

## Chapter 4

# State formation in central western Zambia as depicted by *Likota lya Bankoya*

The present chapter will be largely taken up by a presentation of the specific surface content of *Likota lya Bankoya*. Using analytical language, the insights of modern anthropology and historiography, and a general background of other sources, in order to illuminate the statements in *Likota lya Bankoya* and bring out their implications, yet remaining close to the text, we shall follow the book in its mythical discussion of the pre-state situation, trace the emergence of the institution of *Wene* in that context, and see how that institution served as a condensation point for actual states. Gender relations were redefined under the influence of male usurpation of female royal power, such as was made possible by male-dominated economic changes.

### 4.1. The pre-state situation

*Likota lya Bankoya* stipulates two major elements in the pre-state situation in central western Zambia: a cosmological system revolving on the High God, the latter's child Rain, and the Land; and the clan system as the framework of social, economic and political organization from which later Nkoya states were to spring forth.

*the High God, Rain, and the Land*

The High God, Nyambi,<sup>275</sup> is called by the epithet:

‘The Creator Who Created Trees and Man’ (1: 6).

There is no reason to interpret this formula as a Christian imposition. The formula is still frequently used to indicate the High God in Nkoya songs, ritual formulae pertaining to the traditional religion, and everyday conversation. The formula evokes the central cosmological and symbolic role of trees in Nkoya culture, of which *Likota lya Bankoya* contains many other examples, including the names of two of the four major Nkoya royal titles (Mutondo and Kabulwebulwe), and various royal praise-names. The forest, and every individual tree, is still considered the divine epiphany par excellence: *bitondo wa Nyambi*, ‘the trees of God’, is the Nkoya expression for the forest and by extension for the visible world as a whole. Therefore the village shrine has to be arboreal: a live shrub or a forked pole (cf. van Binsbergen 1981a: ch. 3).

By evoking the prayer formula:

‘Twakabomba, obe Mpandashilanga’ (1: 6),<sup>276</sup>

*Likota lya Bankoya* casts an interesting light on the rain ritual that under the influence of the great prophet Mupumani of Nanzhila spread over much of western and central Zambia in 1914-15: the white pole, the ecological ritual focusing on it, and the prayer formula *Twakabomba*: ‘We are humble’, which have so far been taken to be original innovations by Mupumani,<sup>277</sup> are suggested by *Likota lya Bankoya* to be a straightforward application of standard cultic material available in central western Zambia at the time. If the earlier, innovative interpretation of these elements is to be retained we must assume that Shimunika, although already in his teens at the time of Mupumani’s movement, much later, when writing *Likota lya Bankoya*, confused such innovations with time-honoured elements of ritual culture; however, the way the entire ritual scene of central western Zambia (not only that of the Nkoya) is saturated with these elements, suggests them to be of much older date and much wider distribution than the innovation hypothesis assumed.

Due to the grammatical peculiarities discussed above, the gender attributed to Nyambi remains unspecified in *Likota lya Bankoya* — as

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<sup>275</sup> *Nyambi*, and the various phonological transformations of this word, is the name for the High God in a vast region extending south from Cameroon; it has also been adopted as translation for the English word *God* in Nkoya Bible translation.

<sup>276</sup> ‘We are humble, O You, Creator of Victuals.’

<sup>277</sup> Cf. van Binsbergen 1981a: ch 4 and references cited there.

in everyday Nkoya conversation. The conception of the High God as the origin and the first incumbent of the institution of *Wene*, kingship,<sup>278</sup> would lead contemporary Nkoya readers to interpret the expression Mwene Nyambi to refer to a male personage, — not only because of a merging with Christian notions of ‘the Lord God’, but also because for about a century Nkoya *Myene* have invariably been male. It is likely, however, that such male connotations are alien to the original concept of Nyambi *precisely because* in the Nkoya conception Nyambi was the first *Mwene* — in just the same way as, underneath the contemporary projection of male *Myene*, the most ancient layer of incumbents of *Wene* can be reconstructed to have been female.

Besides connotations of kingship, Nyambi has bird-like connotations — and so has Nyambi’s child, *Mvula*: ‘Rain’.

‘The kingship of the Nkoya is said to have started with the large cooking-pot full of game meat. Many of the Nkoya in the past said that Mwene Nyambi is a bird; and that Mwene Nyambi has a child, Rain (*Mvula*), also a bird; and that two clans in this world are the relatives of Rain: the Nkwehe [Hawks] on the part of the birds, and the Mbunze [Buzzards] on the part of the people.’ (4: 1)

The prominence of this demiurge Rain who links the sky and the land has economic implications: the cosmology evoked in *Likota Iya Bankoya* is no longer that of mere hunters and gatherers — but already that of agriculturalists, for only the latter have a vested, positive interest in rain.

Rain, whose gender remains implicit,<sup>279</sup> is presented as the source and the divine approval of kingship. The events related in the myth of the origin of kingship (the Cooking-Pot of Game Meat), end — as in divine sanctioning — with a heavy downpour, and with the statement:

‘Our Kingship comes from the Raindrop’ (4: 7).

On the one hand this formula states the incomparable cosmological significance of *Wene*: kingship emanates directly from, is perhaps nothing but, the vital link between the Sky and the Land. Meanwhile this formula reappears in a slightly different context in *Likota Iya Bankoya* (28: 1), and then it takes on the following connotation: ‘our political institution of *Wene* has such a cosmological and religious anchorage that it is inconceivable that it could be made subservient to any neighbouring political system’.

Rain specifically as Nyambi’s child comes back in the praise-name of the first Mwene Mutondo, Shinkisha Lushiku Mate, who among other esoteric epithets is called

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<sup>278</sup> Oral source [24] *passim*.

<sup>279</sup> Its essential wetness certainly carries predominantly female connotations in the Nkoya symbolic universe — cf. chapter 6 of this Part I.

‘the Snuffbox of Nyambi’s Child’ (26: 1).

Nkoya Christians would automatically read ‘Nyambi’s child’ as ‘God’s Son’: Jesus Christ. But can the phrase really be taken as an embellishment inserted by Shimunika in his capacity of Christian pastor? In general I would maintain that these formalized praise formulae have been handed down to a later period practically unaltered. Their archaic and dense language, which often poses insurmountable problems of translation even to native speakers, testifies to this. There is a remarkable merging of ideas here. Diffuse and distorted, Portuguese-derived Christian ideas have, of course, percolated through Central Africa for centuries before colonial rule. A ready nineteenth-century example from what later became the Lusaka area is Mwana Lesa — again ‘Son of God’ (Smith & Dale 1920). The fact that the murderous twentieth-century witch-hunter Tomo Nyirenda<sup>280</sup> was also nicknamed Mwana Lesa is likely to have deep local historical roots predating formal Christian missionary influence. And also in the Nkoya case, I refuse to consider the beautiful conception of Rain as Child of God as a mere Christian projection. Had Rev. Shimunika fallen victim to the temptation of pious Christian projection, he would have left out the bird theme, and would have shown far less open-mindedness vis-à-vis other aspects of Nkoya religion.

The Land which Rain, in her humid and life-giving embrace, unites with Nyambi, is nowhere in *Likota lya Bankoya* the subject of explicit general discussion. A few general patterns however emerge.

The land that is the scene of the historical and mythical events recounted in *Likota lya Bankoya*, is a land almost exclusively defined by its rivers, streams and tributaries — as if it is, again, its feminine wetness which counts most. Hydrography provides virtually the only landmarks for the extensive toponymical detail in the book. Rivers often lend their names to *zinkena*, royal graves<sup>281</sup> and individuals (e.g. 9: 2; 13: 2; 36: 1; 50: 6). Toponyms referring to land areas instead of rivers, like Nkanda (the dry land of the Kafue/Zambezi watershed; 29: 3), and Tumba (the new homeland which was established at the headwaters of the Kabompo), are isolated and represent a puzzling, contentious toponymical logic of their own.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Rotberg 1967: 142f; Ranger 1975; Fetter 1971.

<sup>281</sup> Admittedly, royal graves provide another set of landmarks, but they are, in their turn, only identified by hydrographic references, instead of being used as toponymical points of reference in their own right.

<sup>282</sup> In chapter 6 I shall argue that such incompatibilities of various internal logics are likely pointers to historically significant information, as in the case of mutative transformations. More reflection is needed as to the historical implications of the existence of a minority of non-hydrographic toponyms in central western Zambia.

While such hydrographic toponymy is in complete agreement with the mental geography of the region's inhabitants today, it is remarkable in this respect that although relatively well-watered, central western Zambia can by no means be said to form one vast water-land of marshes, wetlands, flood plains etc. — as is the centre of Barotseland, or like the smaller Mbuwa area that plays a considerable part in Nkoya history. Streams and rivers organize the natural and social space of the village clusters around them, and structure such economic activities as fishing and fetching water for domestic purposes, but they are rarely through-ways for water transport (major rivers like the Kafue and the Kabompo are obvious exceptions).

One therefore wonders why there should be this emphasis on rivers in the geographical conceptualization of the region.

There are likely to be longstanding economic factors, such as the dependence on fishing, or an agricultural system in which wet riverside gardens are very important for their rich yields (Schultz 1976). And the river valley, however inarticulate considering the low rise of the land between the rivers, yet forms the most significant unit of the social process — most of the day-to-day productive life takes place within the confines of the valley, one out of two marriages are contracted within the valley, and both these functions are reflected in the fact that each valley has its own ecological cult (around the grave of a major *Mwene*) and informal neighbourhood court of law (van Binsbergen 1977, 1983). Moreover I suspect that the emphasis on rivers contains an important historical message: that it contains reminiscences of the riverain, almost aquatic primitive state of Mbwela society a few centuries ago, with dwellings floating on the water, and most food derived from the river and its banks.

On a symbolic level, the Nkoya conceptualization of the land by means of the rivers is extremely significant. Rivers have no extension, they are one-dimensional lines and not two-dimensional areas, and they convey movement, passing and boundary-crossing much more than localization, geographical fixation and entrenchment. One would not be surprised to find this sort of geographical world-view among people like the Nkoya. Nkoya individuals do not have strong attachments to particular land areas at the village or the valley level, and even the more comprehensive concept of a Land of Nkoya seems to have carried little emotional attachment and identification prior to recent processes of ethnicization. The Nkoya have a long tradition of collective and individual displacement. Given an ecology of shifting cultivation, hunting and fishing, the Nkoya's relation to the land is pragmatic rather than ritualistic. They would rather bite off their tongues than litigate over land. Beyond observances in the first years after burial they do not venerate their ancestral graves except in the case of *Myene*.<sup>283</sup> These

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<sup>283</sup> This is not to deny the prominence of the ancestral cult among the Nkoya; however, the cult focuses not on ancestral graves but on the village shrine, a shrub or forked branch planted in the middle of the village near

*Myene*'s graves constitute the only type of territorial shrine — unless one wants to include shrines whose life span and geographical scope do not exceed that of the village (i.e. a few decades, a few acres): the simple arboreal village shrines, or the tops of anthills placed during a small ritual by means of which the chthonic spirits of a new village site are placated prior to building.

It is only in the most recent years that land shortage is forcing the Nkoya to reconsider their fundamental cultural orientation.<sup>284</sup>

The Nkoya terminology for tributaries (*mushinzi K mwana L mwana M*: 'river K child of river L child of river M') produces downright genealogical statements, and suggests that rivers in themselves constitute a local model for genealogical thinking — as if people, like rivers, flow rather than take root, — as if people are, more than anything, the *Drops*, or *Tears, of Rain!* However, this aquatic imagery is complemented by an arboreal one, not only in the title of *Likota* ['Tree'] *lya Bankoya* but also in Shimunika's frequent use of the term *liziko*, 'branch'; and by the gynaecological imagery of *livumo*: 'womb', '[more or less] matrilineage'.

Beyond the toponymical fragmentation of scores of streams and rivulets that abound in *Likota lya Bankoya* with — why not admit it — irritating monotony, there is yet one uniting concept of Land: *Liunga lya Nkoya*, 'the Land of Nkoya'. The boundaries of Nkoya are not defined, but remote royal establishments, like that of the Momba dynasty, and Mwene Shikanda's at Kayimbu (today's Kasempa), are implied to be outside of it. And so is Loziland, — by which in the context of *Likota lya Bankoya* is mainly meant the presentday districts of Mongu

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the headman's house. When the village is moved to a different place — as frequently happens — a new shrine is erected in the new site. With the exception of *Myene* (the veneration of whose graves is a form of a royal, more than of an ancestral cult), ancestors are remembered not by their graves — which within a few years dissolve irretrievably into the surrounding forest — but by their names, which are specifically mentioned in praying at the shrine, recited one by one during divination sessions seeking to ascertain the identity of an inflicting ancestor, and commemorated by the name-inheriting institution of *ushwana*. Cf. van Binsbergen 1981b and in prep.

284 This pressure is particularly felt around the Nkeyema Scheme in the eastern fringe of the district. In 1988 Mr Stanford Mayowe, the Nkoya councillor for Nkeyema Ward — an educated person who before retirement had been the director of a Zambian parastatal company — began to persuade local fellow-Nkoya to earmark certain outlying valleys, then temporarily unoccupied, as the specific hereditary territory of each of the Nkoya villages in the area. This move was certainly timely in the face of alarming developments: the massive influx of enterprising migrant farmers from all over western Zambia, the generosity with which Mwene Kahare granted agricultural land to non-Nkoya newcomers, and the lack of legal protection of collective ownership rights in fallow land under the Zambian national legislation. However, Mr Mayowe had great difficulty driving his point home — local concern and indignation at stranger encroachment did not mean that one was prepared to change one's time-honoured attitudes towards land overnight.

and Kalabo, at the heart of Western Province. While this somehow defines the eastern, western and southern limits of the Land of Nkoya, its northward extension remains undefined, and this probably reflects a gradual shift of the centre of 'Nkoya' history from the northwest (the Mwinilunga and Zambezi districts on the Upper Zambezi) to the south-east (the Kabompo, Lukulu and particularly Kaoma districts). This Land is the earthly space within which Nkoya history will be set.<sup>285</sup>

Finally, this Land is implied to have been available, even (since no previous occupants are acknowledged in *Likota lya Bankoya*) to have been *empty*. We do not hear about non-Bantu, Khoi-San predecessors although they must certainly have been there. Nor does Shimunika's conception of history as dynastic history allow us more than a glimpse of those people who appear to have formed the fairly stable occupants of the Land of Nkoya for a number of centuries — both before, and after the arrival of, the dynasties on which *Likota lya Bankoya* concentrates. With the exception of the painful subjugation of the Nduwe people by Mwene Liyoka (37: 4), the book leads us to believe, quite wrongly, that the entire contemporary population of the Land of Nkoya descends from Mwene Libupe and her followers.

The mental image of the Land of Nkoya as the Promised Land of the Nkoya people — a transformation involving considerable ethnic manipulation and biblical projection — is certainly part of the contemporary Nkoya ethnic consciousness, whose most vocal expressions are put forth by literate people with a solid grounding in fundamentalist Christianity, using Christian prayer in the Nkoya language as a mobilizing ethnic idiom at social, political and family gatherings. The image can be detected, for instance, in Mr H.H. Mwene's introductory description (cf. Parts II and III below) of Mwene Libupe (cf. Moses) leading the Nkoya people across the rivers (cf. the Red Sea) from Zaïre (cf. Egypt) to 'this land of Zambia' (cf. the land of Israel). There are even indications<sup>286</sup> that this is not mere contemporary Christian rhetorics: that the departure from Zaïre, of the dynastic core that was to become the Mbwela, aimed in fact at the liberation from

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285 I cannot resist the temptation to point out that, according to H. Rider Haggard's detailed topographical directions, the Land of Nkoya is directly adjacent to a mythical landscape that has captivated generations of readers: Kukuanaland, and particularly — leading to it — the stretch of land northwest of Shitanda's capital, as depicted in *King Solomon's Mines* (Haggard 1967, first published 1885). Needless to say that (by contrast to the evoked mineral wealth of the region, which happens to be a reality) the desert, the snowcapped peaks and the presence of a Zulu-related people established there for half a millennium or more are all figments of Haggard's imagination. They reflect not only stereotypes of imperialist romanticism, but also the fact that by the time *King Solomon's Mines* was written (the period of Lewanika I and of Munangisha), what is now Zambia's Central and Northwestern Provinces was still effectively outside the domain of imperialist expansion. For a reading of Haggard's geographical imagery in terms of gender symbolism and gender conflict, cf. McClintock 1990.

286 In Musumban oral traditions; cf. Schecter 1980a: 41 as discussed above.

humiliation at the hands of the Mwaat Yaamv. However, in Rev. Shimunika's own main text of the *Likota Iya Bankoya* this final dimension of the Land theme is little manifest.

Yet even he stresses the Nkoya *Mwene's* legitimate ownership of the land. This is expressed by Mwene Mutondo in the time-honoured symbolism of hitting a tree with a weapon at the very moment that colonial occupation became effective (51: 3).

### *clans*

The clan (*mukoka*) receives a great deal of attention in *Likota Iya Bankoya*, not only with reference to before the period of state formation (when the clan was the main form of socio-political organization), but also when later periods are concerned. In the opening chapter, where Shimunika lists his chief informants, the impression is conveyed that clan leaders are the principal guardians of oral history (1: 1f). Likewise, when the training of Lutangu/Sipopa as a hunter is described (33: 2), great emphasis is laid on the clan membership of the hunters concerned, suggesting a pattern of hunters' associations cutting across clan lines. Clan affiliation is often specified when royal personages and their ancestry are discussed (e.g. 35: 1; 40: 2).

In presentday Nkoya life the significance of clans is not immediately obvious. This is partly due to their high degree of dispersal and intermingling in modern times. Yet on further analysis clans turn out to be still rather important on the level of the marital system, joking relations, rural support systems in times of individual destitution, and funerary arrangements. In all those respects the clan structure offers interlocal ties which largely regulate that part of the social process that extends beyond the immediate daily face-to-face context.

Joking relations exist between specific pairs of clans. Such relations were and are expressed by stereotypical reference to the natural relations between clan totems; e.g. between members of the Bees clan and the Smoke clan a joking relation exists, they call each other 'grandfather', abuse each other, may take sexual liberties with each other (if from opposite sexes), and appropriate each other's possessions without actionable offense, since it is through Smoke that Bees are chased when wild honey is being collected in the forest.

The clan structure provides an extensive and dense network of consanguinity, affinity and putative kinship spreading all over the countryside. *Likota Iya Bankoya* contains several examples (although not necessarily referring to the pre-state phase) of the effectiveness of this network.

By contrast with clan structures in many other societies, Nkoya clans are not necessarily exogamous.<sup>287</sup> Nkoya clans are even ideally

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<sup>287</sup> Oral source [10] and author's field-notes.



endogamous,<sup>288</sup> since such a marital strategy would most effectively bind junior kinsmen, through marital ties, to senior kinship-based patrons. Of course in cases of clan endogamy, when both parents have the same clan affiliation, the question of the clan affiliation of their offspring does not arise. It does in cases of clan exogamy, and then<sup>289</sup> clan affiliation is ambilineally inherited, the offspring claiming both the father's and the mother's clan.

Also in *Likota Iya Bankoya* is clan membership reported to be transmitted through both the father and the mother — with perhaps a suggestion that for sons their father's clan affiliation may be stressed, for daughters their mother's:

'When Shilemantumba died she left her two sons in the branch of kingship. They were from the Mbunze clan, for Mukwetunga Lyovu Iya Mbuwa, the one who begot the Myene, belonged to that clan.' (5: 2)

The clan emerges as the original form of social organization:

'After creating everything else in the world Mwene Nyambi created Man. 2 Our grandparents used to say that we, all the people in the world, were born from the same great-grandmother. She was fertile, and from her womb came forth all the clans, notably:

- (1) Lavwe,
- (2) Mbunze,
- (3) Shungu or Le,
- (4) Ntabi,
- (5) Nkomba, and
- (6) Nyembo.' (3: 1)

The extensive geographical distribution of a limited number of clan names (all through their nicknames associated with animal species and other natural phenomena) points to a cosmologically-supported social-organizational continuity throughout the region and far beyond — a far wider scope than the presentday distribution of rather small ethnic and linguistic clusters in the area would suggest. It also corroborates the now general view that the precolonial movement of people was far from massive nor within a limited time period, but very gradual and largely realized at the level of small clan segments.<sup>290</sup> However, while clans today are dispersed and any residential community (a village; a valley comprising a dozen or more villages) contains members of any number of clans, pre-state clans were rather localized:

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<sup>288</sup> Oral source [14].

<sup>289</sup> Oral source [14].

<sup>290</sup> Vansina 1966: 88; Cunnison 1951, 1959; White 1949.

‘When Luhamba and Katete were being hidden by the Mbunze — Luhamba in a bark container, Katete in a mat —, 2 the Humbu came to the village of Lyovu Iya Mbuwa’ (7: 1f).

The clans occupied a contiguous, rather well defined area, in which they had exclusive rights over the natural resources present.<sup>291</sup>

These clan rights were realized through such economic activities as fishing, hunting and the collection of forest products: fruits, tubers etc.

‘Mwene Libupe (...) and her people ate fish, game meat and wild fruits collected in the forest, for at that time there was no porridge.’ (2: 3)

The reference is to *ncima*, a stiff porridge (prepared out of water, salt, and the meal of maize, cassava, or millet) which today is the staple in the region and throughout Zambia. However, it is not clear yet whether its absence refers to an unusually severe famine period; as elsewhere in South Central Africa (e.g. cf. Richards 1939), extreme annual seasonal food shortages have formed a constant feature of the agriculture-based economy. The alternative interpretation is that this passage refers to an economic phase in which agricultural food production was relatively unimportant, at times perhaps even negligible. Unlikely as this may seem in the face of the diffusion history of food crops, including American ones, in Africa, this possibility was also reflected in sources<sup>292</sup> which stress the importance of the collecting of wild fruits and tubers in early Mbwela society. As late as the 1930s, villages located east of the Kafue/Zambezi watershed were reported to rely largely on meat consumption, involving truly amazing quantities of smaller and larger game as killed per head of the human population:

‘The Bambwela in common with their cousins the Bankoya are great hunters and game meat occupies a more prominent part in their diet than with most tribes. They are prevented from owning domesticated stock on account of tsetse fly and, although they do eat insects and other small animals with their porridge, they would be genuinely distressed if deprived of game meat; especially so because the ground in the area (...) is for the most part very infertile, and it is only because of the presence of plentiful game that it supports even the sparse population which inhabits it. (...) Each village of Bambwela was said to account for 30 buck smaller than a reed buck and 20 buck bigger than a reed buck including reed buck (*sic*), every month. If we estimate the average number of inhabitants at 45

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<sup>291</sup> Oral source [19] 18-20.10.1977.

<sup>292</sup> White 1949, 1962; cf. Sandasanda 1972; Schechter 1980a.

(probably too high), this would amount to one buck per person per month!<sup>293</sup>

Although this source suggests that the clan-based ecology was still rather viable in the beginning of the twentieth century, in fact it has undergone considerable changes since the arrival of the present clans two or three centuries ago. Named rulers from the period of statehood, when clans were no longer the dominant principle of socio-political organization, are credited with innovations in the field of elephant hunting and the introduction of new crops which have persisted to this day (15: 1f). Agriculture, therefore, seems to have been rather limited in the pre-state period. Hunting, with bow and arrow, spear, and traps, must have been for food and skins rather than for ivory. Today fishing in this region is merely a welcome seasonal addition to a diet largely based on other economic activities. There is a division of labour along gender lines: men enter into the water, engaging in spear-fishing and setting fish traps, whereas women remain at the banks and from there scoop the fishes out of the water with baskets.

In so far as the control over natural resources was both vital and uncertain, on the religious plane the clan engaged in ecological ritual<sup>294</sup> directed to the High God, Nyambi. Throughout South Central Africa, such ritual had moral and social connotations in addition to meteorological and economic ones: such major social evils as sorcery, murder and incest were supposed to 'tie up' the rain, and thus the typically collective rain-calling ritual had the function of cleansing the community at a point in the annual cycle (the end of the dry season) when, due to famine and relatively high morbidity and mortality rates, community morale would be at its lowest and fears of evil (foremost sorcery) would be paramount.

In pre-state central western Zambia, the clan's economic rights and religious duties seem to have been vested in the clan head, who would initiate rain ritual, first fruit ceremonies, collective fishing parties, etc. The ecological ritual was dominated by women:

'When there was a drought in the land, the Mwene or any Mukambuyu<sup>295</sup> in that area gathered the people and told them that they were going to have a prayer day. Two men would go into the forest to cut down a tree of medium size. They would remove its bark and cut off all the branches except two; these two would be

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<sup>293</sup> Zambia National Archives, District Commissioner Mumbwa to Provincial Commissioner Lusaka, 12.7.1933, 'Kafue Game Reserve: Recommendations', enclosure in KDB 1/2/1 Kafue Game Reserve.

<sup>294</sup> Cf. Schoffeleers 1979; van Binsbergen 1981a; Ranger 1985.

<sup>295</sup> *Mukambuyu*: 'notable'; a significant addition: as if the rain ritual was older than the kingship, and/or as if *Myene* did not really control rain-making nor the territorial cult in general — in line with the general argument in van Binsbergen 1981a: ch. 3.

shortened so as to leave a fork, and bark rope (procured from the *mukwe* tree) would be tied around the fork. 7 Two old women would be appointed to go and clean a spot around an anthill and two furrows would be drawn in the ground so as to form a cross: one longer furrow from the east to the west, and a shorter one from the north to the south.

An old woman would be asked to bring water in a gourd; that water ought to have been brought into the village the day before the ceremony. In the morning two or three old women would bring maize meal in a container and onto it they would pour cold water until a very fluid solution was obtained. The oldest woman of all would take that solution into her mouth. Looking upward she would blow it out with force, to her right side, her left side, in front and behind her, and after that she would pour the solution into the furrows, praying:

“Bring water, You our Lord, Nyambi of Glory,”

and all the people would ululate and start singing’ (1: 6).<sup>296</sup>

There are indications that clan heads were female:

‘Shawaya became the leader<sup>297</sup> of the Shikumbawuyuvu clan.’ (12: 2)

The account is silent on the point of the judicial powers of clan heads, but since no other legal authorities are specified for this period, it is safe to assume that clan heads fulfilled at least such judicial roles as village heads today: presiding over village moots, with an emphasis on persuasion and consensus, and few formal sanctions.<sup>298</sup> The extent of the social group within which arbitration is possible in the case of

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<sup>296</sup> This is the rain ritual that was temporarily revived by the Ila (more precisely Lumbu) prophet Mupumani, who in 1913 incited forked poles as described here to be planted all over central western Zambia and far beyond; cf. van Binsbergen 1981a: 147f and references cited there. Today the ritual is no longer performed, as far as I know, but Mupumani’s ritual formula, *Twakabomba* (‘We are humble’) has survived; cf. (1: 6).

<sup>297</sup> Nk.: *Mukulwane*. Shikumbawuyuvu is another name for the Lavwe or Sheta clan. Since Shawaya is situated in a period for which already male *Myene* were recorded, this passage may also indicate that after the rise of *Wene*, clan heads retained some ritual status (as indeed they still have today), and that members (particularly female ones?) of the royal family who did not make it to *Wene* status could be compensated with such ritual office. Similar ritual compensation can also be reconstructed for other processes of state formation in South Central Africa (cf. van Binsbergen 1981a: 119-124 — on Bemba priestly councillors — and references cited there).

<sup>298</sup> In fact, early Luvale ‘chiefs’, who as stranger dynasties imposing themselves on a Nkoya-speaking population are historically closely related to — if not identical to — the clan leaders we are dealing with here, are primarily mentioned in their capacity as judges and arbitrators; cf. White 1949, 1960, 1962; Papstein 1978.

murder is often taken as an indication of the size of the effective juridico-political group. However, we have no means of ascertaining how the clan functioned in this respect: for the earliest period there is no mention of violence, nor of a military apparatus and its exploits. Such cases of murder and arbitration as *Likota lya Bankoya* mentions, all refer to a later phase, that of statehood.

It is likely, none the less, that the clan-based social organization provided a framework for a social and moral order out of which no juridico-political specialty yet seems to have articulated itself, in the way of secular rulers. This would leave the clan heads to have been primarily land priests,<sup>299</sup> incarnating a total cosmological order whose ritual and organizational keepers they were. Through their role in ecological ritual (perhaps already foreshadowing later, exclusive royal claims to fishing pools and game animals) they would occupy a central place as mediators between the population and Nature: not in order to monopolize and hoard Man's proceeds from Nature, but to redistribute them over, and share them with, their subjects, over which they held not so much juridico-political but primarily symbolic or ritual authority. In other words, they formed an example of Sahlins's (1965) redistributive chief, at a very incipient stage of political centralization.

As we have seen, *Likota lya Bankoya* suggests clans to be internally segmented in junior and senior branches, much like matrilineages (38: 6-7). Do we witness here a transition from the clan as a unit of social organization, to the clan as a principle of political and dynastic organization? For in the same vein, the existence of clan leadership with ecologico-ritual and economic prerogatives suggests that before the emergence of states, clans formed not just localized named groups and immigration cores, but also rudimentary political cores: the very growth points for later states. This ties in with the myth of origin of Nkoya kingship — the myth of the Pot of Game Meat cooking on the fire, which we shall discuss below.

#### 4.2. The emergence of the institution of *Wene*

The clans were composed of matrilineal segments, the most important of which is claimed to spring from the first Lady Mwene Libupe:

'THE NKOYA CAME FROM THE LUBA  
LIBUPE

**2** 1 Our grandparents used to tell us that Libupe came from *ncelele*, 'the north' as we say today in the language of the English. She was the first Lady Mwene. She came with the Nkoya across the Zambezi near its source. They were known by their old name of Mbwela.' (2: 1)

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<sup>299</sup> On the great significance of this category throughout Zambian precolonial history, of the present millenium, cf. van Binsbergen 1981a: ch. 3.

*Likota Iya Bankoya* consistently avoids using the word *Mwene* for clan leadership, but claims that it was upon such a structure of clanship that the Nkoya institution of *Wene*, politico-religious leadership at the supra-clan level, developed: as the outcome of a contest between the clans, with representatives of each clan trying to lift a big pot with game meat off the fire. When Shilayi Mashiku, the daughter of Mwene Libupe and her *Mukwetunga* Shikalamo sha Mundemba, completed the task successfully, she gained the leadership for herself and her clan:

“The kingship of the Nkoya is said to have started with the large cooking-pot full of game meat. (...) 2 Shikalamo sha Mundemba was therefore the one who prepared the large pot with game meat he had bagged; he put the pot on the fire and started cooking the meat. The meat had been cooking from the early morning till midday, and when the pot of meat was still on the fire Mpungumushi sha Mundemba called all the people. He said to them:

“Anyone who can take the large pot of game meat off the fire will become Mwene of all the people in this area.”

All clans in that area tried very hard to take the pot of meat off the fire. 3 Some went to cut poles long and strong enough to take the pot of meat off the fire, but they could not go near, for the fire was very large (...). 4 All the clans: Mbunze, Lavwe, Ntabi, Nkomba, Shungu and Nyembo, tried to the best of their ability but they failed to take the pot of meat off the fire. Then the daughter of Shikalamo sha Mundemba fetched water in a tight basket; with the aid of this basket she managed to go around the fire, pouring water and extinguishing the fire. 5 With great efforts she got near the pot of meat and using her pole she managed to take the pot off the fire. Then she called her relatives and all the people, saying:

“Let us eat.”

After they had eaten one of her relatives shouted:

“Come so that you can lick the plates of the Sheta who have gone around the pot of meat which was on the fire.”

Then Shikalamo sha Mundemba told all the people:

“You have all failed to take the pot of meat off the fire, but my daughter Shilayi Mashiku has managed to do so. She has eaten the meat with her relatives. She is ‘the bird that takes good care of its young ones’ and she becomes your Mwene. You who have licked the plates are the junior Myene henceforth known as Nkonze. The Sheta and the Nkonze are the same people, all Myene”.

7 When all the clans heard this they said to the people of Shilayi:

“You are from now to be called Sheta, for you have gone around and around the pot of meat when it was on the fire.”

To the others they said:

“You are from now to be called Nkonze for you have licked the plates of the Sheta.”

At the end of the ceremony it rained so heavily that the fire was extinguished. The people said :

“Our Kingship comes from the Raindrop.” ’ (4: 1f)

The fact that not Libupe, but her daughter Shilayi Mashiku is the protagonist of the myth of origin of *Wene*, suggests that Libupe’s *Mwene* status was only incipient, even though she is consistently called by that title. At a structural level — for all we know Libupe herself may well be only a mythical personage — this seems to mean that the *model* of *Wene* could have been imported from Musumba, but not by people who themselves were *Myene* already: the opportunity to apply that model to themselves only arose in a new, distant land, away from the sphere of influence of the Mwaat Yaamv. But the non-immigrant contribution — on the paternal side, Shikalamo’s — to the development of *Wene* is at least as much stressed by the story.

While presenting the outlines of a symbolic structure whose characteristics in terms of gender relations we shall explore below, this story on the surface suggests that the early Nkoya Lady *Myene* largely emulated the still earlier clan head: combining the socio-economic task of redistribution of local produce in an economy largely based on hunting and gathering (associated with the father, Shikalamo), with symbolico-ritual mediation between her people and nature, in the context of a cosmology that forms the basis of her legitimacy and power. The story of the Big Pot of Game Meat poses that through the institution of *Wene* the various clans were incorporated into a wider, super-clan socio-political framework, and that in this process an increasing monopolizing of the control over Nature in the hands of a few played an important part. For in the myth, Shikalamo sha Mundemba controlled both the proceeds from Nature (game meat), and the means to process them into food fit for human consumption (the cooking pot, the fire), in such a way that the members of other clans had to submit to him. It is likely that this differential control was related to such *ex officio* rights over certain fishing pools and certain game animals or parts thereof,<sup>300</sup> as were to characterize *Wene* till today. These rights were the basis of royal tribute (*ntupu*), on which the economy of the royal courts was to be based — later to be supplemented by slavery and long-distance trade. They provided an obvious supply of commodities for the *Mwene* to trade with or entertain tribute relations with superior royal courts; as one oral source insists:

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<sup>300</sup> In the colonial period, these rights had been preserved virtually intact in the case of the Lozi Litunga, and it is as such that they have been described by Gluckman (1968a).

‘The Mwene kept all skins, he did not redistribute them among his subjects.’<sup>301</sup>

The nature of the *Mwene*’s rights was so absolute that

‘There was a death penalty on violating royal rights to animals.’<sup>302</sup>

The animal rights were complemented by royal fishing rights over pools and streams, as documented in various passages of *Likota Iya Bankoya*, e.g.:

‘Nearby is also Lake Nkombalume, which together with Lake Mukondoloke (or Matuka) belonged to Mwene Kalumbwa.’ (14: 4)

Or again in chapter 43, where Mwana Mwene Kalumpiteka is killed when, on the basis of his royal ancestry, he claims fishing rights in the land of Lubanda (now Namwala district), but meets his doom when these claims are utterly unsupported by the local Ila.

Other sources differ from Shimunika, claiming that special fishing rights were peculiar to Lozi chiefs but not to the Nkoya *Myene*,<sup>303</sup> or again that among the Nkoya not the *Mwene*, but his *Lihano* possessed such rights.<sup>304</sup>

The royal game rights had continued to constitute central symbols of royal status. Thus by the end of the nineteenth century, Mwene Wahila’s democratic stance of delegating royal power to the Bilolo (50:10) is summarized as ‘sharing out tusks’ to them.

However, *Wene* is more than economic power: it is a form of divine kingship (cf. de Heusch 1984). It was only Shikalamo’s daughter Shilayi Mashiku who had a very special relation to Rain — the origin and symbolic consummation of her leadership (‘at the end of the ceremony it rained’), and with which she is identified (‘she is the bird...’). Libupe’s part in the story is not explicitly stated, but there is a suggestion that the mythico-ritual link with Rain is her personal contribution to Shilayi’s status. The bird-like connotations of Shikalamo’s Luba name Mpungumushi<sup>305</sup> suggest that the paternal, non-immigrant side contributed not just the hunting and clan complex, but also another link with Mvula via ornithological imagery. Whatever the case, the ecologico-ritual elaboration of leadership may have been the main

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<sup>301</sup> Oral source [20].

<sup>302</sup> Oral source [18] 13.10.1977. The same source states that the chief’s rights also extended to *dagga*, a narcotic crop. Smoking of *dagga* was a royal prerogative and infringement of this right cost the offender a fine of an axe or a spear.

<sup>303</sup> Oral source [20].

<sup>304</sup> Oral source [18] 14.10.1977.

<sup>305</sup> Cf. below, Part III, note to (4: 2).



innovation at the root of pre-state *Wene*. We shall come back to this point below, when we discuss the differential significance of rain for various branches of production.

According to this myth, the Nkoya acquired the institution of female-dominated *Wene*, but we are still in a pre-state situation. I would agree with de Heusch (1972, 1984) that in South Central Africa, 'kings' like the original *Myene* are older than state-like structures, and relate not to a political organization but to a specific cosmological and symbolic order.

The image of a continuing Golden Age of peace evokes this order adequately:

'Mwene Libupe did not wage war on any other Mwene and she reached a high age.' (2: 3)

But that situation was soon to end with the Humbu war, as we shall see in the next section of this chapter.

The mythical language of *Likota Iya Bankoya* when speaking on the emergence of *Wene* from a substratum of clan leadership, inevitably lends a strong element of conjecture to our analysis on this point. However, oral sources outside *Likota Iya Bankoya* cast a much brighter light on the connexion between clan leadership and later political leadership. Thus in a group interview with the Mutondo Royal Council<sup>306</sup> it was clearly stated that in the past *all* clans had their own *Myene*, and a detailed list was produced (*table 1* below).

One was well aware of the fact that some of these chiefs are now sub-chiefs, and have no orchestra. Some titles (those marked with an asterisk in table 1) were claimed to have been 'killed by the Nkamba', i.e. their royal status was eclipsed by the action of the Lozi representative *indunas* posted in their area as from the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>307</sup>

This evidence is extremely interesting because it corroborates two ideas which have emerged on the basis of analysis of other traditional materials and passages in *Likota Iya Bankoya*: not only the emergence of latter-day *Wene*, as a structure of political domination in the hands of males, out of the much more ancient clan organization; but also the idea that the contemporary moiety-like bifurcation of Nkoya society in Kaoma district between Mutondo and Kahare is spuriously projected back into the past. What the above list shows is that the clan connotations of *Wene* persisted right to the twentieth century, and that even at the onset of incorporation in the Lozi state Kahare and Mutondo were rather *primi inter pares* among a whole array of Nkoya *Myene* — more exalted than most of them because of the elaboration of Mutondo's and Kahare's regalia (foremost the elaborate royal orchestra — the other clan chiefs only had *zingongi*, royal bells, a symbol of

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<sup>306</sup> Oral source [19] 18.10.1977.

<sup>307</sup> Oral source [19] 20.10.1977.

<b>'clan</b>	<b><i>Mwene</i></b>
Nyembo <sup>308</sup>	Mwene Kahare
Sheta	Mwene Mutondo
Lavwe <sup>309</sup>	Mwene Kabulwebulwe
Nkonze	Mwene Shakalongo*
Mbunze	Mwene Nyati*
Ntabi	Mwene Kingama*
Shungu	Mwene Nyungu*
Shihombo	Mwene Shilulu
Nkomba	Mwene Mukambe
Le	Mwene Yuvwenu.*'

*Table 1. Clans and Myene among the Nkoya.*<sup>310</sup>  
(for the meaning of the asterisks, see text)

royalty throughout Central Africa), but all the same completely on a par with Shakalongo, who also boasted a full royal orchestra. The latter-day moiety-like structure partly stems from some sort of survival of the fittest, on the part of Kahare and Mutondo, in the process of incorporation into the Lozi state and the colonial state by the turn of the twentieth century.

### **4.3. The emergence of states**

#### *the beginning of violence*

The first violent test to which the emerging, *Wene*-centred organization was put, is said to have been the Humbu war:

‘The Humbu war was the first war the Myene of the Nkoya fought, as a result of a request from a Lihano to the effect that the Mwene should go to *Mukanda*, along with the entire land which resorted under the kingship. 2 The Nkoya refused to adopt that custom, and the war started. The Humbu were at first defeated, for the Nkoya outnumbered them. The Humbu had come from the north, crossing the Zambezi and the Kabompo. Another, greater army came and many of the Nkoya were killed. The Humbu had come to take the land of Mwene Luhamba. They came from Mwantiyavwa following his order:

‘Go and kill for me all the Nkoya Myene.’”

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<sup>308</sup> Also called Kamanisha.

<sup>309</sup> Also called Shihondo.

<sup>310</sup> Oral source [19] 18.10.1977.

3 The Humbu went all over the land killing the members of the Sheta clan, including Mwene Shilayi Mashiku and all the other Myene, with the exception only of Luhamba and his sister Katete Mashiku. When the war intensified Luhamba fled with his sister Katete Mashiku to hide among the Mbunze. 4 The Mbunze hid Luhamba in a bark container and Katete Mashiku in a mat. The war continued and the Nkoya defeated the Humbu. The Humbu said:

“We did not want to fight against the entire tribe — all we want is the Sheta of Luhamba son of Shilayi.” (6: 1f)

The Humbu or Amahumbu constitute an ethnic group in northwestern Zambia and eastern Angola. It is remarkable that in that environment, where historical links with the empire of the Lunda dynasty of the Mwaat Yaamv in what is now southern Zaïre are stressed as a source of political and cultural prestige, the Humbu, more than any other group, have Mbwela connotations. *Likota Iya Bankoya* puts the Humbu in a very different position: that of the most conspicuous exponents of a Lunda expansion that went at the expense of Mbwela autonomy on the Upper Zambezi.<sup>311</sup>

What is puzzling about the present passage of *Likota Iya Bankoya* is the suggestion of anachronism: the use of the word *Lihano* (male *Mwene*'s consort), and the insistence on circumcision of the *Mwene* who therefore is implied to be male, both point to a later phase in Nkoya politico-religious organization: when violent men had already usurped the female-dominated kingship and created states on that basis.

*Likota Iya Bankoya* suggests that, along with more obvious reasons of territorial expansion, the Humbu war was triggered by Lunda irritation at the emergence of independent rulers among the Nkoya — asserting their independence by a rejection of the Musumban Mukanda. That would at least be a likely reason why the Sheta, the clan which (from the Mutondo-centred perspective of Shimunika) owned *Wene*, were singled out for battle by the Humbu. A fuller discussion of male circumcision we shall reserve for chapter 5.

Although the Nkoya are claimed to have come out victorious, the Humbu war brought home the great vulnerability of their underdeveloped socio-political system (consisting of clans upon which the ecologico-ritual institution of *Wene* was superimposed) in the face of military attack. Also, many *Myene* (emphatically not all of them female, which is further brought out by the fact that circumcision in this part of Africa is an exclusively male affair) are said to have been killed. This cleared the way for Luhamba as the first male *Mwene*.

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<sup>311</sup> Cf. Verhulpen 1936; McCulloch 1951: 6 and appendix map; Schecter 1980a: 293f, specifically on the Lunda/Mbwela confrontation; Papstein 1978: 78, and references cited there. The Mbwela wars are also discussed in detail in Sangambo's (1979) *History of the Luvala*, another Zambian specimen of literate ethno-history, whose geographical coverage (including the areas of the Maniinga, Kafue, Kabompo and Lukolwe rivers) partly overlaps with the region dealt with in Nkoya traditions.

What happened meanwhile to Luhamba's sister Katete? She is remembered as a mother and grandmother of (male) *Myene*, but not as a *Mwene* herself — although there appears to have been another Katete, who in the kings' lists added to the *Likota lya Bankoya* manuscript by Mr H.H. Mwene features as the third Nkoya *Mwene*, while Luhamba is only the sixth. Lipepo, mentioned as brother of Luhamba and Katete, later also became a *Mwene*, but it is doubtful if he was of the same generation: he does not feature in the account of hiding during the Humbu war, and is only reported as succeeding to the successor of his alleged brother Luhamba. This is again an indication that, due to the principle of free permutation of names, titles and even exploits as discussed in section 3.4, a source like *Likota lya Bankoya* does not allow us to reconstruct early history down to the point of specific personages and specific events.

### *the first royal courts*

The Humbu war is a watershed in Nkoya history: it marks the emergence of fully-fledged states. For whereas *Wene* is already described for an earlier phase, it is only with reference to periods after that war that all the characteristics of Nkoya states appear in *Likota lya Bankoya*. It traces the emergence of male leadership, and its taking on secular and military overtones, to this dramatic event.

With reference to the period after the Humbu war, the book begins to make mention of what until today constitute the central characteristics of a royal establishment or court: the royal village, distinguished from other villages by a generic name (*lukena*), a peculiar appearance and spatial arrangement (a reed fence supported by pointed poles), and regalia reserved to *Myene*: the *mpande* — a shell ornament —, and further primarily musical instruments: xylophones, iron bells, and various types of drums.

The fenced royal court with pointed poles is to this day the prerogative of only a handful of 'traditional rulers' in western Zambia. The movable royal paraphernalia have a less restricted distribution: along with such ceremonial ironware as bow stands and axes (the latter are found among the Nkoya but are much less emphasized than the musical instruments and the *mpande*),<sup>312</sup> they form the standard ceremonial

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<sup>312</sup> Oral source [20] emphatically denies that the *zimpane* derived from long-distance trade in the more recent centuries:

'before the *Myene* arrived in Zambia from Zaïre, they had already *zimpane*.'

The same source proclaims that only the following people could wear *zimpane*: the *Mwene*, the *Mwana Mwene*; and the *Mwene*'s sister. However, due to the parallelism and transformation that exists in nineteenth- and twentieth-century western Zambia between *Myene* and (predominantly female) leaders of cults of affliction (see below, 6.5), *zimpane* can now be found to circulate freely (and apparently without

equipment of ‘traditional rulers’ throughout much of Zambia and in surrounding countries.

From a point of view of the development of the Nkoya royal symbolic apparatus it is remarkable that although the earlier *Myene* are reported to have dwelled in a well-defined, named place, Tumba, at the head-waters of the Kabompo, no mention of a *lukena* is made in that context<sup>313</sup> — it seems to be a spatial component of exalted court life typical of a later period; likewise, hardly any praise-names are recorded for these earlier *Myene*.

In the Nkoya language the word ‘drums’ (*zingoma*) is used indiscriminately for the entire Lunda-style royal orchestra, which besides big drums (*liwoma*, pl. *mawoma*) and small drums (*ngoma*, pl. *zingoma*) comprises one or more xylophones (*njimba*, pl. *bilimba*), at least one hourglass drum (*munkupele*),<sup>314</sup> and royal bells (*ngongi*, pl. *zingongi*).

The drum, as an individual instrument or metaphorically as the royal orchestra in general, appears in *Likota Iya Bankoya* as the central symbol of kingship:

‘Take over the drum because your elder brother has died.’(13.1)

Also compare (14: 3f):

‘The fortification of Mwene Kabongo was near the source of the Shitwa. 4 When he died on the Shitwa the Nkoya elected his younger brother Kalumbwa to take over the drum.’

Elsewhere in *Likota Iya Bankoya* (41: 3) it becomes clear that not the title of *Mwene* (which we see also employed, loosely, for non-ruling kinsmen of rulers) but that of *Mwene wa zingoma* (‘*Mwene* of the drums’) is the title which characterizes kingship. Mwene Kahare II is said to be dethroned because during her reign the drums could not glorify the kingship to the full extent (*ibidem*). Mwene Liyoka brings a human sacrifice to his drum, and names a river after an (unspecified) incident in which his drum got broken (36: 2f).<sup>315</sup> More generally, the

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offence to royal privilege) in the cultic milieu, even when a major *Mwene* like Mwene Kahare until recently did not possess even one *mpande* among his regalia.

<sup>313</sup> H.H. Mwene, in his discursive kings’ lists as quoted in the notes to his lists of royal graves at the end of Part II below, misses this crucial point when he claims that the earliest *zinkena* were in Tumba.

<sup>314</sup> A standard item in the Lunda musical regalia, also reported by for instance Papstein (1978) for the Luvale.

<sup>315</sup> That river, thus called the Kawoma or Kaoma, was close to the spot where the Mankoya district headquarters were finally built in 1906, so that, when President Kaunda in 1969 decided to remove all ethnic connotations from toponyms in western Zambia — changing Barotseland into Western Province, and Balovale into Zambezi — the Mankoya district, renamed Kaoma after Mwene Liyoka’s river, through a fortuitous

fate of Nkoya kingship in confrontation with the Lozi and the Kololo also hinges on the issue of drums, which takes up much of the argument of *Likota lya Bankoya*. However, there are other, not necessarily secondary symbols of kingship: the royal name or title, the praise-name, the *mpande* shell ornament, and other material regalia. The prominence of the drums, and of the royal orchestra in general, must be interpreted against the increasing prominence of the Lunda court culture, whose introduction seems to have greatly transformed the already existing institution of sacred kingship (*Wene*).

The movable regalia were symbols not so much of an individual ruler, but of a royal name, a dynasty, and the state as a whole. As such these paraphernalia inspired awe and fear in subjects and enemies; their capture by enemies spelled doom for the dynasty involved and is a cause of ethnic shame to this very day.

So much did the *lukena* (a repository of the regalia as much as a dwelling place and the centre of state administration), become the spatial expression of this apparently new style of leadership, that upon a *Mwene's* death the *lukena* would turn into the royal grave: it would be deserted and — with the exception of the royal shrine in the form of a pole — left to be swallowed up by the forest, while the successor (who could not risk contamination with the predecessor's death) sets out to construct a new, specifically named *lukena* elsewhere, typically at a distance of scores of kilometres.

As sign of a ruler's individual identity, the *lukena* was complemented by a verbal emblem: the ruler's praise-name (*lizina lya ku litanga*), many of which have been preserved by tradition; their archaic and dense language makes them precious sources, but difficult to decipher.<sup>316</sup>

The *lukena* was in the first place the dwelling of the immediate royal kin. For the early decades of the nineteenth century, female *Myene* are still reported, and male *Myene's* close ties of descent and affinity with the female leaders of an earlier period are still emphasized. In fact these men's sisters (likewise called *Mwene*) occupy such prominence in the accounts that one gets the impression that the brothers only rule on their sisters' behalf (and sometimes hardly with the latter's blessing). At any rate, *zinkena* emerged as the relatively stable, fixed spatial centres of the emerging state structure. In principle, every *Mwene* would construct her or his own *lukena* upon accession, and this central place would only be given up after that *Mwene's* death. It is important to realize that only the court would be moved at a *Mwene's* death: the surrounding villages of freemen on which the court fed for its labour and tribute would not follow suit, the peasant population would remain considerably immobile despite the wanderings of courts, and every

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irony of history could continue to boast a name that in terms of Nkoya political culture was highly significant.

<sup>316</sup> For northern Zambian parallels cf. Chiwale 1962.

term of office a different part of the realm would be most directly exposed to the demands of a nearby royal court.

Meanwhile a number of exceptions to this pattern should be mentioned.

First, several *Myene* are reported in *Likota lya Bankoya* to have entertained smaller hunting *zinkena* in addition to their major establishment. These hunting *zinkena* show the extent to which primary production (in the form of hunting) rather than extraction (in the form of tribute and slave labour) continued to form an important element in the upkeep of royal courts. In other words, if after state formation royal courts among the Nkoya came closer to constituting a distinct, tributary mode of production, the reproduction of that mode was not entirely relegated to a subservient peasant community of primary producers — the tributary mode had to compromise through engagement in hunting: a branch of direct production pursued and propagated by the royals themselves.

Secondly, there is ample evidence of *Myene* having built, and moved to, subsequent *zinkena* after the first one which they originally established upon accession:

‘Mwene Luhamba begot Kashina, who acceded to the kingship, at first remaining in the same capital on the Nkulo. Later on, Kashina son of Luhamba moved his capital from Nkulo to Nabowa, and built his capital on the Katetekanyemba, a tributary of the Nabowa. This is where he died.’ (8: 2)

Considerable royal spatial mobility can further be detected in the generation of Mwene Mutondo Shinkisha and her sisters (17: 4f).

*Likota lya Bankoya* contains a few pointers as to the reasons for these displacements of *zinkena* during a *Mwene*’s reign. In the case of Shihoka I, his move first to the northeast, and westward again to the Maniinga area, is said to be prompted by hunting considerations, but since this was a major formative period of the Lozi state, external political and military pressure may have been a major factor for Shihoka’s departure from the Kabompo (cf. Mutumba Mainga 1973). For good reasons Shihoka’s capital on the Maniinga was a fortified one, a *kembi* (10: 5). A similar factor (Kololo pressure) is shown to be behind the succession of *zinkena* of Mwene Liyoka. In other cases internal strife within the dynastic group appears to have been a major factor for moving — like those unspecified conflicts giving rise to the Momba and Kabulwebulwe dynasties.

The rule concerning the evacuation of the *lukena* upon the *Mwene*’s demise constituted another reason for movements. However, it was not always adhered to. In *Likota lya Bankoya*, the Kalimbata *lukena* turns out to have been in operation in a period extending over the reign of several *Myene* (cf. *Appendix 7*).

Underlying all these specific, often political and ceremonial reasons for displacement there may have been economic necessities such as we shall discuss in section 4.5.

Whatever the specific underlying reasons, in a way only implicitly and obliquely documented in Shimunika's book the spatial movement of royal courts virtually came to an end at the beginning of the colonial era. Since then, the successive incumbents of both the Mutondo title and the Kahare title continued to live in close proximity — in fact, the very same valley — of the *lukena* of their immediate predecessor; Mwene Mutondo Muchayila, who re-ascended to the throne in 1981 after the death of Mwene Mutondo Kalapukila, even lives in the same palace building as Kalapukila. Accessibility from the point of view of the district headquarters became a major consideration in the location of *zinkena*, and some pressure was exerted (rather in vain) to move the *lukena* closer to such services as schools, rural health centres, and the main road.

#### *court officials*

*Likota lya Bankoya* gives the impression that gradually, in the early centuries, the *zinkena* became peopled with other functionaries than the immediate royal kin.

The offices of royal musician and praise-singer can be taken for granted from as soon as the royal instruments appear on the scene. The high value which initially was attached to their services is suggested by the fact that they were paid in cattle and slaves;<sup>317</sup> their status must have declined considerably over the centuries, for at present it is conspicuously low.

The office of *Mwanashihe*<sup>318</sup> (Principal Councillor, the *Mwene*'s spokesman in front of the people as well as the people's spokesman in front of the *Mwene*, and emphatically a commoner) is first mentioned in a context referring to the mid-nineteenth century (27: 7). The *Shamanga* (a commoner, also called *Shikombwa sha Mwene*) and, as his assistant, the *Livumina*, were the court stewards, supervising the *Mwene*'s wives, slaves, and in general the production and reproduction going on at the *lukena*.<sup>319</sup> The *Shamanga* also functioned as royal priest, responsible for the royal medicine upon which the well-being of the *Mwene* largely depended.<sup>320</sup> Moreover there were senior

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<sup>317</sup> Oral source [15].

<sup>318</sup> Oral source [19] 19.10.1977; oral source [20] gives the alternative form of *Mwene Shihenya*.

<sup>319</sup> Oral sources [6]; and [19] 19.10.1977.

<sup>320</sup> Shimunika in the original manuscript uses the plural term *Bya-Manga*, which on the advice of Nkoya readers has been altered into *Bashamanga*. The translation is problematic. Shimunika's typescript dictionary (Anonymous n.d. (b)) contains on p. 57 a double entry for the word



councillors with the titles of *Mushakabantu*, *Kangongwe* and *Nanyundo*.<sup>321</sup> There is confusion concerning their specific roles: according to some sources the *Mushakabantu* was a war leader, according to others a judge; *Kangongwe* and *Nanyundo* are often considered as judges, but another source<sup>322</sup> claims that the *Nanyundo* was again assistant to *Livumina*. The precise nature of these functions cannot be detected from a study of contemporary conditions at Nkoya *zinkena*: the original court offices have turned into hereditary titles of headmen and names of villages, and the incumbents do no longer discharge any specific court office. Finally there was the court jester: *Kayoni ka Mwene* or *Shiyoni ka Mwene*,<sup>323</sup> who is also mentioned in *Likota Iya Bankoya* (50: 12). Moreover, throughout the nineteenth century selected male rulers are reported to have divided up their territory over their male kinsmen, who served them as councillors and territorial representatives (*Shilolo*).<sup>324</sup> These offices, of an obvious political and military nature, were complemented by those of the ruler's much-feared secret executioners (*Tupondwa*).

The set-up is reminiscent of Lunda court arrangements,<sup>325</sup> although the principal structural features of these courts according to Schecter (1980a: vi-vii) were hardly developed among the Nkoya — perpetual kinship, and positional succession. It is very likely that the virtual absence of these features had a negative influence on the political survival of the Nkoya states: their structure remained brittle and fragmented. Moreover their emphasis on more or less democratic procedures (see below, ch. 5) repeatedly checked such autocratic tendencies as certain Nkoya *Myene* displayed in the course of the nineteenth century, and which, if they had been allowed to persist, might have given rise to more enduring state structures or a wider geographical scope. Instead, the nineteenth-century history of the

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*shamanga*: 'one who present people to king' (*sic*), or, a few lines lower, 'steward' (*sic*). The translation as ritual specialist is adopted on the authority of Mr M. Malapa, and converges with my personal impressions of this office whose specific tasks however are surrounded with considerable secrecy.

321 Oral source [20].

322 Oral source [19] 19.10.1977.

323 Oral source [17] 30.9.1977.

324 From the Lunda *cilool*, political chief (Vansina 1966: 333); cf. Cunnison (1967:120) on the use of this term on the Luapula, among the eastern Lunda:

'*Cilolo* on the Luapula means an elder particularly skilled at giving political advice, as distinct from *cikolwa* [clan head, *ibidem*, p. 72 and *passim*] who is an authority on lineage affairs. Court assessors, for instance, are frequently referred to as *bacilolo*.'

Apart from dialectical differences, the same would apply to Bilolo among the Nkoya.

325 Cf. Vansina 1966; Hoover 1980; Papstein 1978.

*zinkena* is full of cases of regicide, impeachment, abdication, of *Myene* who had lost their subjects' support.

Neither can the central Nkoya regalia be characterized as Lunda in the narrower sense. Nkoya *Myene* did and do possess some of the more strictly Lunda paraphernalia (cf. Papstein 1978: 91, 104, 137), such as the *chimbuya* (a miniature battle-axe), the *mukwale* (the double broadsword) and the *muchamo* (crown), but they have lacked the central Lunda symbol of kingship: the *lukano* (a bracelet of human penises and sinews). It is the *mpande* and the musical instruments, much more than the Lunda paraphernalia, that dominate Nkoya royal symbolism and ceremonial, and as such the Nkoya paraphernalia largely belong to a series that has a much wider distribution over South Central Africa than have the Lunda items. The origin and history of selected Nkoya regalia will be discussed when we trace the evolution of the Nkoya political culture in chapter 5.

However, Lunda connotations can be detected in the pattern of ritual separation between ruler and subjects among the Nkoya, which to this day is reflected in a great many taboos and observances surrounding *Wene*. Just one example is the judicial procedure at the *zinkena*, whose basic pattern appears to have been constant throughout the nineteenth century and the colonial period: the *Mwene* would remain in the inner recesses of the palace, and the councillors, with the *Mwanashihemi* in the chair, would try the case up to the final verdict, which — especially in appeal cases — was the *Mwene*'s, but communicated to the public by the *Mwanashihemi*.<sup>326</sup>

The court priests were in charge of the royal medicine without which no *Mwene* could hope to survive the attacks (through both physical and magical means) that rivals and enemies would level against the ruler's life and fertility. The priests would also be in charge of the shrine inside the royal village (the place where a new incumbent would be enthroned upon selection), and would make regular offerings at the more distant burial shrines of the dynastic ancestors. Powers over the natural environment were claimed for the latter shrines, in such a way that the earlier, pre-state cult of the land, at the clan level, was supplanted by a royal cult venerating deceased members of the one royal clan.<sup>327</sup>

### *a new style of kingship*

The new style of *Wene* (male, violent, dynastic, organizationally structured: *Wene* in a context of statehood) sought to find ideological

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<sup>326</sup> Oral source [19] 19.10.1977.

<sup>327</sup> Cf. van Binsbergen 1981a: ch. 3 for parallels all over Zambia. However, among the Nkoya the cult of royal graves, and its ecological connotations, remained rather limited, as compared with other, larger states in South Central Africa, including the Lozi state.

support by such 'ecological' claims, but even more so by the terror and violence, both manifest (as through the actions of the *Tupondwa*) and symbolic: human sacrifices to the *lukena*'s fence, to the drums, and at the occasion of a *Mwene*'s burial; royal medicine procured from hideous magical substances including human brains; head-hunting, so that the *Mwene* and his courtiers could drink from human skulls; notions of *Myene*'s incomparable skills of trickery and magic (*malele*), including invisibility and travelling through the air...

Although still the incarnation of the cosmological order of an older period, and as such the embodiment of all that is positive and ideal in Humanity, the new style of leadership seems to have added a Janus image to this ideal: the *Mwene*, guardian of morality and sociability, at the same time becomes the greatest sorcerer, the greatest evildoer, of all. The institution of *Wene* changed from an idiom of ecological concern into one of societal power. It is this redefinition that allowed the older institution of *Wene* to become the focus of states.

Meanwhile it would be likely that the dual nature (benevolence/terror) as found among the later *Myene* as political rulers, could build upon a dialectical contradiction already inherent in pre-state *Wene*, as is suggested by de Heusch (1972, 1984), whose distinction between sacred kingship and statehood is very much to the point here. Ever since Durkheim (1912) we have learned to appreciate both well-being and terror as essential aspects of the sacred, and by extension, of sacred kingship.

Thus we are beginning to identify a number of ways in which the emerging state structure of the Nkoya can be said to be truly a departure from pre-existing social, economic, political and ideological relationships — *and defining itself perhaps through nothing so much as through that drastic and revolutionary departure*. While the institution of *Wene* and thus the office of *Mwene* predates statehood and as such continues to suggest a fundamental continuity legitimating the state structures that were to emerge, we see in actual fact the radical shift from ecological priesthood to secular ruler status at the hub of a courtly culture whose incumbents in their many specific roles were increasingly others than the royal kin; from redistribution of local produce to exploitative appropriation (through tribute, manorial services<sup>328</sup> and slave labour), courtly accumulation and interregional distribution in the form of long-distance trade and higher-order tributary relations with distant superior courts (like that of the Lozi); from supernatural intervention to military and financial protection of the subjects: the tasks of the new-style *Mwene* included shelter in times of war and the ransom of those of his subjects who had been captured in raids;<sup>329</sup> and finally from female-centred cosmologically-underpinned order to male-centred violence and manipulation. Some of these processes we have already

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<sup>328</sup> Oral source [18] 14.10.1977.

<sup>329</sup> Oral source [18] 14.10.1977.

documented to the extent *Likota Iya Bankoya* allows us; others we will pursue presently.

#### 4.4. Male usurpation of *Wene*

Two out of scores of similar passages in *Likota Iya Bankoya* may give some idea of the initial continuity of female leadership, and of the relations between female *Myene* and their male children who were to succeed them:

‘Mbuyu [Muyeke]’s daughters were Mulawa and Shiwutulu. Mwene Shiwutulu lived on the Nkulashi, a tributary of the Dongwe. Her capital and her grave were near the Nkulashi-Dongwe confluence. 2 Her children and grandchildren (Mwene Kinga, Mwene Pumpola, and Mwene Tumbana) remained in Shifuwe, between the Kabompo and the Dongwe.’ (11: 1f)

‘Nawato was the daughter of Katete, Luhamba’s sister; Katete and Luhamba were both children of Shilemantumba. As sister’s daughter of Luhamba, Nawato acceded as Lady Mwene. Mwene Nawato had two daughters called Mulawa and Muhoba. Mulawa was living in the west and 3 she had the following children:

- (1) Likambi daughter of Malovu
- (2) Shihoka Nalinanga
- (3) Mwanambinyi also called Silumesi, and their sister
- (4) Mbuyu Muyeke.

Likambi lived at Mongu with her mother Mulawa.

4 Mwanambinyi crossed the Zambezi right into Kalabo, taking the Nkoya there. Shihoka and his sister went north crossing two rivers, the Luena and the Kabompo, to the valley of the Maninga.’ (10: 2f)

After the Humbu war, in which his mother was killed, the male Mwana Mwene Luhamba took over *Wene*. No explicit explanation is offered as to why his sister Katete, who escaped with him, did not accede to the throne, but the context suggests that the war experience called for a male leader, and that there were already some male *Myene* at the time. With his brother and his sister Katete, Luhamba had been brought up to be *Mwene*, emphatically after the example of their mother and grandmother who had been female *Myene*:

‘When Shilemantumba died she left her two sons in the branch of kingship. They were of the Mbunze clan, for Mukwetunga Lyovu Iya Mbuwa, the one who begot the *Myene*, belonged to that clan. He ended up with Luhamba and his other children, and brought them up well:

“Our children are to follow the example of the kingship of their grandmother Shilayi Mwene Mashiku and their mother Shilemantumba.” (5: 2)

And so a situation develops where the narrator feels he has to justify the position of female *Myene* by reference to their male royal relatives, instead of the other way round:

‘Another Lady Mwene called Shiwutulu was the mother of Mwene Yaboka and a number of younger children including Ncamanga. 3 Mulawa gave birth to Mwene Welema and Mwene Nzinzi; the latter became Lady Mwene, **being Welema’s sister.**’ (11: 2f; my emphasis).

There are however several indications that at first succession by male incumbents was not considered a matter of course, and needed some additional (though not quite convincing) justification, as if in fact there was a serious succession dispute whose arguments still reverberate across the centuries:

‘When Mwene Kazikwa died Mwene Shihoka acceded to the kingship. All the Nkoya elected him after Mwene Kazikwa’s death:

“Take over the drum because your elder brother has died.”

Shihoka II was born in their family just after Mwene Kazikwa.’ (13: 1)

Also in other ways male *Myene* continued to justify their position by reference to female predecessors:

‘Mashiku was also called “Manenga the mother of Mukamba”, for Mukamba adopted the following praise-name:

“I am Mvubu ya (son of) Manenga. I am Mwene Mvubu ya Manenga,”

which can be explained because Mvubu was indeed a son of Manenga.’ (12: 4)

Moreover, so often are early male *Myene* accompanied by their mothers or their sisters, and so often are these women mentioned without any obvious reason in the context, that one gets the impression of some sort of mystical bond, or as if the male *Mwene* needs his sister and/or mother as a basis for his own legitimacy:

‘Fighting started and the Kololo defeated the Nkoya. Mwene Liyoka was captured along with his sister [Nankuwa]. Most regalia were taken by the Kololo (...). The Kololo took Mwene Liyoka to Loziland. On their way to Loziland, on the road near Lake Ngoma, his sister Mwene Nankuwa died and she was buried there.’ (38: 2)

Initially, female *Myene* still maintained prominence, like Mwene Shinkisha and her sisters:

‘Mwene Kashina Lishenga’s sister Mwene Shimpanya lived at the Makubikufuka with her Mukwetunga Mabizi. 4 Mwene Kabandala lived in the valley of the Miluzi near the capital of their sister Mwene Shinkisha at Kalimbata. Lady Mwene Kabandala had brought her<sup>330</sup> children, whose names were: Kashina Shiyenge; Mukamba Kancukwe; and their sister Shihoka. When Shihoka acceded to the kingship she adopted the following praise-name:

‘I am Mwene Komoka  
Who has Surprised the Nkoya.’ (27: 3f)

The theme of the dynastic relationship between brother and (classificatory) sister relates of course to the theme of royal incest (cf. de Heusch 1958), which is prominent in Luyi myths of origin of the Luyana dynasty,<sup>331</sup> but which is not at all present in the Nkoya myth of origin of *Wene*. As we shall see, the symbolic pair wife/husband is the most obvious and drastic transformation of the sister/brother opposition characteristic of this phase of the struggle for *Wene*; the fact that among the Nkoya this transformation was not explicitly elaborated is only one of several indications that ultimately male usurpation of *Wene*, and thus fully-fledged state formation, has remained less definitive here than among the Lozi. Even in the hands of men Nkoya *Wene* could not break out of the confines of a kinship-based social organization whose most powerful rule was the incest taboo; therefore Nkoya statehood could not surpass, but largely remained controlled by, the pre-state socio-cultural structures.

Meanwhile, a very fine and unmistakable case of male/female sibling rivalry in the struggle for royal power is to be found in the story of Shihoka and his elder sister Likambi:

‘Mwene Shihoka had very many people and they learned how to make canoes which they used on the Kabompo; there were many large trees suitable for the construction of canoes. Mwene Shihoka’s capital was called ‘Lukolwe’ and so was the area as a whole. (...) When Shihoka’s elder sister, Likambi Mange,<sup>332</sup> heard about the canoes and wooden dishes that Shihoka’s people were making, she

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<sup>330</sup> Classificatory use.

<sup>331</sup> Cf. Jalla 1921; Muuka 1966; Mutumba Mainga 1972; the very word *Luyana*, a common name for the Lozi dynasty, means ‘incestuous’, both in Nkoya, and in Si-Luyana, the Luyi court language (cf. Givon 1971; Fortune 1963). For comparative parallels on incest in ethnic and dynastic origins in South Central Africa, cf. Roberts 1973: 346 and references cited there.

<sup>332</sup> Nk. Mange = ‘Wizardess’.

sent her people to Shihoka in order to request such products as were being made in the Lukolwe area. Mwene Shihoka chased them from the land. Likambi Mange sent a woman who had been pawned to her, to fetch a diviner-priest. 7 He cut medicine from the poisonous *mubulwebulwe* tree. Then he made a *nankishi* in the shape of a woman, with breasts and all. When this was doctored it turned into a living woman, and she went to Maniinga. 8 When the people of Mwene Shihoka's capital saw the beautiful girl standing just outside the capital, they went to report to the Mwene:

“We have seen a most beautiful young woman.”

9 When Mwene Shihoka heard this he said to his people:

“Go and bring her here into the capital so that she can be Lihano.”

They went and brought her into the capital. And she became Lihano. This was the cause of the illness from which Mwene Shihoka died in Lukwakwa on the Maniinga.’ (10: 5f)<sup>333</sup>

We note that the transformation from sister/brother to wife/husband is performed in this story, but only via the mystifying link of the *nankishi* (idol, fetish, elaborate medicine container).<sup>334</sup> Representing the elder sister, the magical doll herself becomes the royal wife, and — most significantly — the male *Mwene* does not survive the transformation.

As a Nkoya version of Morgana la Fay in England's Arthur legends Likambi claimed her right to the throne, which her younger brother had usurped. The account is the only one of its kind in *Likota lya Bankoya*. Although many scores of *Myene*, both male and female, are discussed in Shimunika's work, and although contemporary male *Myene* are reputed to be sorcerers, Likambi is one of the few *Myene* actually depicted as using sorcery (*wulozi*)<sup>335</sup> against a rival. The other cases are Mwene Fumika (the later Lozi ruler Sipopa, and therefore hardly a Nkoya *Mwene* from the perspective of *Likota lya Bankoya*) killing his rival Imasiku with sorcery (33: 1); and Mwene Mutondo Munangisha promising not to harm the temporary incumbent Kashunkani (47: 6).

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333 The story does not occur in my oral sources, but one of them deals with a conflict between Shihoka and his sister Likambi Mange over cattle: [3] 9.10.1973.

334 In line with Wyatt MacGaffey's (1977, 1986a, 1986b) penetrating analyses of *nkishi* in the Lower Congo context, also among the Nkoya the *nankishi* can be defined as a deliberately intricate medicine container, taking a great variety of shapes and subject to free variation and individual experimentation.

335 The orthography (but not the pronunciation: ≈ *woo-róthi*) spuriously suggests a link with the ethnic name Lozi; in the Nkoya language, the Lozi are associated with political rather than with supernatural evil, and they are referred to as Luyi (≈ *Rooyi*).

Other *Myene* are reported to have magical powers, but these belong to the neutral or positive category of *malele*.

The story of Likambi reflects considerable male bias: in the historical sequence offered by *Likota Iya Bankoya*, it is the first time that a woman appears no longer as exponent of the politico-religious cosmic order, but as morally and politically opposed to that order — now epitomized in male political power. Sheerly by opposing the latter, a woman acquires the connotations of utter evil. The confrontation between male and female political power must have been grim indeed, at the time.

Nor was the struggle for male succession decided once and for all, without resilience of female claims. The powerful and formidable male Mwene Kayambila<sup>336</sup> was succeeded by Mwene Shinkisha Lushiku Mate, whom we have reconstructed to have been a woman. This reverting to female *Wene* is all the more remarkable since Kayambila's reign is pictured as the heyday of Nkoya statehood, with tribute streaming in from all directions and the Lozi king Mulambwa almost humiliating himself to get a share of the Nkoya royal medicine. A similar oscillation between male and female *Myene* can be seen in the nineteenth-century succession pattern of the Kahare kingship.

Soon however the *Myene* turn out to have become predominantly male. Their accession is no longer exclusively justified by reference to a female kinsman; and there is never any specific mention of the reason why not a woman should be selected. The male *Myene* are then accompanied by their sister's son (the heir apparent) as much as by their sister or mother:

'Mwene Shihoka, his uterine nephew Mwene Kahare and their people went to the valley of the Lunga (...) in order to hunt elephant, and they came across the valley of Wushanga.' (39: 3)

While the first Royal Escort, the *Mukwetunga* Shikalamo sha Mundemba, used his influence to have his daughter installed as *Mwene*, later *Bakwetunga* appear to have played an important role in the ascendancy of male *Myene*:

#### 'THE GREAT BAKWETUNGA

- (1) The oldest *Mukwetunga* was called Shikalamo sha Mundemba and he begot a daughter with Mwene Libupe, by the name of Shilayi Mashiku. When he died his uterine nephew Lyovu Iya Mbuwa succeeded him in the *Mukwetungaship* by marrying Shilayi Mashiku.

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<sup>336</sup> Cf. 2.5, 'genealogical over-interpretation: the case of Mwene Kayambila Shishopa'; and *Appendix 3*, genealogy 2.



- (2) Mukwetunga Mulyata, in his turn, begot six Myene with Mwene Manenga, the Mother of the Nkoya. His younger brothers were: Mulambo, Mwitila Kamamba, and Liyowa.
- (3) Mukwetunga Mukena Kakwasha lived at Mankumbwa with his uterine nephew Mukwetunga Lwengu.' (4: 7)

Note that the status of *Mukwetunga* appears to run in the family, in a way which offers the only suggestion, in *Likota Iya Bankoya*, of perpetual kinship, since invariably a *Mukwetunga* would have, as a feminine counterpart, a Lady *Mwene*. If several generations of *Bakwetunga* live in one *lukena*, as Mukena Kakwasha and Lwengu did, a powerful faction is likely to emerge, creating a challenge to the *Mwene*. The status of Royal Escort appears to have developed into a formal position within the royal hierarchy, which did not completely coincide with the social role of husband of a female *Mwene*:

'Mukwetunga Mulyata was the father of the Myene born descending from Lady Mwene Manenga the Mother of the Nkoya. 8 Mulyata married the Mwene and that is why he received the title of Mukwetunga.' (27: 7f)

The separation between political role and kinship role is perhaps understandable in the light of the unstable nature of marital and amorous relationships of female *Myene*, but might also be seen as an implication of perpetual kinship. The fact that *Bakwetunga* have *zinkena* of their own (instead of living at their wife's *lukena*) suggests that the political office of *Mukwetunga* was more important than the conjugal aspect. Sometimes the position of the Royal Escort as a counterpart and perhaps structural rival of his royal wife receives a symbolic expression: thus the father of Shihoka, one of the first male *Myene*, was called Linanga: while *Wene* stems from Rain, his name means 'Drought' (*Linanga*).

Remarkably, all traces of perpetual kinship (that powerful binding force of Lunda-inspired state systems in South Central Africa) disappear from *Likota Iya Bankoya* as its argument proceeds to periods when the imposition of male dominance was well advanced. In the process, there are indications that the Royal Escorts began to strengthen their power by increasing control of and innovation in the realm of ideology. Or how else must one interpret the following passage:

'Mukwetunga Shikalamo, who also lived a long time ago, knew the origins of the creation.' (2: 4)

This marks the beginning of a male ideological perspective, whose gradual elaboration we shall discuss below, in chapter 5. Let us first look at the material requirements for male ascendancy.

#### 4.5. Changes in local branches of production under male initiative

An impression has been given above of the pre-state economy of the region. Under the male *Myene* gradually a different picture emerges. An early male *Mwene* like Lipepo still acts as redistributor, but his royal rights to tribute are so elaborate that he can dispense with other productive activities. He

‘was well-known for his benevolence. 2 The Nkoya were fond of him, blessing him with the following words of praise:

‘‘You, Mwene Lipepo Mwenda na Nkuli,  
You Who Feeds the Orphans like Your Elder Brother Did:  
Luhamba son of Shilayi.’’

(...) 3 Because the Mwene was liked very much by the people they would bring plenty of tribute, calling him:

‘‘Receiver of Gifts,  
Who lives by Tribute only.’’ (9: 1f)

We are indeed approaching a tributary mode of production, where royal centres for their reproduction largely rely on the material exploitation of surrounding village communities.

Under conditions of statehood the institution of kingship began to take the form of a distinct mode of production, defining a central exploitative relation of production (between productive village communities and essentially non-productive royal courts), and having as a central ideological tenet the stipulation that the *Mwene* in no way could engage in productive work. We see this in Lipepo’s praise-names as quoted above, and in several others, e.g.

‘You Mwene Shikongi Son of Mulawa  
The One on Whom Leisure Thrives  
As Forests Thrive on the Soil,  
The One who Feeds the Hungry.’ (52: 10)

Emphasis on the *Mwene*’s absolute dependence on the production of others is also the essence of the punishment of Mwene Kashina: when the people deserted him for his bad leadership, cowardice and appalling marriage legislation,

‘They did not pay him tribute any more, not even food, and so he died on the Shimano, a tributary of the Nyango. The ants buried him.’  
(34: 5)

A *Mwene*, not supposed to engage in productive labour, must receive tribute or else he or she simply dies from hunger!

Much later, faced with a total redefinition of economic, political and ideological relations under colonialism and Christianity, it became pos-

sible — nay almost imperative, it seems — to suspend this taboo and make the *Mwene* productive once more:

‘During the month of July the Mwene called all his people and told them that they were going to build a school. The Mwene himself, with his own hands, and Mwene Lishenga, with his own hands, contributed immensely to the work.’ (55: 4)

Much as we can appreciate the authentic Christian enthusiasm of the two *Myene*’s participation in school building, more is involved here than piety alone. Christianity genuinely takes the form of a liberation from a fossilized ideological position, which has become untenable in the face of changing political and economic reality. In the 1930s, when the Nkoya kingship was *de facto* no longer a viable mode of production, Christianity provides a setting for the celebration of productive labour in order to mark that transformation. Only in the face of this new ideology, immensely powerful (for backed up by the colonial power and the Lozi Paramount Chief), the *Mwene* need no longer to be ashamed of having become something totally different from a non-productive, exploitative agent.

However, in the time of the early male *Myene* the flow of tribute is still felt to be in accordance with the established world-view and cosmology, and does not represent a sinful denial or breach of Nature. These are still *Myene* who live in harmony with the environment, to the benefit of their people:

‘Mwene Kazikwa lived in his capital on the Mukunkike near the Namasheshe-Mukunkike confluence; 6 in that old time there was plenty of water in the Namasheshe and people caught plenty of fish in their traps.’ (12: 5)

The political order imposed by a good *Mwene* is beneficial in ecological terms: both aspects pertain to the same cosmological order.<sup>337</sup>

Even so, *Myene* already begin to develop a taste for forest products for purposes other than food and shelter:

‘Mwene Kazikwa built his capital along the valleys of the two rivers. 7 He was surrounded by an abundance of waterbuck, or [as they are called in the Lozi language] *bitutunga*. (...) The people brought him plenty of tribute: elephant, eland, rhinoceros, leopard, antbear, honey from the forest, and new varieties of food crops.’ (12: 6f)

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<sup>337</sup> Or is this a symbolic reference to female power (water), held to underpin — as we have seen — Kazikwa’s reign as a (most probably) male *Mwene*? See chapter 6 below, where the gender symbolism of fish will be discussed.

*Likota lya Bankoya* suggests, for the period coinciding with the emergence of male-headed states, a marked development of hunting (for meat, skins and ivory — both for external circulation as objects for trade and tribute, and for local use as food and royal hoards), and a concomitant shift away from fishing — in other words a relative shift from economic activities that both women and men engage in, to economic activities that are exclusively male.<sup>338</sup>

In a context of state formation, we should realize that hunting is much more than a source of food and marketable commodities. Like elsewhere in South Central Africa, to be a hunter is a paroxysm of manhood, and as such a central expression of a male-centred ideological system featuring violence, arms, control, blood. Moreover it is an activity that entails secluded male group activities in the forest: the exclusively male hunting camps in which the activity is organized, are also places of instruction for boys.<sup>339</sup> Besides, hunters have their own elaborate rituals and magic.<sup>340</sup> Thus hunting provides men with a basis of gender mobilization, solidarity, expertise in physical violence and in magic, and regional networks: it is a considerable source of power, even in excess of the social power generated by the circulation of game meat within the local community and beyond. As such the social and political implications of hunting are comparable with the male circumcision complex (see below, chapter 5), as well as with — outside the scope of *Likota lya Bankoya* — the female puberty complex (whose central taboos refer to fish and fishing!).

Not surprisingly, therefore, the early female Mwene Shilayi Mashiku is said to have derived part of her position from the fact that her father

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338 Speaking about the Luvale but with reference to the area (northwestern Zambia) where today's Nkoya dynastic groups used to live prior to their migration to Kaoma district and surrounding regions, Papstein (1978: 84) argues a production shift in exactly the opposite direction, from hunting to fishing. He comes to this view mainly on archaeological grounds: the variation in arrowheads suggesting an early emphasis on hunting; further research appears to be required on this point. Below I shall argue the ambiguous gender symbolism of fish and fishing, articulating the way in which the female domain (water) is set off by the male domain. If this makes sense, a symbolic equation would seem to hold:

$$\text{female/male} = \text{water/fish} = \text{Mbwela(Nkoya)/Luvale,}$$

and the shift away from fishing might be historically related to the intrusion of Musumban elements and the subsequent out-migration, from the Upper Zambezi, of the Mbwela element, henceforth coming to specialize in hunting in a different part of western Zambia. However, in the final analysis (6.3, 'from contemporary Nkoya culture to *Likota lya Bankoya*: examples of transformations') it will be argued that fish cannot be simply equated with one pole in the male/female opposition, but in a liminal, ambiguous fashion stands for the very opposition itself.

339 Not necessarily in a context of male circumcision.

340 For a study of a contemporary Zambian hunting group which in many ways resembles the Nkoya hunting complex, cf. Marks 1976; also White 1956; Turner 1957.

was a hunter: his was the game meat that was contested in the big Pot of *Wene*. The emergence of *Wene* as pictured in *Likota Iya Bankoya* in relation with, but distinct from, hunting thus echoes — in fact, inverts — a passage in the Inkalanyi epic, a basic tradition of the Lunda diaspora: there, during her menstruation seclusion the female ruler Ruwéj is robbed of her regalia by her husband, the *hunter* Chibinda Ilunga.<sup>341</sup> Evocations of male dominance are not limited to the hunter theme: by the same token, the fire from among which the pot of meat had to be procured, has male rather than female connotations. This suggests that state formation among the Nkoya amounted not just, negatively, to an adulteration of pre-state female elements (in the ecologico-ritual sphere of *Wene*), but must also be seen, positively, in relation with a development of male economic and symbolic elements.

Hunting was undoubtedly men's work:

'The capital of Mwene Shihoka I was in that area, before he left to go to Kayanga in order to hunt elephant. He went with the following people:

- (1) Kahare,
- (2) Shihoka III, (...)
- (9) Shamawoma,
- (10) Mbuma.

5 There were also women among his escort.' (39: 4)

Rather to my surprise, *Likota Iya Bankoya* does not present the hunting of elephant and other big game (a well-documented speciality of Nkoya hunters in the late nineteenth and the twentieth century) as a timeless constant of Nkoya culture, but as something improved and propagated by male *Myene* after the men took over *Wene* from the women. The digging of pits to catch big game is presented as if it was a great technological innovation at that time.

The male *Myene* had good reasons for these activities:

'When a person became Mwene he would think of a way to expand his kingdom, adding to his regalia and his land. He would teach the people how to hunt elephant and other game, or how to clear anthills in order to grow oil seeds, tobacco, kaffircorn on *chitemene* fields, *mankazi* yams, *ntamba* yams, and ordinary yams, climber yams, sweet potatoes, 2 sorghum, groundnuts, peanuts, kaffircorn and oil seeds from which body ointment was prepared.' (15: 1f)

The fundamental shift in production associated with state formation is here depicted not as from hunting to agriculture (in Nkoya society today hunting skills still exceed agricultural skills), but as from fishing and collecting to both hunting and agriculture: in other words to

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<sup>341</sup> Cf. Papstein 1978: 104; Hoover 1980; Turner 1955.

economic activities associated with men, and claimed to be introduced by male rulers who take on the characteristics of economic innovators. One would almost use the term culture heroes,<sup>342</sup> if the period in which *Likota Iya Bankoya* situates them had had more of a mythical ring about it; but instead, in this context names, genealogical relationships and deeds are specified as if we are approaching historical times — but that might of course be a narrative device.

The gender symbolism is far from clear on this point. Rain, an association of *Wene* which has female connotations, is the agriculturalist's ally, much more than the fisherman's (whose dwindling pools in the dry season contain more fish than in any other season), the collector's and the hunter's. In this respect the emergence of *Wene* could be said to be connected with the increasing economic importance of agriculture, but then it is remarkable that *Likota Iya Bankoya* associates innovations in agriculture primarily with male *Myene*. Or do these economic innovations simply refer to adaptations of a pre-existing pattern in some later phase of increasing male dominance, and was early agriculture, after all, both a primarily female undertaking, and the origin of *Wene*? There appears to be a dialectical interplay here between two distinct processes: on the one hand, on the economic plane, the evolution of production factors as affecting the various branches of production, and on the other hand, on the political plane, state formation out of a female-centred politico-ideological institution of *Wene*. Only evidence of a non-traditional nature (e.g. from documentary sources, archaeology or linguistics) will enable us to disentangle this dialectic.

Immediately after the above quotation, *Likota Iya Bankoya* continues:

'The commodities which people sold in the past and through which they gained great wealth were:

- (1) slaves,
- (2) Portuguese beads, Mwene's ornaments (*zimpane*), ivory bangles, copper bangles, 3 spears, axes, hoes, bows and arrows. In the old times there were people at the courts of the Nkoya who were able to make steel, and out of it they manufactured many types of implements, including axes and hoes. Today the Nkoya have entirely lost the knowledge of making these objects themselves. As raw material for their steel the Nkoya in the old days used iron ore from the river beds.' (15: 2f)<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> Here again we see *Likota Iya Bankoya* reiterate a cliché of South Central African legends of ethnic origins; cf. Roberts 1973: 346-7 and references cited there.

<sup>343</sup> Cf. oral source [10]: 'The Nkoya made steel in kilns. They traded in axes, hoes, spear heads and knives.' Nkoya activities in regional trade are also repeatedly mentioned by Holub in similar terms; in addition he stresses their trade in tobacco (Holy 1975: *passim*).

Thus, in addition to petty-commodity production, another mode of production appears: the male-dominated economic activities came to be connected with long distance trade, i.e. the outmost periphery of a world-wide system of mercantile capitalism. This incorporation also involved a transformation of slavery from kin-based pawnship and domestic slavery to a commoditized form.

The idealization of *Wene* in *Likota Iya Bankoya* does not create a favourable environment to admit that there are also, admittedly inconsistent, indications that in the process (notably in the early nineteenth century, when royal expansion was unchecked by the Kololo and Lozi) the redistributive role of the *Mwene* was transformed: trade goods and non-perishables like valuable skins were increasingly hoarded in storehouses, and considerable quantities of them were forever withdrawn from circulation by being buried along with the *Mwene* (and a few slaves).<sup>344</sup>

Shimunika merely allows us a few glimpses of the volume of trade going on in the area in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Our discussion, in chapter 3, of slavery and the distribution of firearms in the region has already shown that Shimunika did not appreciate the specificity of the long-distance trade patterns and their differential effects on the Nkoya states inside and beyond the Lozi sphere of influence. He does however mention the important trading capital of *Mwene Kayingu* just west of the Hook of the Kafue (43: 1), in the heart of the continent, in its strategic position as link between the east-bound and the west-bound long-distance trade across the African continent.

From the oral sources outside *Likota Iya Bankoya* the picture of the Nkoya economy in the nineteenth century becomes richer, but at the same time internally contradictory. E.g.

‘The Luvale trade in meat for Portuguese gun powder started before Shamamano.

The Nkoya chiefs visited Angola to buy salt, gun powder, and maize.’<sup>345</sup>

The fact that the Nkoya *Myene* travelled to Angola to buy not only gunpowder but also salt and particularly maize, suggests that either agricultural production in the Land of Nkoya in the nineteenth century was in general stagnating<sup>346</sup> or that more specifically the *zinkena* themselves were facing great economic difficulties — that they did not really succeed in extracting from the local population the surplus crops needed for the upkeep of the royal establishment, and therefore had to

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<sup>344</sup> Oral source [2] 21.3.1973; oral source [20].

<sup>345</sup> Oral source [10].

<sup>346</sup> Which is not in accordance with Livingstone’s notes (Livingstone 1971: ‘Detailed map’) concerning the abundance of crops among the ‘Bamasa’ [= Mashasha], whom he did however not visit personally.

buy outside. Significantly, food crops were claimed by Shimunika to have been luxury food, consumed by the *lukena* courtiers while the slaves (and women) who were supposed to produce them themselves had to feed on wild tubers and other produce collected in the forest.<sup>347</sup> This does shed a different light on the innovative activities in agriculture that Shimunika credits the *Myene* with in *Likota Iya Bankoya*; while we might be tempted to stress the development potential and the productive dimension of the introduction of new food crops, their being luxury food almost makes them comparable to the other new symbols of royalty the *Myene* utilized to underpin their vulnerable new states: the royal orchestra, regalia in general, *Mukanda* at times, a male ideology of violence and terror, etc.

Perhaps there was some conjuncture in this respect in the course of the nineteenth century — a reflection of the general social, constitutional and economic decline in the second half of that century, of which we hear the echoes in *Likota Iya Bankoya*. The increasing subservience to the Lozi state whose economy was based on slave labour (Clarence-Smith 1979; Frankenberg 1978) and which therefore created a dislocation of labour from the peripheries of the Lozi realm including the Nkoya areas, must have been a factor in this. Perhaps the disagreement in the oral sources as discussed in chapter 3, on the flow of slaves either into or away from the Nkoya capitals, can be explained in this light: before effective Lozi incorporation the Nkoya states, in full expansion, produced slaves through raiding and internal strife, and sold them to the Mbundu and Swahili middlemen; later in the nineteenth century this flow of trade might then be transformed into tribute to Lealui, while the *pax Lewanika* to a considerable extent precluded the further slave raiding within the effective Lozi state — so that late nineteenth century accounts on actual slave raiding were confined to the outer fringes of Lewanika's realm, e.g. Kabulwebulwe's area on the Kafue. This state of affairs might have provided the Nkoya *zinkena* with a desperate lack of productive labour, which they then tried to respond to by the purchase of both slaves and food in Angola, making the detour north and east along the centre of the Lozi state, and surreptitiously paying with some of the local forest products which the Lozi claimed as tribute for themselves.

If there was such an economic crisis at the Nkoya *zinkena* in the second half of the nineteenth century, one is tempted to look for other evidence concerning the difficulty to locally support these rather unproductive settlements. Shimunika, in an interview quoted by Brown (1984: 109) suggested that at the background of the frequent movements of Nkoya *Myene* over considerable distances, not only upon accession but also during their reigns, were not only military threats, supernatural fears of harm inflicted by a deceased predecessor, and dynastic conflicts, but also the economic need to find new hunting grounds and new land for agriculture.

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<sup>347</sup> Oral source [22].



In terms of economic processes, *Likota Iya Bankoya* allows us to pinpoint what increasing Lozi domination in the second half of the nineteenth century amounted to: not just political interference in royal succession and, in general, through the presence of representative *indunas* all over the Land of Nkoya, but also a change in the economic position of the *zinkena*. From centres of royal accumulation in their own right the Nkoya *zinkena* became mere shunting points for streams of tribute ultimately heading for the Lozi court at Lealui. Thus, during the reign of Mwene Wahila,

‘Mwene Mutondo Wahila built a splendid capital along the valley across the Luena, in the south, at a place called Kazembe, where Mwana Mwene Mwangala resides today. He sent many tusks as tribute [to Lealui]. 5 Ngambela Katuta, or in other words his Mwanashihemi, along with his Bilolo, collected the tusks of Mwene Mutondo Wahila. (...) 9 Mwene Mutondo Wahila was a great hunter and during his reign he killed plenty of elephant and other game. He used to go hunting elephant and other game at Kayanga. He would stay there for one month, sometimes two months. 10 Before the Whitemen came to Nkoya, the Nkoya would hunt elephant on a larger scale than in later years.’ (50: 4f)

Meanwhile, it is in slavery and tribute labour that the exploitative nature of the *zinkena* found its clearest expression: it enabled the *zinkena* and their *Myene* to thrive at the expense of the surrounding communities. The female-centred world-view, dating at least from the time the *Myene* were merely coordinators and redistributors of production, could no longer legitimate or conceal the increasing exploitation, and a new ideological system was needed, one that justified the exploitation by male *Myene* through reference to their exalted status.

Of that status the regalia were the most obvious tangible expressions. A further exploration of their significance will open our next chapter, on the political culture of the states whose emergence we have traced in the present chapter.