

## Review Article

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### What went Wrong? Zambian Political Biography and Post-colonial Discourses of Decline

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**Francis Kaunda, *Selling the Family Silver***

Printpak Books, KwaZulu-Natal, 2002

197 pp

ISBN 0 620 29652 6

**Andrew Sardanis, *Africa: Another Side of the Coin***

I.B. Tauris, London & New York, 2002

320 pp

ISBN 1860 64 926 2

**John Mwanakatwe, *Teacher, Politician, Lawyer: My Autobiography***

Bookworld Publishers, Lusaka, 2003

515 pp

ISBN 9982 24 021 8

**Akashambwata Mbikusita-Lewanika, *Hour for Reunion, Movement for Multi-Party Democracy: Conception, Dissension and Reconciliation***

African Lineki Courier, Mongu-Lealui, 2003

448 pp

ISBN 9982 872 00 1

**Simon Zukas, *Into Exile and Back***

Bookworld Publishers, Lusaka, 2002

220 pp

ISBN 9982 24 020 X

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History matters in Zambia. The recent publication of these five biographical or semi-biographical studies by important political and economic figures is testament to a widespread thirst for knowledge and explanation of the events of late colonial and post-colonial history. The relevance of history to the contemporary social and political discourse is, however, certainly not new. In the years after independence in 1964, historical studies played an important role in the self-conscious construction of a Zambian identity, shaped around a nationalist metanarrative of injustice, exploitation and struggle, culminating in the achievement of national independence under the ruling United National Independence Party (UNIP) and its leader, President Kenneth Kaunda.<sup>1</sup> Kaunda's own writings utilised a particular interpretation of pre-colonial and colonial history to support UNIP's approach to post-colonial governance.<sup>2</sup> In "Humanism", for example, Kaunda claimed that the enduring importance of chiefly authority pointed to an authentically African model of unity and consensual and communitarian decision-making that made competing political parties not only inappropriate, but also potentially destabilising channels for tribally-based conflict. The logical conclusion of such arguments was the declaration of a one-party state in 1972, presented by UNIP as the ultimate expression of popular will, but in fact UNIP's only response to rising political opposition and its failure to meet popular expectations of social and economic change. During Zambia's era of "one-party participatory" democracy, the Kenneth Kaunda Foundation produced some important historical works that nevertheless served to reinforce UNIP's own interpretation of colonial history.<sup>3</sup>

When the one-party state was overthrown and replaced by a multi-party democracy in 1991, the new ruling Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) made little effort to provide its own re-interpretation of either colonial or post-colonial history. The MMD had to grapple with a major economic crisis and perhaps had little interest in such matters, but the significant presence of former UNIP leaders amongst the ranks of the

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1. See for example: R. Hall, *Zambia, 1890-1964: The Colonial Period*, (Longman, London 1965 & 1976); D.C. Mulford, *Zambia: The Politics of Independence 1957-1964* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1967); A. Roberts, *A History of Zambia* (Heinemann, London, 1976); H.S. Meebelo, *Reaction to Colonialism* (Institute of African Studies, University of Zambia/Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1971).
  2. K.D. Kaunda, *Humanism in Zambia and a Guide to its Implementation I* (Zambia Information Services, Lusaka, 1968); K.D. Kaunda, *Humanism in Zambia and a Guide to its Implementation II* (Zambia Information Services, Lusaka, 1974).
  3. For example: H.S. Meebelo, *African Proletarians and Colonial Capitalism* (Kenneth Kaunda Foundation, Lusaka, 1986).

MMD government may have represented a deterrent to any detailed investigation into the successes and failures of UNIP's rule. In Zambia, there was no Truth and Reconciliation Commission to publicly investigate widespread allegations of torture and illegal detention of both opposition politicians and dissidents from the ranks of the many national liberation movements for which Zambia provided a base from the mid-1960s to the early 1990s. The Munyama Human Rights Commission, which sat from 1993 to 1995, heard testimony from some Zambian victims of torture, identifying the location of secret places where such events took place. However, Munyama made the mistake of reporting human rights abuses under the new government, as well as under UNIP. Although the report was submitted to President Chiluba, its findings were never formally published. This historical "forgetfulness" enabled the MMD to replicate many of UNIP's methods of exclusion and repression, for example in its use of detention (see below).

In 2001, Chiluba's attempt to transgress the constitution introduced by his government in order to stand for a third term of office was prevented by a popular movement of civil society organisations and mass protests. Since his MMD successor, Levy Mwanawasa, took office in January 2002, the space for historical research and examination has widened considerably. The development of a relatively competitive multi-party system, a comparatively free press and an increasingly confident civil society have all contributed to increase the examination of Zambia's recent past.

Not coincidentally, a revitalisation of Zambian historical research has also occurred in recent years. Decades of underfunding and neglect have undermined the University of Zambia's own research capacity, and most of the important new developments have been initiated by foreign researchers. The establishment of the Network for Historical Research in Zambia (NHRZ) has provided important coordination and information sharing capacity for both new and established areas of research.<sup>4</sup> NHRZ organisers Giacomo Macola and Marja Hinfelaar, working with the National Archives of Zambia (NAZ), developed a collection of the private papers of former politicians (the papers of two of the authors reviewed herein, Zukas and Sardanis, are now available to the public at the NAZ) and launched a significant programme digitising important historical documents, initially colonial-era district notebooks. In 2004, Macola and Hinfelaar succeeded in their painstaking efforts to persuade UNIP to open its own archives, supplying valuable material that is

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4. Information about the Network is available by email from [nhrz@zamnet.zm](mailto:nhrz@zamnet.zm).

already enabling researchers to provide new insights into colonial nationalism and post-colonial politics and governance.<sup>5</sup> In August 2005, the NHRZ hosted an important conference in Lusaka with the theme “Zambia: Independence and After”. It brought together thirty historians and other social scientists engaged in Zambian research. A book, due to be published by Brill in late 2006, will reproduce many of their papers.

Lurking just below the surface of much of Zambia’s historical self-examination lies the persistent question: “What went wrong?” Whilst in many countries, history provides a confident narrative underwriting a story of national progress and development, in Zambia it is utilised to explain how the country experienced one of the most dramatic economic and social declines anywhere in the world. Whereas at independence, Zambia’s gross national product was not far behind developing European countries such as Portugal and Turkey, today it is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 166th out of 177 countries on the United Nation’s Human Development Index of 2005.<sup>6</sup> Zambia’s comparative wealth in the 1960s was constructed on the fragile base of a high international copper price; its dramatic (and, until recently, apparently permanent) decline in the mid-1970s destroyed the assumptions on which UNIP’s model of state-led development was constructed. UNIP, and then the MMD, presided over dramatic economic decline. The implementation of structural adjustment and economic liberalisation policies, applied hesitantly by UNIP in the 1980s and persistently by the MMD in the 1990s, did nothing to arrest this decline. Indeed, such policies, strongly influenced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, significantly increased poverty and unemployment.<sup>7</sup>

Zambia’s drastic economic decline inevitably raises a series of questions that focus attention on late-colonial and post-colonial policy-making. How could the legacies of settler colonialism and racialism best have been overcome? Was nationalisation of the economy the correct response to the marginalisation of Zambians in their own economy? Was

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5. G. Macola, “‘It means as if we are excluded from the good freedom’: Thwarted expectations of Independence in the Luapula Province of Zambia, 1964-1966”, *Journal of African History*, 47, 2006; M. Larmer, “‘A little bit like a volcano’: The United Progressive Party and resistance to one-party rule in Zambia, 1964-1980”, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 39, 2006, forthcoming.

6. See: [http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/pdf/HDR05\\_HDI.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/pdf/HDR05_HDI.pdf).

7. L. Rakner, *Political and Economic Liberalisation in Zambia, 1991-2001* (Nordiska Afrikanstitutet, Uppsala, 2003).

Zambia's inability to adjust to its economic difficulties hampered by its admirable commitment to the liberation of neighbouring countries, which led to increased export and import costs and to military incursions onto Zambian territory by Portuguese, Rhodesian and South African forces? Was economic and social decline worsened by economic mismanagement, corruption and the accumulation of wealth by an emergent state-based capitalist elite? Such questions, and their application to present and future dilemmas of democratisation and governance, fuel Zambians' thirst for historical knowledge and analysis.

One of the most public signs of the contemporary historical discourse is "KK's Diary", the former President's weekly column in the exemplary independent newspaper, *The Post*. In his "Diary", Kaunda reminisces about the major events of his 27 years as Zambian President, his friendships with prominent African contemporaries like Tanzanian President Nyerere, and the difficult issues he grappled with and overcame. It is perhaps unsurprising that Kaunda fails to address any of the criticisms of his regime such as the use of torture and detention against political opponents, the widespread presence of intelligence agents in Zambian society and the enrichment of political leaders by corrupt means. Nevertheless, this unwillingness to reflect on the weaknesses (as well as successes) of UNIP rule throws up some particularly acute historical ironies. Kaunda frequently bemoans the constitutional manipulation that prevented him from standing in the 1996 presidential elections, and his subsequent detention on trumped up charges alleging a planned coup attempt in 1997. He has however not addressed the obvious parallels under his own leadership, such as the last-minute changes to the UNIP constitution in 1978 that prevented challenges to his presidency, or indeed his own detention of Chiluba and other union leaders in 1981.

Nevertheless Kaunda, forced by a popular movement into conceding a return to multi-party democracy and subsequently voted from office, is today generally revered as an elder statesman, revered in nostalgic comparison to the more obviously corrupt and unsuccessful ten-year period of Chiluba's rule. The current historical discourse has the potential to shed significant light on the failure of the post-colonial Zambian state to achieve social and economic progress, but this of course depends on the quality of the evidence available, for example in the presentation of historical biography by the actors concerned. Does the current wave of such writing enable a clearer understanding of how Zambia got to be where it is today? Or does it replicate and reconstruct

the myths of the past? This article applies these questions to the five books under review.

Simon Zukas was the only significant white figure of UNIP's nationalist struggle. A socialist close to, and strongly influenced by Southern African Jewish contemporaries like Joe Slovo and Jack Simons, he arrived in the then Northern Rhodesia in 1938. Following his education and his brief career in the armed forces during the Second World War, Zukas applied his political ideas to the nascent nationalist movement from the late 1940s. Zukas' work is one of the best written of these studies, providing an insight into the struggle against the British colonial system and the role of a white progressive within it. The first half of the book details his significant role in the emergent nationalist opposition to the establishment of the Central African Federation in the early 1950s. As well as providing insight into the role of the individual in such movements, Zukas provides details of important debates within nationalist organisations over strategy and tactics, illustrating not only the comparative moderation of older leaders such as Godwin Mbikusita-Lewanika, first president of the Northern Rhodesia (African) Congress, but also their willingness to work with colonial authorities to undermine younger radicals. He also distinguishes between the positions adopted by political leaders and their followers, for example illustrating that the rejection of political strike action by mineworkers' union president Lawrence Katilungu in 1953, was probably not supported by the majority of his members.<sup>8</sup> Zukas' significant role in early African nationalism was recognised by the colonial authorities, who deported him to Britain in 1952. There he remained, encouraging nationalist movements across Southern Africa throughout the 1950s, until returning to Zambia at independence in 1964.

The clarity of Zukas' analysis of colonial-era nationalism makes the second half of his book, covering the post-independence period, all the more disappointing. Zukas' perceptive observations of early nationalism give way to a decidedly ambiguous tone, as he is forced to address the uncomfortable realities of post-colonial governance under UNIP. He provides some important insights into early divisions within the ruling party, although he tends to see this as purely ethnically based, failing to engage with the way these divisions illustrated widespread disillusionment with the failure of the post-colonial state to meet popular expectations of economic and social change. His position towards the declaration of the one-party state in 1972, following the breakaway of the United Progressive

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8. S. Zukas, *Into Exile and Back* (Bookworld Publishers, Lusaka, 2002), p 81.

Party (UPP) from UNIP, is that the UPP was an exclusively Bemba tribal project.<sup>9</sup> He recalls rejecting UPP advances for financial support, but he is unenthusiastic in defending his position at the time:

Although I regretted the steps being taken to “contain” the UPP, I was, at the time, still a supporter of the one-party system for Zambia ... This one-party system appeared to be the solution to the tribal schisms that were threatening to tear Zambia apart ... This point of view I retained for another decade ...<sup>10</sup>

Zukas is critical of UPP leader Simon Kapwepwe, suggesting that he would have been a divisive national president, but also expressing sadness that he was denied the chance to test his support democratically. He expresses decidedly mixed views about President Kaunda, for example:

Despite many dictatorial pronouncements and actions, Kaunda achieved to a high degree our national motto: “One Zambia One Nation”.<sup>11</sup>

Zukas does not record his reaction to the torture of his former close political ally and prominent UPP figure, Justin Chimba, who is mentioned extensively in the earlier section of the book. Zukas goes on to describe his increasing disillusionment with economic corruption under the UNIP one-party state from the early 1980s, later conceding that “We should have spoken out much earlier than we did” against UNIP’s “milking of the public sector”. The former socialist believes that Zambia’s precipitous economic decline could have been avoided by economic liberalisation, coupled with increased copper production.<sup>12</sup> It is not however made clear if, in hindsight, Zukas regrets having supported the one-party state at the time of its inception.<sup>13</sup>

After independence, Zukas left formal politics and built a successful engineering company. He remained close to important political and economic figures and provides tantalising glimpses into the nature of practical post-colonial governance and administration, for example the corruption endemic in the awarding of government contracts. He briefly describes his company’s involvement in the construction of the

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9. For an alternative perspective on the UPP, see Larmer, “A little bit like a volcano”.

10. Zukas, *Into Exile and Back*, p 139.

11. Zukas, *Into Exile and Back*, p 155.

12. Zukas, *Into Exile and Back*, p 176.

13. Zukas, *Into Exile and Back*, p 173.

infamous “redbrick” intelligence headquarters in Lusaka, and his provision (at Oliver Tambo’s request) of plans for a prison for the ANC to be built in Angola, but in neither case reflects on the morality of such projects.

Many of Zukas’ contacts in business were involved in the coup attempt of 1980-1981. Zukas provides some insight into the context of this event, rightly linking it to increased disillusionment after the lack of economic improvement following Zimbabwean liberation in 1980. Although he provides some insight into the personalities of coup plotters, including Valentine Musakanya (see below), he is again ambiguous in his attitude to the event, stating at one point that he “had no sympathy with the coup”, but expressing sympathy with its aim of re-introducing democracy, and wondering aloud what would have been his attitude if he had been approached to join the plot.<sup>14</sup>

Zukas returned to the political fray in 1990, joining the opposition MMD. He is critical of the MMD’s replication of aspects of UNIP’s political style, for example empty sloganeering. He describes his campaign and election as an MMD member of parliament (MP) in Western Province, and his concern that local MPs were expected to deliver development funds to their constituency from their own pockets if necessary.<sup>15</sup> As Minister of Agriculture in 1993, Zukas experienced the hostility resulting from the very liberalisation policies he advocated, in the removal of agricultural support mechanisms.<sup>16</sup> After serving as Minister of Works, Zukas protested against MMD President Chiluba’s abuse of power and the latter’s increasingly corrupt administration, ultimately joining the new Forum for Democracy and Development Party in 2001.

Zukas does not attempt to go beyond his periodic criticisms of aspects of UNIP rule to offer a comprehensive critique of the failures of post-colonial governance. He is however prepared to admit his mistakes and, at least by implication, suggest that his sincere support for Zambia’s important role in regional liberation may have prevented him from clearer insight into the consequences of UNIP’s suppression of internal dissent and economic failure. The same level of retrospective insight is not offered by John Mwanakatwe. His exhaustive (and indeed exhausting) biography certainly challenges stereotypes regarding the nature of nationalist politicians. Mwanakatwe is the epitome of elite conservatism.

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14. Zukas, *Into Exile and Back*, pp 151-152.

15. Zukas, *Into Exile and Back*, p 184.

16. Zukas, *Into Exile and Back*, p 194.



Proud of his royal Sikazwe ancestry, his father being a prosperous businessman, Mwanakatwe attended South Africa's Adams College in 1942. Unlike some of his co-students, like future Zimbabwean nationalist leader Herbert Chitepo, Mwanakatwe was not drawn into the nationalist struggle. Instead, he made an initial career in education, becoming the first African headmaster of Kasama Secondary School in 1957. Whilst many of his contemporaries were engaged in the nationalist struggle, Mwanakatwe became a civil servant in the last years of Northern Rhodesia's colonial administration. As Zambia was moving towards independence, he studied law and was called to the London bar in 1964 (he cites his admiration for fellow law student Margaret Thatcher).

However, as independence approached, UNIP sought out educated men like Mwanakatwe who, it was believed, might do a better job in governing Zambia than some of the freedom fighters in their ranks. In 1962 Mwanakatwe was elected UNIP member of the transitional Northern Rhodesian parliament. Following the 1964 elections that paved the way for Zambian independence, Mwanakatwe was appointed Minister for Education. Mwanakatwe's reflections on the transition to independence are narrow: he is certainly forthcoming about his own achievements, but says little about either his failures or limitations. Although Mwanakatwe never says so explicitly, many UNIP militants were angered by the sudden appointment of technocrats like him. His focus is on his rivalries with other ministers, rather than the failure of his government to meet the expectations of his fellow teachers:

During the political campaign for the 1964 elections, people's expectations were aroused for better living conditions after independence. Therefore they looked forward to big salary increases and better teachers' houses. When new salary scales were introduced, they did not equal their expectations and teachers were bitterly disappointed. The new salary scales for African teachers did not narrow the differential between existing salaries for European teachers and salaries for African teachers with equal qualifications ... The teachers were made to believe by some people, probably my rivals who had expected appointment to the education portfolio, that I was responsible for their plight ...<sup>17</sup>

Mwanakatwe is similarly selective in his recollection of intra-UNIP conflicts. Describing ethno-regional divisions within UNIP that arose in 1967, he claims that President Kaunda managed to unify UNIP in preparation for the 1968 elections. In fact, the divisions that arose in

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17. J. Mwanakatwe, *Teacher, Politician, Lawyer: My Autobiography* (Bookworld Publishers, Lusaka, 2003), p 167.

1967 continued to intensify during the rest of the decade to the point where, in 1971, the majority of Mwanakatwe's fellow Bemba-speaking leaders broke away to form the UPP. The few Bembas who remained loyal to UNIP were widely criticised for betraying Kapwepwe, something that might have been expected to have a significant effect on Mwanakatwe's political life. Not only does he not address whether this was the case, but there is no mention whatsoever of the UPP nor even the introduction of the one-party state either. After spending fourteen pages on his one-year presidency of the African Development Bank, Mwanakatwe describes his re-election as MP for Mpulungu in 1973, neglecting to mention that this took place under the one-party state.<sup>18</sup>

Mwanakatwe's loyalty to UNIP enabled his political career to reach new heights. He was appointed Minister of Finance in 1970, a position in which he served until 1974, and then again from 1976 to 1978. Kaunda habitually appointed fiscal conservatives to this position, to take the blame from radical UNIP leaders for unpopular economic policies. Mwanakatwe hints at his unpopularity amongst "die-hard party activists", but does not concern himself with examining whether such activists were more representative than he was of popular opinion in UNIP or Zambia as a whole.<sup>19</sup> During this period, Zambia's economy declined significantly. Whilst Mwanakatwe was not primarily responsible for this decline, he offers little reflection on the causes of the economic crisis that enveloped what had previously been one of Africa's most successful economies.

Following his initial retirement from political leadership in 1974, Mwanakatwe established a legal practice. However, his chairing of important committees drew him into political controversy. In 1977, Mwanakatwe chaired a parliamentary select committee that caused controversy by recommending significant liberalisation of the economy. These recommendations were denounced by Kaunda. Here, Mwanakatwe provides a useful analysis into some of the weaknesses of the one-party state and UNIP's economic model, from a pro-liberalisation position. His wider critique of the one-party state is however weakened by its lack of historical context: if indeed the "one-party system of government had become unpopular" by the time the MMD was established in 1990, when did this unpopularity begin?<sup>20</sup> Was the economic model adopted in the 1970s incorrect, or were the problems Zambia experienced caused by external structures or faulty implementation? Little retrospective opinion

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18. Mwanakatwe, *Teacher, Politician, Lawyer*, p 243.

19. Mwanakatwe, *Teacher, Politician, Lawyer*, p 271.

20. Mwanakatwe, *Teacher, Politician, Lawyer*, p 422.

is offered. Instead, Mwanakatwe's judgement on much of his ministerial career is provided in the form of letters of praise congratulating him on his various appointments and achievements – it appears not to have occurred to him that such obsequious missives would have been sent to any person of his standing.

Mwanakatwe also surprisingly suggests that in the 1970s,

UNIP was a well organized political party ... at that time, it was among the best organized political parties in independent Africa ... the UNIP officials both at the village and district levels were active participants in the process of initiating and executing the projects for the development of various areas in the parliamentary constituencies.<sup>21</sup>

Such a claim needs to be set against contemporaneous studies showing UNIP's weak or even non-existent structures in many rural areas from the 1970s onwards.<sup>22</sup>

One of the most interesting episodes in Mwanakatwe's varied career is when he served as a defence lawyer for Valentine Musakanya, a relative by marriage, for his part in the coup plot of 1980-1981. Musakanya was convicted of treason and served two years from 1983, before Mwanakatwe succeeded in having his client's statement ruled inadmissible and getting him released. Whilst aiding the historian with copious details of the legal process, Mwanakatwe offers no opinion regarding the coup attempt itself. Whilst this may be regarded as the natural position of the practising lawyer, any well-informed reader would wish Mwanakatwe to reflect on his distinctive personal trajectory: having been an apparently loyal minister under the one-party state to 1978, how did it feel to be defending a man who sought to overthrow that government by force just three years later? We are, regrettably, none the wiser.

Mwanakatwe's role as an elder statesman is explored at tedious length in the latter part of the book. He stresses his commitment to transparency as the first chairman of the Zambia Privatisation Agency:

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21. Mwanakatwe, *Teacher, Politician, Lawyer*, p 299.

22. See for example, M. Bratton, *The Local Politics of Rural Development: Peasant and party-state in Zambia*, (University Press of New England, Hanover – NH & London, 1980); M.C. Bwalya, "Participation or Powerlessness: The Place of Peasants in Zambia's Rural Development" in K. Woldring (ed), *Beyond Political Independence: Zambia's Development Predicament in the 1980s* (Mouton Publishers, Berlin, 1984).

In its function of privatising state-owned enterprises, ZPA acted independently without political interference from the minister of commerce, trade and industry or any other officer in government. It was responsible for the submission of its reports and recommendations only to the cabinet for final approval. That objective – the transparency of the Agency and accountability for its operations – was achieved by the time I relinquished my position as chairman ... at the end of December 1993.<sup>23</sup>

Mwanakatwe may have done all he could to ensure that the ZPA was transparent and accountable, but there is significant evidence that it was used by politicians and others with links to government to manipulate the privatisation of state-owned assets throughout the 1990s.<sup>24</sup> Neither does Mwanakatwe offer any opinion about Zambia's numerous privatisation scandals, nor the disastrous decline in the Zambian economy following the economic liberalisation that Mwanakatwe advocated for so long.

The MMD's economic liberalisation policies were a response to the perceived failure of decades of state domination of the economy since the late 1960s. Two of these books provide significant insights into the nationalisation and subsequent privatisation of Zambia's economic assets. Andrew Sardanis was the leading figure in shaping the semi-nationalisation of the economy in the late 1960s. He headed the Industrial Development Corporation from 1964 to 1969, and was Permanent Secretary in the Ministry for State Participation in 1970. Sardanis, a small-scale shop-owner of Greek Cypriot origin, used his close relationship with UNIP leaders on the Copperbelt to shape the way in which the post-colonial Zambian state would address and overcome the domination of the economy by white settlers and foreign multi-nationals. Sardanis is critical of white resistance to what he sees as necessary economic reform; he blames settler colonialism for neglecting African economic and technical advancement, thus preventing the development of "the most important element of every stable society: a robust indigenous middle class".<sup>25</sup>

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23. Mwanakatwe, *Teacher, Politician, Lawyer*, p 438.

24. See for example: Inter-African Network for Human Rights & Development (Afronet), Citizens for a Better Environment (CBE) & Rights and Accountability in Development (RAID), *Zambia: Deregulation and the denial of human rights*, Submission to the OECD Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Lusaka, Kitwe, Oxford, March 2000).

25. A. Sardanis, *Africa: Another Side of the Coin* (I.B. Tauris, London & New York, 2002), p 153.

Sardanis argues that it was necessary for the post-independence state to interfere in the economy to “tilt the balance in favour of blacks”.<sup>26</sup> However, he is simultaneously critical of UNIP radicals who sought to establish a level of state control that he feels would have deterred foreign investment. Whilst this is an impressive double-edged explanation of the tensions at work in managing Zambia’s post-colonial economic transition, Sardanis is less convincing in portraying himself as the neutral technocrat carefully managing these conflicts during negotiations for the state’s purchase of majority state shareholdings in most important private companies. Whilst attacking the utilisation of state resources and positions (for example, by government ministers) to reward their own supporters, he does not acknowledge his own economic interests and does nothing to confront the widespread view that he used his strategic position to enrich himself. Nor is Sardanis prepared to take any blame for some of the evident failures of economic intervention: he blames settlers and banks for the failure of the 1968 takeover of the retail sector by African businessmen, but many of the latter blamed UNIP for failing to provide credit to support them in purchasing retail outlets.<sup>27</sup>

Sardanis played the leading role in negotiating the 51 per cent takeover of the mining industry in 1969. He is critical of political interference in this and subsequent negotiations, failing to acknowledge that elected politicians in a new democracy had a responsibility to influence such arrangements to the benefit of their constituents. Sardanis’ commitment to Zambian economic nationalism, whilst driven by a declared concern for rural poverty, did not extend to an enthusiasm for democracy, as demonstrated in a letter he wrote to Kaunda in June 1970:

One of the problems with democracy is that it tends to sanction any economic gains one group is able to make at the expense of another through the market mechanism. In Zambia, urban workers can raise wages and yet resist paying more for their food. This is done not because they are consumers but because they are voters. There is a limit to the extent that the State can redress the balance since urban workers, as well as being strong economically, are strong politically. For these reasons we must be very careful about introducing any system which might enhance the power of the urban workers.<sup>28</sup>

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26. Sardanis, *Africa: Another Side of the Coin*, p 165.

27. For a case study of the attempted takeover of the retail sector, see H. Macmillan, *An African Trading Empire: the Story of Susman Brothers and Wolfsons, 1901-2005* (I.B. Tauris, London & New York, 2005).

28. Sardanis, *Africa: Another Side of the Coin*, p 245.

Sardanis is evidently frustrated at how his delicately constructed balance between African aspirations and the profit motive collapsed almost as soon as it was constructed, and aware that his initiatives in INDECO (the Zambian Industrial Development Corporation) actually paved the way for the accumulation of wealth by an emergent state-based elite.<sup>29</sup> In this respect, he was an unwilling servant of those he purports to despise. In this respect, Sardanis was a forerunner and catalyst of an emergent indigenous state capitalist elite that utilised strategic positions in the ruling party, economic ministries and parastatals to accumulate wealth and influence. Concerned about popular unrest from the Copperbelt's unionised workers in particular, this group tacitly accepted the one-party state as a price worth paying for political and industrial stability, becoming critical of the UNIP leadership only when economic decline and state intervention became a restraint on their own economic accumulation in the late 1970s – Mwanakatwe was in some respects an elder statesman of this group.

Sardanis paints an entertaining picture of many such influential political figures, for example describing former Prime Minister Humphrey Mulemba as “a wealthy champagne-drinking crypto capitalist with many business interests, dressed in Saville Row suits”.<sup>30</sup> Whilst Mulemba was undoubtedly deeply corrupt, the same could be said of others absolved from Sardanis' stinging tone, so that the impression is left that the author, rather than seeking to shed light on the corruption of the one-party state, is settling scores with his personal enemies. Sardanis blames an investigation into his own business interests in Zambia in 1974 on an attempt to silence his criticisms of further economic reform, and has nothing to say regarding his role in the disastrous collapse of the Meridien Bank in the 1990s.

After leaving government service, Sardanis worked briefly for Lonrho. He provides an illuminating glimpse into Tiny Rowland at a time when Rowland was a major player in Southern Africa's rich tapestry of political, economic, diplomatic and military conflicts and contacts. Sardanis is unsurprisingly critical of Lonrho's systematic small-scale bribery of African ministers, but despite Sardanis' declared distaste of Rowland's dubious business methods, an impression is given that this was primarily a clash of two egos too large and too similar to operate in the same organisation.

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29. Sardanis, *Africa: Another Side of the Coin*, p 245.

30. Sardanis, *Africa: Another Side of the Coin*, p 286.

The analysis of post-colonial politics in *Africa: Another Side of the Coin* is less convincing than Sardanis' description of economic reform. He lays the blame for political destabilisation and the rise of ethnically-based politics exclusively on Kapwepwe, seeing this purely in tribal terms. At times he appears to understand that such political opposition arose in large part out of frustration at the failure of the economic reforms he instituted to address the aspirations of the majority of Zambians, and the widespread expectation that government ministers would reward their political support base in the form of loans and other rewards accessed via state structures. Sardanis is however ultimately unwilling to accept that it should be elected Zambians, rather than technocrats like himself, who define the appropriate pace and type of economic change in post-colonial Zambia. The logical outcome of Sardanis' political analysis is that he effectively holds Kapwepwe responsible for the introduction of the one-party state as a result of his temerity in forming an opposition party, rather than Kaunda, whose ban on opposition parties was, as recent academic research suggests, driven more by his fear of electoral defeat by an opposition electoral alliance than the danger of tribal chaos.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, Sardanis commits a major factual error in claiming that Kaunda was forced to ban the UPP by a specific act of violence, the murder of twelve people in a welfare hall in Chililabombwe. This supposed event occurred in 1978, not 1972 as Sardanis implies; the fire which caused the deaths was never proven to be more than an accident; and those detained for the "bombing" of the hall were detained and tortured before being released in 1981, with no evidence ever being presented against them. Sardanis does acknowledge the use of torture by Kaunda's government, but blames this on Kaunda's "over-reaction" to what he believes was a limited political threat.<sup>32</sup> He also asserts that the 1980 coup attempt was supported by South Africa – my own research suggests that this may well be the case, but Sardanis offers no proof for this claim beyond the familial connections of one of the plotters, Pierce Annfield, to South Africa. He also wrongly claims, in contradiction to Zukas, that the coup plotters were never tortured.<sup>33</sup>

Sardanis' continuing loyalty to Kaunda prevents him from offering any direct criticisms of the former President. In 1990, he briefly worked with Kenneth Kaunda again, believing for some unexplained reason that

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31. D.N. Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005), p 183.

32. Sardanis, *Africa: Another Side of the Coin*, p 263.

33. Sardanis, *Africa: Another Side of the Coin*, p 289; Zukas, *Into Exile and Back*, pp 151-152.

he was the best man to lead Zambia back to democracy. The man who presided over the nationalisation of the country's strategic mining industry now advised UNIP on the proposed privatisation of Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM). These plans were never realised, as UNIP lost power to the MMD the following year. Francis Kaunda (no relation to Kenneth Kaunda) was in some respects a successor to Sardanis. As chairman and chief executive of ZCCM from 1982 to 1991, and a member of UNIP's Central Committee from 1988, he was a crucial link between the ruling party and its most important economic resource. Although the mining industry had ceased to be profitable by the time he presided over it, ZCCM remained a vital provider of foreign exchange, a significant part of which was spent on politically prestigious projects and luxury consumption by the UNIP leadership.<sup>34</sup>

*Selling the Family Silver* focuses on the privatisation of ZCCM in the late 1990s. Francis Kaunda chaired a special Privatisation Negotiating Team (PNT) appointed by MMD President Chiluba in 1997. The PNT overrode the legal obligations governing privatisation, disregarding established bidding processes under dubious circumstances. Indeed, Kaunda's book serves in many respects as his defence against the widely held view that mine privatisation was a disaster for Zambia. In so doing, Kaunda revealingly illustrates the close personal ties between state-appointed parastatal officials and the senior executives of multinational companies like the Anglo American Corporation (AAC). Kaunda is evidently proud of his personal friendships with senior AAC officials, with whom he first worked in the 1970s and 1980s, during which AAC retained a 26,3 per cent share in ZCCM. He is however at pains to deny that this influenced the decision to award the most valuable part of ZCCM to AAC in 1999, following the controversial rejection of an apparently more generous bid by the Kafue Consortium the year before.

Like Sardanis, Kaunda is certainly enlightening in his unedifying depiction of MMD ministers' active lobbying for particular bidders, but unconvincing in distancing himself from such behaviour. His personal relations with the Binani family are believed to have influenced the award of the Roan Antelope Mine in Luanshya to the Binani Corporation in 1997. Twenty million US dollars paid for the mine disappeared; it is generally thought to have fallen victim to the plundering of state resources by then President Chiluba and his cohorts (Chiluba became the

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34. J. Aron, "Economic Policy in a Mineral-Dependent Economy: the Case of Zambia." DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1992, p 205.



first ex-African president to have his immunity from prosecution removed in 2002; he is now on trial facing charges of theft by public servant). The Roan Mine was asset-stripped and Binani ignored its legal obligation to compensate retrenched mineworkers. Non-payment of electricity bills led to the mine's closure in 2001, with devastating consequences for its employees and their families.<sup>35</sup>

Kaunda nevertheless claims that he sought to ensure the optimum long-term benefit for Zambia:

Privatisation of the mines ... did more to confirm the Zambian government's commitment to free market culture than all the policy pronouncements made. Conclusion of privatisation brought heightened economic activity to the mining towns, as mine support industries and services revived.<sup>36</sup>

The first part of this claim is certainly true: mine privatisation was a key test of the MMD's willingness to follow the strictures of the IMF and the World Bank, which applied stringent pressures in order that they did so.<sup>37</sup> Kaunda's claim regarding the impact of that privatisation is, however, in direct contrast with the actual results of a botched and corrupt privatisation process. Its result was not only the loss of more than half of mining industry jobs, but also the granting of generous concessions to the new owners in the form of tax concessions and profit repatriation. Now that the recent rise of the international copper price has made Zambia's mining industry highly profitable for the first time in thirty years, the legacy of this process is the accrual of high revenues to foreign mine owners, with little of this revenue accruing to the government that might enable it to pick up the social, economic and environmental pieces of devastated former mining areas.

Akashambwata Mbikusita-Lewanika is one of Zambia's leading political intellectuals, an occasionally erudite and always loquacious thinker who portrays himself, not entirely inaccurately, as a principled individual whose dislike for the dirty games of practical politics seems destined to keep him in the political wilderness. As a dissident left-leaning thinker in the 1980s, "Aka" (as he is universally known) played a leading role in initiating the 1990 conference that led to the

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35. See M. Larmer, "Reaction and Resistance to Neo-liberalism in Zambia", *Review of African Political Economy*, 103, 2005, pp 29-45.

36. F. Kaunda, *Selling the Family Silver* (Printpak Books, KwaZulu-Natal, 2002), p 180.

37. Afronet-CBE-RAID report, p 173. See also: Rakner, *Political and Economic Liberalisation*, pp 73-80.

founding of the MMD, first as pro-democracy movement and subsequently as political party. Like Zukas, Mbikusita-Lewanika became rapidly disillusioned with the MMD in power, and was expelled in 1996 after criticising the party's leadership. In *Hour for Reunion*, Mbikusita-Lewanika offers a largely unconvincing defence of his recent return to the MMD and election as its national secretary, following Chiluba's replacement as the party's and State's president by Levy Mwanawasa in December 2001. Mbikusita-Lewanika claims that Mwanawasa has returned the MMD to its original agenda (namely that conceived by Mbikusita-Lewanika himself) of "social liberation and national development".<sup>38</sup> Mbikusita-Lewanika's implicit portrayal of himself as the author and sole guardian of this agenda has recently been tested by his (second) ousting from a position of authority in the MMD in 2005.<sup>39</sup>

Amongst the self-important and pseudo-intellectual meanderings of the book, Mbikusita-Lewanika provides a significant new insight into the nature of the MMD and its early conflicts. Although he attempts to present these problems as the result of deviations from his own (unproblematic) agenda, it is evident that these reflected the MMD's very nature as an uneasy, and ultimately contradictory alliance of diverse interests united only in their opposition to Kaunda and the one-party state. *Hour for Reunion* illustrates three key interest groups in the MMD leadership in 1990 to 1991. Around Mbikusita-Lewanika, there were progressive and socialist intellectuals and former student leaders, advocating a decentralised political system, influenced by new ideas around the importance of civil society, but wrong-footed by the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Secondly, a business elite centred around former UNIP leaders like Arthur Wina, Humphrey Mulemba and Ronald Penza (and, in a minor role, Mwanakatwe) sought to establish a free market economy in which to realise the full value of the wealth they had acquired from their state linkages. Thirdly, labour leaders and other prominent figures in the politically and economically important Copperbelt, who were led by the chairman general of the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), Frederick Chiluba. Mbikusita-Lewanika developed ties with ZCTU leaders in the 1980s, linking criticism of UNIP's structural adjustment programmes with the lack of democracy. He nevertheless shares Zukas' criticism of the way in which

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38. A. Mbikusita-Lewanika, *Hour for Reunion, Movement for Multi-Party Democracy: Conception, Dissension and Reconciliation* (African Lineki Courier, Mongu-Lealui, 2003), p 315.

39. For his personal account of these events, see: A. Mbikusita-Lewanika, *A Mulungushi Experience: 2005 MMD 5th National Convention* (African Lineki Courier, Mongu-Lealui, 2005).

Chiluba's position in the MMD was strengthened through a replication of UNIP's tactics of sloganeering and cult politics. Significant insight is provided into the machinations of these groups in competition for the MMD leadership.

However, Mbikusita-Lewanika's distaste for the ugly realities of mass politics limits his analysis of why Chiluba had been elected MMD (and subsequently Zambian) President in 1991. He fails to mention that Chiluba was the first significant Zambian leader to call for a return to multi-party politics at the end of 1989. Chiluba's profile rested on his powerful leadership of the ZCTU since 1974, during which he came to be seen as a principled figure who never accepted a position in UNIP. Most importantly, Zambia's trade unions had succeeded in retaining their autonomy from the ruling party, and had significant organisational capacity that helped enable the MMD to operate during 1990, when its legal status was ambiguous. Moreover, as Wina explained to me in 1991, only Chiluba had the credibility to convince Zambia's urban masses of the need for drastic economic liberalisation under MMD rule, from which they would suffer declining living standards throughout the 1990s.<sup>40</sup>

Although Mbikusita-Lewanika does little to acknowledge these realities, he nevertheless provides a useful analysis of the ways in which the battle for control of the MMD's organisation and ideas was acted out in the early 1990s, leading to the effective ousting of Wina and other leaders of the business group in 1993, and a shift to more ethnically-based support for both the MMD and new opposition parties. He rightly points out that many of the former MMD politicians who attacked Chiluba's attempt to attain a third term in office were motivated by their own desire for high office, and illustrates their own use of intimidation and authoritarianism in dealing with the MMD's opponents in 1996-1997. Perhaps surprisingly, Mbikusita-Lewanika has little to say about the resurgence of civil society activity since 2001, initially in the anti-third term campaign and more recently in initiatives against the privatisation of remaining state assets, as well as for a more democratic constitution. Despite positioning himself as the torch-bearer of more progressive politics, Mbikusita-Lewanika's apparent inability to relate to the motivations of ordinary Zambians for political change, leads him to place his hopes in the Mwanawasa presidency, a view that few Zambians would share.

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40. Interview with Arthur Wina, Lusaka, July 1991.

## Conclusion

Despite their considerable drawbacks, this wave of Zambian historical biography provides significant insight into the nature of post-colonial Zambian history, economics and society. They demonstrate and document the challenges that faced the post-independence rulers and administrators of post-colonial African countries integrated into the global economy solely as suppliers of raw materials, and with limited domestic private capital formation. They show the enduring importance of popular discontent with the efforts of UNIP to address the expectations of Zambian people for service delivery and the redistribution of wealth. When read together, these books demonstrate that, despite their different political orientations, both UNIP and the MMD represented coalitions of conflicting interests that, in power, faced fissiparous pressures that ultimately fractured both parties along ethno-regional and social lines. The similarities between the recourse of both parties to tribal stereotyping and “othering” to justify authoritarian repression are striking, although only Mbikusita-Lewanika and Zukas see significant parallels in this regard. Most particularly, these texts provide substantial (and perhaps unintended) historical evidence of the rise of the political-business class first identified by Szeftel that, through periods of radical nationalism and nationalism, then economic liberalisation and political plurality, has entrenched its position through the effective utilisation of political influence, the power of patronage and its connections with international business.<sup>41</sup> In all of these areas, a comparison between Zambia and the post-colonial politics and economics of other sub-Saharan African countries could potentially increase our understanding of the development of social differentiation and economic inequalities since independence.

These texts must, however, be understood for what they are: the selective memoirs of senior political and economic figures seeking to explain and justify their role in nationalist and post-colonial decision-making. Their appearance during a period of heightened public examination of such issues demonstrates that they are in many respects deliberate interventions into this debate. Whilst the best of these works, particularly that of Zukas, seek to honestly address the difficult issues involved, they in general are limited by their lack of self-criticism and, in the works of Sardanis, Mwanakatwe and Kaunda, a tendency to deform the historical record by omission and occasional distortion. For their full

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41. M. Szeftel, “Political graft and the spoils system in Zambia – the state as a resource in itself”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 24, 1983, pp 4-21. See also: C.L. Baylies & M. Szeftel, “The Rise of a Zambian Capitalist Class in the 1970s”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 8, 2, 1982, pp 187-213.

worth to be realised, they will need to be read alongside the new wave of historical research noted above. For their part, the new post-colonial Zambian historians have a responsibility to ensure that their newly uncovered evidence and insights are made available in ways that practically contribute to popular understanding of how Zambia came to be what and where it is today, in order to aid its people in their efforts to ensure that it has a better tomorrow.

### **Abstract**

A recent resurgence of interest in the political history of late colonial and post-colonial Zambia is shaped by an unspoken national debate that seeks to explain Zambia's economic and social decline since the 1970s. This new wave of historical activity is characterised by both new activities in academic research and by the appearance of notable autobiographical studies by prominent political and economic actors. These texts provide significant insights into the dilemmas of post-colonial governance, the reasons for economic nationalisation in the late 1960s, the establishment of the one-party state in 1972 and the return to multi-party democracy in 1991, as well as the impact of economic liberalisation in the 1990s. In particular, these studies demonstrate the rise of a bureaucratic capitalist class, linked to state-owned corporations and multi-national business that, from the late 1970s, sought the liberalisation of the economy in order to fully realise their newly found wealth and power. The continuing influence of this class can be seen during the periods of both one-party and multi-party rule. However, the unwillingness of most of these authors to examine their respective own historical roles self-critically tends to reinforce nationalist myths of an earlier generation of history.

### **Opsomming**

#### **Wat het Skeefgeloop? Zambiese Politieke Biografieë en Post-koloniale Redevoering oor Verval**

Die onlangse herlewing van belangstelling in die politieke geskiedenis van laat en post-koloniale Zambië word gevorm deur die versweë nasionale debat wat verklarings probeer vind vir die ekonomiese en sosiale verval wat sedert die 1970's in Zambië plaasvind. Hierdie nuwe golf van historiese aktiwiteit word gekarakteriseer deur beide nuwe werksaamhede op die akademiese navorsingsterrein, asook deur die verskyning van belangrike outobiografiese studies deur prominente

politieke en ekonomiese rolspelers. Laasgenoemde werke bied insig in aspekte soos die dilemmas van post-koloniale staatsbestuur; die redes vir ekonomiese nasionalisasie in die laat 1960's; die totstandkoming van die eenpartystaat in 1972; die terugkeer tot multiparty demokrasie in 1991; asook die impak van ekonomiese liberalisering in die 1990's. Hierdie studies demonstreer in die besonder hoe 'n burokratiese kapitalisteklas, gekoppel aan staatskorporasies en multinasionale ondernemings gegroei het en hulle sedert die laat 1970's beywer het vir die liberalisering van die ekonomie, ten einde hulle nuutgevonde rykdom en mag tot volle wasdom te laat kom. Die voortgesette invloed van hierdie klas tydens beide die periodes van eenparty- en multipartyregering word duidelik geïllustreer. Daarteenoor staan die onwilligheid van die meeste van hierdie outeurs om hulle eie onderskeie rolle selfkrities te ondersoek – 'n verskynsel waardeur nasionalistiese mites oor 'n vroeëre generasie geskiedenis opnuut versterk word.

### **Key words**

Akashambwata Mbikusita-Lewanika; Andrew Sardanis; Francis Kaunda; Frederick Chiluba; John Mwanakatwe; Kenneth Kaunda; political biography; post-colonial discourses; Simon Zukas; Zambian history; Zambian historiography.

### **Sleutelwoorde**

Akashambwata Mbikusita-Lewanika; Andrew Sardanis; Francis Kaunda; Frederick Chiluba; John Mwanakatwe; Kenneth Kaunda; politieke biografie; post-koloniale diskoerse; Simon Zukas; Zambiese geskiedenis; Zambiese historiografie.