PART ONE
CHAPTER I

Blood and Words

Writing History with (and about) Vampire Stories

The name of the bloodsucker superstition is Mumiani. I understand the superstition is fairly widespread throughout Africa. The Mombasa incident took place . . . in May or June [1947]. A man . . . started a story that the Fire Brigade were Mumiani people and had been seen walking around with buckets filled with blood, and had taken a woman as prisoner at the Fire Station with intent to take her blood. The man gave a good deal of detail, most of which I forget, but the gist of it was that Fire Brigade men took this woman while she was sleeping . . . off to the Fire Station.

The story ran round rapidly and aroused a great deal of excitement. . . . about noon on the day the rumours got started . . . the Municipal Native Affairs Officer heard the yarn, and . . . went to the Fire Station. . . . By that time excitement was rapidly rising. . . . Very soon after the MNAO’s arrival at the Fire Station a larger and angry mob gathered and started to get rough. Responsible Africans told the mob there was nothing in the story and certified they had searched the Station and found all in order. The mob refused to believe them. The MNAO with a few African police tried first to reason with the mob and then to disperse them. They were however heavily stoned and had to beat a rapid retreat . . . soon after an adequate force of police came up and after a few Baton charges dispersed the crowd and made a few arrests. The excitement then rapidly subsided. The mob were roused in the first instance by their superstitious fears, and were soon reinforced by the rowdies who are far too numerous in Mombasa and always ready to join in any shindig.

The unfortunate Fire Brigade have I believe from time to time been suspected of Mumiani practices, because they wear black overalls, which are reputed to be similar to the dress of the alleged Mumiani men.

George Brown (?), letter to Elspeth Huxley, 20 June 1948

1. Elspeth Huxley Papers, Rhodes House, Oxford, RH MSS Afr. s. 782, box 2/2, Kenya (1). From the level of detail in the letter both about this and issues in colonial policy and his references to Huxley’s visit with him in 1947, my guess is that the writer was George Brown, then acting provincial commissioner of Coast Province. Other accounts of this riot are “Human Vampire” Story Incites Mombasa Mob’s Fire Station Attack,” East African Standard, 27 June 1947, 3; Elspeth Huxley, The Sorcerer’s Apprentice: A Journey through East Africa (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), 23 n.; Kenya Colony and Protectorate, Report on Native Affairs, 1939–47 (London: HMSO, 1948), 83.
An African politician recalled that in 1952, a man returned to his home area in central Kenya, much to the surprise of his neighbors: "He had been missing since 1927. We thought he had been slaughtered by the Nairobi Fire Brigade between 1930–1940 for his blood, which we believed was taken for use by the Medical Department for the treatment of Europeans with anaemic diseases." In 1986, however, a man in western Kenya told my assistant and I that it was the police, not the firemen, who captured Africans ("ordinary people" just "associated firemen with bloodsucking because of the color of their equipment") and kept their victims in pits beneath the police station.

What are historians to do with such evidence? To European officials, these stories were proof of African superstition, and of the disorder that superstition so often caused. It was yet another groundless African belief, the details of which were not worth the recall of officials and observers. But to young Africans growing up in Kenya—or Tanganyika or Northern Rhodesia—in the 1930s, such practices were terrible but matter-of-fact events, noteworthy, as in the quotations above, only when proven to be false or when the details of the story required correction. In this book, I want to study these stories both as colonial stories and for their mass of often contested details. I want to interrogate and contextualize these stories for what was in them: I want to contextualize all their power, all their loose ends, and all their complicated understandings of firemen and equipment and anemia, so that they might be used as a primary source with which to write, and sometimes rewrite, the history of colonial East and Central Africa. I argue that it is the very inaccurate jumble of events and details in these stories that makes them such accurate historical sources: it is through the convoluted array of overalls and anemia that Africans described colonial power.

These were, as officials knew, widespread stories, which showed great similarities and considerable differences over a wide geographic and cultural area. Game rangers were said to capture Africans in colonial Northern Rhodesia; mine managers captured them in the Belgian Congo and kept them in pits. Firemen subdued Africans with injections in Kenya but with masks in Uganda. Africans captured by mumiani in colonial Tanganyika were hung upside down, their throats were cut, and

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3. Anyango Mahondo, Sigoma, west Alego, 15 August 1986. All interviews cited for 1986 were conducted by myself and Odhiambo Opiyo.
their blood drained into huge buckets. How is the historian to tease meaning out of such tales? To dismiss them as fears and superstitions simply begs the question. To reduce them to anxieties—about colonialism, about technology, about health—strips them of their intensity and their detail. Indeed, to attempt to explain these stories, to show how they made sense of the world Africans experienced, would be to turn them into mechanistic African responses: it would reduce them to African misunderstandings of colonial interventions; it would be to argue that these stories simply deformed actual events and procedures. Such an analysis would turn the resulting history away from these stories and back to the events Africans somehow misunderstood.

This book takes these stories at face value, as everyday descriptions of extraordinary occurrences. My analysis is located firmly in the stories: they are about fire stations, injections, and overalls, and they record history with descriptions of fire stations and injections. These are tools with which to write colonial history. The power and uncertainty of these stories—no one knew exactly what Europeans did with African blood, but people were convinced that they took it—makes them an especially rich historical source, I think. They report the aggressive carelessness of colonial extractions and ascribe potent and intimate meanings to them. Some of the stories in this book locate pits in the small rooms of Nairobi prostitutes in the late 1920s. Others relocate the Tanganyikan Game Department in the rural areas of Northern Rhodesia in the early 1930s. Such confusions offer historians a glimpse of the world as seen by people who saw boundaries and bodies located and penetrated. The inaccuracies in these stories make them exceptionally reliable historical sources as well: they offer historians a way to see the world the way the storytellers did, as a world of vulnerability and unreasonable relationships. These stories of bloodsucking firemen or game rangers, pits and injections, allow historians a vision of colonial worlds replete with all the messy categories and meandering epistemologies many Africans used to describe the extractions and invasions with which they lived.

This book is not simply about rumor and gossip, however: it is about the world rumor and gossip reveals. The chapters in part 2 argue that such stories perhaps articulate and contextualize experience with greater accuracy than eyewitness accounts. They explain what was fearsome and why. New technologies and procedures did not have meaning because they were new or powerful, but because of how they articulated ideas about bodies and their place in the world, and because of the ways in which they reproduced older practices. The five chapters in part 3
write colonial history with vampire stories. The result is not a history of fears and fantasies, but a history of African cultural and intellectual life under colonial rule, and a substantial revision of the history of urban property in Nairobi, of wage labor in Northern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo, of systems of sleeping-sickness control in colonial Northern Rhodesia, and of royal politics and nationalism in colonial Uganda. In each case, evidence derived from vampire stories offered a new set of questions, recast prevailing interpretations, and introduced analyses that allowed for a reworking of secondary materials. Vampire stories are like any other historical source; they change the way a historical reconstruction is done.

SITING VAMPIRES

But why have I focused on these stories of blood? There are any number of other widespread rumors—about food additives that made men impotent, about dreams that foretold the appearance of white men, or dreams that foretold when they would vanish, about the origin of AIDS—that I could have used. But they do not share the same generic qualities and lack the similarities of plot and detail. Stories about colonial bloodsucking, in contrast, are told with—and about—a number of overlapping details; they are identifiable over a large geographic and cultural area, both by the people who tell them and the people who hear them, as a specific kind of story. Even people who don’t believe them understand that this is a particular kind of story and often use it as an example of what Africans are willing to believe, as chapters 4 and 8 argue. These stories are almost always taken together, so that they form a genre, a special kind of story that, while drawing on other kinds of stories and everyday experiences in each retelling, retains a specific set of plot and details. It is the pattern of the tale, not the circumstances of the telling, that makes a story recognizable as belonging to a genre, different from other stories that flourish alongside reports of bloodsucking firemen and game rangers.4 As some of the oral material quoted in these introductory chapters makes clear, the circulation of the genre gives these stories their unity. These were the kinds of stories that, like some kinds of song or praise poetry, could be extended, amended, and applied

Map 1. East and Central Africa
and reapplied to different situations in different places.\textsuperscript{5} Listeners understand the variety of these stories as forming part of a whole: hearing a bloodsucking story from Uganda can confirm a bloodsucking story from Nairobi. When someone hears that prostitutes work for firemen in Nairobi but not in Kampala, this does not contradict the story he or she knows. Instead, it underscores the local difference that makes the stories such accurate descriptions of life in Kampala and Nairobi. The circulation, and the differences circulation reveals, makes storytellers and listeners aware of the historical location of these stories, which in turn gives the genre its authority: a story that reports so many diverse experiences from so many different places must depict elements of social life—and speech—that hearers recognize and want to repeat.

Firemen, pits, injections, game rangers, and buckets—these are the formulaic elements of these stories. The formulaic has had a troubled history in the study of oral literature. Originally thought of as a group of words that expressed an essential idea, often in meter, formulas were once considered a key tool by which Homeric bards had composed their epics. But the idea was reworked, and by the time African history emerged as an object of academic study, the very fact that formulas were an explicit tool in performance was thought to make them less reliable as historical sources.\textsuperscript{6} The devices of storytelling were considered irrelevant to the history as a story told. Recent research, however, has argued that African oral materials never provide the same kind of stable texts that documents do and has challenged historians to unfix the boundary between the formulas used to tell a particular story and the history transmitted in that story.\textsuperscript{7} My use of the concept of formula in this book takes up that challenge, arguing that the formulaic elements of these stories, the firemen and the pits and the injections, are simply that: terms and images into which local meanings and details are inserted by their


\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 1–33. See also Jan Vansina, \textit{Oral Tradition as History} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

tellers. These stories say different things about injections and pits in different places because the history and the meaning of those terms is different in those places. These stories belong to a genre that is told with formulaic elements; they are about the past and can be used to recover experiences and ideas best described in terms of firemen, pits, and blood.

I call this transnational genre of African stories vampire stories, not because I want to insert a lively African oral genre into a European one, but because I want to use a widespread term that adequately conveys the mobility, the internationalism, and the economics of these colonial bloodsuckers. No other term depicts the ease with which bloodsucking beings cross boundaries, violate space, capture vulnerable men and women, and extract a precious bodily fluid from them. No other term conveys the racial differences encoded in one group’s need for another’s blood. Europe’s literary vampires were a separate race, which fed, slept, and reproduced differently from humans. Yet I worry, as historians of Africa are prone to do, that an African specificity will be lost when I invoke a dominant European term. I worry that all the regional and local history in this book will be submerged into a vision of African vampires congruent with that of European lore. But in fact, some of the very processes of storytelling that inform this book should spare me further anxieties about which term to use: in contemporary usage, “vampire” conveys little of its original meaning. Popular versions of Transylvanian counts and modernized vampires reveal how powerfully a concept—and a word—can attract and hold events and ideas that were never part of its initial construction. The issue is not so much the accuracy of terms like “game ranger” or “firemen” but how such terms can be used to describe many situations. It is not a common point of origin that gives vampire beliefs their longevity and periodicity; as Nina Auerbach points

out, “it is their variety that makes them survivors.”9 Indeed, I hope that the very variety of colonial vampires in this book, and the variety of colonial situations they depict, will encourage others to look more carefully at the supernatural—the very term should encourage a careful rereading of what it might mean—and at Europe’s vampires. Far from being products of folk belief or a clear-cut representation of the extractions of a dominant power, vampire stories articulate relationships and offer historians a way into the disorderly terrain of life and experience in colonial societies.

TRANSLATING VAMPIRES

There are no words in the languages of the people I write about for blood-drinker or blood-taker. The words in African languages that I translate as vampire are already translations—they are words for firemen, game rangers, or animal slaughterers that had already undergone semantic shifts to mean the employees of Europeans whose job it was to capture Africans and take their blood. This of course raises another question: were the practices of firemen and game rangers and surveyors such that they encouraged stories about bloodsucking, or did these terms mean vampire before the tasks of firemen and game rangers became well known? In short, which came first, the use of a term to describe an actual thing or job, or its use to mean vampire?

There is no simple, undialogic answer. One of the oldest terms for vampire on the East African coast, mumiani, first appeared in Swahili dictionaries in the late nineteenth century. According to Bishop Edward Steere’s dictionary of 1870, compiled on Zanzibar, mumyani was a mummy, but could also refer to medicine.10 It had been a widespread belief in late nineteenth-century India, especially among plague victims on the west coast that hospitals were torture chambers designed to extract momiai, a medicine based on blood. The Indian Ocean trade, with African sailors coming and going between Zanzibar and India, could easily have carried the idea, as well as medicines supposedly made from blood, to East African markets.11 Just over a decade later, Krapf’s dic-

tionary, compiled near Mombasa, repeated Steere's definition of mumiani, as the word was transcribed, but added "a fabulous medicine which the Europeans prepare, in the opinion of the natives, from the blood of man." No one I interviewed, however, said that mumiani appeared that early. Even people born in the 1890s said the practice started after World War I in Kenya and in the 1920s in Northern Rhodesia and Uganda. It may be that some people on the East African coast in the late nineteenth century believed that Europeans made medicine from African blood, but their stories about it did not survive. But the term mumiani was in intermittent use on the coast for over a century, during which time it was given many of the contemporary meanings associated with blood accusations. In the Swahili-French dictionary of the priest Charles Sacleux, compiled on Zanzibar and published in 1941, mumiani is defined as mummy, and a medicine Africans believed was made from dried blood. Jews, Sacleux added, were in charge of getting the blood from people. In everyday use, mumiani was synonymous with kachinja and chinjachinja. This Swahili term came from the verb kuchinja, to slaughter animals by cutting their throats and draining their blood. Doubling the root word intensified its meaning. The prefix ka- meant small in Kenya and gross in Tanganyika. Either or both meanings may have applied when the term was fixed in everyday use. However, the term for slaughtering people, according to A.C. Madan's 1902 English-to-Swahili dictionary, was a literal translation word that meant the killing of many people (from the verb kuua, to kill) that did not use the root -chinja. The use of a term specific to animals for vampires may have kept the idea of bloodsucking outside of all logic and nature. Indeed, animal butchers were not accused of bloodsucking on the East African coast: firemen were.

The word for firemen, wazimamamoto in Swahili (bazimamotto in Luganda), is a literal translation: the men (wa-) who extinguish (from kuzima to put out, to extinguish) the fire or the heat (moto). It became

a generic term for vampire, always as a plural, almost as soon as it was in widespread use, well before there were formal fire brigades in most of the places where the word meant vampire. In Uganda, for example, the idea that bazimamoto took Africans’ blood predated full-time firemen by thirty years. Chapters 4 and 7 explore the loose relationship between occupational practices and the social imagination, but the fact that there were no real firemen meant that the term could be applied to surveyors, yellow fever department personnel, whomever. It is not that the term had no specificity, but that its meaning was unstable enough to be made to fit any number of situations and relationships. The term banyama (singular, munyama) for game rangers in colonial Northern Rhodesia was translated by officials there as “vampire” as early as 1931. Not only did it refer to the game department in a neighboring colony, but it was another term depicting actions toward animals applied to humans. The word was never fully translated into Bemba, the local language. The prefix ba- means men, but nyama is Swahili and Nyanja for the meat of animals and quadrupeds who shed blood, either in sacrifice or as predators: cows have nyama but chickens do not. The Bemba word is nama.17 Although the term does not seem to have been used in Swahili-speaking areas, banyama maintained its Swahili origins for Bemba speakers; it was never naturalized in the local language. Many words for vampires were never given African translations. Among the Nilotic Luo peoples of western Kenya, the word for vampire was the Swahili plural wachinjaji, slaughterers, and not a Luo translation. In Mozambique, the term was Portuguese, chupa-sangue, literally “blood drinker or blood sucker,” although Swahili speakers would note the implicit pun that chupa means bottle in Swahili, a word derived from the Portuguese chupar, to suck or drain.

The pun I impute to chupa-sangue raises another question. When we speak of words used by people who neither read nor write, how useful are terms like “translation,” and “pun,” or even “multiple meanings”? Are we not better served by asking what kind of understandings speakers bring to bear on their own use of these words? The term for those who captured Africans for the Europeans who ate their flesh in colonial

17. E. Hoch, Bemba Pocket Dictionary: Bemba-English and English-Bemba (Abercorn: White Fathers Press, 1960), 54, 72, 107. In the mid 1930s, Africans in central Tanzania spoke of “Bwana Nyama,” the head of the game department, who went alone into the bush to look for blood, but the term banyama does not seem to have taken hold in Swahili (Fr. H. de Vries, Morogoro, “Superstition in Africa,” Holy Ghost Messenger 32 [1936]: 67–69). I am grateful to Peter Pels for these notes.
Belgian Congo was *batumbula* (singular, *mutumbula*), from the Luba *tumbula*, translated in Shaba Swahili as to “butcher.”18 (Shaba Swahili is the variant of the Swahili of the East African coast spoken in present-day Shaba, colonial Katanga, shaped as much by work and migrancy in the area as it was by its historical roots as a trade language.) But the range of meanings for the root *tumbula* in the region suggest how accurately the term came to describe all the things batumbula did. In Luba, *tumbula* means “to overpower,” but also “to pierce or to puncture,” sometimes from below.19 In many of the languages of Kenya and Tanzania, including Swahili, the meaning is “to disembowel” or “to make a hole with a knife or sharp object.”20 *Batumbula*, a term that took hold among the migrant labor population of the mines of colonial Katanga, may have been heard by Swahili speakers with one set of meanings and by Luba speakers with another set. The power and viability of the term lay in its many meanings, which allowed the word to encompass all the things batumbula were said to do, from digging pits, to giving their victims injections, to eating their flesh. And in colonial Belgian Congo, *batumbula* was also glossed by the Shaba Swahili term *simba bulaya*, the lion from Europe, another animal term to describe the predatory cannibals who left their victims’ clothes behind.

Why are there so many terms that could mean “bloodsucker”? And why do so many of them describe another activity altogether? Such semantic shifts occur when existing languages do not have the words to convey new meanings. But the fact that *wazimamoto* meant “vampire” almost as soon as it became a word suggests that these words were semantically malleable: once in everyday use, they could be taken over by their users and given new and potent meanings. They did not simply describe firemen the way a new word might describe a streetcar or an air-


plane; they described firemen and what Africans thought they really did.21 The words for firemen and game rangers and small butchers themselves were translated by Africans to describe true meanings not available in the language from which they are taken. Vampires were new. Despite scattered written references and a dictionary definition, no one I ever interviewed knew any precolonial stories about whites or Africans who took blood: "In those days there was nobody looking for blood."22 The blood of precolonial sacrifice was bovine; the ritual killings that sometimes marked a king's death did not draw blood, and the blood of blood brotherhood was thought of as a sexual fluid, more akin to breast milk or semen than to the blood of wounds and injuries.23 But why do some of these terms require two languages to contain their meanings? Part of the reason is again semantic: blood was not a stable enough category to allow for a local term to describe its extraction. Many African peoples do not have a specific concept for blood that matches the scientific concept of a fluid pumped by the heart into arteries and veins. Many African peoples use a word for blood broadly as a metaphor for sexual fluids, either because of symbolic systems or because of the demands of polite conversation. At the same time, many African languages distinguish between kinds of blood and the circumstances in which it leaves the body in ways that the scientific concept does not, so that the blood of childbirth and the blood of wounds are called by different terms.24


22. Yonasani Kaggwa, Katwe, 27 August 1990. "Eating" and cannibalism have a wide range of meanings in East African Bantu languages that do not translate easily into English: "eating" has all the metaphorical power of "hunger" and the expressive power of "consumption." When the Kabaka, or king, of Buganda was enthroned, it was said that he had "eaten Buganda" (Benjamin Ray, Myth, Ritual and Kingship in Buganda [Oxford, 1991], 114).


The red fluid circulating through the body was in some places an alien concept, best described by the Portuguese word *sangue* or by using a term derived from the verb *kuchinja*. But different conceptions of the body do not explain why some words never fully became Bemba or why Luo speakers use a Swahili word without translation. The absence of linguistic transformations, however, may be less semantic than genealogical: each plural, and each language carries a historical link to the source of the term. The term never becomes fully Bemba, or Luo, because part of its importance lies in its origin, part of its local meaning is its very foreignness. And throughout this book I shall use *wazimamoto*, *mumiani*, *kachinja*, *banyama*, and *batumbula* as synonyms for “vampire,” and vice versa: cultural literacy, like translation, is a two-way street.

Many of the published accounts of vampires have been memoirs: an author encountered the rumor, wrote about it, and theorized its meaning. Only Rik Ceyssens, in an encyclopedic article on batumbula in the Congo, argues that these stories can be traced to the sixteenth century and the slave trade. He relates stories of consumed Africans to precolonial African ideas about agricultural cycles and commodity production. According to Ceyssens, batumbula stories from World War II Kananga and Katanga, for example, were but modern versions of eighteenth-century slaves’ beliefs that they were being transported to the New World to be eaten; he is more concerned with the continuity of African ideas than with the ways in which 1940s batumbula stories described the industrial spaces of the urban Congo. Ceyssens flattens a variety of descriptions of consumption into ingestion and levels much of the sense of region that I try to make prominent in this book. The white cannibals of the slave trade and the white cannibals who captured the imagination of Congolese after the fall of Belgium during World War II were constructed in different social worlds. The tales told by slaves on the Atlantic coast and tales told by fishermen in the Luapula River Valley four hundred years later are not the same. While the idea of cannibalism informs these stories, the white people in each set of narratives have different meanings, different relevances, and different histories. Among Kongo-speaking people in and around Kinshasa and near the Atlantic