LABOUR MIGRATION AND THE GENERATION CONFLICT:¹

AN ESSAY ON SOCIAL CHANGE IN CENTRAL WESTERN ZAMBIA²

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Abstract: Antagonism between older and younger men is claimed to constitute a striking feature of a rural community in post-independent Zambia. Against this background we see, particularly in the local political processes surrounding the 1973 Zambia general elections, a small group of young men organizing themselves within a framework suggested by national party politics, and attempt (with unexpected support from the elders) to construct a youth-centred social order which could dissolve the intergenerational struggle whilst presenting a blue-print for rural reconstruction. The paper attempts to interpret these data: synchronically by reference to power relations between rival national political parties and between generations; and particularly diachronically, as the outcome of a process of social change mainly shaped by labour migration. For this purpose, it examines the pre-colonial career model, changes in the rural leadership under colonial rule, the emergence of an urban career model, the changing status of rural young people, ideological change in the colonial era, and the post-independence situation.
1. The problem.

1.1. Introduction.

As part of a study of rural-urban relations in Zambia, rural field-work was carried out in Chief Kathembe's village, Kaoma district, Central Western Zambia, 1973-74. One of the most striking features of this post-Independence society is the very strong antagonism between older and younger men, pervading every sphere of social life. Against this background we see a small group of young men emerge, organizing themselves within a framework suggested by national party politics, and attempt (with unexpected support from the elders) to construct a youth-dominated social order which could dissolve the inter-generational antagonism whilst presenting a crude blueprint for rural reconstruction.

This paper intends to interpret these data as the outcome of a process of social change in which labour migration has played the main role.

In this short paper I can only present the bare outlines of a complex and tentative argument; for ample case material, archival and quantitative data, I must refer to my forthcoming monograph and to my other papers listed in the bibliography (Van Binsbergen 1974, 1975, in press (a), (b), (c), and forthcoming).

1.2. The setting: rural stagnation.

People in this area live in villages of 1 to 25 households. Each head of household is linked to the village headman by bilateral kinship (often remote or putative). Staple crops are cultivated in dry forest gardens and riverside gardens; there are indications that pressure on the latter begins to build up now. Insignificant quantities of surplus crops are sold locally or outside (in the latter case through the government marketing agency, or the local shopkeeper). There is hardly any cattle. Hunting, although restricted by government action and the dwindling of game, remains an important course of animal protein and cash. It is supplemented by seasonal fishing, honey collecting, occasional sale of domestic produce etc. A few local men (only one of them under forty) find permanent employment at the chief's staff. Two young men help out at the shop. The only other employees are 'strangers': teachers at the local primary school and the recently arrived agricultural adviser.

Export of labour remains the main source of cash and manufactured goods in this area, although recently opportunities for migrant labour have greatly declined. Almost all adult men have been away on migrant labour, and those under 45 all aspire to such employment. All village claim absent members working or staying in town.

The nearest township (Kaoma) is at a distance of 80 km. Nearly 400 km away is the national capital, Lusaka; the main labour market for this area since the customary migration to Rhodesia and South Africa became prohibited at Independence (1964). A tar road linking Lusaka and Mongu (the provincial capital) through Kaoma was completed in 1972; the area is connected to this road by a 20 km track. A little developed associational life (in which the Watchtower church is prominent), minimal exposure to mass communication a local language (Nkoya) which is not
officially recognized and in which there have been, virtually no, publications save the New Testament, a high rate of illness and death (the nearest rural clinic is 30 km. away), and a low material standard of living in general, complete this picture of a rather typical rural backwater in Central Africa.

1.3. The contemporary generation conflict.

In no sphere of life can older and younger men be observed to interact without great tension, readily precipitating into verbal abuse, sometimes violence.

Young men will resent, or refuse, their share in garden-work allotted to them by their senior kinsmen. Prolonged hunting expeditions, once the main setting for the socialization of the young men by elders, are now undertaken by age-mates or solitarily. Young men refuse to accept the elders' advice, and jealously guard what little resources (money, food, implements, the labour force of themselves and their wives) they have. They engage in drinking bouts, often start fights, damage property, get themselves involved in adultery and paternity cases (concerning women who, as wives, daughters, daughters-in-law, are in the care of older men), abuse elders verbally. The pattern also manifests itself in recreation, where the elders have become selfconscious vis-à-vis the young men and feel too embarrassed to sing and dance at parties; young men, with new songs which often ridicule elder people, have usurped this old men's privilege.

The young violate central values in this society, by threatening village unity and challenging the headmen's power. This is a sin against the village dead, and is considered to make the village more open to attack from illness, death and sorcery.

The elders are clearly at a loss as to how to maintain order in this situation, whereas local norms and values still identify their authority as the main focus of social control.

Part of the elders' frequent complaints may refer to hurt pride and material self-interest, but much of it appears an expression of genuine distress over the future of their society. In their despair the elders have taken recourse to drastic means: when their own, informal, domestic admonitions fail (as they often do), inter-village courts of elders will consider the breaches of etiquette and other offenses of the young against the old. This often results in the cases being taken to the Local Court in the periphery of the area. In extreme cases involving very close kinsmen a young man is cursed and thus expelled from the village (Van Binsbergen 1974:5ff, 27f).

Although young men tend to be more literate, better informed and, in the modern-industrial sense, more skilful than the elders, they do not accuse the latter of ignorance or backwardness. Their antagonism is expressed, and rationalized, in terms of a symbolic framework which carries no explicit reference to modernity and which they share with the elders: in line with the common Central- and East-African identification of power, wealth and sorcery (Van Binsbergen, in press (a); Parkin 1969), they see the elders as the main sorcerers. Their accusations are frequent, and often in public (which is considered a criminal offense).

Especially when a cluster of villages is gripped by a crisis, e.g., immediately after a death, it is the elders collectively, or a particular close senior kinsman (often the headman), who are indicated by the younger
people as having caused this death wilfully, and as plotting for more
to follow.

My analysis below (2.1.) will show that the present generation
conflict partly relates to persisting inter-generational tension dating
back to pre-colonial times. There are however strong indications that
what we witness here is not so much a historical pattern (which some
colleagues might wish to call "traditional"), but "a possible sign of
radical change and crisis", as Gluckman (1967:426) says after describing
his impressions of a similar generation conflict in the Mongu area, 1966.
These indications include the elders' confusion; clinging to a seniority-
centred value system which they increasingly realize to be out of touch
with the realities of contemporary distribution of status, power and
wealth at the local and national level; my informants' recollections of
the past; and particularly the recent, explicit attempts, by a small
group of young village people, to forge a new, youth-centred system of
power and legitimation.

I shall describe the latter key episode in some details.

1.4. The UNIP Youth branch: the quest for a youth-dominated social order.

Since the 1950s (Van Binsbergen 1975) the people of this area have iden-
tified with Zambia's first nationalist party, African National Congress
(ANC).

In the late 1950s the United National Independence Party (UNIP)
developed out of a break-away from ANC. UNIP became the largest party,
achieved Independence, and proclaimed itself the only legal party under
a "one-part participatory democracy" in 1972. By then ANC was still the
only party with a local branch in this area. Chief Kathembe, with hardly
any UNIP supporters among his people, had been made a Honorary Councillor
of the district, and a UNIP Trustee, shortly after Independence. But
his two main opponents in local politics focused on the chieftainship,
were members of the local branch executive of ANC. Due to the predominance
of UNIP supporters among immigrant ethnic groups outside Kathembe's
area, UNIP carried Kaoma (then Mankoya) district as a whole in the 1968
general elections. District headquarters began to exert strong pressures
on the local ANC branch, and the branch was forced to dissolve when
Zambia became a one-party state. Most local people however continued to
identify with ANC and to reject the UNIP government from which, they
claimed, they had only suffered; losing their hunting grounds, and their
employment opportunities in the South.

It was only early in 1973 that UNIP persistent organizing attempts
from Kaoma carried a minimum of success in the area.

A young widow from Kaoma took up residence with her uncle near
Kathambe and started a UNIP Women's Brigade; the members, a handful, are
mainly unattached women. Two local young men created a UNIP Youth Branch
of some ten age-mates, who generally shared the following characteristics:
they are between 20 and 30 years of age, have completed the higher grades
of primary school, have some urban experience, and are newly married.
The executive officers receive minimal token remuneration from Kaoma; they
are occasionally visited by experienced organizers and taken to district
headquarters for meetings and training.
In the absence of an ordinary branch of mature men, "the Youth" (Ba-Yusi) soon came to regard themselves as the local representatives of the ruling party, and of government itself. Their activities, although incompatible with the customary role of young men, and which claim to represent a political party rival to ANC, are yet looked upon surprisingly favourable by the general population, including the elders. Elders who express their bitterness about the local young men in general, may yet praise the members of the Youth branch for such constructive action as: going around the villages asking the people what problems they have, urging the people to cooperate, being on the look-out for harmful strangers, etc.

But this can scarcely suffice to explain the elders' relatively and moderately positive attitude vis-à-vis the Youth branch. For on closer observation, the primary aim of the members of the Youth branch appears to constitute a direct challenge of the elders' role in society. In the Youth branch's contacts with the local population, campaigning for UNIP is seldom emphasized; neither do the members aspire (at least not ostensibly or within a short-time perspective) to great wealth nor to high formal status as historically defined within the local status system.

Their primary goal, phrased in sociological terms, appears to be: to impose themselves locally, by means of UNIP, as the central focus of power, legitimacy and social control. They try to assume the role which the existing value system assigns to the elders. Below we shall reconsider the elders' rather amazing reaction to this aspiration.

In pursuit of their goal the Youth branch has to challenge the two main local institutions that carry relatively high power and prestige and constitute rival representations of the central government: the chief and the primary school. The Youth branch's alliance with either will confirm the young men in a dependent position:

The chief has an exalted status in the seniority-based local political system, in modern district administration, and, if only nominally, in UNIP; moreover he is a member of the House of Chiefs. The teachers command resources of information, skill and extra-local backing which the village youth cannot equal; moreover the headteacher has been assigned to the Youth branch in an advisory position.

In this struggle the UNIP Youth branch does, on the other hand, seek alliance with the two most senior headmen under the chief (the former ANC executive!).

These have their own interests in attacking both the chief, their more successful rival, and the teachers; these headmen are on the local school council and derive political credit, among the parents, from challenging the professional and social performance of the teachers; but these two senior headmen themselves do not represent a threat to the Youth branch, as long as ANC remains prohibited and the present chief remains in office.

The Youth branch completely ignored the chief, repeatedly harrassed the teachers, and held closed-meetings with the two senior headmen. Finally, a few weeks before the elections, the Youth branch organized a most
dramatic mass meeting at the school compound. Here, in front of the majority of the local population (including all headmen) several members of the chief's faction, and finally the chief himself (all of them elderly men with a cash income), were publicly accused of sorcery by the Youth branch executive. Subsequently the Youth executive brought out the general grievances against the teachers. Both attacks were assisted by the two senior headmen, who turned the meeting into an informal court session with cross-examination of the witnesses and the accused, although no verdict was pronounced. Concluding the meeting the Youth branch secretary read a list of rules which the Youth branch from then on would impose on the people:

- Visitors must be reported to the Youth branch; weekly Youth meetings would be compulsory for everybody; all worries would have to be reported to the Youth branch; everybody must cooperate with the Youth branch; current prices in the village (beer, meat) must not be increased; older men must physically assist young people in their projects (building a Youth branch office, clearing a football field) etc.

With their small numbers, as yet, and their lack of sanctions (they threatened with violence but, in contrast with urban Youth branches, have never used violence so far), there is little wonder that this piece of juvenile legislation did not carry much immediate effect. Those accused of sorcery were shortly afterwards publicly (though informally) reconfirmed in their status and government backing, when the District Governor visited the area in order to finalize preparations for the elections. At the elections themselves the returns from this area were very low and largely anti-DNIP, despite the Youth branch's campaign.

The enlisting of the two most important local ANC supporters, and the attack on the very rural institutions (chief and school) upon which the UNIP government hopes to base its support and legitimacy among the rural people of Zambia, suggests that the Youth branch activities carry no clear-cut relation with national politics and can certainly not be explained by reference to UNIP directives. The Youth members' use of sorcery accusations, attacks on the school, and their complete lack of insistance on whatever symbols of modernity (education, smart clothing, urban experience) they might claim for themselves, shows that their action neither relates to a cleavage between "progressive" and "traditional" elements in the rural population (which is sometimes claimed to be a major phenomenon in post-independence rural Africa). In fact, judging by criteria such as literacy; membership of a modern religious association; use of non-western medicine; or rational farming, the members of the Youth branch are by no means more "progressive" than their fellow-villagers of the same age or even much older.

When these more obvious viewpoints do not offer an explanation, I would suggest that the crucial issue in this episode is that here we have a small group of young people, who probably for the first time in local history not only attack their elders (young men have done so often before, individually and in isolated events), but now identify themselves as youth, develop a solidarity and rudimentary organization on that basis, and proceed to work out and present a blue-print, however crude, for a new, youth-dominated social order. Moreover they are taken
by the elders. Indeed the most striking aspect of the episode is that none of the older people is known to have challenged the Youth branch publicly or privately, and many openly approved of their action.

Even if the Youth branch's action did not yet carry spectacular and lasting effects, it is obvious that the members have already attained a position of considerable power. Otherwise they would not have been able to organize a mass meeting, level attacks against the school and the chief, ignore the habitual role patterns of young men, and yet earn public support and praise instead of being ignored, ridiculed, or taken to court. Whence do they derive this power? Not from their weak economic position, which precluded their acting as patrons for a following of clients. Obviously, in an area where people generally continue to identify with the now defunct ANC, the Youth branch's power is partly based on the fear of UNIP, with which they identify and with whose regional headquarters they keep up frequent contacts. UNIP is government now, UNIP has been able to eclipses ANC on the national level and to forcibly put an end to the local ANC branch; therefore, if the UNIP Youth branch were not treated well, the repercussions might be very unpleasant.

But this can only be a partial explanation. For in the infrequent, direct dealings with district headquarters and UNIP, people of this area may openly defy the central government, UNIP, and their senior officials; in fact they are notorious for this (e.g. Van Binsbergen 1975:18f). Moreover, the local Youth branch's action is greatly at variance with UNIP policy, and the fact that this action was largely undone during the District Governor's visit, suggests that the branch runs the risk of losing the support from regional headquarters. While admitting that identification with an outside focus of power may generate power locally even if the identification is instrumental and is disclaimed by the outside agent, all this suggests that the dynamics behind the local Youth branch's power to a large extent derive, not directly from an outside focus, but from the internal structure and history of the local-village society (which of course indirectly reflects outside relations, throughout).

Depth interviews, and observations of the elders' dealings with the Youth branch, reveal the elders' attitudes vis-à-vis the Youth branch as an important basis for the latter's power. The elders are facing a standard anomic situation. They see their historical authority system fall apart, are distressed and tired of inter-generational bickering, and seem prepared to accept, sometimes even welcome, the lead of the young people. Responsibility as regards the integrity of the community and the avoidance of sorcery-generating internal conflict, is a dominant value in the role definition of these elders. This value allows them now,
without losing face too much, to step back in the interest of the harmony and future of the community - even if this means that younger people adopt role patterns (initiative, sanctioning, avoidance of sorcery, constructive social organizing) that used to be the elders' prerogatives.

This may explain, to some extent, the power of the Youth branch once formed; it does not explain however the more fundamental determinants of the present situation. Why does this severe rural generation conflict exist? Why are the elders incapable of dealing with the situation? Why did there emerge, from among the young men in the village, a social movement which (under the rationalizing disguise of a local branch of the national party) seeks to create a new, youth-dominated social order?

In my view the historical development of labour migration offers the major explanation here. The remainder of this paper will argue this point.

2. Labour migration and the career model.

2.1. Career model and inter-generational relations in the pre-colonial period.

Prior to colonial rule, villages in Central Western Zambia comprised up to a few hundred inhabitants, who were tied, by bilateral kinship or slavery, to the headman, usually the incumbent of a political title of high prestige. Residence, auto-selection and succession, rather than being governed by fixed narrow rules, were highly optional, involving strategic choices out of a fairly large pool of bilateral kinsmen, many of whom would reside at considerable distances. Succession to a title (outcome of a formal process of selection and appointment, guided by elders under strong factional pressures) depended not upon ascription but upon achievement, power. Any man born into this society would face the challenge of a standard career model, which would culminate in him becoming headman of a large village. (For similar accounts about neighbouring areas, cf. Fielder 1969; Lancaster 1966.)

This general struggle for individual ascendance formed the central structural theme in this society.

In the absence of a hereditary aristocracy, and of fixed rules of succession, competition was fairly open, even to include slaves. Material property was limited and ephemeral (e.g. cattle would die because of tsetse fly); this precluded the accumulation of wealth and made that every young man had to start from scratch. Social relationships and manipulatory skills were a man's main capital; whatever differential social opportunities one had in shaping one's career lay in the specific properties of one's network of kin.

In the pursuit of this career a man would have to follow a complex strategy throughout life. In his youth he would become attached, as a
co-residing junior client, to a senior kinsman from either father's or mother's side. Often this kinsman was his prospective father-in-law, in whose village he was to render bride-services. (Bride-wealth was not practised until colonial times.) Subsequently hunting, trading and participation in military exploits provided opportunities to acquire, not so much wealth, but political credit and experience, and especially additional wives (mainly from among captive or slave women). In this marginal subsistence economy polygamy provided the main condition for an agricultural surplus, on the basis of which a man in his forties could begin to attract from elsewhere clients of his own, and form his own faction in local politics. Freed from immediate economic commitments by his wives and clients, but controlling their economic activities and checking conflicts between them, he could now dedicate much of his time to political affairs, successfully compete for minor, then major titles, and end up with his own large village - either as a chief or as a chief's senior client who himself controlled a considerable following.

Death due to disease, hunting accidents or warfare, and departure (as captives, slaves, or ambitious dissidents) would continually thin out the ranks of those advancing in status - while those replacing them were usually of low status: newborn children, slaves, and clients from elsewhere. Therefore, even if the number of possible positions of chief and chief's senior client was of necessity limited, a man's chance of attaining high status late in life was very considerable - provided he succeeded!

Though for many clients their attachment to a particular headman, and their residence in his village, would only last for as long as this served their individual strategies of ascendance, the power of the headman was very considerable: the inhabitants were largely dependent upon him for food (particularly in the case of wife-less clients, and in general during seasonal famine when the headman's granaries would have to see the village through), conflict regulation, and protection against both human and invisible assailants.

Competition between age-mates was fundamental to the system. A developed, institutionalized structure of solidary age-groups, as is found in parts of East- and Southern Africa, is inconceivable here. Between people of the same age, even if closely related, there would be little solidarity. Brothers, cousins, would seldom grow up in the same village for more than a few years. The main enduring social relations in this society were between members of different generations: between a man and his father, classificatory fathers, grandfather, mother's brothers, and fathers-in-law.

However, there were also strong inter-generational tensions within the system.

Wifeless clients coming to exchange their labour force for food, protection and sometimes a wife, have little bargaining power in a community where insecurity is high and seasonal famine is common. Exploitation and the corresponding resentment form recurrent themes in the oral-historical accounts. Several cases are recorded of kinmen giving their junior client kinsmen into slavery; senior matrilateral kinmen were in fact formally entitled to do so. Conflict regulation was in the hands of the elders; headmen and their senior clients; in serious cases payment of a slave was imposed (who could be taken from among the junior clients). Junior clients would make love to the wives of polygynous elders and, if exposed, be punished by mutilation. Many cases concerned the breach, by younger people, of the formal rules of etiquette in dealing with senior people. Younger men were debarred from participation in the recreation and rituals of the old.
This fragmentary evidence suggests that senior kinsmen wielded great power over their junior, client kinship. This power was rationalized by strong values. The judicial enforcement of these values was in the hands of the elders. Younger people occasionally challenged these powers, infringing upon the prerogatives of older people, and by and large seem to have displayed an instrumental attitude towards their patrons: they would exchange them for others whenever this was in the interest of their own advancement.

However, the young people were not in direct political competition with the old, being too young to take the latter's places yet. Occupying a high status was, and is, considered to be risky because of attacks not from younger people, but from the middle-aged senior clients who could hope to succeed a murdered headman of their own age. Inter-generational tension took on the more symbolic form we have already seen. The powerful old were generally considered to depend for their success on sorcery; the manipulation of the remains of, particularly young, human beings killed for that purpose. The old, while indispensable providers of food, security and order, and representing the ultimate career model for the young, were considered sorcerers par excellence. Among many other aspects (Van Binsbergen in-press (1)), this belief offered young people an explanation for the misfortune which frequently befell them (as an underprivileged group in society), and also a ready rationalization when one wished to sever the relationship with a particular patron.

This system was affected by the upheaval in the region, and in Central Africa in general during the last century. Insecurity, illness and seasonal famine seem to have increased then. People would gather in enlarged, stockaded villages around powerful headmen who now adopted the Lunda chiefly paraphernalia to glorify their status. The slave-trade penetrated into the interior and rapidly transformed both chieftainship and domestic slavery by introducing the gun (the standard price for a deported slave) as a major transferable commodity. The effect of these changes was, after an initial expansion, a tightening of the rather open opportunity structure, especially for the younger people, at the eve of colonial rule.

2.2. Changes in the rural leadership structure.

With the establishment of colonial rule around 1900, all headmen and chiefs were affected, in their political and economic power, by pacification, abolition of slavery, hunting restrictions, and the disappearance of local trade. Some however gained considerably by the colonial administrative system that supplanted the pre-colonial political structure. The colonial administration, and the Barotse state bureaucracy (whose influence in the region had been limited prior to colonial rule, but had since been given a tremendous boost (Clay 1945; Caplan 1970;
Stokes 1966; Van Binsbergen 1975) redefined the fluid, competitive political system of the region into a fixed, formal hierarchy of titles. Rapidly the gap widened between those few headmen who received official recognition, and the others. The former enjoyed, especially after the creation of indirect rule (1929), considerable power, prestige and remuneration; their succession became much more rigid and had to be confirmed by the colonial and Barotse authorities. The only compensation other headmen received was the keeping of the village tax register, which carried no remuneration and merely added a vaguely official element to village leadership.

As a result the rural career model changed radically at the higher levels.

The values of individual autonomy, leadership, a village of client kinmen, and succession to a glorious title, took a modified expression. Deprived of economic, political and judicial powers beyond the immediate local level (in sharp contrast with their economic and military activities over a wide geographical area, as a chief's most senior followers in pre-colonial times), and with virtually no chance of ever leading to the status of government-recognized chief, village headmanship under the new conditions yet continued to function as the main focus of rural-oriented individual career aspirations. The greater security in the region no longer necessitated the large villages of the 19th centuries. A proliferation of small villages took place, absorbing a large proportion of the middle-aged and old men as headmen. The associated titles continued to be keenly competed for. The power of such a "modern" headman was much smaller than that of recognized chiefs, and had a rather different basis from pre-colonial headmanship. Yet the colonial headman's power was considerable, and represented a marked dominance of the old over the young. The headman controlled land and implements, usually more than one wife, unattached kinswomen, clients, and much of the cash flowing into the village from outside (his own savings from previous migrant labour, remittances by village-nomads abroad; and bride-wealth; see below). In addition to continual, informal conflict resolution within his own village, he would sit on inter-village courts where minor cases could be heard outside the official Local Courts of the chiefs. His factual dominance would be supported both by legitimizing values of seniority and respect (carrying judicial and supernatural sanctions), and by the sorcery connotations of his high status.

2.3. Labour migration and the emergence of an alternative, urban career model.

Even more crucial was the effect of labour migration on the career structure.

The necessity to pay a hut tax roughly equivalent to three months' wages, the desire for manufactured goods, and the scarcity of local cash sources, were the main factors turning large numbers of men into labour migrants from the time colonial rule was imposed.Soon labour migration had become an established institution, sustained by many other than purely economic factors, and interwoven in the total texture of this rural society.

Migrant labourers from the region would seek employment at the mines and commercial farms throughout Central and Southern Africa. The majority
went for short spells (a few months to a few years); they kept up the
home contact through remittances and, if communication allowed this,
participation in life-crisis ceremonies. The frame of reference of
such migrants remained the village, where they returned regularly
for longer periods of residence and where they kept a stake, in the
prospect of retiring there and achieving high status according to
the rural career model.

This situation has been well described for other parts of
But previous studies, in their timely emphasis on urban-rural
interconnectedness, have somewhat overlooked the significant
minority, from Central Western Zambia and elsewhere, to whom this picture
does not apply. Admittedly the places of work offered little economic
security or retirement opportunity. But this did not deter successful
migrants from repeatedly extending their stay abroad, travelling from
workplace to workplace, letting their rural wives come over or entering
into more or less permanent relations with local women (cf. Colson 1958:
67f). At least among part of the migrants, urban life began to be
appreciated not just as a necessary exile from home but as an attractive
way of life in its own right. Both archival sources and the life histo-
ries I collected demonstrate that already before the second World War
the urban centres of Southern Africa contained migrants from Central
Western Zambia who had secured permanent jobs, had not been back for
ten, twenty or more years, and had never sent any money home. It was
not uncommon for a newly-married woman to stay without any message or
money from her husband abroad for many years; in fact, local customary
law was revised to enable such women to divorce and remarry. The bureau-
cratization of political leadership, and hence the difficulty of rural
career advancement (even for mature men in their thirties and older),
with elders largely controlling both female labour and cash, had caused
a tightening of the rural opportunity structure, which often manifested
itself in the form of open inter-generational conflict. Men would depart
for work as a temporary withdrawal from such conflict, i.e. without
having to sever local ties overtly and to commit themselves to another
rural patron. Under these circumstances successful migrants might reach
a point where high investment in rural relations, mobility and security
seemed no longer realistic. It would then no longer be good rural rela-
tions and a continuous interest in village politics, but cash saved in
town (thus remaining under one's own control), which they hoped would
provide a basis for their retirement (even though many eventually found
themselves retiring in the villages of Central Western Zambia, where their
cash was of much less importance than their neglected social ties, which
they then had to re-activate and heavily invest in). While in town they
pursued individual careers as alternatives to the rural career model,
Neither did the smooth reintegration of returning migrants into their rural communities, taken for granted in some studies (Fortes 1938; Mitchell 1959), occur in all cases. In the region under study returning migrants (especially, but by no means exclusively those who while in town had at one stage tried to sever their rural ties) tended to face great conflicts after their return; besides individual cases, the evidence for this includes the statistically demonstrated tendency for returning migrants to move to another village shortly after their return—a sure reign of social conflict. A fair proportion of the migrants did not return at all; many died in town before retirement age (death rate among migrants was high: Heisler 1974:40f), virtually retired in town by joining households of younger migrant kinsmen, or settled in peri-urban or rural areas elsewhere.

In a manner eminently applicable to the migrants from Central Western Zambia, Van Velsen (1961, 1963) has discussed the apparent contradiction of migrants pursuing urban careers yet, in many cases, returning to the village. Once labour migration had become an institution every migrant had been socialized into both career orientations, and depending upon his situation at various stages in life, either one would be dominant and the other suppressed. For the successful migrant the rural career orientation would remain latent and might even be ignored, until such time when he was to experience personally the insecurity of urban life: at the attainment of old age, dismissal from his job, or massive unemployment such as occurred e.g. during the Great Depression (from 1929 onward) and after Independence (see below). He would try to return to the village if he could secure no other place to go; and then would often reluctantly accept, and secretly cherish, a title which he might have ridiculed while still in town. Alternatively, even the migrant retaining his rural orientation and contacts, would while in town develop a somewhat relative view of his rural society, become aware of urban alternatives, and temporarily pursue these.

2.4. Labour migrant and the status of young people in the rural area.

The labour migrants exploring alternatives to the rural career model were mostly men in the ages 25 - 45 years old: adults who had already made some progress in their rural careers, who had married, possessed the necessary documents, and were often themselves father or otherwise patrons of junior clients. Both archival and oral sources suggest that formal labour recruitment was the main venue to labour migration in this region. Adolescents from this region seldom went as labour migrants—mainly because unmarried dependents they could not produce the documents required by the labour recruitment agencies. These documents depended on marital
status and previous tax payments (Heisler 1974:58, 102); especially the favorite labour migration to South Africa was heavily controlled and subject to red tape (Prothero 1974:viii). Young men did try to find work in the open market, e.g., as carriers; but here opportunities were small and wages exceedingly low.

Thus men up to their mid-twenties were kept from earning money - in a society which rapidly adopted a money economy. Manufactured goods (clothing, matches, implements) had supplanted some locally produced life-necessities. Transactions in the village were increasingly on a cash basis (beer sale, extra-marital affairs). The rural economy was deeply affected by the introduction of such high-yielding capital investments as the gun (game meat) and the bicycle (local transport), which now became available for the successful migrant and senior people in general. The young men staying behind in the village, under the control of elders who had retired from wage employment, had to make up particularly for the agricultural work of the absent male migrants within the rural economy: the preparing and maintaining of forest clearings, in order to enable the women (including many wives of absent migrants) to cultivate. For all these reasons the relative standard of living of the young men deteriorated after labour migration had been introduced, and they were increasingly dependent on their senior kinsmen who either earned cash incomes abroad or who, as headmen and/or as bride-givers, controlled the cash flowing into the village.

The adolescents' predicament is particularly clear in relation to marriage.

In the past a man would take up residence in his prospective father-in-law's village in his late teens, render bride-services for several years, and consummate the marriage at the girl's attainment of puberty. Thus he could obtain rights over a wife by his own powers, without needing substantial assistance from his other relatives. However, under modern conditions the marriage pattern changed drastically over a few decades. Whereas the earlier marriage pattern tended to local endogamy, now the geographical distance over which marriages were contracted increased. Marriage with kinsmen (with bride-givers and bride-takers retaining about equal rights in the offspring of the marriage) was increasingly avoided. Being geographically distant from the bride-takers' village and increasingly lacking effective kinship links with the latter, the bride-givers lost much of their former control over the day-to-day actions of their married kinswoman. Ever rising payments in cash came to replace the former bride-services (Van Binsbergen 1974:111). The factors leading to these changes are yet imperfectly understood and are currently being subjected to quantitative analysis. Labour migration, which impeded bride-services in person, is one of the factors of the introduction of marriage payments; but its contribution to the marked decrease of local endogamy and of marriage between kinsmen is less obvious. On the contrary, if labour migration were the main factor changing the marriage pattern, one might expect as a result a set-up in which the wife could rely as much as possible on her own kinsmen while her husband was away working: propinquity and consanguineal ties underpinning the affinal ones.
In any case, a young man henceforth had to find a considerable amount of cash in order to be able to marry. Unable, in most cases, to go and work for it beforehand, he was completely dependent on his kinsmen to contribute towards the bride-wealth, and on his in-laws to arrange easy terms. Often indebted to both sides, he would depart for work as soon as possible after the wedding, leaving his young wife (whom he had had much less opportunity to establish an adequate relationship with than under the bride-service system) in his village. Data currently being processed suggest a marked increase both in the average age at first marriage, among men, and in the proportion of first marriages ending in divorce.

In so far as a man's marriage continued to form his basis of rural economic security and political expansion (through producing children and attracting, and feeding, other clients), the situation had become much more difficult for young men in the first phase of their career. Similarly, somewhat older men who had already married, were finding it difficult to contract second marriages.

Thus labour migration had the double effect of enabling some to venture on alternative careers abroad, and subjugating those staying in the village more and more to the headmen and other elders. The two effects reinforced each other and greatly added to the intergenerational tensions.

2.5. Labour migration and ideological change in the colonial period.

If migrants "dropped out" of, or at least took a more relative view of, the rural career model, this meant nothing less than a challenge of fundamental normative and structural principle of their rural society. These principles were pertinent not only to economic security, power and status, but also to self-realization, mental health, and meaningfulness of life in general. However, to what extent were the centres of European activity where they found work, capable of providing them with lasting and inspiring alternative value orientations? While participating in the economic sector of European life, they were debarred from full absorption of, and participation in, European culture in general, through barriers of language, socialization, segregation, and the colonial power distribution. Their existential problems were to be solved not by wholesale adoption of European culture, but by creating in and around themselves a new society on the basis of elements derived from both their rural and their European experience.

This attempt to actively and explicitly create a new social order, a new and inspiring participants' model of the ideal society, emerges as the main solution for the predicament of those whose rural social
order was no longer of overwhelming relevance to them, and forms one of the central themes of cultural change in Central Africa since 1900.

The ramifications of this process reach from such secular aspects as the emergence of a distinctly African urban identity and culture; the trade union movement; nationalism, to the religious sphere: the Watchtower movement (which touched a very large proportion of the Central-African population since the 1920s), witchcraft eradication, healing movements, the eager adoption of Christianity, and the proliferation of independent churches. There is a tendency to atomize these various developments and reduce each to a limited struggle for power and material goods: Black against White, young against old, in the concrete, particular arena of the mine, the church congregation, the village etc. However, they all seem to form historically and dialectically related aspects of the same social transformation process, which necessarily entails a redistribution of power in all these sectors of Central-African society, but even more comprehensive than that, aims at the creation of a new, eminently inspiring, redeeming social order.

From the beginning of labour migration the places of work in Central and Southern Africa functioned as ideological and organizational laboratories, where migrant workers would try out solutions for social reconstruction; and from there they would penetrate the distant rural areas.

The social sciences have long recognized the role of religion as a fundamental model of, and for, the social order (e.g. Geertz 1965). In Central Africa this model revolved around ancestrial cults and sorcery beliefs governing the world-view, community integration and leadership (Van Binsbergen, in press (a), (b)). With Christian missionary teaching forming the main selection from European spiritual culture available to Africans, little wonder that up to the 1950s religious movements constituted the most numerous and popular responses coming out of these "workshops" (Taylor and Lehmann 1961; Sundkler 1948; Van Binsbergen in press (a), (c)). But the more secular ones, in luding those leading to political independence, followed closely behind them and often merged with them.

From the urban centres the new ideas and movements would be taken to the rural areas, not primarily by regular short-term migrants with a strong rural orientation, but by more marginal people in whom the ideological predicament described here was particularly pronounced: long-term migrants who had been deeply committed to the urban situation and who had often gone through a better than average urban career; or strangers (largely with this same background) who rather than returning to their own rural area from town, made a career of propagating ideological innovations elsewhere (Van Binsbergen in press (a)).

Around 1930 the first major wave of innovatory responses reached Central Western Zambia: Watchtower (Hooker 1965) and Mchape (a complex of witchcraft and sorcery eradication paractices) (Banger, in press). The central issue in both, extremely popular, movements was the vigorous commitment to the creation of a radically new society through the elimination of evil and the preparation, in the Watchtower idiom, for the Second Coming. The rural establishment of chiefs and village headmen
woode the innovators in a bid to benefit from their enormous influence over the population. This proved unsuccessful. By their origin, recruitment and ideology these movements were anti-establishment; not only did they try to expose elders as sorcerers, they also provoked the colonial and Barotse administration to such an extent that the chiefs and headmen were threatened with denunciation should they continue to associate with the new movements (Van Binsbergen in press). In the 1950s ANC brought the second major wave of innovatory response, Migrants, and people of corresponding age in the village, adopted the movement. ANC came to function as a unifying symbol of local ethnic identity against the Barotse (Van Binsbergen 1975), and this seems the main reason why at this stage ANC was hardly used to express inter-generational tensions. Not that such tensions had disappeared; rather, they took the older form of Mchape-style sorcery accusations of the young against the old, which were particularly frequent and intense during the late 1950s in this area (Reynolds 1963; Gluckman 1967:422ff).

While expressing the need for a new social order, none of these movements (Watchtower, Mchape and ANC) in colonial times was successful in bringing about a thorough and lasting transformation of the society in this region. It appears that in order to achieve this, this kind of movement must satisfy at least four requirements: and ideology which emphasizes total innovation and offers a blue-print for the future society; an organizational structure which defines leaders and followers, their roles and the situations in which these roles are to be played, and allows for expansive recruitment and for adaptation to outside reactions to the movement; a mass following; and finally specific "action of catharsis" (baptismal or cleansing ritual, self-accusation, trial, combat etc.) in which the transition from old to new order is enacted symbolically, and in which individuals and structures opposing the new order are isolated and eliminated.

In its initial stage, local Watchtower came closest to fulfilling these conditions. But after strong external political pressures it lost the impetus it originally acquired and it has now been routinized: these days it forms the largest local denomination; continues to dictate ritual, politics and much of everyday life in a few local Watchtower villages; but no longer has anything like a dynamic, general impact on the rural society throughout the region. Neither did Watchtower, in these few village congregations, inspire the economic development recorded for Watchtower elsewhere in rural Zambia (Long 1968; Cross 1970). Of the four requirements, Mchape only offered cathartic action; despite its origin outside the local context this could be easily accommodated within the existing culture, in which some form of witchfinding had been a familiar institution for centuries. Local ANC commanded mass following and an adequate organizational structure, but after the ascendance of the more radical "UMIP", its ideology (with the absence of anti-White feelings which Gluckman (1971:156) has recently identified as a dominant feature of rural society in colonial Africa; and with its emphasis on specific, particularistic issues in district and provincial politics (Van Binsbergen 1975:102) was conservative rather than transformative;
By the time of Independence was gained, the communities of Central Western Zambia had radically changed. They had been incorporated into a complex, large-scale society comprising at least the whole of Central and Southern Africa. Labour migration (implying a movement of people, material resources, and ideas) constituted the main link between these communities and the other constituting segments of this complex society. (Although, of course, it never formed the only link; in particular, we could not underestimate the direct impact of the administration, which from the urban centres reached into the rural districts and even into the villages.) The structural changes represented a challenge to existing values and conceptions, but they had not yet found articulation in a new and explicit model of an alternative social order in the consciousness of the participants - nor had these participants found the means to actively bring about further changes instead of accommodating the results of change induced elsewhere.

2.6. The post-Independence situation.

With Independence the structure of the labour market changed considerably.

The replacement of European by African personnel was pursued at a larger scale than ever before; meanwhile the existing administrative and industrial establishments grew rapidly, and many new establishments were created. The main demand however was for skilled people with formal qualifications. Unskilled work in the towns did not grow at the same pace, and with the departure of White farmers unskilled farm work declined severely. Migrant labour to the South became prohibited; on the other hand many labourers who had worked outside Zambia for many years returned to this country, attracted by the promise of new opportunities, fleeing from mounting racial tension in Southern Africa, or forcibly repatriated. Labour recruitment ceased, but tax was abolished, and with the creation of the National Registration Card issued at district headquarters any employable person, regardless of age, sex or marital status, could compete for work. A phenomenal urban drift ensued, which the urban employment opportunities failed to accommodate.

The effects upon inter-generational relations in the area under discussion were startling. As regards access to work, the balance swung in favour of the young, who have usually passed through the higher grades of primary school (hardly ever more than that), and speak some English, the official Zambian language. Whatever limited skills the older men derive from previous labour experiences (as farm hands, miners, compound policemen etc.) were not acknowledged or no longer in demand. There is now open competition between young men and the elderly; the latter are usually at a disadvantage as compared to those who are twenty or more years their juniors. Neither as keepers of the tax register nor as major providers of cash and manufactured goods can the elders dominate any longer over the young. The former continue to control the rural women, for whom ever increasing marriage payments are demanded; but the relatively few young men who manage to live in town are reluctant to
spend their money on a "proper" marriage (which ties them to a rural network) and, as long as they can stand the pressures of social control exerted by both rural and urban relatives, prefer informal sexual unions with women of their own choice (Van Binsbergen 1974:23f). Thus a large proportion of the money earned in town does not pass anymore through the hands of the rural elders, even if ultimately the majority of men from this area end up with women from home.

Meanwhile the total amount of money earned in town and reaching the village seems to be on the decrease (taking inflation into account). Men of all ages find it almost impossible to secure any job at all. The younger men soon learn that their achievements in the village schools make no impression whatsoever on urban employers; primary schools in this area are often of non-competitive standards, and moreover the towns abound with unemployed with qualifications far above the primary-school level. In the still relatively large sector of the Zambian urban economy where unskilled labour is sought, access to jobs is largely controlled by entrenched townspeople from other parts of Zambia, who act as brokers for mainly those belonging to their own networks.

In general labour migration has stagnated. People continue to travel to town, but their prolonged efforts to find a job or to create a living by self-employment very seldom carry effect now. Meanwhile they live off the scarce resources of their urban relatives, until they return home or (exceptionally) can settle in town on their own.

As a result the villages of Central Western Zambia are now full of mature men retired before their age, and without the status and power formerly to be expected upon rural retirement; and of young men desperate to enhance their economic and social independence through urban wage labour, but grudgingly tied to the village after unsuccessful attempts in town.

3. Conclusion.

For the rural young, the urban career model (which after Independence acquired pronounced elements of power, conspicuous consumption and youthful success) had become the dominant frame of reference. The mature frustrated migrants, and those definitely too old to go on rising, should be orientated towards the higher levels of the rural career model; but while some clearly are, many fail to derive inspiration from a status which is no longer surrounded with the authority, power, sanctions, splendour it would carry in their youth.

In the past young and old men constituted mutual reference points as occupants of complementary statuses within an overall rural career perspective. Now they have become threats to each other's identity.
The present, bitter generation conflict seems primarily the result of two categories of people finding themselves trapped together within the frustrated career perspectives associated with rural stagnation. This stagnation is the outcome of economic and political incorporation processes in which labour migration features foremost.

Social processes involve structural relationships between individuals and between groups, but also participants' explicit models of the ideal social order and of their own place therein (ideologies). In the past structural change in Central and Southern Africa has precipitated numerous social movements which offered new ideologies to replace obsolete models of the social order. In colonial Central Western Zambia, Watchtower, Meca, and ANC constituted such movements, and none was as lasting success.

In line with these earlier movements, the recent attempt by a few young people to create a new youth-centred social order appears not only a move to decide the generation struggle (by replacing the absolute domination of the young, and the present open conflict between young and old, by a new domination by the young), but also a first step towards successful rural ideological reconstruction—which may well lead to material development long overdue. The young people's movement described here represents an incipient formulation of a participants' model that no longer takes rural dependence and migrancy for granted, but instead stipulates (however crudely) a local future to be realized through the action of local people. Eclectically employing such apparently contradictory devices as the historical framework of sorcery accusations, UNIP, alliance with elderly senior headmen who support a rival party now defunct, and attacks on the chief and the school, their attempt has a chance of success as it combines, for the first time in the modern ideological history of the region, the four requirements of ideology, organization, mass support (if not yet an actual mass following), and cathartic action, which I have suggested to be crucial.

A local follow-up study in addition to comparative data could bring out to what extent my analysis is more than wishful thinking.

Meanwhile this analysis is extremely tentative. The topics involved deserve attention, however. Young people are more and more identified as a major problem in developing nations (and not just there); circulatory labour migration has largely given way, in Zambia at least, to a structure where more stabilized urban communities politically and economically dominate a stagnated countryside; African governments proclaim a back-to-the-land policy and actively undertake rural development. In this context, examination of the potential contribution of rural young people to the reconstruction of their society may prove of vital importance for the future.
1. I am indebted to the following persons and institutions: to my informants and the Zambian authorities for their warm co-operation; to the University of Zambia for permission to carry out extensive research while I was a lecturer, for a generous research grant that started off the project, and for ample research facilities provided by the Universities' Institute for African Studies; to my wife; to B.K. Shiyoue for excellent research assistance; to professors J. van Velsen and A.J.P. Köbben for encouragement and advice; the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO) for supporting the writing of this paper; to J. van Velsen, A.J.P. Köbben and C. van der Geest for commenting on an earlier draft.

2. Throughout this paper I identify the rural society under study by an awkward geographical denomination, instead of using a tribal or ethnic name. Within the ethnic framework of modern Central-African society, the people described here are largely "NKoya", and the same overall picture applies to such neighbouring groups as the "Konde", "Lamba", "Wangwa", "Konde-ililu", "Totela" etc. Elsewhere I argue in detail why, however, this ethnic labelling cannot be taken as a point of departure in an analytic study, but instead in itself constitutes a major, and extremely complex, subject for such study (Van Binsbergen 1975).

3. Demographic conditions important for a further understanding of intergenerational relations in this area are: the very low reproduction rate of the population (documented by both government censuses and by my own demographic data currently being processed; the same phenomenon has been reported from surrounding areas: Evans 1950; Spring Hansen 1972); and the fact that of all 35 Zambian districts, Koma has the largest proportion of people older than 45 years, and nearly the smallest proportion of people younger than 21 years (SKY 1971).

4. In contrast, members of urban UNI-Youth branch tend to be considerably younger, and unmarried.

5. The House of Chiefs is an assembly of some twenty Zambian chiefs, which meets about bi-anually, at the instigation of the President of the Republic, to comment on government policy. It has no formal powers, and mainly seems to represent a device to channel political dissidence exists in rural localities of power that has not been created by the central government, and to render the central government acceptable in the eyes of the "populations. (Constitution of Zambia 1964; House of Chiefs debates 1971).

6. The implication is: conflicts and resentments which cannot be taken to court and therefore have to be resolved informally or else will give rise to sorcery.

7. People voted on two issues: the selection of one Member of Parliament representing Koma, from among three UNI candidates (cf. Van Binsbergen 1975:18f) and whether the one, UNP, presidential candidate, H.E. K.D. Kaunda who has been Zambia's President since 1964, should or should not be president. On this latter issue people from this area tended to vote "no". Thus Zambia's one-party participatory democracy in fact also voting against the ruling party.

8. Terms like "chief", "headman", "senior client", "senior headman" are rather inadequate attempts to represent shades of autonomy and dependence within the shifting, competitive, nominally feudal political system of the region under study, in pre-colonial times. A more systematic use of terms would require a political analysis which falls beyond the scope of this paper.

9. Alternative solutions are: far-reaching participation in European culture (in which a minority managed to succeed) or adoption of the local African culture prevailing near the place of work - but then, in this local culture the predicament described here would also have made itself felt, and have precipitated specific responses similar to the ones listed in the text below, by the time migrants would adopt this local, African culture.
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