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The Politics of Household Budget Research in Colonial Central Africa

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This paper investigates the various academic studies of the household budgets of Africans living in what became the countries of Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi, and the Congolese province of Katanga. These studies were made during the colonial period, by members of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, the Central Statistical Office of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, in what was then Salisbury, and by Belgian researchers in the Congo. It demonstrates how what at first sight appears to be a neutral form of investigation was in fact highly politicised. On the one hand, there were many who showed how African incomes were insufficient to meet their needs. These studies were basically highly anti-colonial. On the other hand, the Central Statistical Office and the Belgians were much more concerned to show how Africans were prospering under colonial tutelage. All of them, however, contributed to making colonial society much more 'legible' for its rulers.

At the centre of much economic research, and behind many calculations of the Gross National Product (GNP) of a country or some part of it, lie investigations based on the collection of household budgets. The principle seems easy and effectively neutral. On the basis of some criterion—preferably some form of random selection—a number of households are chosen by the researchers and asked to record all the economic transactions which they perform over a specific period of time, not less than a month, but preferably rather longer. Given enough such budgets, it generally proves possible to make sensible statements about the prosperity (or lack of it) of the community in question, the distribution of wealth and income within it, and the patterns of consumption that it enjoys. These can then form the building blocks for wider and more comprehensive statements about economic conditions.

These calculations seem to be neutral enough. In practice, however, the process of compiling and analysing this sort of data inevitably requires such a plethora of decisions that they necessarily become highly politicised documents. In the first place, of course, there are questions as to where the research should be done, and to what questions it is hoped to provide evidence in answer. The sort of research involved is likely to be costly, both as regards time and money, with the consequence that the enthusiasm for it will generally depend on the perceived need of fund-givers, particularly governments, to acquire information on some subject, and this can never be considered a neutral act. Statistics are collected, inter alia, to provide rulers with information about their subject population, in order to tax them and to control them. Indeed, the whole history of statistical practice emphasises the degree to which statistics and statecraft were, and remain, intertwined.¹ But states, of course, are never monolithic. There is always some form of internal tension, and political argument. As a result, statistics can be, and have been used, to argue for varying positions within a state's political life. It is true that statisticians have a clear interest in making the numbers seem inviolable, with the consequence that the political path of which they approve will seem inevitable. Often the products of the statistical

¹ See for instance: Theodore M. Porter, *The rise of statistical thinking, 1820 – 1900* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986); Theodore M. Porter, *Trust in numbers: The pursuit of objectivity in science and public life* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995); Alain Desrosières, *La politique des grand nombres: Histoire de la raison statistique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1993); and, more generally, James C. Scott, *Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1998).

bureaux are claimed to be the politically neutral results of professional expertise, and thus a denial of politics. But, *pace* Margaret Thatcher and Herbert Spencer, there is always an alternative, and generally more than one. In this paper I will be examining how studies of household budgets in late colonial South Central Africa, here defined as the modern countries of Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, and the province of Katanga in the Democratic Republic of Congo, were used as weapons in the political arguments about the standard of life of the African inhabitants of the territories, and thus about the political future that should be followed.² This of course derived from the practice of research, and the choice as to which households should be studied. Truly random samples are rare enough, and often decisions were made which unconsciously overemphasised the poorer, or indeed the richer, elements of society. Analysis and the presentation of results can also be full of bias. To say that, for example, 60% of households have an income below some specified standard, necessarily entails saying that 40% have incomes at or above that level, but the messages provided by the one comment or the other are likely to be profoundly different.

The first major studies of Central African colonial economies came in the early 1930s, with the studies of the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt carried out by E. A. G. Robinson. However, he did not have the resources or the time to conduct household budget surveys. He limited his comments in this regard to reporting an official's estimate of how the wages that had been earned in the Roan Antelope mine were actually spent.³ Nevertheless, the Northern Rhodesian government began to feel the need for more information on the financial position of the Copperbelt miners, in particular after the 1935 strikes in the mines. The Governor, Hubert Young, had had a long-term interest in creating a research institute in order to study the social problems of the colony, and in this sense the strikes gave an impetus to this project, giving him extra arguments in his efforts to convince the Colonial Office in London of the need to found such an institute, and to fund it.⁴ At any event, he was successful in his endeavour, and the Rhodes Livingstone Institute was established. Out of this came the first significant study of African household economics, which was conducted by Godfrey Wilson in Broken Hill (now Kabwe) in 1940 and reported in his path-breaking *Essay on the Economics of Detribalization in Northern Rhodesia*.⁵

Wilson begins his *Essay* with the comment that 'I have tried ... to limit myself to a bare description of the facts and of their inevitable connections and I have not—so I honestly believe—either allowed my own political opinions to colour that description or made covert propaganda for any cause, or race, or party'.⁶ This is undoubtedly the truth, as Wilson experienced it, but it nevertheless betrays a realisation that his work could be read as implying a political position on his part. It is indeed not difficult to do so. Wilson actually makes two highly disputable general claims about the world in general and Northern Rhodesia in

² For comparative material, see: Gerardo Serra, 'An uneven statistical topography: The political economy of household budget surveys in late colonial Ghana, 1951-1957', *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, 35:1 (2014), 9-27.

³ E. A. G. Robinson, 'The economic problem' in J. Merle Davis (ed.), *Modern industry and the African* (London: Macmillan, 1933), 179.

⁴ Audrey Richards, 'The Rhodes-Livingstone Institute: An experiment in research, 1933 - 1938', *African Social Research*, 24 (1977), 275-8; as cited in Lyn Schumaker, *Africanizing anthropology: Fieldwork, networks and the making of cultural knowledge in Central Africa* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2001), 167, 313, but see also: Richard Brown 'Anthropology and colonial rule: Godfrey Wilson and the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, Northern Rhodesia', in: Talal Asad (ed.), *Anthropology and the colonial encounter* (New York: Humanities Press, 1973).

⁵ Godfrey Wilson, *Essay on the economics of detribalization in Northern Rhodesia* (Livingstone: Rhodes Livingstone Institute, 1941).

⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

particular. The first is based on a radical level of Equilibrium Structural Functionalism, at a level that is beyond the general run of norms. He departs from 'the assumption that uneven change leads to pronounced social tension, which *must* then be somehow overcome'.⁷ In other words, if social change has not affected all the interlocking facets of society in very much the same way, and to similar degrees, then 'a state of temporary disequilibrium is set up. It can only be a temporary state; society cannot continue if some of its relationships and institutions are in implicit contradiction with one another; readjustment must be made; equilibrium must be re-established in a new form, whether the human actors desire its re-establishment or not'.⁸ What Wilson, in his study of Broken Hill, was arguing was further that disequilibrium was the result of the incorporation of 'tribesmen' into the capitalist world system, and that this could only lead to tensions, until, as a result of the struggles of the labour force, equilibrium would be achieved again. It is an analysis which he states to be fact, but it was just as much a radical rejection of the colonial system of Northern Rhodesia, not perhaps based on a Marxist analysis in the strict sense, as class is not a factor in Wilson's discussion, but nonetheless not a line which would have made him popular with the great majority of whites in the country.

Wilson had done his fieldwork in Broken Hill at the beginning of World War II. This conflagration was fought at a great distance from Central Africa, but naturally had its effects on the economies of the region. In particular, difficulties with transport and the changed priorities of production meant that the cost of living on the Copperbelt, in particular, increased dramatically. To find out what the effects of this were, the government brought in A. Lynn Saffery, a trade union organiser who had had much experience in South Africa doing budget studies for the Institute of Race Relations. His report made clear how the inflation of the war years was reducing most of the inhabitants of the mining towns to poverty.⁹

During and after World War II, the British state began to look for ways of increasing its revenue from its African colonies, and generally began to set about 'developing' them. In 1940, the British Parliament passed the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, which allowed London to provide its colonies with sums for investment, at least after the Colonial Office had received a ten-year plan in which the intentions of the colonial governments were set out. In practice, of course, this did not get going until 1946, although it is not implausible that Saffery's surveys were commissioned with the provisions of the Act in mind. At any rate, after the end of the war, in many places the British implemented actively interventionist policies with regard to agriculture and stock-keeping, which have been described as 'the Second Colonial Occupation', an invasion of the daily practices of African farmers and cattle herders by agriculturalists, veterinary surgeons, and the like.¹⁰ The resentment this produced was often at the heart of early nationalist agitation. However, alongside such actions, it was also considered necessary to increase the knowledge that the government had of what was going on in its territory. Equally, a series of strikes, particularly in the docks and on the railways, meant that the intervention of government in the relations between employers and their employees began to increase.¹¹ There is thus the sense in which the activities of the social scientist in collecting information about the Africans' way of life was as much a part of the Second Colonial Occupation as were the dealings of an agricultural officer.

⁷ *Ibid*, 15.

⁸ *Ibid*.

⁹ A. Lynn Saffery, *A report on some aspects of African living conditions on the copper belt of Northern Rhodesia* (Lusaka: Government Printer, 1943).

¹⁰ D. A. Low and J. M. Lonsdale, 'Introduction' in D. A. Low and Alison Smith (eds.), *History of East Africa III* (Oxford: Oxford UP), 12.

¹¹ Frederick Cooper, *On the African waterfront: Urban disorder and the transformation of work in colonial Mombasa* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987).

These comments allow the placing of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute (RLI) as part of the colonial offensive in immediate post-war Africa, even if many of those who worked for the RLI might have hated the thought. Ethnography, whether rural or urban, was a way in which the colonial rulers, whether in Africa or in London, could acquire information about their subjects. It may not always have been the information which they wanted to receive, or that met their prejudices, but it was sufficiently appreciated for the funding of the RLI to be maintained for many years.¹²

John Barnes and Clyde Mitchell in the rural hinterland of the Copperbelt conducted the first budget studies under the RLI. The primary purpose of this research was to train the neophyte researchers in the techniques of fieldwork, above all, according to the director, Max Gluckman, the collection of genealogies and the taking of a census. Their interest in household budgets came, it was noted, as the result of a direct request from the department of agriculture. But it was all part of the project of making the colony better known, and thus more easily governable.¹³

This was even more clearly the case with the research carried out by Phyllis Deane, in conjunction with the RLI, although she was not on the Institute's pay roll. Deane was a trained economist who was well at home in the new economic world of planning and of, as she noted, 'the great increase in the accepted responsibilities of government, which characterised the post-war world'. In essence, her project was to work out ways to construct national accounts in the circumstances of a colonial state, where there was both a vast quantity of economic activity that went on outside the cash nexus, and in which the sources of information on even that part of the economy that used cash were fragmentary and of poor quality. It was a heroic task, and one that entailed working together with the RLI's anthropologists, notably Barnes, Elizabeth Colson, and Gluckman, to gain some insight into the economic structure of African farming households. These allowed her to produce information sufficient to give 'a series of articulated but necessarily incomplete social accounts', but not of the quality which would have formed the basis for 'detailed national budgeting'. The quantities of local level data that she would have needed were simply not available to her.¹⁴ Nevertheless, from the point of view of this paper it is clear that the work on the budgets of farming communities was a part of the process whereby colonial governments attempted to strengthen their grip on the societies of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Her information at a local level derived exclusively from Northern Rhodesia. There were at that stage no budget studies for Nyasaland, and her estimates of production and consumption derived entirely from agricultural surveys. At the very least, her work would have increased the 'legibility', to the state, of the colonial population.¹⁵ Further, the colonial government would be able to use the results of such a survey to determine, at least in part, its economic policy, with all the attendant consequences of that. State intervention requires the information that Phyllis Deane attempted to provide. She did not manage to do so to her own satisfaction, but in the process, obviously, she showed what more was needed.

¹² Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology*.

¹³ J. C. Mitchell and J. A. Barnes, *The Lamba Village: Report of a social survey*, Communications from the School of African Studies, University of Cape Town, (new Series no. 24), Cape Town, 1950, pp. v - vi and 56-67.

¹⁴ Phyllis Deane, *Colonial social accounting* (Cambridge: CUP, 1953), quotations from pp. 1 & 228; on Phyllis Deane's Central African work see Mary S. Morgan, 'Seeking parts, looking for wholes', in: L. Daston and E. Lunbeck (eds.), *Histories of Scientific Observation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), and Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology*, 104 - 7; for the difficulties of African statistical material to this day, see Morten Jerven, *Poor numbers: How we are misled by African development statistics and what to do about it* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2013).

¹⁵ Scott, *Seeing like a State*.

As part of the same shift in governmental style, colonial officials may have attempted to produce similar information on which to base their decisions. In 1947, for instance, the District Commissioner (DC) of Mwinilunga, in the far northwest of Northern Rhodesia, reported that households in his district spent between 15/- and £3 on consumer goods each year.¹⁶ Exactly how he came by this information is unclear. Probably, the DC and his messengers asked around in a haphazard and non-scientific way. All the same, it gave him the feeling that he was basing his decisions on the granting of trading licences on something other than his own rule of thumb.

In addition to the essentially anthropological approach of the RLI, there was another way of looking at household budgets that was to be found throughout Southern Africa. This was much more official and openly activist, in one way or another. It could be found, for instance, in the investigations of the 1950 Commission of Enquiry into the Cost of Living in Northern Rhodesia. The ending of the War had not led to a return to pre-War price levels. Since wages, notoriously, are likely to be much more sticky than prices, this led to a threatening crisis on the Copperbelt, which would have considerable consequences not merely for Northern Rhodesia, but further for the whole sterling area. The perception of danger led to the institution of the 1950 Commission. This body was primarily concerned with the income and expenditure patterns of the white miners and their families, and in this sense laid the basis for the great, if temporary, prosperity of this group through the 1950s.¹⁷ The Commission did also collect a substantial number of African workers' budgets, even though it could not vouch for the representativeness of the information so provided. It did however make the point that foodstuffs played a major part in the expenditure of the African workers, rivalling the importance of clothing in the budgets, and that the rising cost of foodstuffs was severely affecting the ability of Africans in towns to survive at a reasonable level of comfort. It also noted that many respondents reported much higher expenditure than income, but was unable to provide an explanation for how this could come about.¹⁸

Over the years, moreover, there had developed in South Africa a substantial body of work which was primarily designed to demonstrate how impoverished the black population of the country was, and thus how measures had to be taken to alleviate the squalor in which in particular the urban blacks found themselves. This was above all centred on the Institute of Race Relations in Johannesburg, but the main proponent was perhaps Edward Batson, Professor of Sociology at the University of Cape Town.¹⁹ Batson is famous, or perhaps notorious, for having developed the concept of the Poverty Datum Line, which he defined as 'an estimate of the income needed by any individual household if it is to attain a defined minimum level of health and decency'. This, Batson repeatedly pointed out, was a very conservative measure, giving the 'barest minimum at which subsistence and health can theoretically be achieved', and did not allow for anything

¹⁶ National Archives of Zambia, SEC2/955, F. M. N. Heath, Mwinilunga tour report, 16.11.1947. I owe this reference to Iva Peša.

¹⁷ Ian Phimister, 'Workers in wonderland? White miners and the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt, 1946 – 1962', *South African Historical Journal*, 63:2 (2011), 183 – 234; Ian Phimister, 'Proletarians in Paradise: the historiography and historical sociology of White Miners on the Copperbelt', in: Jan-Bart Gewald, Marja Hinfelaar & Giacomo Macola (eds.), *Living the end of empire: Politics and society in late colonial Zambia* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2011), 151 – 160.

¹⁸ *Final report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Cost of Living*, Lusaka, 1950, 182 – 194.

¹⁹ This corpus of work in South Africa is discussed in a sister paper to this one, 'The politics of household budget studies in South Africa', to be published in *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, probably in 2015. For Batson, see D. Grace Davie, 'Poverty knowledge in South Africa: The everyday life of social science expertise in the twentieth century', Ph.D. thesis, University of Michigan, 2005.

except food, clothing, housing, fuel, lighting and transport to work.²⁰ It thus left out everything not immediately necessary for survival.

Batson himself, together with his wife, conducted research in Salisbury (Harare) in the last years of World War II, although this was primarily concerned to establish the level of the Poverty Datum Line, rather than estimating how many households had to exist on incomes which were below that level. The Batsons did not have the opportunity to do the concerted research in the townships that would have been necessary to establish such information. They had to be content with recording the price of foodstuffs, clothing, and so forth.

Batson's concerns, and to some extent his methods, were taken up by some of those in the RLI. Clyde Mitchell, always the most mathematical and quantitative of the RLI's anthropologists, was well aware of what Batson had been doing, and incorporated his methodology into his survey work on the Copperbelt.²¹ So did David Bettison, a self-proclaimed sociographer who was employed at the request of the Government of Nyasaland to perform basically quantitative research in Blantyre and the peri-urban settlements around what was then the territory's capital. These studies are in general in the category 'dry as dust', but on occasion the political message gets through. In 1960, he published an article on the Poverty Datum Line, in which he compared the situation in Salisbury, Blantyre, and Lusaka. His conclusion was that the wages which were paid might be sufficient to keep a single worker out of poverty, but were certainly not sufficient for family units. In the long run, he was to comment, 'privation becomes manifest in the form of high disease rates, fatigue, irresponsibility, inefficiency and a host of indirect factors a fully developed economy cannot afford to bear'. There was no margin for safety, nor was there peace of mind for employers or 'the political leaders of the community'.²² In this last clause, the final words of his article, Bettison made plain his personal support for the Nationalist movements in what was then known as Central Africa.

This is even more evident in an article he published in the next issue of the *Rhodes Livingstone Journal*.²³ He repeated his contention, based on his Poverty Datum Line studies, that 'real wages [in British Central Africa] have not risen much above subsistence level for a single man'. In an analysis which foreshadows Harold Wolpe's famous arguments on the articulation of modes of production in South Africa,²⁴ Bettison argued that Europeans were able to exercise coercion over potential African labourers, and thereby 'remove the influence that a limited supply might have on wages in the face of constant or increased demand'. This could only work because colonial governments had gained 'complete control of [the] political institutions'. As a result the Europeans were able to impose wage rates which were in no way sufficient for a family income. Even into the 1950s, wages were fixed by Wage Boards, whose decisions 'are still based on principles of subsistence costs, and of consumption units smaller than family type households'. In other words, women were subsidising men, and the rural areas were subsidising the towns. This could only end as a result of effective trade unions and political action, and Bettison saw both as necessary and incipient.

²⁰ As cited in Edward Batson, *The poverty line in Salisbury* (Cape Town: School of Social Science and Social Administration, 1945), 1-2.

²¹ Schumaker, *Africanising anthropology*, 157.

²² David G. Bettison, 'The poverty datum line in Central Africa: Comparative material from Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland', *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, 27 (1960), 1 - 40.

²³ David G. Bettison, 'Factors in the determination of wage rates in Central Africa', *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, 28 (1960), 23 - 46.

²⁴ Harold Wolpe, 'Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: From segregation to apartheid', *Economy and Society*, 1 (1972).

As this shows, in the course of the 1950s, the study of African household economics became embroiled with the broader politics of the region. The arguments were essentially about the institution of the Central African Federation, which was to encompass both Rhodesias, Northern and Southern, and also Nyasaland. This was an attempt to preserve and to strengthen white rule throughout the region, and its prime supporters were the settler community of Southern Rhodesia, and, to a lesser degree, the whites of the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt. In particular, the former group was to prosper from the transfer of resources accrued by the mining industry to the economy of Southern Rhodesia, whose secondary industry boomed in this period, and which took benefit from projects such as the building of the Kariba dam.²⁵ It became the target of African nationalist agitation, most notably in Nyasaland, but also in Zambia.²⁶ It was in this context that the Central Statistical Office of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, based in Salisbury, began to conduct their own surveys, mainly in Southern Rhodesia but also in what was to become Zambia. The Office was, of course, a government institution. Though it would never have admitted to the fact, the Office's work was in fact a justification of white rule in the region and of the dominance of Southern Rhodesia over the other territories. Their concerns were not, as in the contemporary South African Institute of Race Relations surveys in Johannesburg,²⁷ or Bettison's studies in Nyasaland, to discover what proportion of the African Population in Salisbury and Bulawayo were living in abject poverty. Rather, they were concerned to discover the level of income at which individuals or families began to make savings. A number of their early reports hypothesised that household incomes would increase by £1 a month each, and attempted to calculate what the result would be for the African market, perhaps not such a mad suggestion as it might seem, because there was pressure for the raising of the minimum wage.²⁸ As Timothy Burke commented of the surveys, they were 'explicitly political documents used both to demonstrate that Africans were better off than anticolonial critics supposed and to encourage strategically limited increases in African wages'.²⁹ The demand for higher wages was not totally illusory. Entrepreneurs in what was to become Harare, and in other Rhodesian towns, were agitating for an increase in African spending power.³⁰ Nevertheless, the Statistical Office was clearly glad to provide a description of black urban life in very positive terms.

This conclusion belies the fact that the reports of the Central Statistical Office are technically of a higher quality than most others in the region. The first director, J. R. H. Shaul, was aware of the

²⁵ Julia Tischler, *Light and power for a multiracial nation: The Kariba Dam scheme in the Central African Federation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

²⁶ See above all John McCracken, *A history of Malawi* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2012). A good, up-to-date history of Zambian nationalism still has to be written, though it is unlikely ever to supplant Andrew Roberts, *A history of Zambia* (London: Heinemann, 1976); but see Giacomo Macola, *Liberal nationalism in Central Africa: A biography of Harry Mwaanga Nkumbula* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

²⁷ See Ethel Wix, *The cost of living: An enquiry into the cost of essential requirements for African families living in Johannesburg, Pretoria and the Reef towns, August - December 1950* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1951); Olive Gibson, *The cost of living for Africans* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1954); Joy de Gruchy, *The cost of living for urban Africans, Johannesburg, 1959* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1960).

²⁸ I have used Central Statistical Office, *Second report on urban African budget survey in Salisbury, 1957/58*, Salisbury 1959; *First report on urban African budget survey in Bulawayo, 1958/59*, Salisbury, 1960; *First report on urban African budget surveys in Umtali and Gwelo, July, 1959*, Salisbury, 1960; *Second report on urban African budget surveys in Umtali and Gwelo, July, 1959*, Salisbury, 1960; See also 'Family budgets in Africa South of the Sahara : III - Southern Rhodesia', *Inter-African Labour Institute Bulletin*, 7:5 (1960), 50 - 85, for summaries of the main findings.

²⁹ Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy men, Lux women: Commodification, consumption and cleanliness in modern Zimbabwe* (Durham: Duke UP, 1996), 218.

³⁰ Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*, chapters 5 & 6; c.f. Phyllis Deane, 'The Industrial Revolution in British Central Africa', XII, 1962.

latest developments in statistical and sampling theory.³¹ The data are presented in the driest possible way, without any embellishment as to the economic, social, or political context within which the subjects of the research were living. Even the major political events, the break-up of Federation and the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Rhodesia, did not receive a mention when the budgets collected in 1968 were compared with those of a decade earlier. Even at this stage it was apparently assumed that all would go on as long before. It is only in the acknowledgement of help from, for instance, the African Affairs Department of the city of Bulawayo, or of Rhodesian Railways, that the place of the investigations in the fraught world of the Central African Federation becomes evident.

Within these reports, then, there is a clear message. African prosperity was growing in the cities of Southern Rhodesia. White rule and tutelage over the Africans was beneficial to the latter, and political agitation was not necessary. Statistics such as these were not necessarily damned lies, but were clearly being used as part of the hegemonic project of white Rhodesia.³²

This was something that the African communities fully understood, probably far better than the white economists who ran the Central Statistical Office. In 1960, the Office decided to pursue its work north of the Zambezi. It wanted to make surveys covering the towns of Lusaka, Livingstone, Broken Hill (Kabwe), Ndola, Kitwe, Mufulira, and Chingola. Undoubtedly, there was an implicit hope for comparison with the situation to the South, but the reports of the survey were scrupulously and conspicuously totally silent on the matter. Certainly it was assumed further that the surveys would be of importance to the Government of Northern Rhodesia, and thus worth doing even if they might exacerbate political tension. Therefore, attempts were made to enlist the support of the 'African mine workers unions', but there is no indication that this was forthcoming. There were not just the normal suspicions of such surveys, which could generally be dispelled. The politics of the country militated heavily against success. As the report noted:

The following factors upset this survey:

- (a) There were riots,
- (b) There was intimidation of fieldworkers,
- (c) There was political activity against the survey. It was described as being:
 - a. Designed to find out how much was spent on beer so that wages could be reduced accordingly,
 - b. Connected with the Monckton Commission,
 - c. Held with the object of registering people for Federation,
- (d) There was adverse publicity based on an isolated incident in Lusaka, which reacted unfavourably in the Copperbelt towns where the surveys started later.³³

³¹ J. R. H. Shaul, 'Sampling surveys in Central Africa', *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 47 (1952), 139 - 54. The RLI researchers were not enamoured of his methods, which they saw as missing much relevant detail; Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology*, 180.

³² This seems to have been the case even when the surveys were conducted by members of the notably nationalist Samkange family. Perhaps they were primarily concerned to satisfy the board of the Rhodesian Milling and Manufacturing Company which had commissioned the study, though I must admit that I have not been able to consult the original report. See Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*, 219. See also Terence Ranger, *Are we not also men? The Samkange family & African politics in Zimbabwe, 1920 - 1964* (London: James Currey, 1995).

³³ *First report on the urban African budget surveys held in Northern Rhodesia from May to August 1960*, Central Statistical Office, Salisbury, 1960, 2. On the Monckton Commission, see R. Cranford Pratt, 'Partnership and consent: The Monckton Report examined', *International Journal*, 16 (1960-61).

The townships of Mufulira and Chingola had to be excluded from participation in a follow-up survey, because of difficulties encountered during the first one.³⁴ For all this, the results of the surveys are presented in the heavily matter-of-fact manner of the other works.

Later, after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), repeat surveys were conducted in Bulawayo, Salisbury, and the Rhodesian midlands.³⁵ In Bulawayo, it was noted that there was 'a fair amount of resistance on the part of householders to participate in the survey', mainly, it is believed, due to suspicion of the motives of the survey. Even here, non-response was often attributed to the fact that only the husband was in residence. In Salisbury, suspicions of the motives of the survey were said to be linked to a desire for privacy, and in the Midlands it was said to be above all the absence of family members which caused the problems. How far these comments properly reflect the state of affairs, how far the investigators were concealing non-cooperation and how far the power of the Rhodesian state was enforcing compliance, is all very difficult to say. What is clear is that the Statistical Office was able to produce part of the ideological justification for white rule in the region, and many Africans realised this and acted accordingly.

Moving further north, there is a corpus of work on the budgets of Africans living in colonial Belgian Congo. The most informative of these deals with Elizabethville, which immediately afterwards became Lubumbashi.³⁶ It is worth mentioning because it is by some distance the most detailed and informative of the works I have been discussing in this paper, and of course because the two Copperbelts, the Congolese and the Zambian, had much in common, and many connections. It was based on research carried out between October 1957 and March 1958 in the townships of the city and the compounds of the Union Minière de Haut Katanga and of the Chemins de Fer de Bas-Congo. The work was under the auspices of the Centre d'Etude des Problèmes Sociaux Indigènes in Elizabethville (CEPSI) and of the University of Ghent and was clearly done in the assumption, almost universal among Belgians both in the colonial Congo and certainly in Belgium, that colonial rule would last for decades. This was overtaken by the events of 1959 and 1960, and was only published when it was already known that the Congo would become independent on 30 June 1960. What had begun as a standard piece of colonial science, an attempt by the CEPSI to gather the information which would aid in the development of a colonial state, was seen as a way to help the new Congolese state build on the advantages which that state had provided. More than ever, it was claimed,

... in the young Congolese state, objective study of all socio-economic problems will be highly necessary. And who should in this have a greater responsibility than the inhabitants of this country, both Flemings and Walloons, who can be proud that over the last eighty years they have brought more economic and human development in the heart of Africa than has no doubt ever been achieved in any country in the world in such a short time?³⁷

³⁴ In the absence of a comprehensive study of African nationalism in Zambia, along the lines of John McCracken's *A history of Malawi*, it is impossible to say if these mining settlements were particularly volatile, or if purely logistic reasons dictated the statisticians' plans.

³⁵ Central Statistical Office, *Report on urban African budget survey in Salisbury, 1969* (Salisbury, 1970); *Report on urban African budget survey in Bulawayo, 1968* (Salisbury, 1970); *Report on urban African budget survey in the Midlands (Gwelo, Que Que and Gatooma), 1970* (Salisbury, 1971).

³⁶ Ferdinand van Assche, *De consumptie der inlanders te Elizabethstad: Proeve van onderzoek naar haar structuur en ontwikkelingstendens*, (Elizabethville: Centre d'Etude des Problèmes Sociaux Indigènes, 1960); see also E. Bourgeois, 'La rémunération des travailleurs: Quelques budgets familiaux', *Bulletin du C.E.P.S.I.*, 33 (1956); L Baeck, 'Enquete budgetaires sur les congolais évolués de Leopoldville', *Bulletin du C.E.P.S.I.*, 38 (1958).

³⁷ A. J. Vlerick, 'Ten geleide', to Van Assche, *Consumptie der Inlanders*, 6 (my translation).

Indeed, the whole tone of the research report was to stress how an African middle class, above all the clerks, and to a degree the skilled labourers, of the city were developing a pattern of consumption much more allied to the European than to that of the villages from which they had come, but which was nevertheless fundamentally driven by the imperatives of the village, in particular the drive to promote the economic equality of the inhabitants (*nivelleringsstendens*), which was seen as fundamentally inimical to economic development. At the same time, the distinction between Europeans and the Congolese, very visible in Elizabethville, could lead to problems. European manners were most attractive, though the African emphasis was on the surface of the behaviour. In particular the imitation of the Europeans in terms of clothing and furniture was most important. However, as Van Assche wrote,

... the native is caught between two fundamentally different views on life. The traditional with its ancient decency and well-known pattern is undoubtedly the strongest, while the new, the Europeanised with its comfort, display and luxury, is the more attractive ... In terms of economic growth, this split in way of life is disadvantageous for a harmonious and assimilated development. The flower of the native economy flourishes in the artificial climate of the speeded development. The break that the rural population applies to the growth of wealth among the townspeople, only increases the discrepancy between the latter and that of the whites, and increases the frustration of the urban native, especially as he is confronted with an exceptionally high white living standard.³⁸

The paternalism of Belgian colonialism could scarcely be better illustrated.

One final comment is necessary. In this paper I have stressed the problems, which the political agendas of the various research traditions entailed for the researches they produced. However, it must be recognised that this does not disqualify them as historical sources. They are full of very important information, and necessarily form part of the basis by which the changing consumption patterns of Africans through the twentieth century can be analysed. Like all historical sources, they require careful reading, and critical discussion, but material should not be discarded or ignored because it is in some sense contaminated. Otherwise, any form of history writing would be impossible.

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³⁸ Van Asscher, *Consumptie der inlanders*, 226-7.

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