Some years ago, Luc De Heusch's *Rois nés d'un cœur de vache* (1982) stimulated J. Vansina to a masterly critique (1983), which, while concentrating on De Heusch's approach, at the same time provided an impressive theoretical and methodological statement on African history and structuralism. In Vansina's words (1983: 342):

'All history as reconstruction of the past is of course mythical. Myths are held to be "true". De Heusch is to be faulted for not using all the traditions about the past, however recent that past, and considering them myth. But, conversely, historical accounts reflect the past. The well-known problem is to find exactly how a set of data reflects the past as well as how it expresses the present.' The succeeding problem, then, is how to reconstruct the past most objectively, and in doing so create a new myth. Not because the account is not true, but because it will be held to be true'.

In this arduous undertaking, Vansina *(ibid.: 343)* sees no role whatsoever for De Heusch's brand of structuralism: '... there never can be a successful structuralist approach to historical reconstruction'.

Given the many types of structuralism and the unpredictable future developments of African history, this statement (or Vansina's 1983 argument as a whole) does not seem to preclude that, within the framework of a sophisticated theory and method, some degree of structuralist *inspiration* could yet benefit African history.

De Heusch claims that the substance of our common oral-historical

1. Cf. De Heusch's angry rejoinder (1986)—but in its lack of specificity little convincing—which essentially restates his well-known earlier position.
2. Emphasis original.
3. Emphasis added.
data is not necessarily a residue of historical events but may be largely a restatement of perennial myths and cosmologies. How to answer, in the face of that challenge, the central question as phrased by Vansina? How to negotiate between

(1) a traditional mythical content as shared throughout a culture or even an extended cultural region,

(2) the myths (in the way of idiosyncratic restructuring) that latterday transmitters of that content (informants impose upon (1) on the basis of their own particular intellectual, artistic, moral and political interests and pursuits, and

(3) the scholarly myths which we create on the basis of both (1) and (2)?

My argument will concentrate on a collection of oral-historical data from central Western Zambia: J. Shimunika's *Likota ly a Bankoya* (Van Binsbergen 1988). It is a first statement of 'Nkoya' history, as a necessary element in the building of a 'Nkoya' ethnic consciousness in recent decades. Its explicit aim is to evoke a glorious 'Nkoya' past—including such times when the ancestors of today's Nkoya were mainly known as 'Mbwele'—as against the bleak contemporary reality, people identifying under a Nkoya ethnic label having suffered humiliation by the dominant Lozi ethnic group ever since the late nineteenth century. Shimunika's discourse, then, is predominantly nationalist and apologetic. However, a more careful reading, involving a minute assessment of text references to gender both implicit and explicit, reveals also a very different statement: one that traces the historical development, in the social history of central Western Zambia, from

(a) a peaceful stateless situation when—against the background of an integrated symbolico-cosmological system—women were politically and ritually dominant, to

(b) male-headed states in which violence predominated, the old symbolico-cosmological system had been shattered, and women had been relegated to a position of social, political and ideological inferiority.

On the basis of the text a very coherent account can be constructed of these alleged developments, in unexpected detail, with regard to such topics as the pre-state situation; the emergence of the institution of *Wene* (sacred kingship); the emergence of states; the male usurpation of *Wene*; concomitant changes in local branches of production under male

initiative; the increasing emphasis on regalia as a male prerogative; the process through which men attempted to capture the dominant societal ideology and to relegate women to a state of symbolic pollution and incompetence; and finally the changing kinship roles of women. A superficial inspection of the symbolic structure in the book suggests at first that this somewhat hidden message has all the characteristics of a myth. It could almost serve as a textbook example of Engels's thesis (1976), yet does not seem to spring from my reading of Engels or other similar products of our North Atlantic tradition (by such authors as Bachofen, Robert Graves, and Sierksma). If it is a myth, it is primarily one created, subconsciously, by Shimunika. How to disentangle the mythical elements involved on the levels of tradition, narrator and analyst?

A structuralist-inspired approach will enable us, first, to reconstruct the more or less static infrastructure of a symbolico-cosmological system whose familiar central oppositions ('wet/dry', 'rain/drought', 'earth/sky', etc.) can all be subsumed under the dominant opposition between 'female/male'—in other words, where all other oppositions can be seen as simple, equivalent transformations of the gender opposition: 'wet/dry = female/male', etc. On this level, statements on gender relations can only be seen as a-historical restatements of cosmology, and not as reflections of historical events involving real men and women in the past; their information content on actual relations between the sexes is zero.

However, a second type of transformations can be detected in the text, in those cases where gender oppositions deviate from, transcend and deny the mutually supporting layers of symbolic analogy that make up the symbolico-cosmological system. Here transformations no longer produce equivalents but *mutants*: an equation like 'wet/dry = female/male' no longer holds and, if anything, is inverted. These mutative transformations mark at least two types of discontinuity:

(a) deviations, in the *Likota* text, from contemporary Nkoya cultural practice;

(b) inconsistencies, in the *Likota* text, within the pattern of oppositions by which a particular past episode is evoked. These mutative transformations can be shown to converge to the same pattern of changes in gender relations in the process of state formation, but they do so in a way

5 Cf. Van Binsbergen 1986b, 1987a. Also, cf. Butterman (1985), who, by concentrating on the colonial and postcolonial phases, nicely complements my argument, with this qualification that her view of precolonial gender relations remains altogether too general: it overlooks women's possible dominance and subsequently changing roles in what could be called the tributary mode of production.

6 Cf. De Mahieu 1985; Van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers 1985, and references cited there.
which obviously escapes all conscious intentions of Shimunika as a neo-traditionalist nationalist (and, incidentally, a male chauvinist). Formally, it might be possible to look at these mutative transformations as instances of what linguists call free variation, a reflection of the narrator’s artistic working upon an infrastructure whose logic he does not consciously perceive or manipulate. However, from a point of view of historical analysis it is much more attractive to interpret these quantum leaps in the symbolic structure as evidence of actual qualitative changes in the relations between the sexes in central Western Zambia and adjacent areas. In other words, I claim that their information content is well above zero. Admittedly, such an approach to the principle of transformation is unorthodox in so far as it defies the structuralist assumption of an integrated and essentially stable set of relationships (deep structure); if the mutative transformations are claimed to reveal not an underlying, timeless Ur-myth (e.g. of sacred kingship), but the effects of actual historical processes, they would be examples of homeostasis (Vansina 1985: 120 sq.) rather than of transformations in the stricter structuralist sense.

In conjunction with the contemporary ethnographic evidence on Nkoya society, and against the background of some limited comparative evidence on women’s political and ritual dominance and decline in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,7 these mutative transformations, more than anything else, indicate that the ‘feminist’ message in Likota lya Bankoya is not a gratuitous, historically irrelevant statement concerning a static cosmological order projected back into the Golden Age, but a reflection of an actual (if difficult to periodize) historical process rechanneling women in central Western Zambia to inferiority in the political, ritual, economic and kinship domains.

Having thus extracted the historical message of Likota lya Bankoya, and familiarized ourselves with the historical changes and symbolic transformations of gender relations in that context, I shall apply these insights to the form and structure of women’s cults that constitute the dominant religious expression in central Western Zambia, suddenly throwing light on issues that I failed to clarify when, almost a decade ago, I wrote Religious Change in Zambia (1981).

« Likota lya Bankoya »

This relatively long text (100,000 characters) forms the pièce de résistance in my oral-historical data on the Nkoya. The first Nkoya Christian

pastor and principal Bible translator, Reverend J. Shimunika (c. 1898-1981), compiled these traditions and committed them to writing in the 1950s-1960s. The text came into my possession in 1977. Reading, translating and editing that text on the basis of my participatory anthropological research among the Nkoya people since 1972 (Van Binsbergen 1988) I was for a long time unaware of the fact it had a wealth of information to offer on precisely the female dimensions of Nkoya state formation. True, it depicted some early rulers as female; but since latterday Nkoya ‘chiefs’ (as the colonial and postcolonial heirs of precolonial rulers are commonly called in anglophone Africa) are invariably male, I read the historical accounts of precolonial rulers in the way any Nkoya reader would: assuming that also those rulers whose gender was not emphatically stated would of course be male, just like their modern heirs, who still carry their dynastic titles and are still called by the same generic name: Mwene (pl. Myene), incumbents of the institution of Wene. It was only when I prepared for a conference on the Position of Women in the Early State, rereading the text in order merely to glean a few apt illustrations from it, that this issue of contemporary male bias was suddenly rendered and the text began to yield its full ‘feminist’ message as summarized above. After more or less solving the more obvious problems of translation,8 I then had to devise some sort of a method to control the exploratory process. I regret that limitations of space force me to condense here to a few lines the methodological considerations that allowed me to read the text properly in the first place; but thus the space is saved to elaborate on the methodology of interpreting that text.

First I had to place the text against such contemporary data on political leadership, ethnic identity and male/female relations as I derived from my ongoing anthropological research.9 It turned out that female royal kin today play only a limited and informal role in the Nkoya royal courts (lukanca) as subsidized by the colonial state. Thus the Nkoya situation today is rather at variance with the prominence of female royal kin as described for other parts of Zambia and Africa in general.10

8. Apart from the New Testament and Psalms (Testamenta... 1952), a short historical pamphlet anonymously published by Reverend Shimunika in the late 1930s (it was largely incorporated into Likota), one or two Primers as formerly used in local mission schools, and a small number of very short pious pamphlets, nothing has ever been published in the Nkoya language; nor has the language ever been studied professionally. So there were obvious problems of orthography, lexis, syntax etc.


10. The special ritual and political roles of female royal kin constitute a recurrent
Partly on that contemporary basis, I could subject the document to the usual historical criticism, trying to identify the purposes and biases of its author and the function of the document in the context in which it had been generated. Specifically: was the document intended as a feminist pamphlet or had the myth as stated above inadvertently crept into a text whose manifest goals and functions were quite different? As it turned out, the compiler's biases as a Nkoya nationalist, a Christian, a reader of published accounts of Zambian history, a member of a Nkoya royal family and as a member of the male gender, can all be detected in his book (e.g. in his omission of discussions of slavery, female puberty rites, and wars between the 'Nkoya'-Mbwele and the 'Luvalé' on the Upper Zambezi); but these very biases make it impossible to view Likota as a conscious feminist statement. Likota lya Bankoya was intended as a powerful declaration of Nkoya identity and history in the face of arrogant Lozi attitudes vis-à-vis the Nkoya in recent decades. Whatever vision of gender relations crept in must be attributed to unconscious mechanisms stemming from the author’s sharing in the Nkoya culture and collective historical experience.

A further step involved the operationalization of the procedures and indicators (linguistic, contextual and symbolic) through which I could detect gender in the predominantly gender-unspecific Nkoya usage. In this I rely on such limited gender specificity as kinship terminology and the terms for royal office contain. For instance, whoever is presented as the marriage partner of a Mukwetunga (= royal escort; pl. Bakwetunga) is intended, by the Nkoya author and his informants, as female; but whoever is married with a Lihano (= royal wife; pl. Mahano) is intended as male. On the basis of such close-reading a specific gender could be assigned to the majority of names and titles mentioned in Likota.

This raised a further question: gender symbolism is likely to have led to all sorts of spurious projections of present-day gender connotations into the past onto real or fictitious actors. In other words, far from taking Likota at face value, we must decode it in the light of the sophisticated approaches scholarship has developed for the handling of traditional oral sources. For Likota’s message as regards changing gender relations (a development from pre-state female leadership to male-dominated statehood) might just amount to a timeless statement of a cosmology or world view, in which a Golden Age of peace and harmony with Nature happens to have female connotations (and therefore is presented in terms of a spuriously projected female leadership), while the Iron Age (in Ovidian, not archaeological terms) with all the nastiness of the human condition takes on male connotations.

The specific context of Central African political structures and their history offers us yet a second possibility of symbolically interpreting gender relations. Often the political relations (in terms of hierarchy and seniority, political versus ritual supremacy, autochthonous versus immigrant status) between certain hereditary dynastic titles are expressed in a kinship idiom (‘perpetual kinship’; cf. Schecter 1980a). This idiom can be one of consanguinity (where title X is called the ‘younger brother' of title Y), but it may also be one of marital relations, where title A is the ‘wife' of title B. A sacred form of the latter is that the secular title B has as its complement the priestly title A: his ‘spirit wife’. In such cases one could expect—especially with reference to a distant, mythical past—the incumbents of title A to be represented as women, and those of title B as men, regardless of their actual biological gender. Towards the end of my argument I shall consider whether this offers a revealing perspective upon historical gender relations among the Nkoya.

Limitations of space do not allow us to dwell on the specific surface content of Likota’s message. The summary as given above will have to convince the reader that Likota does offer a remarkably detailed picture, step by step, of the alleged change from pre-state clans, via female-centred sacred kingship (Wene), to male-headed states. We shall proceed directly to the analysis of its deep structure, and such mutative transformations as appear to have been effected upon it.

« Likota lya Bankoya » as Cosmology and as History: Aspects of Nkoya Symbolism and its Transformations

Can we make history out of Likota’s detailed account of a transition from female-headed clans to male-headed states? In attempting to do so, can we benefit from the structuralist inspiration yet preserve our historiographic sophistiation?

Identifying Likota’s Symbolic Structure

In Likota lya Bankoya, as in similar accounts, we can detect a detailed symbolic structure that amounts to a total world view. The immediate surface manifestations of this structure consist of such pairs of oppositions as listed in the first and second column of Table I; all can be backed by literal quotations from the text, for which however space is lacking here (cf. Van Binsbergen 1986b; 1988).
TABLE I. - MAIN SYMBOLIC OPPOSITIONS IN « LIKOTA LYA BANKOYA »

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Opposition</th>
<th>Domain*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ascription</td>
<td>achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bird</td>
<td>game animal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>container (gourd, basket, pot)</td>
<td>power politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cosmological legitimation</td>
<td>c/p/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drum (female)</td>
<td>c/e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fish, fishing</td>
<td>c/p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>hutembwisha banhanga</em>* (female puberty rites)</td>
<td>c/e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>life</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lizard</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>menstruation</td>
<td>c/p/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moon</td>
<td>c/p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mother</td>
<td>c/p/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Mwene (ruler)</td>
<td>c/p/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>natural death</td>
<td>c/p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>order</td>
<td>c/e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peace</td>
<td>c/e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rain</td>
<td>c/p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rain redistribution</td>
<td>c/p/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sister</td>
<td>c/p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sister's son</td>
<td>c/p/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sky</td>
<td>c/p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water</td>
<td>c/p/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wild fruits</td>
<td>c/p/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*wulozi (sorcery)</td>
<td>c/p</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* c = cosmology; e = economy; p = politics; s = social organization.
** Not explicitly mentioned in Likota lyu Banhyo.

As indicated in the right-hand column of Table I, these oppositions belong to four partly overlapping domains of symbolic reference: cosmol-ogy, economy, politics and social organization. In Table I, therefore, the oppositions are presented per domain rather than alphabetically, while for each domain they are loosely grouped around common themes such as natural phenomena, natural species, etc.

Apart from the grouping of the material around fairly self-evident themes, the information in Table II goes beyond that in Table I on two points.

Under the heading ‘abstractions and generalities’ I have taken the liberty to spell out some of the obvious distinctions (such as ‘horizontal/vertical’; ‘cold/hot’ etc.) underlying the surface oppositions appearing in Likota; no doubt a much more penetrating semantic analysis could be

**TABLE II. - SYMBOLIC OPPOSITIONS IN « LIKOTA LYA BANKOYA » ORGANIZED INTO FOUR SYMBOLIC DOMAINS, AND ARRANGED THEMATICALLY.**

**Cosmological Opposotions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(natural phenomena:)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(natural species):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*fish, fishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*wild fruits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lizard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>menstruation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*hutembwisha banhanga (female rites)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>wulozi</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(abstractions and generalities, partly made explicit by analyst):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-human nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supernatural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vertical (below/above the earth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>container (gourd, basket; pot?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>natural death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>openness, and action involving smooth contact over extensive surface (pour, pound, fill, hold; cf. vulva)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cosmological legitimation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ascription</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Economic Opposotions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(implements:)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>container (gourd, basket; pot?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(environmental conditions:)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*fish, fishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*wild fruits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>redistribution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MEMORY, MYTH AND HISTORY**

*307*
Political Oppositions
(status, power base)

- **Muwe ne**
  - cosmological legitimation
  - ascription
  - **kwtemboisha hanhanga** (female rites)
    - (insignia etc.):
      - container
      - menstruation
      - drum (female)
      - moon
      - natural death
      - order
      - peace
      - redistribution
      - *wulozi

- **Mukwetunga**
  - power politics
  - achievement
  - **mukanda** (males rites)
    - (social processes):
      - weapon
      - blood from wounds
      - drum (male)
      - *mpande

Social Oppositions
(demarcation of principal social categories)

- **kwtemboisha hanhanga** (female rites)
  - menstruation
  - mother
  - sister
  - (kin categories):
    - son
    - brother
    - sister's son

- **mukanda** (males rites)
  - blood from wounds
  - (status, the social process, the handling of conflicts):
    - monopoly, hoarding
    - *malele

- **Muwe ne**
  - ascription
  - redistribution
  - peace
  - container
  - order
  - natural death
  - *wulozi

- **Mukwetunga**
  - achievement
  - violence
  - weapon
  - disruption
  - violent death
  - *malele

* Opposition not harmonious with gender opposition.

made on this point, but for our present argument Table II will suffice. Even in its present form the cosmological entries in Table II, while **grosso modo** reflecting Nkoya culture, clearly pertain to a symbolic system which has a very wide distribution throughout South Central Africa; fragments and/or equivalent transformations of this system may be gleaned from almost any set of ethnographic and mythical data recorded anywhere in the subcontinent.

Identifying Transformations in Likota ly a Bankoya

The second new feature of Table II is crucial to our present argument on the evolution of gender relations. It turns out that, in all four domains, nearly all specific pairs of opposition are used, in Likota, to highlight another fundamental opposition: gender. The male/female opposition is the central axis on which the symbolic universe of Likota hinges, no matter whether we look at symbolical representations of the cosmological domain, the economy, politics or social organization.12

The evidence is so overwhelming that it was easy to indicate in Table II, by an asterisk, those few entries that appear to form exceptions:

* fish, fishing
* wild fruits
* wulozi

In Likota ly a Bankoya, these entries are presented in association with a gender dichotomy, but such a gender association is not borne out by contemporary Nkoya cultural practice; therefore these entries appear to be the result of specific transformations which the author of Likota ly a Bankoya, or his informants, have performed upon the Nkoya cultural material.

For while *malele* is a category of neutral magic almost exclusively associated with *Myene*, nothing in the rest of Nkoya culture outside Likota suggests that women are more closely associated with sorcery (*wulozi*) than men.

A similar argument holds for the two entries having to do with the extracting of food stuffs from the natural environment, and their pro-

12. This does not mean that, under the hegemony of the gender opposition, the Nkoya symbolic system as mediated through Likota ly a Bankoya is anything near consistent. E.g. the species in Table II feature a confusing number of extremities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>female</th>
<th>male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bird (biped)</td>
<td>game animal (quadruped)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lizard (quadruped)</td>
<td>python (legless)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The underlying logic, if any, is not readily spotted: the 'bird/game animal' opposition could be relegated to the more fundamental one between the male dry land and the female sky/water, but it is hard to define the distinctive ecological niches of the two classes of reptiles—or it should be that pythons are rather less appreciated around places of human habitation. No doubt, further research could bring up plausible missing links, but these ought to be treated with great caution: as VANSINA rightly observes (1983: 310 sq.; cf. VAN BINSBERGEN & SCHOFFMANN 1985) the extreme flexibility and absence of methodological rigour in this sort of structural analysis creates an ideal setting for interpretational artifacts.
14. Such symbolic éléments that refer to the proporties of the entire socio-ideologkal
13. However, fpr the nineteenth Century male slaves, who were themselves engaged
across that boundary.

and transgressions that (at life crisis ritual, sexual activity, etc.) occur
evoking the gender boundary, and suggesting the crossings, exchanges
culinity, fish seems to represent a symbol of gender définition
—both
ambiguity of her status—which Nkoya culture expresses in terms of her

a fully-fledged woman: she has to come to terms with the liminal
is herself not
male symbol, just as the female novice after
menanhe

from catching anything but the smallest fry. Fish is not a clearcut
when fishing, but have to remain on the bank of the pool—which prevents

other, gender-indifferent symbolic oppositions (e.g. 'nature/culture',
reverted to in famine periods is exclusively in the hands of women.13

Other, gender-indifferent symbolic oppositions (e.g. 'nature/culture',
'forest/village') seem to underlie the opposition 'wild fruits/nshima'; its
presentation in Likota, as gender-related again appears to form a
transformation.

A similar opposition is posited, in Likota, between fish and nshima.
As one of the three standard relishes to accompany a dish of nshima
(the others are meat and vegetables), and therefore a likely male comple-
ment of that female food, fish is yet gender-ambiguous. The symbolic
role of fish in contemporary Nkoya society is most articulate in the field
of female puberty ritual: virtually all food taboos to which the female
novice is subjected during the time of her seclusion revolve on various
species of fish; likewise, women are not allowed to descend into the water
when fishing, but have to remain on the bank of the pool—which prevents
them from catching anything but the smallest fry. Fish is not a clearcut
male symbol, just as the female novice after menarche is herself not
a fully-fledged woman: she has to come to terms with the liminal
ambiguity of her status—which Nkoya culture expresses in terms of her
being possessed by the anti-social blood spirit Nkang'a, to be brought
under control by the puberty rites (cf. Turner 1967; Van Binsen-
berg 1987a). Rather than being a symbol of either femininity or mas-
culinity, fish seems to represent a symbol of gender definition per se—both
evoking the gender boundary, and suggesting the crossings, exchanges
and transgressions that (at life crisis ritual, sexual activity, etc.) occur
across that boundary.14
with history as we define it academically. Whatever it presents as male or female is so presented primarily for cosmological and symbolic reasons, regardless of historical accuracy.

Does this mean that we end up with nothing but a generalized and timeless statement on human society in general and the Nkoya condition in particular, presented in a static and unalterable idiom of gender relations—merely because that is what Nkoya symbolism hinges on, and with just as little specific relation to the actual evolution of gender relations in Nkoya society as any literary work has vis-à-vis the society in which it was created?

It is on this point that we shall leave De Heusch behind us. At the surface level the symbolic structure of Likota lya Bankoya keeps reverting to the same, and partly universal, oppositions, but it does not do so in a static, timeless pattern that is repeated throughout the argument, regardless of the historical period we are referring to. In this respect, Table II is slightly misleading: we have yet to explore the dynamics of mutative transformation through which these pairs are connected to one another, gather tension and direction, and thus may generate meaning, emotion, truth and history—in a work of art as much as in a culture, and presumably also in a contribution to ethno-history such as Likota is.

If we aspire to crack some historical code that we hope lies hidden in this ethno-historical statement, we must look for contradictions that, on closer scrutiny, upset and disrupt its tautological unity.15 Such contradictions we may then take for the sediment of historical processes, of which contemporary actors and informants are so unaware that they have failed to process these manifestations and bring them in line with the overall symbolic structure that shapes their conscious argument. Above we have already encountered some possible instances of such contradictions or mutative transformations: the oppositions 'fish, fishing/nshima', 'wild fruits/nshima' and 'umulosi/malele'.

On closer analysis the text of Likota lya Bankoya turns out to offer many more such instances, in a way that is particularly conducive to an academically historical reconstruction of the evolution of gender relationships. Reiterating, once again, the pairs of oppositions that we have considered in Tables I and II, the essential data are presented in the right-hand column of Table III.

Thus, on second analysis, the majority of symbolic pairs in Likota lya Bankoya, that at first glance could be read as a timeless cosmological statement on the human condition, turns out to be involved in significant transformations, which all are about the changes that institutions, organisa-

15. Much in the same way as I took the internal contradictions, the lack of systematic unity, in the contemporary religious scene in central Western Zambia as a manifestation of historically articulated socio-ideological subsystems (VanBinsbergen 1981; VanBinsbergen & Geschiere 1985: 270-278).
the emphasis on nineteenth-century father/daughter relationships in Likota

this opposition in fact stands for two oppositions: (a) female Mwene / male Muhwetungwa, and (b) the two ways in which a man can relate to the highest political office, either as incumbent (Mwene) himself, or as husband (Muhwetungwa) of a female incumbent. Likota presents transformations of both oppositions in a nineteenth-century context: the result is 'male Mwene / female Likota'

violent death, murder

see: natural death/violent death, murder

no conspicuous transformation in Likota

see: rain/fire

insistence on exclusive royal rights is mainly discussed by reference to male Mwene, yet the latter are in other contexts depicted as sharing out their tribute; not a very convincing case of transformation

the obvious transformation in gender terms would have been that from 'sister/brother' to 'wife/husband'; although a central theme in royal mythology and ritual among the neighbouring Lozi, in Likota this incestuous transformation only appears in the most oblique form: female Mwene Likambi lets herself be represented by a magical doll; the latter marries male Mwene Shihoka I and causes his death

perhaps the fact that gradually sisters give way to sister's son as Mwene's companions can be seen as a historically revealing transformation

in the story of Kapeshi, the ladder, and its downfall, constitutes an attempted but abortive transformation

see: sky/earth; not a very convincing case of transformation

see: rain/fire

this opposition seems in itself the result of a transformation which (under the influence of increasing male dominance in both the economy and the ideology) presents two predominantly female products as reflecting a gender opposition

this opposition seems in itself the result of a transformation which (under the influence of an increasingly dominant male ideology) presents two inherent aspects of Wene as reflecting a gender opposition
tional forms and ideologies undergo, and which all converge systematically to the same two themes of state formation and increasing (though ultimately checked) male domination. Of course the compiler of Likota was free to select and reshape the contents of the actual stories he included. But as to their underlying symbolic structure, he had little choice (since that part of his job escaped his own conscious deliberations) but to copy the tensions and transformations to which he was programmed as a member of his society and as one sharing in the collective Nkoya historical experience. For it is clear now that the text of Likota is in no way a simple statement emulating Nkoya society and symbolism as it exists today.

One could disagree as to the extent to which the contemporary situation revolves on the gender opposition. This is partly a matter of secondary, academic interpretation. We are dealing here—Vansina (1983) made this very clear—with a realm of anthropological enquiry where intuition, persuasiveness, artfulness and cunning, more than reliable, valid and intersubjective method, form the anthropologist’s stock-in-trade—the analysts themselves, foremost De Heusch and Lévi-Strauss, often posing, or imposing, as culture heroes. However, a symbolic system is not unrelated to the economic and political structures of the society in which it is found. Contemporary Nkoya society (if one could at all discuss it as a distinct entity—which it is only in a very relative sense, both geographically, linguistically and ethnically)—is a complex social formation composed of a number of mutually linked (articulated) modes of production, including a domestic mode centring on the rural household, but also the remnants of the Wene-centred tributary mode of production whose historical forms Likota helps us to unravel, and dominated by industrial capitalism as mediated by the modern state. Modes of production revolve on their central relation of exploitation, and in only one of the constituent modes, the domestic one, can that central relation be properly represented in terms of gender (the exploitation of women’s labour by male elders). Classical anthropology might perhaps be tempted to treat even the present-day symbolic system of Nkoya society as solidly unitary, and emphasize aspects of domestic symbolism; but a more sophisticated approach would have to incorporate that domestic, gender-centred component in a much wider framework also encompassing the imagery (including its distortions and transformations) of indigenous statehood, of modern political and economic incorporation, of the national state, urban life and capitalism. Against this background, the gender-centred universe of Likota must itself be seen as a transformation performed by the Nkoya author and his informants. And that applies a fortiori to the central theme of our argument: the emphasis, in Likota, on female Myene whereas today all Myene are male.

From Transformations to History

Having thus identified one main type of mutative transformation in Likota (from twentieth-century cultural practice to the body of the text—presenting all Myene as male in accordance with contemporary cultural practice—), within that text the material in Table III allows us to trace yet another type of mutative transformation: from the dominant imagery in the text, to exceptions where that imagery is inverted or ignored. Read as a timeless symbolic statement on gender relations, the message of Likota lya Bankoya is very far from consistent; its fundamental orientation is, time and again, denied and contradicted, precisely on the crucial issue of gender, and the author is allowed such inconsistency because, after all, he is supposed to write history—the inconsistencies are, already at the folk level, implicitly if not explicitly explained as historical transformations.

Neither does this complete our picture of various types of transformations. A diagram may clarify the complexity of the situation—which, however, in no way appears to be a-typical in the field of oral history.

![Diagram of historical transfer between symbolic structures and possible transformations](image)

Historical transfer between symbolic structures, and possible transformations, between early ‘Mbwele’ society, contemporary ‘Nkoya’ society, and the image of society in Likota lya Bankoya.
The diagram presents the historical argument as an exchange between two parallel planes separated in time:

(i) early Mbwela society—the society of the ancestors of contemporary Nkoya on the Upper Zambezi and further across the Congo-Zambezi watershed, sometime in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries;¹⁶

(ii) contemporary Nkoya society. Somewhere between these planes hovers—of uncertain shape and historical location—

(iii) the image of society as presented in Likota lyam Bankoya.

Both historical societies (i) and (ii), as well as Likota (iii), have a symbolic structure. For simplicity's sake, let us decide to ignore any internal dialectics within the symbolic structure of early Mbwela society and contemporary Nkoya society. The symbolic dialectics within Likota we have explored above. In the diagram they are rendered as D (the transformations performed on contemporary symbolic material, so that Likota's symbolic contents do not match present-day Nkoya cultural practice), whereas the transformations which internally provide alternatives to the dominant symbolic structure of the book are represented as C. Within the framework of an overall historical continuity involving social change on all aspects of society (not displayed in the diagram), the contemporary symbolic system of the Nkoya can be said to be the product of historical transfer from early Mbwela society; most likely, this transfer involved significant transformations, shown as A in the diagram. Finally, it is likely that the symbolic system of Likota is not entirely a transformational product from contemporary Nkoya society (along the lines of D), but also has received some more direct input from the past; however, to avoid jumping to conclusions let us also assume that this input has been subject to transformations (B).

With the aid of the diagram we can now reformulate the methodological difficulties of making history out of Likota, and of using it as a source for the historical evolution of gender relations. What we really seek to know is the past: (i); however, we have no direct evidence of it, but only transformed transfers or projections: (ii) and (iii). We perceive a dialectical structure in (iii). Although some allowance will have to be made for any dialectics present in both (i) and (ii), I submit that we should interpret these dialectics primarily as the result of the confrontation between two sets of mutative transformations, D and B: one a projection from the present, the other a more direct transfer from the past we wish to penetrate. Admittedly, we still lack a method that would allow us to distinguish, in (iii), between the effects of D and those of B.

It is doubtful whether such distinction is possible without additional information on the past from other sources. But I believe that even without such a method we have already come close to cracking Likota's historical code. It is no accident that the diagram looks remarkably like a classic feedback set-up, and even more like an optics drawing. Just like an optical grid magnifies the effects of light waves bumping onto each other so as to allow us the macroscopic vision of interference patterns (and thus to measure otherwise unmeasurable, microscopic phenomena), the emphatic contradictions (C) between a dominant and an underlying pattern of symbolism in Likota (iii) offer us more than a hint as to the nature of the essential transformation (A) that connects contemporary Nkoya society to early Mbwela society, and (since we do have ample ethnographic evidence on the former) allow us to trace earlier forms of contemporary institutions and their gender aspect. In these mutative transformations the real historical message of Likota is encoded—safe from conscious manipulation and personal biases of the Nkoya compiler and his informants—, waiting to be deciphered. It is on this level that Likota lyam Bankoya, although compiled and written in a way very different from academic historiography, is yet a statement on history that can be taken seriously and even literally—not, of course, in its details, but in the broad patterns of mutative transformation it offers. We only need the obstetrics of a historical and anthropological method to bring these patterns to the surface.

While this may go some way to convince the reader of the presence of a coded yet partially discernable past in Likota, the possibilities of making history out of this pattern remain limited.

First the problem of periodization. We clearly perceive a number of layers: the pre-statal layer, the rise of Wene in the hands of women, the rise of states led by men, the consolidation of such states; and we have detected the transitions between these layers, in the way of gender-articulated transformations in the narrative material. But we cannot simply assign a date to each of these layers! All the common chronological distortions that have been noted for other oral traditions are also found in Likota lyam Bankoya. It is impossible to draw a sharp boundary between mythical and historical time. As regards genealogical positions, the well-known telescoping effect occurs, and in the Nkoya case it is enhanced by the institution of name inheritance between generations. When we count the generations between the first female Mwene Libupe, and her twentieth-century successors, the limited number of intervening generations would suggest her reign to have been in the eighteenth century.
Likota? the basic story of Ruwej and Chibinda Ilunga, and thus the thème of Central Africa. Male usurpation of female leadership, is found in many parts of South Africa. Is this not a reason to close the subject of early female leadership, and attempt a totally different explanation of the relevant accounts in Likota? The institution of perpetual kinship allows us to interpret the early female Myene simply as the one, symbolically female, half of a pair that has been distorted in the process of tradition: the ‘female’, relatively autochthonous Mbwela element which (did not, as some other Mbwele, pursue the option of partial local assimilation to the Lunda and Luvalu immigrants but) moved away to Kaoma district, while the ‘male’, invading, dominant element remained on the Upper Zambezi in the form of dynastic titles among the contemporary Lunda and Luvalu.

This surely is an attractive way of looking at the complex evidence. It would help to explain (in terms of both a traumatic repression from memory, and geographical displacement over hundreds of kilometers) why the Lunda and Luvalu, who27 played such a dramatic role in Mbwela-Nkoya history, yet are virtually absent in Likota. It would clear up the puzzling rôle of the Humbu: Likota claims them to have been the main Musumban antagonists of the early Myene, yet among the ethnic subgroups on the Upper Zambezi today the Humbu have the strongest Mbwela-Nkoya connotations of all. Perhaps the Bakwetunga (royal escort), providing the only, slight suggestion of perpetual kinship in the whole of Likota,28 in fact form the missing links between the Nkoya flying to the south-east and the invading Lunda and Luvalu. Perhaps Nkoya traditions from Kaoma district must present the earliest Myene as women, because these leaders were politico-structurally the ‘female’ components in chains of perpetual kinship where the ‘male’ part was occupied by rulers in the Musumban system; perhaps the Nkoya Myene could only become ‘male’ after they had, through out-migration, asserted or regained their independence vis-à-vis that system. If this reasoning is historically sound, one would expect the incorporated Mbwela elements which have remained on the Upper Zambezi to still have gender-articulated ties of perpetual kinship (as ‘wives’) with Lunda and Luvalu dynastic titles. It is then certainly not from association with the latter at the Upper Zambezi that the incidental, and invariably vague Nkoya references (not just in Likota) to Mwaat Yaamv originate; they either refer to a pre-Upper Zambezi phase in Mbwela history; or (after the notion of Nkoya/Musumba antagonism has gone lost to contemporary Nkoya informants) they merely form a twentieth-century concession to the immense prestige the Mwaat Yaamv title has in much of Zambia.

The elegance of the perpetual kinship argument would be that it allows us a way around the tantalizing questions that the structuralist analysis of the data in Likota raises: for it would simply mean that the Nkoya Myene at no point in their history have been biological women. With this argument, the rejection of and separation from the Lunda

17. According to traditional accounts hailing from those ethnic groups; cf. PAPSTEIN 1978; SCHICHTER 1986a; White 1949, 1952.
18. Their recruitment from generation to generation is described, in Likota, in ways suggesting that the office of royal escort forms part of an enduring political structure of clans and factions.
heritage becomes even more emphasized, and we have found additional reasons to understand why—much to their later detriment—the main features of Lunda political organization (positional succession and perpetual kinship) are virtually absent in Nkoya states. The argument would perhaps also take care of those Myene who, long after the departure from the Upper Zambezi, are still represented as female: Shikanda, Shakalongo. Were these also politico-structurally female (but biologically male), in a set of perpetual kinship comprising, on the male side, the Mutondo title (for Shikanda’s case) and the Kahare title (for Shakalongo’s)?

Occam’s razor, however, would suffer several major dents. Just as one never encounters only one totem but totems can only function as group symbols in a structure of several mutually opposed groups (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1962), gender projection in the case of perpetual kinship is only meaningful if there is a clear dichotomy between male and female titles—and that not just between one historical period and the next, but within one historical period. When any one historical period has only women to show, as is the case in the early history of Wene among the Nkoya, a symbolic explanation in terms of perpetual kinship does not take us very far. Also, the argument in terms of disrupted perpetual kinship entirely fails to explain why, in passages referring to the periods after the departure from the Upper Zambezi, the female element in Wene continues to be stressed to the extent it is in Likota. And why this tallies with the ethnographic and historical evidence on nineteenth-century female political leadership elsewhere in the region.

For the time being, I would consider the politico-structural explanation of the female dimension of Nkoya states as an interesting idea, with some heuristic potential for future reinterpretations of Upper Zambezi history, for which probably new data will have to be collected. Once formulated, however, it does no longer allow us to take Likota literally on the point of women as early Myene. At the baseline of Nkoya history, we now have a case both for and against female leadership, and so far the competition is undecided. But this does not seem to invalidate the symbolic argument I have put forward, as long as we limit its scope to the reconstruction of more recent changes in gender relations: the last few centuries prior to the imposition of the colonial state. For that recent past, the transformations listed in Table III—against the background of contemporary Nkoya ethnography and comparative evidence throughout the region—appear to me to constitute convincing evidence. This would mean that Likota’s narrative, from female-headed clans to male-headed states, would cease to be just a myth, and may become a form of history as we know it, for the more recent past.

The processes we are trying to reconstruct here are hard to locate not only in time but also in space, and according to socio-cultural group. It is clear that the first, more clearly mythical phases of Likota’s argument refer not to the present-day Nkoya homeland in and around Kaoma district, but to economic and political structures prevailing centuries ago at the Upper Zambezi or perhaps still further afield: north of the Zambezi-Kongo watershed. It is equally clear that these reconstructions do not really deal with ‘the Nkoya’ but with the ‘Mbwela/proto-Nkoya’. Of course ‘Nkoya’ is a political identity which only articulated itself in the middle of the nineteenth century, as the name of the leaders and subjects involved in the state structure centring on the lukena (royal court) of Myene Likota; and it is only in the second half of the twentieth century that ‘Nkoya’ became an ethnic label of a much wider scope. The use, in Likota, of mythical material (such as the ladder into heaven, and the menstruating female ruler being deprived of her regalia) that has a wide distribution all over South Central Africa, suggests that here layers are touched which may be older than the later ethnic articulation of social groups such as found today in the subcontinent. One wonders to what extent a deep, millennia-old layer of common Bantu symbolic heritage ‘à la De Heusch’ could be involved here—or are we just dealing with coded references to the much more recent shared past of a Southern Zaire half a millennium ago?

Although many questions remain, it is my contention that ‘ethno-history’, in this case, has survived remarkably well the confrontation with academic canons of historiography. I believe that the Likota text does allow us to perceive the process of state formation in Western Zambia during the second half of the present millennium as entailing, inter alia, specific changes in gender relations—and that, at least for the nineteenth century, we can pinpoint those changes, not of course by taking oral traditions like those of Likota Iya Bankoya at face value, but by processing them methodically to a point where they surrender their rich surface content and underlying deep structure.

While my argument may have been ‘elegant’ (it would have been more so if the various types of transformations had been subjected to further theorizing), and while it does seek to derive inspiration from De Heusch’s work, it also employs forms of refutation and ‘proof’ not uncommon in the evolving methodology of oral history. Meanwhile, the real proof of the pudding is in the eating, and I shall conclude by demonstrating how the tentative insights gained in the history of gender relations in central Western Zambia on their turn illuminate a different set of data: those on twentieth-century cults of affliction.

Beyond « Religious Change in Zambia »: The Religious Transformation of Women’s Political Power

A-moral, non-communal cults of affliction, such as Bituma, Mowa and Bindele, constitute a religious complex which is conspicuously absent
from Likota lya Bankoya, yet can be said to dominate as a religious expression among the Nkoya today, and particularly among Nkoya women. In Religious Change in Zambia (1982), I presented descriptions of these cults both in their rural and their urban forms, traced their recent history, and argued that these cults expressed the process through which, in the social formation of Western Zambia, the domestic mode of production became articulated to a tributary mode hinging on exploiting chief's courts, and to the capitalist mode of production locally penetrating in the form of peripheral mercantilism, in the hands of Umbundu and Swahili traders. I went at great length to argue that this class of cults should not be seen as the expression of any one of the modes of production involved, but (on a more abstract level) as an expression of the articulation process itself. Not only was this supposed to explain the rise of such cults in the first place, but also their continued dominance: largely in the hands of women (as both cult leaders and adepts), and straddling both rural and urban sections of contemporary Nkoya life, these cults were claimed to constitute a major instrument to transfer men's earnings in the modern capitalist sector, to women who are largely debarred from participation in the capitalist mode of production.

While the analytical power of such an interpretation is discussed in Religious Change in Zambia, the argument was far from conclusive—nor did it pretend to be so. Despite the lengthy theoretical sections of the book (particularly in ch. 1, 7 and 8) a considerable part of my then emerging theory of 'layered' structure (with each layer corresponding with a mode of production) and transformation, linking ideological and material processes, confrontations and struggles, remained implicit. Taking the domestic mode of production as my base line, the interrelation between the tributary and the capitalist mode of production, emerging at about the same time, remained admittedly vague. I could not account for the female preponderance in these cults:20 was there anything in the articulation process that particularly affected the relations between the sexes? And although I had long been puzzled by the symbolic and formal correspondence between those cults (such as Bituma) and royal institutions in Western Zambia, the articulation perspective did not seem to offer explanations here:

There are some interesting parallels between chiefs and healers which however are too imperfectly documented to be discussed in greater detail. Various musical instruments (the nje 'mba xylophone and the mupande hourglass drum), and other paraphernalia (like the hufu eland-tail fly-switch and the mupande conus-shell disc) were associated with the new dynasties coming from the north and establishing in the form of peripheral mercantilism, in the hands of Umbundu and Swahili traders. I went at great length to argue that this class of cults should not be seen as the expression of any one of the modes of production involved, but (on a more abstract level) as an expression of the articulation process itself. Not only was this supposed to explain the rise of such cults in the first place, but also their continued dominance: largely in the hands of women (as both cult leaders and adepts), and straddling both rural and urban sections of contemporary Nkoya life, these cults were claimed to constitute a major instrument to transfer men's earnings in the modern capitalist sector, to women who are largely debarred from participation in the capitalist mode of production.

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20. I am indebted to my colleagues R. Buitenhuijs and J. M. Schoffeleers for stressing this point in various discussions we had on the subject.

21. The text between brackets corrects a printing error in the original.
new cults of affliction. Even if my idealistic interpretation of the latter's emergence still sounds somehow convincing, it could only be one side of the story. For what ideological pressures were at work on the other side: that of the non-entrepreneurs, the non-participants in the new modes of production which have invaded the domestic community from perhaps the eighteenth century? And what actual flow of goods and services, what actual processes of appropriation, attended the ensuing ideological struggles between entrepreneurs and others? There are some indications, both in oral and in written sources relating to the nineteenth century, of what did go on, e.g. accounts of the caravan trade, of production at chief's lukena being largely realized by slaves, and of how elders trapped youth (their children and grandchildren, but particularly their sister's sons) into a pawnship that rapidly deteriorated into commercial slavery. But these data did not throw much light on the positions of women, and how alterations therein might have called forth the specific ideological response of the new cults of affliction.

Although most of the theoretical loose ends remain, and while I shrink from spelling out, and mapping out, the specific symbolic transformations involved, my argument in the present paper is a step forward as far as the interpretation of the specific historical and ethnographic evidence is concerned. It sets the context of the political, economic, kinship-structural and ideological discrediting of women in central Western Zambia. While we cannot claim exclusive female political leadership for the early periods of Nkoya state formation, our transformational analysis (and the way it has vindicated the ethno-historical account) allows us to conclude that in the course of the nineteenth century women further declined in status and were more and more debarred from political high office, ultimately even entirely so. When then, in the twentieth century, we see female cults featuring regalia and royal symbolism in general, the following conclusion presents itself: under the rise of male dominance, the political idiom of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been transformed into a religious idiom of the twentieth century. The losers strike back in a new way: 'from queens to cult leaders'. The struggle and the politics of the process are clear. This would mean that the new cults are not so much in themselves abstract expressions of articulation; their adepts were primarily not people engaging in relations of production beyond the domestic community, but women who fought back as their men (as traders, rulers, etc.) were engaging in such tributary and especially mercantile-capitalist relations of production. Already in the nineteenth century the women had definitely lost this struggle on the material and political plane.24 Now, through the new cults, the women were soon to regain some of their terrain. Little wonder that these cults came to provide a lever to bring the spoils of men's operation in a wider capitalist sphere within women's reach. Meanwhile, with the increasing incapacitation of the (male) remnants of Wene on the political plane as dominated by the modern state (Van Binsbergen 1986a, 1987b), one can only wonder what potential at political renewal remains stored in these cults, in the hands of women.

With all the faults that Vansina—on the basis of a sound academic conception of history—has exposed so convincingly and appropriately, De Heusch's work has continued to inspire historians and anthropologists working on oral-historical materials from Central and South Central Africa. This inspiration does not spring from De Heusch's handling of history itself, but from the fact that he claims access to an essentially static, a-historical base line—an 'archaeology of Bantu thought' which seeks to break through in all sorts of transformations and permutations over vast geographical areas and historical periods.

On the other hand the historian is challenged to refute De Heusch's a-historical assumptions as to the unadulterated continuity of primordial symbolic and cosmological arrangements; in this way, De Heusch's archaeology of fossilized African thought can become a history of ideas and ideologies—something scholarship has hitherto not dared to expect from oral history.

On the other hand De Heusch has managed to sensitize us for underlying symbolic oppositions and transformations in the oral-historical materials we are handling, thus opening up fields of reconstruction and historical criticism that may otherwise have remained closed. A structuralist inspiration offers combs with ever more delicate teeth with which to work upon the deeper symbolic implications, contradictions and

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22. This remains to be done particularly for all oppositions that do not have conspicuous transformations within the body of Lihota bya Bankoya: we should assess whether perhaps they have transformations in 19th-20th century female cults.


24. Although an extensive discussion of what could be gleaned from Lihota with regard to the ideological processes involved makes it very clear that the men never effectively captured the ideology; cf. Van Binsbergen 1986b, 1988.

25. If only as a persuasive literary genre, beyond the canons of empirical scholarship; cf. Vansina 1983: 329 sq.

26. Recent attempts to salvage, with the aid of a complex and explicit methodology, what little remnants of history the traditions might yet contain, while acknowledging the amount of a-historical archaeological and cosmological projections therein, include Miller 1980; Schoffeleers 1985. Much of recent precolonial historiography of Zambia and neighbouring areas can be seen to struggle with this problem: e.g. Hoover 1980; Papstein 1978, 1980, 1985; Prins 1978, 1979, 1980; Reeve 1981; Roberts 1973; Schecter 1980a, 1980b. In my own work, similar attempts to thresh history out of data which initially would appear to be a-historical or synchronous reflections of structure, and to confront the methodological problems inherent to such a task, include Van Binsbergen 1981, 1985b (cf. Vansina 1985: 193 sq., 122; Van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers 1985).
transformations inherent in these materials. This is particularly useful when we seek to penetrate the peculiar modes of historical practice (cf. Sahlins 1983), different from academic canons of historiography, and (especially in the case of purposeful creation of a neo-traditional corpus, such as Likota) far from entirely conterminous with the narrator’s contemporary culture. Thus we may begin to fulfill what Sahlins (ibid.: 534) sees as an urgent task: ‘...to explode the concept of history by the anthropological experience of culture’.

For both reasons the history we may end up with, even if not at all in line with De Heusch’s approaches and conclusions, owes a considerable debt to him, through a fascinating academic dialectic not dissimilar to the very processes of intellectual production we seek to unravel ourselves as oral historians.

African Studies Centre, Leiden.

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Testamenta...


TURNER, V. W.

Déplacements de population et migrations forcées sont des phénomènes inhérents aux guerres civiles ou aux conflits entre États. Ils ne sont donc pas propres à notre époque. Néanmoins, depuis la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, avec les affrontements de toute nature (guerres de libération nationale, guerres civiles, décomposition des États, rivalités Est-Ouest), ces phénomènes ont pris des proportions telles que la communauté internationale a dû tenter, sinon d'en éliminer les causes, du moins d'en gérer les conséquences. Ainsi, par exemple, a été défini au niveau du droit international un statut du réfugié. Pour mieux coller aux réalités concrètes, certaines organisations régionales ont quelquefois adapté en l'élargissant, ce statut. Ainsi a-t-on créé divers organismes chargés de répondre au jour le jour les problèmes les plus criants, notamment le Haut Commissariat des Nations unies pour les réfugiés (HCR) en 1951. En 1985, le rapport mondial du HCR estimait le nombre de réfugiés et de personnes déplacées à plus de 10 millions : 3 millions en Afrique, 1,9 million au Moyen-Orient, 3,8 millions en Asie, 1,8 en Europe et 362 000 en Amérique Latine. Ces chiffres sont souvent revus à la hausse par d'autres organismes. Près de la moitié des réfugiés se trouvent en Afrique, avec la plus forte concentration au nord-est,

1. Les deux textes fondamentaux sont la convention de 1951 et le protocole de Bellagio de 1967. Ces deux textes ont été paraphés par quatre-vingt-sept États. Deux n’ont signé que le texte de 1951, et le Swaziland et les États-Unis que le protocole. Ces deux textes fournissent la définition du réfugié : « toute personne qui, craignant avec raison d’être persécutée du fait de sa race, de sa religion, de sa nationalité, de son appartenance à un groupe social donné, ou de ses opinions politiques, se trouve hors du pays dont elle a la nationalité et qui ne peut ou, en raison de cette crainte, ne veut réclamer la protection de ce pays ; ou qui, si elle n’a pas de nationalité et se trouve hors du pays dans lequel elle avait sa résidence habituelle, ne peut ou, en raison de ladite crainte, ne veut y retourner ». En 1969 l’Organisation de l’unité africaine (OUA) a élargi le statut : « toute personne qui, du fait d’une agression, d’une occupation extérieure, d’une domination étrangère ou d’événements troublant gravement l’ordre public dans une partie ou dans la totalité de son pays d’origine ou du pays dont elle a la nationalité, est obligée de quitter sa résidence habituelle pour chercher refuge ailleurs, à l’extérieur de son pays d’origine ou du pays dont elle a la nationalité ».