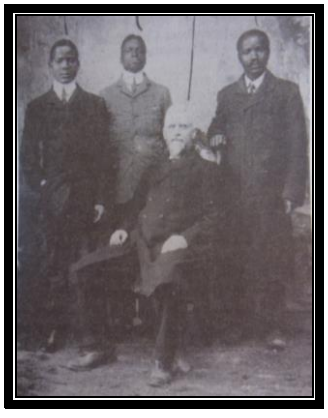
With Kamwana and his wife Annie Nyamanda in the Seychelles.

By Julien Durup a student of history

Elliott Musokwa Kamwana Achirwa was normally known as Elliott Kenan Kamwana. He was the head of a religious group in Nyasaland and the first religious deportee to be sent by the British to the Seychelles in 1919. He left the Seychelles in 1937, and returned to his homeland after 18 years in exile. Sadly, most of our colonial history books have been unkind to him. This is easy to understand as Napoleon the Corsican said that *"L'histoire est écrite par les vainqueurs."* The victors wrote very little regarding the main reasons that led to their detainment in Mauritius and later in the Seychelles and nothing about his wife who died in the Seychelles. They also remained silent about the failed lobby of the Anglican Church for them to become Protestants.



Kamwana (standing) in the middle and Joseph Booth seating in 1909.

Sources: Voices of Preaches in Protest, p. 28.

Previously, Britain had incarcerated in the Seychelles three other groups of unwanted persons respectively one from the Malay states, and two from Africa, the Assanti and Ugandan Kingdoms.

Kamwana (the little one), was born in 1872 in Mpopomeni village, Mzimba District and was from the Tonga tribe in the Northern Nyasaland (now Malawi). His father was a tribal chief and was killed in a battle against the Ngoni tribe while he was still very young. He moved to Bandawe with his mother, there he attended the Free Church of Scotland Mission School first established in Cape Maclear (named by David Livingstone in honour of his Friend Thomas Maclear an Irish astronomer), in 1875 in the Southern Nyasaland and a few years later the mission was moved to Bandawe. There, Kamwana became a bright student and later moved to Overtoun Institute in Khondowe, influenced by Joseph Booth, the former English Baptist Missionary, who set in 1892 the "Zambisi Industrial Mission" in strong opposition to the "Scottish Free Church Missionary". Booth later joined the Seventh Adventist and later the Watch Tower teaching of Charles Taze Russell. Kamwana left the Overtoun Institute in 1901 in dissatisfaction with the Scottish Missionary and joined the Plainfield Seventh-Day Industrial Mission that was established in 1902 in Tyolo district. While there he was baptised and taught at one of the Mission's schools. He later left for South Africa and worked as a hospital attendant, and became a preacher. In his

homilies he also voiced concern of the harsh conditions of migrant labour. In 1907, while in Cape Town, he met Booth who introduced him to the Watch Tower teaching.

After embracing the teaching of Russel, Kamwana returned to his native land and started preaching and baptising many people.

He did so side-stepping the procedure imposed by Scottish and English missionaries. He baptised approximately 10,000 people many of them from the Scottish and English Churches.

He attacked the Scottish and English missionaries governing policies and charging of school fees; and the British Government injustice in taxing the poor. This caused fearful outrage the Scottish and British Missionaries who instigated his arrest and supported the British Colonial authorities' action to exile him.

His arrest in early 1909, caused his followers to revolt, this uprising has gone in the history book as the "Kamwana Revolt of 1909".

He was exiled to Zomba, and sent to Mulanje prison, later South Africa and Chinde in Portuguese East Africa.

His preaching that the world would come to an end in 1914 and his call for his followers not to join the army was taken as truth with the announcement of WW1. This caused the British (who badly needed African recruits to fight a European war), to hurriedly expel him

without any proper trial from Africa. In 1915. Kamwana left Chinde with his wife Annie Nyamanda along with Elliot Yhanne Archrwa and Willaim Mulagha Mwenda and their spouses for Mauritius; after four years in Mauritius (little is known regarding his place of exile in Mauritius), they were sent to the Seychelles where they arrived at Mahé in September 1919. The exact date of their arrival is still to be determined and also the name of the ship that brought them to the Seychelles. There are two clues, they might have arrived on 2 September on SS *Karapara* or on the 30 September 1919 on SS *Karagola.*

They lodged in one house at Anse Royale near the present hospital rented from Miss Georgina de Silva. She was the daughter of Dr Thomas Bradley and was married later to Douglas Bailey. The British Government allocated only one policeman to look after them. For some time, they were on nominal detention, however, they had to report to the nearby police station twice a day and their moments were strictly monitored. Kamwana was not allowed to preach and was not allowed to any church service.

During their incarcerations, they were visited by the local representatives of the Church of England who were trying to convince them to join the Church of England but they failed. This was followed by a visit to Mahé of an important delegation of

missionaries from the Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), from Likoma Island who tried to persuade them (especially Kamwana), to join the UMCA. The latter was established by members of the Anglican Church. Their visit seems to have had the backing of the British authorities in Malawi; because they promised Kamwana if they joined they would be released and upon their return he would be made Bishop. Both attempts failed and they remained fervent Jehovah' Witnesses. Little is known if they were approached by the Roman Church at Mahé. In 1932, Annie Nyamnanda who apparently became an ardent Jehovah's Witness, was married to Kamwana in early 1909. She died later in the Seychelles and was presumably the first Jehovah's Witness to be interned in the Seychelles.

In 1935, he had a new wife from Malawi, she was Loniya Kasmabara the sister of "Mankhambira" a prominent chieftain of Nkhata Bay.

As for Mwenda, while in Seychelles he was a person with a good singing voice but seems to be a sexually impotent. In early 1926, his wife imported from Bombay some "French potency pills" but when the parcel arrived the Police Inspector refused to hand it over to her.

After a dispute between Kamwana and Elliot Yhanne Archrwa, the Government moved Archrwa and his wife to another house at Le Rocher. Soon after, William Mwenda recanted and wrote secret letters against Kamwana to Governor Byrne in order for him to get

early repatriation. A year later he was allowed to return home on 10th January 1928 by SS *Khandalla*.

Kamwana and his brother Willaim Mulagha with their wives were set free on the occasion of the Coronation of His Majesty King George VI in May 1937 and were allowed to return home. They left on 13th July on SS *Kenya* for Beira where they took the train for Nyasaland. He arrived in at Chintheche on 16 October 1937.

Upon his return Kamwana found that his movement was still alive but he was not welcomed to the Watch Tower Society on the grounds that he was suspected of practicing politics. Kamwana founded the "Watchman Healing Mission" also known as Mlonda Mission in 1938. His new Church later broke into two groups, one of them was called "Ufuma wa Yehova ndi Amikaeli" (The Kingdom of Jehovah and Micheal" and the other one "Ine was Yehovah ndi Amikaeli" (I am of Jehovah and Micheal). However, Kamwana regarded both of them as his followers.

Kamwana died at 84 years old on 31 July 1956 at his home in Chiwanag-Lumwi.

A for his first wife Annie Nyamanda she was known while in the Seychelles as "Anna Manda". She was born in Malawi in 1894 and died on 10 June 1932 at 3 pm at the Victoria Hospital at Mahé with chronic asthma. She was apparently buried at Mont Fleuri.

Regrettably the Seychelles annals of history remain silent about her, even though she was a fervent Christian and the wife, of Malawi's greatest African Christian preachers. She was according to Malawi's oral tradition baptised by her husband Pastor Elliott Musokwa Kamwana Achirwa as a Jehovah Witness in Malawi, to whom she was married in 1908.

During their detention her husband became a keen gardener they grew bananas and had a plot solely for pineapple which he was allowed to sell to the public.

In her death certificate she was declared as Annie Achiwa née Hyamanda. According to their folklore the prefix "A" in her husband surname is honorific. The two witnesses on her death certificate were her husband and Edgard Rosette of Mont Buxton. Edgard later went to see and became a prominent boatswain; his last boat was the *Argo* of Harry Savy. She was strangely declared as a Protestant and for her profession and residence the civil status officer wrote "Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society" of Anse Royale Mahé. If her religious denomination was correct then her husband who had baptised over ten thousand people, blacks as well as whites could not lobby her to change religion.

In 1935, after her demise a new wife was selected for Kamwana in Malawi, she was Loniya Kasambara the sister of "Mankhambira" a

prominent chieftain of Nkhata Bay. Before she was allowed to travel to the Seychelles to join her new husband, Kamawana had to find 515 rupees out of which 415 were to be paid to Chief Mankhambira as *Chiongo* (bride wealth), and the rest was for her transport to the Seychelles. During that time it was a lot of money for a *Chiongo*. Traditionally once the *Chiongo* is paid the marriage became legal and the *Chiongo* was also a form of marriage certificate. After the *Chiongo* was paid, arrangement was made for Loniya to sail for the Seychelles where she arrived on 15 May 1936. They do not seem to have married civilly in the Seychelles.

There is nothing regarding Annie and Loniya at the Seychelles National Archives in the files on the deportees from Nyasaland. During her 13 years in Seychelles Annie must have frequented many Seychellois and presumably became a créolophone. As Protestantism she could have been a regular visitor to the Anse Royale Church. Tales about her during her captivity could still be in the minds of some old people of Anse Royale. Throughout the world "oral lore" is considered to be very important in preserving history as well as culture. However, it is now more or less like a taboo in the Culture Division, even though our "oral lore" started smoothly after 1977 with Jean-Claude Mahoune, David André, Daniel Jovani Ally and Jeannette Madeleine. That was prior the arrivals of some *coopérants Guinéen*.

Going back Anna Manda, Its seems that the corpse was never repatriated like other African deportees who died in Seychelles. If her tomb is located it could become a shrine for African visitors especially Malawians.

As for Anna Manda *c'est trop tard,* she has no further reward, her name is forgotten. This famous Malagassy saying *" Les morts ne sont vraiment morts que lorsque les vivants les ont oubliés. »* goes well with her. We hope that we have done a little justice to Kamwana and Anna Manda by putting them back in our chronicles of history.

Ref:

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