lundu family, the inner circle, the highest Jural authority and the population at large indicates that it is the most popular and highly accepted version. Being the most Christianized version it also suggest that the Christian beliefs have deeply assimilated into the M'bona faith. On another hand the fact that Schoffeleers says that it is the only version highly acceptable in Lundus court suggests that it is a 'post factum' to Lundu. This is also supported by Schoffeleers statements that Lundu was responsible for the change as in the following quotation:

At the time of the rise of the Lundu dynasty in the sixteenth century, a combined political and theological revolution took place in the lower shire valley. The Lundus gained control of the shrines and in the process the myth and the structre of the cult changed. A new myth was created which is the dominant theology of today. In this story which may well have reflected a historical clash between Lundu and the older guardians of the cult- we are told of a great male prophet, directly inspired by God, who was slain on the orders of the Lundu paramount. It is the prophet rather than the spirit wife who is called M'bona in this myth. After his martyrdom, so told, M'bonas spirit was appeased by Lundus. The Lundu chiefs provided a succession of wives for the M'bona (Schoffeleers, 1975:14)

However, my analysis of this examination was that the evidence to prove popularity of the Christianized version III was not convincing enough because there is a high prevalence of the three versions to overlap. Despite that, text I and II narratives are also found in the outer population and not only restricted to the inner circle as Schoffeleers suggests

Schoffeleers himself was confused as to whether a particular version belonged to I, II, or III because they overlapped (Schoffeleers, 1992:45). At the end of the day, he gives the impression that the most Christianized version (III) was the most popular, assuming that the Christian elements were widely acceptable. On the same note, he also asserts that Rangeley and Chakanza's accounts strike a balance of all the three versions he constructed (Schoffeleers, 1992:245), while the obvious Christian elements of version III, like the virgin birth, are left out in these accounts. In my research, I found out that there are no pure versions that can perfectly fit into I, II, or III as Schoffeleers groups them. The narrations are usually a mixture of all the versions, as suggested by Chakanza's narrative. (See Appendix D).

My question is this: if version III was the most popular, why wasn't it popular with his predecessor, Rangeley, who did his anthropological research in 1953, ten years before Schoffeleers started his research? Can we assume that this was the period when the Christianized versions developed? The conflict between Chief Tengani and the M'bona advocates that started in the 1930s is believed to have been the cause for a rigorous defensive behaviour on the part of the M'bona advocates, which gave birth to the most Christianized versions of the M'bona story (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:25).

Compared to other researchers like Rangeley and Chakanza, Schoffeleers seems to be the only one who has maintained and over-emphasized version III as the most popular. Chakanza's account points to version I. Schoffeleers argued that both Rangeley and Chakanza's aim was to eliminate what they thought was fiction from fact. Chakanza's text names M'bona's father (Schoffeleers, 1992:245) whereas version III does not mention M'bona's father. According to Schoffeleers, this was tailored to assume virgin birth (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:23). Chakanza's text also reflects that M'bona was a married adult, different to version III that claims that M'bona was a child. Again according to Schoffeleers, this was done to assert the claims of his celibacy, and that he was not a witch (Schoffeleers, 1992:153).

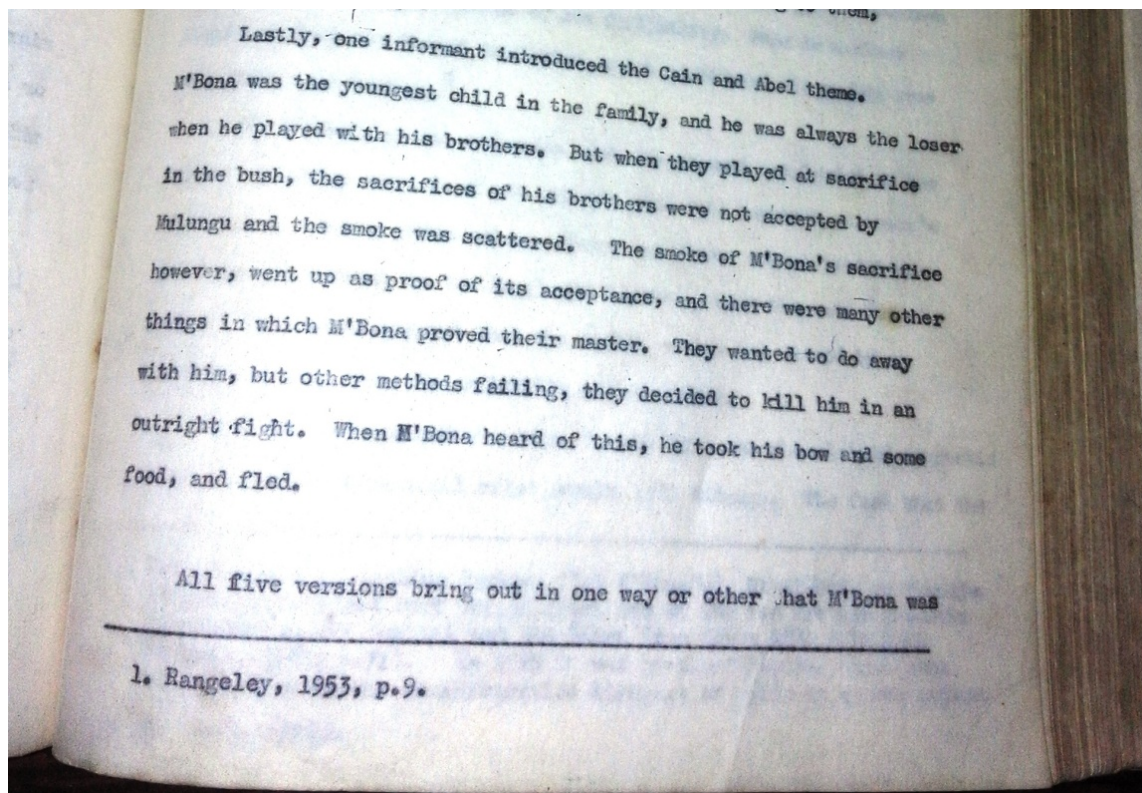
Here, my argument is: if Chakanza and Rangeley made an effort to separate fiction from fact, then it suggests that they knew about the long-standing traditions of M'bona accepted by the larger population. Schoffeleers further argues that Chakanza concentrated his research on the elders of the cult and due to limited resources, he wasn't able to reach out to the wider

population as Rangeley did. However, both their accounts surprisingly strike the balance among the three versions.

The narrations in my research reveal a mixture of all the versions, but most of them omit the direct Christian elements popular with Chapiroira, for example, about the virgin birth; being the son of God and the celibacy of M'bona.

At this point, it is very important to note that there are direct Christian elements that it is claimed the M'bona people copied from Christianity, and there are suggestive ones that required a deliberate assertion by the writer. I am of the view that these direct Christian elements (which are enough to justify the assertions) are what sparked off the curiosity in the researcher, and the non-direct ones (for example the analogies between church establishment and shrine establishment, change from having a female prophet to a male prophet) are circumstantial; they might have been learnt from other 'territorial cults' such as the Dziwaguru cult, which has a male prophet. Schoffeleers compared the M'bona faith with other territorial cults, and learnt that some of the things that he thought the M'bona people learnt from Christianity were common to both Christianity and these territorial cults (Schoffeleers, 1968:341), which might mean that they might have been learnt from non-Christian sources (Schoffeleers, 1975:16).

I also have problems with those instances where Schoffeleers includes Christianized versions without citing the names of the respondents who narrated such versions. I suspect that versions like the Cain and Abel in the extract below were made up to confirm Schoffeleers' assumptions.



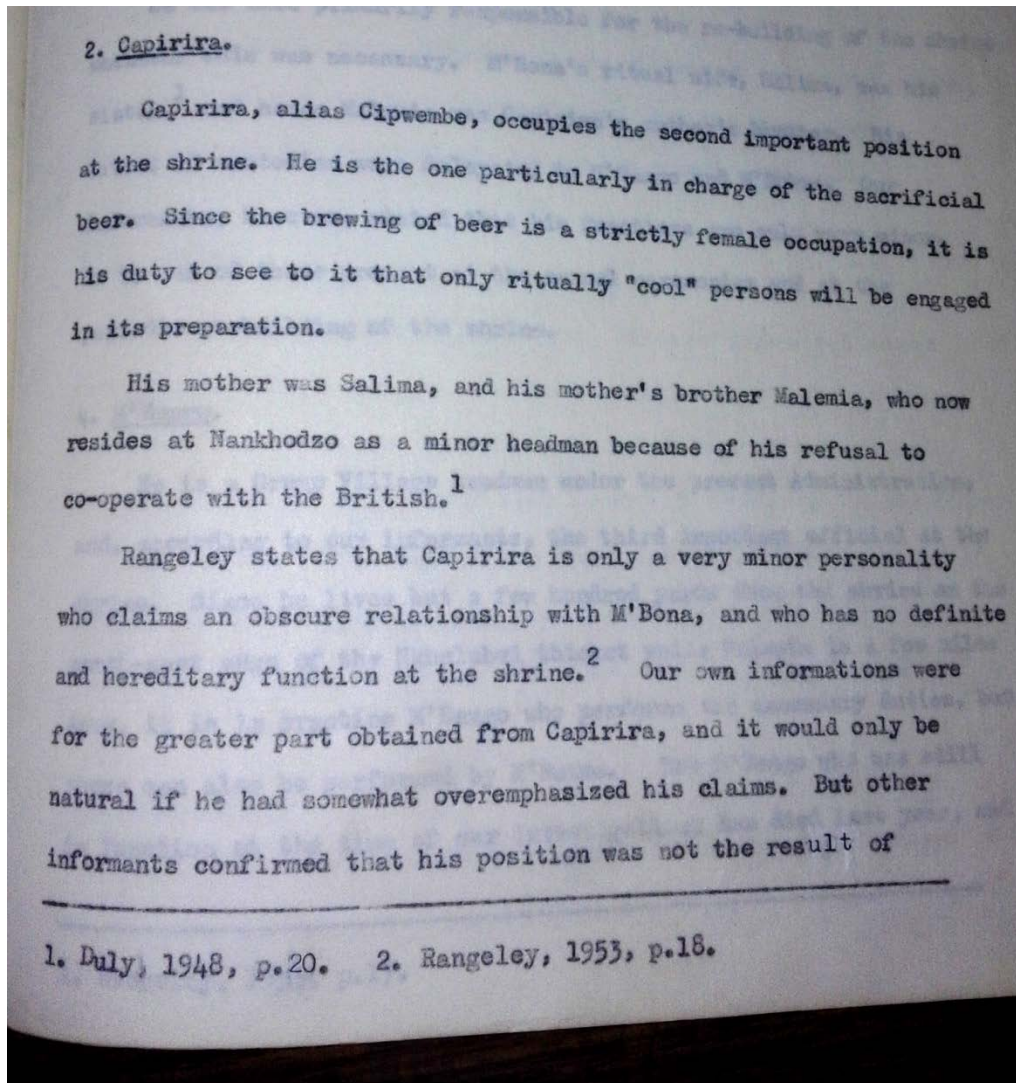
Extract 5: The Cain and Abel version of M'bona

(Source: Schoffeleers, 1966:272)

As noted, Matthew Schoffeleers understood the M'bona religious group to be a 'territorial cult' in which the shrine had political influence over the land apart from its ritual duties (Schoffeleers, 1992:7). He also adopts an idea that territorial cults may possess several competing and conflicting versions of how they originated. This is in part due to the different political ambitions of clans of people within the same territory, especially where there is an autochthonous group and a colonial group (invaders from outside the clan). Further, he explains that invaders may arise from the politically ambitious elite of the same clan (Schoffeleers, 1992:9). In this case, Lundu, who conquered his brother Kaphwiti and took possession of the shrines, is a good example (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:14)⁴⁰. This concept is in support of the Malinowskian views as discussed earlier on. On the same note, Chapirira's claims or versions may be seen as

⁴⁰Schoffeleers' explanation that the land is usually controlled by the spirits of an autochthonous group despite colonization by migrants (Schoffeleers, 1992:8) might help to explain why it is the Sena migrants who dominate in worshipping the Man'ganja spirits. (Refer to the historical background of the Man'ganja)

stemming out of political ambitions, as you may note in Extract 6 where he is noted as the only person who claims an obscure relationship with M'bona.



Extract 6: Rangeley's views about Chapirira

(Source: Schoffeleers, 1968:299)

While Schoffeleers relied on Chapirira as a main informant, he knew that Chapirira was lying, and just being defensive as we can note in the extract 7 below. However, a follow up on Schoffeleers' research reveals that most of the Christianised versions that revealed obvious biblical analogies were derived from Chapirira.

4. M'Bona's family.

Chief Capirira told us that M'Bona was born miraculously, "in the same way as Our Lord". This he said in reply to the question why he was unable to give us the names of M'Bona's parents. It did not occur to him that, if the parallel with Christ held true, he should have been all the more able to name M'Bona's mother. Mary, the mother of Christ, has under the name of Maliya (Maria) deeply penetrated into Maravi beliefs, rituals and folklore. She is one of the most popular characters in the nyau mimes.

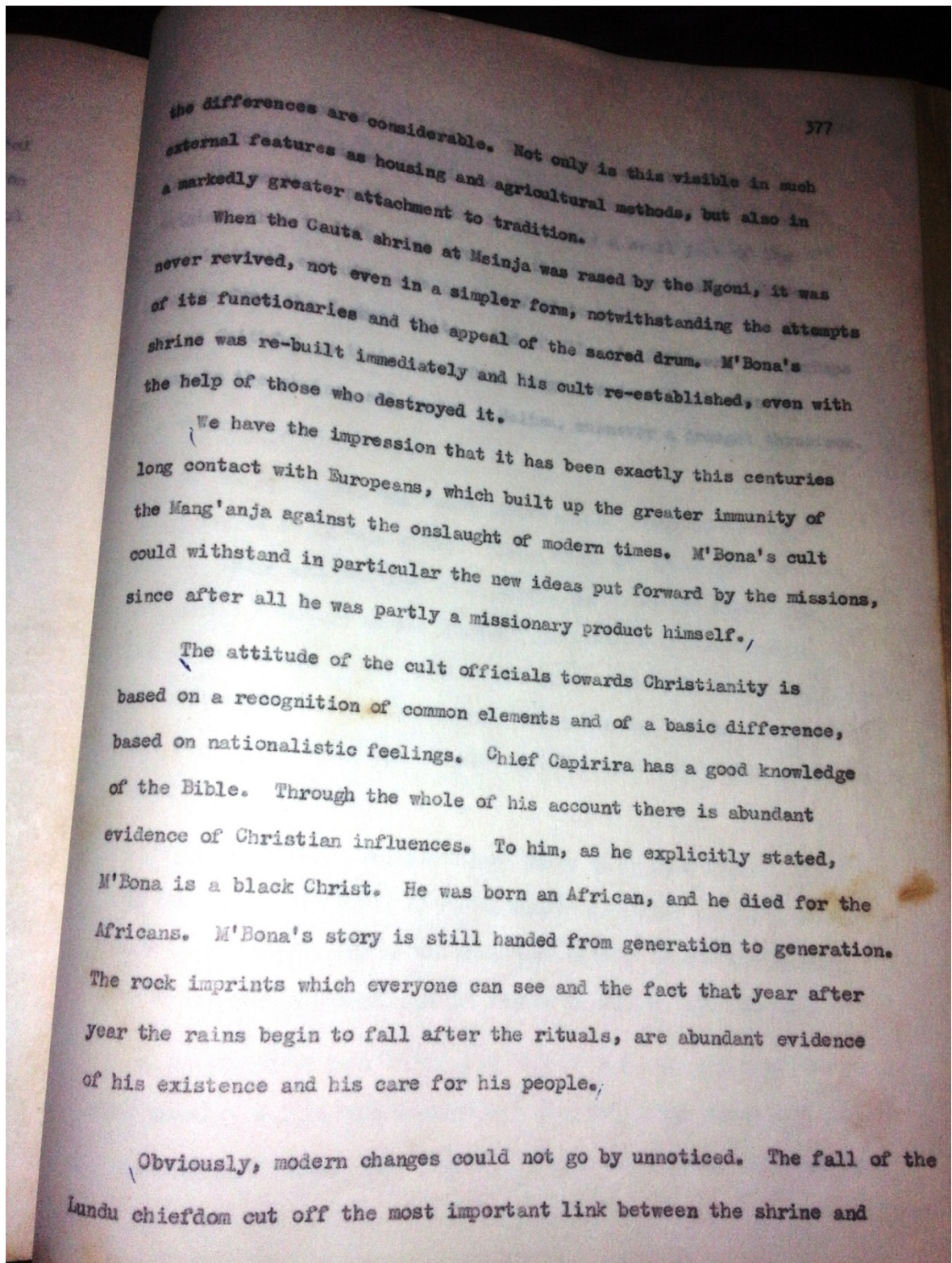
1. Rowley, 1866, p.407.

2. Chingota, 1961, p.13.

3. Scott, 1892, p.331.

Extract 7: Virgin birth claims by Chapirira

(Source: Schoffeleers, 1966:279)



377
the differences are considerable. Not only is this visible in such external features as housing and agricultural methods, but also in a markedly greater attachment to tradition.

When the Cauta shrine at Msinja was rased by the Ngoni, it was never revived, not even in a simpler form, notwithstanding the attempts of its functionaries and the appeal of the sacred drum. M'Bona's shrine was re-built immediately and his cult re-established, even with the help of those who destroyed it.

We have the impression that it has been exactly this centuries long contact with Europeans, which built up the greater immunity of the Mang'anja against the onslaught of modern times. M'Bona's cult could withstand in particular the new ideas put forward by the missions, since after all he was partly a missionary product himself.

The attitude of the cult officials towards Christianity is based on a recognition of common elements and of a basic difference, based on nationalistic feelings. Chief Capirira has a good knowledge of the Bible. Through the whole of his account there is abundant evidence of Christian influences. To him, as he explicitly stated, M'Bona is a black Christ. He was born an African, and he died for the Africans. M'Bona's story is still handed from generation to generation. The rock imprints which everyone can see and the fact that year after year the rains begin to fall after the rituals, are abundant evidence of his existence and his care for his people.

Obviously, modern changes could not go by unnoticed. The fall of the Lundu chiefdom cut off the most important link between the shrine and

Extract 8: Chief Chapirira as the main source of Christianized versions

(Source: Schoffeleers, 1966:377)

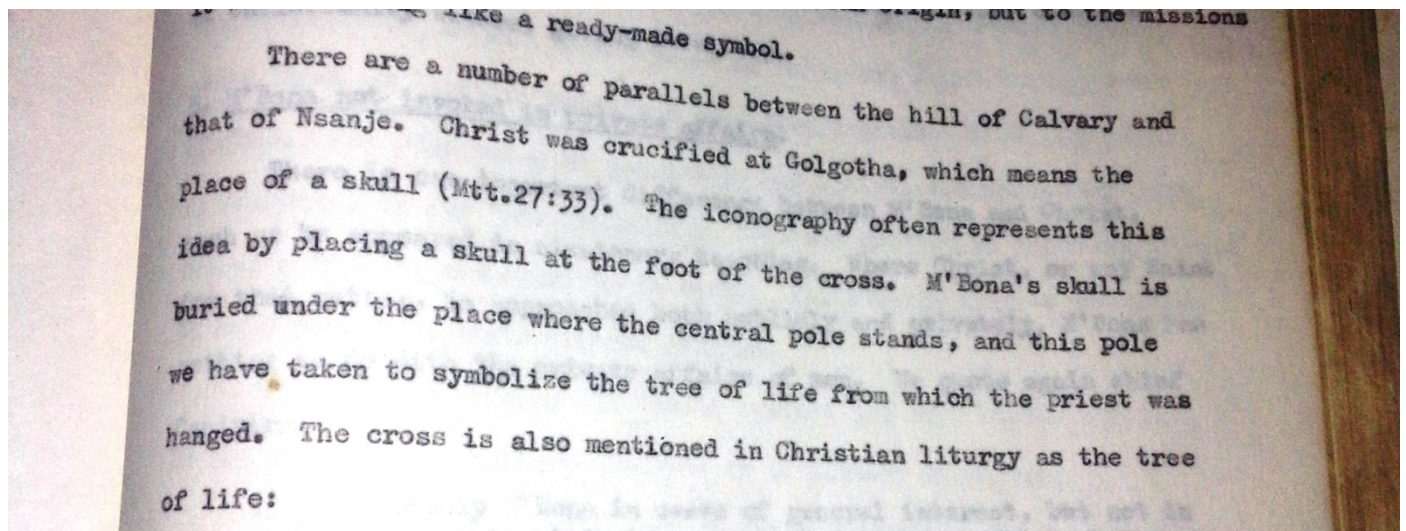
The other group that can be seen to claim control of the cult with a purpose, according to Schoffeleers, is the second group that opposed Chapirira's Christianised versions.

Another important idea utilised by Schoffeleers is that oral traditions of the mythical or legendary type are to be regarded as symbolic interpretations of values held by contemporary society (Schoffeleers, 1992:11). This approach gives Schoffeleers the opportunity to utilise his educational, cultural and Christian background to interpret the beliefs and values encountered within the M'bona cult. This approach brings in an argument by Michael Horton as discussed below.

Conceptual ideas behind my arguments

Robert Horton argued that African studies of religion are dominated by theologians, rather than independent social scientists; as a result, exponents of a theological approach enjoy a virtual monopoly of interpretation (Horton, 1993:8). He further argued that theologians usually have a feeling that non-Christian religions are inferior to Christian religions, and they try to resolve this conflict by Christianizing them, which draws them away from the realities of other religions outside Christianity (Horton, 1993:9).

The extract below by Schoffeleers reveals the tendency explained by Horton.

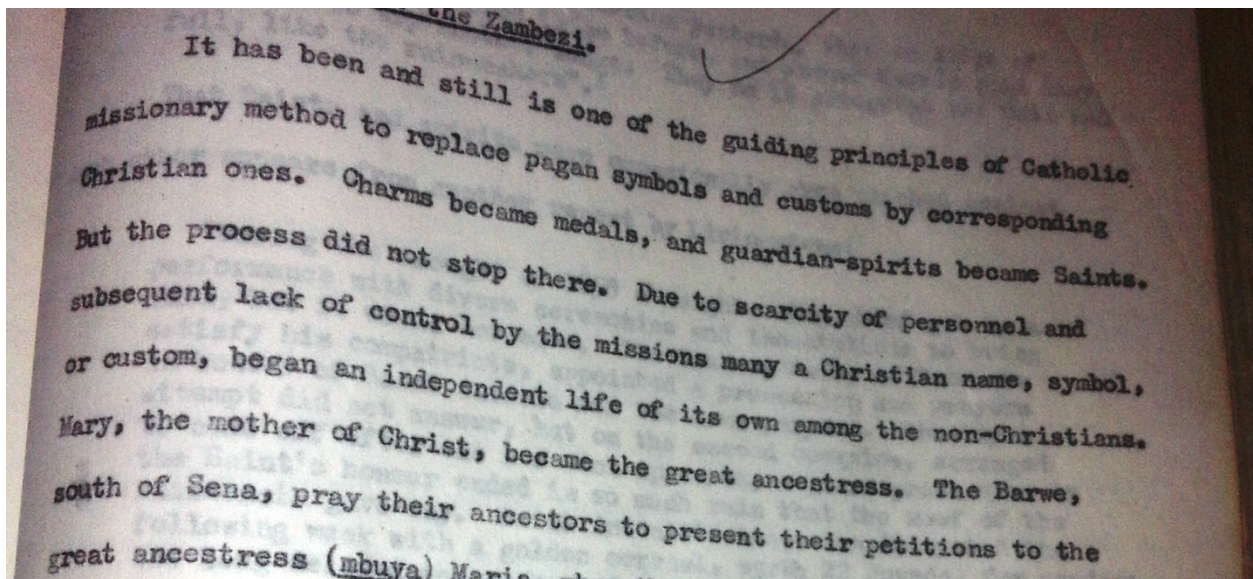


Extract 9: The analogy between the establishment of the church and the M'bona shrine

(Source: Schoffeleers, 1968:374)

It is important to note that Khulubvi is at the foot of the mountain of Nsanje. This means that M'bona, unlike Jesus, wasn't hanged on the mountain. Secondly, the use of the word hanged is wrongly placed for M'bona because M'bona's killing wasn't by hanging. Thirdly, the mountain of Nsanje is not as significant as Golgotha in the M'bona narratives, and is rarely mentioned. Fourthly, Jesus's skull wasn't buried under the pole of a hut or his cross according to Christian narrative.

Iconographical interpretation largely depends on the viewer's association of the present with the past, which is constructed by cultural beliefs, values and personal experiences. In most cases, the subject in view is excluded from opinion. The fact that Matthew Schoffeleers had a Christian background is a very good reason why he was able to relate his Christian beliefs with the M'bona beliefs. While he makes these associations, the M'bona advocates are excluded from this mental exercise that might end up with biased interpretations/conclusions, or misrepresentations. Extract no 9 above illustrates my point. Another tendency that has led to such misinterpretations is the practice of 'baptizing' 'pagan' beliefs into Christian beliefs. By the end of the day, the missionaries, especially Catholics, perceive other religions as doing the same. The Extract 10 below reveals this tendency.



Extract 10: Christianization of African beliefs by the Roman Catholics

(Source: Schoffeleers, 1968:370)

Allegations by Europeans colonizers, missionaries and anthropologists that African natives copied Christian religious beliefs are not only manifested in Malawi but in other parts of Africa as well.⁴¹

A discussion on my fieldwork

Before going into fieldwork, my views about M'bona were largely taken from Schoffeleers' writing. I discovered that these views were not accurate; I had believed that the story that M'bona was born through virgin birth was the accepted by the elders of the cult, and I thought that Schoffeleers was just puzzled to encounter another virgin birth prophet that he couldn't accept. The fact that he gathered many versions of the M'bona story and concluded that they were inconsistent and therefore not reliable enough to prove M'bona's historical existence made me assume that, perhaps, M'bona was just a title, not a single personality. This, I discovered, was not an accurate reflection.

My fieldwork was done for 12 days at Zomba, Blantyre and Khulubvi. More details about the interviews are contained in the appendix (Appendix A).

The versions that I obtained from the elders at Khulubvi during my field research interviews are different from the material used by Schoffeleers and that formed the basis of his comparative analysis. I outline these differences below:

- virgin birth of M'bona, which was believed to be a copied belief from Christianity;
- his claimed martyrdom, which was likened to Jesus' martyrdom;
- an analogy drawn between the establishment of the shrine and events surrounding the establishment of the church;

The following quotation reveals that claims that African Indigenous religions copied Christian beliefs are common in other parts of Africa not only in Malawi⁴¹

The early and later Christian missionaries wrote to fight traditional religions primarily as an obstacle which hindered the way to the total evangelization of Africans. When this failed, the later missionaries devised a new strategy by baptizing (reinterpreting) the salient features of the religion as a form of evangelization of the pagans. The colonial officers too, had carried out some field work. Some of the amateur ethnographers, and anthropologists among the colonial military and civil administrators included Sir Alfred B. Ellis. He served both in Nigeria and Ghana. The officers too wrote under the inspiration of their armchair research at home and tried to elucidate the native's idea about religion and magic. Ellis, for example wrote that the Akan Supreme Being is a recent introduction by Europeans. The idea was introduced by European. (Gbenda n.d:8) Read more from the following address:<http://studylib.net/doc/8241295/the-impact-of-colonialism-on-african-indigenous-religion>

- the change of gender from a female prophet to a male prophet, which was taken to be evidence of an appropriation of Christ as a male prophet;
- the altered age and marital status of M'bona, which was seen as an effort to claim Christ-like humble and innocent characteristics;
- claims of M'bona as a son of God, which were likened to Jesus' claims.

I have added another version labelled (IV) in table 1 below. This version has been adopted because it was narrated in the presence of all elders of the cult, thus surrounding Khulubvi with Mbukwa's approval as the oldest member of the cult who was also interviewed by Schoffeleers.

Amongst my interviewees in Blantyre, there was one member who narrated the virgin birth version, but this version was opposed by fellow members. Again, another member, a political science student, Chifundo Mlambe from Chanco in Zomba, who is also an advocate of M'bona (interviewed on 27 December 2016) confessed that he read about the virgin birth in Schoffeleers' book, and believed it to be true, but he had never had the chance to gain any alternative information from the elders⁴². According to my field findings, it has been revealed that the beliefs which were attached to the M'bona religion as originating from Christianity, such as the virgin birth of M'bona, M'bona as the son of God, and celibacy, do not exist within the belief system. These beliefs were the making of Chapirira as he tried to claim for M'bona what the azungu (white people) claimed for Christ, as one can observe from the Extract 11, In this case, and according to the current elders, adopting ideas of one ambitious elder for the whole belief system was not an accurate representation.

⁴²He said that the problem with their M'bona religion is that it doesn't have a canon for reference, so people learn about the beliefs from different oral sources or other written sources.

369

virgin-birth and hence a physical relationship to Mulungu, he does so because of his special interest in the matter. Being an ex-church member himself and one of the prominent figures in M'Bona's cult, he is anxious to claim for M'Bona what the azungu (Europeans) claim for Christ. Other sources, as we have seen, mention the name of M'Bona's father. Capirira claimed that Mulungu was his direct father, and his contention points to the fact that parallels with Christ can be drawn and are constantly being drawn. This includes even the pre-figurations of Christ, of which the Abel motif is an example.

It could be objected that for one thing the married state of M'Bona certainly conflicts with the virginity of Christ. But then the marriage aspect receives little attention in M'Bona's life story. Women play no essential rôle in his earthly life at all. It will be remembered that among the rock imprints along the route of his flight, there are none ascribed to his wives. What matters in the comparison between M'Bona and Christ are the prophetic and messianic characteristics, based on a special relationship with Mulungu, and it is this relationship which is re-asserted under Christian influence as one between father and son.

Extract 11: Chapirira's personal ambitions to claim for M'bona what the whites claimed for Christ

(Source: Schoffeleers, 1966:369)

In the table below it is noted that version IV is a balance of all the three versions, which seems to suggest that Chakanza or Rangeley’s individual versions might not be a synthesis of different traditions as Schoffeleers suggests, but arising by chance. Separating fiction from fact might be done without necessarily constructing an independent version. According to my findings, there are no pure versions as classified by Schoffeleers (eg I, II and III), which might suggest that these versions were tailored for a purpose to show historical changes in succession as a way of proving that the M’bona people have been adopting Christian beliefs progressively over some time. However, the disparities on ancestors and origin might well be a consequence of misinformation or an effort by some people who wanted to claim direct relation to M’bona (for example, Chapirira), but not necessarily likening M’bona to Jesus. My version is very close to Chakanza’s version. The fact that this is a raw version from Khulubvi forest elders suggests that Chakanza did little to change the story.

Table : Comparison of characteristics from M’bona narratives

	Marital status	Homeland	Ancestry	Identity of main antagonist	How he was killed and where his head was buried	Establishment of the Shrine	Events
M’bona I (Schoffeleers, 1992:142-147)	Adult with several wives.	Kaphirintiwa.	Chipeta tribesman - (<i>His Mother Chembe and his father Chingala</i>).	His half-brother whose name is not mentioned.	Killed by metal weapons in unknown forest.	Initiative of local population.	Involved in a poison ordeal but deployed some tricks and fled.
M’bona II (Schoffeleers, 1992:142-147)	Adult with one wife.	North Western rim of the valley (Shire Valley).	From Phiri Clan, and maternal nephew of Kaphwiti.	Chief Kaphwiti and Uncle, also known as Mlauli in other books.	Killed by metal weapons and head buried in Shire Valley.	M’bona’s initiative with no cooperation of the King.	Accused of using sorcery to disable his uncle’s rainmaking powers. Refused the poison ordeal. Miraculously turned into vapour, guinea fowl or trees to hide from pursuing enemies.
M’bona III (Schoffeleers, 1992:142-147)	Child or childlike person.	Shire Valley.	Maternal nephew of Chief Lundu the first. (<i>His mother Tundu bore him out of wedlock through virgin birth</i>).	Chief Lundu.	Killed with a grass stem and metal weapons, head buried in South bank of Zambezi river, died a martyr death.	M’bona’s initiative: the king ordered to cooperate.	Performed a number of food miracles to keep himself and mother alive during flight. Created a paddy field. The poison ordeal is omitted.

M'bona IV Field version	Adult with one wife.	Kaphirintiwa, but fled to the South while running away from his kinsmen, the Chipeta, who wanted to kill him.	Chipeta tribesman (<i>His mother is Nyangu and his father's name is not known but he had a father</i>).Lundu was his uncle.	Chief Lundu, also known as Mlauli.	Killed with <i>Nansongole</i> by stabbing him on the head and cutting his neck with a sugarcane sheath. He was killed at Ndione but his head was buried at Khulubvi forest where the shrine is.His enemies caught him sleeping when he was too tired to run further.	M'bona's initiative. The King ordered to cooperate.	No poison ordeal. With several miracles mentioned but different from those by Jesus.
Joseph Chakanza's Version, collected from N'gabu (Schoffeleers, 1992:247)	Adult with one wife.	Kaphirintiwa, but fled to the South, after a quarrel with chief Changamire.	Lundu is his maternal uncle, but surprisingly mentions Tengani as M'bona's father.	His elder brother, but name not mentioned.	Killed him with a <i>Nansongole</i> leaf, cut off his head with a knife and buried it at Khulubvi, but after some time.	M'bona's initiative; no ordering of the King to cooperate.	The miracle of the rice field. No poison ordeal mentioned.
Rangeley (1953)	Adult with several wives.	Kaphirintiwa, but descended to the South.	Lundu, his maternal uncle, his father Chingale, and his mother Cembe.	Chief Lundu.		M'bona's initiative with no involvement of the King.	The poison ordeal is mentioned.

M'bona's martyrdom

According to the Cambridge dictionary, a martyr is a person who suffers very much or is killed because of religious or political beliefs he or she upholds, and is often admired because of this. David Eastman of the Society of Bible Literature, in his article "Paul the Martyr; the Cult of the Apostle in the Latin West," has the following description of a martyr that is congruent with a Christian context:

The cult of the martyrs was one of the focal points of Christian piety in late antiquity. The basis of the cult was the belief that the martyrs (those who chose to die rather than recant their Christian faith) occupy a particularly elevated position in the spiritual hierarchy. Having voluntarily followed the example of Christ to the point of death, they reside in the presence of God and enjoy God's special favor. Although they are

physically dead, they remain alive and accessible to Christians who seek their intercession and assistance. (Eastman, 2011: 2)

Since the M'bona faith is accused of mimicking Christian beliefs, it is logical that the definition of martyrdom be from a Christian perspective. On the other hand, it would be illogical to assume that the elders of the M'bona faith knew all the definitions of martyrdom and would therefore have been careful not to accord with the Christian definition. It is also very important to note that seeking intercession from the spirits of the dead is a long lived African tradition.

M'bona's martyrdom according to Schoffeleers, has been considered thus on the grounds that he gave himself up to die and he represented human suffering (Schoffeleers, 1992:4). However, according to all versions of the M'bona story, M'bona was mainly celebrated for his rainmaking supernatural powers not his martyrdom. Unlike Jesus, his death or suffering is of secondary importance to the M'bona faith.

Schoffeleers assumed that M'bona was the cause of the dispute that separated the Chewa and the Man'ganja because he claimed that he was a son of Mulungu (God), which resulted in a dispute that made him run away⁴³. These assumptions stemmed from Chapirira's narratives (Schoffeleers, 1966:275). However, this was not the reason why he was killed, and there is no narrative that proves that M'bona died because he refused to denounce such a belief.

According to the definitions given above, Jesus (as interpreted in the Bible) died while advocating that he was the son of God, and indeed was martyred. This also applies to his disciples Stephen (Acts 7:54-60, *New King James Bible*) and Paul (Eastman, 2011:2), who died while advocating that Jesus was a true son of God. However, I have reservations regarding the accounts of M'bona's martyrdom.

Considering the definition of the word martyr as defined above, I am going to illustrate how M'bona was not a martyr (or, perhaps, he can be considered as a different kind of martyr from Jesus) by referring to the accounts by Rangeley (See Appendix E) and Chakanza (See Appendix D). According to these accounts, M'bona did not die because he refused to renounce any religious beliefs, like Paul and Stephen of the Bible. M'bona died because the king was jealous

⁴³D.D. Phiri claims that the separation of the Man'ganja and the Chewa came after a peaceful agreement (Phiri, 2004: 16).

of his capabilities as a rainmaker, and he tried to escape, only to be found by his enemies. While Jesus did not escape death, which is indirectly renouncing his right to live, M'bona did run away. This suggests that he did not want to die and he wasn't ready to submit his life to his enemies. He purportedly spent many days fleeing from his enemies with his mother, and covering very long distances in the hope of escaping his enemies for life (Schoffeleers, 1992:5). Chakanza states that:

As his enemies were still pursuing him despite the distances involved...

Upon reaching Ndione, M'bona felt very tired, but his enemies were still following him. It is true he had been using magic so that they had not been able to do anything as yet, but they were far from giving up. Feeling utterly exhausted and sympathizing with his enemies, he finally told them to do as they liked. (Schoffeleers, 1992:250)

Summary

In summary, Schoffeleers' concentration on Chapirira's Christianized versions, despite acknowledging that he was making deliberate moves to liken M'bona to Jesus, and also ignoring other elders who disapproved of Chapirira's versions, weakens his arguments that the advocates of the M'bona religion appropriated Christian beliefs. In addition, his categorizing of the story – as in versions I, II, III – is not very convincing since there is too much overlap in the narratives. On another note, he is not certain about the dates of his historical retrieval of the claimed changes within the belief system. Mostly, his iconographical interpretations of some beliefs and events seem unreasonably influenced by his own Christian background. All this makes his work challengeable.

Thus, this is the background informing the artworks I have developed for the practical component of this degree.

CHAPTER 3

M'bona the Black Jesus of Malawi: Practical work

Introduction

The practical component for this degree takes the form of an installation of paintings and sculptures. As mentioned earlier, these paintings and sculptures present a challenge to Schoffeleers' interpretations of the M'bona beliefs. As a Malawian artist, whose work is based on recent research, including fieldwork and oral histories, I feel it is imperative to present an alternative view to Schoffeleers' missionary and anthropological account, and his colonial interpretation and representation of African cultures.

In the paintings, I create complex pictorial scenes that visualise the M'bona beliefs and my concepts regarding Schoffeleers' interpretation of them. I do this primarily through a combination of symbolic iconography and colour, and by asserting the material texture and three-dimensionality of the canvas surface. The paintings create narrative worlds in which the sculptures are related, and in which they are physically situated. The sculptures are rendered in clay, with one exception that is cast in bronze. Some found material is included such as leaves, drift wood, seedpods, plastic and wood animals. The sculptures depict key figures in the faith: M'bona, Salima – his symbolic wife, Chief Lundu who murdered M'bona, and the particular values ascribed to them. Surrounding the M'bona figure are smaller non-naturalistic figures which are intended to embody the imaginative realm in which mourners of M'bona are represented.

To the best of my knowledge, there is no body of artwork specifically created to represent the M'bona religion. Some depictions of particular aspects of M'bona exist in Malawi, but they do not add up to a consolidated attempt to create a world that challenges the colonial interpretation perpetrated by Schoffeleers.

I am of the conviction that one of the vital functions of art is to embody society's beliefs; my installation is therefore intended as a visual interpretation, representation and preservation of some of the unique cultural values and beliefs of the Mang'anja people, and by extension, of Malawi as a country. I intend to install the work in Malawi in a manner that locates it as a

heritage project. I would like the site of the installation to be accessible for broad public appreciation. The M'bona beliefs are deep, rich and complex, so much so that this paper cannot uncover all the exciting aspects, events and values of the faith. My wish is to continue researching and working on the project after completion of this degree.

In addition to discussing my paintings and sculpture, I also refer to works by two South African artists. I have selected particular examples of their work. The artists are Jackson Hlungwani and Richard Baholo. Their work relates to my project, both formally and conceptually. What makes them particularly distinctive and important to my project is that they also reference autochthonous spirituality, lineage and oral tradition, with and without techniques or approaches that can be associated with Western traditions of art making and the influence of the Christianization.

Jackson Hlungwani (1923-2010) was a spiritual leader and healer who lived in Mbhokota near Elim in the Northern Province. His work references both Tsonga spirituality and Christianity. What appear as individual pieces were part of large installations embodying his cosmology and situated in the rural area in which he lived. Curator Lesley Spiro Cohen describes Hlungwani as having adopted Christian beliefs at a moment of ill health and despair after a vision, and that he was ordained in the African Zionist Church in 1946, later founding his own church, "Yesu Galeliya One Aposto in Sayoni Alt and Omega" in Mbhokota at sites in the Northern Province, which he named New Jerusalem and New Canaan, and for which he produced much of his sculpture (Borman, n.d).

In her article entitled, 'Jackson Hlungwani's Altars: An African Christian Theology in Wood and Stone', Anitra Nettleton, a professor of Art History at the University of the Witwatersrand, describes how Hlungwani synthesizes aspects of Tsonga spirituality with Christianity in the production of unique sculpture that she identifies as having been consciously made as art, and argues that his iconography is distinct from orthodox Christian dogmas (Nettleton, 2009:n.p.).

I find Hlungwani's work both indirectly and directly relevant to my project. In both contexts, there is reference to Biblical sources in relation to indigenous religious beliefs. Hlungwani chooses to embrace Christianity, while my presentation expresses rejection of Christianity by the M'bona people. Either way, a concern with Christianity pertains. While I seek to intentionally draw a line between the M'bona beliefs and Christianity, Hlungwani sought to synthesize aspects

of Christianity and Tsonga spirituality. Both Hlungwani and I set out to create an original interpretation of indigenous spirituality through artwork.

Although creating altars for his church and religious sculptures for teaching and sale, Hlungwani also avoided illustrative Christian art. Hlungwani's two installations, *The Altar of Christ* and *The Altar of God* (see Illustration 5)⁴⁴ are meant to tell a story of God or Jesus in relation to Tsonga culture and spirituality, including the artist's values and experiences as a black man, and not necessarily conforming to the Bible narrations (Nettleton, 2009:n.p).

Our installations include key iconic figures to complete a personal interpretation, without necessarily following the narrative of the long-established tradition. For example, in the killing of M'bona installation, I juxtapose the dead body of M'bona with the seated figure of Chief Lundu, M'bona's killer. This particular situation never happened according to traditional M'bona narrations. Similarly, with *The Altar of God*, Hlungwani gathers together Christ, Cain, Cain's son, Cain's aeroplane, Angel Gabriel, a Shangaan Warrior, a God and Christ Panel, and Jonah's fish (Nettleton, 2009). Thus, while the individual figures have a biblical source, placing them in this particular configuration is alien to the narration of stories in the Bible.



Figure 5: The Altar of God, Jackson Hlungwani
(Source: Nettleton, 2009)

⁴⁴Described as a healer, preacher and visionary, in addition to being a sculptor, Hlungwani created a unique world for himself in Limpopo, on a hilltop at Mbhokota village, 38 kilometres from Makhado, formerly the town of Louis Trichardt. He constructed a rocky pilgrimage route, leading to what he called "New Jerusalem, the new country home of God and Christ", where he displayed several altar pieces, including his *Altar of God*, *Altar of Christ*, *Gabriel 11* and *Jonah's Fish*. People would come to the hilltop to be healed by him and learn about the gospel from him. He also carved his sculptures on the hilltop, and taught prospective artists how to sculpt. His New Jerusalem was built on an ancient site used over the past 1 000 years by Venda people, giving it special significance. Read more: <http://www.medioclub.co.za/culture/3923-jackson-hlungwani-s-a-new-jerusalem-comes-to-joburg#ixzz51Jk8ugt0>

Commenting on Hlungwani's practice, Nettleton writes that Hlungwani's sculpture is a protest against a Christian attitude that tended to emphasize incompatibility between indigenous religious practice and Christianity (Nettleton, 2009). In a way, Hlungwani sought to elevate his indigenous beliefs by giving them an equal status to Christian beliefs. A very good example is the theme of Cain on the altar of God, described by Nettleton as follows:

The figure of Cain is carved so that an original tree trunk provides the basic torso, and its two branches, the legs. The figure has a carved skirt around the hips, and a carved bag suspended from the shoulder and resting on the right knee, elements which, with the sandals on the large feet, are ethnically located in Tsonga-Shangaan male dress, and within a contemporary African context. This large figure contrasts with the tiny figure of Abel (representing whites), tied to the Aerial of God, and through which Hlungwani reflects South Africa with its radicalized fault-lines cutting through religious practice.
(Nettleton, 2009)



Figure 6: Cain on the Alter of God
(Source: Nettleton, 2009)

According to Nettleton, Cain's aeroplane is a long canoe-like shaped fish with a number of compartments. She suggests that Hlungwani is giving Cain the power of flight, analogous to Gabriel's power. Cain has been given a special place on this altar because he is believed to be the ancestor of the black race. The aeroplane given to Cain gives him back the power to be on the same levels with the celestial beings like Christ and Gabriel. Surprisingly, Gabriel has no wings

on this altar (Nettleton, 2009). The fact that Gabriel has no wings, and does not have an aeroplane, might suggest that Cain, representing the black race, has more power than Gabriel.

I relate to Hlungwani's noncompliant attitude, which I see as questioning colonial religious dogma. Rather than abandoning and despising our indigenous beliefs, which were largely condemned by the missionaries, we assert our beliefs. This attitude to Christian beliefs is evident in my painting *Sabotage* where I present the Christian faith and the M'bona faith as being on the same level. To me, both are based on beliefs that are difficult to prove scientifically. Secondly, both of them have been accused of copying beliefs from other faiths. While Schoffeleers and other missionaries have accused the M'bona faith of being fake and mimicry of Christian beliefs, the Christian faith has been accused of copying Horus beliefs from Egypt.

Hlungwani incorporates natural objects like stone as part of his installation. He sees such objects as an integral part of the cosmology that he is creating. He cannot allow his sculptures to be separated from particular stones, as these rocks are related to the sacred ground which activates the altar⁴⁵ (Nettleton, 2009). While the leaves and twigs I use in my installation are not from a sacred site, it is important to me that they evoke the meaningful, un-swept natural environment of the sacred grounds of Khulubvi forest.

My work resonates with Hlungwani's installations more generally in the importance given to the imagination in the production and placement of the figures and objects. But the symbolic associations of the materials in which the figures are created is also key. While Hlungwani carves in wood, I usually model in clay. Both wood and clay are from the earth, and both have been historically important to African art. Hlungwani's wood sculptures seem to be fashioned in a way that acknowledges the tree as its source, and in a manner that lets the tree live on. The form of the original log is present in the figures. This has resonance somehow in my clay pieces, especially those that represent trees and other forms of nature. Although I have been exposed to Western art history, ideas and techniques, and he developed his sculptural language and technique from inherited traditional methods without formal training, there is correspondence in how we treat material. The picture below shows two wood pieces, '*The Leg of God with Eggs*' and '*A Face of God*' by Hlungwani, and my piece '*We are doomed*' in clay.

⁴⁵ The altars no longer exist in Mbhokota, but seem to now be divided between collections of the Johannesburg Art Gallery and Wits Art Museum.



Figure 7:Hlungwanis two pieces, God and the leg of God and my piece We are doomed
(Nettleton, 2009:n.p)

Richard Kersom Baholo’s project entitled ‘Pictorial Response to Certain Witchcraft Beliefs within Northern Sotho Communities’, which he submitted for a Master of Fine Art at Michaelis in 1994, is another interesting engagement with autochthonous spirituality that relates to my project. As a Christian, he grappled with his anxiety about witchcraft in Batlokwa society, while acknowledging that it was an integral part of him, expressing this through a series of paintings.

Having grown up in this society where witchcraft beliefs are predominant, my fears, as a child, of witches were very real. In later life I have attempted to ignore these fears. However, I do not think they will ever disappear entirely, as I will never be able to extricate myself from my origins. This experience of the dangerous witch is one of the reasons that compelled me to respond pictorially to some of these perceptions for the purpose of highlighting the concerns of ordinary people and the extent to which they have been affected by belief in witchcraft. My paintings are a translation of real and unreal incidents fused together producing a visual narrative (Baholo, 1994:5).

From the above statement, you may notice a conflict that dominates Baholo’s pictorial response his beliefs with regards to witchcraft as an adult, and his beliefs with regards to witchcraft as a child, which seem to never reach a compromise. While he tries to dismiss his anxiety about his childhood beliefs, these childhood fears never cease to be part of his adult life. This aspect of childhood memory seems to feature through his inclusion of children in a number of his paintings. The painting of witches eating human flesh, *Witches as Cannibals* below is expressive of his interest in witchcraft. The painting reflects the perception “within Batlokwa society that

witches live on human flesh” (Baholo, 1994:42), and the witches are depicted in the painting as competing for their share of a newly buried child.



Figure 8: Witches Sharing meat by Baholo

(Source: Baholo, 1994:42)

Baby-Witch Training is an interpretation of a common Batlokwa narrative about witches.(Baholo, 1994:35).



Figure 9: Baby witch training

(Source: Baholo, 1994:42)

There are some things in connection to these witchcraft beliefs that registered in his mind as real incidents; situations that affected the people so much that he could not just dismiss everything as

imaginary. For example, real incidents of witch hunting and punishment that actually happened cannot be dismissed as with the beliefs about witchcraft, such as that witches fly at night. Similarly, there are some things about M'bona that cannot be easily dismissed as imaginary, for instance, the historical events that are connected to his existence. While Baholo's pictorial response seeks to translate these real and unreal incidents, fused together in his visual narratives that express his anxiety and imagination, the focus of my visual narratives is not on translating or fusing the real and unreal incidents about M'bona. This task was done by Matthew Schoffeleers in writing. Rather, my artworks are a reaction to his final interpretation and presentation of the translation or fusion of the real and the unreal incidents about M'bona.

In discussing divination and assumptions made regarding traditional healers and witchcraft, Baholo also challenges colonial interpretations:

Instead of being regarded as the genius of African societies, African colonial literature portrayed the medicine-person as a semi-allegorical figure portraying him or her as being in the way of civilization and forces of colonial light by acting or posing as a “sinister figure of the witch-doctor, the epitome of evil, primeval cunning and the dark forces of barbarism.” (Hammond-Tooke, 1994:103, in Baholo, 1994)

Curiously, it is Schoffeleers (quoted by Lagerwerf) that he refers to, suggesting that “today's African theologians are no longer hostile to traditional healers” (Lagerwerf, 1987:9, in Baholo, 1994:13). Baholo also acknowledges the role of political manipulation in a section headed, “Witchcraft and Apartheid – Some Tentative Links”.

Baholo found value in the recording of oral narratives to form his artworks. He describes this in considering the various mechanisms through which stories are recorded as historical facts.

Baholo writes:

This idea has informed my approach which is extended to include the assumption that the process of recording oral history is not only confined to oral transmission or written literature, but is also contained in the production of art and artifacts. By providing a visual dimension for these stories, my paintings are useful to me in the reconstruction of

aspects of Batlokwa history rooted in oral tradition. In this way, my pictorial representations provide visibility to what otherwise would remain only as mental images within an individual society. (Baholo, 1994: 9)

For similar reasons, I consulted the Mang'anja advocates of M'bona, and therefore find Baholo's comments very useful. Baholo continues: "The use of oral history in this project emphasizes the importance of obtaining information directly from informants and the need to find a method of presenting such information to the reader or viewer" (Baholo, 1994:9). Baholo also states that his paintings are to be seen as complementary to the oral and written accounts of Batlokwa society. As witchcraft is conditioned by secrecy, his only access to information was to listen to the accounts of individuals, or consult what he knew from common Batlokwa narratives (Baholo, 1994).

My project, in relation to the artists discussed above, illustrates three different ways in which Christianity has played a role in, or been assimilated into African spiritual life; how autochthonous spirituality remains present despite the introduction of Christianity, or the artist's faith; and, importantly, that art has been used in different ways to mediate the tensions that arise within this context.

Process, materials and methods used in my work

In the following section I discuss how my process of painting relates to my topic.

Using lots of paint mixed with glue, I attach a bigger stretchy canvas material onto a smaller inflexible thick cloth material in most of my paintings. This method allows much scope for manipulation, formal and symbolic, and to build up the three-dimensionality of the canvas. This gives the opportunity to use the basic element of my canvas as a concept.

According to the significance of heritage to my project, the concept of roots interpreted literally as a symbol of heritage is what I desire to attain through the three-dimensional aspect of my paintings. Some of the materials that I use to stuff parts of my canvas have symbolic value, along with the three-dimensionality of the surface. An example is *The Judeo-Christian Spectacles* (2017). In this work, the crosses depicted are emphasized through the way twigs have been stuffed under the surface of the canvas to evoke the material of the cross of Jesus. The irregular format of my canvases supports the evocation, as it suggests something organic and the potential to take any desired shape.

As mentioned, clay has a long tradition in African sculpture across the continent, with the symbolic value of originating as earth. My sculptures are mostly made of clay, except for one piece, *M'bona the rainmaker*, which is cast in bronze. I decided on bronze for this piece, partly because I needed a more durable material due to the delicate structure of the design⁴⁶, but also because, for the proportionately smaller figure depicting the living M'bona, a valuable metal with a long tradition in Africa seemed appropriate, signifying a great honour to the subject. In

⁴⁶Clay sculptors usually use armatures when they have to build higher or big, but these cannot be fired. Armatures can have a destructive effect on the sculpture during firing and are usually used when clay is to be cast into another material (bronze, synthetic materials). Very big sculptures are very challenging to produce in clay as they tend to collapse with weight that cannot be supported by wet clay. I found a way of building in sections using an architectural support approach. Refer to the figure below.



addition, bronze has been associated with durability and the representation of significant figures and heroes in the West, but also in Africa such as the Edo Benin court bronze plaques and portraits of the thirteenth century. A figure made in bronze could exist beyond the living, eternally. My effort to cast the Rainmaker in bronze is my way of honouring M'bona, the hero of the Man'ganja people.

My sculptures and paintings are presented in an installation that suggests a particular working of narrative that art historian Olu Oguibe describes as typical in African narrative art:

African narrative art is characterized by a complexity of style, iconography and functions, hence scholars of sub-Saharan African art often find it difficult to identify, interpret and appraise this fundamental genre of African art. This is especially true of scholars who utilize Western yardstick in their interpretations. Thus scholars pay a cursory glance at this aspect of African art or ignore it outright. (Oguibe, in Ebeigbe, 2015)

As my work combines abstract, realistic, imaginary and exaggerated forms and utilizes physical space, ambient light and colour, my installations might not be readily categorizable, as Oguibe suggests is the case with African narrative art. Facial expression is dominant in my paintings and every expression is intended to evoke a story, mood or character in connection to what is depicted around it. Symbolism is straightforward. If I portray someone as a chameleon, the viewer should be able to connect the subject with the behaviour of the animal, to interpret the character symbolized. Such symbolism is reflected clearly in *Sabotage!* (see illustration 14).

Installation of paintings – A Pictorial Research Project

The paintings contest Schoffeleers' ideas that claim that the M'bona faith appropriated Christian beliefs. My discussion of each painting is arranged in the order of a research essay layout: background information, the conceptual framework, research results and conclusion.

A background to the genesis of M'bona religious beliefs



Illustration 1: The Killing of M'bona (2016)

Medium: Acrylic on Canvas

Size: 2m x 1.2m

The Killing of M'bona (2016) is an interpretation of the murder of M'bona. The painting depicts the decapitation of M'bona and M'bona's mutilated body with blood flowing from it. The blood creates a river of blood that turns into water downstream. An unknown king's guard is depicted holding the head up in celebration of victory over M'bona. The other guard holds a bent knife that has failed to penetrate M'bona's magical body. In his other hand is a sugarcane sheath that, in the narrative, was finally used to kill M'bona. The downstream scenery is imagined focusing on people's surprise that a river has emerged out of nowhere forming a large pool that references Ndione, a pool that still exists to this day. The river comes with its usual adornments: different species of fish and crocodiles terrorizing people, a situation that still pertains at the Ndione pool in a contemporary context. On the left are mourners crying for the rainmaker, and in the trees are the ancestors, angry about the evil act that has transpired. The rocks in the river show M'bona's footprints. The footprints represent a belief that M'bona left them on rocks in his flight. The mourners cry for the rainmaker. In their tear drops are pictures of the rainmaker performing his duties. Every facial expression has a message or character, although the message is as much at the viewer's discretion as what I have intended.

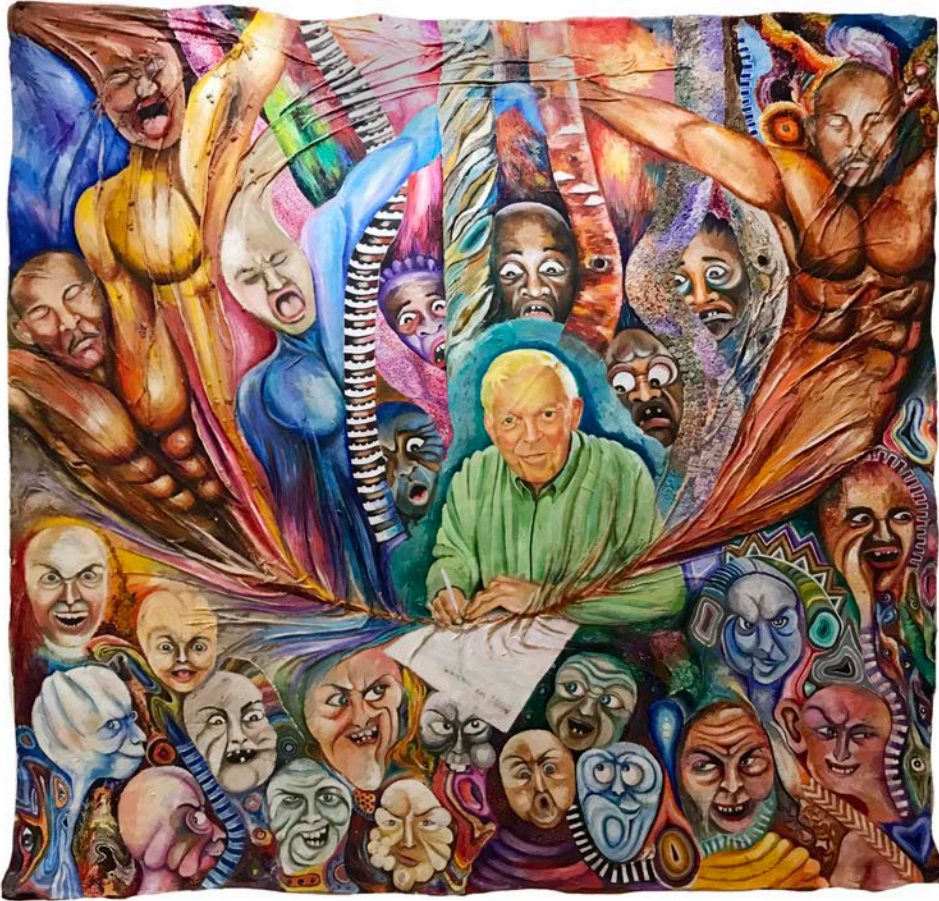


Illustration 2: The Whites were more cunning than the Blacks (2016)

Medium: Oil on Canvas

Size: 2mx 2m

The source for the work is Matthew Schoffeleers' statement: "Although both sons were first equally powerful, Christ had become the more prominent because the whites were more cunning than the Africans."⁴⁷ The painting refers to my assumptions before going into the field. After reading different versions of the story of M'bona, I assumed that M'bona was just a title that was assumed by different people in succession. In the painting, Matthew Schoffeleers is pictured in the act of converging the three personalities of M'bona into one personality through his writing; the three basic personalities of M'bona are ascribed to the same person. I have portrayed this act of combining personalities as a

⁴⁷Schoffeleers, M.J. (1992). *River of Blood: The Genesis of a Martyr Cult in Southern Malawi*.

cunning imposition onto M'bona faith. Further, the idea of cunningness is extended to the way 'cunning' whites are depicted in the section just below Schoffeleers, mockingly portraying cunning expressions on their faces. It is suggested that they are cunningly working under the roots – the roots in this case refer to the ancestors of the black people represented by the three M'bona figures in the painting. The figures with surprised facial expressions behind Matthew Schoffeleers are the black people depicted as having just discovered that their autonomy has been lost to Christian missionaries.

Problems with interpretation



Illustration 3: The Judeo-Christian Spectacles

Medium: Oil on Canvas

Size: 3mx3m

Schoffeleers appears again in *The Judeo-Christian Spectacles* (2017) and *A Twist of Tales* (2017). *The Judeo-Christian Spectacles* refers to the main problem with the interpretation of M'bona

beliefs by Matthew Schoffeleers, with even the trees Christianized into crucifixes. (Refer to Robert Horton's argument in Chapter 2).

The figure of Schoffeleers is seen as he looking through spectacles through which everything is Christianized. This is symbolized by the reflection of the crosses on everything he sees. The irises of his eyes have crosses; a way to depict the imprint of his Christianized vision of M'bona beliefs. Unlike in my other paintings where trees are vertical, trees here look like crosses. The people in black adopt reprimanding gestures and represent the elders of the M'bona faith, who resist the Christianized versions of the M'bona story. In the lower register of the painting lies M'bona. His prostrate body suggests a Christianized image of Christ's dead body, because this is how he has been disguised in Schoffeleers' writing to mimic the body of Christ. The skull with a cross represents how Matthew Schoffeleers compared M'bona's death to that of Christ's; that M'bona's skull was buried under a tree, and so connected to Golgotha (the place of Christ's death), which means 'place of skulls' (Refer to extract no 9). All the other figures with different facial expressions (despair, surprise, anger) represent the mourners or the followers of M'bona. The big eyes with Christianized irises represent a horrifying domination of Christianized ideas in the story of M'bona.



Illustration 4: Atwist of tales (2017)

Medium: Oil on canvas

Size: 2x4 metres

A Twist of Tales reflects the results of my research challenging Matthew Schoffeleers' assertions that M'bona people appropriated Christian beliefs. Many elements of the M'bona story were misrepresented or twisted, either through iconographical interpretation that was influenced by a Christian background by Matthew Schoffeleers, or out of self-defense in the case of his main informant Chapirira.

In the centre of the painting, Schoffeleers is depicted in the act of writing on the influence of Christianity on M'bona. Schoffeleers is the only figure painted realistically. This is because, unlike the M'bona faith advocates who do not have a written canon, he is the only person whose story is known to the world through what he wrote that became adopted as the M'bona canon. His facial expression looks cunning at the same time, he expresses a brilliance. Everything in the painting seems to be gravitating around him as its centre. Lines are twisted in the process, reflecting that he has colonized the story; it does not belong to M'bona anymore. The grey twisted figure is M'bona himself. The tree with many faces and babies growing on it represents his ancestors, whose identity has been confused with a representation of different characters from the many versions. The three blue twisted monkey-like figures with evil looking faces represent M'bona's killers; their identity keeps changing. On the far right are three figures in a romantic pose that represents M'bona's confused marital status. On the far left there is a lady giving birth, an image which stands for Schoffeleers' misrepresentation of M'bona's birth. Below this figure, there is Salima whose character is Christianized as a catholic nun (Schoffeleers, 1992:4). The fire ball on the far right represents the great liberation of power from the river of blood formed after the killing of M'bona. This has been likened to liberation of power through the bloodshed of Jesus by Schoffeleers (Schoffeleers, in Ranger, 1975:16). The little figures stand for the people of M'bona who reacted with surprise to developments concerning the documentation and representation of their beliefs.

During my field interviews with the elders of the M'bona faith, I briefly explained at the end of the interview how Matthew Schoffeleers presented the M'bona story in writing. After hearing this, they were surprised that they were portrayed as mimics of the Christian faith.

Conclusion



Illustration 5: Sabotage! (2016)

Medium: Acrylic on board

Size: 1.3x .8m

Sabotage! Is a conclusion and is the smallest painting.

The painting captures my personal feelings about the whole scenario of Christians and other religions. To be precise, I feel that what Matthew Schoffeleers and other missionaries did, or do, is sabotage as explained in the following paragraph.

For a religious group to maintain a large following, the followers have to believe that there is truth in their beliefs. Any serious questioning of the beliefs that brings about doubts results in a loss of followers. After the missionaries accused the M'bona people of their religion being baseless and copying Christian beliefs, the M'bona people lost their followers. Generally, Christians claim that their religion is the only one that holds the truth. To me, the scenario of Christians and other religions accusing one another of being inauthentic is like having lizards accusing chameleons of committing an offence of camouflage.

In the painting, the Judge is Schoffeleers (a lizard in judicial attire) passing judgement on M'bona (the chameleon on the chair). The onlookers on the floor behind M'bona are his followers while those on the chairs behind Schoffeleers represent the missionaries. The

suspended heads represent the ancestors who witness the scene but stay silent. On the three crosses, different religions appear in the form of chameleons (capable of camouflaging), with Christianity in the middle as the original religion. Others on the sides are thieves just like the M'bona faith who are accused of appropriating Christian beliefs.

This whole scene is also my reaction to the hypocrisy reflected by Christian missionary anthropologists, who try to disapprove of other religions using scientific methods, despite the fact that any faith, by its very definition, cannot be proved scientifically.

Sculpture

There are three main sculptural installations. In all the works, I have aimed to represent the core beliefs of the M'bona faith and, in so doing, conserve them in a tangible form for cultural heritage. The ideas reflected in the works were narrated to me by the elders of the M'bona faith in December 2016. I have made a concerted effort to reflect the ideas from elders in as authentic a way as possible, but the artworks also are clearly manifestations of my own imagination.

During my field research, I presented photographs of my paintings to the elders of the faith and explained the meaning behind them. There was no objection to any form of the representation or presentation. I reflected on why they did not contest any aspect of my depictions of their spirituality, and came to the conclusion that their acquaintance with the Nyau mask dancers (also known as Gule wamkulu) of the Chewa⁴⁸ would have made them familiar with the way visual form can embody spiritual belief. Nyau mask dancing is still practised amongst the Man'ganja, although it is diminishing.

⁴⁸ Nyau mask dancing is practiced by a semi-secret men's association of the Chewa clan (especially in rural areas) that traditionally have its meetings close to the graveyard. It is a dance that is intended to teach culture and moral behaviour. Usually, the teaching of good behaviour is illustrated through displaying opposite but extremely bad behaviour. The missionaries misunderstood this practice and took it as a national evil to their own advantage (Curran, 1999:1).

Nyau Masks and Ritual Author(s):

Douglas Curran. Source: *African Arts*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Autumn, 1999), pp. 68-77 Published by: UCLA James S. Coleman African Studies Center. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3337711> Accessed: 10-12-2017 22:13 UTC.



Figure 10: The Nyau mask dancer

(Source: Curran,1999:69)

I also had an advantage in that there are no artistic representations preserved by the faith, that is, visual templates through which old ideas can be entrenched. Even though the elders were not able to see photographs of the sculptures (which were created after our meeting), I feel confident that their approval of the paintings will transfer to the sculptures, because the latter are three-dimensional versions of the former. For instance, the little figures referred to as mourners can be seen in both paintings and sculptures. The same is true of the depiction of the dead M'bona and the river of blood.

M'bona the Rainmaker

This Sculpture is about M'bona as the rainmaker, and an intercessor between God and the Man'ganja clan.



Illustration 6: M'bona the rainmaker (2016)

Medium: Bronze

Height: 1.7m

M'bona the rain maker presents a male figure cast in bronze. He raises his hand and holds a knife, the point of which transforms into a lightning bolt that emerges from the cloud hovering above. The scene depicts M'bona's supernatural powers of rainmaking, a central belief of the M'bona faith. *Ka mtambo ndi yaka ndi yako kanya mvula ndi koti ka mtambo?* Translated into English the phrase means: This cloud and that cloud, which one produced the rain? As M'bona followers sang these songs, they clapped their hands and beat their drum, while M'bona kept on

dancing, shouting, jumping up and down. In his hand was a dagger known as Kandaranga. The dagger pointed in all directions; north, south, east and west. Then it shifted in the direction depicted in the artwork. It is said that M'bona kept on doing this until the rains started, accompanied by fierce lightning and thunder, and everyone would run away to their houses.

The sculpture of M'bona has been fashioned to portray M'bona as a hero of the Man'ganja. The pose, the shout as in a wide open mouth, and the body muscles shaped to emphasize this point.

The Killing of M'bona

This tableau deals with the aspect of M'bona's death, which marked the beginning of M'bona faith. Due to his rainmaking capabilities, Chief Lundu, who had lost his rainmaking ability, grew jealous of M'bona and dispatched men to kill him. On his death, M'bona was decapitated. Blood oozed from his head and body, forming a pool that started flowing like a river running downstream and turned into an actual river of fresh water. As noted earlier, this pool still exists and is referred to as the Ndione pool. 'Ndione' means 'see me'. The pool was named in this way because it is the place where M'bona was found sleeping before he was killed by his enemies. The body of M'bona was buried at Ndione, where he died, but his head was buried at Khulubvi forest, where the first shrine was built by Chief Lundu as instructed by M'bona just before he died.

The tableau comprises two life size human figures. One figure depicts a fat man seated on a chair. He holds a bloody dagger. A human head lies on the floor beside him. This figure represents Chief Lundu, the killer of M'bona. The other figure is a headless body with some blood oozing from it. This figure represents M'bona. The blood forms a river. Surrounding both figures are ten small figures that represent mourners of the dead M'bona. When M'bona died, it rained for several days. This was followed by a severe drought that made people plead for the rainmaker. Chief Lundu, who was hesitant to build M'bona's shrine, was now forced to build it as the mourners were devastated by the drought.⁴⁹

Chief Lundu is presented in an attitude of anger, hatred and jealousy. He is holding a blood-stained knife, as a murderer of M'bona. His royal attire has thorns on the crown and the collar he is wearing, representing cruelty. A thorny tree is not friendly to climb. When its branches fall,

⁴⁹Matthew Schoffeleers found it awkward and nonsensical that the killer, Lundu, was responsible for building the shrine. He assumed that the elders of the cult twisted the story to liken M'bona to Jesus, whose voice was active in building the church.

they prick. Unfriendly people sting when they are unhappy. His legs lean on a form, a creature reminiscent of a skeleton, symbolizing death – there is death where he puts his foot down. He was perceived as a fierce ruler who could order war, or the death of an individual in no time.

The M'bona body lying close to Chief Lundu has roots coming out of its genitalia. This represents the ancestorship of the faith. The spirit mourners surrounding the dead body include humans and trees that were both affected by the death of the rainmaker. Their faces express deep sorrow, despair, shock and surprise, just as depicted in the paintings and sculptures.

Illustration 10: The Killing of M'bona (2017)

Medium: Clay







Illustration 11: The Mourners

Medium: Clay

Height for the tallest figure: 60cm

Lady Salima



Illustration 12: Lady Salima and M'bona Romancing (2017)

Medium: Clay

Height: 71cm

The Chichewa/Man'ganja word 'Salima' means 'one that does not till the ground.' With reference to the Man'ganja beliefs, the phrase means 'one that doesn't work.' Lady Salima is considered a queen mother and is not expected to work; everything is done for her, including cooking, cleaning of her utensils, washing of her clothes and all domestic work.

When Chief Lundu built the shrine of M'bona, M'bona's spirit came to him and requested a spirit wife, in human form, who would become M'bona's symbolic wife. Through this spirit wife, M'bona would be able to reach out to the people in need of help.

The installation of lady Salima comprises a female figure representing Salima. She is cuddling a snake. It is believed that M'bona comes every night in the form of a snake to romance his wife. This happens in spirit through dreams. The artwork presents the lovers as happy and smiling, holding each other, with M'bona's snake body coiled around her. Salima has roots coming out of her back to symbolize her core function in the faith. Her roots extend to connect her to the Khulubvi forest for the rest of her life. Without her, the faith cannot exist. She is a heritage to the M'bona spirit.

According to the beliefs of the faith, killing animals is not allowed, even those considered dangerous, like snakes and scorpions. They all live in harmony. . The ground at Khulubvi forest is never swept. This is depicted by the driftwood, seeds, pods and leaves all on the floor. It also relates to the difficulties I had choosing where to step in the forest when I visited the site for my field work. There are two pots close to Salima. One has a glass mirror inside with eyes popping out like fruit to represent her prophetic duties. She is considered as one with many eyes that can see the future.

Black is the symbolic colour of the faith. Black represents sorrow, and is worn by widows in Malawi. It symbolizes mourning that never ends. The mourning for the spirit of M'bona will never end. When I visited the shrine, I was taught to bare my breasts and only wear a black cloth from the waist down. This is how the people dress at the shrine, including lady Salima. Shoes are not allowed. People walk around barefoot, hence some shoes near the entrance. Bathing is done without soap, and any application of oil after bathing is not accepted either. Close to the shoes, there are some soap tablets and body oils inscribed with an X. When one is about to visit the lady Salima these rules are to be followed. Prior to the visit, you have to bath without soap and apply no oil on your skin.

Every year, the elders have a meeting to repair the house of M'bona and that of Salima. The house is always built in a temporary form. At the same meeting, prayers, beer and black cloth are offered as sacrifice to God through the spirit of M'bona for the rains and other problems they need rectified.



Illustration 10: Makewana as Salima

Medium: Clay

Height:91cm

‘Makewana’ means the mother of children in this context. The term Makewana exists among the Chewa religious beliefs with the same meaning. Salima, in this work, is symbolically referred to as Makewana for her motherly role amongst the Man’ganja. Makewana has a duty to take care of all the people, who are considered her children. In the artwork, this is represented by the many children she has around her suckling her breasts. She has many breasts because she is expected to reach out to every child who is hungry. Hunger in this context stands for needs.

CONCLUSION

A major concern with written accounts of African religions, like the M'bona beliefs, is that there is no accepted written canon, as in the Christian and other predominant faiths. The varying versions that arise out of oral tradition or anthropological and ethnographic research can be created out of misunderstanding, or deliberate personal ambitions, and misinterpreted through writers who neither speak the language nor are part of the culture. If it wasn't for the written canon, I believe that a similar thing could have happened to the Christian faith. Its accusers, for example, those who say that Christians copied Egyptian beliefs (Murdock and Acharya, 2009); (Graves, 2007) would have capitalized on this weakness to draw ambitious conclusions. In this document and in my artwork, I have argued and represented my reaction to the postulation made by Schoffeleers that the M'bona faith owes its genesis from appropriated Christian beliefs. The paintings make direct reference to Schoffeleers, and the sculptures have mainly dwelled on representing the alternative and acceptable beliefs sourced from literary research and interviews, and what has been endorsed by the current elders of the M'bona faith at Khulubvi forest in Nsanje District, their headquarters.

It is true that cultures do assimilate, but, without concrete historical evidence, sources of learning cannot be justified in the assumptions they make, especially where there seem to be several sources. The fact that Schoffeleers doubted the sources made it unfair for him to be confident in his conclusion that the M'bona religion's genesis was from Christian beliefs, and that it mimicked most of them. Moreover, he capitalized on Christianized views from one preferable elder, while ignoring the opposing non-Christian views from fellow elders. His methodology and interpretation were also questionable, as we have seen. In this regard, this research can also be seen as a part of the broader decolonising project. It records an apparently undocumented counter account by the elders and advocates of the M'bona faith, obtained in our common language of Chichewa, with their approval, and including that of an elder interviewed by Schoffeleers, Chief Mbukwa.

The hegemonic political environment that favoured Christians and doubted African religions made Schoffeleers' work less questionable than it might have been. Lack of contestation of his work has fortified his views as the only truth about the M'bona people's faith – that they are

highly influenced by Christian beliefs – and this is what the world has come to acknowledge. However, let it be known through this project that these views are contested and not acceptable to the current elders of the faith, and their wish is to be detached from Christian association. The followers are currently organizing their canon for publication.

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Figures

Figure 1: M'bona the Rainmaker

Malawi Institute of Education.(1985). *Ulendo Series, Mtunda 8, Chichewa for Standard 8*. Dzuka Publishing Company Limited.

Figure 2: A map of Southern Malawi

<http://www.geographicguide.com/africa-maps/malawi.htm>

Illustration 3: Chief Mbukwa in 1965

Schoffeleers, M.J. (1992). *River of Blood: The Genesis of a Martyr Cult in Southern Malawi, c. AD 1600*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Figure 4: Chief Mbukwa in 2016

Chikabadwa, E. 2016

Figure 5: The Altar of God

Figure 6: Cain on the Altar of God

Figure 7: Hlungwami's two pieces - God and The Leg of God

Nettleton, A. (2009). *Jackson Hlungwani's Altars: An African Christian Theology in Wood and Stone. Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief*, 5(1) (2009 Mar):50-69.

<http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=00389506-a08a-4084-a965-af74f541ceb2%40sessionmgr103>

Figure 8: Witches Sharing Meat

Baholo, K.R.(1994). *A Pictorial Response to Certain Witchcraft Beliefs within Northern Sotho*. MFA thesis. University of Cape Town.

Figure 10: The Nyau Mask Dancer

Curran, D. (1999). *Nyau Masks and Ritual*. *African Arts*, 32(3) (Autumn,1999): 68-77.UCLA James S. Coleman African Studies Center.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Version of the M’bona story derived from my field research

APPENDIX B: M’bona versions I, II and II according to Schoffleers

APPENDIX C: Chapirira and Kumbiwanyati

APPENDIX D: Chakanza version

APPENDIX E: M’bona the rainmaker, by Rangeley

This appendix section includes a version of the M’bona story that I got from my recent research with the elders of the M’bona faith in December 2016, a version by chief Chapirira (Schoffleers, 1992: 181), Joseph Chakanza (Schoffleers, 1992: 244) and Rangeley (Rangeley, in *The Nyasaland Journal* Vol 6, No.1.January 1953). The appendix also contains basic versions I, II, III as classified by Schoffleers (Schoffleers, 1992:142).

APPENDIX A: Version of the M’bona story derived from my field research (December 2016)

Amongst my main respondents there was Chief Mbangi (Pearson Genti), Chief Mbukwa (HenryMangechi), one of the chosen sons and chiefs of M’bona, Enock Henry (a son to chief Kombe) and Tate Fred Kwacha who is currently the chief elder of the M’bona faith. Fred Kwacha resides in Blantyre not Nsanje and I interviewed him separately. His story was the same with the other elders from Nsanje. According to my interviews with the elders of the cult, here is the story I got about M’bona with one narrator – Finiasi Kombe, while others stayed in check to correct where they felt the narrator wasn’t accurate:

M’bona was a son to a woman called Nyangu but his father’s name is not known although he had one. He descended from the Chipeta family of the Phiri clan which is one of the major two clans of the Chewa, the other clan is known as the Banda. He was married to one wife and had a son N’gabw who was the only child of M’bona. He was persecuted and executed by his tribesmen, the Chipeta. In his childhood, M’bona used to perform different miracles that were revealed by his friends to their parents. For example, as a child in a group, they used to watch over a herd of cattle, and rain would fall on the land but leaving them dry as a group around where M’bona was. Just before his death, there was famine in the land and the King (Chief Lundu) gathered the

villagers to offer a prayer sacrifice for the rains. When he performed a rain dance, God did not listen to the king since he abandoned him for unknown reasons. Then other people remembered M'bona who had proved to have supernatural powers and they suggested that he should dance instead of the King. When he danced, there was rain and the King grew jealous.

Regarding existing narratives, the elders dismissed the idea of a disobedient king's young son being killed by lightening as a fraud. They said that they had heard about this narrative but don't know how it came to be.

The elders also dismissed the story of the poison ordeal where M'bona was accused of bewitching his uncle Mlauli and an attempt was made to force him to drink poison, but he did not accept. Other versions say that he drunk it but he secretly took an antidote so he vomited. Both these versions were refuted by current elders.

Mlauli was identified as the same Chief Lundu since he was also a prophet. In this case Mlauli just means prophet.

When the king became jealous of M'bona, he sent him killers. He escaped with his mother into the forest covering a long distance. Before he died, he performed several miracles.

Unfortunately, M'bona was not meant to stay long; his enemies caught up with him sleeping and exhausted. Upon finding him, his enemies tried to kill him using metal weapons to no avail.

Then M'bona tired of being pursued, revealed a secret on how to kill him by means of a Nansongole seed stabbing him first on the head then using a sugarcane sheath to cut off his head.

He requested that his head should be buried at Khulubvi away from Ndione. This is a place where the shrine was built. When they killed him, a pool of blood formed which started flowing like a river and later on, turned into a real river of water. Up to date this pool is known as Ndione together with the river. This pool has a lot of fish because it is believed that fishing out more than one fish can lead to horrific experiences like fishing out a human head or a ghost baby.

I also had a chance to interview at greater length other advocates in Blantyre and Zomba. These are:

Mr Mlambe of Zomba – a student at Chancellor college, Masauko James N'gombe, Mr Nyangayabira, John Zyambo and Wilford Msambalima. Mr Msambalima narrated the story of

the virgin birth which was refuted by his colleagues including Mr Fred Kwacha through phone calls. However, Msambalima acknowledged that M'bona had a wife. Another detail that I noted is that Mr Mlambe, a strong advocate of the faith, still believes that M'bona was born through virgin birth. I suppose that he has never taken time to hear the story from his elders but was misled through hearsay and reading Schoffeleers', just as I was.

APPENDIX B: M'bona versions I, II and III according to Schoffeleers classification in terms of major differences in the oral traditions

Source: Schoffeleers (1992)

142 | THE MBONA CULT IN THE SHIRE VALLEY

circumstantial rather than direct evidence. In addition to this, such information as can be abstracted from these sources is, to use Willis' terminology, primarily of a qualitative kind, referring to social-evolutionary processes rather than discrete events.⁶ Given these provisos, however, it would seem that the Mbona material offers a suitable case against which to test de Heusch's central assumptions.

The argument will be developed in three parts. First, I shall introduce the principal versions of the Mbona myth and show how and to what extent they reflect the history we have dealt with in the previous chapters. In the second part, I turn to the cosmological aspects of these legends, asking in what sense they represent different worldviews and what historical factors may have given rise to this differentiation. In the third and final part, I return to de Heusch's assumptions to see how they stand up to these findings.

In the course of my fieldwork and by combing through the scarce literature on the subject, I have been able to collect some twenty versions of the Mbona story, seven of which are reproduced in the second part of this book. Although varying considerably in elaboration and content, they possess a common sequential structure which in essence consists of three elements. First, Mbona is invariably portrayed as a person who had power over the rains and who for that reason aroused the hostility of some rival. Second, all accounts tell us that he had to flee from his rival but that the latter managed to kill him in the end. Third, in all cases, it is mentioned that after the killing a shrine was built to his name and that by this act the beneficial powers he had possessed during his lifetime were perpetuated. This basic structure constitutes the minimal dogma shared by all who have an interest in the cult.

Turning our intention to the variations in these stories, we find that they relate to the location of Mbona's homeland, his ancestry and social personality, and the identity of his main antagonist. Other variations describe events said to have occurred at the time of his flight, the manner in which he was killed, and the manner in which the cult came to be instituted. Taken together, these variations fall into three distinct patterns. Labeling these Mbona I, II, and III, the following picture emerges.

MBONA I

In this stream, represented by Texts I/A and I/B, Mbona is said to have been a Chipeta tribesman from the area of Kaphirintiwa. Mbona was already a married man with several wives when a quarrel developed between him and someone else, one accusing the other of sorcery.

Since the person called upon to arbitrate in the matter was a rain priest (*msumphi*), it is likely that the kind of sorcery referred to had to do with withholding rain. When it remained unclear who the guilty party was, the arbitrator ordered both to undergo the poison ordeal. Some traditions have it that Mbona cheated by secretly taking an antidote which made him vomit; others hold that he objected to the ordeal, declaring it to be a human invention and therefore fallible. Whatever the case, the arbitration effort failed, and Mbona decided to flee to the Shire Valley with some of his followers. Although the two versions reproduced in Part 2 do not mention that he left imprints of his body and his weapons or utensils behind on rocky surfaces along the route, the theme of the imprints should nevertheless be considered as forming part of the Mbona I stream. This appears at its clearest when at the end of his journey he engraves the Chipeta tribal emblem on a rock boulder below Malawi Hill. The local population welcomed him, since he brought them regular rains, but his sojourn among them was not to last, for when his enemies discovered his whereabouts they came down to kill him. After the killing they cut off his head, which they then threw into a thicket, but local villagers buried the head and built a shrine over the place.

MBONA II

In this stream, represented by Texts II/A and II/B, Mbona is portrayed as a member of the aristocratic Phiri clan and a maternal nephew of Kaphwiti, the reputed founder of the earliest state system in southern Malawi. As a married man he was apprenticed to another uncle, who held the position of the chief's official rainmaker. Once, at the time of a great drought, the uncle performed the rain dance, but for the first time in his career without success. Explanations differ about the reason why. Sometimes it is said that Mbona had applied sorcery against him. Others maintain that Mbona made his uncle powerless by accusing him of making improper overtures to the women assisting at the dance.⁷ However this may be, Chief Kaphwiti, siding with his senior rainmaker, declared that Mbona merited death, and the latter thereupon took flight. On his way through the Shire Valley he managed time and again to elude his pursuers by changing himself and his followers into a misty vapor, a clump of trees, or a flock of guinea fowl. In the end, however, overcome with fatigue, he was caught. However much his assailants tried to kill him with their knives and spears, though, they were unsuccessful, because as soon as they touched his body they became limp and powerless. In the end Mbona himself told them to cut him with a blade of grass instead, and

in this manner they were finally able to kill him. As in the first group of traditions, the head was severed from the body, and a shrine was built over it by Mbona's sympathizers.

MBONA III

In this stream, represented by Texts III/A and III/B, Mbona's homeland is in the valley itself. He is said to have been the maternal nephew of the first Lundu king. Normally he would have been a candidate for succession to the kingship, but there were two obstacles. First, he was considered illegitimate, since his mother, whose name is mentioned as Tundu, had borne him out of wedlock. Second, although already an adolescent, his behavior was still that of a child, for contrary to accepted custom he continued to live in his mother's hut, whereas he should have been staying in a bachelor's hut like other youths. The king therefore despised him, but the ruler did not know that Mbona's mother had conceived him by the power of Mulungu, the Supreme Being, and that he was therefore a son of God.

At the time of a major drought, the king tried to perform the rain dance as he was used to doing, but this time the dance was unsuccessful. Other members of the royal lineage took their turn, also without success. The public then urged the king to let Mbona try, and the long-awaited rains finally began to fall. An accident happened, however, for in the course of the performance a lightning bolt killed the king's young son. The king accepted this as an act of God, but his wife blamed Mbona and refused to sleep with her husband unless he promised to have Mbona put out of the way. The king finally gave in and hired a band of assassins, but when the latter sneaked up to Mbona's hut, they found him and his mother already gone. Sensing the king's evil intentions, the two had decided to flee southward.

On the way Mbona performed a number of food miracles, such as creating a patch of rice, to keep his mother and himself from starving. When they came to the Matundu Hills, which form the southwestern rim of the valley, the mother took leave of her son and was miraculously carried to the south bank of the Zambezi, where she became a priestess with power over rain and drought. Upon her departure Mbona was caught by Lundu's men, but once again they failed to kill him until he told them that this could only be done in the valley below by cutting his throat or the top of his head with a blade of grass. This done, he died, but after the killing he revealed himself as a new territorial spirit. He ordered the king to provide him with a woman who was to be his "wife" at the shrine and

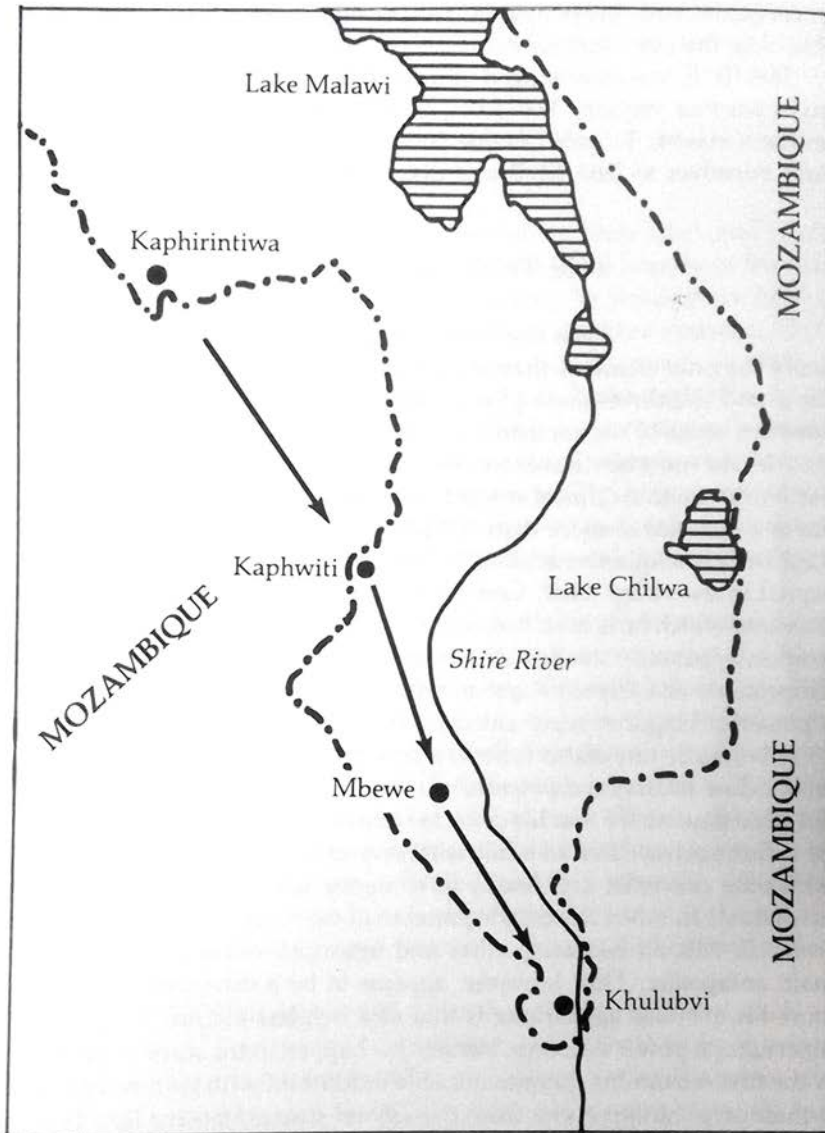
to cooperate with his people in making regular sacrifices to him. It was thus that the cult commenced.

Text III/B, just summarized, is a text proper to the commonalty. There exists another version, Text III/A, which contains the view of the court on these events. To avoid undue complications, in this chapter we shall limit ourselves to Text III/B and discuss III/A in the next chapter.

THE THREE STREAMS COMPARED

Each stream tells a somewhat different story, and virtually the only elements that remain unchanged throughout are Mbona's name and the three-phase plot structure. When looked at more closely, however, some of the variations exhibit strikingly regular patterns. To begin with the most obvious example, Mbona's reputed homeland shifts from north to south in an almost straight line (map 7): from Kaphirintiwa, which lies at a distance of more than 300 kilometers from the Mbona shrine, to Kaphwiti's headquarters at about half that distance, and finally to the king's capital in the valley itself. Concomitant with this, one notes that the society into which he is born becomes increasingly centralized, transforming from an apparently stateless system associated with the ethnic designation Chipeta, via an early state system represented by the name Kaphwiti, into a powerful kingdom represented by the name Lundu.

Mbona's *de jure* status follows a similar upward curve, as in each case he is a close relative and potential successor of the main officeholder. Yet at the same time we see that his *de facto* status follows a downward curve, for he is first portrayed as an adult with several wives, then as a young man with only one wife, and finally as someone who is socially a child and an outcast. In other words, the pattern is one of an increasing power differential, Mbona becoming more and more powerless in relation to his main antagonist. This, however, appears to be a deception, because the more his outward appearance is that of a helpless victim, the greater his supernatural power becomes. We see this happen in the story of his killing. In the first stream his enemies are able to kill him with iron weapons and at their own initiative, but from the second stream onward iron becomes powerless, or powerless on its own, and has to be substituted by or combined with grass. On the symbolic meaning of that combination we shall have more to say later on; for the moment it is important to note that the initiative is Mbona's, for Mbona himself has to tell the killers that only grass can kill him. This substitution of grass for iron is also a form of mockery, since the arms from which Mbona's adversaries derive their arrogance and power prove worthless and have to be replaced by something that to



Map 7. Route of Mbona's journeys

them seems nonsensical but allows them nonetheless to achieve their aim.

The increase in supernatural power is equally visible in the account of the cult's founding. In Mbona I, a shrine is built at the initiative of Mbona's followers. In the second stream the shrine is built at Mbona's own initiative, made known by the local medium, but without the participa-

APPENDIX C: Chapirira and Kumbiwanyati

Source: Schoffeleers (1992)

TEXT I/B

Chapirira and Kumbiwanyati (1964)

The following text is part of a tape-recorded interview I conducted on August 24, 1964, with village headman Chapirira, official deputy to the high priest Ngabu Phiri, and Kumbiwanyati, cleaner of the shrine grounds. It was my first interview with any of the shrine officials, hence the question-and-answer format, which was avoided on subsequent occasions. The interview, excerpts of which were reproduced in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, ranged over a variety of topics, including the organization and the more recent history of the cult. Here, we confine ourselves to the passages which deal with Mbona's biography and the beginnings of the cult. The text, brief as it may be, is nevertheless crucial. It stems from a source close to Ngabu, and it shows significant parallels with Text I/A, recorded more than fifty years earlier.

TEXT

1. Qu.: Whereabouts was Mbona born?

"Mbona was born far to the north of the Shire valley. It is sometimes said that he came from Lundu's village near Chikwawa, but he was born somewhere in Zambia.¹ From there he moved to Lundu's, where he lived for a while with relatives because his own people, the Chipeta, were after him in connection with some quarrel they were then having among themselves. But when he found out that even at his new place he was not safe, he fled to these parts via Dzambawe and Chididi.² We were pleased with him and regarded him as God's son whom we had to respect."

2. Qu.: What made people think he was God's son?

"Before he came we used to experience a lot of hardship, but he ended that. When we speak of hardship we are thinking particularly of droughts which in those days occurred almost every year and which inevitably meant famine. If food could be found at such times, it certainly was not much. That is why we welcomed him when he came to these parts, and why we called him a son of God."

3. Qu.: Can you tell me when Mbona was born?

"We know little about the time he was still living in his native country, but he was certainly born before the arrival of the Goanese.³ We don't know the names of his parents, but we believe that he was born like the Lord Jesus whose mother conceived from the Holy Spirit."⁴

4. Qu.: Who killed him?

"His own countrymen. They tracked him down to this place and, when they did not find him immediately, decided to wait until they would get a chance to kill him."

5. Qu.: Why did they want to kill him?

"They told us they were after him because he was the cause of the quarrels they were having among themselves. We on our part replied that we did not understand this, since he had brought us nothing but good. For instance, the day he offered prayers we would have rain and there was no longer scarcity in our country. But those people had already made up their minds, and when they finally came upon him, they killed him for fear that one day he might return to their country."

6. Qu.: Why is it that Mbona, though a Chipeta, chose to live among the Mang'anja?

"Because the Mang'anja belonged to his own kind, since like him they had originally come from Zambia. He knew, therefore, when he came to the valley that he would be among his own folk, which is another reason why we did not turn him away."

7. Qu.: What happened after his death?

"In accordance with his last wish we buried his head in Khulubvi thicket and his body in the Ndione thicket on the edge of the marshes, at the place where he was executed. Ndione too is a sacred place."

8. Qu.: Why was a shrine built?

"We built a shrine hut over the place where we buried his head, for he was a man of great wisdom, and his head was the source of that wisdom. We hoped that by building that hut and by making offerings there, his spirit might stay with us forever and bestow its blessings upon us, which is indeed what happened. Droughts became a rarity."

APPENDIX D: CHAKANZA VERSION

Source: Schoffeleers (1992)

A MALAWIAN SYNTHESIS

TEXT IV

J. E. Chakanza (1967)

THE PRESENT TEXT was composed in Chimang'anja in 1967 by a young man, Joseph Chakanza, who was preparing for the Roman Catholic priesthood and who for that purpose had to serve a probational year on one of the mission stations. The one assigned to him was Ngabu, situated in the chiefdom of Ngabu Banda (to be distinguished from his namesake at the shrine), which occupies the entire central part of the Lower Shire Valley. Chakanza formed part of the first generation of Malawian seminarians trained to take a positive view of their country's traditional culture rather than condemning it wholesale, as had been customary. In line with this new attitude, students were encouraged to collect information about traditional religion and to write papers on the subject. The author, a native of the valley, focused on the Mbona cult, which may have seemed to him attractive both from a theological and an ethnohistorical viewpoint. Some thirty years earlier his father had also recorded a version of the Mbona story.¹

It is particularly against this ethnohistorical background that one has to read the present text. The author tries to separate fact from fiction by comparing different accounts of the same fact or episode and opting for the one that seems the most plausible. He was not the first to use that method. W. H. J. Rangeley, a colonial administrator and an ethnohistorian of considerable local renown, had tried the same method some fourteen years before.² The difference between the two is that Rangeley, occupying the position that he did, was able to collect his data from the length and the breadth of the valley and from the most important members of the traditional political establishment, whereas Chakanza had to confine himself largely to the central section of the valley and to the commonalty. Con-

sequently, Rangeley's account contains considerably more information about the relationships between the political and the religious establishments, but the two accounts both contain extensive compilations of Mbona I, II, and III traditions. As noted in the introduction to Part 2 of this book, practically no version of the Mbona story is "pure" in the sense of representing one tradition only at the exclusion of the two others. Virtually all versions are therefore to be regarded as combinations of several traditions. What sets the Rangeley and Chakanza accounts apart is that they are exercises in conscious comparison or attempts at establishing a kind of critical ethnohistory. Neither author thought in terms of Mbona I, II, and III as we have been doing in this book, but it is significant that their comparative exercises have resulted in two accounts with a strikingly balanced representation of the three streams that we have identified. As we have considered Rangeley's Mbona article in the first part of this book, we will now examine Chakanza's.

To begin with, Chakanza's text is in several important respects typical of Mbona I: It names Mbona's father, it expatiates a great deal on the imprints ("boundary markers") Mbona is supposed to have left behind on various rocks, and Mbona's chief adversary is a sibling and not an uncle. As far as Mbona II is concerned, three or four points are to be noted. First, the story begins at a time when Kaphwiti, the reputed founder of the earliest Mang'anja state, is the supreme political authority. Second, Mbona is apparently married to one wife only, which though seemingly trivial is nevertheless characteristic of Mbona II. Third, there is an emphasis on Mbona's metamorphoses during the flight. Finally, there is the theme of the tug-of-war between Mbona and his pursuers. With regard to Mbona III themes, one may point to Lundu's position as Mbona's maternal uncle and wife-giver, the killing being done by hired assassins, the rice miracle, the episode of Mbona parting with his wife, and the powerlessness of iron, which, although it appears also in Mbona II, receives more emphasis in Mbona III. Superficially, one might be tempted to consider Chakanza's to be a Mbona III text, but it lacks the "bite" of Mbona III in that it omits the entire childhood symbolism and virtually all references to the theophanous episode. Mbona's murderers return home unharmed, as they do in streams I and II, and Mbona does not reveal himself in a storm or through a medium to establish a cult. The question to be asked is whether this is to be regarded as something accidental or as something rather more structural. The latter seems to be the case.

The chiefdom of Ngabu Banda, where Chakanza collected his information, is a major cotton-growing area which has, especially since the flooding of the Dinde Marsh in the late 1930s, attracted thousands of immigrants from the overpopulated Nsanje District. Comparing the kind of

information he was able to get from the autochthonous population and the immigrants, Chakanza found the latter by far the more knowledgeable. He explicitly tells us that nearly everybody who had something worthwhile to tell was an immigrant from Nsanje, implying that many of these immigrants came from the neighborhood of the shrine, where cult affairs were much more part of everyday talk than elsewhere. This seems to be borne out by the descriptions of the shrine grounds and the sacred pool (secs. 19–29), which contain the kind of detail that can only be provided by people familiar with the situation. More important, though, one can see it illustrated in the prominent place given to Mbona I and II motifs, which, as argued in the first part of this book, point to a source or sources close to the major shrine officials. Yet specific central or northern motifs are not lacking either. Thus, for instance, the incident of the missionaries barging into the shrine grounds, becoming mad, and dying afterward (sec. 21) is without doubt a reference to the Anglican missionaries who in August 1862 went looking for a more suitable location for their mission station in the neighborhood of the Thyolo shrine and who on that occasion met with the most determined resistance on the part of the local shrine officials. One finds this episode extensively described in the journals of several of the missionaries.³ Although the folk version recorded by Chakanza is not correct in every detail (for instance, the missionaries who died were not the same as those who had been to the shrine, as Chakanza's text suggests), one can nevertheless maintain that it is a recognizable recollection of a historical event documented more than a century ago. The difference between the northern and southern traditions is that when people from the southern part of the valley tell stories about Europeans violating the prohibition to enter the shrine grounds and being punished for it, the culprits are tax collectors instead of missionaries.

Yet despite such differences, the traditions collected by Chakanza also represent a synthesis of northern and southern data. That synthesis is not only to be regarded as a conscious construct on the part of the author—which of course to a great extent it is—but also as the outcome of largely subconscious processes by means of which the autochthonous and immigrant sections of the local population have tried to weave the two types of data into a logical and generally acceptable account. To illustrate this, one need only to look at Mbona's pedigree in the present text. As far as his mother is concerned, there is nothing unusual. In line with other accounts, especially within the Mbona III tradition, she is described as Lundu's sister. This, as we have seen, is a way to symbolize the close relationship between and interdependency of the royal dynasty and the cult. The unusual element is rather that Chakanza's text mentions Tengani as Mbona's father, and Tengani, as we know, is the perpetual title of the southern dy-

nasty. In other words, Lundu and Tengani – two names representing two autonomous state systems – are linked together by Mbona's name, Tengani being Mbona's father and Lundu being his maternal uncle.

In a subtle yet complex way this genealogical construct describes the position of the southern immigrants in the chiefdom of Ngabu Banda as it obtained until fairly recently. Under the Maravi kinship system the maternal uncle has priority over the father, but clashes are difficult to avoid, especially in situations in which patrilineal descent becomes more and more emphasized. Although immigrant families (many of them from Tengani) had already lived in Ngabu Banda's chiefdom for one or two generations and although they had in the meantime made a not inconsiderable contribution to the local economy, they still tended to be considered culturally and politically inferior to the autochthons. Second, most of the southern immigrants maintained a patrilineal system of descent, while the host group remained largely matrilineal, though this is no longer the case to the degree that it used to be. This, too, used to create problems, particularly when immigrants intermarried with autochthons. The portrayal of Tengani as Mbona's father and Lundu as Mbona's maternal uncle and the tensions and conflicts suggested or evoked by that combination may thus be regarded as a reflection on some major social contradictions through the prism of conflicting kinship systems (matrilineal and patrilineal) and conflicting social roles (maternal uncle and father). Since the contradictions referred to were most acutely felt by the immigrants, it stands to reason that they were also the ones making the greatest efforts symbolically to solve them. By the same token, they would have had a more direct interest in the Mbona cult and its oral traditions than would the autochthons. The suggestion to be made, then, is that the immigrants' knowledgeability in regard to the Mbona cult, on which the author of the present text puts so much stress, may have been a consequence of their geographic origin as well as their present social position. For even if they hailed from the cult's heartland, they could have ignored it if it was in no way functional to them.

TEXT

I am of the opinion that the events I am about to describe did actually take place, although it is difficult to say when. Many people in the Shire Valley know about them, but as they occurred long ago without anybody recording them, our only sources of information are oral testimonies. But when history has to be passed on by word of mouth only, certain elements tend to be omitted, while others are continually added. That elements have been added is clear, and that others

are no longer remembered is also clear, for no two or three people among those I interviewed recounted the story in the same manner, although there were occasional similarities. I have also met people who muddled up everything. When that was the case I have only retained such bits of information as seemed to fit in with the present account.

In the chiefdom of Ngabu, where I collected most of my material, people who are knowledgeable on this subject are rather rare. Quite a few told me that, if I wanted to know more, I ought to go to Nsanje. As a matter of fact, nearly everybody who had something worthwhile to tell came from there. Yet people at Ngabu remain convinced that it is a true story, and for them it has meaning, even if they do not remember every detail. It is this conviction of theirs which makes me also believe that something did indeed take place in the distant past, even if it was different from what we are being told now.

Mbona's Parentage

1. We have no reliable information about Mbona's parentage, although there seems to be evidence of some kind of connection between Mbona, Lundu, Tengani, and Kaphwiti. It is said, for instance, that in the beginning the four of them lived together in a place called Kaphirintiwa, where they became involved in a quarrel with a Chief Changamire,⁴ and that it was this which eventually made them decide to migrate to the Shire Valley.
2. More specifically, it is said that Mbona held the position of diviner⁵ vis-à-vis Kaphwiti, Lundu, and Tengani. As regards these three, the general conviction is that Lundu and Tengani were Kaphwiti's maternal nephews and that Kaphwiti divided the country between them after they had arrived here from Kaphirintiwa. Lundu was thereby granted authority over the Chikwawa District and Tengani over Nsanje. Mbona, for his part, is said to have been the son of Lundu's sister, born to her after she had married Tengani.⁶

The Conflict

3. As said earlier on, many people are convinced that Mbona was a historical person. The general opinion is that he lived in Lundu's chiefdom, some say even at Mbewe, Lundu's headquarters. Whatever the case, being a married man he had settled in his elder brother's village section much like everyone else.⁷

It sometimes happened that in a particular year the rains failed. Whenever this was the case, people tried various means to make the rains come, such as making a libation at the base of a tall tree or performing the rain dance. Often enough, their attempts would be unsuc-

had brought with him along the rim of the well, where it began to sprout. It still grows there every year, when its season has come again, yielding a fine crop.¹⁵ The imprints of his various belongings can also be seen there to this day.

9. After leaving Dzambawe, we are told that he returned to British territory, traveling in a southerly direction until he came to Ngabu's chiefdom.¹⁶ His footprints are still visible in the neighborhood of the school in Chituwi's village and along the upper course of the Chingadzi Stream in the Nsanje District.¹⁷ I have not been able to ascertain what he did at Makande, but some people told me that it was the home area of one Bandawe, about whom I cannot say much except that he may have been the local cult leader, somewhat like Tengani in Nsanje.¹⁸ Since people in Ngabu's chiefdom also believed in Mbona, Bandawe may have been the one escorting them whenever they went to worship at Nsanje. I also heard that on his way to Nsanje, Mbona passed close by Tengani's village, where, according to some, there are also imprints to be seen.

Mbona's Arrival at Nsanje

10. When Mbona got to the stream called Nyamadzere,¹⁹ which flows by the Chididi mission station, he stepped onto a rock, leaving an imprint of his foot behind. He also took a brief rest there, laying his bow and spear beside him, and those too left imprints that can still be seen.

11. In the meantime his enemies did not think of giving up and kept on chasing him. He himself continued in a southerly direction toward Malawi Hill, which he then ascended. It is said that, when he reached its top, he left yet another footprint behind on a rock. He made a water hole there too and drank from it in exactly the same manner as at Dzambawe, leaving the imprints of his knees and hands on the rock on which he had been kneeling.

12. As his enemies were still pursuing him despite the distances involved, Mbona traveled down the eastern slope which faces Nsanje township until he came to a place called Khulubvi at the foot of Malawi Hill. From there he continued eastward to a place called Ndione on the edge of the marshes.

13. Upon reaching Ndione, Mbona felt very tired, but his enemies were still following him. It is true, he had been using magic so that they had not been able to do anything as yet, but they were far from giving up. Feeling utterly exhausted and sympathizing with his enemies,²⁰ he finally told them to do as they liked. They were overjoyed when they heard this, and snatching a bow, they tried to shoot an arrow at him. People say, however, that the arrow, instead of wounding Mbona, became strangely twisted. Next, they tried to wound him with an axe, but the axe reportedly

broke. Following this, they tried a large bush knife, but it bent double. They ended up by firing a gun at him, but what a shameful sight that was, for it ejected water instead of a bullet!²¹

14. Yet his enemies were not prepared to give up, and a tremendous fight now ensued, which lasted a very long time. Grabbing him and forcing him to the ground, they once more tried to cut his throat with a knife, but the knife became limp like a maize leaf and was of no use. The fight continued the whole day, and only when everybody, including Mbona, felt utterly exhausted and every available weapon had been tried did he reveal his secret. Having told them first that they would never succeed no matter how hard they tried, he added, "But if you are still determined to kill me, take a leaf of the *nansongole* grass²² and use that to cut my throat. In that case I shall die without fail!"

15. He also said to those present, "When I shall be dead, bury my body at Ndione and my head in Khulubvi thicket at the foot of a *mnjale* tree."²³ The tree he referred to is very tall and stands in the middle of Khulubvi. He continued, "When my head has been buried at the foot of that tree, a pot of the *phiso* type is to be placed over it [*phiso* is the Sena term for the large earthen pots used by women to brew beer].²⁴ People shall also build a hut there in which my wife shall live and my belongings shall be kept, for I must always have a wife. If you do not obey these commands, you will experience a great many troubles and, most important, you will have no rain."

16. When Mbona had finished speaking, his enemies fetched a *nansongole* leaf, grabbed him, and pinned him to the ground. This done, they cut his throat and killed him. People say that where his blood flowed, a deep well was made, which filled itself with an enormous quantity of blood before spilling over to form a river.²⁵ Upon seeing this, those present were awestruck. We also hear that along the well and the stream, which contain blood instead of water, one finds medicinal trees and plants of every description.

17. It is said, though, that after the murder these people never did what Mbona told them to do. They just went home and lived like everyone else without giving it further thought and unafraid of what might happen to them for having killed Mbona without fulfilling his last wishes. We hear that the consequences were dreadful indeed, for when the time came to plant, there was no rain at all. Not even the smallest cloud could be seen. There followed a frightful drought which led to an equally frightful famine, and only when they were suffering thus did people begin to remember Mbona's words and commandments.²⁶

18. They took his head for burial at the base of a *mnjale* tree in the middle of Khulubvi, where it was covered over with a pot. Next they built

a reed hut with a thatched roof over which they spread a blue cloth,²⁷ and they concluded everything by installing Mbona's wife in the hut together with his personal belongings. Only when all this had been completed did Mbona unleash the rains, and people no longer needed to be uncertain about whether they should plant or not. There were abundant crops that year because there was plentiful rain, and all around there was great rejoicing at the time of the first fruits and the harvest.

Khulubvi

19. The village of Khulubvi is surrounded by a fence of thorn shrubs.²⁸ Within are the huts of the guardians, and Mbona's shrine is in a clearing. It is said that all wild animals found there, such as monkeys, baboons, snakes, and the like are harmless. They used to come to the doorways of the huts or to the village meeting place without people chasing them away, and on occasion people let them even eat with them. It is forbidden to kill them, an injunction which also applies to the marabouts in the neighborhood.²⁹ In days gone by, Mbona's hut had to be rebuilt every year or every few years, and if this was not done there would be no rain, or there might be an invasion of locusts or some other pest making people suffer and go hungry.³⁰

20. There had to be a woman in his hut, who was known as Salima. When one Salima died, another had to be fetched from Lundu's area, but she always had to be an elderly person or someone whose husband had been dead for a while. Some people say that the woman had to come from the village of Dzimbiri,³¹ which forms part of Changata's chiefdom in the Thyolo District. Others maintain that she had to come from Ngabu's chiefdom.

21. Of Mbona's cloth and other possessions, it is said that they are still extant and that they are not subject to decay. There is also an ancient rule to the effect that no European should be allowed into Khulubvi since Mbona himself has forbidden this. Despite this, it once happened that a few well-known missionaries forced their way in, staying there for hours on end despite the prohibition. But they were to know what they had done, for as soon as they had returned home they began running about, shouting at the tops of their voices like madmen, and in the end they died without even being buried.³² At least that is what people say. If one wants to visit the place, one needs the permission of the guardians. Children are not allowed in at all.³³

22. In the olden days they kept the following procedure when rebuilding Mbona's hut. First, a message was sent to Chief Tengani, who would then come with his people. Before reaching Khulubvi they spent the night at Malemia's village,³⁴ which lies close by at the foot of Malawi

Hill. Early the next morning all of them assembled and proceeded to Khulubvi, where they would be met by Chief Ngabu and Headman Mbangu, whose village is adjacent to the shrine. There they would find chiefs and headmen from other places as well as people bearing gifts. 23. Having discussed whatever needed to be discussed, the building of the hut began. Everybody had to work hard, and while going about one's task, one had to take off one's clothes and remain naked.³⁵ When the walls of the hut were finished, they began building the roof upon the head of Chief Tengani. Some say that every Tengani who had taken part would die soon after, which is also why some incumbents absconded to Mozambique when being bidden to the rebuilding.³⁶ 24. After finishing the roof, they would spread a blue cloth over the grass thatching. But before lifting it onto the walls, they invited the rains by swaying it in the direction of the four points of the compass, beginning with the east in the direction of Ndione. The moment they had finished their work, peals of thunder would be heard, lightning would flash, and a storm would break accompanied by heavy downpours, so that on their way home people would be drenched to the bone.

Ndione

25. Ndione was a place where quite unusual things happened. It was, for instance, customary every year to take a young boy and kill him there as a sacrifice to Mbona.³⁷ Offerings of flour and beer were also made there. Whenever there were problems concerning the land, the village headmen would go to Khulubvi with their elders to make this kind of offering. Upon approaching Khulubvi they would halt in silence at a place nearby, and the headman alone would enter the grove to make an offering on behalf of his people.³⁸

26. There lived many big and tasty fish in the well and the stream at Ndione. In the olden days people used to go fishing there, but there was a limit to the number of fish they were allowed to catch.³⁹ A person could catch one, two, or three fish and no more. If you said, "These fish are lovely and quite easy to catch. Come on, let us try a fourth one!" you might drag up a child instead of a fish. That child would be crying and would tell you, "Take me and eat me, for those fish are apparently not enough for you!" The fisherman would then become frightened and start running around in circles without ever finding his way home again. 27. Or he might drag up three knobkerries, which made for him the moment he landed them, to give him a sound thrashing, and again he would begin aimlessly running around. On some other occasion he might drag up a sable antelope, which is a forest animal and which would say, "Are those fish not enough? Take me and eat me!" and the outcome would

be the same as in the other cases. People therefore took great care. When they had caught one, two, or three fish, they went home without trying any further.

28. In the forest around Ndione there are vegetal medicines in the form of trees and all sorts of herbs. Everybody knowing something about medicines goes there to collect them.⁴⁰ Adjacent to Ndione one finds the villages of Nkhukuime, Mmanzi, and Chilembwe.⁴¹

The Decline of the Cult

29. In the year 1935 or 1936, when Chief Tengani (the one who recently abdicated) had been installed, he refused to pay homage to Mbona, and he also refused to have the roof built upon his head, because he had become a Christian.⁴² When he stuck to his decision despite pressure and protests from the population, things at Khulubvi began to change. The waters at Ndione changed from red to colorless.⁴³ People began catching fish there as they liked, and they moved about the place without any trace of fear. At Khulubvi, too, things took a turn for the worse. Everybody, including Europeans, could go inside and look at things. The inhabitants who had never paid tax before, as they were Mbona's people, now had to pay like everyone else.⁴⁴

Mbona's Manifestations

30. This is how Mbona communicated with his people after his death: he made someone from Khulubvi or from the villages of Mbangu, Ngabu, Chiphwembwe, or Nthole dream.⁴⁵ It is said that when such a person had a dream he or she was able to tell people everything they needed to know. People therefore were quick to do as they were told, even if it was something difficult, for fear that otherwise they might find themselves in great trouble.⁴⁶ I have also been told in connection with Mbona's miraculous powers that he could turn into a snake (or that after the murder he turned into a snake) and that he would come to his wife by night to tell her things such as "This year there will be famine!" or "This year there will be food in abundance!"⁴⁷ Others again say that Mbona was in the habit of visiting a *mtondo* tree, which they called "the tree of the spear."⁴⁸

31. People from Ngabu would travel to such places as Nyathana and Kalambo, or even to Tengani and Khulubvi to hear those prophecies.⁴⁹ According to some, the person who conveyed Mbona's utterances about what was to be done in a certain year lived at Mitseche,⁵⁰ but others maintain that it was his wife, the one in Mozambique who is said never to grow old. One also hears that everything Mbona foresaid came to be fulfilled, which is why so many people had faith in him and why some

still have it. That Mbona's memory is not altogether dead, not even in our days, becomes clear when one interviews people in Nsanje and Chikwawa. Though the story may be mixed up in many ways, it is surprising to see the remarkable attraction it still exercises on people, including little children.

APPENDIX E: Mbona the rainmaker, by Rangeley

Source: Rangeley, W.H.J. (1953). Mbona the rainmaker. *The Nyasaland Journal*, 6 (1). January 1953. Society of Malawi – Historical and Scientific

MBONA - THE RAIN MAKER by W. H. J. Rangeley

This is the second of the articles by Mr. Rangeley on "Two Nyasaland Rain Shrines", the first of which was published in our last issue. If you ask the Mang'anja people of Southern Nyasaland where they came from to settle in their present abodes, they will tell you "from Kaphiri-Ntiya, from Malawi", but they will stoutly deny that ever was their name Malawi as a tribe. If you ask them where are Kaphiri-Ntiya or Malawi, they will point to the north, and will confess that they do not know where these places are? They know only that they came from the north, and these places are in the north. These names are but remembered names and no more. Until the coming of the seventeen Kololo porters of Dr. Livingstone, who settled just below the cataracts of the Shire River, and the raids of the Yao, nearly a century ago, the chief of all the Mang'anja peoples was Lundu Phiri of Mbewe wa-Mitengo, chief of all the country from the Zambezi River in the south to the Namaramba in the north. For a time, several centuries ago, he had been junior to a "brother", Kaphwiti, whose home was at Malawi-wa-Kaphwiti, on the Wamkurumadzi River, west of the Shire River. In 1616, Gaspar Bocarro stayed fifteen days at this Malawi and referred to him as the great chief of the country, yet forty years later we hear that the Portuguese of Tete and Sena had heard that Lundu was the great chief. The relationship of these two chiefdoms is obscure. It seems that Lundu gradually took over the power of Kaphwiti, until Kaphwiti became but an important subordinate chief of Lundu. There are two stories about the place from which Mbona fled to become famous. Some hold that Mbona fled from Lundu while Lundu was "at Malawi, at Kaphiri-Ntiya", others that he fled from Lundu after Lundu was already settled at Mbewe-wa-Mitengo. There is a third story which perhaps gives the correct answer. This is that Mbona fled from the Cipeta people and country of Central Nyasaland, as a result of troubles over rain-making, and sought refuge with his Phiri kinsman, Lundu. The story that Mbona fled from "Malawi, at Kaphiri-Ntiya" has confusions. Kaphiri-Ntiya is a small stone outcrop "on which the footprints of all kinds of man and animals may be seen" on the western border of Nyasaland in the Dzalanyama. Malawi is the hot low-lying plains west of the upper Shire River above the cataracts and west of the southern end of Lake Nyasa. This is the country of Malawi, and in Malawi is Mabere-a-Nyangu, twin hills like a pair of human breasts, but two or three miles from Msimbi-wa-Cilembwe, an isolated upright hill, named for the traditional husband of Nyangu who alone in all that country might wear the long tail feathers of a cock (msimbi) on his head, and it is from Mabere-a-Nyangu that Lundu and Kaphwiti went out to settle the wilderness of the south. Malawi as a place is the forest

thicket, now much reduced in size, on the north bank of the Nkadzipulu Stream, opposite Mankhamba where Mwali Banda lived, where the Phiri shrine of the Karonga-s is still maintained. All stories agree on the following reasons for the flight of Mbona from Lundu. There was a severe drought, and Lundu summoned all his people to appeal to the spirits of their ancestors to cause rain to fall. The usual ceremonies of rebuilding the tribal kacisi (spirit house), followed by offerings at the kacisi, the gathering of the people and the clapping of hands and beating of drums and appeals for rain then followed, but no rain fell. (The ceremonies of Mgwetsa?the rain dance?differ widely from place to place). It is said that Mbona was a son of Cembe, a sister of the Lundu of that day. His father was Cingala. After Mphedza, Nkwangwa and Malema, the Induna's of Lundu, who organised the rainmaking, had failed to produce rain, Mbona then entered the circle formed by the people and, leaping about and shouting, pointing in all directions and calling upon rain to fall, tradition asserts that the clouds immediately gathered, lightning rent the sky, and copious rain began to fall. The Induna-s (Induna?a counsellor of a chief) were furious at this slight on the chief and reported the matter to Lundu, who accused Mbona of having prevented the rain from falling, through his witchcraft, when Lundu's agent had appealed for rain. Lundu challenged Mbona to the test for all witches, the drinking of the poison cup of muabvi. This Mbona refused to do, saying that he had not prevented Lundu's rain, but that he had a special power from God to bring rain. To refuse to take the muabvi test is to admit guilt. Mbona fled, and Lundu ordered men to follow and kill him. Mbona fled to the south, together with one of his four wives, Sawawa, her younger daughter Sajola, his dog, and carrying his two spears, while his wife carried a tusk of ivory. By some accounts, Sajola did not accompany her mother. Lundu's men proceeded to follow Mbona. According to the story that all this happened at Kaphiri Ntiya (the Mang'anja version of Kaphiri-Ntiwa), Mbona was then followed through half the length of Nyasaland, perhaps three hundred miles, through uninhabited and trackless forests, until Mbona was found and caught. Such a happening strains the greatest credulity. On the other hand, those who maintain that Mbona fled from Mbewe-wa-Mitengo have a much stronger case. During his flight, as will be related below, Mbona caused a number of miraculous incidents. These start only near Mbewe-wa-Mitengo, and there are none north of there, between Mbewe-wa-Mitengo and Kaphiri-Ntiya or Malawi. Secondly, the two spears of Mbona, which are said to have existed intact until about 90 years ago at the shrine of Mbona, and which are definitely stated to be Mbona's original spears, are said to have had hafts of wood made of the Nandolo tree, a tree found only in certain thickets in the area near Mbewe-wa-Mitengo, rare even there, and non-existent, according to Africans, elsewhere. All Africans agree that this Nandolo tree does not exist anywhere to the north. Thirdly, it is agreed by all that Mbona had four wives, named Sawawa, Samisanje, Cungwe, and Tiza, and had children by them, and it is agreed that at the time of Mbona's death all except Sawawa were living at Mbewe-wa-Mitengo. In fact, the flight from Kaphiri-Ntiya supposes a movement for the whole village of Lundu as rapid as that of Mbona, for we hear that when his pursuers caught up with Mbona, they wished to take him to Lundu, at Mbewe-wa-Mitengo. The

solution would appear to be that Mbona (or an earlier ancestor of this name) fled from the north to Lundu, and that Mbona himself, the last of that name, fled from Mbewe-wa Mitengo. According to Chief Tengani, who is traditionally the chief custodian of the shrine of Mbona, the country was already settled when Mbona fled to the south from Mbewe-wa Mitengo, and we must credit that this was in fact so, because his pursuers could never have found him otherwise. Further? more, the fact that the shrine was built immediately after Mbona's death (so it is averred) by people other than his pursuers must mean that there were people there to do so. No rain shrine could have been built in Tengani's country unless he agreed and adopted it, and so he must have been there when it was built, and hence his "ownership" of the shrine. The general tradition is that it was from the first remembered Lundu, Cauma, the one who is said to have led the migration from Malawi to Mbewe-wa-Mitengo, that Mbona fled, but we can not credit that the country would be settled, and the villages scattered as far as the Zambezi River, in that first generation of settlement. The flight must have been some time after the people had settled at Mbewe-wa-Mitengo and had multiplied and explored the country, and sought new dwelling places. We can be sure, therefore, that it was some time later, probably several generations later after Cauma, that Mbona fled from Mbewe-wa-Mitengo. Chief Tengani states that Mbona fled from Mbewe-wa-Mitengo during the period that Nkhunga ("the tall white one") was the ruling chief Tengani, and that Nkhunga was chief when Matekenya, the Portuguese half-bred raider, began to raid the country about the lower Shire River. This would put the flight of Mbona in the middle of the 19th Century, but there is such a wealth of legend about Mbona, and his fame was so widespread even at the time of the raids of Matekenya, that one feels that the flight was many scores of years earlier. A few miles to the north-west of Mbewe-wa-Mitengo, perhaps a mile and a half south-east of the Mulomba thicket along the south bank of the Mwanza River, is a group of rocks. On the summit of one of these, perhaps ten feet above the ground, Mbona is said to have reclined during his flight, and it is said that the impressions made in the rock by his body remain to this day. This stone is known as Mfunda-wa Lundu or Cifunda-wa-Lundu (the origin of Lundu), and formerly all Lundu-s were formally installed as chief by placing the Lundu on the rock above all the people, clothing him in new clothes, and publicly proclaiming him to all the people. It is asserted that every Lundu, after the Lundu who led the migration from Malawi, until the break-up of the Lundu chiefdom with the death of Tsagonja Lundu at the instigation of the Kololo in the early 1860-s, was so crowned and proclaimed on Mfunda-wa-Lundu. There is a slight hollow on top of the rock, but no obvious impression to resemble that made by a human body on yielding material. It is a matter of great difficulty, in these days, to find any African who can identify the rock. Many know of Mfunda wa-Lundu, but few know where it exists. Round the base of the rock were formerly placed offerings to the spirits, said to be offerings to Mbona, but possibly to departed Lundu-s. Numerous fragments of pots of considerable age and different style from present-day pots lie scattered round the base of Mfunda-wa-Lundu, and the bottoms of two or three are still reasonably intact, showing them to have been originally placed upright to

receive offerings of beer (and not upside down as over graves). There can be little doubt that Lundu-s were crowned on Mfunda-wa-Lundu long before there was an Mbona, and the fact that tradition now associates the rock with Mbona well illustrates how unreliable African tradition may become. From Mfunda-wa-Lundu, Mbona fled to the south. Tradition has it that-he rested the first night on a rock named Mwala amodzi in the sandy bed of the Thangadzi River, perhaps a mile south-west of Namalambo Hill. Tradition has it that on this rock may be seen the imprints of the feet of Mbona's dog and the marks where the dog lay down, the marks where Mbona stuck his two spears into the rock by their butts (as men stick them into the ground), the footprints of Mbona and where he lay down to sleep, and the marks of his buttocks where he sat on the rock. Curiously, no marks are attributed to the wife of Mbona. It is said that even to this day it may be seen where Mbona walked through the grass when leaving the rock. Alas, these marks are no more than ordinary weathering of the rock, except the imprints of Mbona's buttocks. These buttock imprints are two parallel shallow grooves on the rock, and appear to be the grooves where stone-age men ground and polished their stone axes. If that is so, then this may well be the first such site found in Nyasaland, although other traces of these people are common enough. From Mwala-amodzi, Mbona is said to have fled to Dza mbawe, which is west of the Malawi Hills, and is in the country of chief Cituwi, a former subordinate of Lundu, east of Danga, in what is now Portuguese East Africa. At Dzambawe, it is said that there is a large and naked rock, about an acre or so in extent or perhaps less, and that on this rock is a hole, perhaps ten feet across, which contains water which never dries up. It is said that Mbona, being thirsty and desiring water, miraculously made this well in the rock. This, however, is not the only miraculous well credited to Mbona. At Mbewe wa-Mitengo, where many generations of Lundu-s lived, water was drawn from a well, said never to have run dry, dug by Mbona. Since the breakup of the Lundu chiefdom and the decline of the Mbona shrine, that well has dried up and no longer holds permanent water. Indeed, the chief reason why the present-day Lundu family live at Mbewe, some miles to the east, is because, when they returned to their ancestral homes some twenty years ago, they found no permanent water any longer at Mbewe-wa-Mitengo. At Dzambawe, the miraculous pool of Mbona is not the only water. It is said that there is a stream, the Ngoma stream, and swamp some distance away, and here is said to grow the miraculous rice which was planted by Mbona. It has long been said that no-one can take it away. Visitors who may collect some of this rice invariably forget to take it with them when they leave, so it is said, and no rice has ever left there. (Mr. Tom Price describes Dzambawe in an article in this issue of the Journal. Mr. Ashwin planted seed of the rice from Dzambawe and it germinated, but when the young plants were several inches in height, they withered and died during his absence elsewhere, probably through lack of water, for the seeds were planted in a tin. Africans assert that nowhere else than at Dzambawe can this rice be got to grow, and no doubt the death of Mr. Ashwin's seedlings would, in their eyes, prove the point. This Dzambawe rice is described by Mr. Ashwin as a "red" rice, and it would appear to be not unlike the "red" rices still grown occasionally in Nyasaland. In 1616, Gaspar Bocarro

remarked that Muzura, whom the author identifies as Kaphwiti, supplied him with rice, and other foodstuffs. There are Africans who talk of an olden-day rice which no longer exists in Nyasaland, and which was quite different from the modern rices found in the country. They say this rice had a far larger grain than the modern rices, as they heard from their fathers, for no living African has seen these olden-day rices which are known only in tradition). From Dzambawe, Mbona turned east, on hearing that his pursuers were closing in on him, and travelled over the Malawi Hills. During his descent, between Cididi and Ndione, on the face of a rock known as Nembo-za-Cipeta, Mbona carved what are said to be the tribal tatoos of the Cipeta people who live in the Cewa country, east of Kaphiri-Ntiya. (This fact alone would indicate that Mbona was regarded as one of the Cipeta people, and goes far to strengthen the story of those who say that Mbona had fled from the Cipeta country to Mbewe-wa-Mitengo, and from there had fled again to the south). As might be expected, these "tribal marks" are no more than normal differential rock weathering. The Mang'a nja of the lower Shire River have so long been out of touch with the people further north in Nyasaland that one must find it of interest that they refer to these marks as Nembo-za-Cipeta (the tribal tatoos of the Cipeta), for the name Cipeta can be no more than a vague name to them. The Cipeta peoples colonised the country they now inhabit long after Lundu established himself at Mbewe-wa-Mitengo. When Mbona came to the south, he would have been marked with the Cipeta tribal marks, and would have been known as one of the Cipeta, and hence the perpetuation of marks on the rock that were supposed to represent the alien tattoo marks of Mbona, and not those of the Mang'anja. For, be it noted, it was not the nembo of the Mang'anja which Mbona is said to carved on the rocks, but his own Cipeta nembo, as all in? formants agree. According to some informants, his pursuers caught Mbona at Nyaganzi, where the Shire River enters the Zambezi River, in the country of chief Dobvu, a subordinate of Lundu, and started to bring him from there to Mbewe-wa-Mitengo. By other accounts, they caught him where the Ndione pool is now. By a third account, they caught him at the Nkhulubvi thicket, and wished to kill him then and there. By all accounts, it was at the Ndione pool in the Ndindi that Cingala, a relative of Mbona who led the pursuers, killed Mbona and cut off his head. Those who say that the pursuers caught Mbona at Nkhulubvi say that Mbona informed his pursuers that, as long as he stood on high dry land, no axe could cut him, and no spear or arrow pierce him, and that if they wished to kill him, they must take him down to flat open land; and accordingly his captors took Mbona down to the nearby Ndindi plain. Those who say that Mbona was captured at Nyaganzi say that Mbona would go no further on his return to Mbewe-wa-Mitengo when they reached the Ndindi plain, and therefore they killed him there. Those who say that the pursuers caught up with Mbona on the Ndindi plain say that they killed him then and there. All accounts agree that, before Mbona was put to death, he asked his captors to cut off his head when he was dead, and to take his head to Nkhulubvi thicket nearby, and there bury his head, and to bury his headless body at Ndione. Nearly all accounts agree that they buried Mbona's body there where they killed him, and some say that, whereas there was no pool and marsh before, forthwith the Ndione pool

brimmed full where the body was buried. His head they placed in a basket, and these they buried in the Nkhulubvi thicket, and thereupon, so it is said, it rained copiously for four days without ceasing, and people said "Mbona has started to talk". By some accounts, Mbona had asked his executioners to build a shrine over his head, and this they did. Such, however, is hardly likely, for we could hardly expect the executioners of an acknowledged witch (he, who had refused the muabvi) to have treated him as a God or Spirit. The author can not believe that they buried either his head or his body. His executioners would have treated him like any other mfiti (witch)?they would have left his body to rot and feed the vultures and hyaenas. It is someone else?the local people?who must have cut off his head and buried it in Nkhulubvi (if, indeed, that ever happened) and buried his headless trunk at Ndione Pool. It was for witchcraft that Mbona was hunted and died; and witches are not buried. According to Chief Tengani, it is a Tengani, Nkhunga, who had a spirit-house (kacisi) built over the head of Mbona, and who collected Mbona's belongings and placed them in the kacisi. According to the lately-deceased Lundu, it was a Lundu who ordered Tengani to build the shrine. It is the belief of the author that no-one else but Tengani could have ordered the burial of the head and torso of Mbona, and no-one else but Tengani who ordered the kacisi to be built. Who else could have done so? Not Lundu, who sent men to kill this "witch". At this shrine there sprang up an elaborate ritual to placate the spirit of Mbona, which it was believed could make rain to fall, or could withhold rain, as it wished. It has already been stated that Mbona was accompanied by a wife, Sawawa, and possibly by her child Sajola. By some accounts, the name of this wife was Sawa. After the death of Mbona, Sawawa remained at the Nkhulubvi thicket, which is east of the Malawi Hills, and a few miles south of the present Port Herald. Nkhulubvi thicket is a dense thicket of almost evergreen scrub and trees, a few acres in size. By Mbona, Sawawa had two daughters, Sajola and Kamembe, and a son Ngabu who was the oldest of the three. Sajola had been carried on the back of her mother, Sawawa, during the flight from Mbewe-wa-Mitengo. Ngabu, after the death of Mbona, was looked after by Salima, a sister of Malemia, until he was old enough, and he then left Mbewe-wa-Mitengo and joined his mother and sister at Nkhulubvi. That is the Ngabu account of how Ngabu came to be connected with the Mbona shrine. By many accounts, the daughter, Sajola, did not accompany her mother to Nkhulubvi. We must accept that the country was already occupied when Mbona was killed, and since Nkhulubvi is, and always has been, in the country of Chief Tengani, then we must accept that Tengani was a prime mover in the creation of the Mbona shrine, for no lesser person would have dared to raise up a rain shrine without the approval of the chief. We must accept the Tengani version that it was a Te? ngani who ordered the shrine to be built, and since the chief personally, in the past, played a very important part in the re-building of each shrine, it seems that Tengani himself built the first shrine. The shrine, however, is known not as Tengani's shrine but as Lundu's rain shrine, and it is for this reason that tribute to the shrine came from throughout the country of Lundu. We can only suggest that Lundu adopted the shrine after it became famous. Malemia, who resides at Nankhodzo, was the custodian of the Nkhulubvi thicket. The duty of

Malemia was, and still is, to see that the thicket is not violated. It is to Malemia to whom persons wishing to make offerings at the shrine must first go, and he leads them to the shrine. Mbango is his assistant, and it is said that the first Mbango was a slave, of Mbona. Mbango, in his turn, has an agent who lives actually in the thicket, a score of yards from the shrine, and he is the actual guardian of the shrine. This is Mbukwa. Until a few years ago, Mbukwa would not enter the precincts of the shrine unless he wore only black clothing. Nowadays, that is not so. Since Mbango lives but a few hundred yards from the shrine and on the edge of the Nkhulubvi thicket, while Malemia is a few miles away, it is, in practise, Mbango who performs the necessary duties, but, even so, these duties can nowadays be performed even by Mbukwa. These names are hereditary names and employments, It is Malemia who is primarily responsible for rebuilding the shrine whenever necessary, which is only when a shrine collapses from decay, or there is a great drought or famine. The shrine is never repaired. It is completely rebuilt each time. Malemia has a story that Sawawa, the mother of Ngabu, had not accompanied Mbona to Nkhulubvi, but that she had fled from a raid of "maBziti" (the name usually given to the Ngoni) of one, Nyamande, and that his half-sister, Salima, had then looked after Ngabu at Nkhulubvi. By this account, the wife who accompanied Mbona to Nkhulubvi was this Salima, but this account appears incorrect and but an invention of Malemia. This version, however, puts the origin of Mbona in about 1867 or 1868 (the time when the Ngoni of Cidiaonga Maseko were massing on the eastern bank of the Shire River at Nyamvuu preparatory to crossing the river to Domwe), but we know that the Ngoni never raided as far as Mbewe wa-Mitengo or Nkhulubvi. Furthermore, E. D. Young mentions the cult of Mbona in 1866. (The following quotations are from "The Search after Livingstone" by E. D. Young from the 1868 edition. Page 88?"We came at last to a native village called Kolubvi, its trees were a welcome sight after the everlasting rushes:" Page 91?"The hill on which the presiding spirit of the Shire valley reigns, was passed today, the 12th of August. It forms the extreme peak of the Kolubvi hills, and the natives year by year resort to it to listen to the dictates of an unhappy woman who is incarcerated upon it in a hut. She is the wife of a spirit, who once in the human form, as a distinguished chief named M'Bonar, brought the Mang'anja tribe to listen to his laws. Now, he is supposed to speak through a prophetess, who is constantly being renewed, for death generally relieves the office of its tenant in a year or two. The worst of it is, any man's wife may be seized at a moment's notice as a successor, and great is the dismay when it is known "Zarima's" life has fled from the lone hill top"). We fear that Malemia has got sadly muddled in his memories. Nyamande led the Ngoni raid that drove Kawinga from Kongwe to Cikala, and, in turn, it was Kawinga who was to set the Yao a-moving yet again after they had made their first settlements in southern Nyasaland. However, Malemia was brought from Mbewe-wa-Mitengo after the death of Mbona. While Ngabu claims that he placed Malemia in his position of custodian of the Nkhulubvi ticket, Malemia claims that Ngabu was Malemia's nephew, and that Malemia detailed Ngabu for various duties at the shrine, particularly to look after the actual shrine, and that, through him, Mbango received authority. The truth appears to be that both Malemia and

Ngabu, who lives just south of the Nkhulubvi thicket, were appointed by Tengani. Neither is a chief as such, but through their importance in connection with the shrine were granted small blocks of country by Tengani as Eni Dziko ("owners of country" and the rights of initiation and allotting country). Lundu states that Malemia is the senior custodian of the Nkhulubvi thicket, and that Mbango assists him in this duty, and that Ngabu is the custodian of the shrine, and that all these were appointed as such by Tengani. This must be accepted as the correct position. Ghipwembwe also claims an official position in connection with the shrine. He resides at Matunduzi, south of Port Herald, and claims that the first Ghipwembwe was a relative of the Lundu of that day. The truth appears to be that the first Cipwembwe, named Ntungambela, who was reputedly alive when Matekenya raided that area in the early 1850-s and the 1860-s, and who submitted to Matekenya, was an elephant hunter who migrated from Mbewe-wa-Mitengo to Matunduzi, and married a woman of the Malemia family named Nakutepa. What duties he performs at Nkhulubvi are only to assist Malemia, and at Malemia's invitation. Mbona had a brother named Kapatikana who wished to succeed Mbona, and to take his traditional name on Mbona's death, but, it is said, Mbona warned Kapatikana in a dream not to do so, for fear that he too would be killed. Rain-makers are often hereditary, and the art or claim to bring rain is assumed by the heir to the name of the deceased rain-maker. In other parts of Nyasaland, we find greatly famed rain-makers of great antiquity, the title and power being inherited. Of these hereditary rain-makers, perhaps the most widely known was Cauwa of Cirenje, a Banda woman, an offshoot of Cembe Banda of Mankhamba, which is Banda country but the seat of the Karonga chiefs. Mbona had no heir to his name, for the reason stated above, but Kapatikana remained at Nkhulubvi, and while he was alive he made annual offerings to the spirit of Mbona. It has already been mentioned that Mbona had four wives. After the death of all these wives, the spirit of Mbona (referred to always as Mbona himself) informed Ngabu in a dream that he wished a wife sent to keep him company, and that she should come from Mbewe-wa-Mitengo, and her name should be Salima. Salima was to be accompanied by a maiden to be named Camanga. This was immediately communicated to chief Tengani, who informed the Lundu, and thereupon the Lundu forwarded an elderly woman past childbearing, and a virgin girl who had not yet reached puberty to Nkhulu bvi. These two took the names desired by Mbona. By other accounts, Camanga has always been a local girl. (Camanga is often referred to as nthena. At other times she is referred to by the usual names of an immature girl of buthu or mtsikana. That they should refer to her as nthena means a great deal more than merely an immature girl. When a man marries a woman, he will often take to wife also her younger sister "to keep her company" and without paying any bridal guarantee for her. This second sister-wife is generally immature when married and is referred to as nthena. To refer to Camanga as nthena is to imply that she was a virgin wife of Mbona with whom he had not commenced habitation, but nowhere is it ever suggested that Camanga was ever a sister to Salima). A description of how the shrine was built should now be given. Chief Tengani gave word for the re-building of the shrine. Malemia was responsible for organising the collection of all materials, and the building of

the shrine. The shrine is far larger than the usual, and is built in a circle, about eight to ten feet in diameter, of poles of the Kalembo tree implanted in the earth with the intervals between the poles filled in with Bango (*Phragmites* sp.) reeds. The roof is made without poles and entirely of Bango reeds, over which a thatch of Nsine grass is sometimes laid. The material for tying the shrine is bark string from Mikundi trees. There is no verandah and the walls are not mudded. The roof is supported by a single central pole. No other than the materials named above may be used, and the poles may never be any other than Kalembo poles. Formerly, and until the time of Tengani Mulondagwala, who was chief until twenty or so years ago, Tengani himself placed the centre pole in position and held it upright until the roof was firmly in position. A deputy now performs this function, but this former function of chief Tengani clearly shows the important part that chief Tengani traditionally had in the maintenance of the shrine. It is said that a low fence was sometimes built round the shrine. The doorway of the shrine was closed with the usual door made of Bango reeds, and formerly a tusk of ivory about three feet in length was used as the door stopper. This tusk is said to have been that which Mbona took with him when he fled from Mbewe-wa-Mitengo, but it is said that an early Administrative Officer removed the tusk, and a pole of Kalembo wood is now used. However, the tusk that the early Administrative Officer is said to have taken could hardly have been the original ivory tusk of Mbona. It must have been a tusk placed there after the raid of Matekenya which is described below. It is by no means certain that this ivory door stopper was used at the shrine itself or at the hut of Salima. The shrine itself has always been built on exactly the same site. The inside of the shrine is never cleaned or swept out. As the shrine begins to rot and collapse from the actions of termites and natural rot, the roof and perhaps the sides fall in. Termites have raised their earthen casings on the fallen material, until now the interior of the shrine is an earth mound perhaps two to three feet higher than the surrounding land. Inside the shrine were placed offerings of beer, cloth and such things. At the present time, the hut of Salima is about twenty yards from the shrine (Kacisi). It also is built of Kalembo poles interlaced with Bango reeds, and is about seven to eight feet in diameter. The roof and sides are thatched with Nsine grass, and the door is made of Bango reeds. This hut also is built on exactly the same site each time, but because it is swept out frequently, and because the old material is always cleaned away before a new hut is built, the floor is level with the surrounding land. Two or three yards from the hut of Salima is a small hut, perhaps five feet in diameter, and this is Salima's kitchen, and in it formerly slept Gamanga. Like Salima's hut, it is always built on exactly the same site, and of the same materials, and in the same way, differing only in being smaller. It is possible that in relatively recent times there has been a change in the arrangements for the shrine and the hut of Salima. Very many informants told the author that Salima used to sleep actually in the shrine, and that the shrine was built over the head of Mbona. They stated that the spears of Mbona were placed at the top end of Salima's bed, and above the place where the head of Mbona was buried. That is not so according to the actual custodians of the shrine. They state that Salima has always had a separate hut from the Kacisi (the shrine

where the offerings are placed) and that this hut where Salima slept was known as Nyumba ya Mbona (the hut of Mbona). At the shrine they say that Camanga slept in the kitchen, but other informants have stated that sometimes she slept in the hut of Salima. The chief part formerly played by chief Tengani was in the building of the shrine and not in the building of the two huts. It is not certain whether the two huts would be re-built separately from the shrine, or whether all three were always re-built at the same time. Salima would have had to be kept reasonably well housed. It is possible that the shrine itself was at one time rebuilt on each occasion that it started to decay, and not only when a national calamity threatened. All at the shrine agree that the relics of Mbona were buried under the Nyumba ya Mbona and not under the Kacisi, and until the author personally inspected the shrine and hut of Salima, all informants had been quite unanimous that it was the head of Mbona, placed in a basket, which had there been buried. When the author inspected the shrine, Mbukwa stated that it was the body of Mbona which was buried beneath the hut and was immediately supported by chief Tengani and other Africans present, stating that it was the head of Mbona which was buried at the Ndione pool in the Ndindi Marsh. (The author believes that this sudden turn? about was in some way designed to excuse the informants to the spirit of Mbona for showing the site to a stranger). It is stated that the bed of Mbona, on which Salima slept, was constructed so that the top end reached exactly to the spot where the relics of Mbona were said to have been buried. This bed was built in the usual African manner of forked poles placed upright in the ground, with lengthwise long poles resting on these forks. These poles, in this case, had always to be of Kalembo wood. The bed was decked with Kalembo poles, and over these were laid offerings of cloth, which had always to be black or dark-coloured cloth. It is said that long ago the two spears of Mbona were stuck upright into the ground, at the head of the bed and above where Mbona's relics were buried, by the iron butts designed for that purpose. It is said that the original spears did not differ at all from present-day spears, and consisted of a spear-head thrust into a wooden shaft, the joint at the shaft being wrapped with iron. At the other end, a square-tipped butt-iron was thrust into the wooden shaft, and the shaft wrapped with iron. The shafts of the original spears were said to be of the rare Nandolo tree, which does not exist near Nkhulubvi, and is unknown to the people there. (Present-day spears differ hardly at all from those in use ninety years ago as illustrated on page 507 of the original edition published in 1865 of Charles and David Livingstone's "The Zambezi and its tributaries"). The shrine is still built whenever necessary, although nowadays "necessary" is interpreted as any occasion when there is an urgent need to appeal to Mbona for help to bring rain, on such occasions as notable droughts. Chief Tengani no longer plays the principal part in building the shrine, and a deputy does this. It should be added that, on occasions when the shrine is rebuilt at Nkhulubvi, at the same time ceremonies are held at Mwala-amodzi by headman Siki. Also a shrine is maintained at a thicket on the bank of the Ndione pool, on the site of the reputed grave of the body of Mbona. Until about 1900, a fresh Salima was sent from Mbewe-wa Mitengo on each occasion that a Salima was requested by Mbona. By the commonest accounts, the procedure was to send

the two spears of Mbona to chief Tengani. It is said that it was Kalowantsekera, who lives in the small village of Mbukwa, in the edge of the Nkhulubvi thicket, and whose name is inherited in the usual manner, who always heard the utterings of Mbona, and he would report to Mbukwa what he had heard. Mbukwa would then tell Mbango, who would summon all the surrounding headmen so that they might hear the wishes of Mbona. Mbango would then send Kamba lame to chief Tengani with the two spears as a sign that he carried the wishes of Mbona. When Mbona communicated his wish to have a wife in the first instance, the matter had naturally to be arranged properly according to Mang'anja custom, and Cipwembwe, Ngabu, chief Tengani and Mbango accordingly arranged that Kamba lame should be Mbona's marriage go-between and witness (Nkhoswe). Since that time, Kambalame has been the traditional Nkhoswe of Mbona, and when Mbona uttered oracles (ku bwebweta) that he wished a new Salima, it was Kambalame who went off to see about it. He would report first to chief Tengani, and from there Tengani sent him on to Ngabu Banda at the Makande thicket, traditional chamberlain of the Lundus, through whom all tribute from the east, south and west had to come. Kambalame usually went alone, but if Mbona directed that he should be accompanied, Kambalame was so accompanied. When Ngabu Banda received the spears, he took them to the Lundu, accompanied, according to some informants, by Kambalame. When the Lundu received the message that Mbona desired another wife, a fresh Salima would be selected and sent to Nkhulubvi. The Salima was Mkazi wobwebweta, a woman who might enter into a trance and utter oracles. There is divided tradition as to how precisely Salima was brought from Mbewe-wa-Mitengo to Nkhulubvi. Some say that Kambalame reported only, in the first instance, to chief Tengani to acquaint him of Mbona's wishes, and that he would then return to Nkhulubvi with the permission of chief Tengani for the marriage. A large party would then set out for Mbewe-wa-Mitengo via Ngabu Banda at Makande, beating the little kassa drums, large drums, blowing on whistles and trumpets, and led by Kambalame with the two spears. They would wait at Mbewe-wa-Mitengo until a Salima was supplied to them, and they would then escort her to Nkhulubvi. When she was settled in at Nkhulubvi, Matumbo would then be sent from Mbewe-wa-Mitengo with many people, and carrying baskets of maize, to visit Salima to assure that she was properly installed and to carry the usual wedding gifts. By some accounts it was Matumbo, the earless messenger, who was the messenger of Mbona. By others, he was the marriage witness of Salima. By some accounts, the badge of office of Matumbo, apart from his lack of ears, was the flute made from the horn of a Sable Antelope on which he played tunes. By other accounts, and in some respects perhaps the most reliable accounts, Matumbo was a man of Nkhulubvi (although at Nkhulubvi they say he was a man of Mbewe-wa-Mitengo), and he was the traditional messenger of Mbona, whose badges of office were his lack of ears and his flute. At Nkhulubvi, they say that it was not Matumbo who had the flute, and they say that the owner of the flute was Ngabu, but when asked to explain where the flute is today they are very evasive about the matter. According to the Nkhulubvi version that the flute was that of Ngabu, there were two kinds of flute. There was the horn

flute of Ngabu, and there were other and ordinary reed flutes. When the wedding party went from Nkhulubvi to Mbewe wa-Mitengo, the flutes were silent, but on their return from Mbewe-wa-Mitengo with Salima, the flutes proclaimed aloud for all to hear that a new wife was on the way for Mbona. By such accounts, Matumbo accompanied the wedding party to see that Salima arrived safely. By other accounts, Matumbo came later to ensure that Salima had arrived safely. Matumbo was an earless man. The first Matumbo was a man with a deformity without ears. Thereafter, he was a man selected, not a hereditary appointment, who had his ears cut off, and around whose head was wrapped a cloth to hide his disfigurement. It is said that there is no Matumbo at the present time. Chief Lundu states, and he alone states this, that Salima did not invariably come from Mbewe-wa-Mitengo. There were occasions, so he says, when she was supplied by chief Kamanga, of Makanga, north of Mlambala Mountain (Livingstone's Morambala), and east of the Shire River. We hazard a guess that when the Kololo broke up the Lundu chiefdom, and the survivors fled to Ciromo about 90 years ago, that the people of Nkhulubvi then turned to chief Kama? nga to supply them a Salima. Chief Lundu states that the spears of Mbona were never sent to Makanga. It is said that the selection of a new Salima depended on the spirits, who would indicate a suitable woman. In the early 1860-s, the Portuguese half-caste known to Africans as Matekenya (he who causes one to tremble with fear) attacked and destroyed the shrine at Nkhulubvi and took away with him the two spears of Mbona. We suppose that he certainly also took the ivory door-stopper. Very shortly thereafter there was a complete failure of the rains and a dreadful famine. This was almost certainly the famine of 1862, the effects of which are graphically described by the Livingstones in their "the Zambezi and its tributaries". The Mariano to whom they frequently refer in that publication, for instance "the notorious rebel-robber and murderer, Mariano" is the Matekenya of African tradition. This Mariano alias Matekenya had established a base near Mlambala and his successor moved to east of the Shire River in the Macinjiri country. When the great drought and famine ensued shortly after Matekenya had destroyed the shrine of Mbona, he was told that the drought was due to his action. Matekenya therefore sent three spears, some European-type knives, and a china cup and saucer, together with cloth and beads as offerings to the shrine. The shrine was then re-built. Two only of the spears now remain, although there were still three as late as 1920. Only one cup remains, and fragments of the saucer. The knives have all rusted to decay. The two spears are much rusted and differ from the usual type of spear. They have leaf-shaped blades, the actual blades being about six inches long and perhaps an inch and a half wide, tapering down to iron shafts about eighteen inches long. These shafts are thrust into very crudely constructed wooden shafts of wood from the Tkongolo tree, which is found on the slopes of the Malawi Hills nearby. These hills were originally known as Phiri-la-Nyamazere, and the name was changed to Ma? lawi?"to remember our homeland". The total length of the spears is a bit less than five feet each. The wooden shafts are not wrapped with iron, and there are no butt-irons. When shown to the author, they had been leaning against the inside wall of Mbona's hut opposite to the doorway. From the condition of the wood of

the wooden shafts, it was fairly obvious that new shafts had been fitted to the iron spear heads, almost certainly in 1949. As already stated, Salima was a woman of Mbewe-wa Mitengo, and perhaps for a short interval, a woman of Ma kanga. She never died at Nkhulubvi. When Mbona tired of his wife Salima he would, in an oracle, direct that she should be returned to Mbewe-wa-Mitengo, and there must have been frequent periods when there was no Salima. It is not known whether Camanga returned with Salima at such times. As her name implies, Salima did not till the soil, neither did she draw water, nor cook food, nor gather firewood. She did no work at all. It was the duty of Camanga to do all these things for Salima. It was long ago the duty of Ngabu to see that the beer pots at the shrine were always full of beer, and it was the duty of Ngabu to ensure that Salima and Camanga always had enough food to eat. Offerings to Mbona were of many kinds. Ivory was placed in the shrine, or laid on the floor of Mbona's hut next to the spears, and eventually traded for black cloth with which to deck the bed of Mbona. Live animals offered to the shrine were killed and cooked and the meat placed in pots in the shrine. Cloth, grain of various kinds (but usually sorghum) and beer were often offered. By some accounts, the wishes of Mbona were always communicated to Kalowantsekera through the medium of dreams, and he would inform Mbukwa who would then call the headmen together to hear the wishes of Mbona. By other, and probably less reliable accounts, it was Salima herself who dreamed the wishes of Mbona, and she would tell Kamba lame, who would tell Mbukwa. It is said that formerly Mbona would inform the people when rain would fall. Formerly, offerings were sent to Mbona, not only from throughout the country of the great chiefdom of Lundu, but also as far afield as the chiefdom of Kaphwiti, who was related closely to Lundu, and the lesser Undi chiefdoms of Kasuza and others. Not only was it people of the great Karonga "empire" who sent offerings. Lolo from beyond Mlambala Mountain, Lambala from Mlambala Mountain, Sena from the Zambezi River, and even Thonga of chief Makombe from south of the Zambezi River all sent offerings on occasion. When Matekenya raided the Nkhulubvi area, the survivors fled from the area to Gombe, near the Zambezi River, in Chief Dobvu's country. The drought followed, and was certainly attributed by Africans to Matekenya for destroying the Mbona shrine. Matekenya was informed that there was drought because there were no guardians at Nkhulubvi, and no-one to make offerings to Mbona. Matekenya thereupon permitted messengers to go to Gombe to fetch Kapiciriko Ngabu (Ndaunguza Ngabu having died at Gombe and been succeeded by Kapiciriko) and instal him at Nkhulubvi. The shrine of Mbona was built, the offerings sent by Matekenya and others were offered to Mbona, and thereupon, it is said, copious rains began to fall. Chief Ciputula, the Kololo chief who established himself at Tsapa and at Ciromo, never interfered with the shrine, although on one occasion he passed Nkhulubvi on a journey to Dobvu.

It is said that one early Administrative Officer gave goods to Ngabu to place in the shrine. Since the formation of Protectorate Government, regard for Mbona's shrine has largely declined, and it is many

years since neighbouring chiefs in Nyasaland have sent offerings to Mbona. It is probable that no Salima has been sent from Mbewe-wa-Mitengo for at least forty years, and possibly more. The last Camanga to be sent from Mbewe-wa-Mitengo was about fifty years ago. On reaching puberty, she ceased to be Camanga, as was the custom, but instead of returning to Mbewe-wa-Mitengo she remained at Nkhulubvi and married a man near Mbukwa's village and had children. In 1949, when there was a great drought, Cambote of Ntole village, while in a trance, uttered wishes of Mbona that the shrine should be rebuilt and Salima provided for him. This former Camanga referred to above, who was by then a widow, was installed as Salima. On that occasion, chief Tengani himself took no part in the ceremonies, and it was Ngabu who held the centre pole of the shrine while it was being built. That shrine has already (early 1952) largely collapsed, and Salima has vacated the hut of Mbona and returned to her village nearby, although she is still known as Salima. In 1949, few if any nearby Nyasaland chiefs sent offerings to the shrine, but both chiefs Dobvu and Kamanga from Portuguese East Africa sent offerings. Normally, in the past, if Salima vacated her post, she would be escorted back to Mbewe-wa-Mitengo by Mbango and Mitanje. Since she has become a local resident through settlement near Nkhulubvi, she was not so escorted back when she ceased to live in the hut of Mbona, and in fact she is still known as Salima. Visitors to the shrine had formerly to wear only black or dark-coloured clothing. At the present time, this is no longer insisted on, but anything red is definitely not allowed near the shrine.

In olden times, throughout the whole of southern Nyasaland, Mbona was the great rain-maker. Even today, there are few among the older Mang'anja people (who are now very much in a numerical inferiority in southern Nyasaland, owing to invasion by the Yao, and even greater immigration by various tribes of the Nguru peoples) who do not know at least the name and fame of Mbona. That, in times of great need, the people still remember Mbona is well shown by the hundreds of Africans who hastened to re-create the shrine of Mbona and instal a Salima in 1949, when a famine of the intensity reported by Dr. David Livingstone in 1862 threatened the people of the lower Shire Valley, and the rains almost entirely failed.

In December 1952, the shrines have again been re-built.

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