

MONOGRAPHS FROM THE AFRICAN STUDIES CENTRE, LEIDEN

TEARS OF RAIN

**Ethnicity and History
in Central Western Zambia**



Wim van Binsbergen

ROUTLEDGE


Tears of Rain

Monographs from the African Studies Centre,
Leiden

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

to Patricia

First published in 1992 by Kegan Paul International Limited

Distributed by
John Wiley & Sons Ltd
Southern Cross Trading Estate

Set in Times
by W. Goar Klein/Z-Work
Gouda, The Netherlands

This edition published 2016 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Binsbergen, Wim M. J. van
Tears of Rain : ethnicity and history in central western Zambia. —
(Monographs from the African Studies Centre, Leiden)
I. Title II. Series
305.86894

ISBN 071030434X

US Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Binsbergen, Wim M. J. van.
Tears of Rain: ethnicity and history in central western Zambia / Wim van
Binsbergen.
xxii + 495 p. 21.6 cm. — (Monographs from the African Studies Centre,
Leiden)

Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-7103-0434-X

1. Likota Iya Bankoya—Criticism. Textual. 2. Nkoya (African people)—
History—Sources. 3. Ethnicity—Zambia. 4. Ethnohistory—Zambia. 5.
Zambia—History—Sources. I. Title. II. Series.
DT3058.N56B56 1991
398.22'08996393—dc20

91-21009
CIP

ISBN 13: 978-0-7103-0434-6 (hbk)

Contents

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xiii
Acknowledgments	xix
PART I. TEARS OF RAIN: ETHNICITY AND HISTORY IN CENTRAL WESTERN ZAMBIA	1
Chapter 1. The contemporary point of departure: The Nkoya-speaking people and their chiefs	3
1.1. The Nkoya	3
1.2. Nkoya subgroups and the recent process of their ethnic convergence	11
<i>the proliferation of Nkoya subgroups</i>	11
<i>pan-Nkoya convergence and its implications for the study of history</i>	17
1.3. The major Nkoya chiefs and their political environment today	19
<i>the distant Lunda association</i>	21
<i>chiefs, royal kin and headmen: the internal structure of the neo-traditional Nkoya polities</i>	23
<i>the indigenous Barotse administration and the colonial state</i>	28
<i>the post-colonial state</i>	43
<i>Mutondo and Kahare: moiety-like structure and the struggle for seniority</i>	47
Chapter 2. The <i>Likota Iya Bankoya</i> manuscript	53
2.1. History of the <i>Likota Iya Bankoya</i> manuscript	53
2.2. <i>Likota Iya Bankoya</i> as belonging to a genre of historiographic production	58
<i>characteristics of the genre and methodological implications</i>	59
	v

Tears of Rain

<i>between colonialism, missionary influence and ethnic concerns</i>	62
<i>narrative structure and style</i>	66
<i>the uses of a religious education</i>	68
2.3. Reconstructing the original manuscript	70
2.4. Editing the reconstructed manuscript	73
<i>Nkoya as a written language</i>	74
<i>editorial conventions</i>	75
2.5. Problems of translation	79
<i>the identification of gender</i>	80
<i>gender and death from natural causes: an example</i>	84
<i>Shakalongo as female: another example</i>	86
<i>the handling of kinship terms and terms for social groups</i>	88
<i>genealogies</i>	90
<i>genealogical over-interpretation: the case of</i>	
<i>Mwene Kayambila Shishopa</i>	91
<i>terms for court offices</i>	93
<i>toponyms</i>	95
<i>more specifically literary problems of translation</i>	96
Chapter 3. Historical criticism of <i>Likota Iya Bankoya</i>	99
3.1. The apologetic intention of <i>Likota Iya Bankoya</i>	99
3.2. The quest for authority	101
<i>identification of sources</i>	101
<i>dates</i>	102
<i>anachronisms</i>	103
<i>recycling of published historical texts</i>	103
<i>dynastic numbers and the nature of the Nkoya royal titles:</i>	
<i>between ascription and achievement</i>	106
<i>authoritative lists and biblical elements</i>	112
<i>the spurious insertion of a mainstream event</i>	113
3.3. Shimunika's possible biases	114
<i>Nkoya nationalism?</i>	115
<i>Nkoya as a toponym</i>	117
<i>Nkoya as the name of a dynastic group centring on</i>	
<i>the Mutondo kingship, and its emergence as</i>	
<i>an ethnonym</i>	118
<i>Christian bias?</i>	120
<i>bias in favour of the Mutondo kingship and the aristocratic</i>	
<i>perspective, and against earlier occupancy by other</i>	
<i>ethnic groups</i>	121
<i>bias in the treatment of slavery</i>	125
<i>bias in the treatment of firearms?</i>	130
<i>Shimunika as a laudator temporis (colonialis) acti</i>	138
<i>male sexist bias?</i>	138
3.4. The ultimate test: the confrontation of <i>Likota Iya Bankoya</i>	
with unprocessed oral data from central western Zambia	140

3.5. <i>Likota lya Bankoya</i> as literature and as myth	148
<i>Kapeshi ka Munungampanda</i>	148
<i>symbolism and history: the case of gender relations</i>	151
Chapter 4. State formation in central western Zambia as depicted in <i>Likota lya Bankoya</i>	155
4.1. The pre-state situation	155
<i>the High God, Rain and the Land</i>	156
<i>clans</i>	162
4.2. The emergence of the institution of <i>Wene</i>	167
4.3. The emergence of states	172
<i>the beginning of violence</i>	172
<i>the first royal courts</i>	174
<i>court officials</i>	178
<i>a new style of kingship</i>	181
4.4. Male usurpation of <i>Wene</i>	182
4.5. Changes in local branches of production under male initiative	188
Chapter 5. State and society in nineteenth-century central western Zambia:	
Regalia, legal aspects, ideology and gender	197
5.1. Regalia: A male prerogative?	197
5.2. Some legal aspects of Nkoya states	202
<i>royal succession</i>	202
<i>delegation and democracy</i>	204
<i>the extent of interstate rule of law and the geographical extent of Nkoya-ness</i>	205
5.3. Towards a male ideological perspective	211
<i>limits to male ascendancy: the ladder into the sky</i>	212
<i>male circumcision and the Mbwela connexion</i>	214
<i>shattering the female cosmos</i>	218
<i>Lady Myene of a later period</i>	223
5.4. The changing kinship roles of women	224
5.5. Contested patrilineal succession of the Kahare kingship around 1900: Shamamano, Kambotwe and Timuna	230
5.6. Another look at the seniority contest between the Kahare and Mutondo titles	234
Chapter 6. <i>Likota lya Bankoya</i> as cosmology and as history: Aspects of Nkoya symbolism and its transformations	239
6.1. Theoretical and methodological orientation	240
6.2. Identifying <i>Likota lya Bankoya</i> 's symbolic structure	244
6.3. Identifying transformations in <i>Likota lya Bankoya</i> <i>from contemporary Nkoya culture to Likota lya Bankoya:</i>	246
<i>examples of transformations</i>	247
<i>equivalent transformations leading to a self-validating timeless structure</i>	249

Tears of Rain

	<i>looking for mutative transformations</i>	250
6.4.	From transformations to history	255
	<i>remaining problems: periodization, and the sifting of myth and history</i>	257
	<i>an alternative explanation: perpetual kinship on the Upper Zambezi?</i>	259
	<i>the vindication of ethno-history</i>	261
6.5.	Beyond <i>Religious Change in Zambia</i> : The religious transformation of women's political power	262
6.6.	Conclusion: history out of myth	266

PART II. LIKOTA LYA BANKOYA:

EDITED NKOYA TEXT 269

Ku tontolola [Preface]: lya tikitiwile na ba [by] Hamba H. Mwene 271

Likota lya Bankoya: lya tikitiwile na ba [by] Rev. Johasaphat Malasha Shimunika, lya manishiwile na ba (editor) Wim van Binsbergen 273

Mitwe ya byambo bya mu Likota [*original detailed table of contents*]

[Main text, chapters 1-56] 275

Bizino bya Bamyene ba Bankoya [*The burial sites of the Myene of the Nkoya*]: lya tikitiwile na ba [by] Hamba H. Mwene 341

PART III. THE HISTORY OF THE NKOYA PEOPLE:

ENGLISH TRANSLATION 349

Preface: by Hamba H. Mwene 351

The history of the Nkoya people: by Rev. Johasaphat Malasha Shimunika, translated by Wim van Binsbergen and Masuku Malapa 353

Chapters of the stories in 'Likota' [translated original table of contents]

[Translated main text, chapters 1-56] 355

PART IV. REFERENCE MATERIAL	419
Appendix 1. A description of the constituent parts of the <i>Likota lya Bankoya</i> manuscript	421
Appendix 2. Variants of the <i>Likota lya Bankoya</i> manuscript	425
Appendix 3. Genealogies constructed on the basis of the text of <i>Likota lya Bankoya</i>	431
Appendix 4. List of published texts in the Nkoya language	441
Appendix 5. List of oral sources	445
Appendix 6. List of archival sources and district files consulted	449
Appendix 7. <i>Zinkena</i> in western Zambia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries	451
References cited	457
Author index	473
Subject index and glossary	475

List of diagrams

<i>Diagram 1.</i> Ethnic groups in twentieth-century central western Zambia	7
<i>Diagram 2.</i> Nkoya facial scarification in males	10
<i>Diagram 3.</i> Ethnic groups and subgroups in Mankoya district in 1933	13
<i>Diagram 4.</i> Nkoya kinship terminology	82
<i>Diagram 5.</i> Approximate trade routes in central western Zambia, second half of the nineteenth century	135
<i>Diagram 6.</i> One oral source's genealogy of Nkoya <i>Myene</i>	143
<i>Diagram 7.</i> Official royal genealogy of the Nkoya <i>Myene</i>	144
<i>Diagram 8.</i> Nkoya royal genealogy according to elders in Lusaka	145
<i>Diagram 9.</i> Reconstruction of the genealogical relationship between Shamamano and Kambotwe	233
<i>Diagram 10.</i> Historical transfer of symbolic structures, and possible transformations, between early 'Mbwela' society, contemporary 'Nkoya' society, and the image of society in <i>Likota lya Bankoya</i>	256
<i>Diagrams 11a-b.</i> Genealogy 1 — from Mwene Libupe to Mwene Manenga	432-433
<i>Diagrams 12a-b.</i> Genealogy 2 — from Mwene Manenga to Mwene Munangisha	436-437
<i>Diagram 13.</i> Genealogy 3 — from Katete to Mwene Shakalongo	439
<i>Diagram 14.</i> Genealogy 4 — from Mwene Shihoka to Mwene Shamamano	440
<i>Diagram 15a.</i> The location of Nkoya <i>zinkena</i> in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries according to <i>Likota lya Bankoya</i> — overview of western Zambia	455
<i>Diagram 15b.</i> The location of Nkoya <i>zinkena</i> in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries according to <i>Likota lya Bankoya</i> — the Land of Nkoya	456

List of tables

<i>Table 1. Clans and Myene among the Nkoya</i>	172
<i>Table 2. Main symbolic oppositions in <i>Likota lya Bankoya</i></i>	243
<i>Table 3. Symbolic oppositions in <i>Likota lya Bankoya</i>, organized into four symbolic domains, and arranged thematically</i>	245
<i>Table 4. Symbolic transformations in <i>Likota lya Bankoya</i></i>	251
<i>Table 5. Zinkena in western Zambia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries</i>	451

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Preface and acknowledgments

This is a book about ethnicity among the Nkoya people in central western Zambia, and about the historical stuff out of which that ethnicity is made. It studies in detail the fascinating ways in which ethnicity both creates, and feeds upon, ethno-history. At the same time it assesses the possibility of reconstructing objective historical processes, in that region since the sixteenth century, on the basis primarily of one very extensive source, Rev. Johasaphat Malasha Shimunika's *Likota lya Bankoya*, whose production (as a compilation and processing of local oral traditions) is intimately related to contemporary ethnicity.

But most of all this is a book about that fundamental, and humble, condition of scholarship: *reading*. The main message I have to impart in my argument is what it means to read a text like *Likota lya Bankoya* (and by implication — since that text belongs to the genre of literate ethno-history — an entire category of sources of modern African historiography). In order to be able to scrape off layer after layer of the text, and to begin to understand its meanings, workings and preconceptions, we need the linguistics, the symbolism, the documentary and oral sources; we need also such insight in the local socio-cultural process as derives from prolonged participatory research, and an appreciation of contemporary political and ethnic structures in the region. And beyond even these academic tools of method, skill and knowledge, as I hope to develop in the course of my argument, such reading appeals to existential categories: patience, empathy, the excitement of discovery, sense of literary beauty, power of imagination, and love.

This volume consists of the following parts:

- Part I* An analytical study of the *Likota Iya Bankoya* manuscript, sketching its political, ethnic and ideological background and the problems of editing and translation which it poses, and proceeding to extract — in confrontation with other oral and documentary sources, and gradually perfecting our methodology — whatever information that text has to offer on the precolonial history of the region and, in that region, on the process of Nkoya ethnicization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries;
- Part II* A critical edition of the Nkoya text of *Likota Iya Bankoya*, upon which the argument in Part I is largely based;
- Part III* An English translation of *Likota Iya Bankoya*, through which the materials of Part II will become available to non-Nkoya-speaking audiences;
- Part IV* Reference material, including genealogies, a bibliography, and indexes.

With all the care with which the Nkoya text has been prepared and embedded in a critical apparatus, I certainly do not claim to make an original, professional contribution to African linguistics. The conventions of editing and orthography as followed in this book reflect the concerns of contemporary Nkoya speakers and of an anthropologist-cum-historian, and these are not necessarily those of the international community of Bantuist scholars. If this edition will manage to kindle an interest in Nkoya among students of Bantu languages, inviting them to correct such linguistic errors as the present edition no doubt contains, I shall consider that part of my task to have been fulfilled successfully.

The Nkoya speakers who have contributed to the present edition, and I myself, take pride in the fact that — along with its companion volume, a popular edition for a local Zambian audience — this is the first publication of a major Nkoya text since the appearance of a Nkoya translation of the New Testament and Psalms in the early 1950s — which was also largely Rev. Shimunika's work.

Despite an early attempt such as Gervase Clay's *History of the Makoya district* (1945), the history of central western Zambia which forms the main topic of the present book has long constituted a relative blind-spot in the study of South Central Africa. As Schecter wrote in his assessment of Lunda southward expansion:

'And somebody must ask the people of the Nkoya-Mbwela group, who now live south of the area of Lunda expansion, for their view of the whole process.' (Schecter 1980a: 320)

This is precisely what I have done in the research which led to the present book.

Similarly, a decade ago Gwyn Prins, making up the balance sheet of his Lozi oral-historical research, was so generous as to express the hope that my work in progress on the eastern Lozi periphery, among the Nkoya, would yield new insights into Lozi history (Prins 1978: 220). On this point this volume may be disappointing. Although prominent Lozi royal figures like Sipopa and Lewanika feature in *Likota lya Bankoya* with unexpected vividness and detail, the accepted picture of Lozi-Nkoya relations — in the sense of ‘Lozi’ domination over ‘the Nkoya’ since c. 1860 — is not going to be greatly altered by the present material and my analysis. Unless in the following sense: now that the precolonial history of state formation among the Nkoya has entered scholarly debate, it will help us to discern overall patterns and comparative models of state formation in western Zambia; in the light of these patterns the Lozi state, however much it has captured public imagination and scholarly attention, will lose some of its uniqueness and glory. Up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, processes of state formation throughout western Zambia, including the ancestors of the people whom we call today the Lozi and the Nkoya, appear to have displayed many parallels. The striking differences that were to develop in the nineteenth century were due, partly to historical accident (such as the invigoration of the Lozi state with the Kololo impulse), partly to ecological differences, partly to such internal ideological, social and political developments as the present analysis helps us to pinpoint.

Throughout Africa, state formation entails the imposition, upon a local social formation, of a more or less centralized socio-political structure representing a *total departure from*, or a *total transformation of*, the social organization and ideology prevailing in earlier, pre-state times. In the specific context of the expansion of the Lunda political culture in South Central Africa, the typical form of statehood emerging from that transformation had two salient features as identified by Schechter (1980a): *perpetual kinship* and *positional succession*. Together these made for the powerful organizational and mobilizational structure of the Lunda-ized states. Perpetual kinship expresses the political relationships between rulers and between aristocrats in terms of fictive kinship, so that the incumbent of position A is always identified as e.g. the younger brother of the incumbent of position B; political alliance and seniority are implied in this idiom. Positional succession, as the complementary device, stipulates a fixed order of incumbence and promotion encompassing all the senior political positions within a state, by virtue of which all incumbents move one place up when one incumbent in a more senior position dies or otherwise has to be replaced. The literature on the Lunda realm shows how these organizational formulae have strengthened state organizations; and while these states have seldom been examined from the point of view of a total transformation of the pre-state order, dynastic myths

of origin at least bring out the element of a historic break, a rupture represented by the advent of statehood. Particularly among the Nkoya's western neighbours, the Lozi, all these elements are very manifest, and brought out by the works by Gluckman, Mutumba Mainga, Muuka and Prins as listed in the bibliography.

Let us look at the following anecdote which was told by the hunter F.C. Selous about Sipopa, the Lozi king (1864-1876) who restored the Luyana dynasty after a quarter of a century of occupation by the Kololo from South Africa:

'In Sepopo's [Sipopa's] time many people were executed for witchcraft and other offences, and their bodies thrown to the crocodiles. (...) One day, as he [Mr T., a trader, and friend of Selous] was drinking beer with Sepopo, a very old man crept up and begged for food. The king, turning to some of his men, asked who he was, and learned that he belonged to one of the slave tribes. He then said, "He's a very old man; can he do any work?" and was informed that the old man was quite past work, and depending upon charity — a very, very scarce article in the interior of Africa. Then said the king, "Take him down to the river and hold his head under water," and the old man was forthwith led down to the river. Presently the executioner returned. "Is the old man dead?" said Sepopo. "Dead he is," they answered. "Then give him to the crocodiles," said the king, and went on drinking beer and chatting to my friend T.' (Selous 1893: 249f).

This is more than a simple tale of royal cruelty, although Sipopa's reputation as a tyrant is well-established (Holub 1879). We see the Lozi king negotiating between three different social spheres:

- (a) the state, defining relations between the king, his court officers, an animal species (the crocodile) as a royal emblem, and his subjects including 'slave tribes';
- (b) peripheral mercantile capitalism whose penetration brings the king in contact with European traders, in the pursuit of mutual benefits;
- (c) and the kinship-based social order at the village level, where commensality rules and where the elderly (to whom all juniors are linked by ties of real, putative or fictive kinship) are to be supported and honoured, but at the same time are feared for their obvious powers of sorcery (also considered a form of 'work') without which they could never have attained their advanced age.

Seeking to entertain and impress the representative of mercantile capitalism, Sipopa's action celebrates the absolute supremacy of his state over the village order, and the absolute rejection of the latter's principles of seniority and commensality. The specifics of the episode are decidedly ironic: as we shall see in the present book, it was with a

'slave tribe', the Nkoya, that Sipopa had found refuge during Kololo rule, and it was among them that, through ties of fictive kinship, he had received his early training as a hunter. The king's action amounts to a rejection of all this, confronting the kinship etiquette, sorcery connotations and Sipopa's personal obligations of reciprocity vis-à-vis a subjugated ethnic group, with the physical and symbolic power invested in the Lozi state: a power not only manifestly superior to the old man's but deriving, as it were, from a different universe — the state — and implying yet a third universe — peripheral capitalism and European penetration in general. As such, the anecdote is similar to standard tales of Lozi arrogance circulating among contemporary Nkoya; if told before a twentieth-century Nkoya audience it would immediately summon the resentment that Nkoya have built up in over a century of domination by the Lozi state under conditions of outside, European support. Patterns of Nkoya ethnicization are to be understood in the light of this resentment. However, the principal point I wish to make at this initial stage is that such total departure from the social and symbolic order of village society was never attained by the states which, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the Nkoya sought to establish for themselves.

Nkoya states failed to exploit to the full extent the Lunda heritage of perpetual kinship and positional succession; and they equally failed to build, out of the social and symbolic material available, a state that not only deviated from, but radically transformed that material, making such a transformation the basis for a viable new domain of exploitation hinging on the political structure. The Nkoya myth of state origin, which we shall examine in detail in this book, hints at transformation of the pre-state society but at the same time stresses considerable continuity with the past. Nkoya states did erode, but did not fundamentally surpass, the female-centred cosmological framework and the kinship structure that informed it, and hence remained *inchoate* states, always subject to the internal dynamics of the dynastic group, and to the vicissitudes of tribute and external pressure. It was therefore, probably, that the Nkoya states were no match, not for the Kololo, the Lozi or the Yeke, nor indeed for the colonial state.

It is to the growth of scholarship on this systematic, abstract level that this book seeks to contribute, more than to the detailed description of specific events in the Nkoya past.

Historians of South Central Africa may be persuaded, by this volume, that *Likota Iya Bankoya* is indeed the goldmine I believed it to be when I set out to devote an irresponsibly large number of years to its editing, translation and analysis. Casting some surprising light on historical processes and evolving political, social and ideological structures in central western Zambia, Shimunika's text is particularly fascinating for the exercises in historical method and criticism to which it invites and which form the core of my argument. I have sought (in such fields as state formation, ethnicization, modes of production, gender relations, symbolic analysis — and the ideological implications of

colonialism, Christianity and literacy) to formulate new problems and new solutions, whose applicability seem to extend beyond the parochial confines of Nkoya culture and central western Zambia. It is in this sense that I hope to contribute to the study of African history and ethnicity in general.

The precolonial history of central western Zambia, and the text of *Likota lya Bankoya*, confront us with a great many puzzles, some of which I have sought to solve in this volume. In order not to add another puzzle let me explain the volume's unusually poetic (or is it tear-jerking?) title *Tears of Rain* at this early stage. As my argument will make clear, Rev. Shimunika's text has the apologetic intention of asserting Nkoya ethnic identity in the face of twentieth-century political subjugation and arrogance to which the Nkoya were treated on the part of the Lozi ethnic group, the dominant one in western Zambia. In this respect *Likota lya Bankoya* is very much an expression of ethnic conflict such as arose and intensified within regional and local-level arenas created by the colonial state. The Lozi challenge is met by Shimunika's evoking a glorious precolonial past of Nkoya kingship, revolving on the proud adage that resounds through *Likota lya Bankoya*:

'Our Kingship comes from the Raindrop.'

From raindrop to tear is only one step — in fact the adage could be translated as 'Our Kingship consists of the Tears of Rain', where Rain is the personified demiurge Mvula who mediates between the Land (the visible world) and the Sky (the abode of the High God, Nyambi). Thus the adage conveys both cosmic legitimation, divine ancestry and expanse — to the extent of fragmentation — in terms of number of royal titles (cf. *Appendix 7*) and numbers of subjects. In fact the contemporary Nkoya firmly believe that most of western and central Zambia would, in the last analysis, qualify as belonging to the Nkoya realm.

Tears, however, have a sorrowful connotation in most cultures and the Nkoya are no exception. Rev. Shimunika's argument is profoundly tragic. For while attempting to glorify the Nkoya past and to state the case for Nkoya political independence from the Lozi, his very data make abundantly clear that as from c. 1860, nearly half a century before the imposition of colonial rule, Nkoya states were losing their economic and political independence first to the immigrant Kololo, and subsequently to the Lozi as soon as the latter had managed to reclaim their state after a quarter of a century of Kololo rule.

This remarkable historiographic integrity on Rev. Shimunika's part indicates the status of *Likota lya Bankoya* as a contribution to history. As a student of and a participant in Nkoya life since 1972, I should add that this ironic twist in the constitution of their ethnic awareness appears to me to have in itself an eminently Nkoya flavour. The tension between pride and humiliation, submission and individual assertiveness may be a universal trait of human society, but it is particularly

noticeable as a constant of Nkoya social and political life, where it often tends to be resolved by the studied adoption of the underdog's role. Those who today identify as Nkoya derive pride and hope from the fact that finally their vulnerable identity has managed to establish itself in the world of books, political participation and development schemes — even if this does not alter the material hardship of life in central western Zambia today, and meant bringing out the somewhat humiliating truth, probing for its deeper meaning instead of hiding in antiquated myths.

It is to this process of illumination that I have committed myself in this book, and I am deeply grateful to all those who have enabled me to bring my contribution to completion.

Acknowledgments

This volume forms the outcome of a long editorial and analytical process, in which the concerns of those in contemporary Zambia who identify as Nkoya have been combined with what I hope to be the international standards of scholarship. In the course of this process, which has enjoyed the patient support of the people from Zambia's Kaoma district (Western Province), their traditional leaders Mwene Mutondo and Mwene Kahare, and the district's modern officeholders, the following people have contributed specific essential services:

- Mr Denis Kawangu Shiyowe, of Shumbanyama village, Kaoma district, who was the first to attract and stimulate scholarly interest in the Nkoya language and culture in the early 1970s; he taught me the language and was my research assistant in the years 1972-1974. Without his brotherly dedication, humour and love this book could not have been written, and the research on which it is based could never have been undertaken.
- Mr Hamba H. Mwene, of Lusaka, who preserved the manuscript of *Likota Iya Bankoya* and passed it on to me in 1975 with the purpose of having it published; Mr Mwene has been most helpful throughout the various stages leading towards the editing and publication of the manuscript. To acknowledge this contribution, a preface and kings' lists by Mr Mwene have been included in the present edition — duly italicized in order to distinguish these writings from Rev. Shimunika's text itself.
- Mr Masuku Malapa, of Lusaka, who by making draft translations of the manuscript into English enabled me to penetrate the Nkoya text more fully and to create a scholarly context within which, as a by-product, a popular Nkoya version could be published as a separate volume: *Likota Iya Bankoya: Nkoya edition*, Research Report No. 31 B, Leiden: African Studies Centre, 1988, 97 pp. That popular edition, without analytical study, English translation,

footnotes or other reference material, but printed from the same computer files as the Nkoya text included in the present volume, made the *Likota lya Bankoya* text available to its immediate users in a simple and accessible form.

- Mr Davison Kawanga, of Kaoma, whose companionship and guidance as from 1977 has enabled me to broaden and deepen my approach to the Nkoya language and the people speaking it, and who has made specific contributions to the editorial process.
- Mr Jackson Shimunika, of Luampa, who especially after his father's death in 1981 assisted the editorial process in various ways.
- The Institute of African Studies, University of Zambia, Lusaka, which has inspired, supported and facilitated my research on western Zambia ever since 1972.
- The African Studies Centre, Leiden, which as from 1977 made the most generous contributions conceivable towards this volume and towards my research on western Zambia in general: in terms of technical facilities and publication funds, my working time, and field trips in 1977 (three months), 1978 (one month), 1988 (one week) and 1989 (two weeks) — adding to my original field-work among the Nkoya from March 1972 to April 1974. Without the enthusiastic support and trusting patience of this institution's former General Secretary Mr G. Grootenhuis, its Bursar Mr J. Nijssen, its computer specialists Messrs R. Niemeijer, W. Veerman and M. Leopold, and its publication officer Mr D. Stelpstra, the present volume could never have been produced, nor its companion volume. I am indebted to the Editorial Board of the African Studies Centre for its wisdom to agree to the inclusion, however costly, of the Nkoya text of *Likota lya Bankoya* in this volume — a requisite for the kind of meticulous editing and close reading on which my historiographic method depends. Without the stimulating intellectual environment which my colleagues in the Department of Political and Historical Studies helped to create, the final product would have taken even longer to materialize, and its treatment of issues of state formation and ethnicity would have been even more defective. Rob Buijtenhuijs, specifically, read the manuscript and made useful comments.
- In the editorial process, a decisive point was reached in 1985, when proofs of the Nkoya text and of an earlier draft of the English translation became available for circulation. Then Mr M. Malapa and Mr H.H. Mwene contributed their own full sets of corrections and queries. At the same time, in Kaoma, Mr D. Kawanga organized an editorial committee which submitted its own set of corrected proofs; the members of this committee were: Mr David Kapungu, Ms Ruth M. Kashompa, Mr Davison Kawanga, Mr Enock Mulando, Mr Powell Munengo, Mr Dominic

Preface and acknowledgments

D. Mupishi, Mr M.S. Mutupa, Ms Mary Nalishuwa, Mr Amon N. Njenjema, and Mr Moffat R. Tumbila. Similarly, Mr Jackson Shimunika organized, in Luampa, an editorial committee consisting of Rev. Shimunika's sometime associates in Bible translating: Mr H. Katete, Mr M. Kayoya, Mr H.M. Kazekula, along with Mr Jackson Shimunika himself; this committee jointly contributed a set of corrected proofs, too.

- While expressing my thanks to all those mentioned here, I wish to include those who, in my personal life since 1972, in The Netherlands, in Zambia and elsewhere, have lived with me through the various phases of my research on western Zambia, sharing its delights and its burdens, and contributing to its final outcomes in more extensive and profound ways than could be spelled out in this scholarly context. The foundation for this book was laid in 1972-74 with the loyal support of Henny van Rijn, 'Mandanèshima', my first wife. My understanding of Nkoya politics and history made decisive progress through field-work in 1977 and 1978, when between Mukunkike and Nkeyema I found a fulfilment to which this book is perhaps a belated tribute, among other commitments. This book is dedicated, however, to my wife Patricia, 'Mandashikanda', not because the burdens of Nkoya-ness were so excessive in her case, but because she largely created the conditions which allowed me to finish what, ten years ago, or again in 1989 when the manuscript of this book was stolen during field-work in Botswana, appeared to me a hopelessly impossible task.
- Clearing up the dazzling complexity of names and places in *Likota Iya Bankoya*, and doing justice to that complexity in the index, would have been nearly impossible if my brother, Peter Broers, had not taught me how to write the required computer programs, even doing essential parts of the writing himself.
- Finally I wish to express my gratitude to Mr Marc Schoen and especially to Mr Shunil Roy-Chaudhuri for their work in the proofreading phase of the production of this book.

Earlier versions of my argument (particularly sections of chapters 4 and 5, and chapter 6) were presented to the international scholarly community on the following occasions:

- (1) The 'Netherlands Early-States Club' Workshop on the Position of Women in the Early State, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, 14 June 1985; I am indebted to Hans Claessen, Martin Doornbos, Dick Papošek and Héleen Sancisi for useful comments made on that occasion;
- (2) A Dutch translation of that earlier version has been published as 'De vrouwelijke kant van staatsvorming in prekoloniaal centraal

westelijk Zambia', in: H.J.M. Claessen (ed.), *Machtige moeders: Over de positie van de vrouw in vroege staten*, Leiden: Institute for Cultural Anthropology and Development Studies, University of Leiden, 1986, pp. 157-216; and benefited from the editor's constructive remarks.

- (3) 'Female dimensions of state formation in central western Zambia, c. 1500-1900: And the religious transformation of women's political power in the nineteenth and twentieth century', paper presented at the Conference on Culture and Consciousness in Southern Africa, University of Manchester, Manchester, 25 September 1986. I am indebted to Terence Ranger, Matthew Schoffeleers, Wyatt MacGaffey, Shula Marks, Ned Alpers, Marjorie Mbilinyi and John Peel for stimulating comments made on that occasion.
- (4) Chapter 6 was presented at the conference 'Mémoires, histoires, sociétés,' Department of History, Université Laval, Québec, October 1987, and appeared in essentially the same form as 'Likota lya Bankoya: Memory, myth and history', in: *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, (1987) 27, 3-4: 359-392, special issue on popular modes of history in Africa; in this connexion the editorial suggestions made by Bogumil Jewsiewiecki and Henri Moniot are gratefully acknowledged.

Part I

Tears of Rain

Ethnicity and history
in central western Zambia

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Chapter 1

The contemporary point of departure: The Nkoya-speaking people and their chiefs

1.1. The Nkoya

Among the Nkoya people of central western Zambia, ethnicization and the production of history are inseparable processes. An analysis of their history is impossible without an assessment of the formation of their ethnic identity over time, and their present-day ethnic structure and functioning can only be understood against the background of their history. If then, in the present chapter, we set out to approach this Gordian knot with the blunt knife of synchronic political ethnography, this is mainly a heuristic strategy.

At the same time, it must be admitted that one could not very well start the argument of this book by a profoundly historical statement. For nearly one and a half centuries the area where the Nkoya are now concentrated has formed the periphery of a major state, that of the Luyana and Kololo. And since the creation, almost a hundred years ago, of the colonial state, and the advent of capitalist development along the 'Line of Rail' which connects the ancient capital of Livingstone to the Copperbelt, that very Luyana state has formed a periphery

of the central state. As a result, the Nkoya have only been treated, in academic writing, as an appendix, a mere footnote to history.

The same pattern can be seen with regard to precolonial documentary sources, which for other parts of South Central Africa have often been far more abundant.

One of the first published references to a region adjacent to that of the Nkoya — notably the head-waters of the Zambezi, then called the Land of Levar or Loval, from which no doubt the Luvale ethnic group takes its name — is by M. Botelho de Vasconcellos in 1799, as quoted by Sir R.F. Burton in the introduction to his famous edition of *The lands of Cazembe* (Burton 1873: 24, 25, n.).¹

Nineteenth-century European sources on the Nkoya region are limited to a few explorers, hunters and missionaries, most of whom² are listed and have their itineraries marked on the 1964 *Map showing routes of the early European travellers in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (Director 1964).

In 1853-54 Silva Porto crossed the region from west to east, and coming from Naliele (the ancient Luyana capital on the Zambezi) allegedly reached the well-known trading capital of the ruler Kayingu on the Kafue; this makes Silva Porto a potentially unique source on nineteenth-century Nkoya history. However, only in 1942 an excerpt from his diaries was published; this work could not be consulted by me.³

Silva Porto's hopes of opening up Barotseland for Portuguese trade were partly frustrated by lack of financial support (Gann 1958: 16), yet in the 1870s there existed a substantial flow of Portuguese trade goods, which only after 1872 met with some competition from the South (Holub 1879: 166f). In the second half of the nineteenth century the easterly route from the Zambezi to Kayingu was no longer used for long-distance trade, due to Ila raids and to long-distance traders' bypassing Barotseland via a northeastern route to Kayingu. The best known missionaries, Livingstone and Coillard, therefore travelled close to the Zambezi and never came near the Nkoya heartland (cf. Livingstone 1971; Coillard 1971). The same limitation applies to the

¹ Prins (1980: 255, n. 31) cites an even earlier, 1795 reference to Bulози i.e. Loziland, contained in a late nineteenth-century Portuguese publication I could not trace.

² I.e., with the exception of a few authors I shall refer to in chapter 5.

³ Silva Porto 1942. Cf. Gann 1958: 16, where reference is made to the published diaries but likewise with the admission that Gann had not seen them. According to Smith & Dale (1920, i: 47, n. 1) Silva Porto travelled from Naliele to Kayingu. An identical itinerary for Silva Porto appears on the map opposite the title page of Burton 1873: from *Naliele* to *Cahinga*. A different itinerary however is shown on the 1964 map (Director 1964), but then under the name of J. da Silva (1853-54), claimed at the back of that map to have been a 'bondsmen or *pombeiro*' with whom Silva Porto travelled through eastern Angola to arrive at Naliele together; Silva Porto's itinerary east of Naliele is not shown on the map. Obviously, further research is needed on this point.

Tears of Rain: The contemporary point of departure

Portuguese Major Serpa Pinto, who having arrived in Lealui (the later Luyana capital) from Angola in 1878, was prevented from continuing his intended journey due east to Kayingu, and instead was confined by Lubosi Lewanika I.⁴ Sipopa's successor, to the southeastern route along the Zambezi (Serpa Pinto 1881).

After a successful expedition from Angola to Yakaland, Zaïre in 1877-80, the two Portuguese naval officers H. Capello and R. Ivens undertook another, more southerly expedition in 1884, which took them across eastern Angola to the Zambezi, then along an untracked route northeast along the Kabompo, to Katanga and from there back southeast through central Zambia and on to the Cape (Capello & Ivens 1881, 1886).⁵ Thus they traversed the western and northern fringes of the Nkoya region, but their published account throws regrettably little light on the detailed historical issues discussed in the present book. The late nineteenth-century travelogue was a literary genre where ample introspection on the explorer's communion with the African landscape, historical retrospect, and mineralogical, botanical and zoological impressions, left room for only the most fragmentary and superficial ethnographic and political data; and the latter tended to be clad in evaluative terms. Therefore, while accidental reference to a specific ethnic group in a travelogue may yield significant information, the lack of such reference does not mean that the phenomena the travellers could have observed (considering other evidence) were not there. We are already lucky that at least Capello and Ivens's map (1886, i: opposite 333) of the relevant part of their itinerary shows, in the correct places, many hydronyms and other toponyms still in use in the Nkoya region today.⁶

To the same travelogue genre belong the works of the hunter F.C. Selous, who in 1877-78 with his companion L.M. Owen reached the Lukanga swamps from the southeast, and in 1888 returned for a trip due north to the Kafue/Mwembeshi confluence, on both occasions skirting the extreme easterly extension of Nkoya presence, on which topic however he has very little to say (Selous 1893). A few relevant observations are found in the notes of the trader G. Westbeeck, who traversed Barotseland and surrounding areas intensively until his death in 1888 (cf. Tabler 1963; Sampson 1972).

A transition from the travelogue to a more professional ethnographic genre we find in the works of the Czech Emile Holub, who on an ill-fated expedition to the Kafue in 1885-86 visited the fringes of

⁴ Lewanika I reigned from 1878-1884, and again from 1885-1916; cf. Mainga Mutumba 1973; Prins 1980; Clay 1968.

⁵ I am indebted to Mr A.S. Bell, Librarian, Rhodes House Library, Oxford, and to Mrs D. de Lame, Royal Africa Museum, Tervuren, Belgium, for tracing Capello & Ivens's obscure 1886 book and making it available to me.

⁶ E.g. Lukulu (*Rio Lucullo*), Namilende, Dongwe (*Rio Zongué*), Luampa (*Rio Luampoa*), Lukahu (*Rio Lukáoê*), Luena, Lukolwe (*Lucolloe*).

Nkoyaland. Both the narrative of his expedition (Holy 1975) and his earlier *Ethnographic sketch of the Marutse-Mambunda empire* (Holub 1879) contain some information pertinent to the Nkoya. However, the reliability of that information is negatively affected not only by Holub's limited exposure in both time and place (his account of Loziland is mainly based on hurried observations in Sesheke), and by the fact that he was one of the pioneers of ethnographic method, but also by his personality; as Prins (1980: 253, n. 10) points out, Coillard and Westbeeck both had a low opinion of Holub's abilities and good sense. But how else could these members of established professions have regarded an anthropologist *avant la lettre*?

Against this minimal background of precolonial documentary sources, it is little wonder that the Nkoya area became a fertile ground for the study of oral history — which started already with the publication of Clay's *History of the Mankoya district* (1945), under conditions which we shall consider in chapter 2.

However, let us first present the outlines of twentieth-century Nkoya social and political organization.

The Nkoya people are primarily found in what today is Kaoma district, in the eastern part of Zambia's Western Province, the former Barotseland Protectorate which at Independence (1964) — when Northern Rhodesia became Zambia — remained incorporated in Zambia under special conditions stipulated by the Barotseland Agreement (Mulford 1967). When the boma (colonial administrative headquarters at district level) was established in 1906 (Clay 1945: 16), the district was named Mankoya — a name deriving from the word 'Nkoya', but with a plural prefix derived from the Lozi language. In 1969 President Kaunda revised the special status of Barotseland and, in an attempt to excise all ethnic connotations from toponyms in western Zambia, the district was renamed Kaoma, at the same time as Barotseland changed its name to Western Province (a name until then reserved for what then became Copperbelt Province), and Balovale became Zambezi district (cf. Caplan 1970).

In addition to those in Kaoma district, there are minorities of Nkoya-speakers and people identifying as Nkoya in all the adjacent districts and even provinces.

The Nkoya-speaking peoples number about 30,000 members. Estimates are rendered difficult by a number of factors: the frequent occurrence of bilingualism among Nkoya speakers particularly outside Kaoma district (so that perhaps a few thousand of speakers of Lozi, Kaonde, Lamba, Lenje, Totela and Subiya might also be classified as Nkoya speakers); and on the other hand the excessive claim by contemporary partisans of Nkoya ethnicity, who would insist that extensive portions of Zambia's Western, Northwestern, Central and Southern Provinces were 'originally' Nkoya. The linguistic data derived from the 1969 census (Kashoki 1978: 20) give a total of 31,000 Nkoya speakers or 0.8% of the Zambian African population.

Tears of Rain: The contemporary point of departure

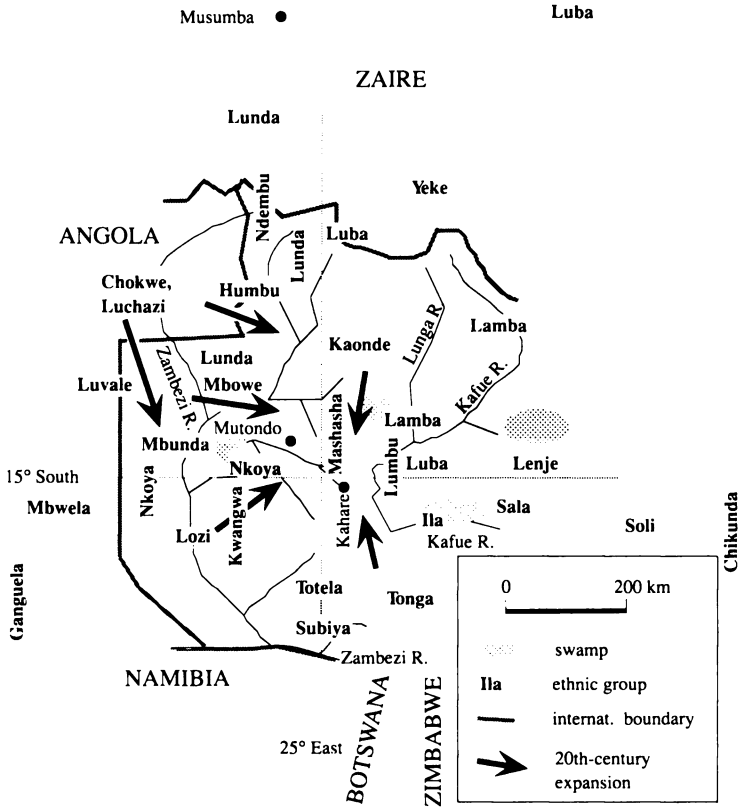


Diagram 1. Ethnic groups in twentieth-century central western Zambia.

In Kaoma district the Nkoya⁷ live in a rather well-watered and densely-wooded savanna area between the Kafue and the Zambezi valley, in the west fringing on the Kalahari sands, and in the east artificially bounded by the large Kafue National Park, an uninhabited area since the 1930s. The region (cf. diagram 1)⁸ is characterized by its

⁷ On the Nkoya, cf. Brelsford 1965; Clay 1945; Derricourt & Papstein 1977; McCulloch 1951; Brown 1984; and my own publications as listed in the bibliography.

⁸ This diagram is based on the author's field-notes, and on Surveyor General, n.d. [late 1960s], 'Tribal and linguistic map of Zambia', Lusaka: Surveyor General. The information in the latter map shows the situation as in the late 1920s, as is clear from the fact that exactly the same geographical distribution of ethnic and linguistic groups appears in

specific agricultural systems for subsistence crops (Schültz 1976), and until quite recently offered its population ample opportunities for hunting and fishing.

As the diagram indicates, the Nkoya are surrounded by a considerable number of other ethnic groups, outstanding among which are the Lozi to the west, the Kaonde to the north, the Ila to the east, the Tonga (and related groups such as the Subiya and the Totela) to the southeast. The linguistic boundaries are seldom sharp, bilingualism is a common occurrence especially near such boundaries, and the latter do not neatly coincide with the region's equally vague cultural boundaries.

In this fluid set-up, it is little surprising that local attempts to define Nkoya-ness in cultural terms (and such attempts were invariably the result of prompting by myself as an alien researcher) never yielded clear-cut and totally convincing indicators. Yet such self-definitions are worth looking at.

Thus, in a group discussion at one of the Nkoya chief's capitals in 1977, the Kahare Royal Council,⁹ being Nkoya was defined by the following five criteria:

- '(a) mastery of the Nkoya language;
- (b) being born from Nkoya parents;
- (c) observing the institution of *kutembwisha kankanga*, the female puberty ritual;¹⁰

Richards (1939), end map entitled 'Tribal areas Northern Rhodesia', and there said to be based on a 'map prepared by the Northern Rhodesian Survey Department, 1930'. In over half a century, the geographic location of established ethnic groups has not undergone great changes, but the official map's suggestion of ethnically homogeneous, virtually demarcated rural areas can no longer be sustained — if ever it was more than an administrator's fiction. Lozi and Luvale have expanded further eastward, into Kaoma district, and so have large numbers of Angolan immigrants. In the extreme east of the district, the Nkeyema Tobacco Scheme has virtually grown into a rural town of over 20,000 inhabitants, most of them non-Nkoya and hailing from all over western Zambia. These dynamics are indicated in diagram 1 by arrows. By the same token ethnic clusters have been identified not by a demarcated area but merely by a loosely placed name, as in Ohannessian & Kashoki (1978), map 8: 'Languages of Zambia' (end map). A sophisticated approach would start with the notion of rural ethnic heterogeneity and would seek to depict percentages of ethnic affiliation per area or region. However, the data for such an approach are not available to me — they may have been yielded by the national language survey on which Ohannessian & Kashoki (1978) is based; however, such a quantitative approach would not greatly add to the present, historical argument.

⁹ Oral source [18] 13.10.1977. Oral sources are identified in *Appendix 5*.

¹⁰ As described in van Binsbergen 1987a.

Tears of Rain: The contemporary point of departure

- (d) practising the central expressive complex of song, music and dance known as *makwasha*;¹¹ and finally
- (e) the specification 'Nkoya' as tribal affiliation in an individual's colonial tax document (*shitupa*) as in use during the colonial period, and on the post-colonial National Registration Card.¹²

The point is that these criteria are either begging the question (b), or externally imposed (e), or not really distinctive: bilingualism creates borderline cases with regard to criterion (a); the dominant position of Nkoya music all over western Zambia¹³ makes for a much wider distribution of the *makwasha* complex (d) than simply among the Nkoya proper; and forms of female puberty ritual (c) which only in detail differ from the Nkoya practice can be found all over central western Zambia and surrounding areas.

An attempt at even more stringent definition was made at another Nkoya chief's capital,¹⁴ where a group of traditional councillors claimed that being Nkoya was simply dependent upon the presence of specific patterns of scarification:

- (a) *in men*: facial scars as in diagram 2; incisors filed to a slightly pointed shape (this is admittedly not general and might be a Lozi

¹¹ Cf. Brown 1984, ch. 5: 'Makwasha, the most ancient repertoire of Nkoya royal music', pp. 151-182.

¹² The latter part of this final criterion is certainly spurious: the Zambian National Registration Card specifies the bearer's chief, but not his or her tribe — in line with the general administrative aloofness (also manifest in e.g. national census questionnaires) of the Zambian bureaucracy vis-à-vis aspects of social life that could be regarded as 'tribalist'.

¹³ Nkoya music, played by Nkoya musicians to the accompaniment of texts in the Nkoya language, is the established court music throughout Barotseland. Brown's (1984) excellent study of Nkoya music is not confined to Kaoma district but also deals with this form of cultural domination of the Lozi by the Nkoya in the Lozi heartland, which somehow counterbalances the political domination which has worked the other way around. Below (chapters 4 and 5) we shall repeatedly come back to the role of the musical instruments — drums, xylophones and *zingongi*, 'royal bells' — as principal regalia among the Nkoya. Nkoya oral sources and *Likota Iya Bankoya* trace the position of Nkoya music at Lozi courts to friendly exchanges between the Lozi ruler Mulambwa and the Nkoya *Mwene Kayambila* in the early nineteenth century. Royal orchestras are widely referred to in the literature on Barotseland (cf. Brown 1984). An extensive early description is by Holub (1879: 57, 135f), who offers perfect illustrations of the instruments, but makes no mention of the special role of the Nkoya in this connexion. Amusingly, he calls the double *zingongi*, 'of which the Lozi king Sipopa had two pairs', *Stahlhandschuhe*, 'steel mittens', which is perhaps what they look like to an explorer from a northern temperate climate (Holub 1879: 143). On African royal bells in general, cf. Vansina 1969.

¹⁴ Oral source [19] 19.10.1977.



Diagram 2. Nkoya facial scarification in males.
(the thick lines indicate scars)

- custom); pierced ears; three horizontal scars on the biceps; circumcised penis (this has admittedly become very exceptional);
- (b) *in women*: scars on the buttocks proving that the woman in question has gone through the female initiation rites — a criterion therefore corresponding with point (c) in the previous list.

However, never in my experience have I known a person to have been identified as Nkoya on the basis of an examination of these patterns of scarification.

In the perception both of the rural population and of the post-colonial state, being Nkoya is primarily defined not so much by these or other cultural traits but by allegiance to state-recognized traditional rulers, called ‘chief’ in Zambian English,¹⁵ and *Mwene*, pl. *Myene*, in Nkoya. If the *Mwene*¹⁶ is Nkoya, the vast majority of his subjects are counted as Nkoya — the main exception being very recent immigrants into the chief’s area, who have not yet been assimilated and who retain their original ethnic affiliation.

However, before we discuss the descriptive and historical details of chieftainship among the Nkoya let us have a look at the various sub-groups out of which the contemporary ethnic cluster of the Nkoya is said to consist; these subgroups are, in their turn, mainly distinguished by reference to specific chief’s titles.

¹⁵ On the ambiguous nature of this term, cf. Apthorpe 1960; and van Binsbergen 1987b.

¹⁶ In Part I of this volume I have italicized Nkoya concepts such as *Mwene* (‘king’, ‘ruler’), *lukena* (‘*Mwene*’s capital’), etc. I have however refrained from doing so when the word ‘*Mwene*’ is used in combination with a specific personal name, e.g. ‘*Mwene Munangisha*’. In Parts II and III, which present the Nkoya text of *Likota lya Bankoya* and its English translation, I have refrained from such italicization; and likewise in literal quotations, in Part I, from these and other Nkoya texts.

1.2. Nkoya subgroups and the recent process of their ethnic convergence

the proliferation of Nkoya subgroups

The Nkoya today see themselves as a people whose membership, while concentrated in Kaoma district, is dispersed: sizeable clusters are found in the Zambezi flood plain, i.e. in Mongu district (under Mwene Nyati, Mwene Njungu and Mwene Lowa); in Lukulu district; in Mumbwa district (under Mwene Kabulwebulwe); in Kabompo district; and in Kalomo district (under Mwene Momba). In Namwala district, the chiefs Kayingu and Shezongo are sometimes considered as Nkoya, along with part of their subject population which however is more often counted separately as Lumbu or Ila (cf. Rennie & Mubita 1985a, 1985b). Finally, the Nkoya claim pockets of their people as far east as Lusaka district (on the Mwembeshi river), Kabwe rural district (under headman Lilanda), and Ndola rural district.¹⁷ In this connexion, specific mention is sometimes made of the Ngolobani group of Nkoya, at Mangula, near Lusaka; they are claimed to have remained behind after assisting, in the first decade of the twentieth century, in the building of the line of rail from the then colonial headquarters Livingstone to the then Belgian Congo.¹⁸ However, most Nkoya residing in villages of their own (i.e. not as modern urban migrants) near the Line of Rail are considered to be descendants of elephant hunters venturing so far eastward in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ According to one Nkoya tradition²⁰ even the name of Lusaka, the national capital since the 1930s, was derived from a Nkoya word: *rushaka*, a round fruit which because of its wooden peel is used for dancers' ankle rattles.

Below we shall analyse the historical emergence of the word Nkoya used as an ethnonym. As far as the internal composition of that ethnic group is concerned, people now identifying as Nkoya have a great predilection for summing up the many subgroups out of which their 'people' or 'nation' consists: not only the clans, which for centuries have ceased to be localized and whose respective members now live side by side in the various localities where Nkoya-speakers are found — but

¹⁷ Cf. Brelsford 1965: 15f; Northern Rhodesia 1943, 1960.

¹⁸ Oral source [5].

¹⁹ Cf. van Binsbergen 1981a: 359, n. 13; Nkoya immigrants in the city of Lusaka particularly refer, for their ritual and musical requirements, to a village named Kahare in Chief Mungule's area, Kabwe rural, not far from Lusaka's Matero township.

²⁰ Oral source [2].

particularly the localized ethnic subgroups.²¹ Similar, largely converging lists crop up in many interviews and in correspondence. For instance, a fairly exhaustive list is given by Mr Katete Shincheta:²²

- (1) Nkoya Mbwera [Mbwela] of Mwinilunga District
- (2) Nkoya Lukolwe of Kabompo District
- (3) Nkoya Lukolwe of Lukulu District
- (4) Nkoya Shishanjo of Kalabo District
- (5) Nkoya Lushangi [Lushange] of (...) Kaoma District
- (6) Nkoya Nawiko of Kaoma District
- (7) Nkoya Mashasha of Kaoma District
- (8) Nkoya Lumbu of Namwala District
- (9) Nkoya Mbwera [Mbwela] of Kasempa District
- (10) Nkoya Shibanda of Mumbwa District
- (11) Nkoya Shikalu of Chief Momba in Kalomo District
- (12) Nkoya of Chief Mungamba [Mungambwa] of Sesheke District
- (13) Nkoya Shibanda of Chief Lilanda in Kabwe District.'

Sometimes the enumeration of subgroups is given a linguistic, dialectical, rather than an ethnic slant, e.g. in a list of Nkoya dialects as compiled by Mr Nason Mushakabantu:²³

'Nkoya has several dialects — Shililanda of (Mweene) [*sic*] Lilanda in Lusaka; Shukulumbwe of Mweene Kabulwebulwe of Mumbwa District and part of Namwala; Balumbu of Mweene Moomba [Momba] of Namwala District; Shimashasha of Mweene Kahare at Litoya Royal Establishment; Shiukalu [Shikalu] of Mulobezi, Nyambi, Shiyowe and Luampa areas; Shinkoya of Mweene Mutondo of Lukena Royal Establishment; Mbowela²⁴ of Mweene Nyati of Lukulu District, Kabompo, Kalabo and Mongu Districts.

Others can be located in Kabwe District under Chiefs Ngabwe and Kankomba who claim to have Nkoya orientation. I think the problem of having lost contact with each other over years, intermingling and marriages covering a stretch of well over 500 kilometres has led to disintegration and identical dialects mushrooming. However, it appears most can still and are able to trace their backgrounds to Nkoya clans.'

²¹ One such list is to be found in Parts II and III below, in the Preface which Mr Hamba H. Mwene wrote for *Likota lya Bankoya*. Another similar one is given in oral source [3] 19.11.1973.

²² In a letter to the author, 25.10.1979.

²³ In a letter to the author, dated 21.10.1987.

²⁴ A contamination perhaps of the ethnonym *Mbwela* and the Lozi word *mboela*, which means 'south' and in particular refers to the Nalolo court.

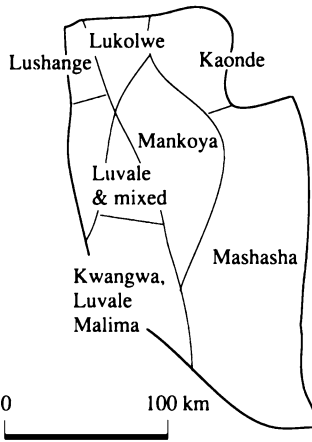


Diagram 3. Ethnic groups and subgroups in Mankoya district in 1933.²⁷

Most of these ethnic subgroups are also discussed in the scholarly and popular literature on the area,²⁵ and in the district records.²⁶ The latter also contain an early sketch map of the main ethnic groups and subgroups in the district, reproduced here as diagram 3.

The nomenclature of these subgroups is neither stable nor consensual, and the various ethnic labels are often interchangeable. Thus Mwene Kabulwebulwe's people, now largely in Mumbwa district, are alternately claimed to be Mashasha,²⁸ Mbwela, Lumbu, Shibanda,²⁹

²⁵ Clay 1945; Brelsford 1965; McCulloch 1951. Of the Nkoya sub-groups, the following were mentioned in Holub (1879: 3f): Lushange (*Alushanga*), Nkoya (*Mankoja* or *Manköë*; Holub counts them among the principal ethnic groups of Barotseland), and Shibanda (*Wassiwanda*).

²⁶ E.g. District Commissioner Mankoya to Provincial Commissioner Mongu, 30.4.1935, 'Tribal boundaries', enclosure in Zambia National Archives, KSX 1/1/1 Mankoya correspondence 1931-35.

²⁷ District Commissioner Mankoya district to Director of Surveys, Livingstone, 17.7.1933, enclosure in Zambia National Archives, KSX 1/1/1 Mankoya correspondence 1931-35.

²⁸ E.g. in District Commissioner Mankoya to Provincial Commissioner Mongu, 30.4.1935, 'Tribal boundaries', enclosure in Zambia National Archives, KSX 1/1/1 Mankoya correspondence 1931-35.

²⁹ *Likota Iya Bankoya* (22: 4).

Since Rev. Shimunika organized *Likota Iya Bankoya* in chapters and verses, reference to specific passages of *Likota Iya Bankoya* is made by

Kaonde-Ila (Brelsford 1965), and even (as in Mr Mushakabantu's statement) Shukulumbwe — the latter designation equating them with the dreaded raiders of the early administrative reports and travelogues.³⁰ Normally, however, the Mashukulumbwe are assumed to be identical to the Ila, the Nkoya's eastern neighbours.

Interchangeability of ethnic nomenclature is also striking in the context of the name Mbwela. A case in point is Sandasanda's (1972) remarkably rich compilation of Kaonde oral traditions belonging to the same literate ethno-history genre as *Likota Iya Bankoya*, the text on which the present study revolves. Sandasanda discusses the Mbwela, whom he also calls *Mashasha* and *Nkoya*, as one of the four groups of original occupants of Kaondeland, northwestern Zambia. The other three groups are alleged to have been the 'Bushmen' (locally called *Bambwena Kulipi*, according to Sandasanda), the 'Mashasha of the Busanga area', and the 'BaSubya' (Subiya) (identified by Sandasanda as 'Hottentots'). The Busanga Mashasha³¹ are claimed to be related to the Luyi or Lozi — the dominant ethnic group of the Zambezi flood plain and throughout Zambia's Western Province, and as such a referent in much of Nkoya history. In Sandasanda's description of early Busanga Mashasha society the extremely primitive economy is evoked which also other writers³² have associated with the Mbwela and in general with the earliest Bantu inhabitants of western Zambia: in the absence of cultivation, their food is said to have consisted of fish, meat and raw birds, and they reportedly lived on floating dwellings in the water (Sandasanda 1972: 8f).

In contrast with many other sources, Sandasanda does not offer an etymology of the ethnic labels of Mashasha and Mbwela. A common explanation for the name *Mashasha* is that the name derives from the Lozi word *shasha*, equivalent to the Nkoya *manala*, 'a mat made of reed rushes'. According to widespread traditions, the Lozi gave this name to the group of people they saw leaving the Zambezi flood plain eastward, carrying their sleeping mats on their shoulders.³³ The Mbwela ethnic label, which is found all over western and northwestern

citing chapter and verse numbers, separated by a colon, e.g. (12: 4). The edited Nkoya text of *Likota Iya Bankoya*, and an English translation, are included below in the present volume, as Part II and Part III respectively. Alternatively, reference to specific numbered sections of my own argument in Part I will take the form of two digits separated not by a colon but by a period, thus: (3.2). Reference to unnumbered sub-sections will be through quoting their titles.

³⁰ E.g. Tabler 1963; Holy 1975; Serpa Pinto 1881; Selous 1893.

³¹ 'But these Busanga people it's known that some of them are Nkoya, the Mbwela people' [*sic*], Sandasanda 1972: 13; further on the Busanga of Mwene Kayingu, see Rennie & Mubita 1985a, 1985b.

³² Cf. White 1949, 1962; Schecter 1980a; Derricourt & Papstein 1977.

³³ E.g. oral source [20]. Below we shall see that this etymology is not supported by *Likota Iya Bankoya* (41: 8).

Zambia but which is particularly associated with the earliest Bantu dwellers on the Upper Zambezi and further north of the Zambezi/Congo watershed,³⁴ is generally considered to mean ‘Westerners’, but interpretations differ as to the specific people whose western neighbours the Mbwela are: are they ‘west of the Lunda’,³⁵ which would fit in with their early association with the Zambezi/Congo watershed; or are they ‘west of the Lenje’, as claimed in another oral source?³⁶

This might suggest that the use of the word Mbwela has a situational aspect, and that the group designated by this ethnonym in any specific case merely depends on the speaker’s geographical location.³⁷ Is Mbwela then no longer the designation for a specific cultural cluster? Twentieth-century Nkoya in or from Kaoma district scarcely recognize any historical or cultural links across the Angolan border. This is understandable in the face of an overwhelming immigration from Angola during this century, and hence the desire to insist on firm boundaries between the Nkoya identity and that of the immigrants. This state of affairs regrettably obscured the relevance of Angola-Zambian continuities for the interpretation of Nkoya history and culture until very late in my research. However, the affinities on the linguistic and cultural plane are unmistakable.³⁸ Serpa Pinto’s description of the Angolan Mbwela — whom he visited in 1878 on his way to Barotseland and the Indian Ocean — is reminiscent of the situation in the Land of Nkoya in the early nineteenth century, but remains too unspecific for far-reaching conclusions:

‘The Ambuelas [Mbwela], of far more favourable disposition, are not at all bellicose. They may well be the nicest indigenous people of Southern Africa. Great cultivators, they are no less active in the collection of wax. They are poor, but could be very rich indeed if they took to animal husbandry. They form a federation like the

34 Cf. White 1949, 1962; Derricourt & Papstein 1977; Papstein 1978; Schechter 1980a.

35 ‘The name Mbwela was given to them by the Lunda, it means “Westerners”, namely west of the Lunda’; oral source [20].

36 ‘The name Mbwela means “Westerners” and was given to them by the Lenje, who chased them to the west’; oral source [3], 19.11.1973.

37 By comparison, the ethnonym Tonga is used in South Central Africa for at least five very different ethnic groups (Mitchell 1971: v), and it is possible to explain at least some of these cases in terms not of cultural specificity but of political relations — notably, the rejection of central political authority (Lancaster 1974); a similar explanation, incidentally, is given for the ethnonym Kwangwa in Barotseland: ‘those who have grown tired [*ku-kwanga*] of the state’. Kwangwa is the name for forest Lozi, who at one stage in their history voted with their feet and left the flood plain — without effectively leaving the sphere of Lozi influence; cf. Icacana 1971; Brelsford 1965: 17f.

38 Cf. McCulloch 1951; Derricourt & Papstein 1977; Papstein 1978; Serpa Pinto 1881, i: 248-301; Capello & Ivens 1886, i: 267f.

other[people]s, but the chiefs retain a certain measure of independence. Throughout Africa we see that the people governed by minor rulers are the more happy and free. Here we do not witness those horror scenes which are familiar from the great empires ruled by autocrats' (Serpa Pinto 1881, ii: 95f; my translation).

In the twentieth century large geographical gaps — filled by many other ethnic groups — exist between the Angolan Mbwela, the dispersed pockets of Mbwela identified in Zambia, and the Nkoya proper (McCulloch 1951: end map). But something of a missing link, which bridges these distances, is offered in the 1799 account by M. Botelho de Vasconcellos of the head-waters of the Zambezi, where the 'Land of Loyal', governed by 'the Soveta Caquica [Headman Kakenge]', is said to be

' "bounded by the Sova-ship [Kingship] of Luy Amboellas [Luyi of the Mbwela?]" '

to the east, and

' "on the right (south) by the powerful Amboellas [Mbwela] chiefs of Bunda and Canunga [Kanongesha]; on the left (north) by lords, vassals to the great Sova [King] of the Moluas (the Miluas [Luba], or people of Muátá yá Nvo [Mwaat Yaamv]) (...). The traders were hospitably received, business was prosperous, and they found less robbery than in our territory — the more we advance the less villainous are the people."

Thus we see the Portuguese, in 1799, pressing into the heart of the country visited by Dr Livingstone.' (Burton 1873: 25, n.)

Around 1800 the ethnonym Mbwela turns out to be in use on the Upper Zambezi for groups which are associated with Mwaat Yaamv and which in the twentieth century will be known as Lunda (e.g. Kanongesha).³⁹

Cultural and linguistic affinities unite the Mbwela (including the Nkoya) in Angola and Zambia under a common ethnonym which far from being merely situational points to an original, if fragmented, shared identity. This is also reflected in the material culture (e.g. patterns of hunting and collecting, the presence of the *munkupele* hourglass drum). And even beyond the designation 'Mbwela' these affinities extend over much of eastern Angola, including such ethnic groups as the Ganguela (also cf. Burton 1873: 17) and the Luchazi. The

³⁹ On the significance of the use of the ethnonym Luba in this connexion, see below.

Ganguela word list as offered by Serpa Pinto⁴⁰ shows a great similarity with Nkoya as spoken today in Kaoma district, and this (against the background of the similarity between Nkoya and other non-Lozi languages of Barotseland, particularly Luyana) may have brought Serpa Pinto (1881, ii: 8) to claim that there were three principal languages spoken in Barotseland by 1878: *Ganguela*, *Luina* (Luena, i.e. Luvale and Mbunda) and *Sezuto* (Sotho, i.e. Kololo or Lozi). Of course, the actual linguistic situation is far more complex than Serpa Pinto suggested (cf. Fortune 1963), but his observation convincingly brings out the linguistic continuity which exists between the Land of Nkoya and much of eastern Angola.

McCulloch (1951) confidently — but not yet on the basis of personal field-work — discusses all these peoples as one cultural cluster, and only has difficulty fitting the Nkoya in; he reserves a special chapter for them. Much more work remains to be done on this point. What is particularly needed is the type of research as undertaken by Papstein (1978) for the Luvale: extending the field-research, from Zambia, into Angola and Zaïre, searching for continuities which have become obscured by the fact that three very different nation-states have emerged in this African region during the past hundred years, each studied by the remarkably self-contained national academic communities in the former metropolitan countries of Great Britain, Portugal and Belgium, and thus involving publications in English, Portuguese, French and Dutch. Given the relative international isolation of the Zambian Nkoya today, and the political and military insecurity which has prevailed in much of the region, I did not yet venture on such a major exploration, but it has to be undertaken in the near future, though not necessarily by myself.

pan-Nkoya convergence and its implications for the study of history

The full history of the many separate groups now brought together under the umbrella of Nkoya-ness, and of the interrelatedness of these subgroups, remains to be written, and lies largely outside of the present book's argument. Our view is blurred here by at least two factors. First should be mentioned the tendency towards 'pan-Nkoya' unification as an aspect of the overall ethnic process in modern Zambia. As one oral source out of many puts it:

'The Nkoya came from Luba as one people, under one chief.

Mwene Manenga is the source of the kingships of both Mutondo and Kahare.'⁴¹

⁴⁰ Serpa Pinto 1881, ii: 325-35; he claims that, with slight modifications, Ganguela is spoken by 'Quimbandes [Ovimbundu], Luchazes [Luchazi] e Ambuelas [Mbwela]' — 1881, ii: 95.

⁴¹ Oral source [18] 13.10.1977; cf. Shimunika's statement:

Secondly there is the difficulty of unravelling the different strands of linguistic, cultural and political traits which by contemporary ethnic activists are seen as but one, holistically integrated package but which in fact may have been less coinciding. For instance, while in the contemporary Nkoya core land people listed as Nkoya tend to be united by a common language and culture under the two major chiefs (Mwene Mutondo and Mwene Kahare) who are clearly identified as Nkoya, the Nkoya-ness of Mbwela in Mwinilunga and Kasempa is far less marked, and whatever their cultural and linguistic traits, the Nkoya headmen in those districts resort under Lunda and Kaonde chiefs.

Are the Nkoya really an ancient people, dispersed by the accidents of history in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and now struggling to reclaim some original unity? This is what those identifying as Nkoya today like to believe. The evidence in this book, and my specific arguments as based on that evidence, lead to a very different interpretation. Nkoya turns out to be a rather recent ethnic label, whose traceable historical referent was originally a fairly small polity (that centring on the Mutondo kingship) in what today is called Kaoma district. Largely because of the relatively prominent position of the Mutondo kingship, among other Nkoya royal titles, *once these had been incorporated in the Lozi state*, the Mutondo title has subsequently managed to emerge as a focus and a name for widespread cultural and linguistic affinities. These affinities may well predate the process of state formation which gave rise to that 'Nkoya' polity in the first place, but in earlier centuries this set of cultural traits was certainly not yet designated as 'Nkoya'.

Meanwhile, however, the word Nkoya has obtained such hegemonic qualities as to obscure the fact that the Nkoya are not so much a people, but rather a historically and geographically heterogeneous set of inhabitants of the western half of Zambia now *seeking to define themselves as a people*. Originating from the group which in the last few centuries was most consistently associated with the land of Nkoya (an ancient toponym), the word Nkoya thus features *both* as the name of one of the ethnic subgroups (namely Mwene Mutondo's subjects, also called the Nawiko), and as the name of the — newly invented — overall group.

Identity formation goes hand in hand with the construction of a common past, and therefore many of the oral traditions one can today collect among people identifying as Nkoya, seek to state the unity of Nkoya ethnic subgroups by tracing historical and political links between these subgroups. The most obvious way to claim such links is through the chief's titles associated with them. Often these links are conceptualized as genealogical ties between specific past rulers which

'Even though the fruits may be scattered, we come from one and the same mukolwa tree' (4: 3).

ties then are supposed, by the participants in the local society, to be far from metaphorical but instead to correspond to actual historical fact. Another way of conceptualizing these links is by *perpetual kinship*: the metaphorical expression of political relations in a kinship idiom involving two royal or chief's titles A and B, so that every incumbent of title A stands forever in the same fictive kin relation (e.g. that of 'younger brother') to every incumbent of title B. Political relations of hierarchy and seniority, autochthonous versus immigrant status, and secular rulers versus ritual specialists, throughout South Central Africa are commonly expressed in terms of perpetual kinship (cf. Roberts 1976; Schecter 1980a), but among the Nkoya this idiom is little developed; yet we shall repeatedly come back to this point in the course of our argument.

In the scholarly study of the history of western Zambia, the ethnic and historical constructions of the local people are our obvious point of departure. It is essential that we seek to understand their conscious history in the context of their experience, identity and political concerns. The study of history involves, among other things, the study of a particular ideological idiom. In this sense, but in this sense alone, it is eminently meaningful to speak of 'the Nkoya' — for they certainly exist as a symbolic entity in the minds of contemporary participants. However, historiography proper would seek to take distance from that idiom, and use whatever understanding we have achieved, in order to trace back the actual course of events and the actual political and social relationships from under the smoke screen of a local ethno-history that particularly serves identity formation. An academic history which entirely concentrates on such decoding, and that misses or ignores the meaning with which the people endow their own constructed history, is not worth pursuing. In the course of the present argument we shall see that to some limited extent it is possible to unravel 'actual' historical process in a way that abstracts almost entirely from local consciousness, and thus to reconstruct processes of state formation, the economic and ideological basis of these processes, and the amazingly central role of gender therein. We shall also see that such reconstruction is only possible at the level of broad generalities — specific genealogical relations, deeds and movements of specific historical individuals can hardly be traced in detail on the basis of an ethno-history which serves identity formation. In that respect our analysis will be one of Nkoya (ethno-)history, but it will not produce an academic history of 'the Nkoya' — this ethnonym being an evasive category which belongs to the realm of ethno-history more than that of academic history.

1.3. The major Nkoya chiefs and their political environment today

The two principal Nkoya *Myene* today, Mwene Mutondo and Mwene Kahare, have managed to maintain at least the appearances of an intact traditional chief's court (*lukena*, pl. *zinkena*), with a number of state-

subsidized traditional offices: the principal councillor or *Mwana-shihemi* (usually referred to as Prime Minister in outside contacts), retainers, *kapasus* (uniformed chief's messengers with limited powers of law enforcement), and the court musicians whose task it is to announce the chief's presence and well-being by playing the royal music every day at sunrise and nightfall. The *lukena* population further consists of the *Mwene's* wife (*Lihano*, pl. *Mahano*), female kin, and clients (often of slave ancestry),⁴² all of whom are not eligible for state subsidy.

In the course of my ethnographic and oral historical field-work in Kaoma district, I lived with my family at the *lukena* of Mwene Kahare Kabambi, from September 1973 to April 1974, and returned there for shorter periods in 1977, 1978, 1988 and 1989. My sharing in the day-to-day life of the 'royal establishment' (as the *lukena* is called in the official state terminology) not only yielded insights in its contemporary functioning (van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1985b: 261-70), and its underlying organizational and conceptual structure; it also created a context in which I could elicit oral data on the history of these courts and their subjects, and could begin to evaluate this information against the background of contemporary issues: increasing insistence on a unitary Nkoya identity in the face of regional and national political and economic processes, as well as local interests, factional conflicts within the Nkoya group and its neo-traditional political structure.

Nkoya chiefs today operate within four superimposed political complexes, each stemming from a particular phase in the historical genesis of the socio-political structure of central western Zambia. These complexes are:

- (a) a very vague association with the historical Musumban Lunda empire of Mwaat (King) Yaamv in southern Zaïre;
- (b) the internal structure of incapsulated Nkoya polities;
- (c) the remnants of the Barotse indigenous administration; and
- (d) the post-colonial state.

We shall discuss these four complexes one after the other, in the above, chronologically-inspired order. However, we should constantly remind ourselves that in actual fact, whatever their differential historical origin and reference, each complex in its own way informs the *current* socio-political structure of central western Zambia.

⁴² Some court clients are still alleged to hold the traditional office of *Tupondwa*, the *Mwene's* secret executioner.

the distant Lunda association

The contemporary Nkoya political culture retains a lingering notion that ultimately, across the ages, Nkoya kingship derives (via an intermediate stage of dwelling near the Zambezi/Congo watershed) from the Musumban Lunda empire of the Mwaat Yaamv⁴³ in southern Zaïre. Although there appear to have been no actual contacts with Lunda courts for decades (cf. Mutumba Mainga 1973: 19, n. 43), members of Nkoya royal families still pride themselves on being from Lunda stock; they sometimes speak Lunda when among themselves.⁴⁴

In this connexion a peculiarity needs to be addressed: the fact that the Nkoya oral sources as well as *Likota Iya Bankoya* insist on an origin, at the same time, 'from the Luba people' (2: 1) and 'from Mwantiyavwa'. Until a few decades ago it was customary, in synthetic academic accounts of demographic, cultural and political expansion from southern Zaïre southward, to speak obliquely of 'Luba-Lunda'. Meanwhile detailed historical and linguistic research by Hoover (1980) and Reeve (1981), among others, makes it impossible to maintain this indiscriminate use of ethnonyms. Reeve (1981: 73f) clearly distinguishes two parallel belts in Southern Zaïre, one (designated Luba) north and east to the other (designated Lunda); Mwaat Yaamv belongs to the Lunda belt and is usually identified as such in our days. Does this mean that the Nkoya claim a distant ethnic origin in the north-eastern Luba belt, while only at a later point in time they (or more precisely, the ancestors of their ruling groups) were caught in the political sphere of influence of Mwaat Yaamv?

The problem with such an interpretation is that not the slightest collective memories appear to exist among the Nkoya as to what such a Luba connexion, as distinct from that with Mwaat Yaamv, might have consisted of.

An ethnonym however does not constitute a timeless and permanent datum, but is necessarily subject to constant redefinition in time and space. An easy solution to the Luba/Lunda puzzle, at least with reference to the Nkoya and to central western Zambia, is suggested by the fact that in the earliest Portuguese sources relating to the region, the term Lunda is not found and Mwaat Yaamv is identified as Luba. This is particularly the case in the oldest reference by M. Botelho de Vasconcellos in 1799, as quoted above (Burton 1873: 25, n.). Almost a century later, Capello & Ivens (e.g. 1886, i: 427) use the ethnonyms *Lunda* and *Lua* [Luba] as interchangeable, and refer to Mwaat Yaamv

⁴³ Cf. Vansina 1966; Bustin 1975; and extensive references cited there. In Nkoya this ruler is called *Mwantiyavwa*, and this orthography will be retained in this book in Nkoya texts and their translation.

⁴⁴ In an undated, untitled manuscript notebook in the possession of Ntaniela Mwene Mulimba in 1977 (cf. oral source [16]), Mwene Kahare is listed as a Lunda chief, along with such well-known Zambian Lunda chiefs as Musokantanda and Kanongesha.

as *Lua*. This most probably reflects the local usage at the time on the Kabompo (along which they are trekking) and in adjacent areas. Much as Mbwela, the Luba ethnonym (which actually shades over into Mbwela) is associated, from the point of view of western Zambia, with the head-waters of the Zambezi and the country immediately north of them across the Zambezi/Congo watershed, rather than with the far Zairean interior. Therefore, when the Nkoya identify as hailing from 'the Luba' they are merely repeating, rather than complicating, their claim of Mwaat Yaamv association.⁴⁵

Capello & Ivens (1886, i: opposite 333, 412-19; ii: 12) also make clear that by the late nineteenth century Mwaat Yaamv's empire was still a presence on the Upper-Zambezi. They claim to have crossed the Barotse/Lunda boundary and entered his realm at the Lunda chief's Chilembi's capital, near the Kabompo/Zambezi confluence, i.e. as far south as 13°20' and only 80 km north of the Lozi village of Libonta on the Zambezi. Clearly Chilembi's was a rather isolated outpost. It is only after trekking in a northeasterly direction along the Kabompo through 300 kilometres of forest (sparsely inhabited, as Capello & Ivens describe, by Lozi, Mbunda, Mbowe, Mbwela, Luena and Nkoya), that they claim to have crossed again into Mwaat Yaamv's territory. However, had they gone due north they would have reached a contiguous Lunda area within only about a third of that distance. These are important geographical parameters to keep in mind when, in the course of our analysis of Nkoya state formation, we shall discuss the Humbu war (c. 1790) as an attempt to force the Nkoya *Myene* back under the control of Mwaat Yaamv. This war was fought in the Upper Zambezi area, where a hundred years later Musumban overlordship was not a distant nominal association (as it is today among the Nkoya) but still a living reality.

Ideas of Lunda links were rekindled in the time of the Mushala guerilla in Zambia's Western and Northwestern Provinces in the late 1970s: along with other major 'chiefs', Mwene Mutondo featured, at least on paper, in grand schemes that, after the envisaged abolition of the post-colonial state in its present form, stipulated a confederation of neo-traditional states extending over much of Zambia, Zaire and Angola (cf. Wele 1987: 153).

Significantly, in everyday conversation and in court proceedings, neither the very distant Mwaat Yaamv, nor latter-day Lozi rulers (whose generic title is *Litunga*) would normally be referred to by the term *Mwene*, although Nkoya traditions use it freely for Barotse rulers prior to Lubosi Lewanika I (1842-1916), under whose reign Lozi domination over much of western Zambia was consolidated and carried over into the colonial period. While references to the Lunda tend to be limited to a distant past, the Lozi are a main reference point in Nkoya ethnic and political identity: they are seen as an ethnically and

⁴⁵ Probably a similar argument applies to the puzzling Luba group east of the Lumbo.

historically closely related people, who nevertheless have politically dominated and socially humiliated the Nkoya ever since Lewanika's rise to power, and throughout the colonial period. If the Nkoya consider their historical experience as bitter, it is by exclusive reference to the Lozi (cf. van Binsbergen 1985a).

chiefs, royal kin, and headmen: the internal structure of the neo-traditional Nkoya polities

The relations between the *Mwene* (as recognized by the state and the Barotse system), royal kin, councillors and subjects are complex: embedded in ordinary kinship relations, they involve a multitude of dynastic titles, so that the only two *Myene* in Kaoma district who are still recognized as 'royal' by the outside world in fact are surrounded by a considerable number of other *Myene*, some of whom are hereditary councillors at the two royal courts and even contenders for royal succession. In Nkoya discourse today, the word *Mwene* (designating an incumbent of the institution of *Wene*: the kingship) is used not only for major Nkoya rulers past and present and most other ethnically foreign rulers of similar stature, but also for many members of the royal kin, for lesser nobles, for clan heads, and for every village headman. The title of *Mwene* carries various shades of formality, which reflect the various intermeshing political and administrative contexts in which Nkoya royal courts function today. Thus *Mwene* on the one hand means the unique incumbent of the highest political office among the Nkoya, and on the other hand has a more diffuse usage applying to a much larger number of people. The same applies to other terms for royal status, particularly: *Lihano* (pl. *Mahano*), female escort to a male *Mwene*; and *Mwana Mwene* (pl. *Bana ba Bamyene*), (classificatory)⁴⁶ child to a *Mwene*. The title *Mukwetunga* (pl. *Bakwetunga*), male escort to a female *Mwene*, these days has no longer living incumbents since for almost a century all Nkoya *Myene* have been male.

This tension between formal, unique versus more diffuse, multitudinous usage of these terms can also be detected in various passages of *Likota lya Bankoya*. Royal kin who have clearly not or not yet acceded to the kingship may yet be called *Mwene*, and then the word would mean 'prince', 'royal' or 'lord' rather than 'king'.⁴⁷ At one point greater clarity is achieved by speaking of the 'senior or principal *Mwene*', implying the existence of several lesser bearers of that title:

⁴⁶ The anthropological concept of classificatory kinship applies when kinship categories which could be biologically distinguished are pooled under the same general term, e.g. when the same term (such as the Nkoya word *mwana*, 'child') is used indiscriminately and without further qualification for Ego's biological children, brother's children, father's brother's children, mother's sister's son's children, etc.

⁴⁷ Cf. 6: 2; 44: 2; 44: 3.

'When they arrived here in Nkoya they did not want Mwene Mutondo Kashina to be their senior Mwene any more.' (34: 5)

In the life at the *lukena* today, women are not very much in evidence. Not only the *Mwene* but also all court officials are men. The *Mwene*'s sisters play a ceremonial role, e.g. as watching over the *Mwene*'s beer and drinking vessel (the fear of poisoning is very strong among neo-traditional officeholders), and as singing with the royal orchestra. The *Mwene*'s immediate female kin are among the very few people who have free and unlimited access to his chambers. As cup-bearers they are often present at private meetings between the *Mwene* and his councillors. They are treated with deference by the *Mwene*, but there are no indications that they are considered as actively sharing in the *Mwene*'s status and prerogatives. They play a role in the preparation of offerings (beer, meal) for the domestic shrine of the royal village, and feature in the enthronement ceremony there, but the important rain ritual at the graves of the royal ancestors is — at least at present — entirely in the hands of senior male courtiers.⁴⁸

The rather humble and informal position of the Nkoya female royal kin today contrasts with the pattern prevailing in many parts of Africa.⁴⁹ Moreover, the relative aloofness of women in traditional political relations today should not make one overlook the fact that in the rural economy, in day-to-day domestic and conjugal matters, and in non-royal ritual, Nkoya women display considerable power and initiative. Their economic and legal position and their gender solidarity (primarily achieved and expressed through female puberty rites) grant them considerable independence vis-à-vis men. Underneath a formal etiquette of female submissiveness, Nkoya culture tends to stress a considerable gender equality (van Binsbergen 1987a).

In chapter 5 we shall see the great extent to which the contemporary pattern of gender relations at the *lukena* differs from the situation in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

Given the fact that, with regard to many aspects of socio-political dynamics, the distinction between chief and headman is mainly gradual

⁴⁸ Oral sources [2], [3] 21.11.1973, [21] 16.10.1973. The *Mwene* himself is not allowed to go to his ancestors' graves for reasons of symbolic avoidance: death and kingship are incompatible. This appears to be a fundamental difference between the Nkoya and the Lozi kingship: the Lozi royal graves feature prominently in Lozi court ritual and *Litungas* have been recorded to take offerings there themselves (cf. Coillard 1971: 217).

⁴⁹ Of course, the special ritual and political roles of female royal kin is a recurrent feature in African 'Early States'; cf. Claessen 1984; for a Zambian example, cf. Shimwaayi Muntamba 1970; Mukuni n.d. (both on the Mukuni Leya of Livingstone District, incidentally close neighbours of the southernmost Nkoya, those of Mwene Momba).

in twentieth century Nkoya neo-traditional politics, a closer examination of Nkoya headmen and their titles not only throws light on fundamental local-level processes in Nkoya village society, but will turn out to be very illuminating for the analysis of Nkoya royal titles and political history in general.

My data derive from the Njonjolo and Kazo valleys of Mwene Kahare's area, in the eastern part of Kaoma district. In the 1970s and 1980s cash-cropping, either within or outside the sphere of influence of the state's agricultural schemes, introduced the concept of 'the farm' (with fragmented and isolated settlement, mounting emphasis on the nuclear family, and some agricultural wage labour — in other words as an incipient form of participation in the peripheral capitalist mode of production) as an alternative to 'the village'. However, the village mode has remained the standard option in many outlying villages, and the personal and labour histories I collected in 1973-74 among two hundred adults of both sexes and various age brackets shows that its fundamental outlines have remained fairly constant since the 1930s and 1940s — if not much earlier. One important aspect of the village mode is a career model stipulating that a man by the age of forty or fifty should seek to establish himself as a village headman, after decades in which he would have attached himself as junior kinsman to a series of senior kinsmen/patrons, intermittently with spells of absence as a labour migrant.⁵⁰

Villages are named after their headmen (although they may also have, in addition, a less formal nickname). The most honourable way to succeed to headmanship is by *ushwana*: to inherit a previous incumbent's name, social person, and selected material goods (cf. van Binsbergen 1981b).

A name inheritance ceremony is to take place up to a year after a person's death, and consists of a nocturnal musical festival attended by hundreds of people. After midnight elders come forth to implement their earlier secret deliberations as to who of those present at the festival should inherit the name. They scoop down on the person of their choice and literally try to catch him or her, while the one elected struggles and runs in order to avoid the dangerous responsibility inherent in succession: not only may the new name not agree with the candidate — which leads to the latter's illness, possibly death — but also does the successor attract the envy and malice of other candidates, often channelled through sorcery attacks, poisoning, or more open acts of violence. Theoretically, a chosen candidate who manages to run downhill from the village and reach the stream and plunge into it, before the elders can catch him or her, will go free⁵¹ — but I have

⁵⁰ Van Binsbergen 1975. For similar dynamics, cf. Turner 1957; Fielder 1979. For the overall discussion in this section, cf. van Binsbergen, in prep.

⁵¹ This is our first encounter, in this argument, with water symbolism, which occupies such a prominent role in Nkoya culture. Water is a catalyst in

never come across actual cases: 'to be caught' is a very great honour. Once 'caught', the candidate — these days to be dressed in white clothes, in the past to be smeared with white koalin clay — is placed on a reed mat inside a half-circular reed windbreak, and welcomed by the electors and members of the community in general by clapping, praises and short speeches in which the merging of the social personality of the heir and the predecessor is stressed. While seated under a newly-erected shrine of the appropriate type, the heir's new identity is confirmed when members of the community line up to sprinkle meal over his or her head. Royal succession follows the same ceremonial pattern but in a grander form, and also involves secret medication at the hand of the court priests.

Usually the headman title thus inherited is a name which has circulated in the family group for some generations — but not necessarily as a hereditary title granting rights to exercise the village headmanship. The family group is a micro-political more than a genealogical or residential unit, usually extending — along with other such groups — over a number of villages, with rights to headmanship in only one or a few. Ever since the inception of labour migration more than a century ago, close kinsmen residing in distant places of work are still counted as 'members' of the village conceived primarily as a micro-political cluster. A central concern of the village group is the management and transfer to new generations of a repertoire of established, hereditary personal names (*lizina*, pl. *mazina*). Intragroup conflict is often interpreted in supernatural terms referring to difficulties in the transfer of such names (van Binsbergen 1977, 1979), and inter-group conflict in terms of the attempt to usurp or eradicate the other group's name.

In this fascinating dialectics of individuality⁵² and group identity, demographic vicissitudes and survival as a group, some names may become latent for a few decades, only to be revived after some generations. Thus about one third of the names of village headmen⁵³ in the twenty-odd villages of the Njonjolo valley (where Mwene Kahare's *lukena* has been situated since the 1920s) goes back to the generation of the present Kahare's grandfather Shamamano and his siblings in the late nineteenth century, even if people are now unable (or, for reasons of partial slave ancestry, unwilling) to trace their precise genealogical links to that generation.

the contact between Man and the Supernatural, as is also clear from the fact that traditional prayers are to be preceded by taking water in one's mouth and spitting it out (1: 7 and author's field-notes). The more direct contact with the ancestors through the river — which throughout Central and South Central Africa is considered their abode — redeems the candidate from the ritual association, subject to human volition and choice, with one particular ancestor through *ushwana*.

⁵² For on one level *ushwana* celebrates the deceased incumbent and the latter's heir; cf. van Binsbergen 1987a.

⁵³ Some of these names appear below, 3.3, 'bias in the treatment of slavery'.

A particular name may accrue to a socio-political office such as village headman; but on the other hand the pool of a group's names is not unchangeable, and powerful and impressive individuals often manage to add their own chosen praise-names to that pool. Individual achievement is then incapsulated, and redeemed from its initial sorcery connotations (cf. van Binsbergen 1981a: ch. 4), to precipitate (as a collective good) a new name, which is subject to transmission to later generations.

Likewise, if even after many years of waiting (in exile, or as a labour migrant in town) and politicking no village headmanship becomes available (and such office is heavily, sometimes murderously, contended), an ambitious man may go and found his own village, rallying his junior kinsmen, lending either his given birth name or his self-chosen praise-name to the newly established village, and hoping (but now more resignedly) that in later years one of the more prestigious names circulating in his kin group may yet be given to him through *ushwana*. Equally likely, his own name may be inherited by his successor as headman of the new village, and the wider kin group's pool of names will then have slightly altered its composition.

It is no exaggeration to say that, until the alternative career perspective of the individualized farm became available (and in most villages this is still only an option open to a minority), the process of individual mobility and group identity preservation constituted⁵⁴ the very motor of Nkoya village society, the central organizing principle of kin groups, factions, individual careers, and leadership outside the domain of neo-traditional *lukena* politics. The process was and is still articulated in serene or festive integrative collective rituals: not only *ushwana* but also the redress, at the village shrine, of illnesses interpreted in terms of defective name inheritance; and the process is also reflected in the no less frequent, deeply emotional outbursts of hostile gossip, sorcery actions and accusations, and inquests, where it provides the idiom for the expression of the kin group's anxieties, particularly in a context of grave illness and sudden death.

In this way everyday village life is to a considerable extent structured by the process of incessant waxing and waning of names and titles at the level of village headman, an interlocking process of ascription (through *ushwana*) as well as achievement through personal initiative, power games and the handling of public opinion and rhetorics. Given the diffuse and contentious nature of authority and the negotiable, situational nature of kinship roles in Nkoya village society, the formal status of headman is indispensable if one is to manage the social, marital, productive and ritual affairs of the small village group, and to arbitrate its numerous minor and major conflicts. In the process, the headman is usually aided by a junior kinsman acting as assistant headman.

⁵⁴ That is, at the micro-political level; no doubt there are underlying economic and symbolic factors and constraints.

It is very likely that the local-level socio-political processes described here have formed a constant in the society of central western Zambia, extending throughout the colonial period back into the last few centuries before the imposition of colonial rule. However, in at least one respect did the colonial state significantly alter the overall pattern. In line with the general bureaucratic remodelling of local polities, and while respecting the headmen's subordinate position vis-à-vis the chiefs, the colonial state accorded headmen a bureaucratic status of their own by issuing them with 'the book': the village register used for the administration of hut tax. Rural-based taxation was abolished at Independence. However, when the responsibilities of chiefs and headmen in the context of village registration and village productivity were redefined in the *Zambian Village Registration and Development Act of 1971*, the village register took the place of the earlier tax book. The public status of a new village headman has to be confirmed by his inheriting his predecessor's book or, in the case of a newly created village, his being issued with a book of his own. 'The book' is therefore still the much-coveted sign of office for the village headman, and as such the subject of numerous machinations within Nkoya village politics.

the indigenous Barotse administration and the colonial state

The Lozi state⁵⁵ had reached its greatest expansion in the late nineteenth century, after the Luyana dynasty had put an end to a quarter of a century (1840-1864) of immigrant rule by the Kololo, a Sotho military force immigrating from presentday South Africa. In this expansion process, many groups in western Zambia were relegated to the status of 'Lozi subject tribes', with their rulers incorporated in relatively junior positions in the Lozi indigenous aristocratic hierarchy, and eclipsed by Lozi 'representative *indunas*', which the *Litunga* had begun to station in the outlying areas of the Lozi kingdom after its restoration from Kololo rule. Clay (1945: 16) cites the year 1899 for the advent of representative *indunas* in Mwene Kahare's area, and *Likota lya Bankoya* mentions the date of 1904, but also suggests much earlier dates (43: 13; 43: 15; 48: 4). In those initial years of British South Africa Company rule Lewanika's territorial claims were still in full expansion (Stokes 1966). The arrangement was formalized in 1917:

'As far back as 1917 the Lozi Paramount Chief felt that the two Nkoya chiefs were not in effective control of the district and so

⁵⁵ Cf. Mutumba Mainga 1973; Prins 1980; Gluckman 1943, 1968a, 1968b; Turner 1952.

reinforced them with 14 *Silalo*⁵⁶ *Indunas* each of whom had a court and made people pay tribute to the Lozi Paramount Chief.⁵⁷

The number, geographical distribution, and power of these *indunas* was greatly expanded in the first two decades of colonial rule — much to the resentment of non-Lozi populations, and to the increasing irritation of colonial administrators in these areas.⁵⁸ In the Nkoya case, their inferior status as ‘subject tribe’ was clearly brought out by the fact that the major, kettle-shaped royal drums (*liwoma*, pl. *mawoma*) of the Mutondo kingship, captured by the Kololo around 1860, after the restoration of the Luyana dynasty had never been returned; also the other royal titles among the Nkoya (especially Mwene Kahare) were never allowed to have anything but minor drums (*zingoma*).⁵⁹

As the argument of this book develops, we shall have occasion to assess the extent of Lozi overlordship in central western Zambia in the *precolonial* period. With some minor qualifications, the emerging picture turns out to confirm the views held by both the Lozi establishment and the scholarly literature: Lozi control of what is now Kaoma district dates back to at least the middle of the nineteenth century. The Lozi viewpoint was for instance phrased, in 1977, by Chief Litia, son of Litunga Mbikusita and the most senior representative of the Lozi indigenous administration in Kaoma district. He claimed that Lozi representative *indunas* were in Kaoma long before the Whites came,

‘partly in request of the Nkoya chiefs for protection against the Kaonde’.⁶⁰

However, this state of affairs, far from humiliating to the Nkoya, merely allows them to share in the great Lozi identity, for in Chief Litia’s view

⁵⁶ The *silalo* is a Barotse administrative district under an *induna*; each consists of several *sililanda* units, which in turn each comprise several villages (Mutumba Mainga 1973: 48).

⁵⁷ District Secretary Kaoma to Permanent Secretary Western Province, 10.5.1974, enclosure in Kaoma district files, ADM/12 ‘Chiefs and headmen’.

⁵⁸ Cf. Stokes 1966; the irritation is very clear from the data contained in Zambia National Archives ZA 1/13, Barotse influence.

⁵⁹ Drums of the *liwoma* type (semi-globular, and with a diameter of about 1 metre), which are now completely absent among the Nkoya, have since formed part of the Lozi royal orchestra (Brown 1984), and significantly enthronement of the *Litunga* on the principal *liwoma* is the climax of the Lozi coronation ceremony; cf. Zimbabwe National Archives, photographic collection, Barotse section, photograph 20143 (showing the coronation of Litunga Imwiko in 1946), and 6707 (showing the Lozi royal instruments in the 1910s).

⁶⁰ Oral source [9].