

CLASSIC REPRINT SERIES

# Schism and Continuity in an African Society

A Study of a Ndembu Village Life



V. W. TURNER



Schism and Continuity in an  
African Society

## **Classic Reprints in Anthropology**

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Schism and Continuity in an  
African Society

A Study of Ndembu Village Life

V. W. Turner†

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## PREFACE TO THE 1996 EDITION

VICTOR Turner's *Schism and Continuity* is among the more outstanding monographs that came out of the work of Max Gluckman's 'Manchester School' of anthropology. This group developed from a research tradition established by Gluckman at the then Rhodes-Livingstone Institute for Social Research (now Institute for African Research and part of the University of Zambia). Gluckman succeeded the former Director (Godfrey Wilson) in the closing stages of World War II and set up a programme for the thorough ethnographic study of the region which included what are now Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. When Gluckman was appointed to the Chair of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester in 1947, the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute continued as the research base for the school of anthropology that Gluckman was to develop. Those who gathered at the RLI and who largely built the fieldwork and theoretical perspectives that made Gluckman's Manchester School an important development within British social anthropology included Elizabeth Colson, Clyde Mitchell, Bill Epstein, John Barnes, Max Marwick, and Victor Turner. These scholars in their own distinctive ways pursued Gluckman's insistence that any theoretical and conceptual understanding of social forms and their defining ideas must be grounded in the study of social practice. This approach which Gluckman himself elaborated from the example of Evans-Pritchard became known broadly as 'situational analysis' and the 'extended-case method'. The line that Gluckman encouraged was also informed by a mixture of Durkheimianism (largely through the interpretations elaborated by Radcliffe-Brown) and the ideas of Marx and Engels. Overall, the theoretical and methodological hallmark of the Manchester tradition concentrated on practices which were viewed as revealing the inner 'logic' of what Gluckman referred to as custom or more generally, these days, as culture.

It must be stressed that the Manchester position was innovative. Many in British anthropology at the time regarded the Manchester anthropologists to be marginal to the mainstream and the

Manchester/RLI group valued themselves in this way. They were left-oriented and opposed to conservative tendencies in anthropology. In Central Africa they became sharp critics of Colonial Rule and were criticized in the press. Gluckman himself was officially refused entry into the region (and other areas of colonial rule such as Australia-controlled New Guinea). Others in the Manchester group were similarly prevented from continuing their research. Many of the Manchester/RLI group were directly active in radical politics in England and elsewhere (although, Gluckman was more subdued in such affiliation, a fact that exposed him to friendly jibes from his colleagues and students). The Manchester/RLI group in the fifties and early sixties carried their generally radical attitudes into their anthropological practice. It was a distinctive feature of the Manchester School. They pioneered perspectives that only became widely accepted much later in the seventies and eighties. The events of 1968 in Paris were an important intellectual watershed for anthropology as for other academic disciplines.

The Manchester emphasis on practice was sometimes compared with Firth's contrast between organization and structure. They were very different. Firth's observation largely boiled down to the fact (in my view fairly trivial) that the representations that anthropologists and the subjects of their observation make of their forms of life diverge from what they actually do. He stressed the importance of exploring the actual fluid organizations of activity. Leach probably carried this notion further (a notion already implicit in Malinowski) as did Barth. The developments within the Manchester School were more profound. They were not interested in the contradictions within 'cultural systems' (Leach) or in the dynamics of individual rational choice (Barth)—aspects that they did not ignore—but were directed more fundamentally to the contradictions within historical, political and economic forces of a global nature which were part of the wider circumstance within which particular human populations struggled to recreate or reproduce their social and cultural ways of life. (Jonathan Friedman's critique of Leach for overlooking the historical forces should be noted.) The Manchester orientation was more developed than many later and more fashionable post-1968 attempts at a Marxist perspective in other major centres of anthropology in

England (for example, that at LSE where first Firth and then Bloch announced a commitment to a Marxism that manifested a far cruder functionalist economism that in fact had no need of Marx of Engels).

The originality and possibility of the Manchester anthropology perspective reached a milestone in Turner's *Schism and Continuity*. The argument extends from Gluckman's lead, focussing on the dynamics of social conflict and its foundation within contradictions at the heart of systems of relatedness through kinship and marriage. This is the central problematic that guides the analysis (the contradiction between virilocality at marriage and a pattern of matrilineal descent and inheritance). The everyday conflict and the course of this conflict was rooted in this contradiction which was further complicated by the fact that the Ndembu of the villages studied by Turner were embroiled in larger historical changes effected through Colonial Rule. Turner shows how the contradictions at the heart of Ndembu life became, in effect, more and more irresolvable in the context of larger economic and political developments. He centres his account around the ambitions of a key and in many ways a tragic figure, Sandombu. Through the struggles of Sandombu the reader is lead into a remarkably vivid account of the everyday life of Ndembu villagers and, in Marxist vein, how they come to participate in the transformations of their own world even as they are caught in structural processes that are ultimately beyond their control.

Turner's methodological innovations in *Schism and Continuity* overcame contradictions in social anthropology between actor-oriented and structure-oriented perspectives, whereby a concentration on one aspect obviated the other. The overcoming of this contradiction was one concern of Gluckman's methodological development of 'situational analysis' which Turner elaborated and transformed. Broadly, situational analysis expanded beyond the sociological use of cases or instances from life to illustrate larger systems of structure or institutions of the social order that the analyst discerned—the case as illustrative. The aim was to demonstrate the intricacies of larger processes operating within the dynamics of particular events. Thus Gluckman explored how a bridge-opening ceremony in Zululand in Natal revealed the complexities of a then emergent system of apartheid. He applied the method to the process

of judicial decision in Lozi courts in Barotseland in Zambia. However, it was Turner in *Schism and Continuity* who realized the full possibilities of the approach. Not only did he demonstrate the 'logic' in the event, Turner (by taking a number of events in series involving the same actors) was able to demonstrate how participants changed and transformed the very structural circumstances of their own action.

The general significance here of Turner's innovation should not be missed. Gluckman's perspective opened out to the importance of considering how people themselves constructed their contexts of action; that is, they had a role to play in the making of their socio-political and cultural realities. It was a move away from the objectivist position of the anthropological observer, a 'thick description' in Geertz' sense well before the latter had formalized the idea. However, Gluckman and his colleagues, regardless of their insistence on practice, could not, in fact, escape the case or the event as an illustration of social principles that they devised independently of participants. Furthermore, although they stressed an attention to the change OF systems of social action and not their timeless repetition, they could not break out of a form of analysis that was more about how systems remained the same rather than how they changed or transformed. I note, that this was also the marked difficulty of other perspectives developing in British social anthropology at the time—those of Leach and of Barth. Turner's analysis in *Schism and Continuity* broke out of the mould. He did so in a marked Hegelian manner.

Thus Turner analysed each crisis in the constantly changing flux of Ndembu village life as a dynamic of rupture reaching towards its overcoming in a new synthesis (resolution) or organization of social relations. The wider environment or political economic field of activities at once external and internal to Ndembu village life (the colonial political order, capitalist economies manifest in urbanization, labour migration, market farming) generated forces that were expressed in the conflicts that Turner describes and which the villagers could not resolve. However, their efforts to 'control' such forces involved villagers, nonetheless, in constituting dimensions of their changing universe and developing and elaborating original

cultural conception and practice.

Coming back to the Hegelianism in Turner's approach, he does have a notion of an ultimate 'higher' unity. This is established in ritual and the growth in importance of rites, such as the Chihamba curing rite, that cross-cut the social boundaries of kin group and village. The Chihamba and its political importance is driven in the unresolvable divisions and ruptures emergent not just from the contradictions underlying the 'traditional' order (the contradiction of the matrilineal and virilocal principles) but in embracing globally connected political and economic changes. In an important way the Chihamba rite is generated and reinvented in such circumstances. It does not maintain the system, as a more functionalist analysis might have it (e.g. Gluckman's analysis of the rites of Swazi and Zulu kingship that were influential on Turner but from whose implications Turner broke). Rather it is integral within a dynamic of Ndembu social and political reconstitution.

The discussion of the Chihamba and other rites in *Schism and Continuity* is preliminary to what became Turner's key focus—the symbolic processes of rite. His later work, *Chihamba the White Spirit*, is a wonderful elaboration on themes indicated in *Schism and Continuity*. In this later study he gives full flight to his own creative spirit, engaging a variety of perspectives from other fields of enquiry (literary studies, Jungian and Freudian psycho-analysis) to an understanding of Ndembu symbolic processes and how they extend a comprehension of the dynamics of human being that goes far beyond a particular cultural/historical context. British anthropology up to and beyond the work of Turner is often characterized as static British structural functionalism. This common enough stereotype can only be so if his work is ignored and attention is focussed on what turned out to be the far more conservative and stultifying efforts of those centres of anthropology located in London and Oxbridge. I emphasize that it is by reading *Schism and Continuity* that a full grasping can be achieved of the radical direction that Turner was to lead the anthropology of ritual and symbolism.

Turner (and his Manchester colleagues) are what might be generally referred to as 'practice theorists'. Turner should be compared with more recent developments in anthropology, for example, those of

Sahlins and especially Bourdieu. The latter explicitly sets his approach to practice in contrast to that developed from Manchester. He chooses to distinguish his line from that of Van Velsen (*The Politics of Kinship*). Van Velsen's study was conceived of as a development from that of Turner. It took an individualistic strategic choice direction. This was a possibility of the Manchester orientation but probably a retrograde step (I state this self-critically because it is also a direction in my own early work written in the Manchester context). Bourdieu's line on practice is also potentially individualistic as evidenced in his free borrowing from the American pragmatist traditions of symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology. Turner's analyses never hinges on a simple politics of self-interest or of strategy and, in my view, extends beyond many of the otherwise positive and fruitful aspects of Bourdieu's work.

Bourdieu attempts a synthesis of Husserl's (also Heidegger's) phenomenology with a Levi-Straussian structuralism. His approach is extraordinarily illuminating but his synthesis is not thoroughly successful and the way human beings can shift their doxa or radically alter the circumstances of their habitus or habituated activities is never clear. Bourdieu is committed to dynamics of the reproduction of the same and is not oriented to the production of difference and originality. In this, I consider, Turner in *Schism and Continuity* and in later work is probably more successful. He does not attempt to force together two forms of analysis (structuralism and phenomenology) that in Bourdieu's treatment at least appear to be incompatible. Turner's is an approach to practice—an approach that never relents on the density of the cultural processes ingrained and developing out of practice—that indicates how new modes of symbolic comprehension and structures of daily activity can be generated.

There is much else I could say about *Schism and Continuity* by way of introduction. For instance, here is an orientation that does not see cultural/social forms as coherently bounded systems. Turner developed on discussion at Manchester concerning the use of the concept of social field—borrowed from the social psychologist Kurt Lewin (see Turner's later *The Drums of Affliction*)—which concentrated on the dynamics of social structuration with an open field of forces. Turner in his development was himself a generative centre

for perspectives developed by others within the Manchester tradition (e.g. Epstein, Bailey). Although intellectually unrelated, Turner's unbounded field notion was 'reinvented' within the contemporary suggestions of a postmodern anthropology. In Turner too we have a sense of the many voices of Ndembu villagers as they participate in the fashioning and refashioning of their own existential realities.

*Schism and Continuity* is a central work in the history of anthropology. It is critical for a thorough understanding of Turner's later writing. But it has far more than a historical significance. It is exemplary of the creative possibilities of anthropological ethnography, the centrality of rigorous ethnography in the anthropological contribution towards more general human understanding. The work should be read and reread as one example of how anthropologists might go about their research and develop analytical understanding. This is particularly so at this historical moment in a general discourse within anthropology concerning new analytical directions and the role of ethnography in demonstrating them.

BRUCE KAPFERER



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## PREFACE TO THE 1972 EDITION

**S**Ocial anthropology in its modern form is only about forty years old, and during its short history it has changed and developed fast. For from the time when anthropologists began to carry out intensive field-studies, they have experimented with many methods of presenting their increasingly rich data about social life. Dr. Turner attempts a new mode of presentation in this book, but it is a mode which grows out of the history of anthropology since the War. He has here combined general analysis with the individual case-study in what I consider a most fruitful and illuminating way.

When social anthropologists began to cope with the problem of handling their very detailed data on the tribal societies of Africa, Oceania, Asia and the Americas, they seem first to have sought to establish that some kind of system existed in these societies. Malinowski found the system in the interdependence of culture, Radcliffe-Brown found it in social structure. The next generation of anthropologists in the British Commonwealth, among whom I myself fall, continued this search for system. As I see it, our analyses abstracted a set of regular interconnections between various social relationships, ecological relationships, modes of belief, etc. From the time when Evans-Pritchard analysed the Azande beliefs and practices relating to witchcraft, oracles and magic, to show that these constituted a rational philosophy of causation and philosophy of morals, which were related to a particular mode of social organization, we have exhibited that there is a systematic structure in one field of tribal life after another. The evidence for the existence of these structures was mainly qualitative, and consisted largely in illustrations from different situations of action in a number of families, villages, or political groups. These illustrative data were rarely related to one another. In result, when one reads even the best books of this period, it is not easy to put the system into working operation in actual life. In order to demonstrate the existence of system at all, we discarded much of the living reality about which we had collected information.

I consider that this was a necessary stage in the development

of our discipline. Faced with the great variety of custom and forms of social relationships which occur in the tribal societies, we had first to produce a morphology of their structures, and general analyses of how their systems worked, to exhibit some stability within constant change of personnel and relations between personnel. But I think all of us have felt that more could be done with the detail of our data. It seems to me that our systematic knowledge has now developed sufficiently for us to achieve the next step. *African Political Systems* (1940), a collection of eight studies, marked an important step in the systematic study of one field, and it was followed by a series of comparable, but fuller, monographs. Yet it is significant that political studies since the War have, so to speak, put their systems back into a particular history, while still aiming at the demonstration of systematic interconnections: this is marked in, for example, Evans-Pritchard's *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* and J. A. Barnes's *Politics in a Changing Society*, an historical analysis of the Fort Jameson Ngoni. Some anthropologists, notably Schapera, have even moved fully into a method of work more like orthodox history, but still seeking for a systematic structure.

The same change is likely to occur in the fields which social anthropology has made peculiarly its own: for the problems we meet in the field of tribal politics and law, we share with political science, history, and jurisprudence. The other fields are the study of domestic and village life, of familial and kinship systems, and of ritual—religion, magic, witchcraft, etc. And here Turner has made a significant contribution, following leads set, for Central Africa, by Mitchell, Colson and Barnes. Great classics on domestic and village life, like Fortes's books on the Tallensi and Firth's on the Tikopia, analyse for us the regularities they find in a variety of actual situations and relationships, and the interdependence between those regularities. Theirs are magnificent analyses. But they use the method of appropriate, illuminating illustration, and hence, in a way, of chance illustration. We cannot from their analyses work out how any one group of people lived, at a particular time and in a particular place, within this social structure and using these customs. Turner has used a different mode of illustration, which I consider deepens the understanding which he gives us of Ndembu tribal life. Indeed, it would be more accurate to say that he abandons

illustration altogether, to develop what is, for African studies, a new mode of analysis. He first gives us a systematic outline of the principles on which Ndembu villages are constructed, and measures their relative importance with unusually adequate numerical data. Then he takes the history of one village through twenty years to show how these abstract principles have operated through that history, within the chance occurrences of illness, death and other misfortune, of good luck, of individual temperament and ambition, and finally of the major changes which have resulted from British overlordship. He thus shows us how certain principles of organization and certain dominant values operate through both schisms and reconciliations, and how the individuals and groups concerned try to exploit the varied principles and values to their own ends. Turner himself would not claim any particular points he makes as original, for most of them he has taken individually from the works of his predecessors. But this use of the detailed case-study, in the background of general systematic analysis, combines what he has taken over into a pioneer study. The late Buell Quain in his *Fijian Village* attempted this task, but his death perhaps prevented the final pulling together of his analysis, and it did not quite come off.

One thing I can do, in this foreword, is to answer a possible objection to this method: how is the reader to assess that Turner has selected a 'typical' village? This question is partly answered in the careful numerical analyses of many villages which precede the 'village-study'. Secondly, I am in the privileged position of having heard Turner present analyses of other village histories; and hence I can vouch that for all its uniqueness, the village of 'Mukanza' is 'typical' of Ndembu villages. Turner hopes to publish separately studies of some of these other villages; and collateral validation for this present analysis will also come out of the study of Ndembu ritual which he is now writing. For he plans to use the same method of analysis in studying ritual: and again I consider this will mark a significant advance in this field of research.

Turner has built his study of Mukanza village around what he calls 'the social drama'—one of a series of crises occurring in the history of the village, when either a quarrel between some of the inhabitants, or a misfortune ascribed by the people and by divination to ancestral spirits or sorcery, precipitates threats to

the unity of the village. The village as a whole, and its neighbours, as well as component groups within the village, try to use different forms of redress to meet these threats. Turner argues that when the conflict emerges from the opposed interests and claims of protagonists acting under a single social principle, judicial institutions can be invoked to meet the crisis, for a rational attempt can be made to adjust claims which are similarly based. But when claims are advanced under different social principles, which are inconsistent with one another even to the point of contradicting one another, there can be no rational settlement. Here recourse is had to divination of sorcery or ancestral wrath, causing misfortune ; and ultimately to a ritual reconciliation which can reassert all the values held by decent Ndembu, under the pretence that harmony is restored within those values. He shows that after this situation has occurred, there is a temporary respite ; but the deep conflicts between groups and individuals in the village continue. Through the intervening, comparatively peaceful period, struggles continue till they precipitate a new crisis. Each crisis marks the culmination of a period of altering alignments of power and shifts of allegiance within the village—though matrilineal attachment is always dominant in the end. The crisis itself, through four stages which he carefully delineates, is temporarily solved ; but again this involves a definite shift in the village's internal balance of power.

I have sketched something of Turner's method : he can speak better for himself. But I make a few points to support him. First, I hope no one will turn away from his analysis in dislike of the phrase ' social drama '. Several of us have tried, with Turner, to find another phrase which is less likely to meet objections : we have failed to, and he would be grateful for suggestions. Secondly, I warn readers that it is not easy to follow the complicated story of this village, with its complicated internal genealogy and its important links in other villages. Turner has done what he can to help the reader, with a main genealogy and periodically with subsidiary genealogies of those involved in each drama. But the labour of learning who the characters are, and how they are related to one another, is well worth while. The reward is equal to the labour. I myself found that I soon got the main characters clear, and the rest followed easily. Then I became absorbed in the story itself, and particularly in the tragic

story of Sandombu—moved not only by his personal ambition, strong though that was, but also moved by the pride of his lineage, to struggle for the village headmanship when everything was against him. With his generosity and capacity for affection, he fought with his quick temper and the curse of his sterility, to achieve a headmanship; and Turner shows clearly out of his general analysis, that Sandombu was doomed to lose, and on the way to defeat to incur a reputation for sorcery. He is a tragic figure, indeed. But we learn too that his rivals could not wholeheartedly take advantage of his weaknesses; for when they had overcome him, they in turn were moved by guilt, for, under the dominant value of Ndembu, was he not born from the same womb as they?

Into this story, Turner has woven a striking general analysis, of schism of groups and relationships, and of continuity of society and principle and value above the schism—a continuity of a 'community of suffering', for it is misfortune which assembles the cult-groups whose rituals dramatize that continuity. Thus incidentally as the story unfolds we learn what are Ndembu beliefs and customs. We see these working in the process of social life, where they both control people, and are exploited by people. Customs and beliefs are real, systematized through social relationships: they are not mere adjuncts. In working all this out, Turner also—and this is an achievement—brings in the changes of values and principles of organization which are emerging out of British overlordship—the development of wage-earning and cash-cropping, the establishment of peace, the killing out of game which has struck at the dominant male value of hunting. In all this I see a contribution to our knowledge of Africa, and to anthropological theory and method. It is achieved in a book which will fascinate anyone.

MAX GLUCKMAN

UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER,  
June 1956



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## PREFACE TO THE 1968 EDITION

IT is now more than a decade since *Schism and Continuity* was first published. Seen from this perspective it emerges clearly as a transitional book between the prevalent structural-functionalism of British anthropology in the 1940s—the period in which I received my training—and the processual analysis of the 1960s. Whatever influence it may have had seems to have lain in the rapidly advancing sub-disciplines of diachronic micro-sociology and micro-politics. Yet it has sometimes been forgotten by those caught up in the first enthusiasm for ‘processualism’ that ‘process’ is intimately bound up with ‘structure’ and that an adequate analysis of social life necessitates a rigorous consideration of the relation between them. Historical hindsight reveals a diachronic profile, a ‘temporal structure’ in events, and this structure cannot be understood in isolation from the series of synchronic profiles which make up the structure of a social field at every significant point of arrest in the time flow. Processual studies can never be the negation of structuralism; rather do they put the discoveries of structuralism to new use in the perspectives of history.

In his introduction to the first edition of this book Professor Gluckman has called attention to the way in which case material is used to facilitate what he has later described as ‘the intensive study of the processes of control in a limited area of social life viewed over a period of time’ (Introduction to *The Craft of Social Anthropology*, 1967 by A. L. Epstein, London: Tavistock Publications, xvi). He contrasts this ‘extended case method’ with ‘the method of apt illustration’ (of abstract structural principles), and suggests that its systematic use would deepen our understanding of law and morality. But it was not solely with the collection of a different kind of data that I was concerned, even at the time of writing the book, but with a different kind of analysis. In formulating the notion of ‘social drama’ I had in mind the explicit comparison of the temporal structure of certain types of social processes with that of dramas on the stage, with their acts and scenes, each with its peculiar qualities, and all cumulating towards a climax. In other words, I was groping

towards the notion of studying the structure of successive events in social processes of varying scope and depth. But while the synchronic structures investigated by many anthropologists could be shown to rest upon custom and habit, and very often to remain beneath the level of conscious awareness, the diachronic structure or 'processional forms' that I was interested in exposing and analysing developed out of clashes and alignments of human volitions and purposes, inspired by private and public interests and ideals. Yet the social drama itself represented a complex interaction between normative patterns laid down in the course of deep regularities of conditioning and social experience, and the immediate aspirations, ambitions and other conscious goals and strivings of individuals and groups in the here and now. At the time, however, I was only able to raise some of the problems of processual analysis, not to provide any of the answers. Thus, I was able to suggest that to the different phases of the social drama, breach, crisis, redressive action, and immediate result, there corresponded a particular style of social interaction, particular patterns of norms and values, specific types of goals and goal-orientated behaviour and specific forms of conjunctive and disjunctive behaviour. But I was unable to probe these differences minutely or especially cogently. For one thing, there was little at that time in the way of comparative data of this type. Since then there has been a considerable accumulation of extended case material, for example, in the works of van Velsen (*The Politics of Kinship*, 1964, Manchester University Press); Gulliver (*Social Control in an African Society*, 1963, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul); and Abner Cohen (*Arab Border Villages in Israel*, 1965, Manchester University Press) to name but a few, while new theoretical perspectives on the study of social processes (particularly political processes) have been opened up by such scholars as Gluckman (*Politics, Law and Ritual*, 1965, Chicago: Aldine); Bailey (*Politics and Social Change*, 1963, Berkeley: University of California Press); Adrian Mayer (*The Significance of Quasi-groups in the Study of Complex Societies*, 1966, in *the Social Anthropology of Complex Societies*, A.S.A. Monograph No. 4, London: Tavistock Publications) notably his concept of the 'action set', a concept further elaborated by Gulliver (*Dispute Settlement without Courts: the Ndendeuli of Southern Tanzania*, paper given in Wenner-Gren Symposium No. 34, 1966, *Ethnography of Law*); Swartz,

Turner and Tuden (Introduction to *Political Anthropology*, 1966, Chicago : Aldine) ; Swartz (Introduction to *Local Level Politics*, 1968, Chicago : Aldine) ; Nicholas (Factions : a Comparative Analysis in *Political Systems and the Distribution of Power*, 1965, A.S.A. Monograph No. 2, London : Tavistock Publications) and the articles on case method by A. L. Epstein and van Velsen in *The Craft of Social Anthropology* (op. cit.). Other scholars are making contributions to a steadily broadening stream of studies in processual analysis, but clearly a great deal remains to be done if serious and rigorous comparisons are to be made in cross-cultural terms between diachronic structures.

To end on an ethnographic note : I have but recently learnt that headman Mukanza died at a ripe old age in 1967 and was succeeded by Kasonda. I predicted in this book that Kasonda would found a new farm and that Sakazao would remain in Mukanza Village with most of his lineage kin. This is one illustration of the difficulties besetting prediction in anthropology, for in 1954 when I left the field I did not anticipate that Sakazao would die within a few months and that Mukanza would live for a further thirteen years. But since my main doubt as to Kasonda's succeeding to the Mukanza headmanship was based upon his relative youth in 1954, and not upon his capability or the extent of his potential political support, my error was not perhaps so grave. In 1967 Kasonda was sufficiently mature to meet the tacit age requirement for a headman—and a headman he became !



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## PREFACE TO THE 1957 EDITION

'General Forms have their vitality in Particulars, & every Particular is a Man.'  
WILLIAM BLAKE, *Jerusalem*.

**I**N this book I attempt to isolate the cardinal factors underlying Ndembu residential structure. I focus the investigation upon the village, a significant local unit, and analyse it successively as an independent social system and as a unit within several wider sets of social relations included in the total field of Ndembu society. Interwoven with the analysis of structural form I present detailed studies of situations of crisis, which arise periodically in village life. These crises make visible both contradictions between crucial principles governing village structure, and conflicts between persons and groups in sets of social relations governed by a single principle. From repeated observation of such situations I have evolved the concept of the 'social drama', which I regard as my principal unit of description and analysis in the study of social process. On pages 91-3 I divide the social drama into four phases—its 'processional form'—and present reasons for doing so. Through the social drama one may sometimes look beneath the surface of social regularities into the hidden contradictions and conflicts in the social system. The kinds of redressive mechanism deployed to handle conflict, the pattern of factional struggle, and the sources of initiative to end crisis, which are all clearly manifest in the social drama, provide valuable clues to the character of the social system.

But the study of social dramas must be based on numerical analysis of village census data and the critical examination of genealogies. Before one can study breach one must be aware of regularity. I have therefore tried to discuss in quantitative terms such factors as the magnitude and mobility of villages, individual mobility, and the social composition of villages, before undertaking the analysis of social dramas.

Hence I have approached my major field of study in two ways. First, I have compared a number of villages with reference to such measurable criteria as size and genealogical composition. Secondly, I have analysed a sequence of social dramas involving the membership of a single village, and the members of other

villages linked to it by ties of kinship and spatial propinquity. In the first instance I have examined regularities of *form* occurring throughout *many* villages ; in the second, I discuss regularities of *process* in the social maturation of a *single* village. The two approaches complement one another.

By numerical analysis of genealogical and census data I was able to infer the effective principles determining village structure. These on the whole were in conformity with the ideal pattern of residential relations presented by informants. Within villages the dominant principles influencing residence were maternal descent and virilocality.<sup>1</sup> Under Ndembu conditions conflict between them was ineradicable and accounted in considerable measure for the unstable and fissile character of village organization and for the high degree of individual mobility. It is possible that hunting, a purely masculine pursuit, and virilocal marriage, which binds together male kin in local descent groups, are parallel expressions of structural opposition between men and women in this matrilineal society. Hunting, the men's sphere in the basic economy, is socially valued above its objective contribution to the food supply, and is highly ritualized. Cassava cultivation, the women's sphere, is correspondingly undervalued, and is ritualized to a lesser extent. Yet women's work ensures the physical survival of the group, since hunting is fitfully pursued and success in it is uncertain. Hunting implies a rather greater stress on economic co-operation than cassava growing, although in all sectors production is mainly individualistic. Throughout the West-Central Bantu, hunting is linked with eminence or aristocratic ranking. Among Ndembu, professional hunters are highly honoured, and all men hunt to some extent. Hunting is equated with virility and reinforces in some ways the structural opposition between men and women. For marriage, as noted above, is virilocal ; women, on whom the social continuity of villages depends, reside at their husbands' villages after marriage. Nevertheless, maternal descent governs prior rights to residence, succession to office and inheritance of property,

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<sup>1</sup> 'Virilocal' in this book refers to the post-marital residence of a woman in the village to which her husband takes her. 'Uxorilocal' refers to the post-marital residence of a man in his wife's village. 'Patrilocal' refers to residence in one's father's village. 'Avunculocal' refers to residence with one's mother's brother. 'Matrilocal' refers to residence with one's mother.

even of guns, the professional hunters' most cherished items of equipment. The nuclear residential group consists of male matrilineally related kin. To remain together this set of kinsmen must import their wives from other village lineages and export their sisters. But with maternal descent as the basis of village continuity a contradiction arises between the role of men as fathers who wish to retain their wives and children with them, and their role as uterine brothers and uncles who wish to recover the allegiances of their sisters and sisters' children. Without that allegiance men cannot found enduring villages nor can they effectively press their claims for headmanship within their villages. Thus both marriages and villages are inherently unstable and in-laws struggle continually for control over women and their children.

Another consequence of virilocal marriage making for instability in residential structure is the great measure of autonomy it confers on the matricentric family. Frequent divorce weakens the link between father and children but strengthens the tie between mother and children. But virilocal marriage separates a matricentric family from its maternal kin-group during the minority of the children who are reared in their paternal village. If they return to their maternal kin after the divorce or widowhood of the mother, the narrower loyalty of the members of the matricentric family to one another tends to come into conflict with their wider allegiance to the village as a whole. A matricentric family matures into a uterine sibling group which is the most frequent unit of secession to form new villages. Radical incompatibility, then, between maternal descent and virilocality gives a keen edge to conflicts between uterine kinsmen and husbands of women, which result in quarrels between villages; to marital conflicts, producing a high divorce rate; and to conflicts of loyalties between narrow- and wide-span maternal descent groups, which inhibit the development of deep localized lineages.

Another effect of virilocal marriage is a high rate of patri-locality for children of male village kin. Children adhere closely to mothers, and while a marriage lasts the children stay at their father's village. Since villages are small (mean size—10.6 huts), they tend to be at once shallow lineages with a fringe of seminal children and cognatic kin, and bilateral extended families, i.e.

often the headman's uterine sibling group, brothers outnumbering sisters, and their children. There is a tendency to merge kin on the mother's and on the father's side as members of a genealogical generation. Within the village, membership of a genealogical generation cuts across affiliation by matricentric family and unites cross-cousins with parallel cousins. The senior of two adjacent genealogical generations exerts authority over and levies respect from the junior. On the other hand, alternate generations joke with one another and behave more or less as equals. Adjacent generations tend to build huts in separate arcs of the village circle, alternate generations in the same arc. Generation oppositions and alliances tend to reduce tensions in the relationships between matricentric families and lineage segments, and between children and sisters' children of headmen.

Marriages between classificatory grandparents and grandchildren who frequently belong to the same maternal descent group, and marriages between cross-cousins, also tend to bind the various components of the village together.

Nevertheless, despite these centripetal and accretive tendencies Ndembu villages remain inherently unstable. Ndembu have the ideal aim of building up large villages although this is unceasingly rebutted by reality. For the Tallensi described by Professor Fortes the deep localized lineage is the skeleton of the social structure. For Ndembu, on the other hand, a deep lineage is a seldom-realized goal, the end-product of the sagacious manipulation by headmen of a number of organizational principles which conflict with one another in various situations.

Ndembu villages have a wide range of spatial mobility and each maternal descent-group in the course of time is scattered throughout different vicinages (discrete clusters of adjoining villages) over the whole region. Thus vicinages are heterogeneous in composition, for adjacent villages are seldom linked by maternal descent. The mobility and instability of villages partly determines and partly is determined by the absence of political centralization. The Lunda ancestors of the Ndembu came from the great pyramidal state of Mwantiyavwa's empire in the Congo, but in course of time succumbed to the decentralizing influences of their way of life, accelerated by the slave-trading and -raiding of the nineteenth century. But a vestige of the Lunda state power remains in the ritual role of the Ndembu

chief, Kanongesha. The chieftainship symbolizes the unity of Ndembu and their ownership of a common territory.

The instability of the secular social structure can be palliated but not controlled by secular means. Ritual associated with corporate groups such as lineages and villages is meagre and can only act as a temporary brake against fission. But ritual performed by cult associations that cut across villages, vicinages and even adjacent chiefdoms of Lunda origin, acts to keep the common values of Ndembu society constantly before the roving individualists of which it is composed. These values include historical renown, hunting and virility, fertility and motherhood, and health and strength. The mobility of the society is reflected in the contingent and occasional character of the ritual. The misfortunes of life, including bad luck for men at hunting, women's reproductive disorders, and severe illness for both sexes, are attributed to the punitive action of ancestor spirits, who are exorcised and placated in rituals specific to each mode of affliction. The cult association is made up of doctors and adepts who were themselves once patients and candidates in that cult. The widest community of Ndembu is therefore a community of suffering. In the context of the ritual the common values of the whole society are stressed in symbol, mime and precept. The associations are transient groups called into existence by the unpredictable misfortunes of mobile individuals. Hence the cult groups are too fleeting and shifting in composition to develop internal stresses and divisions. It is, I suggest, because the organizational principles which govern the secular structure are contradictory and produce perennial conflicts between persons and groups, that rituals are constantly being performed by unitary though transitory associations, and that these rituals stress common values over and above the clash of sectional interests. Ndembu ritual does not reflect or express, as does Tallensi or Swazi ritual, the structure of a stable society, with ritual role corresponding, as it were, to secular role; rather, it compensates for the integrational deficiencies of a politically unstable society. Poverty of secular status is confronted with rich development of ritual roles in many cult associations. The range of effective political or economic co-operation is small; at some performances of ritual more than a thousand people may attend.

In Chapter One I briefly describe the historical and ecological

background to this study. Chapter Two presents the relevant demographic information, while in Chapter Three I attempt to isolate structural principles governing the social composition of villages on the basis of genealogical and census information. The next four chapters are centred on the theme of maternal descent as the main principle underlying village continuity. In Chapter Four the concept of social drama is first introduced, and it is further refined in the course of this and the following chapter which deal mainly with struggles to succeed to headmanship between the matrilineal kinsmen in a single village. In these social dramas the pattern of factional intrigue is revealed and its consistency with, or degree of departure from, the basic social structure under varying circumstances is discussed. Chapters Six and Seven are concerned with village fission and with the pattern of secession. Chapters Eight and Nine deal with the second major determinant of Ndembu village structure, virilocal marriage, and how it operates within, and then between, villages. In Chapter Ten the integrative role of the cult associations is analysed. In Chapter Eleven the chieftainship, in its ritual importance and secular weakness, is briefly discussed.

That the pervasive theme of the book is conflict and the resolution of conflict arises from my predilection for the views, fast becoming a theory, of that school of British social anthropologists who are coming to regard a social system as 'a field of tension, full of ambivalence, of co-operation and contrasting struggle'.<sup>1</sup> For these anthropologists a social system is not a static model, a harmonious pattern, nor the conceptual product of a monistic outlook. A social system is a field of forces in which, to quote Fortes,<sup>2</sup> 'centrifugal tendencies and centripetal tendencies pull against one another', and whose power to persist is generated by its own socially transmuted conflicts.

Underlying the whole study is the concept, most recently reformulated by Gluckman and Colson,<sup>3</sup> that groups have 'an

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<sup>1</sup> Gluckman, M., *Rituals of Rebellion in South-East Africa* (1954), p. 21. Gluckman has recently developed and expanded this theory in his *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (1955).

<sup>2</sup> Fortes, M., *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi* (1945), p. 244.

<sup>3</sup> Gluckman, 'Political Institutions', in *The Institutions of Primitive Society* (1954), pp. 66-80; Colson, E., 'Social Control and Vengeance in Plateau Tonga Society', *Africa*, xxiii, 3 (July 1953).

inherent tendency to segment and then to become bound together by cross-cutting alliances . . . conflicts in one set of relationships are absorbed and redressed in the countervailing relations'. My analysis of village structure is influenced by this conception. But it must be pointed out that among the Ndembu, conflicts in secular, non-ritual, relations speedily sharpen to the point of irreconcilability in terms of the maintenance of local cohesion. The high rates both of divorce and of village fission attest to this. But conflicts which split sub-systems tend to be absorbed by the widest social system and even to assist its cohesion by a wide geographical spreading of ties of kinship and affinity. Centrifugal tendencies prevail on the whole over centripetal tendencies at the level of corporate kinship and local groupings, but centrifugality is confined within the bounds of the total socio-geographical system of the Ndembu nation. An overall ritual unity is contraposed to the fissile nature of secular life. Secular life shows unceasing attempts to build up coherent groups, but these attempts are as unendingly frustrated by centrifugal and fissile tendencies. The concept of Ndembu unity, transcending all the divisions of the secular system, is the product of innumerable, fitfully performed occasions of ritual, each couched in the idiom of unity through common misfortune.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THIS account of the Lunda-Ndembu is based on two periods of field research carried out between December 1950 and February 1952, and between May 1953 and June 1954, after my appointment as a Research Officer of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute.

I have no skill adequately to express my debt to the Ndembu people of Mwinilunga District for their contribution to this book. Many more than I can name instructed me patiently and painstakingly in their way of life. Villagers were never offended by my presence at many of their sacred or intimate occasions. From them I learnt not only some fascinating facts, but also that human frailty must be forgiven—in oneself as in others—if human social life is to be enriching. My especial thanks are due to Musona, my shrewd assistant, to Samutamba, to Sakazao, and to Headman Kajima. Others who gave me unstinting help were Windson Kashinakaji, Muchona and Chief Ikelenge. I am grateful to Mr. R. C. Dening, the District Commissioner, for access to his excellent maps and to the District Notebook.

Indeed, many persons have contributed, directly and indirectly, to the shaping of this book. Many separate skills and much collective knowledge and wisdom were put at my disposal as field-report became thesis and thesis was fashioned into book.

From Professor Forde I received my first training in social anthropology. It was in his lectures and seminars that my enthusiasm for the subject received form and direction.

During my field-work and while writing up, two sets of colleagues, several of whom belonged to both sets, gave me invaluable assistance. I refer to the Research Staff of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute and to the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester. Professor Max Gluckman, a former Director of the Institute and present Head of the Department, has given me training, guidance and criticism of the highest order throughout this period. It is widely acknowledged, among those who have worked under his direction, that he has the gift of arousing in his students a zest

for anthropological theory which enables them to keep on working with a will in spite of the many and often formidable difficulties and discomforts of field-work. I am deeply grateful to Professor Gluckman for his inspiring teaching, keen criticism and generous friendship.

Several members of the Department and the Institute have greatly helped me by reading the manuscript of this book with critical attention. Professor Elizabeth Colson, a former Director of the Institute, made many constructive comments during the crucial period between spells of field-work. Professor John Barnes read the manuscript at a late stage of preparation with incisive thoroughness. His advice on the layout of tables, diagrams and genealogies was of exceptional assistance. I would also like to thank Dr. A. L. Epstein for many valuable observations on my general argument.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Professor Clyde Mitchell, who was Director of the Institute while I was in the field, for his unfailing help and encouragement. He gave me my first practical training in field-work methods during a happy fortnight of research in Lambaland. His studies of Yao village life opened up several fruitful lines of thought to me.

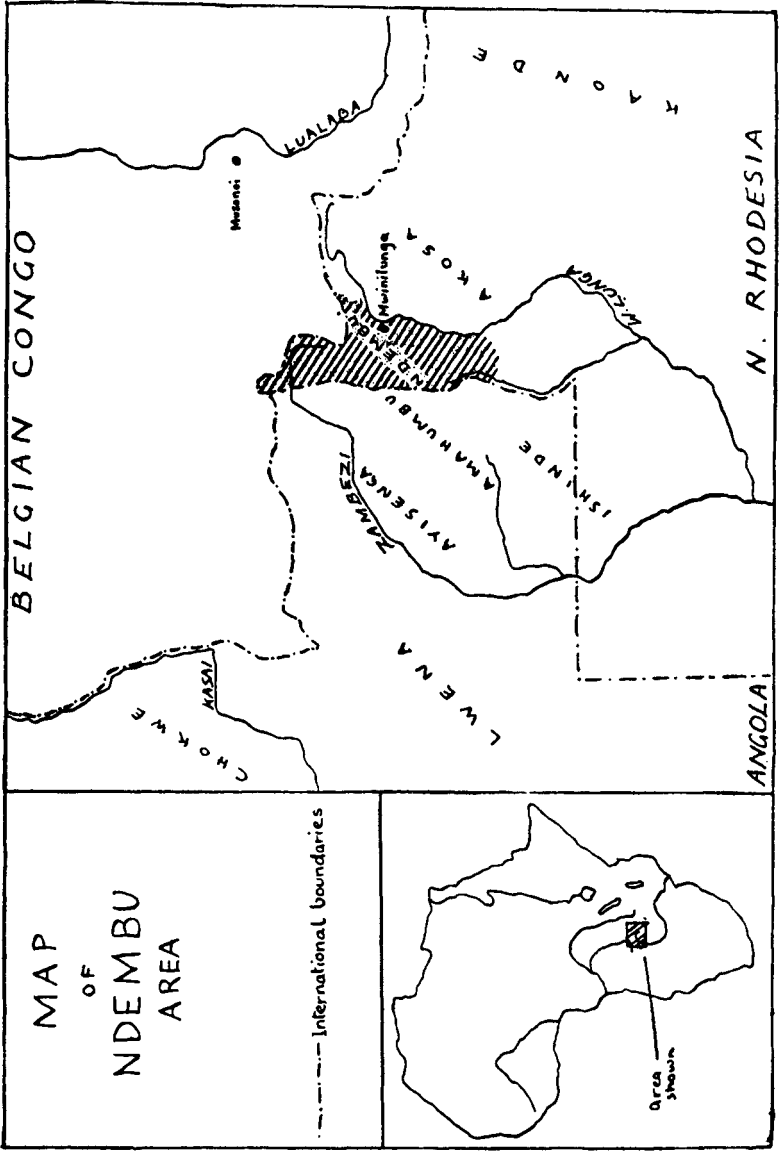
Mr. C. M. N. White, M.B.E., for a time Acting Director of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, gave me the benefit of his wide knowledge of the western tribes of Northern Rhodesia.

The influence of Professor Fortes is writ large in this book. Many of his ideas, first encountered during my student days, had already become part and parcel of my thinking when I entered the field.

My wife collaborated actively in all aspects of my field-work. Her contribution included most of the photography and much of the measuring of gardens and mapping of villages. In addition, she drew the maps for the book. Her comments on the argument have helped to shape its form.

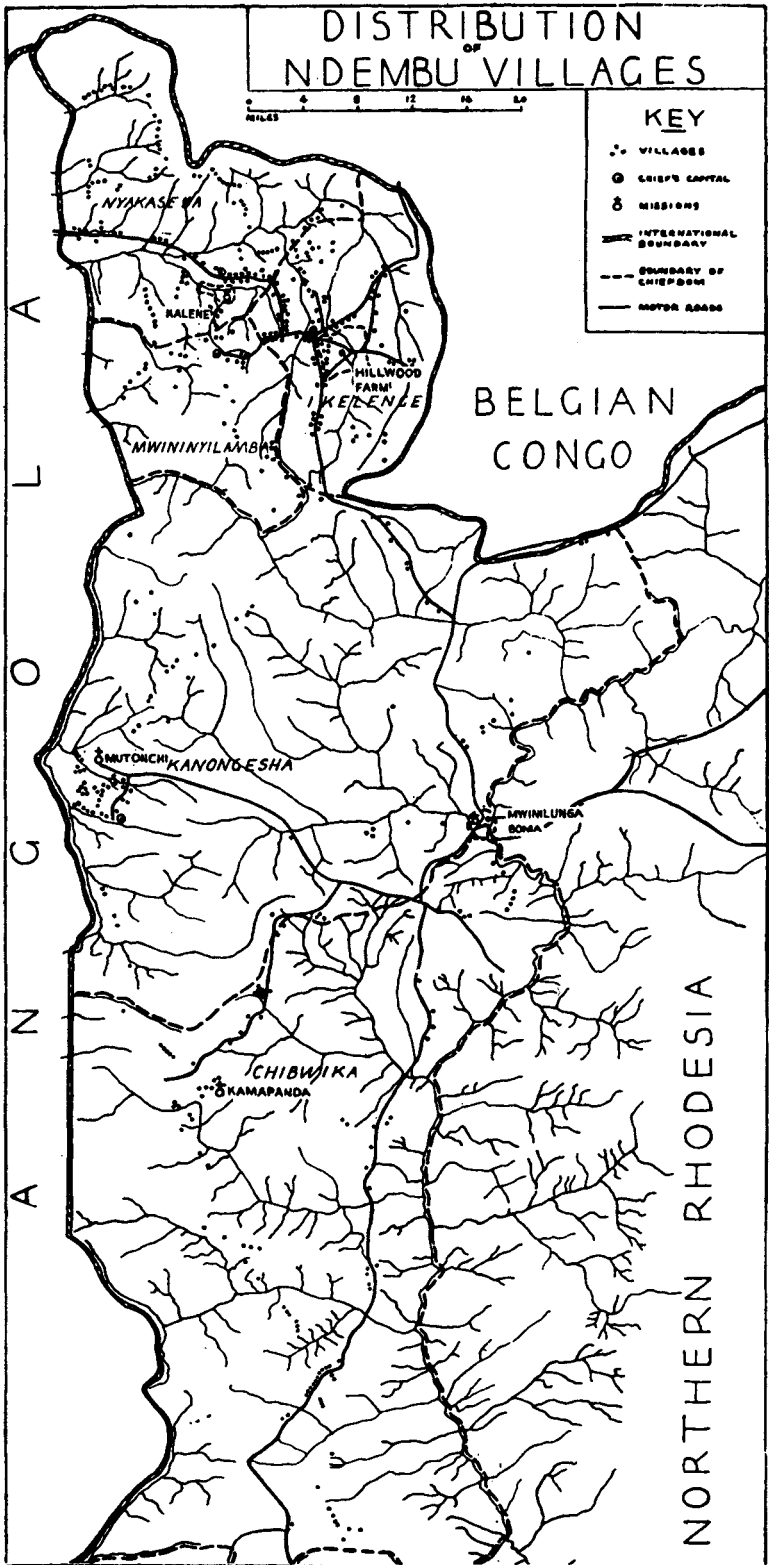
In short, this book is in a very real sense the product of collective authorship.

V. W. T.



MAP I NDEMBU AREA

MAP 2 DISTRIBUTION OF NDEMBU VILLAGE



## CHAPTER I

### HISTORICAL AND ECOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

THIS book is primarily what Professor Fortes would call a 'histological' study, an attempt to analyse in close detail the form and functioning of a sub-system, the village, within a wider system, the totality of Ndembu society. But something must be said, however compressed, about the wider historical and socio-geographical background of the village. Our village microcosm is a component in a system of social relations existing at a specific time and place. But it also has a specific history. By European notions, this history is brief and blended with mythology. Nevertheless, for Ndembu it is a history as a record of successive, interdependent events, making an irreversible process, which in their view explains what they are and where they are.

The Mwinilunga Lunda-Ndembu, hereinafter called Ndembu,<sup>1</sup> numbering about seventeen thousand, today inhabit the western portion of Mwinilunga District in the North-Western Province of Northern Rhodesia, approximately between 11° and 12° south latitude. Before European occupation the Ndembu chiefdom of Kanongesha comprised most of the territory between the West Lunga, Zambezi and Lufwiji rivers. Now the tribal land is crossed by the international boundaries that demarcate Northern Rhodesia, Angola and the Belgian Congo. Kanongesha's chiefdom is virtually bisected by the Angola-Rhodesia boundary, and on either side of the boundary there is a chief who calls himself

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<sup>1</sup> A number of Southern Lunda groups call themselves *Ndembu*, including the inhabitants of the chiefdoms of Kanongesha, Ishinde and Kazembe Mutanda (or Izaizai). My informants say that Ndembu was originally the name of a river at which these chiefs and their followers stayed together for several years after their departure from Mwantiyavwa's capital (see p. 2). I employ the term *Ndembu* throughout this book to distinguish Kanongesha's Lunda from the *Lunda-Kosa* (or *Akosa*) of Chief Musokantanda. This chief lives in the Belgian Congo near Musonoi but has nominated Sailunga as his representative in Northern Rhodesia. The Kosa occupy Mwinilunga District to the east on the West Lunga River. Government refer to Chief Kanongesha's Lunda as 'Ndembu' and to the Kosa group as 'Lunda' in official publications.

## 2 Schism and Continuity in an African Society

Kanongesha and is recognized as such by the colonial power. This book is based on research among the Rhodesian Ndembu and may not apply to Ndembu living in Angola or the Congo.

### *History and Traditions*<sup>1</sup>

The Ndembu, like their Kosa neighbours to the east, claim to have come as invaders from the Northern Lunda<sup>2</sup> empire of Mwantiyanywa between the Kasai and upper Bushimaie rivers, and to have conquered or received the submission of small scattered groups of indigenous Mbwela or Lukolwe. The invasion appears to have taken place before the beginning of the eighteenth century. According to Dias de Carvalho<sup>3</sup> the departure of Kanongesha and his followers from Luunda took place during the reign of the fifth Mwantiyanywa, Ianvo Noeji, whose reign Verhulpen places between 1640 and 1660.<sup>4</sup> According to the traditions of both Ndembu and Kosa, Kanongesha's migration occurred at about the same time as the migrations of other Lunda leaders such as: (1) Kazembe Mutanda, who established a chiefdom just to the north of Kanongesha's; (2) Musokantanda, who founded a chiefdom to the east of the Ndembu in what is now Musonoi District in the Katanga, and in eastern Mwinilunga; and (3) Ishinde, whose chiefdom, like that of Kanongesha's, was later divided between Angola and Northern Rhodesia where it occupies the eastern part of Balovale District. For many years these chiefdoms, like that of Kazembe on the Luapula, described by Lacerda, Gamitto and others, were tributary to Mwantiyanywa, and even today visits are made by

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<sup>1</sup> A considerable literature exists on Lunda history, much of it represented in the bibliography attached to Miss McCulloch's *The Southern Lunda and Related Peoples*, Ethnographic Survey of Africa, ed. Daryll Forde (1951). In addition to works cited below in the text, Lewis Gann ('The End of the Slave Trade in British Central Africa: 1889-1912', *The Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, xvi (1954), p. 36) makes some useful comments on the Angolan slave trade. See also my annotated translation of selected passages from Dias de Carvalho, 'A Lunda Love Story and its Consequences', in *The Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, xix (1955), for the Northern Lunda traditions.

<sup>2</sup> The land of Mwantiyanywa is called *Luunda* or *Luwunda*, and his people *Aluunda*, by Ndembu.

<sup>3</sup> Dias de Carvalho, H. A., *Expedição Portuguesa ao Muatianywa* (1890), p. 541.

<sup>4</sup> Verhulpen, E., *Baluba et Balubaisés de Katanga* (1936).

Southern Lunda chiefs or their representatives to the potentate's capital on the Lulua river when a new Mwantiyanywa succeeds.<sup>1</sup> When a Southern Lunda chief succeeds to office, confirmation is sought from Mwantiyanywa. When the British Government sought to abolish the Ndembu chieftainship of Nyakaseya in 1947, the incumbent hastened to Mwantiyanywa who wrote a letter to the Western Provincial Commissioner on his behalf. As a result he was reinstated.

According to White,<sup>2</sup> the Southern Lunda largely retained their own language and to a greater degree their social system. One reason for this seems to have been that they migrated into a broken thinly-populated country where they had less chance of being absorbed by the people whom they found already there. The latter were of Lukolwe stock as evidenced by the names of rivers which they have left. . . . Indeed the Lukolwe, whose remnants today are a very primitive people, may have been one factor which was responsible for the failure of the Lunda to show the same degree of enterprise as their neighbours. . . . Lunda also suffered continuously from the incursions of their Lwena and Chokwe neighbours which may indicate that they were a later migration, at a disadvantage with their earlier established neighbours, which prevented their expansion and development. Hence the Chokwe and the Lwena were able to live in more open, flatter country, whilst the Lunda took refuge in broken hilly country between the Zambezi and Kabompo headwaters where they lived in small scattered communities.

There are today in the Mwinilunga Ndembu region some twenty-six villages, the residential cores of which claim to be of 'Mbwela' origin. The term 'Mbwela' appears to have been widely applied by in-coming groups of Lunda stock to the more primitive Bantu peoples, such as Lukolwe, whom they encountered to the south and west of their homeland. Ndembu today use the term *kabeta Kambwela* to denote 'the south'. Sometimes they group Mbwela and Kaonde together as having a cultural affinity. The Mwinilunga group of putative Mbwela origin are

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<sup>1</sup> As in 1951, when Mbaka succeeded. Both Kanongeshas sent representatives, Musokantanda and Kazembe Mutanda went in person, and several Native Authority Sub-Chiefs such as Ikelenge, Nyakaseya and Mwininyilamba visited the new Mwantiyanywa, each with his entourage who were given food by the potentate.

<sup>2</sup> White, C. M. N., 'The Balovale Peoples and their Historical Background', *The Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, viii (1949), pp. 35-6.

generally known as 'Kawiku', after the name of a plain to the north-east of Mwinilunga Boma, where they are first said to have been encountered by Kanongesha's invaders. According to Ndembu and Kawiku traditions they resisted the invaders for many years before they submitted. In Angola, the Ndembu apply the name 'Humbu' to a population of Mbwela origin in the south, and the senior Humbu headman Kafwana plays an important role in the Angolan Kanongesha's installation ritual. Today Kawiku and Humbu are culturally and linguistically almost indistinguishable from Ndembu, but on occasion still maintain that they are 'the owners of the country'.

Ndembu did not establish themselves as a higher caste or class above the Kawiku. Both groups intermarry freely and live at the same economic level. Ndembu, however, consider Kawiku to be turbulent, clownish and discourteous people and jibe at their selfish and quarrelsome behaviour. Kawiku take delight in fostering these beliefs by joking about their own uncouthness.

It is doubtful whether Ndembu have retained the social system practised in their homeland to the extent indicated by White. Several well-informed accounts of Mwantiyavwa's state of Luunda exist which give the picture of a highly centralized political system.<sup>1</sup> In the royal capital a host of nobles and officials were permanently stationed, supported by the tribute that flowed in, at the height of Lunda power, from chiefdoms as widely separated from one another as Kapenda-ka-Mulemba to the west and Kazembe on the Luapula to the east, a distance of more than seven hundred miles. Not only tribute but trade contributed to the surplus which maintained the Lunda nobility. Mwantiyavwa had trade agreements with a number of Ovimbundu chiefs who despatched caravans into the interior bearing trade goods in exchange for slaves, ivory and, later, rubber and beeswax.<sup>2</sup> Capello and Ivens<sup>3</sup> wrote in 1882, when the empire was already on the wane, 'at a short distance from the *mu-sumba* [*Musumba*, "state capital"] are established vast markets, true

<sup>1</sup> Dias de Carvalho; Buchner, M., 'Das Reich des Mwata Yamvo und seine Nachbarländer', *Deutsche Geographische Blätter*, 1 (1883); Pogge, P., *Im Reiche des Mwata Yamvo* (1880).

<sup>2</sup> Childs, G. M., *Umbundu Kinship and Character* (1949), p. 205.

<sup>3</sup> Capello, H., and Ivens, R., *From Benguella to the Territory fo Yacca*, translated by A. Elwes, (1882), vol. 1, p. 389.