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Moving along the roadside: A social history of Mwinilunga District, 1870s-1970s

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Conclusion

When mining enterprises commenced in Lumwana in 2008, plans were made for prospecting throughout Mwinilunga District. Journalists, policy makers and academics instantly heralded an ‘epochal divide’, predicting that Mwinilunga would become part of Zambia’s ‘New Copperbelt’.²⁶²⁶ Through mining the district would be lifted out of poverty and this would have a profound influence, not only on the economy but also on popular modes of thought: ‘the development of an entirely new town by the Lumwana company in what was until very recently “bush” has led to new “expectations of modernity” in the region.’²⁶²⁷ Much like colonialism previously, mining was expected to propel profound, transformative and unidirectional change. It is against such narratives of linear, transformative and externally generated social change that this thesis has argued. Narratives of linear social change are clearly not obsolete relics, as they continue to be actively reproduced at present.²⁶²⁸ Undoubtedly, the opening of mines will have a profound impact on the area, yet it is the question whether change will follow a linear course and whether societal transformation will necessarily result.²⁶²⁹ The dominant narrative within which social change in Mwinilunga District has hitherto been described is one of linear and transformative change. This thesis has attempted to move away from and beyond this narrative, arguing that such a narrative obscures rather than illuminates the course of history. Instead of paying attention to ruptures or discontinuity, an emphasis has been placed on long-term trends, local negotiation and gradual change, in order to understand how the process of social change (exemplified by issues of production, mobility, consumption and social relationships) has been negotiated in the area of Mwinilunga between 1870 and 1970. That narratives of linear change have been questioned does not mean that change did not occur throughout Mwinilunga. To the contrary, continuous and at times profound change has been locally negotiated and appropriated within existing frameworks of thought, action and historical consciousness.²⁶³⁰ It is the tension between continuity and change which has been at the heart of this work. No matter how “new” a situation may be, it will have to be appropriated to a certain extent in terms of a set of practices and discourses that are already known.²⁶³¹

Each thematic chapter of this thesis has set out, tested, assessed and adjusted one hypothesis about the course of social change. These hypotheses have been formulated within the metanarrative of social change, which has prevailed among officials, scholars and the local population throughout much of the twentieth century. Running against trends of capitalist penetration, state integration or family nucleation, events in Mwinilunga District appear to have taken a different course. Predictions of linear transitions from subsistence to market production, from self-sufficiency to consumerism, from immobility to mobility or from kinship to individualisation have proven far from

²⁶²⁶ A remark about an ‘epochal divide’ due to the mining boom in Zambia’s North-Western Province was made by Margaret O’Callaghan, at the ‘Narratives of Nationhood’ Conference in Lusaka, Zambia, in September 2012. She referred back to the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute scholars, most notably Godfrey Wilson, yet such views are equally expressed in much recent journalism.

²⁶²⁷ R. Negi, ‘The mining boom, capital, and chiefs in the “New Copperbelt”’, in: A. Fraser and M. Larmer (eds.), *Zambia, mining, and neoliberalism: Boom and bust on the globalized Copperbelt* (New York, 2010), 209.

²⁶²⁸ Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity: Myths and meanings of urban life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley etc., 1999), 16.

²⁶²⁹ J. Van Alstine, ‘Community and company capacity: The challenge of resource-led development in Zambia’s ‘New Copperbelt’’, *Community development journal* 48:3 (2013), 360-76.

²⁶³⁰ J.A. Pritchett, *The Lunda-Ndembu: Style, change, and social transformation in South Central Africa* (Madison, 2001); See also: T.T. Spear, *Mountain farmers: Moral economies of land and agricultural development in Arusha and Meru* (Oxford etc., 1997).

²⁶³¹ H.L. Moore and M. Vaughan, *Cutting down trees: Gender, nutrition, and agricultural change in the Northern Province of Zambia 1890-1990* (Portsmouth etc., 1994), 233.

straightforward.²⁶³² Categories were messy from the outset, and linear narratives fail to capture the ambiguous course of historical practice. Rather than analysing change through ideas of 'development' or 'modernisation', the course of history in Mwinilunga District might be better understood by adopting terms such as the 'internal foundation of production', 'culture of mobility', 'self-realisation' or 'wealth in people'. These terms point towards long-term trends and continuities, arguing that change was domesticated within existing patterns of thought, action and daily life.²⁶³³ Change was incremental, building on existing foundations rather than transforming these.²⁶³⁴ It has been asserted that society in Mwinilunga District exposed a distinct ability to incorporate change continuously, yet that it did so in such a way as to accord with existing methods of production, ideology and interpersonal relationships, thereby projecting an image of continuity towards the outside world.²⁶³⁵

To return to the metaphor of moving along the roadside. The inhabitants of Mwinilunga District moved incessantly. In the 1950s a trend of movement towards the roadside could be witnessed, yet this movement did not entail a straightforward step towards 'development' or 'modernity', as contemporary observers might have expected. Turner's predictions of village disintegration, individualisation and capitalist penetration did not unequivocally hold true.²⁶³⁶ Rather, people in Mwinilunga continued to live in villages, to attach importance to ties of extended kinship and to produce cassava next to cash crops. This evidenced an ability to incorporate change within existing frameworks and historical practice. Instead of being driven by external forces, individuals were able to reconfigure influences of colonialism and capitalism so that these would fit into familiar conceptualisations and ways of doing.²⁶³⁷ Individuals would move towards the roadside to take advantage of opportunities, but this did not necessarily involve abandoning existing forms of social organisation, patterns of livelihood procurement or modes of thought. The movement towards the roadside was not a step towards government control or market involvement. Instead, existing forms of village residence, social organisation and tradition retained importance and served to negotiate, appropriate and domesticate change. Social change did not follow the course predicted by officials, experts or scholars, but became incorporated into flexible and changing patterns of historical practice.²⁶³⁸

The study of Mwinilunga District has argued for the local specificity of social change. Social change cannot be adequately understood within universal frameworks. Carefully located case studies are necessary to 'accurately describe *African* historical trajectories and contemporary realities, rather than simply forcing these to conform to theoretical templates carved from Western history.'²⁶³⁹ Perhaps exactly because of its location on the margins of the state and major markets, Mwinilunga District was able to more freely negotiate change.²⁶⁴⁰ The case of Mwinilunga illustrates the impact of 'large forces', such as colonialism, capitalism or globalisation, by stressing their internally negotiated, rather than external or transformative nature. Idiosyncracies and anomalies might be illustrative of

²⁶³² See: L.M. Thomas, 'Modernity's failings, political claims, and intermediate concepts', *The American historical review* 116:3 (2011), 727-40; F. Cooper, 'What is the concept of globalization good for? An African historian's perspective', *African affairs* 100:399 (2001), 189-213.

²⁶³³ For a similar argument, see: J. Prestholdt, *Domesticating the world: African consumerism and the genealogies of globalization* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2008).

²⁶³⁴ S. Feierman, *Peasant intellectuals: Anthropology and history in Tanzania* (Madison, 1990).

²⁶³⁵ Pritchett, *Lunda-Ndembu*; Spear, *Mountain farmers*; See also: Feierman, *Peasant intellectuals*.

²⁶³⁶ V.W. Turner, *Schism and continuity in an African society: A study of Ndembu village life* (Manchester etc., 1957).

²⁶³⁷ See parallels in: Spear, *Mountain farmers*.

²⁶³⁸ Pritchett, *Lunda-Ndembu*.

²⁶³⁹ K. Crehan, *The fractured community: Landscapes of power and gender in rural Zambia* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1997), 229.

²⁶⁴⁰ Cooper, 'What is the concept of globalization good for?'; Compare with: C. Piot, *Remotely global: Village modernity in West Africa* (Chicago and London, 1999).

the working of markets, states and capital.²⁶⁴¹ Through a specific case 'on the one hand, we can begin to understand something of the role of overarching global relationships in creating local heterogeneity; and, on the other, also begin to rethink some of those broad narratives.'²⁶⁴² Markets, state policies and development schemes could not operate through 'one size fits all' measures. Rather, the outcome of interactions depended on individual agency and local specificity. However small or trivial a case might appear, 'it is in the intimate context of lives lived (...) that larger processes and policies have their effects, and indeed, to a certain extent, their origins.'²⁶⁴³

Historical practice has been placed at the centre of analysis. Historical practices have been continuously and creatively reworked and are therefore essential to an understanding of processes of social change. Historical practice has been juxtaposed to narratives of social change. The two have been studied in conjunction, as they stand in a dialectical relationship: 'hegemonic accounts are, to however small a degree, shaped by the concrete conditions that they attempt to explain.'²⁶⁴⁴ Descriptions of historical practice 'are formulated in terms of existing discourses, and they take shape in the light of previous histories; as such, they are grafted onto a version of the past to be remade in the present.'²⁶⁴⁵ Social change, far from being external or transformative, was locally negotiated in accordance with established forms of historical practice, which underwent continuous but gradual change. This gradually changing basis of historical practice generated a sense of long-term continuity in Mwinilunga District.

Village life, social organisation and idioms of tradition retained their salience, whilst continuously incorporating change. Struggles within society over new forms of wealth generated through labour migration could lead to contestations of categories of gender, age and social hierarchy. Even if such contestations evoked a negotiation and rearticulation of existing categories, these categories were not necessarily transformed, but could be revitalised. Labour migration and mass-manufactured consumer goods, such as bicycles, radios or cloth, could lead to new tensions and power relations, which could nevertheless be channelled through familiar patterns of action, thought and social organisation. Concepts of 'wealth in people' and 'self-realisation' lay at the basis of labour migration and motivated the acquisition of consumer goods and their social usage. Consumption revolved around the human factor and did not lead to an axiomatic dependence on the market. Contrary to expectations, market involvement in Mwinilunga proved fluctuating rather than linear. The desire to generate a stable basis of subsistence could figure more prominently in producer deliberations than objectives of profit-maximisation. The internal foundation of production, which encompasses repertoires, values and rationales, is therefore imperative to an understanding of market involvement or non-involvement in Mwinilunga. Capitalist models of market integration fail to explain why the shift of settlements towards the roadside did not automatically lead towards market production or scientific methods of farming.²⁶⁴⁶ Alternative concepts and frameworks are thus called for, and these have been proposed throughout the chapters of this work.

The case study of Mwinilunga District has sought to contribute to three general debates within Zambian and African historiography, namely those on labour migration, capitalism and kinship. It has been argued that universal claims about the course of history should be substituted with local specificity. Labour migration, rather than being analysed within a 'modernist narrative', can be better understood by looking at life histories and the variety of migrant trajectories.²⁶⁴⁷ In the area of Mwinilunga labour migration built on a culture of mobility, which shaped both the incentives and

²⁶⁴¹ See: Thomas, 'Modernity's failings'; Cooper, 'What is the concept of globalization good for?'

²⁶⁴² Crehan, *The fractured community*, 233.

²⁶⁴³ Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting down trees*, 232.

²⁶⁴⁴ Crehan, *The fractured community*, 226.

²⁶⁴⁵ Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting down trees*, 233.

²⁶⁴⁶ See the previous chapters, especially Chapter 2 and 4.

²⁶⁴⁷ Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity*; J.A. Andersson, 'Informal moves, informal markets: International migrants and traders from Mzimba, Malawi', *African affairs* 105:420 (2006), 375-97.

objectives of migration. Rather than fitting into fixed stages of migration, leading to either rural prosperity or breakdown, labour migration had a variety of possible outcomes, depending on individual trajectories, aims towards self-realisation and the specificity of the local setting.²⁶⁴⁸ Capitalism should equally be approached with local specificity.²⁶⁴⁹ Capitalist penetration did not lead to either development or underdevelopment, but could have a variety of effects, being negotiated through an internal foundation of production and through notions of wealth in people and self-realisation. Kinship, likewise, should not be viewed within a framework of breakdown or individualisation, as kinship proved flexible and adaptive to change, retaining importance over time.²⁶⁵⁰ Dominant narratives, advanced by officials, policy-makers or academics, suggest linear and transformative processes of social change. Yet such representations obscure historical practice, which is ambiguous, diffuse and gradually changing.²⁶⁵¹ In order to understand processes of social change it is necessary to adopt an analytical framework which more closely reflects the course of historical practice.

Even as this work has applied a broad-ranging thematic approach, a number of topics have been left largely untouched. Much more could be explored with regard to themes of religion or formal politics. Turner's seminal studies laid the basis for our understanding of religion and ritual in Mwinilunga District, whereas Pritchett and Kalusa have built on and expanded Turner's work.²⁶⁵² Historical research into religious subjects would most definitely prove valuable, yet existing sources and my own expertise have not allowed such an analysis. The topic of formal politics, as opposed to the everyday micro-politics which have been explored in Chapter 5, will be addressed in more detail in a separate article.²⁶⁵³ Many themes touched upon throughout this work deserve further elaboration, notably the role of initiation ceremonies and changes in marriage patterns. Overall, it has been argued that changes within the spheres of production, mobility, consumption and social relationships did not occur at the same pace, but cut across each other. Social, economic and political change did not concur within a 'total social field'.²⁶⁵⁴ In order to reach conclusions about the nature, pace and direction of social change, an attempt has been made to counterpoise linear narratives of social change with the historical and local specificity of Mwinilunga District. Yet there remains much scope for future research, which might refine or challenge the line of argument proposed here.

Mwinilunga District has been embedded within a broader regional and historical context. The case of Mwinilunga might hold comparative potential, generating insight into broader trends and historical developments. Nonetheless, arguments have been advanced about the specificity of historical events, personal experiences and processes of social change in Mwinilunga District. Although certain aspects of the general argument might be extrapolated to other areas or settings, suggesting for example the feeble nature of colonial rule in the opening decades of the twentieth century in Central Africa or the inadequacy of prevailing periodization into pre-colonial, colonial or post-colonial periods, no claims of general applicability can be made. The account provided here might not apply to Zambia's Southern or Northern Province. It has been argued that linear narratives – adopting ideas of

²⁶⁴⁸ See: J.A. Andersson, 'Re-interpreting the rural-urban connection: Migration practices and socio-cultural dispositions of Buhera workers in Harare', *Africa* 71:1 (2001), 82-112.

²⁶⁴⁹ See: Crehan, *The fractured community*.

²⁶⁵⁰ See: Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting down trees*; S.S. Berry, *No condition is permanent: The social dynamics of agrarian change in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Madison, 1993).

²⁶⁵¹ See: Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting down trees*.

²⁶⁵² Turner, *Schism and continuity*; Pritchett, *Lunda-Ndemba*; W.T. Kalusa, 'Disease and the remaking of missionary medicine in colonial northwestern Zambia: A case of Mwinilunga District, 1902-1964' (PhD thesis, John Hopkins University, 2003).

²⁶⁵³ This article focuses on the interaction between national and local politics, by analysing the rivalry between UNIP and ANC from the 1950s to the 1970s: I. Peša, '“We have killed this animal together, may I also have a share?": Local-national political dynamics in Mwinilunga District, Zambia, 1950s-1970s', *Journal of Southern African studies* (2014).

²⁶⁵⁴ See the Introduction for the RLI discussion on the 'total social field'.

'development' or 'modernity' and postulating a clear direction of historical change – should be nuanced by accounts of local specificity.²⁶⁵⁵ Broad generalisations should be reassessed through specific case studies, for only then can historical understanding be advanced.

Current practices in the area of Mwinilunga have constantly adapted to changing circumstances and a complex setting, involving local, regional and (inter)national factors and actors. Over the course of the twentieth century village organisation and social relationships have changed profoundly. Influenced by social change, categories of kinship, age and gender have been questioned, authority has been redefined and tradition has been negotiated. Yet change did not lead to a demise of previous practices, which could prove flexible and resilient. Tradition has changed and adapted, yet it has retained its salience and it has provided the inhabitants of Mwinilunga District with the power to domesticate and make sense of change.²⁶⁵⁶ In this sense, tradition offers 'to modern people a reservoir, a shared past, which they might draw on to face problems in the present.'²⁶⁵⁷ Due to the incorporation of change, past practices continued to be significant and that is why the inhabitants of Mwinilunga District might still avow that they have kept hold of their traditions. In 'tradition' the inhabitants of Mwinilunga District oppose themselves against the 'modernist narrative', proposed by RLI scholars and replicated in much later historiography.²⁶⁵⁸ In such an understanding of a flexible tradition lies the key to solving the paradox between continuity and change. A tradition which incorporates change yet retains its form and importance over time enables a different understanding of the process of social change in Mwinilunga District.

²⁶⁵⁵ See: Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity*; Crehan, *The fractured community*; Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting down trees*.

²⁶⁵⁶ J. Vansina, *Paths in the rainforests: Toward a history of political tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison, 1990).

²⁶⁵⁷ D.L. Schoenbrun, *A green place, a good place: Agrarian change, gender and social identity in the Great Lakes region to the 15th century* (Portsmouth etc., 1998), 3.

²⁶⁵⁸ Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity*; Pritchett, *Lunda-Ndemba*.