Labour migration and the generation conflict: an essay on social change in Central Western Zambia

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LABOUR MIGRATION AND THE GENERATION CONFLICT:[1]

AN ESSAY ON SOCIAL CHANGE IN CENTRAL WESTERN ZAMBIA[2]

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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 organize 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, organiz' themselves within a frame-work 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 blue-print 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 village 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 a 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 iof living in general, complete this picture of a rather typical rural backwater in Central Africa.

1.3. The contemporary generation conflict.[3]

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 to embarressed 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 of 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/structural 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 detail.

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 identified 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 focussed on the chieftainship, were members of the local branch executive of ANC. Due to the preponderan ce 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 here uncle near Kathembe 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.[4] 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 co-operate, being on the look-out for harmful strangers, etc.

But this can scarcely suffice to explain the elders' resigned 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 assignes 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[5]. 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 posiiion.

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, six 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 assused 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:

e.g. visitors must be reported to the Youth branch; weekly Youth
meetings would be compulsory for everybody; all worries[6] would have to
be reported to the Youth branch; everybody must co-operate 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 constrast 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-UNIP[7], 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
insistence 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 "traditio-
nal" 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 precludes their acting as patrons for a follow-
ing 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 eclipse ANC on the national level and to forci-
bly 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 sis-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 determi-
nants 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, mate-selection and succession, rather than
being governed by fix/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 neigh-
bouring 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 tse-
tse fly); this precluded the accumulation of wellth and made that every
young man had to start from scratch. Social relationships and manipula-
tory skills were a man's main capital; whatever differential social
opportunities one had in shaping one's career lay in the specific proper-
ties 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 sideOften 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 expecially 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 aff'irs, successfully compete first 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.[8]

Death due to disease, hunting accidents or warfare, and departu: (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 survived!

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 kinsmen giving their junior client kinsmen into slavery; senior matrilateral kinsmen 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 rures 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 kinsmen. 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, infringed 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 to young to take the latters' 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 adminis-trative 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 kinsmen, 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 headmenship 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 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-members abroad, and bride-wealth: see below). In addition to continual, informal conflict regulation 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
Central Africa (Gluckman 1960; Watson 1958; Van Velsen 1961, 1963).
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. Poth 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 prrmanent 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 rural/political leddership, 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 hthe 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 migratinon 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 mrrried, 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 as 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, 101); 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- arital 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 culti-
vate. For all these reasons the relative standard of living of the
youngsters 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 marrigae 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 Bins-
bergen 1974:11f). The factors leading to these changes are yet imper-
fectly understood and are currently being subjected to quantitative ana-
lysis. Labour migration, which impeded bride-services in person,is one
of the factors of the introduction of marriage payments; but its contri-
bution 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 before and, he was completely dependant on his kins-
men 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 childredn
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 intergeenerational
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 provi-
ding 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 sociel order, a
new and inspriing participants' model of the ideal society, emerges
as the main[9] 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 ancestral 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, including those leading to political independence, followed closely behind then 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)(Ranger, in press). The central issue in both, extremely popular, movements was the vigorous commitment to the creation of a redically 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

wooed 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 demotion should they continue to
associate with the new movements (Van Binsbergen in press (a)). In the
1950sANC 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 disappaered; 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 1967:422f).

While expressing the need for a new social order, none of these
movements (Watchtower, Mchape and ANC) in colonial times was success-
ful 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 furure society; an organizational structure which defines leaders
and folowers, 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 Watchtowercame 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 recor-
ded 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 institutions for centuries. Local ANC commanded mass following
and an adequate organizational structure, but after the ascendance of
the more radical UNIP, its ideology (with the absence of anti-White
feelings which Gluckman (1971:155f) 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 1975:18f) was conservative rather than transformatory;

neither did it encompass cathartic action.

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 would not underplay the direct impact of the administration, which
from the urban ecentres reached into the rural districts and even into
the villages.) The structural changes represented a challenge to exis-
ting values and conceptions, but they had not yet found articulation in
a new and explicit model of an alternative social order in the conscious-
ness 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, atrracted by the promise of new oppor-
tunities, fleeing from mounting racial tension in Southern Africa, or
forcibly repatriated. Labour recruitment ceased, hut 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 shattering. 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 police-men 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 registrr nor
as major providers of cash and manufactured goods can the elders domina-
te 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 **townsmen 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 eff   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 comsumption and youthful success) had become the dominant frame of reference. The mature frustrated **migrants**, and those definitely too old to go   rking, 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 indivi-
duals 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, Watchto-
wer, Mcha. e and ANC constituted such movements, and none was a 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 obsolete
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 apparent-
ly contradictory devises as the historical framework of sorcery accusa-
tions, 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 requireme ts 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 if 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); circula-
tory labour migration has largely given way, in Zambia at least, to a
structure where more stabilized urban communities politically and econo-
mically 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.

Notes.

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2. Throughout this paper I identify the rural society under study by an awkward geographical denotation, 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 "Kaonde", "Lumbu", "Mwangwa", "Kaonde-Il'","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 constitues a major, and extremely complex, subject for such study (Van Binsbergen 1975).

3. Demographic conditions important for a further understanding of intergenrational 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, Kaoma has the largest proportion of people older than 45 years, and nearly the smalle smallest proportion of people younger than 21 years (Kay 1971).

4. In contrast, members of urban UNIP Youth branches tend to be considerably younger, and unmarried.

5. The House of Chiefs is an assembly of some twenty Zambian chiefs, which meets about bi-annually, 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 devise to channel w' tever political dissidence exists in rural loci of power that have not been created by the central government, and to render the central government acceptable in the eyes of the   populations. (Constitution of Zambia 196; 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 Kaoma, from among three UNIP candidates (cf. Van Binsbergen 1975:18f); and whether the one, UNIP, presidential candidate, H.E L 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 allows 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.

8. 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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