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# Fear and mockery: the story of Osale and Paulo in Tanganyika

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyses the popular story of the two ‘social bandits’ Osale and Paulo who caused insecurity and fear in Tanganyika’s Usambara Mountains during the 1950s. By comparing various oral accounts of the story and supplementing the sparse archival material available, the paper reveals a narrative of multiple anxieties harboured by the residents of Shambaai during a time of rapid transformation under late colonial rule. As they reworked the racialized colonial hierarchy through their narratives, African story-tellers dealt with anxieties concerning settler colonialism, Mau Mau, land scarcity and the colonial administration’s disastrous soil conservation policy. The article demonstrates the importance of taking seriously oral histories for our understanding of African responses to the anxieties of the late colonial period. Furthermore, it sheds new light on the relations between white settlers and Africans in the Usambara Mountains in the light of the administration’s rigorous intervention into African agriculture.

## KEYWORDS

Tanganyika; settler colonialism; social banditry; Usambara Scheme; rumours and oral history; colonial gaze

The story of the two notorious ‘social bandits’ Osale and Paulo, who lived in Tanganyika<sup>1</sup> in the 1950s, enjoyed wide popularity then and still does today in the Usambara Mountains and the entire Tanga Region of Tanzania. Depending on the perspective, it is told as the story of thugs and criminals, the story of men associated with the armed struggle and Mau Mau, or the story of ambiguous social bandits who mastered the world of the invisible, at once both feared and welcomed by the residents of Usambara. Osale and Paulo are said to have travelled in the mountains of Shambaai, as local residents call their home, at night, under the protection of their invisibility. They would steal from settlers and intrude into their family homes, where they shared dinner tables and beds, thus creating additional anxiety on top of Usambara’s political upheavals of the 1950s. The story, although widely known by the Shambaai and other Africans as well as remembered by the white communities then residing in the area, is scarcely documented in the colonial archive. It is a story that gives insight into the multiple anxieties of the 1950s felt by the people of Usambara as colonial rule was drawing to an end.

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These anxieties concern first and foremost, settler colonialism and land scarcity, second, the neighbouring Mau Mau war in Kenya and the threat of violent insurrection, and third, the disastrous soil conservation policy of the colonial state and its consequences for the widening of social cleavages among Shambaai's residents in the 1950s. In the story, Osale and Paulo turned the colonial hierarchy on its head as they slipped in and out of white homes unseen, sharing the settlers' tables and even their beds. The narrative about the figures Osale and Paulo and the travelling of their story can be read as a pushback by the story-tellers against a racialized colonial hierarchy and against settler privilege. It represents the colonial world 'upside down'.

This article looks at the turmoils of the last decade before independence through the lens of African story-telling. It contributes to the scholarly conversation in two ways. First, it demonstrates the importance of oral narratives and rumour for our understanding of African responses to the anxieties of the late colonial period. Second, it brings into focus the relations between Africans and white settlers in the Usambara Mountains, which is an underexamined topic. The article argues that the story-tellers and rumour-mongers who circulated the story about Osale and Paulo played with and inverted the politics of being seen and remaining unseen, of observer and observed, thus formulating a powerful response, commentary and critique of colonial racialized society and its spin-off into local and nationalist politics.

In the wake of Ann Laura Stoler's influential study on colonial intimacies, the literature on settler colonialism in eastern and southern Africa has examined the construction and maintenance of racialized hierarchies and white privilege, as well as the efforts to keep interracial intimacies and so-called 'black peril scares' at bay.<sup>2</sup> Historical studies of African responses to racialized colonial society are not as rich, but include Zine Magubane's formidable work on South Africa, on which this article builds.<sup>3</sup> Unlike South Africa, Tanganyika never had a large settler population. While the story of Osale and Paulo clearly reveals anxieties about settlers, it also contains other worries about social decline in the face of British interventions into agriculture. Local politicians used the story as proof of the political instability that had taken hold of Shambaai. The threat presented by Osale and Paulo was seen as evidence for the weakness of certain chiefs, who had been turned into British puppets, as they were obliged to implement the infamous Usambara Scheme.

Developmentalist interventions in the name of progress and modernization since the interwar period have been a point of interest for a number of studies on the African British Empire.<sup>4</sup> In particular, all efforts were put into combating soil erosion.<sup>5</sup> Such interventions into the agricultural sector provoked fierce resistance, often connected to and fuelled by nationalist activism. Research through a rigorous social history lens has outlined resistance against such interventions and its entanglements with nationalist politics, including in Shambaai.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, this article approaches this history from a cultural perspective. Steven Feierman's seminal work serves as the central reference point. Feierman has shaped our understanding of Shambaa peasant society as far from detached from wider political currents, while insisting on paying attention to local and regional patterns of thought that mould the way global ideas are reworked and protest is formulated.<sup>7</sup> The story of Osale and Paulo is an example of how Shambaa concepts, such as the concept of invisibility, are reworked and adapted as they are evoked in a context of rapid societal transformation.

The article is divided in three sections. First, it analyses the story about the social bandits Osale and Paulo and its depiction in both Tanzanian and white perspectives, an analysis that is based on rumours and oral histories and the sparse archival evidence available. The second section follows local political activist Saidi Dowekulu, who evoked the threat presented by Osale and Paulo to advocate for the removal of the Paramount Chief. The third section analyses an anonymous letter written in protest against the Usambara Scheme, in which references to Mau Mau are used to lend the writers' grievances more urgency. The article is based on source material from the Tanzanian and British National Archives and on interviews conducted between 2014 and 2017.

### **Settler community and the politics of the 1950s**

The settler community in Tanganyika was always comparatively small. In 1913, their number figured at about 5,000, out of which 882 were male adults engaged in agriculture, a number still similar to Kenya's at the same time. In the early stages of German rule, the Usambara Mountains were selected for settlement and the creation of coffee plantations. Thanks to its moderate mountain climate and seemingly fertile soils, West Usambara was chosen as the first option for settlers, with the small town Wilhelmstal, today's Lushoto, as its centre. The first coffee plantation opened in 1891. By 1911, there were 41 farms in the West Usambara Mountains. White settlers, always a mixed community consisting of Germans, Greeks, white South Africans and others, combined mixed farming with small coffee plantations. The land chosen for settlement was not unoccupied. The original African cultivators were concentrated on part of the plantation land, while the rest of the land was alienated. Moreover, the German administration introduced a forced labour system, under which headmen were responsible for recruiting a fixed number of workers each day for each settler. This system produced brutal abuses and was abolished in 1904.<sup>8</sup>

Generally however, German policy did not encourage settlement, probably because coffee production failed and European mixed farming became the rule. Ultimately the larger white settlements in Tanganyika were located on the slopes of Meru and Kilimanjaro. Under British administration, the number of Europeans in Tanganyika grew rapidly between the late 1930s and 1950s to more than 20,000, many of them settlers. British authorities gave them more political influence and land alienation increased quite rapidly, but again mostly in Meru and Kilimanjaro.<sup>9</sup>

The Shambaa and other Africans residing in Shambaai were aware of the rising number of settlers. They, too, were highly conscious of the land losses as a result of the Meru Land Case in 1951 and of the land question that had ignited the Mau Mau war across the border in Kenya. In addition, the much-despised Usambara Scheme, introduced to Shita in 1946 and in 1950 to the whole of Shambaai, caused much irritation and hard labour for the mountain dwellers. The Usambara Scheme was designed to prevent soil erosion through the large-scale laying of bench terraces – the famous *matuta* – and the halt of cultivating on slopes steeper than 25°. <sup>10</sup> The colonial administration endorsed a strict labour regime that brought back memories of the brutal labour recruitment system under early German rule. All these developments taken together fuelled the fear of land alienation and anxieties about settlers, the labourious cultivation rules and social decline.

The unpopular Paramount Chief abdicated his throne in 1947 in response to pressure from large parts of the population for his replacement. His abdication was organized by the *chama*, a precursor of the Tanganyika African Association (TAA). Loyal as he was to the British administration, the Paramount was supported by Usambara's settler community; however, they could not prevent his fall.<sup>11</sup> Peace could not be regained by a mere change of personnel, and the activism of the TAA continued. In 1949, the Usambara branch of the TAA, was banned by the colonial administration.<sup>12</sup> Tensions remained and the 1950s turned out to be the most turbulent decade, not only for the new Paramount Chief, but for the British as well. The protestors not only envisioned a more inclusive political system that included extended powers for commoners, but also fought fiercely against the Usambara Scheme. As the scheme threatened the existence of not only the poorest but also many middle-class households, it eventually helped channel the protest against cultivation rules into broad resistance. The protests soon turned into an instrument to address larger issues, such as the abuse of power of certain chiefs and the rise of nationalism and of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) in the Usambara Mountains and Tanganyika as a whole. This was the context in which the story of Osale and Paulo unfolded.

### **Anti-colonial heroes or petty criminals? The story of Osale and Paulo**

The story about Osale and Paulo is still widely remembered today in the Usambara Mountains. It is a story that enmeshed the political imagery of the anticolonial struggle with trickster stories that draw on the power of the invisible realm. In it, two men, Osale Otango and Paulo Hamisi, paid mysterious nightly visits to the homes of white settlers, thus instilling fear in the settler community and winning the sympathies of many local residents. The story is based on the significantly altered version of a true story that occurred in 1956. In addition to the Tanzanian versions of the story, an 'official' colonial version also exists, in which the two men are presented as apolitical criminals, as well as a version from the settler perspective that bears similarities to certain tropes of British anti-Mau Mau propaganda. In the 1950s and today, different versions of the story coexist at the same time. Comparing them helps us to understand the ways in which the figures of Osale and Paulo were used by different groups, and for what ends. While the stories discussed here are representative of those told in Usambara, they are part of a wider body of accounts about the two social bandits told throughout the Tanga region which differ in scope and context.

In the story as narrated by Tanzanians living in the Usambara Mountains today, Osale Otango and Paulo Hamisi were admired and feared at the same time.<sup>13</sup> The two men had met in prison. Osale was Kenyan and Paulo a native of Shambaai. They were known to break into settlers' homes at night, not to steal or maim, but rather to teach the settlers a lesson. Osale and Paulo were a peculiar pair of 'criminals'. Their major offense was sharing the dinner table with white settlers in the settlers' homes without having been invited. After the meal they would stealthily escape from the scene. Osale and Paulo were believed to command magical powers that allowed them to become invisible.<sup>14</sup> They would leave a written note behind that said: 'We were here and we have eaten with you, but you did not see us. Thank you for supper' and they would sign with their names. All my Tanzanian interlocutors agreed that the white community in Shambaai was deeply unsettled. Their various attempts to catch Osale and Paulo failed.

Osale and Paulo's power came with a condition – they had to refrain from sex during their nightly tours.<sup>15</sup> As the story goes, one day Paulo broke this promise. He had sexual intercourse with the daughter of settlers who he had visited one night. It is said that Osale, although he was not with Paulo at the time, immediately felt a physical sensation when the breach happened. As an immediate consequence, both lost their magical powers and thus their invisibility. On the same evening, Osale was discovered and shot by police at Mtae. Paulo was injured at Irente and transferred to the hospital. People pressed for the secret of his magical power, but as the story has it, Paulo took it with him to the grave.<sup>16</sup> His tombstone in Irente is still there today. In some versions, Osale managed to flee and only Paulo died.<sup>17</sup> One of my interlocutors even claimed that in the 1980s, he accidentally met Osale in Mombasa: Osale, working as a dhobi, served him in the laundromat where my informant picked up his freshly pressed clothes.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, the official version of the colonial administration portrayed Osale and Paulo as mere criminals, guilty of theft and murder and not associated with the anticolonial struggle. The two men were cast as criminals who threatened not only the security of the British and white communities, but also the cultivation under the scheme rules. Documentation in the colonial archive is scarce. Osale and Paulo's death by shooting is mentioned in one of the monthly reports about the progress of the Usambara Scheme. 'The activities of the two gangsters, Osale Otango and Paulo Hamisi in the district created a wide spread unsettled atmosphere until they were shot on the 20th [July 1956] at Mtae', it read. 'Scheme work particularly at Mtae and Mlalo has definitely lapsed, and valuable time was lost in the commencement of ridging. In these areas, it is still taking the populace a little time to settle down again'.<sup>19</sup> According to the police report of 1956, the incident led the colonial administration to introduce heavy security measures. The so-called 'Osale gang'

kept large numbers of Police very fully occupied over a period of more than six months. Motorized Companies, tracker dogs and even spotter aircraft were all used in the hunt. This gang, consisting variably of three or more and led by an escaped convict serving a sentence of 25 years' imprisonment for murder, burglary and for being in possession of firearm, was responsible for the murder of two persons, the wounding of six others and for the theft of large sums of money and quantities of goods, and for several weeks large areas of the Tanga Province were terrorized by the activities of these men.<sup>20</sup>

The purpose of the police report was to convey that the source of trouble in the Tanga province was not political agitation (even if that had been a worry of the government), but rather an isolated incident. In addition, it demonstrated that the colonial state dealt firmly with criminals. Unlike the sober official version, the memories of my British interlocutors – children of British officials who were then posted in the area – suggest that the Mau Mau war created fear in Tanganyikan settler homes. According to their version, which sheds light on the discussions about the incident in the settler community, Osale and Paulo were not only said to be terrorizing the white community, but were also sometimes portrayed in colours similar to those worn by Mau Mau fighters.

The settler version held that the members of white households felt so insecure that they organized watchmen during the night, kept their houses locked at all times, and slept with guns next to their pillows.<sup>21</sup> Osale and Paulo were known to live in caves under an overhanging rock whose 'name means "don't go there" because the locals believed the gods were there. Osale and Paulo were safe there because nobody

would dare to follow them'.<sup>22</sup> One interviewee reported that when Osale and Paulo were finally caught, their dead bodies were publicly displayed. The display of the bodies was presented as inevitable 'because the local Africans thought they were "indestructible."'<sup>23</sup> The slightly dismissive reference to magical powers suggests that these powers were not taken seriously by white observers. Both the wildness of those living in caves and their ridiculed magical powers are tropes similar to those about Mau Mau fighters held by Kenya's white communities. In British memory, as John Lonsdale has demonstrated, Mau Mau functions as a symbol of African savagery, while Kenyan memory is divided between the interpretations of it as militant nationalism and tribalist thuggery.<sup>24</sup> In an area where the border was so close that since German rule, many people who wanted to escape taxation left for Kenya only to return after tax collection,<sup>25</sup> the circulation of images created by the 'British propaganda machine'<sup>26</sup> is unsurprising.

Besides borrowing tropes and images from the Mau Mau propaganda, the official display of the bodies shows the dread that Osale and Paulo provoked. The public humiliation of the bodies of dead enemies was a message to their sympathizers and bears witness to the urge felt by the colonial administration to prove their power and superiority, while at the same time deriding those who allegedly believed in magical powers.

The three versions have some commonalities, but differ in important ways. All tell of some kind of proof that Osale and Paulo died at the hands of the colonial administration, yet the public display of the dead bodies is omitted in the official and Tanzanian versions. The official version also does not mention the magical powers of the two men, perhaps because Tanganyikan officials tried to keep sensationalist reporting that would have established a more concrete link to the Mau Mau terror next door at bay. But curiously, the settler version maintains that white communities knew local residents attributed special powers to Osale and Paulo. Settler perspectives on the events, then and today, employ Mau Mau tropes, such as their 'wildness', the bewilderment and amusement regarding their magical powers, and the parts of the Tanzanian story dealing with their invisibility. Generally, the motif of slipping in and out of houses undetected ties in well with the stories of Mau Mau fighters being everywhere and unseen in the dirty war that took the British almost a decade to win. While in the settler version, the Mau Mau associations were negative and Osale and Paulo seen as enemies, a number of Tanzanians associated the two men with the imagery of the anti-colonial struggle, and thus with a positive reception of Mau Mau fighters.

The story as it is remembered today was already circulating in the 1950s, as the congruence between the settler memories and today's Tanzanian version demonstrates. It is impossible to know how Osale and Paulo situated themselves. Whether they felt they were part of a larger anti-British struggle or whether they were taking from the haves to give to the have-nots or simply stealing to enrich themselves must remain unanswered, although a combination of all three seems likely. All we can know is that they were former convicts and that Osale was Kenyan. This is neither proof of a Mau Mau connection, nor of an apolitical agenda. And yet the two figures inspired Shambaai's residents to engage with the subject matter and use it to express a response to settler colonialism and the fear of land losses, as well as the Usambara Scheme and its impact on Shamba social hierarchies.



## Invisibility and intimacy – reading the story as an inversion of settler privilege

In this section, I offer two possible and interconnected interpretations of what the story about Osale and Paulo meant to Usambara residents. It is not my objective to judge whether or not the story was ‘true’. Instead, I follow Luise White and seek to understand why the story could take on such a dynamic life and become locally credible, as rumours may ‘reveal an intellectual world of fears and fantasies, ideas and claims’.<sup>27</sup> My reading of it centres around two important ‘ideas and claims’ in the story: invisibility and intimacy.

The story is based on intimate encounters in settler homes, including the illicit sexual affair that led to the shooting of the two ‘criminals’. These forbidden but unavoidable intimacies would be quite threatening from a settler perspective. In this light, I read the story as a response by Usambara’s residents to settler colonialism and their commentary on settler fears about illicit intimate encounters between lives that were supposed to be segregated, yet were intricately bound together. The second interpretation deals with the theme of invisibility. As in other eastern and central African contexts, invisibility as a strategy used by trickster characters plays a vital part in the story, thus tying it to larger regional narratives of disobedience, trickery and social critique, but also of danger and power.<sup>28</sup>

In the accounts of my interlocutors, both aspects are interdependent. Only because Paulo is invisible can he sneak into a settler’s daughter’s bedroom, and yet because of this intimate encounter, he loses his invisibility and thus his power. It is significant that the woman with whom Paulo breaks the taboo is not just anyone, but rather the daughter of a settler. As such, she was the token of female respectability, and protecting her ‘whiteness’ would have been central to her and her family.<sup>29</sup> According to Brett Shadle, settler respectability in colonial eastern Africa was understood to be the highest form of white respectability.<sup>30</sup> Contesting settlers and what can be referred to as settler privilege, then, can be seen as a more serious crime than acting against lesser white communities, a fact Osale and Paulo were certainly aware of and played with.

A settler family sharing the dinner table with Africans was as unthinkable in the Usambara Mountains as it was in other settler colonial contexts. Colonial rule and particularly settler societies were predicated on the strict ideological separation between ‘native subjects’ and ‘European citizens’.<sup>31</sup> The reality, however, was less clear cut. Precisely because of the messy reality, a shared dinner table was entirely out of the question. Other forms of separation and spatial segregation undergirded daily life. For instance, Africans were prohibited from entering the Dochi neighbourhood in Lushoto. Yet according to the story, Osale and Paulo still did.<sup>32</sup>

The image of Osale and Paulo enjoying their dinner at the homes of white settlers is a transgression. The shared dinner between colonial masters and servants, between citizens and subjects, between legitimate rulers and abject criminals, certainly also challenged the colonial racialized hierarchy in which Africans were at the bottom. In fact, the story symbolized a major threat to the settler community, as it symbolically intruded into the very intimacy of settler households. The two most private aspects of settler life, the table and the bed, were at the core of the story. Sharing the dinner table with settlers implies not only forbidden intimacy, but can also be read as Africans making a claim to the right to



participate in the settlers' rights and privileges, including exchanging daughters in marriage.

The moment in which Osale and Paulo lost their power due to Paulo's breaking of the taboo was the same moment at which the white settlers were unable to defend the intimacy of their home and the 'respectability' of their daughter. Following the narrative's logic, even though the gangsters were killed, the settlers, too, faced a loss. Policing female respectability and thus 'racial purity' was not unique to British colonies: it was codified in law during German colonialism in the prohibition of interracial marriages.<sup>33</sup> The image of Osale and Paulo, two African ex-convicts, sharing the dinner table with white settlers and the bed with their daughters, or trespassing on private or state property, was a settler's worst nightmare. In addition, the particular version recounted by one of my interlocutors, according to which only Paulo was shot and Osale survived, can similarly be read as evidencing the criminals' unbroken power over the settlers. Osale and Paulo mastered both sides of invisibility, blending in and hiding, as well as exposing others through their gaze while remaining unseen themselves.

Building on the literature on colonialism and settler intimacies and following Zine Magubane's interpretation of it in South Africa, I read these Tanzanian narratives of intimacy and invisibility not as an internalization of the colonial gaze, but as an inversion of the roles of observer and observed. Zine Magubane's powerful analysis of South African responses to and accounts of encounters with the colonizers' concept of whiteness demonstrates that South Africans paid attention to the complex power dynamics involved in looking, observing, seeing, and being seen.<sup>34</sup> She shows that South Africans were aware of how colonial officials and settlers defined the boundaries of race and whiteness and declined to accept those boundaries, for instance in the way the 'swells refused to adopt the posture of silence that was demanded of blacks in a white supremacist culture'.<sup>35</sup> The story of Osale and Paulo has a similar dynamic. The metaphors of the table and the bed invert the colonial racialized hierarchy. In these narratives, the settlers lost the power to control the black gaze, while Osale and Paulo observed and controlled the settlers, themselves remaining invisible. As Bhaba puts it, 'the observer becomes the observed'.<sup>36</sup> The story indeed has a mocking undertone towards claims of white exclusivity.

Stories about invisibility and power have a long history in the area, and people residing in Shambaai were aware of this. Historically, the image of invisibility in Shambaai, as elsewhere in the region, was often connected to danger or to hiding from danger. During the time of slave raids in the Usambara Mountains, some people had special powers available that saved them from the fate of being enslaved. This special power was the ability to become invisible. The story is told in the town of Mazinde near the plains, where slave caravans used to pass.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, under colonial rule, the power of invisibility could save some people from the fate of being recruited for forced labour.<sup>38</sup> Mbegha, the first king of Shambaai, could cause a thick fog to appear on command in order to make people or entire villages invisible to the eyes of their enemies. He would employ this ruse during war and it impressed the initially suspicious Shambaa thoroughly enough for them to make Mbegha, the foreigner, their king.<sup>39</sup> Invisibility is thus a known concept in Shambaa thought and in the mythical story of their first king. It is connected to both danger and heroism, just like Osale and Paulo were dangerous and heroic

at the same time. Similar narratives are known throughout eastern and central Africa, sometimes connected to the escape from danger or to stealing with impunity.<sup>40</sup>

Local rumour-mongers who narrated, owned and traded the story of Osale and Paulo actually contributed to a larger and older conversation about power and danger in the region, while also giving it a new meaning in the context of rapid social change. As they turned the two real characters Osale and Paulo into figures endowed with supernatural powers, Usambara residents celebrated the heroic powers of the two men who, standing in an old tradition, managed to resist their opponents through wit. The story mirrors the connection between danger and heroism, a connection that was at the heart of Shambaa ideas about healthy political relations and the ambiguity of power itself.<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, Osale and Paulo have similarities both with witty trickster characters known in eastern Africa as well as with Mau Mau fighters. They all remained unseen and yet they were everywhere. They were admired and feared at the same time. They all held power, whether they used it for a good or a bad cause. Whether they were seen as moral voices or selfish buffoons or criminals depended on the narrators and listeners.

In my conversation with AliHaji Kaoneka, he said that Osale and Paulo were involved in the struggle for independence. Their goal, he said, was to 'get rid of the colonialist'. He also underlined their unique courage: 'Nobody else could do what they did'.<sup>42</sup> His account is representative for sympathizers of the anticolonial struggle. On the other end of the spectrum was my conversation with Daniel Magogo, the younger brother of the last Paramount Chief, who had been installed by the British and contested by many Usambara residents. In his account, Magogo calls Osale and Paulo *majambazi* and *vibaka*, thugs and criminals, and states that they 'stole from anybody, not only from white people'.<sup>43</sup> In the account that could perhaps be representative for the majority of Usambara residents, the elders of Hemtoyey claimed that after Osale and Paulo's deaths came Nyerere, *mtu wa siasa*, a man of politics.<sup>44</sup> This not only shows the unbroken power of Julius Nyerere's reputation, but also that these men saw Osale and Paulo as acting outside the political realm. Their tricks and ruses were enjoyed and gossip about them swapped – they made for a good story – but they were not the ones who eventually brought independence, they were not *watu wa siasa*, politicians.

The wide circulation of the story suggests that colonial boundaries were increasingly being challenged by Africans. In the condensed image of Osale and Paulo's transgressions, settler anxieties about intimate encounters between master and servant were commented upon and reworked by the story-tellers. The mocking undertone of the narrative reveals creative engagement with the colonial concept of whiteness that was contested by the story-tellers. As the next section shows, there were more anxieties tied to the story about Osale and Paulo, anxieties that concerned the Usambara Scheme and its implementors.

### **Osale and Paulo as a consequence of the weakness of local chiefs**

Despite the potential to identify with Osale and Paulo in the struggle for decolonization, they were not welcomed as anti-colonial heroes by everybody. The interview with the elders of Hemtoyey hinted at the fact that other Usambara residents viewed Osale and

Paulo as ambiguous allies, if not as outright dangerous and unwelcome intruders. This ambiguity, placing them somewhere between heroes and criminals, found its way into the colonial archive by accident in a letter of June 1956, a month before their death. In his letter to the provincial commissioner in which he advocated for the removal of the Paramount Chief, political activist Saidi Dowekulu of Vugha interpreted the insecurity in the country as a consequence of the inability of the Paramount to rule his land well. He instrumentalized the story of Osale to draw attention to the safety vacuum that allowed Mau Mau-type ‘gangsters’ to stir up unrest in Shambaai. Osale’s name was used strategically to malign local chiefs who were perceived as weak and unable to provide for their people. Dowekulu was a political opponent of the Chief and wanted him removed from office. In short, the main argument of Dowekulu’s letter was that the chieftom was in such a sorry state that the chief was unable to prevent criminals such as Osale from harassing local residents, and, even worse, from terrorizing white settlers. The intention of the letter was, by using Osale Otango’s Kenyan name, to conjure up the Mau Mau threat from neighbouring Kenya and the fear that it might spill over the border into Tanganyika.

Saidi Dowekulu argued that since 1947, when an illegitimate candidate inherited the chiefly throne, the Usambara Mountains had been out of control, despite the protests of ‘hundreds and thousands of Shambaa’. Dowekulu blamed ‘one official of the Department of Agriculture’ for it – the same department that was tasked with enforcing the despised scheme rules. Dowekulu continued that the central government had installed the new chief against the will of his subjects in an act he referred to as *matengano ya nchi*, which translates to ‘the breaking apart of the country’. Dowekulu complained the new ruler was ‘carried by the [central] government’ and he ‘used his citizens the way he liked’. He even ‘installed new illegitimate chiefs with a similar character [...] who, like him, only want to fill their bellies’.<sup>45</sup> Then he mentioned Osale. According to Dowekulu, many Shambaa were exasperated by Osale’s presence. He explained:

When in the past somebody acted unrelentingly or criminally towards the government, such as breaking the law, the ruler of the land would collect his people and together they would figure out how to react to the danger until they eventually found a way to get hold of the person who broke the law. But this [current] ruler cannot do such a thing because he has no agreement with his sub-chiefs and citizens. This is the reason why Osale can live in Shambaai and trouble the government. It is why he can rob white settlers and why he wants to kill them. [...] If there was an agreement between the ruler and the citizens as it is the tradition here in Shambaai, that law-breaker could not trouble the government. (...) There is not a thing that frightens him [Osale], and worse things are still to happen.<sup>46</sup>

Dowekulu further argued that the responsibilities of a Shambaa ruler were very similar to those of the British king. He had to take an oath and respect the law, and only then would he be allowed to wear the *taji la kifalme*, the kingly crown.<sup>47</sup> Because the Paramount Chief wore the crown without respecting the law, Osale was able to ‘come into the country of Usambara and many Shambaa invite him to sleep in their homes’.<sup>48</sup> In short, Osale’s popularity derived from the absence of chiefly control and was a sign that there was more trouble ahead.

It is possible that the letter writer used a pseudonym. He asked the provincial commissioner to conceal his identity from the Paramount. Because the matter was so urgent, Saidi Dowekulu wrote, he felt he did not have a choice but to share the story, yet he

must have been aware that he would certainly face trouble if the chief discovered that he had written such a critical letter. However, it would be naïve to expect that the provincial commissioner would grant his wish for discretion. Saidi Dowekulu must have known that, too. Hence, I assume that Dowekulu signed with a carefully chosen pseudonym, a common practice in eastern African literary culture.<sup>49</sup> In Shambaa tradition, Dowekulu was the title of one of the chief's senior councillors. Some of the tasks of a Dowekulu were to keep the country clean and to teach the chief's successor about 'affairs of state'.<sup>50</sup> We cannot know whether Saidi Dowekulu intended that his letter be read as advice on affairs of the state or as a symbolic warning to 'keep the country clean' of people like the Kenyan 'criminal' Osale. However, because of the symbolic meaning of the title 'Dowekulu' and the letter-writer's wish for discretion, I think it is helpful to entertain the thought that his choice of pseudonym was a sign that whoever the letter-writer really was, he attempted to embody the official authority of a senior counsellor to the chief.

Dowekulu's letter remained unanswered. But even if the administration did not react to his message, as it also happened with other idiosyncratic communications,<sup>51</sup> the letter nevertheless gives us precious insight into Shambaa conceptions of what constitutes just rule. Dowekulu believed that the Paramount's rule was illegitimate, an illegitimacy that he directly linked to the chief's defense of the Usambara Scheme. Because of the Paramount's illegitimate rule and his politics of installing loyal but corrupt chiefs, he had not only lost his subjects' confidence, but also the power over his country. He even found himself in a position in which he was unable to prevent the area from being haunted by 'law-breakers' such as Osale and Paulo.

Dowekulu played on the story of Osale to underline the chief's loss of power. Curiously, in this reference to the rumour, Paulo, the native of the Usambaras, was not even mentioned. The Kenyan name Osale Otango was chosen as a vague but recognizable reference to the disorder caused by Mau Mau, and, more obviously, as the threat to settlers in the Usambara Mountains that he arguably presented. Saidi Dowekulu played with the settler fear that Osale and Paulo invoked, a fear markedly different from that of supporters of the anti-colonial struggle. Dowekulu instead shared the British worry about the threat posed by Osale. By turning this fear against the local authorities, Dowekulu made a strong point about the failure of indirect rule in the Usambara Mountains and, by extension, of the central government.

### **'This is the first warning' – playing with the Mau Mau threat**

Saidi Dowekulu made strategic use of the fear created by Osale and his companion Paulo. He did so to show the weakness of the local government, loyal to the colonial administration but unsupported by many residents. Others, and probably those more strongly affected by the Usambara Scheme, used the Mau Mau imagery as a clear threat towards the administration. In 1954, anonymous protestors sent an unsigned letter to Korogwe's district commissioner, in which they threatened an uprising if the administration did not abolish the scheme rules:

We, your citizens of Tanga province are deeply aggrieved due to the problems you give us, the problems of terrace-ridging. This is the first warning. There will be disturbances [*machafuko*] in the district of Korogwe. We have complained many times but you have not reacted.

It is enough, when the riots will come, don't tell us you have not heard the reason why we are complaining. This year might pass but next year won't, there will be riots, I give you the example of Kenya—what has to happen, happens.<sup>52</sup>

This was a not so subtle reference to the ongoing Mau Mau war in neighbouring Kenya. The letter-writers played with the fear of Mau Mau, but they themselves were also driven by fear – the fear of losing their land. In fact, when the Usambara Scheme was first introduced in the Shita neighbourhood of Mlalo in 1946, the residents objected vocally. The reason for this, as expressed by local elders, was the fear of being evicted and subsequently losing their land to Europeans or Indians.<sup>53</sup>

Shambaa peasant cultivators were conscious of the land losses that had been one of the causes of the Kikuyu-led Mau Mau war. Although the war was originally about land, the rage of Mau Mau fighters and supporters was also inspired by the hard labour required as a consequence of the new soil conservation measures introduced by the Kenyan colonial administration. Just like in Shambaa, terrace-ridging was a much-despised activity for the Kikuyu.<sup>54</sup> Given this historical background, it is safe to say that the connection between Mau Mau and the Usambara Scheme was deliberately established by the letter-writers. By evoking the dread of Mau Mau, they put the scheme not only in the context of protests against the various other development schemes in Tanganyika of the 1950s, such as in Uluguru and Sukumaland, but also into the wider context of violent insurrection. The anonymous letter, together with the famous 'weapons of the weak' in acts of everyday resistance, such as foot-dragging and ridicule, contributed to the decision to abandon the infamous scheme in 1957.<sup>55</sup>

By the time the district office received the letter, the Usambara Scheme had already been underway for eight years. Despite much effort by the agricultural officers to persuade the peasants through bonuses for efficiency and financial rewards for those who finished their tie-ridges first or best,<sup>56</sup> the scheme was perceived as an open threat and was boycotted by many cultivators from the start. It triggered protest for several reasons.

First, the additional workload was enormous, particularly for women, who were often left alone with the task as men left to find work in the nearby coastal towns or sisal plantations.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the labourious scheme rules weighed by and large on female shoulders. Secondly, the scheme was a breach with local custom. It threatened the Shambaa principle of guaranteed access to community land for the landless poor, reducing the already scarce land resources still further. Thirdly, as the scheme reduced the arable land drastically, the fear of general eviction turned many quiet cultivators into angry protesters.

The members of the Usambara Association, a conservative settler union, were also against the scheme, and not for altruistic reasons. Their fear was that the scheme would spark more resistance. The Honorary Secretary of the union, Mr Green, wrote in a letter to the district commissioner that

no Scheme which impinges closely on the life of the whole native community can be carried out without also vitally affecting the life of the non-native population and it is therefore hoped that Government will not only explain the scheme fully to our Association but will consult us before each or any stage is put into operation.<sup>58</sup>

The overthrow of the British-loyal Paramount Chief in 1947 had already upset the settler union. Now they worried that the Usambara Scheme would channel the protest against

cultivation rules into broad resistance and fuel the rise of nationalism and TANU, all of which did eventually happen. Being aware of the Mau Mau war next door, and having petty disputes with squatters and workers on a daily basis, Usambara's settlers were very sensitive to the slightest stirring of trouble.<sup>59</sup> However, the administration did not follow their wishes and instead introduced the scheme to the whole district. Administration offered a resettlement scheme to the plains to the Africans residing in Shambaai. But the hill dwellers neither wished to be resettled, nor did they want to follow the cultivation rules. Despite lengthy discussions, the resettlement plans had to be dropped early on.<sup>60</sup>

In such an environment, the 'first warning' announced in the letter to Korogwe's district commissioner was a clever coup. Mountain dwellers tried to capitalize on the fear of Mau Mau. The letter-writers' threat to follow the 'example of Kenya' and the concluding sentence 'what has to happen, happens' shows that they played with the fear of settlers and the colonial administration that Mau Mau might spill over the border. Mau Mau references were not only aggressive threats driven by fear of land loss, but in a more subtle way also served to mock the gradual faltering of British power. The Second World War had already demonstrated that the British had to rely heavily on their colonies to drive home the victory.<sup>61</sup> Shambaai's residents knew that British power was beginning to wane, and used this as a welcome invitation for their mockery. The letter-writers easily incorporated the Mau Mau imagery into their own claim-making strategies. Of course, their threat of violence is not proof of the presence of actual Mau Mau fighters in Tanganyika, but it should be associated with the mostly peaceful yet persistent resistance against the scheme. It too can be placed within the context of the story about Osale and Paulo.

## Conclusion

This article sought to demonstrate that African residents of Shambaai in the 1950s dealt with the multiple anxieties of late colonial rule, concerning first white settlers and fear of land alienation, second Mau Mau, and third the British administration's soil conservation policy and its consequences for Shambaai society, through narrating and owning the popular story of the social bandits Osale and Paulo. By embellishing and trading the tale, which was based on a true story but significantly altered in the circulating versions, Africans symbolically inverted the colonial gaze and its inherent racialized hierarchies. The narratives about intimacy and the power of invisibility can be read as a response to and a commentary on settler fears towards the 'other'. As they represent the colonial world 'upside down', the stories give insight into African perspectives on 'whiteness'. On the side of white communities, the story was remembered in a different light. In it, the depiction of Osale and Paulo as enemies was coloured by the British sensationalist Mau Mau war propaganda. Much to the chagrin of British observers, the subsequent shooting and the display of the dead bodies has eventually immortalized the two 'gangsters' by granting them a famous afterlife in the mountain residents' imagination. While for some Tanzanians, the figures of Osale and Paulo were synonymous with the anti-colonial struggle, not everyone believed so. A case in point was local politician Saidi Dowekulu, who understood Osale and Paulo as a threat to security and linked their activities to the decline of indirect rule. As he mocked the vanity and



corruption of unfit chiefs unable to prevent unrest in their country, he made a powerful critique of the sinking fate of indirect rule, and by extension, the central government. In addition, resistance to authority and protest against the Usambara Scheme were depicted through the imagery of Mau Mau. Although Tanganyikan officials did not formally engage with such expressions, the existence of these letters and rumours nevertheless are indicative of a world of alternative political imaginations and creative forms of disagreement which contested colonial hierarchies outside the narrow space that was intended for Africans.

## Notes

1. Throughout the article I use the term Tanganyika when referring to Tanganyika Territory under British administration. Since I have conducted interviews during my research visits that represent a view of Tanzanians in the 21st century on Tanganyikan history, I chose to use the term Tanzanians for stories that were told after the end of colonial rule. After independence in 1961, Tanganyika Territory initially kept the name Tanganyika but this changed to Tanzania after the union with the islands of Zanzibar in 1964.
2. Keegan, "Gender, Degeneration, Sexual Danger"; Kundrus, "Von Windhoek nach Nürnberg?"; Shadle, "Souls of White Folk"; Stoler, *Race and education*; Thornberry, "Rape, Race, and Respectability."
3. Magubane, *Bringing the Empire Home*.
4. Cooper and Packard, *International Development Social Sciences*.
5. Anderson, "Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography."
6. Hozza, "The Hoza Rebellion"; Pels, "Creolisation in Secret"; Swai, "Colonial Rural Development Policy."
7. Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals*; Feierman, "Concepts of Sovereignty"; Feierman, *The Shambaa Kingdom*.
8. Iliffe, *Modern History of Tanganyika*, 126, 141–2, 152–3.
9. *Ibid.*, 450.
10. Conte, *Highland Sanctuary*, 141.
11. Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals*, 140, 153.
12. Iliffe, *Modern History of Tanganyika*, 526.
13. My special thanks goes to my friend Susanne Erhardt who first mentioned the rumour to me, and generously allowed me to use her research notes, see: Erhardt, "Erinnerungen an lokale Kolonialgeschichte." I collected several versions of the story that varied at different points. I will indicate interesting variations. Unless otherwise indicated, references to the story are shared features of all stories collected. Generally, I am relying on interviews with Ali Mtui Daffa, 27 August 2014; Haruna Mbwana, Lushoto, 27 August 2014; The elders of Hemtoye, 28 August 2014; The elders of Mwangoi, 28 August 2014; Daniel Magogo, 7 November 2014; Hashimu Shekilindi, Lushoto, 6 November 2014; Zaliani Rajabu, Mwangoi, 14 September 2015; and Alihaji Kaoneka, Mlalo, 21 September 2015.
14. According to Erhardt's version, Osale and Paulo were visible to Africans, but never to whites. In the other versions, however, they seem to be invisible to everybody.
15. Haruna Mbwana's version of the story is the only one in which it is specified that the taboo prevented Osale and Paulo from sex with a *white* woman. The other stories insisted on the taboo itself, but not on a specific nature of the woman. I think, however, that the fact that the woman with who the breach happened was white plays an important role.
16. Haruna Mbwana, interview, Lushoto, 27 August 2014.
17. Zaliani Rajabu, interview, Mwangoi, 14 September 2015.
18. AliHaji Kaoneka, interview, Mlalo, 21 September 2015.
19. TNA\DSM 171/3, Vol.III: Usambara Scheme, monthly and annual reports, Report of the month of 25 July 1956, 1.



20. The National Archives of the United Kingdom, TNA\KEW, CO 736/50 Tanganyika Administration Reports, Report of the Tanganyika Police Force, for the year ending 31 December, 1956, 2.
21. Janet Bax, personal communication, 22 August 2017; Elizabeth Roloff, personal communication, 23 August 2017.
22. Janet Bax, personal communication, 22 August 2017.
23. Ibid.
24. Lonsdale, "Mau Maus of Mind," 393.
25. TNA\DSM, G1/139: Usambara Post 1908, Usambara Post No.17, Volume 7, 25 April 1908, 8.
26. Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, 177.
27. White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 86.
28. Austen, "Social Bandits and Criminals"; Beidelman, "Moral Imaginings of Kaguru."
29. Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire*, 216.
30. Shadle, "As if I were in Prison."
31. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*.
32. Zani Ali Rajabu, interview, Mwangoi, 20 September 2015.
33. Kundrus, "Von Windhoek nach Nürnberg?," 126.
34. Magubane, *Bringing the Empire Home*, 139.
35. Ibid., 163.
36. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," 156.
37. AliHaji Kaoneka, interview, Mlalo, 21 September 2015.
38. Elders of Vugha, interview, 19 September 2015.
39. Liajjemi, *Habari ya Wakilindi*, 42.
40. Gordon, *Invisible Agents*, 77.
41. Feierman, "Concepts of Sovereignty," 364–417.
42. AliHaji Kaoneka, interview, Mlalo, 21 September 2015.
43. Daniel Magogo, interview, Magamba, 7 November 2014.
44. Elders of Hemtoye, interview, 9 November 2014.
45. "Matengano ya nchi. Serikali yetu kuu, ilipomuweka mtawala huyu kwa nguvu, mtawala mwenyewe hakuwa na siasa ya utawala, kwa vile anavyofahamu kuwa amewekwa ni serikali tu. Anawatumia raiya atakavyo kwa kuona amebeweka ni serikali tu, hata majumbe wakuu ambao amewakuta pia amewafukuza kwa kuona hawaendeni hivyo atakavyo vya kuwadhumu raiya. Ameweka majumbe wakuu wanya ambao wanafuata tabia yake kwa kutaka (...) kujaza matumbo yao." TNA\DSM, 304, A2/2: African Administration and Affairs. Usambara District including Korogwe Division, Saidi Dowekele to PC Tanga, June 1956, 714, 1. All translations from Swahili are mine.
46. "Hapo zamani akitokea mtu kufanya mambo ya kigaidi au, kuihuni serikali, kama uvunjaji wa sheria, mkuu wa nchi hukusanya watu wote wakafanya mashauri na kufikiri hatari iliyo katika nchi mpaka wapate taratibu itayompata huyu mvunjaji wa sheria lakini kwa mtawala huyu hawezi kufanya kitu kwa sababu hana mapatano na Jumbe wala raiya. Ndio sababu ya mtu huyu (Osale) akaweza kuishi Sambaani na kuipa serikali Tabu, ndio sababu amewanyang'anya Wazungu na kutaka kuwauwa. (...) ilivyo sheria ya nchi hasa kama ingekuwa kuna maungano ya mtawala na Maraiya huyu mvunjaji wa sheria asingeipa serikali Tabu kwa desturi yetu hapa Sambaani (...) maana [Osale] hana analo ogopa (...) na pia bado yatakuwako mengi kuliko haya." TNA\DSM, 304, A2/2: African Administration and Affairs. Usambara District including Korogwe Division, Saidi Dowekele to PC Tanga, June 1956, 713, 2–3.
47. "Kwanza apate apisho la sheria na akubali kuapa. Pili ni kuvisha taji la kifalme." TNA\DSM, 304, A2/2: African Administration and Affairs. Usambara District including Korogwe Division, Saidi Dowekele to PC Tanga, June 1956, 713, 2.
48. "Mtu huyu niliemtaja jina hapo juu alipoanza kuingia katika nchi ya Usambaa, Wasambaa wengi walimkaribisha na kulala majumbani mwao." TNA\DSM, 304, A2/2: African Administration and Affairs. Usambara District including Korogwe Division, June 1956, Saidi Dowekele to PC Tanga, 713, 2.

49. Wamitila, “What’s in a Name.”
50. Feerman, *The Shambaa Kingdom*, 114, 119; Winans, *Shambala*, 124.
51. Lämmert, “Only a Misunderstanding?”
52. “*Tunasikitika sana sisi laia [sic] wako wa province hii ya Tanga kwa taabu tupayo sisi laia [sic] wako. Kwa ajili ya kilimo cha matuta. Hili ni neno la kwanza ambalo litaleta machafuko katika District hii ya Korogwe sababu ni mala [sic] nyingi sana tunatoa malalamiko kwa neno hili nawe hulifanyi ni kitu. Basi usije ukalione chafuko lolote likotokea ukasema ni kwa ajili gani, la, ni kwa ajili ya tabu tumechoka. Basi ingawa mwaka huu utapita lakini mkwaka ujao hauptiti tu. Lazima yawe machufko kama ilivyokua Kenya nakupa mfano ya kua lisemwalo lazima litokee tu.*” TNA\DSM, 171/3/2, Vol. I: Agriculture. Usambara Scheme – Policy and General including Scheme cases, unsigned letter to DC Korogwe, 11 October 1954, 86, 1.
53. TNA\DSM, 28696 Tanganyika Secretariat, Korogwe District, reorganization of, DO Lushoto to DC Korogwe, 11 October 1946, 2, 1.
54. Throup, “Origins of Mau Mau,” 421–7.
55. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 2003, 1 sound disc, 29.
56. TNA\DSM, 72, 43/18, Vol. I: Native Administration Village Headmen, DC to PC, 04 December 1950, 286; TNA\DSM, 72, US/3: Usambara Scheme – Correspondence with Sub-Chiefs Mlalo, Shita Weekly Report, 4 November 1950, 13.
57. TNA\DSM, 72, 62/9E: Reports Mlalo scheme Instructions and Policy Reports, The Mlalo Basin A sociological study covering 14 days in the field. June 1946, 6G, 7.
58. TNA\DSM, 4, 269/5/III: Usambara Scheme, D. Green, Honorary Secretary Usambara Association to DC Lushoto, 18 September 1950, 72.
59. TNA\DSM, 72, US 2: Usambara Scheme Correspondence, 25 February 1951, Secretary to the Usambara Association to DC, 45, 2.
60. TNA\DSM, 72, 62/9E: Reports Mlalo scheme Instructions and Policy Reports, Extension of the Usambara Schemes. Methods and requirements, 4 February 1950, 25, Appendix A, 1 + 2.
61. Byfield, “Producing for the War.”

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