"Untidy tools of colonialism" education, Christianity and social control in Southern Rhodesia: the case of "night dances" – 1920s to the 1930s

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Abstract

This article investigates the phenomenon of "night dances" as an expression of fluid cultural identities and a medium for contesting power by the youth within the context of the 'civilising' influences of education and Christianity. Mostly organised by mission educated and semi-educated people and not by traditional elders in realms where the latter had jurisdiction, the dances became a constant source of conflict. The organisation and participation in these dances upset relations between the generations, particularly between the youth and the gerontocracy (the latter in their capacity as custodians of traditional, moral and cultural values, and in their position as functionaries of the state). Dance became a social expression that entrenched intergenerational struggles between the youth and the gerontocracy, and to some extent buttressed solidarity among the young generation. Issues such as sexuality, organisation and control of labour, and jurisdiction, inter alia, were avenues through which the escalating tensions between the generations manifested themselves.

Introduction

In September of 1930 the Chief Native Commissioner's office (CNC), through the Native Commissioners (NCs) and Assistant Native Commissioners, launched an investigation to ascertain the veracity or otherwise of alleged immorality at the so-called "night dances" in the rural areas. The instruction to investigate was occasioned by the resolution passed by the Conference of Christian Natives[1] and endorsed by the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference in May of 1930 that the "so called Dances or Tea-meetings held at night by irresponsible persons … be eliminated in the outlying districts or kraals".[2] Although the resolution was not clear as to which type of dance was at the centre of the controversy on excessive beer drinking and sexual immorality or the specific districts or areas where the dances were taking place, evidence gathered in the investigations singled out the dances which were organised and proliferated by mission educated teachers and were popular with the mass of youth, mainly those who were in school. In areas which were adjacent to commercial centres, the alleged culprits were those who were returning to the rural areas after a sojourn in the urban areas. The crucible of the urban centres, as did the schools, acted as the transfer point for different cultural influences and became forums for the development of new ideas and traditions.[3]

The investigation into the dances unearthed an undercurrent of discontent among male elders in general and chiefs in particular which was opposed to the social influences of the educated young generation. Constituting part of a variegated trajectory of youth resistance against parental and chiefly authority, dance became a symbol of rebellion. It represented parallel social organisations to those controlled by male elders and, therefore, was an express threat to the established institutions. Some elders wanted to take the opportunity presented by the investigation to deal irreparable damage to the influences of the recalcitrant youth.

By December 1930, the inquiry concluded that the occurrence of the dances, though constituting a significant concern in some areas, was sporadic and, therefore, did not warrant state intervention by way of legislation to ban them. Colonial officials were, however, distraught about the proliferation of these dances which, ostensibly, perforated society's moral fabric, but their real anxiety emanated from the threat that the dances posed to chiefs' moral authority and control over their subjects. Chiefs were a vital cog in Britain's colonial policy of indirect rule, particularly with regards to the maintenance of law and order and any threat to the sustenance of such was a cause for concern. Officials on the different rungs of colonial administration responded differently to the phenomenon of the dances and

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1 The Conference of Christian Natives was a lobby group of African missionaries affiliated to the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference. They were concerned with Government policy with relation to African welfare.

2 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances", Circular from Chief Native Commissioner to Native Commissioners and Assistant Chief Native Commissioners,

3 S. J Salm, Urban Culture and Society

their views fell into three main categories. The first group comprised officials who were averse to enacting a legislative instrument against the dances, highlighting that such measure would be a pyrrhic victory and, instead, suggested the prosecution of offenders under the Kaffir Beer Act, as well as the teaching of morals and discipline in school. The second group, though sympathetic of legislation, cited the limited capacity of the colonial administration to undertake such mandate. The third group constituted those who accepted, with due reluctance, the fact that the dances had become an integral part of the entertainment in the rural areas and legislating against them "would lead to a great amount of dissatisfaction and disaffection amongst the Natives, generally. They (Africans) regard these dances as their chief form of recreation, in most cases an innocent one".[4]

In the end, administration felt it prudent not to attack the dances directly but instead enhanced the power of chiefs through the formalisation of "traditional" authority in the 1930s through the Native Councils Act and the Native Law and Courts Act, which granted civil jurisdiction to chiefs, albeit to a limited degree. In addition, legislative instruments such as the Kaffir Beer Act were amended to give chiefs more authority in their localities. Colonial administration sought to buttress the authority of the chiefs in line with the underlying policy of separate development of the races during the interwar years and the need for more government involvement in the reserves. Measures were taken to weed out any form of resistance to chiefly authority to avoid compromising the implementation of government policy.

The youth and colonial economy

Change during the colonial era encompassed various fields of African society and culture, including the relationship between young and old, mobility and economic emancipation. The development of the colonial economy exhibited some inherent contradictions within the system. For example, colonial rule undermined traditional rulers' accumulation of wealth by limiting and sometimes taking away their jurisdiction over land and labour and in the processes usurped their exercise of power over their subjects. In pre-colonial Africa the control of land and labour was an avenue for maintaining social control and enhancing the social superiority and identity of chiefs and male elders and subjugating young men and women to the power of male elders.[5] According to Grier, Shona fathers controlled their sons primarily by controlling the means of production (land and cattle) and the means of reproduction (access to wives, through cattle).[6] In this respect, the male elders managed to gain the acquiescence of their sons through battery economic and cultural weapons

However with the advent of colonialism and the emergence of wage labour, young men, and to some extent women, were presented with opportunities for economic emancipation. The youth were now presented with opportunities to circumvent the economic control of male elders. Waller notes that colonial states grew by harnessing the energies of the youth in various occupations such as petty functionaries in the colonial administration, askaris, catechists and teachers, and as labourers building a modern economic infrastructure.[7] Inadvertently, the youth were accorded authority, economic power and space. However, the arrogance of the youth which emanated from their Western education and influences of Western culture, threatened to antagonise some constituencies among those who controlled, albeit to a limited extent, the resources of land and labour and the legitimacy on which colonial states depended.[8]

Equipped with education and Christian values, the African youths were not only able to challenge the coloniser by contesting and negotiating the parochial frame of a "primitive race" in which the whites sought to confine the blacks, but also challenged traditional chiefly and parental authority. Although it may be argued that intergenerational struggles between the gerontocracy and the youth pre-dated colonialism and, indeed, outlived it, the influences of Christianity and education during the colonial period accenttuated these long existing struggles. "The responsible section continually complains about the conduct of the younger generation and the question 'can the government do something' is repeatedly asked"[9] In the transforming colonial society, the youth wanted to establish their independence as well as portray their subscription to Western ideas on social comportment and economic development, while the gerontocracy struggled to sustain an enfeebled legacy of control. Commenting on Chief Ntola's complains about the independent attitudes of sons towards their parents, the CNC noted that "the combined influences of the vicious civilising agencies on the younger

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4 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances", NC, Fort Rixon, to CNC 15/09/30
5 Akyampong
6 B. C Grier, *Invisible hands, child labour and the State in colonial Zimbabwe*, Heinemann, Portsmouth,2006, p 58
7 R. Waller, "Rebellious youth in Africa", *Journal of African History, No 47, Cambridge University Press, 2005,* p 78
8 Ibid
9 NAZ S235/5/3 NC, Bubi, Annual Report, 1935, p4

generation as a result of their acquiring individual habits will tend to be a desire to free themselves from parental discipline."[10]

The migrant labour system, which was the fulcrum of the colonial economy, had a debilitating effect on the authority of male elders over young men and women on two distinct levels. At one level, the colonial economy offered the young generation employment opportunities which were not under the direct control of the local African male elders, thereby ensuring a measure of economic emancipation. At another level, the transient labour system entailed that those who sought wage employment would be away from "tribal" control as they moved from one district to another. For example, the Juveniles Employment Act of 1926 allowed for the registration and employment of juveniles who carried employment certificates, thereby opening economic opportunities to an age group that was previously deemed unemployable. Labour demand in most African localities was limited and, as such, juveniles moved across districts in search of employment. Africans in the Shangani and Belingwe districts noted with concern the leverage and mobility accorded to juveniles by this Act. It emerged that most juveniles obtained work certificates under false names and or using other misleading particulars and would destroy the certificates when the need arose, before obtaining new ones.[11] Such a chaotic scenario obtained because prior to 1935 juveniles could obtain certificates from any district office and not necessarily from their district of origin.

In addition, the 1926 Act was not a panacea to the family burden on tax payment and in some cases it even undermined the family unit and the wellbeing of the juveniles concerned. The NC for Bulalima reported,

> The matter was debated at the last Board Meeting, and a resolution passed that the employment of boys be prohibited, except in such cases where a formal indenture or apprenticeship be entered into. It is felt that boys of tender age who are employed often in unwholesome surroundings become *vicious*, and are *estranged* from their families: *that most of them in no way support their parents from wages they earn.* [12] [my emphasis]

From the foregoing, the Juveniles Employment Act, to some extent disrupted the family unit which was the nucleus of social control. Youths were no longer docile and amenable to established authority. Colonial officials noted with concern the exodus of large numbers of "boys" to urban centres as constituting a grievance among parents. In the same vein, Grier argues that sometimes youth engagement in migrant labour was an endeavour to escape the control of their fathers in the homestead economy and gain some autonomy over their labour power to the extent that migrant labour and wage work, and not initiation rites, had become the *rite de passage*.[13] However, the exodus of young men from the rural areas into the urban areas threatened the rural economy. Ploughing, harvesting and the care of stock fell on women and old folk and this disrupted the rural economy.[14] To this end, the NC for Nyanga stopped short of suggesting that rural exodus should be stopped or at least severely minimised, notwithstanding the capital's clarion call for more labour. In addition, the unchecked fluidity of the immigrant population frustrated colonial inclination to fix and classify African people as part of their ruling strategy. It was felt that the scattering of the African population from 'tribal' areas onto the farms and other commercial areas rendered the concept of traditional control ineffective.

Dance and African societies

Dance, including night performances, is an integral and an antiquated institution of heterogeneous African cultures, serving multifarious purposes. Dances were elements of religious significance such as harvest thanksgiving, invocation of departed spirits *(biras)* upon special occasions, or seasons of the year, as well as a form of amusement and recreation for the young and old alike.[15] For example, in the Chipinge area the Chinyambera dance was usually held in moonlight at the first fruit of the season. It was a communal thanksgiving for a good harvest. Among the Sena people in areas bordering Chipinge, the most popular was the Chingondo dance, which was conducted to invoke and propitiate departed spirits and to ask for help and blessing.[16] Most, but certainly not all, official functions were presided

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[10] S482/550/1939 CNC's Report to Secretary to the Prime Minister on the Meeting of Chiefs; Mzingwane, 15/12/25, p2
[11] NAZ S235/5/3 Assistant NC, Shangani, Annual Report 1935, p5
[12] S235/5/3 NC, Bulalima-Mangwe, Annual Report 1935, p10
[13] B. C Grier, *Invisible Hands, Child Labour and the State in Colonial Zimbabwe*,p34
[14] NC Bulalima-Mangwe Annual report p.10
[15] NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" Ass NC, Chipinge, to CNC 11/12/30
[16] Ibid

over by the male elders in patriarchal societies, mainly the chiefs, who exercised power and were the custodians of culture and tradition. Also beer drinking was not an uncommon feature of these ceremonies.

Probably the most popular of the night dances in the Chipinge area was the Chibububu dance, a product of the colonial economy held "in welcome of those who have returned safely from work in the Johannesburg mines" with "the money for the government".[17] The migrants brought back money which was used to pay the tax requirements at household level and sometimes for the whole community. As such, their safe return was marked by a carnival atmosphere of dance and fanfare and beer drinking. The dance was consistent with moves which involved posturing "suggestive of the prancing of cocks amongst hens",[18] which was in itself a symbol of superiority and power. The Chibububu dance no doubt magnified the importance and also elevated the social status of the migrant labourers who were predominantly young able-bodied men.

The night dances that were allegedly organised in the rural areas by educated and semi-educated Africans, and in most cases teachers, were a precipitous trajectory of the late 1920s and the 1930s. A cursory analysis of the archival material reveals that the dances in question were of a heterogeneous form ranging from the so-called 'tea meetings' in most areas and Makwayera in the Gutu District[19] to those dances that were presumably imported from outside Southern Rhodesia, such as Chinyamasasuri or Ndege.[20] Unlike, say, the Beni Ngoma Dance in East Africa which had essential musical features and moves, ranks and uniforms, this wave of dances was so amorphous in character that even the circular from the CNC to the NCs and Assistant NCs instructing the launch of the investigation into the dances did not clearly state as to which type of dance was under the spotlight. The circular simply referred to them as 'night dances'.[21]

Naturally the phrase "night dances" was a potential source of confusion and misinterpretation because while in some areas the colonial officials were investigating Tea Meetings, in other areas the "night dances" took on another form and name, and in certain instances they were gatherings whose agenda could not be expressly defined. Given the fact that dance was an integral part of African cultures and traditions, the parameters of the investigation under night dances were too wide. The Superintendent of Natives for Matabeleland complained that: The resolution quoted comes in serious conflict with Native Custom and Religion, for there are many forms of ceremonial dances and, as far as I know, the only one which is performed by the day is the *Ukubuyisa* dance.[22] In this respect, using "night dances" as the catch phrase in the investigation was not only problematic for the administrators, but also threatened to infringe on those dances which were deemed "legitimate".

Although problematic, the phrase "night dances" had two connotative meanings. Firstly, it referred to the night time when these dances were allegedly conducted. Secondly, it also hinted at the general conduct at these nocturnal excursions − moral bankruptcy. According to Jackson, the demarcation of boundaries and naming were the prerogative of the colonial state and as such an exercise of power.[23] In the same vein, the adoption of the term "night dances" in official communication of the investigations amounted to labelling suggestive of disapproval on the part of the state and was conveniently adopted by the African elders who were more than eager to label and condemn these dances for various reasons. For example, the Ndege or Chinyamasaruri dance was not necessarily performed during the night but it, nevertheless, attracted the disapproval of the male elders.

However the process of investigating the dances themselves identified the "problem dances" not by name or style of the dance, but rather by organisation and participation. Evidence provided by the Africans implicated the dances that were organised by mission educated and semi-educated Africans, especially the rural school teachers, and were popular with the mass of youth, mainly those who were attending the central mission schools, as well as the "kraal" schools which were becoming a salient feature of the rural set up. The protagonists, in providing evidence to the colonial administrators, were the male elders who clearly regarded the dances with derision. The NC for Plumtree was convinced that the nexus of education and Christianity encapsulated the problem

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17 Ibid

18 Ibid

19 B Davies and W Dopcke,*" Survival and Accumulation in Gutu: Class Formation and the Rise of the State in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1900-1939", Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 14,No 1, October 1987,p82.*

20 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" NC, Amandas, to CNC 8/9/30

21 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances", Circular from Chief Native Commissioner to Native Commissioners and Assistant Chief Native Commissioners

22 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances", Superintendent of Natives, Matebeleland, to CNC 10/09/30

23 L.A Jackson, "*Narratives of madness and power: A history of Ingutsheni Mental Hospital and social order in colonial Zimbabwe, 1908-1959*", PhD, University of Columbia, 1997,p68.

> … the evil complained of is increasingly with the civilizing influences for which the missionaries, to a great extent, are responsible. It is difficult to suggest a remedy unless it becomes so prevalent so as to justify legislation. It is unfortunately true that a great deal of beer is sold and consumed at these gatherings and I would suggest that the aid of police be invoked to make special efforts to prosecute these offenders who are selling beer.[24]

The mission as a cultural village exposed Africans to Western social standards and concepts of social organisations. Parry attributes the burial societies, sports and dance clubs which proliferated in Salisbury in the 1920s and 1930s[25] to these Western concepts of social organisation. Education and Christianity provided competing ideologies to those perpetuated by African tradition and educated Africans sought to express their emerging identity and recognised themselves as a distinct social group. Chikowero postulates that the educated African's mediation of Western "civilisation" produced a rich dialogue of self-fashioning which disrupted the raison d'être of colonial modernity.

It is important to note that the educated African not only used his enhanced capacity to engage the coloniser but sometimes disrupted "traditional" African structures and negotiated for space, especially in the rural areas. Using the example of Gutu district, Davies and Dopcke state that teachers sought to distance themselves from the "traditional" community by refusing to participate in "communal" tasks such as carrying water for the dip tanks, which they regarded as demeaning.[26] A sign which proved that these teachers did not identify with the structures in their community was their participation in the Victoria Branch of the Southern Rhodesia Native Association (SRNA) when it was formed in 1925. Such developments buttressed their 'alien' position in rural structures and this precipitated tensions between African male elders and this young educated generation. The educated African's novel ideas of social organisation undermined the African male elders' moral authority and exercise of power.

The emergence of the night dances should be seen within the context of the bourgeoning subculture espoused by the educated Africans. The high degree of objection and sometimes disgust with which African male elders regarded the so-called night dances revealed some salient undercurrent struggle between the gerontocracy and the educated youth. The character of the dances roused suspicion and invited labelling from the African male elders in the perpetual intergenerational power struggles with the youth. Consistent with the other facets of the emergent social organisations for the youth, the dances eschewed any notion of 'traditional' leadership. Chiefly and parental authority was disregarded in so far as the dances were sometimes conducted during the night by a predominantly youthful patronage and/or in the absence of "acceptable" parental supervision and, above all, without the chief's blessing. This paved the way for misdemeanour in the form of excessive beer drinking and sexual immorality. In addition, some of the dances were performed by itinerant dance parties which moved from village to village through a network on invitations.

> Teachers of one or more kraal schools write to one another and arrange a joint dance of their school pupils. Alternatively the people at whose kraals they dance give a goat or something similar − alternatively it is arranged that the combined schools should go on to cultivate for some individual (black or white), a price is arranged by the teacher − one or more beasts usually − on completion of the dance or work the animals are taken by the party to a place in the veld and then killed … dance and feast may go on for 2 days and nights or for as long as two weeks. The pupils and teachers even go outside the district into adjoining districts.[27]

The teachers were creating a parallel power base which undermined the control of male elders. The CNC for Gutu District further reported, "… during the holidays these people are often away from their home for days. The elders object but do not complain because they are afraid of offending the teachers".[28] The fear of the teachers emanated from the fact that the Dutch Reformed Church, Alheit Mission, Gutu District, under HH Orlandini and his African teachers had become a law unto

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24 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances", NC Plumtree to CNC

25 R. Parry, *Culture,organization and class: the African experience in Salisbury 1892-1935, in B Raftopoulos and T Yoshikuni (eds) Sites of Struggles. Essays in Zimbabwe;s Urban History,* Weaver Press, 1999, 66-77

26 B Davies and W Dopcke,*" Survival and Accumulation in Gutu: Class Formation and the Rise of the State in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1900-1939", p78*

27 NAZ S1542-M8, Native Commissioner Gutu to Superitendent Of Natives, Victoria, 28/4/33, p 7

28 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances", CNC to Minister of Native Affairs, 6/12/30

themselves by fining students for absconding class and other misdemeanours.[29] In addition, Orlandini collected fines and "taxes", recruited labour and accumulated huge numbers of cattle, often defying the authority of the NC.[30] Although the villagers laid several complaints with the NC, nothing was done. The mission had assumed some state functions, and apparently the NC was unable to curb these developments.

In the case of Gutu District, the common position shared by Christian Natives as a national body and the local chiefs on the immorality of night dances represented a rear alliance. Generally, the missionary influence was, to some extent, perceived as encouraging divorce and harbouring "renegade" women. Orlandini was unequivocal about the mission being a haven for women who wanted to escape patriarchal control and were willing to embrace Christianity. These women were a very important source of labour on the mission farms as well as for other chores.[31] Categories of runaways included young girls who ran away from arranged marriages, widows who refused to be "inherited", married women who had been mistreated by their husbands and junior wives of polygamous men.[32] This position engendered animosity with patriarchal traditional family values which made divorce very difficult. In large measure, the mission became associated with immorality, notwithstanding its Christian teachings on morals. NC, Nyanga, noted that:

> The Natives think the loose habits of the girls attending schools are due to the undermining of native religion and parental authority. Girls and boys are gathered together in the schools with this evil result. The older people say that at the schools the parent's wishes are ignored. Their daughters are taught to read and write and by this means they are able to correspond with evil young men, mostly young men who are away from their kraals at work, and under no tribal restraint. The girls are taught to look upon their parents as heathens, someone to be looked upon with scorn and contempt.[33]

In this regard, the school system exposed young girls also to the possibility of having their chastity violated by the corrupt influences of Western values. According to Nyambara, school accorded the young girls the power to choose husbands and this not only constituted a threat to parental authority but also jeopardised the parents' material base.[34] In addition, parents were anxious because they did not have confidence in the teachers in whose custody their daughters were whilst in school. In their view, these young teachers were peddlers of insolence and subordination, at best, and debauched libertines, at worst. "They say that many of the Native Teachers have seduced their daughters as such people are more often than not a law unto themselves."[35]

However, Africans were not, as a general rule, opposed to education. At the various meetings and indabas between traditional leaders and the Southern Rhodesia Governor, chiefs stressed the need for the provision of education in their areas.[36] In certain instances they registered their displeasure at government's lack of commitment to African education. "Where are we to put our schools? We are told to move from place to place", retorted Chief Mvutu at an Indaba, in 1927.[37] Although Mvutu's argument had more to do with the land issue, the question of education was critical enough to be used as a façade in addressing the more contentious land issue. Owing to the widespread demand for educational facilities during these meetings, government was forced to take a non-committal position that "while most anxious to provide all possible facilities for their education, Government did not wish to convey even a hint that the education of their (Africans) children is compulsory".[38]

The investigation into the night dances was instituted at the request of the Association of Christian Natives, a position which the gerontocracy shared, and this represented commonality between sides that usually regarded each other with suspicion and sometimes derision. In spite of their suspi-

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29 See B Davies and W Dopcke,*" Survival and Accumulation in Gutu: Class Formation and the Rise of the State in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1900-1939"*

30 Ibid, p65

31 NAZ NVG3/2/1 Orlandini to NC Gutu 3/9/17 ;One of Chief Chimombe's wives disappeared from home and was later found at the mission. This did not go down well with the Chief.

32 P.S Nyambara, *"Missionaries, the Colonial State and African Society, The Struggle for the Control of the African women in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1939" Seminar Paper Presented to the History Department, NorthWestern University, Spring, 1994*, p4

33 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances", NC, Nyanga, to CNC 26/09/30

34 P.S Nyambara*, "Missionaries, the Colonial State and African Society, The Struggle for the Control of the African women in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1939",p 4*

35 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances", NC, Nyanga, to CNC 26/09/30

36 NAZ S482/550/39 Meeting of the Governor of S. Rhodesia, L.S Emery, with Chiefs and Headmen of Mashonaland, 16/08/27 ,p6

37 NAZ S482/550/39 Report of an Indaba held by Governor of S. Rhodesia, L.S Emery with Matebele Chiefs, 18-08-27, p3

38 NAZ S482/550/39 Minutes of meeting of Chiefs and Headmen in Nyajena Reserve, 23/09/29, p4

cions, the chiefs (as custodians of culture and traditional values) were willing to ally with missionaries when it suited them. For example, in Ghana, chiefs worked closely with the temperance movement which was spearheaded by missionaries in their desire to curb excessive beer consumption among the youth.[39]

Cooperation between the two sides was a marriage of convenience and was largely tenuous. Notwithstanding these sporadic instances of cooperation between missionaries and traditional leadership, the image of the educated African (products of missionaries and conduits of their masters) as rebellious and deviant in the eyes of the gerontocracy and the colonial state pervades much of Africa's colonial history. For example, an inquest into the Chilembwe Uprising of 1915 in Nyasaland revealed that a section of the black mission-educated elite had played a prominent role in the disturbances. The Governor of Nyasaland confirmed the "extent to which the principles inculcated by John Chilembwe have been spread and accepted by the Christian-educated section of the native community".[40] Chiefs in the Luangwa District of Northern Rhodesia complained of the "educated native teachers attempting to create themselves a class above the Chiefs".[41] Chiefs also lamented the usurpation of their moral and political authority by these mission teachers through the introduction of a "new dance, unknown to the Angoni tribe called 'Chipe', which had led to 'considerable immorality'".[42] In addition, schools had been established in their areas without their consent. The higher social status and education of the teachers ensured that they played prominent roles as both spokesmen and de facto leaders.[43]

The night dances investigations revealed that the sexuality of the females was a contested terrain between the male youths and the older generation. The resolution by the Native Missionary Conference in part read: "The night dances are great temptations to young girls and in most cases are responsible for the loose habits now practiced by young girls …"[44] In areas where these dances were practised male elders were in agreement with this view and persuaded the state to legislate against them. The NC for Goromonzi aptly captured the tensions arising out of the control of the sexuality of the young women.

> "Tea Meetings" appear to be held more in Seke and Chikwaka Reserves than in the other Reserves, and particularly in Seke Reserve. *Chief Seke and the older people are not in favour of them.* These dances undoubtedly do lead to more beer drinking, as European drinks and edibles (sic). It is a custom that is growing and *one that is being spread by the younger generation returning from urban centres*. The older people raise objection to the Tea Meetings and dances chiefly on the grounds of the freedom given to younger married women, who are apt to find someone more congenial than their elderly husbands.[45] [my emphasis]

In view of this statement, the night dances provided women with the opportunity to overstep the boundaries of "acceptable" social behaviour. However, of infinitely greater significance is the salient intergenerational conflict between the older and younger men over the younger married women. In addition, the control of female sexuality was central with regards to its effects on migrant labour. Some African men were not particularly keen on seeking wage employment because it entailed their being away from their wives. The occasion of the dances posed the danger that wives of absentee husbands might have relationships with other younger men.[46]

The anxiety to control female sexuality among African male elders was reinforced by the NC for Gokwe:

> Anyone reaching the kraal early in the morning is struck by the dissipated appearance of the inhabitants … even old women and mothers with children on their backs, reeling from the effects of drink. If one should happen upon the revels at night when they are in full swing and the drink has taken good effect, one will more likely observe in the veld in the neighbourhood of the dances, men and women in compromising positions. Certainly when under the influence of drink at these dances, girls and wives of absentee husbands

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39 AKYAMPONG

40 Quoted in E. Yorke, *"The Spectre of a Second Chilembwe; Government, Missions, and Social Control in Wartime Northern Rhodesia, 1914-18," Journal of African History, Vol. 34, No 3 , 1990.p377*

41 Ibid.p379

42 Ibid,p378

43 R. Waller, "*Rebellious youth in Africa",*,p388

44 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" CNC Circular 29/08/30

45 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances",NC, Goromonzi, to CNC 20/09/30

46 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" NC, Nyanga,

> are likely to become pregnant to unidentifiable men, the offspring of such chance unions being described by the euphemism "a child found in the grass i.e. veld. [47]

In areas adjacent to towns and other commercial centres the night dances took on a more commercial aspect and was a source of accumulation, with the selling of beer and possibly sexual services. The Assistant NC for Bindura reported:

> … entertainments of this type … are extremely popular in this neighbourhood and are held regularly both in the township and on surrounding farms. I am informed that it is the *practice to invite the attendance of a few girls of an immoral character who mingle among the dancers* and afterwards receive a share in the profits, while the presence of other girls likely to add to the attractions of the evening is often encouraged by the offer of free admittance. Beyond the Township beer is provided, and I am told that general lewdness of speech and gesture prevail. The few parents who are able to maintain control over the movements of their daughters will not permit them to attend these functions. While I agree as to the evils of the "Tea Dance" it seems to me that it is not so much a case of the "Dances" resulting in loose habits as of loose habits resulting in the dances.[48]

These more commercialised entertainments were a result of the distribution of labour which resulted in concentration of large numbers of male labourers who were living away from their wives. The market for sexual services was indeed available. The laxity of morals in towns and on mines had its contaminating effect on rural life when people with urban influences eventually returned to their rural homes.[49] In addition, these dances were tempting to the young rural girls who were "condemned to the drab routine of kraal life, while her less virtuous sister leads a life of ease and comparative luxury, dance and pretty frocks, without, so far as I can see, jeopardizing her prospects of marriage to any extent".[50] Such views by the colonial officials reinforced and perpetuated the image of the deviant African female as nothing more than sexually loose.

However, some administrators were not convinced that the dances were responsible for the youths' moral perversion and instead imputed the blame on the cataclysmic rupture of parental control in African communities.[51] In addition, such misdemeanours were not peculiar with to the Africans but a normal development with youths of all races operating under minimal or no parental control.[52] Not all administrators were willing to jump on the bandwagon of condemning the dances as responsible for moral decadence, because the dances were symptomatic of a broader problem of a lack of African societal cohesion and parental authority rather than being a problem in itself.

In the Gutu District male elders opposed the night dances because of their effect on their control of labour. Since these dances were popular with the youth of school-going age, such excursions were mostly done during the schools holidays and on Saturdays during the school term.[53] Consequently, parents found it difficult to mobilise family labour. Parents were particularly antagonistic because their children worked in the mission fields while their parents' own fields suffered from neglect.[54] The question of labour was not only confined to Gutu District as NC Amandas highlighted

> In this district for instance the Chinyamasasuri or Ndege, a dance brought down from Fort Tur and of an immoral nature, caused all the younger people to go literary dancing mad, night and day the Ndege drums were going throughout the Reserve no work was done and then the elders came and represented to me the necessity for stopping this particular dance, the Missionaries also asked for the assistance.[55]

The dances by the youth became an image of rebellion and subjected the meanings of dance to fierce contestations that bolstered, and sometimes transformed existing generational and gender conflicts.

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47 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances NC Gokwe to Superintend of Natives Matebeleland 27/09/30

48 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" Asst NC, Bindura, to NC Amandas 20/09/30

49 Ibid

50 Ibid

51 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" NC ,Belingwe, to CNC 18/09/30

52 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" Letter 24 -12-30

53 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances "NC, Gutu, to Superintendent of Natives, Victoria, 22/9/30

54 P.S Nyambara, "Missionaries, the Colonial State and African Society, The Struggle for the Control of the African women in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1939" ,p 4

55 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" NC,Amandas, to CNC 8/9/30

Night dances became a rallying point for youth expression of freedom from male elders, a symbol of dissent and an expression of an identity that was congruous to colonial society and economy. Youth solidarity coalesced around these dances as a means to escape the control of male elders and subverted parental control. As a result, opposition to the dances was sometimes not a question of whether or not the dances were immoral but rather who had introduced them.

> The matter has been discussed with Chiefs, Headmen and parents who complain that they no longer exercise authority over their children and that the controlling forces are the Missionaries and kraal teachers…Some of the elder men object to the Mchato (marriage) dance which was introduced by mission natives, *but it appears to be quiet harmless in itself.*[56] [my emphasis]

The culpability of the educated and those with urban influences in the organisation of the dances cannot be disputed in terms of the dances being immoral. The dances highlighted the discursive constructions of deviance in the youth by male elders and colonial officials. While in some areas these dances were deemed legitimate because they were held by "responsible" people, in other areas the same dances were considered an express sign of moral decadence simply because the patrons were considered "irresponsible". For example, the "native" police at Belingwe organised these dances in the nearby villages and they caused no alarm[57] but similar dances in Seke or Gutu were considered an immorality. In the Gokwe district, it had become customary for "the Native Police and Native Messengers to call upon neighbouring kraals to send women to the camps of the Police and Native Messengers to brew beer for their Christmas festivities".[58]

State response to night dances

The effective establishment of colonial rule met with, among other impediments, resistance from the Africans. As such the colonial state was alert to issues pertaining to law and order, discipline and stability by superimposing its authority on the existing African administrative structures. In particular, the colonial state enlisted the services of the local chiefs. It devoted considerable effort to buttressing the domestic authority of African elders and forged alliances with local gerontocracies to create define and manage "tradition".[59] The interwar years witnessed a shift in the political debate over the control, development and segregation of Africans in Southern Rhodesia. The need to control the social and ecological processes in the reserves became imperative owing to the disruptions caused by the depression. The need to restore "tradition" emerged and this involved, among other things, state intervention on behalf of 'traditional' political authorities to eliminate obstacles to thier authority from missionary and settler interests.[60]

The state naturally resented missionaries' interference in its efforts to control the African and considered them a particular nuisance. According to West, colonialists regarded the social mobility of the African as the unintended goal of mission education.[61] They accepted, with reluctance, the formal education Africans received in mission schools which they perceived as too literary. HS Keigwin, the Director of Native Education, epitomised settler mentality when he registered his scepticism about the merits of offering literary as opposed to industrial education to the African in such a racially divided society. For Keigwin, the mission-educated elite threatened white domination and disrupted colonial constructions of 'tribal' society.[62] Although the colonial authorities were not oblivious to the dangers inherent in an education system, for the African, in which they did not have direct control, in the prevailing environment of racial division and financial stringency such concerns were predictably ignored, at least up to the early 1920s. In view of this fact, the state's decision not to take an active role in education is an example of how financial imperatives were allowed to undercut the pillars of colonial political and social control.

The establishment of Domboshawa and Tjlotjo government schools in the 1920s was part of colonial state's endeavour to provide Africans with the 'right' kind of education (technical education) under the rubric of native development. These schools offered industrial subjects such as carpentry, agriculture and building, which were expensive to teach and were sometimes neglected by mission

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56 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" NC, The Range, Enkledoorn, to CNC 12/11/30

57 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" NC, Belingwe, to CNC 18/O9/30

58 S235/386-387 NC,Gokwe, to CNC, Inquiry into conduct of Native Police: Sebungwe District, 26/03/1929

59 R. Waller, p4

60 Davies and Dopke,p90

61 M.O West, *The Rise of the African Middle Class*, p13-15

62 Ibid

schools.[63] Paradoxically, during the late 1920s and the early 1930s when mission schools began to play an important role in providing industrially oriented education, the state was up in arms against them because it feared competition from skilled and semi-skilled Africans, especially during the Depression years.[64]

Night dances provided another occasion where church and state were at variance. Sentiments among some NCs reflected the somewhat tenuous relationship between church and state on what they viewed as the proper control of the educated African. To the extent that some administrators viewed missionary efforts at controlling Africans as largely ineffective and sometimes responsible for some of the social problems, the NC for Mtoko registered his exasperation and disgust with the missionaries over the dances. "Tea meetings have been introduced to the kraals by the Missions. The native teachers usually arrange them. If the missionaries do not like them, *why do they not instruct their native teachers* to discontinue them?"[65] [emphasis mine]. The impression given above is that the problem of the dances could squarely be blamed on the missionaries themselves and it was well within their capacity to deal with the problem and not an issue to be dealt with by administration. The NC for Enkeldoorn viewed the educated Africans as a particular nuisance because they were "Christian elements apeing the European ... They are a mass production and now beyond the supervision of missionaries away from the churches."[66] From the foregoing, administrators largely attributed the problems caused by the educated African to the ineptitude of the missionaries themselves.

Notwithstanding the fact that the dances carried the reputation of attracting a purely corrupt element, some Africans were not particularly keen on having them banned, highlighting that the dances were "the only pleasure … of the kraal life of boys and girls". This reluctance could have informed the sentiments of some NCs that the NMC resolution was generally exaggerated.[67] "The Christian Natives should realize that it is quite futile to attempt to enforce the doctrines they profess by legislation …"[68] Under the circumstances, if the dances "were to be arbitrarily forbidden by law much ill feeling and resentment would be created".[69] In the same vein, some colonial administrators felt that the African was already overburdened with legislation prohibiting one thing or another and as such state intervention in the dances would trigger unnecessary reactions.

> There is nothing more wrong with the Native night dances than there is at the show dances at the Meikles or a Saturday night dance at the Grand … Too many "Donts" make life irksome to the native, and is liable to do more harm than good, we have quite sufficient of them in our present native legislation and should be careful how we add to the number.[70]

Some administrators accepted, with reluctance, that the dances were an inescapable concomitant of the 'civilisation' congruent with colonialism and while subscribing to the idea of keeping the dances in check, questioned the practicality and desirability of eliminating them.[71] This was largely because "the dances are a deep-rooted national institution and to take definite action would be futile".[72] Notwithstanding this aversion to enacting a piece of legislation, the administrators were not oblivious to the 'moral' issue at hand. However, they advocated for a social remedy through the nurturing of a higher code of morals by the church and in schools and also inculcating habits of discipline and restraint.[73] In view of this fact, administration was throwing the problem of dances back at the church. Legislation would only be necessary as a last resort when the social remedies had failed. If not properly handled the problem could leave administration in a quagmire because banning the dances would be "a tyrannical act" likely to be "received with a mixture of indignation and ridicule".[74]

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63 C. Summers, "*Educational Controversies;African Activism and Strategies in Southern Rhodesia, 1920 1934," Journal of Southern African Studies,* Vol 20, No 1, March 1994,p6 Keigwin report

64 Nyambara,p.3

65 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dance" NC , Mtoko, to CNC 10/09/30

66 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances NC, The Range, Enkledoorn, to CNC 21/11/30

67 Ibid

68 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" Superitendent of Natives, Matebeleland, to CNC 19/09/30

69 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" NC, Amandas, to CNC 08/09/30

70 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" NC, Mrewa, to CNC 8/9/30

71 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" NC, Goromonzi, to CNC 20/09/30

72 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" NC, Gokwe, to Superintendant of Natives, Matebeleland, 27/09/30

73 Ibid

74 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" NC Selukwe

Some administrators were against legislation not because of the moral nature of the problem at hand but rather because they doubted the practicability of enforcing such a measure. Administration was already hamstrung for want of messengers and police details in the reserves and any move towards banning the dances "… would be setting the Native Department a herculean task".[75] However, not all administrators were for the idea of using the social remedies to deal with the problem. Some were keen on a legal crackdown on the dances. For example, NC for Marandellas implored the Native Department to give legal powers to NCs "to restrict or prohibit brewing and beer drinking gatherings, also to deal with vagrant females, leading an idle or immoral life …" Some administrators were willing to intervene only when the white employers had complained of any form of disruption to their labour needs as a result of the dances. Not only were these administrators willing to use existing legislation, such as the Kaffir Beer Ordinance, but they were also supportive of banning the dances. Given the fact that beer brewing and selling was a lucrative enterprise in the Reserves and on the farms, it was highly unlikely that the teaching of moral restraint in schools and at church would have yielded any meaningful result; hence the need for a legal instrument. For example, NC Mzingwane promised Chief Ntola all the assistance he could render under the Native Affairs Act in order to curtail and regulate the tea meetings in his area.[76] Some African chiefs, implored the state to craft a legislative instrument

> [T]he women and the young children congregate together and drink beer to excess. We ask you to bring in a law compelling us to leave alone the new strong brew of beer ... Our young men quickly become old through drinking too freely; the numerous cases of assault and fighting are due to beer drinking. We ask you to put a stop to excessive beer drinking.[77]

In an environment of compromised police power and imperfect communication, violators of the Kaffir Beer Act managed to circumvent restrictions on beer distribution and consumption. Some NCs urged the police to make a few examples in terms of arrests and possibly deter would-be perpetrators. However, it was difficult to obtain a conviction under the Kaffir Beer Ordinance because the perpetrators and their patrons worked in a closely knit network and were cautious not to sell beer to strangers.[78] The NC for Sinoia aptly captured the complexity of the problem:

> Police find it difficult to convict under the Kaffir Beer Ordinance … for it is not often that the beer is actually sold to the consumer. The price he pays for admission and bidding money easily repay the organizer of the gathering and he has no need to charge for the beer. The "meetings" are often held at the kraals, so that the provision of Sections 5, 6 and 7 of the Kaffir Beer Ordinance are stultified.[79]

The concept of entrance fees and bidding at beer parties was consistent with what obtained at the big dinners and concerts, where threepence was charged for admission and threepence for tea and bread or cake and participants would bid to dance or sing for another threepence.[80] The prime minister acknowledged that certain provisions of the Kaffir Beer Act were a dead letter, for example, the obligation that guests and visitors were supposed to leave beer assemblies before sunset, under section 7, was not being strictly followed. Further, certain employers on the mines connived at and encouraged the sale of beer by employees.[81] These employers allegedly used such 'luxuries' to lure labour to the mines. In this regard, the effective policing of beer drinking was not only impractical but it also had far-reaching effects on the supply of labour to industry. The state was, therefore, treading a fine line between ensuring social order while at the same time ensuring that there was a constant supply of labour.

The phenomenon of the dances coincided with the emergence of new forms of religious sects and quasi-political teachings in the reserves, which the state regarded with suspicion. The NC for Chipinge expressed unreserved scepticism at the political influences of the migrants to South Africa who peddled "loose and foolish notions gathered from Europeans preaching of various brands of

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75 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" NC, Enkledoorn, 21/11/30

76 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" NC Mzingwane to Superintendent of Natives, Matebeleland , 01/10/30

77 S482/550/1939 Minutes of meeting between the Governor of Southern Rhodesia and the Chiefs, Headmen and Natives of Shiota Native Reserve , Marandellas District , 06/06/27, p4

78 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dance" Superintendent of Natives, Matebeleland to CNC 17/09/30

79 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" NC, Sinoia, to CNC 08/09/30

80 NAZ S235/392 Native Dances: 1930 Inquiry into alleged immorality at "Night Dances" NC, Hartley, to CNC 12/09/30

81 S482/560/39 Kaffir Beer Act, 1936

political economy who abound in and around Johannesburg".[82] The state was also worried about what they termed:

> The more or less surreptitious teaching and preaching by Native emissaries from the Union of the doctrines of new and eccentric sects fashioned after union models has continued but it would seem as if the attitude of the of the *older people of late stiffened against these manifestations of undisciplined religiosity* which even to their untutored minds appear to be fraught with danger to *law and order … That the effect of these meetings is generally bad is not to be doubted; looseness and immorality generally, as well as a weakening of the normally healthy attitudes of the Native towards established authority are the more noticeable results of these nocturnal activities.*[83] [my emphasis].

In the late 1920s, the Zionist churches appeared in the Victoria District, particularly the Zion Christian Church under Rev. Samuel Mutendi, who had worked in South Africa. The teachings of this church appealed to the rural poor by way of ideological control over female labour, healing and protection from witchcraft. In addition, the Zion Church attempted to provide education for its members, with Mutendi establishing an illegal school in the district in 1931. All this was a response to the difficult economic circumstances of the 1930s as well as the unsatisfactory conditions in the mission schools.

In the end, since the administration could not settle for a piece of legislation against the dances, they recommended the amendment of the Kaffir Beer Ordinance, directing government efforts towards the restoration and support of parental authority in consultation with chiefs through the Native Boards. To curb the recrudescence of these dances, the Kaffir Beer Act was amended in 1936. Under the amended Act, beer parties were supposed to end before sunset. In addition, beer parties in the villages were subject to the authority of the chief. Notwithstanding this position, government anxiety over the control of the African in the reserves remained a priority given the undermining of chiefs' authority by missionary influences and sometimes by white farmers. Indeed there was an urgent need to buttress the authority of the chiefs so that government policy would not be threatened. The refocus of government policy in the 1930s towards its support of the chiefs' authority in their jurisdictions was summed up by the NC for Lomagundi,

> The tribal system, however, must be based on tribal control and if it be conceded that this system is not in any way necessary to our native administration, the argument in favour of granting some real power, however small, to the native Chiefs becomes difficult to controvert. If it be considered that the tribal system is unworthy of perpetuation, then, to avoid chaos, we must put ourselves in a position to replace it with something better before it dies a natural death.

The colonial state sought to refashion "tradition" by increasing the chief's legal powers through the promulgation of the Native Councils Act and the Native Law and Courts Act, which granted limited civil jurisdiction to chiefs. Although the chiefs were already trying most of the civil cases, these two acts formalised their activities. The NCs retained the authority to retry cases and revise judgments from the Native Courts. Through this formalisation of the authority of the chiefs, the colonial state was able to establish and maintain a heavy hand in the reserves for the purposes of social control.

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[82] S235/5/4 NC, Chipinge,Annual Report,1934

[83] Pp. 18-19

Conclusion

The fundamental element about the night dances is not so much the culpability or otherwise of the youths in participating in them, as for how the dances were interpreted and how they shaped the generational and social power relations under colonialism. An expression of the effervescence of youth and vitality, the dances represented parallel social organisations to those controlled by the gerontocracy; the dances assumed political signifycance of colossal proportions and, therefore, attracted attention from both local male elders as well as the colonial state. To the extent that the dances eschewed any notion of traditional leadership, their organisation threatened the foundations of law and order on which the colonial economy was firmly built. As such, the dances excited a keen interest in the colonial officials which encapsulated anxiety and caution. Although education and Christianity were ample tools in the white man's endeavour at 'civilising' and controlling the African, these agents also engendered unintended outcomes. Some Africans used their newly acquired skills to fight the colonial mechanisms of control in their quest for self-actualisation and emancipation.