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Chapter 6

From tribe to ethnicity in western Zambia: The unit of study as an ideological problem

Wim van Binsbergen¹

To get inside just one African tribe with as able and lucid a guide as Dr van Velsen is both a salutary and a pleasurable experience and one which can be confidently recommended.

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Introduction

Not only on the ground, in the political and economic aspects of the lives of the people we study in Africa, has the 1970s been a decade of discontinuity. Academically this discontinuity has meant the discarding of so much of established anthropology. A different type of anthropology is emerging: one blending with history and political economy, and one in which structural-functionalist one-tribe approaches hinging on culture or custom have given way, by and large, to more comprehensive regional approaches. Historical process and dialectics are about to take the place of function. Alleged firm and rigid cultural and ethnic boundaries turn out to be breached by economic, political and ideological processes of much wider scope than, e.g., 'the Tallensi', 'the Kikuyu', or 'the Zulu'.

Turning to new paradigms, anthropology in Africa has shed the tribe or ethnic group as its basic unit of study. In this chapter I shall argue that Zambian rural anthropology is on the decline, and that this decline is related to the reliance, among anthropologists, on this unit of study in the past. The problem of the tribe as a unit of study is, however, complicated by the fact that members of Central African society themselves structure their social experience partly in terms of tribes; it is hard for a researcher to tear

himself away from such a folk categorization. I shall discuss this problem with reference to my own research among the Nkoya of western Zambia. I shall then argue that one way to escape from the tribal model on the analytical plane, without sacrificing the subjects' own organization of their experience, is to try to explain this experience as a form of consciousness emerging out of the dialectics of political incorporation and, even more fundamentally, the penetration of capitalism, in other words, the articulation of capitalism and non-capitalist modes of production. This leads to a picture of complex relationships, of much greater scope and abstraction than, and extending in time and place beyond, anything that could be meaningfully defined as a unit of study. The alternative proposed here for the tribal model as a unit of study is *not* another, better unit of study (e.g. mode of production, social formation, or a well-defined spatio-temporal portion of reality), but a growing awareness of possible problems and interrelations, informed by insights from history and political economy. Thus this paper, much like my other recent work (cf. van Binsbergen 1981b and in press), will be an exercise in the interaction of anthropology and history in the analysis of a specific set of data. Such a form of anthropology could try and make its come-back on the scene of rural studies of Central and Southern Africa.

My analysis is set within the framework of the articulation of modes of production — the guiding idea of the present book. However, the inconclusive nature of my argument reflects the fact that recent Marxist studies have not yet made much progress towards a proper understanding of the ideological aspects of modes of production and their articulation.³ As will be argued by Raatgever in her contribution to this book (chapter 8), Godelier's attempts in this respect, dwelling on the applicability of the infrastructure/superstructure metaphor, have not managed to produce much clarity; moreover, his work seldom specifically deals with the process of articulation of modes of production. Yet, among the modern French Marxist authors, Godelier appears to have been the only one to consider explicitly the problem of ethnicity (Godelier 1973: ch. 1.3, pp. 93–131, 'le concept de tribu'). His Marxist inspiration is, however, largely used to arrive at a formal and epistemological critique of the concept of tribe in classic anthropology. Godelier does not yet attempt (as is my intention in the present chapter) to identify the political economic conditions, and the intersubjective dynamics of participant obser-

vation, under which a group of people and a researcher studying them, would adopt or reject the notion of tribe. With regard to other members of the French School, it is only fair to admit that the notion of bounded ethnic groups as more or less self-evident units of analysis was at first uncritically adopted by them; it is the work of Meillassoux and Terray which has made such groups as the Guro and the Dida famous.⁴

More recently, a Marxist perspective on ethnicity is beginning to be formulated by writers in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, and largely by reference to East African data. Thus John Saul, in a study of the dialectics of class and tribe in that part of Africa (1979: ch. 14), offers three allegedly complementary approaches along which ethnicity could be drawn within the orbit of a Marxist analysis. Ethnicity, he argues, could be viewed, first as a response to imperialism, at the sub-national level; second, as an ideological aspect of the articulation of modes of production; and third, as a form of ideological class struggle. Surprisingly, Saul fails to indicate the obvious connections between these three interpretations, which in fact appear to be very closely related. Behind political and military domination, imperialism very obviously served the imposition of the capitalist mode of production. It was thus a major factor in the articulation between that mode of production and such modes of production as were already in existence locally. In so far as it is inherent in the articulation process that these pre-capitalist modes of production retain their own distinct existence — if only in an encapsulated and subservient form — a neo-traditionalist expression of this distinct 'identity' (the very word refers to a problematic which is typical of capitalist encroachment) would readily assume the form of ethnicity. In so far as capitalist encroachment involves local people in new, capitalist relations of production, it amounts to class formation and thus to manifest or latent class struggle.⁵ If the ideological expression of such articulation is predominantly in ethnic terms, the creation and assertion of ethnic identity vis-à-vis other emerging ethnic identities that form part of the ideological lay-out of the social formation, might certainly take on militant overtones, but yet such ethnicity would serve to *conceal* the underlying class nature of the process that is thus being expressed. Therefore it would be more appropriate to view ethnicity as an ideological diversion of class struggle, rather than as ideological class struggle in itself. The point has already been made in

Mafeje's (1971) earlier analysis of 'tribalism', which draws on a more general Marxist inspiration without using the idea of an articulation of modes of production: such ethnicity could essentially be called 'false consciousness'.

In his review article on possible explanations of ethnicity as found in the recent work by Mamdani (1976), Leys (1975) and others, Joel Kahn is less sure of the appropriateness of the term 'false consciousness' in connection with ethnicity (1981: 48-9). Kahn offers a number of stimulating ideas. He dwells on the problematic of the relative autonomy of the ideological instance, the specific forms of domination found in the world-wide or national peripheries (cf. Meillassoux 1975; articulation of modes of production is however not explicitly mentioned), the significance of class analysis in this context, and the relevance of colonial forms of domination. Somewhat superfluously, Kahn stresses that in the ten pages of his article he is not 'attempting to develop a universal theory of primordialism' (1981: 51). And while many of his pointers have parallels in the analysis of ethnicity in western Zambia as set out in the present chapter, my attempt would even be more modest in that I will largely focus on the concrete ethnographic and historiographic forms in which this ethnicity manifests itself to the researcher — shunning the explicit, abstract, Marxist theorizing in which Kahn hopes to find the key for the explanation we both seek.

Finally, there is — precisely at the ethnographic level — a dimension of ethnicity which is surprisingly absent in scholarly analyses of the phenomenon: ethnicity may be an ideological process at the level of participants in any society under study, but our attempt to come to terms with this process in the course of our own intellectual production also has clear ideological implications.

In this chapter I shall argue a view of ethnicity as a response, among African participants, to the articulation of the pre-existing modes of production with capitalism. Alternatively, it is now fairly widely accepted to look at early anthropology as an ideological expression, among North Atlantic participants, of an imperialism seeking to create conditions for the world-wide penetration of the capitalist mode of production (Leclerc 1972; Asad 1973; Copans 1975). This imperialist heritage is likely to have some continued, if hidden, impact on whatever study of whatever topic modern anthropology undertakes in that part of the world where conditions of peripheral capitalism prevail. Considering how long it took

anthropology to take up the study of incorporation processes, capitalist penetration, etc. (a very small trickle up to the 1960s, such studies became a major topic only in the 1970s), one begins to suspect that anthropology is genetically conditioned to turn a blind eye to the very processes of articulation of modes of production to which it owes its own existence. Indulging in a Freudian analogy, one might say that there is here a Primal Scene which anthropology could not, until quite recently, afford to face, for the sake of its own sanity. Since anthropology is primarily a matter of intellectual, i.e. ideological, production, this problematic might have a less devastating effect on anthropological studies of economic or political aspects of the articulation process — studies that do not concentrate on ideology. But when anthropologists turn to the ideological dimensions of the articulation of modes of production, and begin to study for instance religious or ethnic responses under conditions of capitalist encroachment, then the ideological complexity of this research undertaking is raised.

For two ideological processes oddly converge in the anthropological study of ethnicity: first, among anthropologists, the modern transformation of an anthropology which started out as an ideological transformation of imperialism; and second, the emergence, as an ideological response to capitalist encroachment in the Third World, of new 'ethnic' group identities which seek historical legitimation by posing as reminiscences or re-enactments of pre-capitalist African social forms allegedly unaffected by capitalism. Could such a convergence ever produce meaningful and reliable results at all?

The answer to this question cannot be given before we have fully analysed the extent to which the modern social sciences reflect, in their theorizing as well as in the concrete organization of their intellectual production processes, the contradictions inherent in present-day capitalism — in other words, before we have assessed to what extent modern anthropology succeeds in escaping from its imperialist heritage. The good intentions of today's anthropologists, the inclusion of Third World colleagues among their number, the emergence of a self-reflexive, even revolutionary, anthropology, the radical political stances a minority of anthropologists take in public life — all this may be encouraging, but it is not sufficient proof that the fundamental orientation of anthropology has completely altered since its inception a century ago. The complexities of the situation are further revealed when we look at the

relations of intellectual production that prevail in modern anthropology. These largely follow the pattern of modern capitalism: intellectual wage-labour, separation between intellectual workers and their means of production (libraries, computers, office space, motor vehicles used in the field), the bureaucratic organization of production, the reliance on underpaid local assistants in the field, the commoditization of such intellectual products as books, articles, degrees, academic honours, the ensuing academic market pressures, competition, etc. And this confusing complexity manifests itself not just at the impersonal level of structures of academic production, but also in the very personal intimacy of individual thought-processes, motivation in research, the sort of 'rapport' a field-worker concentrating on ideological themes manages to establish with his or her informants, and the force with which that research is drawn towards these informants' own viewpoints.

Once an ideological representative of capitalist encroachment, the anthropologist today may be tempted to identify with, if not to join, the forces fighting this encroachment, e.g. through such ideological forms as ethnic identity, authenticity, negritude, the African personality, Christian independence, prophetic religious movements. These forms appear to express aspirations which as yet — under conditions of intercontinental dependence in the military, monetary and cultural field — are still largely deprived of economic and political reality. In this chapter I shall describe an instance of such identification, on the part of the anthropologist, as a temporary by-product of research into ethnicity. The example does not stand on its own: several researchers of modern religious expressions in Africa yielded to similar pressures by temporarily joining the religious organizations they were studying (Jules-Rosette 1975; Martin 1975). Are these responses, among researchers, positive forms of solidarity with the ideological struggles of their informants, or do they amount to intellectual betrayal in so far as they further the production of 'false consciousness' — stressing ethnic or religious, over economic, analyses of reality?

These are immense questions, which bear on our intellectual integrity, our class position in the world system and the viability of a Marxist anthropology. My present argument will not offer adequate answers. Suffice it to say that anthropological analysis of the ideological dimensions of the articulation of modes of production contains a double bind, an ideological puzzle, which more than justifies a closer look at the anthropological researcher

involved in such an exercise. This is why, in the course of this chapter, I shall have to pay some attention to my own role as a researcher blundering through 'Nkoya' ethnicity. At the same time it may be the fundamental reason why, as yet, any analysis of the ideological dimensions of the articulation of modes of production will remain unsatisfactory. However, it is to such an analysis that I shall now proceed.

The end of rural anthropology in Zambia?

Any analysis of ethnicity in Zambia today has to reckon with the exceptionally rich tradition of colonial anthropology in that country, as created by the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute. In order to understand the reliance on the tribal model among the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute researchers of rural Zambia, we should not overlook the fact that they were adopting, into their analytical frameworks, emic categories employed at the time by Zambian villagers, townsmen, and colonial administrators alike.

In addition, their academic discipline provided these researchers with at least two other reasons for upholding the tribal model. First, the concept of culture at the theoretical level reinforced the notion of tribe (as the most obvious carrier of a distinct, internalized, many-faceted culture); it provided a perspective on allegedly deeply-rooted, 'primordial attachments', which Shils and Geertz have stressed with regard to ethnicity (see Doornbos (1972) and references cited there). And second, the adoption of prolonged and intensive participatory field-work as the main method of data collection did much to strengthen, among anthropologists, the concept of tribe at a personal level. The intimate communion with the one culture that one studies as an anthropologist can be seen both as an irritating cliché of the professional sub-culture of classic anthropology, and at the same time as a genuine existential dimension of doing fieldwork in that tradition. It suggests the adoption of one particular unit of study: that those boundaries are defined by the limits of the cognitive and language field in which the anthropologist, after long and painful study, acquires a certain (always hopelessly defective) mastery: 'my people', 'my tribe'.

The Rhodes-Livingstone Institute researchers working in rural Zambia have seldom explicitly considered the analytical status of the ethnic labels they used for their main units of study. The titles

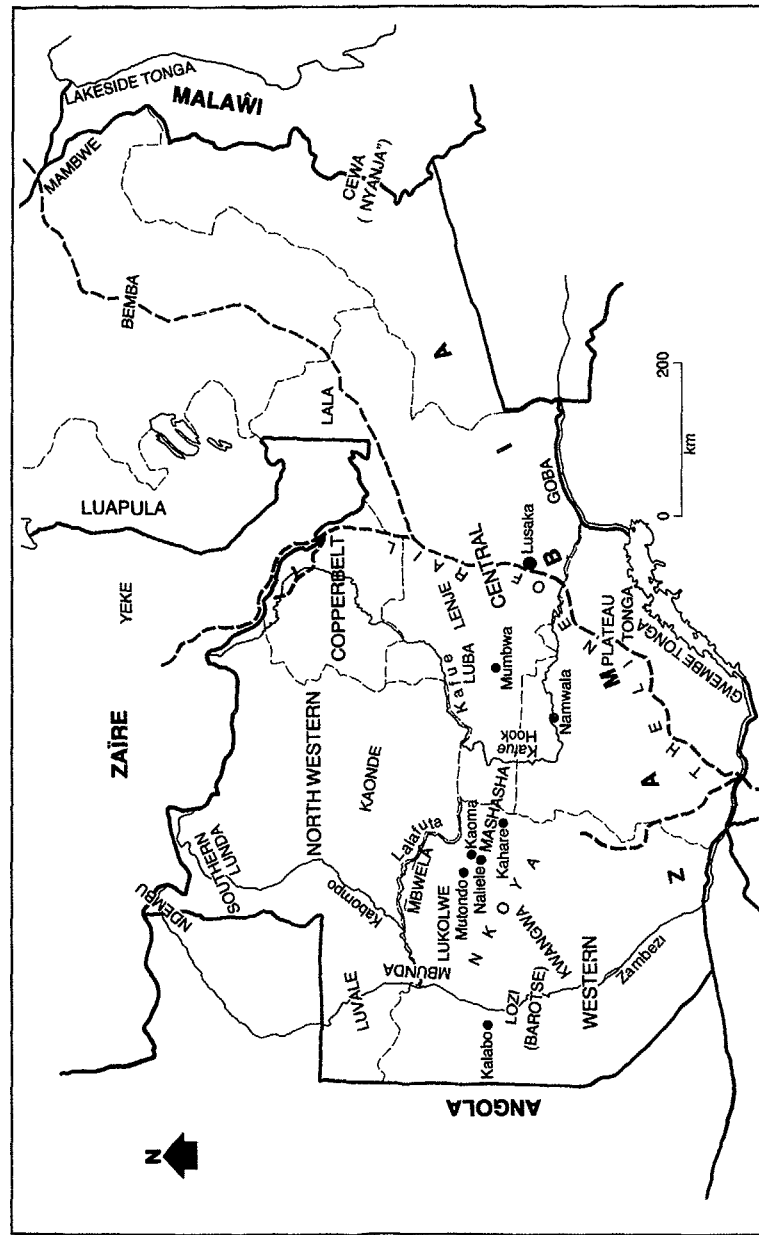


Figure 6.1 Localities and approximate local concentrations of ethnic groups, Zambia

of their main publications demonstrate that they defined their units of study loosely in terms of tribes or ethnic groups.⁶ Much sophistication, admittedly, went into the assessment of the transformation these rural ethnic labels underwent when they were introduced into the urban areas.⁷ Within what was called the 'industrial-colonial complex of urban Northern Rhodesia', these labels were claimed to acquire categorial and situational overtones quite different from the 'total way of life' they were assumed to represent out in the rural areas. Not that the rural researchers claimed to analyse this way of life exhaustively. In fact, most of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute studies emphatically concentrated on only one major aspect of 'tribal life': kinship, marriage, the judicial process, formal and particularly informal political organization, community crises, ritual.

The concept of culture so conducive to the classic tribal model, was rarely used explicitly; instead Gluckman and associates preferred the term *custom*, with its Malinowskian bird-of-paradise feathers. In contrast with American idealist culturology, the Manchester researchers were little inclined to view 'custom' as autonomously determining the course of the social process. If blame them we must, it could be for under-analysing, rather than for exaggerating, the cultural dimension of social life. Van Velsen and Turner⁸ presented dynamic and situational approaches to village life in southern Central Africa that were far richer and more convincing than anything the classic structural-functionalist paradigm had ever managed. Yet, even if one had to limit one's detailed study to selected aspects of 'tribal' life, even if one studied these aspects in a masterly way, the tribe remained the basic unit of study. African village life was essentially depicted as closed in itself and following a logic of its own. 'Outside contacts' with European administrators, missions, the modern market economy, migrancy, nationalism, were tackled in introductory or concluding chapters or in scattered articles, but not in the main books.

The anthropological discipline had at the time no theoretical solution to offer to the formidable problems posed by the persistence of encapsulated neo-traditional communities in a situation of articulation of modes of production. Individual researchers could hardly be blamed for the historical limitations of their discipline, especially not when they themselves were aware of these limitations. Like Jaap van Velsen who, finally realizing that the most fundamental questions concerning labour migration

could not be answered from within Tongaland, in the last minute withdrew his chapters on this topic from the very galley-proofs of *Politics of Kinship*.⁹

Two exceptions to the general pattern are Gluckman's study of *The Economy of the Central Barotse Plain* and Cunnison's *Luapula Peoples* (1959). Both take as their main unit of study not a single 'tribe', but geographical areas which they see as filled with a variety of tribes. While Gluckman takes tribes for granted, leaving the concept unanalysed,¹⁰ Cunnison (1959: ch. 2) engages in a painstaking assessment of the local and analytical meaning of the concept of tribe in the Luapula context. It was the particular poly-ethnic structure of their respective rural research areas that forced Gluckman and Cunnison to discuss, with different degrees of sophistication, the interactions *between* 'tribes'. The other researchers were little concerned with internal organization at the tribal level, but used the tribe rather as a comprehensive setting within which the microscopic face-to-face social process, in which they were really interested, took place and which they studied with excellent results. This approach is particularly clear in Turner's *Schism and Continuity* (1957: xvii): 'I focus the investigation upon the village, a significant local unit, and analyse it successively as an independent social system and as a unit within several wider sects of social relations included in the total field of Ndembu society.'

Paradoxically, the study that, among the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute work, was the most concerned with the relations between a local rural Zambian society and the wider world as dominated by the capitalist mode of production (Watson's *Tribal Cohesion in a Money Economy*, 1958), was at the same time the study that tried to make the most of the tribe, conceived in terms that were essentially those of structural-functionalist anthropology. Mambwe tribal society, far from being a loosely-descriptive (and hence pardonable) category, is for Watson a living, and surviving, integrated entity (1958: 228), tending 'to adjust to new conditions through its existing social institutions. These institutions will survive, but with new values, in a changed social system.'

Regrettably, Long's (1968) impressive attempt to break away from all this, in *Social Change and the Individual*, was at the same time virtually the swan-song of Zambian rural anthropology. Long studied what might have been called 'Lala village life' not as the enacting of changing tribal institutions or of some manipulative internal social process, but rather as the 'social and religious

responses to innovation in a Zambian community'.¹¹ As a unit of study he used, at the descriptive level, a geographically defined 'Kapepa Parish'. Here he sought access, analytically, not to representative glimpses of 'Lala society' but to a structurally complex social field, accommodating both local cultural and structural elements, and economic and social-structural pressures, as well as occupational and religious experiences pertaining to distant urban areas (Long 1968: 6f). In the extended-case studies of van Velsen and Turner, custom, elsewhere considered king, had been dethroned, giving way to a complex social process that was determined by the internal dynamics of local rural society; in Long's analysis, the wider world was finally allowed to step in, and it offered altered patterns of agriculture and farm management, dynamics of power and prestige, and religious experience, that drove home the fact that the single tribe is not a feasible unit of study at all.¹²

It is difficult to believe that Long's book, published in 1968 and dealing with the situation in 1963-4, is in fact one of the most recent full-length anthropological studies to be devoted to rural Zambia. In addition to Turner's *Drums of Affliction* (1968b) (where occasional references to social and political conditions surrounding Ndembu village society cannot hide the fact that Ndembu society remains the crucial unit of study, just as in Turner's earlier studies), the only other examples to come to mind are Elizabeth Colson's *Social Consequences of Resettlement* (1971), Stuart Marks's *Large Mammals and a Brave People* (1976); and George Bond's *Politics of Change in a Zambian Community* (1976), based on field-work in the same period as Long's. Whatever anthropology Robert Bates's (1976) *Rural Responses to Industrialization* contains is best left undiscussed here (see van Binsbergen 1977). There must be some interesting rural studies lying buried in unpublished PhD theses. Lancaster's and Poewe's articles foreshadowed full-length books to be published in 1981.¹³ But, on the whole, workers on Zambian rural anthropology have been eloquently silent during the 1970s. There has been only a faint trickle of publications, based mainly on field-work conducted before the mid-1970s: this includes articles by Bond, Colson, Scudder, Anita Spring Hansen, Marks, Robin Fielder, Lancaster, Hansen, Holy, and myself. Today, the growing-points for the study of Zambian society are history and political economy — and not anthropology. The anthropological study of Zambia's rural areas

has hardly been a field in which the University of Zambia has excelled; and little rural anthropology has been published in the Lusaka-based journal *African Social Research*. One of the most significant studies of rural southern Central and Southern Africa, including Zambia, to be published in the 1970s was *The Roots of Rural Poverty* (Palmer and Parsons 1977); this book was inspired, to a limited extent, by radical anthropology (including the recent French Marxist school) as developed with reference to other parts of the Third World, but towards its argument Zambian rural anthropology did not make much of a contribution.¹⁴ Similarly, the Centre of African Studies in Edinburgh could organize a full-length conference on 'The Evolving Structure of Zambian Society' (1980) without a single anthropologist among the contributors, and virtually without so much as a passing reference to Zambian rural anthropology in the footnotes to the papers.

This characterization of the present state of the art in Zambian rural anthropology relies of course on a particular conception of anthropology, which may well be debatable. I have considered this question at somewhat greater length elsewhere (see van Binsbergen 1981a). Here let it suffice that by anthropology I mean that body of social-scientific work that directly (i.e. in a neo-classical, often implicitly structural-functionalist form) or preferably indirectly (i.e. in a form inspired by regional, historical and political-economic considerations) derives from the methods and problematics of the classic anthropology of the 1940s and 1950s.

It would seem as though anthropology, with its prolonged participatory field-work and its profound insights into family and kinship, the micro-dynamics of the political and economic processes, and the participants' construction of social and ritual meaning in terms of a local particularistic symbolic idiom, is unable to make a meaningful contribution, either to the understanding of rural stagnation today, or in general to current research by historians, economists and political scientists. This is in fact an opinion found, expressly or tacitly, among many colleagues from other disciplines currently engaged in the analysis of rural southern Central Africa. Rural anthropology in this part of the world may have been too slow, or too entrenched in its classic problematics, to address itself to the academic and societal problems of today. Given its reliance, in the past, on the tribe or ethnic group as a standard unit of study, a reassessment of the unit of study may help to find a way out of this dead end. For I am

convinced that the predicament is largely a theoretical one, and cannot be explained away by such practical problems as the availability of research funds, permits, and the hardships of rural field-work.

At the same time I would claim that the perspective developed in the present book (that of modes of production and their articulation) does provide a means for coupling traditional, and meaningful, anthropological concerns to the economic and political realities beyond the local rural community. Without denying the specificity and the internal logic of the domestic or tributary mode of production, the analysis does not stop short there, but instead the conditions are identified for the continued existence (in other words, the reproduction) of this mode of production; and these conditions are sought, not in internalized culture or similar primordial attachments, but in the material and ideological processes through which surpluses generated in modes of production such as identified locally, are appropriated by other modes (particularly the capitalist one) in such a way that the domestic community is accorded a measure of distinct, but encapsulated and neo-traditional, identity.

The unit of study

For an outsider to the social sciences, and perhaps particularly for a natural scientist, it would be difficult to appreciate a situation where libraries have been filled with studies about southern Central and Southern Africa, and specialists hold conference after conference, conversing happily without more than the usual terminological confusion, whereas no real consensus has been reached as to the solution of the problem of the unit of study in this field of enquiry.

What makes our present situation less dramatic than it might seem to outsiders is the fact that considerations of the unit of study tend to refer to a much higher plane of abstraction and analysis than that on which our raw data are usually collected. On the level of the life experiences of the people inhabiting the part of the world we are studying, the concrete data are fairly straightforward. Our research notes consist of interviews, documents, observations, local words and their meanings, and sometimes (for those of us

who are engaged in participatory research) the subjective experience of sharing to some extent in an initially unfamiliar variety of human social life. These elementary particles of social and historical research in Africa may form, in a strict methodological sense, our real units of study, but they are not the ones that concern us here. We have, I suppose, a sufficient amount of trust in each other's professional skill and integrity to accept the descriptive evidence each of us digs up from his particular academic gold-mine. The problem of the unit of study as I understand it arises only when it comes to *collating* these minute facts into meaningful patterns, into more comprehensive complexes that have a systematic extension in space and that go through an identifiable process in time. The question boils down to: What scope of vision should the blinkers allow through which we peer at reality? For, ultimately, everything social is related to everything else; so only the whole world constitutes an adequate unit of study. But such a unit is impossible to handle, and is as little interesting to read about as the tiny particles of information that constitute our raw data. An adequate unit of study should enable us to select as well as to synthesize. We might define such a unit of study, tentatively, as an analytic construct which, in a manner acceptable to a specialist academic audience, allows for the meaningful and systematic integration of disconnected research data around a common focus, in such a way that the analytic construct thus arrived at is relevant for the pursuit of a specific scientific and/or societal problematic.

This sums up a couple of crucial points. First, the distinctions we impose upon the phenomena we study are essentially arbitrary man-made constructs, and do not in themselves emanate from the nature of these phenomena. Second, the choice of a particular construct as a meaningful unit of study is subject to a process of negotiation between colleagues.¹⁵ Third, a unit of study is not on the same level as our concrete research data, or on the most abstract level of grand theory, but on some intermediate level: that on which our disconnected raw data are processed so as to bring out patterns capable of being generalized and explained in fairly general terms that are yet somewhat proper to the geographical area and the historical period we are concentrating on. And, finally, the choice for one unit of study rather than another may be fairly arbitrary from the point of the True Structure of Reality (which we see only in a Glass Darkly, anyway); but this choice is

far from arbitrary when considered within the process of academic production, where such units of study should be selected as have the greatest potential of enlightening the problematic which informs the research that is undertaken. Such problematics, moreover, are not exclusively defined by academics, holding conferences, sitting on boards that distribute research funds between them, or deciding on the publication of each other's papers and books. The study of kinship terminology and the symbolic lay-out of homesteads would be even more of a booming field of research¹⁶ if research problematics were exclusively defined by so-called disinterested intellectual concerns alone. Fortunately, however, scholars are free, to a considerable extent, to turn to problematics that seem to be of particular social relevance, and that may help to explain, if not to alter, the vital predicaments that beset the people they are studying. In this respect, to study the 'roots of rural poverty' (Palmer and Parsons 1977) may be more relevant, as a problematic, than the kinship terminology and symbolic structures obtaining in the same part of the world. And whereas the latter problematic may lead one to distinguish between a host of different tribes or ethnic groups, each with its own total culture including kinship terminology and spatial symbolism, the former problematic would lead one to look for broad, comprehensive, regional patterns that would explain the remarkable similarities in the present-day predicament of the people of Southern Africa. Here, of course, anthropology is merging with history and political economy, and the present non-anthropological work on rural Zambia (e.g. by Muntemba, Klepper, Palmer, Vail) takes on a new significance.

Nor is it only the conscience of more or less committed scholars, and the whims of funding agencies usually located in the North Atlantic region, that suggest the adoption of one problematic rather than another. The official institutions in the areas our research concentrates on, and the very villagers and petty administrators that provide us with our data on the ground, coax us towards the adoption of particular problematics, and thus towards the adoption of particular units of study. Needless to say, their prodding is not always in a direction that coincides with the choices academics would wish to make. The crisis at the University of Zambia early in 1976, or the state of the social and historical sciences within the Republic of South Africa, are only two examples that suggest that the adoption of a radical problematic

may not make us, as researchers, more attractive in the eyes of the (élite) members of the society we study. Below I shall reflect on my personal experience with this problem at a local level, in the course of my participatory and oral-historical research in Kaoma district (western Zambia), and among people from that area now living in Lusaka, 400 km east of Kaoma.¹⁷

That definitional and methodological rigidity is necessary in the handling of one's unit of study has particularly been emphasized by scholars trying to compare the phenomena pertaining to different geographical areas or different periods. The problem of the definition of the units of cross-cultural comparison has haunted comparative studies in the social sciences ever since the end of the last century. Although there have been several attempts at cross-cultural comparison in the Southern African region,¹⁸ the problem of the unit of study was infrequently explicitly considered in the course of these attempts, and probably some of the data used derived from loosely-defined units ('tribes', 'ethnic groups', 'cultures', 'societies') that were essentially incomparable. The assumption was that, e.g., 'the Bemba', 'the Lozi', 'the Tonga', etc. not only really existed as collective representations of participants in Zambian society, but that they also formed viable units of analysis.

The example of urban ethnicity may illustrate that adopting a particular unit of study enlightens a certain problematic, but at the same time forces, like all classification, an essential volatile and dynamic reality into a strait-jacket. In their Copperbelt studies Mitchell, Epstein and Harries-Jones have treated ethnic identity primarily as a logical device to classify individuals. These researchers stressed the *situational* aspects of urban ethnicity. Reliance on a particular ethnic identity is only one of many options a town-dweller has for his personal organization of urban relationships. He may temporarily drop this identity and emphasize, in different urban situations involving the same or a different set of people, a different ethnic identity. Among themselves, and vis-à-vis 'Lozi', the Lusaka migrants from Kaoma district would identify themselves as 'Nkoya', but in many urban situations they would pose as 'Lozi', and sometimes they would try to pass for 'Bemba' or even 'Nyanja'. Alternatively, the town-dweller may, situationally, stress a social identity derived from class, occupation, educational level, political or religious affiliation. The ways in which ethnicity is alternately dominant or played down can be

understood only against the background of the total social process in which the participants are specifically involved.

Description implies fossilization, no matter how dynamic a reality we try to capture. The inevitable result is lack of precision. It is tedious to have to indicate all the time that the unit of study one imposes covers only a certain aspect of the social reality, only in certain situations, and subject to the participants' own conscious and unconscious manipulation. One has to adopt short-hand formulae, and these tend to acquire a life of their own in the course of one's argument. This accounts, for instance, for the following paradox. In his work of the 1950s and early 1960s Mitchell is on the one hand clearly aware of the situational and manipulative aspects of ethnicity, yet does not shrink from detailed studies of, e.g., intertribal prestige scores and differential fertility, where these tribes are neatly boxed and appear as entries in sophisticated, computerized tables — as though they formed both emic and etic categories at the same time (see Mitchell 1956, 1965).

This methodological problem, by the way, is not limited to the main unit of study that we adopt in our analyses. Ever since the extended-case method has made us aware of the shifting, inchoate, situational, competitive elements in the social process, persuading us to consider these elements as the real basic data out of which we have to build a picture of a 'social structure' and a 'culture', we run into the epistemological difficulty that, in order to discuss the data, and the emerging interpretation, at all, we have to lend them far greater invariability and stability than our analysis would yet show them to possess.¹⁹

Studying the Nkoya

I have already indicated how the choice of a particular unit of study can be suggested to the researcher on the basis of other than strictly academic concerns, for instance by his commitment to a problematic that is of wider social relevance, or under the pressure of members of the society he is trying to study. In so far as participants are often ideologically determined to ignore the true make-up of their own situation, there may be considerable tension between these two possible influences on one's choice of a unit of study. In the remainder of this paper, I shall bring out both the

lure of the tribal model as a unit of study for rural western Zambia, and its spuriousness in the light of a more profound analysis. In my conclusion I shall indicate the implications of this experience for the problem of the unit of study in general.

My first research contact with people from western Zambia was in Matero, a fairly respectable residential area in the northwestern part of Zambia's capital. Early in 1972 a friend took me and my family to a nocturnal healing session, staged by one of the senior leaders of a cult of affliction that had been founded by the prophet Simbinga in Kaoma district in the 1930s and that had been introduced into Lusaka in the 1950s. The languages spoken at the session were Nkoya, Nyanja, Lenje, Luvale, and English, in that order of frequency. Most of the cultic personnel, and most of the patients and onlookers, would when among themselves identify as belonging to the 'Nkoya tribe' (*mushobo wa shinkoya*), although, as already indicated above, for many social purposes within the capital they would claim to be 'Lozi', and would use, with varying success, the Lusaka *lingua franca*, Nyanja.

Hoping to penetrate the cultic and social idiom acted out in that nocturnal urban session and in many others I was to witness, deeply impressed by the dramatic and aesthetic aspects of the cult, and in general comfortably unable to resist the very great attraction that the remarkably close-knit, encapsulated group of 'Nkoya' immigrants in Lusaka was exerting on us (an uprooted nuclear family of Dutch expatriate academics), I allowed the Nkoya-ness of this set of ritual and social relations to dominate all other aspects of my urban research (which had started out as a sociological survey of religious organizations in Lusaka . . .). I learned the Nkoya language (and no other) and got deeply involved in Nkoya urban network contacts and collective ceremonies, which even in town were of an amazing scope: while the number of Nkoya in Lusaka, including children, was only about 1,000 out of a total urban population of about 350,000 (early 1970s), for girls' puberty ceremonies, healing sessions and funerary wakes, scores, even hundreds, of participants were mobilized from all over the capital. We were introduced to urban members of one Nkoya royal family, and would be visited by the Chief himself in our urban home whenever his membership of the House of Chiefs took him to Lusaka. As we acquired a working knowledge of those aspects of Nkoya culture that were still prominent in the urban relationships of our Nkoya friends and

informants, my research began to concentrate on urban-rural relations between what I then labelled, provisionally, Nkoya village society, and Lusaka recent immigrants from that society. After initial exploratory visits we settled in Chief Kahare's capital, Kaoma district, for participatory, quantitative and oral-historical research into the rural ends of the urban-rural networks whose urban ends we had previously come to know fairly well. And while my main published academic output during those years remained focused on more general, regional concerns,²⁰ my main Zambian field-work experience, and my main emotional identification as a researcher in Zambia, came to lie with the Nkoya: a small ethnic minority whose homeland was structurally peripheral to the Zambian nation-state, and whose political and economic history over the past century and a half had been determined by their being peripheral even within Barotseland (where they had been labelled a 'Lozi subject tribe' along with so many other groups).

Developing out of a context of urban ritual among migrants, I had certainly not selected my initial set of informants on the basis that they might form a tribe. It was they who told me that they were a tribe, very different from the scores of other tribes which (according to a folk classification system they shared with virtually all Zambians, urban and rural) make up the population of the country. My earlier research in rural North Africa, far from preparing me for a countryside apparently parcelled up into neat tribal units, had instead preconditioned me to look at a cultural region or subcontinent as displaying essential cultural, structural and historical continuity, and to play down local idiosyncrasies in this regional pattern (see Gellner and Micaud 1972); urban-rural differences might be far more significant than intra-rural variation. I also knew that the anthropology of sub-Saharan Africa since the late 1960s had been moving away from the tribal model; such tribes as anthropologists, administrators and Africans had distinguished were beginning to be looked at as more or less recent emic constructs, responses to increase of political scale, as the creation of new political arenas (late pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial) called for new symbolic definitions of group opposition.²¹

And yet I could not resist the very strong illusion implanted by day-to-day close interaction with people who, in their dealings with me at least, emphatically identified themselves as Nkoya.

Their Nkoya-ness very soon became their main, even only, characteristic in my eyes; and I myself became more or less Nkoya-ized in the process.

Rich and rewarding though the experience was, I had some reservations, and felt uneasy about them. As an anthropologist I knew that my friends, modern peasants and proletarians, were not just Nkoya and nothing more; but agreement on their Nkoya-ness had become the *raison d'être* of our frequent interactions. Although I circulated my early papers on the Nkoya widely among my Nkoya friends, I did not dare to show them a conference paper I wrote shortly after my main field-work (van Binsbergen 1975). There I tried to demonstrate that, when all was said and done, Nkoya ethnic identity was only a dependent variable, to be explained by reference to the economic and political dynamics of relatively recent incorporation in a market economy and wider state structure, both pre-colonial and colonial; and I could trace the process of this response in some detail. A few years later, when I gave a seminar at the University of Zambia, Robert Sérpell pointed out the extent to which my research had a Nkoya bias, and wondered how very different my analysis might have turned out had I not learned the Nkoya language but conducted my urban research in Nyanja. I pretended not to understand what he was aiming at: the fact that most of the social life of my Nkoya friends was determined by principles other than their claim to be Nkoya. Yet, only a few weeks earlier, during a field-trip to Kaoma district, I had conducted collective interviews with chiefs' councils, and had consciously felt how the notables present (representing both traditional and modern rural élites) were manipulating me as a likely ally in the expression of a new, proud Nkoya identity that would provide them with a political base in a district and a province that were dominated by people adhering to ethnic labels other than Nkoya (notably Lozi, Luvale and Mbunda). But then again had I not in the course of the same field-trip (which had brought me back to the area after three years' absence), at a collective celebration for which Chief Kahare had spontaneously made available his royal (though 100% state-subsidized) orchestra, been formally declared a Nkoya ('*baji kankoya! baji kankoya!*'), by the same Chief's prime minister; and had not the headman of the segment of the Chief's capital, where we had lived during most of the main spell of rural field-work, on that occasion publicly called me his sister's son ('*baji ba mwipa wami!*'), offering me the

most intimate relationship that can exist between men in this local society . . . ?

Already the situational use of Nkoya-ness in the urban situation, and particularly the 'passing' to more prestigious ethnic identities of certain middle-class people born as Nkoya, made me realize that primordial attachments based on a unique, total tribal heritage did not apply at all to the Nkoya situation. But there was much more. For reasons of space I must refrain, in this chapter, from a discussion of inter-ethnic relations at the level of interpersonal, face-to-face relationships, both in town and in the rural areas, as reflected in residence, sexual and marital relations, friendship, political and economic support, ritual and medical interaction. My monograph on the 'Nkoya' research will be more explicit on this point. Concentrating here on more or less static attributes of 'Nkoya-ness', the data I had collected mainly by virtue of the generosity of the Nkoya made it very clear that the Nkoya were not a 'tribe' characterized by a unique combination of language, culture, political and social organization, and economy, dating back to the pre-colonial era.

Most people who identify themselves as Nkoya are effective members of the Nkoya speech community and in this respect language could be said to underpin Nkoya identity. But most are also fluent in one or more other western Zambian languages or urban *linguae francae*; and due to the massive amount of rural-rural and rural-urban migration, a considerable number (perhaps 15%) of the people who today in their homes use Nkoya as their main language were born in a different speech community or will spend their later life in yet other speech communities.

Moreover, there never was a 'traditional' Nkoya culture, with unique distinctive features or with a unique combination of more widely distributed features. Asked to define Nkoya-ness in cultural terms, my respondents invariably came up with features which were far from peculiar to the Nkoya: their system of name-inheritance (*ushwana*); their collective nocturnal celebrations in which a singing and joking crowd dances round an orchestra composed of xylophones and drums (*ruhñwa*); girls' puberty ceremonies (*kutembwisha kankanga*); absence of male puberty ceremonies (*mukanda*); their skills as elephant-hunters and musicians. Yet apart from their language, which, however, closely resembles Luyana,²² Kwangwa, and southern Lunda, there are no features of so-called Nkoya culture that are not also found with

lesser or greater prominence in other parts of western and even central Zambia. From girls' puberty ceremonies to the Lunda-type ceremonial culture surrounding chieftainship, from patterns of hunting and cultivation to ancestral ritual and name-inheritance: whoever knows the ethnographic literature of Zambia, or, better still, has intensively participated in any rural village in western or central Zambia, will have strong illusions of *déjà-vu* in a Nkoya village today. Admittedly, there are specific details. Nkoya music has unmistakable qualities which have allowed it to become the court music *par excellence* throughout western Zambia. There are specific variations in style patterns as manifested in cultivation or hunting, in food habits, girls' initiation, dancing, etc. Also it is possible that the amazing cultural and structural homogeneity that characterizes present-day western Zambia is partly a result of processes of political and economic incorporation over the past hundred years; these may have obliterated much that was uniquely local, and may have replaced it by a neo-traditional hotch-potch of peripheral-capitalist rural culture as prevailing throughout the region. There are indications in the field of chieftainship and religion that such a converging transformation was one among several intertwined processes of cultural change affecting western Zambia. Present-day similarities should not automatically be taken as proof of past identities.²³ Yet it is difficult to conceive of so-called Nkoya culture as something other than a slightly idiosyncratic combination and permutation of productive, social-organizational and symbolic patterns that are widely and abundantly available throughout the region.

Some of the potentially distinguishing cultural features of Nkoya-ness underwent considerable change over the last few centuries. A case in point is male circumcision (*mukanda*), which, introduced around the middle of the nineteenth century by a Nkoya ruler with close Lunda connections, became a fairly widespread practice among Nkoya-speaking groups until about the 1920s,²⁴ but which over the past fifty years has entirely vanished. The fact that today Nkoya ridicule *mukanda* as a distinctive feature of Luvale and Mbunda ethnic groups, with whom they have been in heavy political and ecological competition since the 1920s (when these immigrants from Angola started to arrive in Kaoma district in large numbers), suggests that the absence of male circumcision became a distinctive feature of Nkoya-ness only recently and in response to Luvale/Mbunda encroachment.

This does not mean that in the pre-colonial past there never was a group of people designated as Nkoya. Although the ethnic distinctions operating today in Central African society have been greatly influenced by intergroup processes within political arenas defined by the colonial and post-colonial state, and therefore must be seen as essentially recent phenomena (see Colson 1968; Ranger 1982), there can be no doubt that many of the ethnic labels and cultural symbols employed in that modern context have *nominally* a pre-colonial origin, whatever fundamental changes in form and function they have since undergone.

As anywhere else in the world, people in pre-colonial Zambia saw themselves and each other as belonging to various named groups defined by any one of the following criteria, or perhaps a loose combination: by language, place of residence, culture, political organization, economic speciality, etc. Named social groups of wider or lesser scope are too prominently and too consistently present in oral traditions to be explained away as mere projections of colonial or post-colonial realities into a pre-colonial past. Moreover, the same names appear in written documents generated in the nineteenth and early twentieth century before the imposition of a colonial administration could have made a deep impact on the way people structured and named their social environment. However, it is more than likely that, like almost anywhere in the world, the various generic and proper names for groups thus distinguished by Zambians in the pre-colonial period operated at various levels of inclusiveness; that their various dimensions did not coincide (e.g. named political units did not coincide with linguistic or economic ones); that these groups were situational and often had blurred boundaries; and that they were constantly manipulated in the course of intergroup interaction. Only in this way did 'tribes' exist in pre-colonial Zambia,²⁵ and, even so, clans were more prominent forms of social organization. Distinctions and identifications at the level of 'tribe' (the word exists in every Zambian language) may have occasionally provided a framework for political and military mobilization, but are not likely to have automatically determined actual group processes; rather they were the shifting results of such processes. A tribal model, such as that propounded by classic structural-functionalist anthropology, could have explained pre-colonial societies in Zambia no more than it throws light on contemporary social realities in that part of the world.

The name 'Nkoya' stems without any doubt from before the imposition of colonial rule.²⁶ According to particularly convincing oral traditions, it is claimed to derive from a toponym denoting a forest area near the confluence of the Kabompo and the Zambezi Rivers, where one of the royal clans (the one owning the Mutondo chieftainship) of the Nkoya is said to have lived about 1800.²⁷ As the names of a social group, 'Nkoya' appears in several royal praise-names with which Nkoya rulers acceded to their respective thrones in the course of the nineteenth century; I am certain that these boastful mottoes are not recent fabrications projected into the past. But there never was, in the pre-colonial era, an autonomous Nkoya polity encompassing the many thousands of people who today are claimed to be Nkoya. Instead, the area has, since the end of the eighteenth century, been the scene of a number of mutually independent chiefdoms, typically with short-lived dynasties, which hived off or replaced each other following a complicated fissionary pattern, and without much of a recognized hierarchy among them. The group named 'Nkoya' obviously had a political dimension, but it was a very small group, and, moreover, its boundaries certainly did not coincide with the (much more extensive) areas of distribution of the linguistic, cultural and economic features displayed by, among others, the members of that group. In reports dating from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the 'Mashasha' group centring on the Kahare dynasty is at least equally prominent. Both the mutual definition of 'Nkoya' and 'Mashasha' as major constituents (along with Mbwela, Lukolwe, the Nkoya offshoots in the Zambezi plain, etc.) of today's Nkoya, and the contiguous geographical areas imputed to them on tribal maps, have gone through a number of different versions since David Livingstone first marked the Bamasa (= Mashasha) on the 'Detailed Map' in *Missionary Travels and Researches*.²⁸ An analysis of these versions²⁹ would take us too far in the present context; but it would certainly corroborate the point I am trying to make: that as an ethnic category, 'Nkoya' is fluid, and expanding.

The extension of the name Nkoya to an entire cluster encompassing several mutually independent chiefdoms throughout western Zambia dates only from the second half of the last century, and was due, largely, to the incorporation, with different degrees of effectiveness, of these several shifting and unstable chiefdoms into the Kololo/Luyana state, and its heir, the Barotseland

Protectorate. This ethnic labelling in the context of Lozi tributary relations was further formalized when in the first decade of the twentieth century a *boma* was established, and Mankoya³⁰ (sub-)district was named after what was then considered to be the main 'tribe' inhabiting the district. Thus contained within a well-defined administrative and territorial unit, Nkoya identity could further develop within the arenas created by the colonial state, and the Lozi neo-traditional government depending upon that state.

Ethnicity, history and the Nkoya experience

How did the Nkoya, against so many odds, manage to convince me that they were 'a tribe'? Why was I lured into adopting this unit of study? My tentative answer is that, although the Nkoya had never been a tribe in the sense of classic anthropology, I became involved with them at a point in their history when they were trying very hard to believe that they constituted such a tribe; when this attempt was finally beginning to pay off; when I was in a position to help the attempt to succeed, because of my access to venues for publication; and particularly when, on my part, underneath their mistaken idiom of ethnic expression I detected a sense of deprivation, protest, struggle, with which I could identify — and identification grew as I learned their language and culture, and exposed myself and my family to appalling conditions of rural life which, although commonplace to the Nkoya, seemed to epitomize their deprivation.

For there was a serious, real-life dimension which my earlier, hidden, conference paper had not managed to capture. The Nkoya experience may be understandable as a product of historical circumstance; may even (as I shall argue below) contain elements of one-sidedness and exaggeration — but this does not make it less real. The Nkoya ethnic pathos swept me off my feet not so much because it provided a temporary shelter for my own uncertain identity, but particularly because it was so clearly and timely an active reaction to a collective historical experience. And I was not the first anthropologist to struggle with the experiential side of ethnicity. Whereas Mitchell's later work on urban ethnicity (1970, 1974) was primarily a (successful) attempt to remedy the analytical confusion of emic and etic aspects in urban ethnic categorization, Epstein went much further in his revision. In *Ethos and Identity*

(1978), he elaborated on aspects which the Copperbelt studies initially had left untouched: the emotive aspects of identity as deriving from a sense of collective history, and from identification between (alternate) generations. Perhaps the emotional struggle to do justice to this experiential side has tempted so many students of ethnicity to adopt such terms as identity and primordial attachments, as ultimate explanations.

Let me summarize how contemporary Nkoya look upon their history since the emergence of their own major chieftainships in the early nineteenth century. They migrated to their present territory, in the course of the last centuries, under the impact of Kaonde and Yeke pressure.³¹ Their royal capitals were pillaged by the Lozi — who earlier, in Mulambwa's time (the early nineteenth century), are believed to have come to beg for chiefly medicine and chiefly instruments from the Nkoya! Since the first decade of this century they were supervised and humiliated by Lozi representative *indunas*, and, since 1937, relegated to an inferior position altogether with the creation of the Mankoya Native Treasury and the Lozi court at Naliele (near the Kaoma district centre), occupied by a senior member of the Lozi royal family. Their lands, since the 1920s, had been encroached upon by Lozi and especially by thousands of Angolan (Mbunda, Luvale, Luchazi) immigrants into the district. They were evicted from much of their agricultural and hunting territory at the creation of Kafue National Park in the 1930s. They were left without adequate mission-provided educational and medical facilities, which (in the Nkoya view) were concentrated near the centres of Lozi power in the district and in Barotseland as a whole.

Neither did the first ten years of Zambia's independence do much to restore Nkoya pride. In the district's primary schools, the use of Nkoya textbooks was abolished, and Lozi ones substituted, in the late 1960s the predominantly non-Nkoya teachers were blamed for the very poor educational success of their Nkoya pupils, most of whom received their education in a language (Lozi) they did not speak at home. Secondary school entrance was very low, and access to higher educational institutions negligible. Radio broadcasting in the Nkoya language, never more than a few minutes per week anyway, was discontinued. At the provincial level, Lozi, and at the district level especially Mbunda and Luvale, dominated the national party, UNIP, as well as the various elected bodies of local government; and the Nkoya mainly supported

ANC until this party was integrated into UNIP at the creation of the one-party state (1972). Like the whole of western Zambia, the Nkoya saw their major access to capitalist labour markets cut off when labour recruitment for the South African mines was stopped shortly after UDI. But, somewhat unlike the Lozi, the Nkoya, because of their different educational and mission history, and because of their lack of previously established urban footholds, could find little compensation in migratory opportunities along the Zambian 'line of rail' (the central belt of the country, with developed infrastructure and predominantly capitalist relations of production). Cash-cropping opportunities were slowly increasing in the district, including agricultural extension work, the erection of National Agricultural Marketing Board depots, and a massive tobacco and maize scheme of the Tobacco Board of Zambia. But again very few Nkoya benefited by these, except as low-paid agricultural workers. And people in the outlying villages negotiated in vain for tractors to come to their villages and plough their maize-fields. Among the villagers, cash-crop production still tends to be limited to a few bags of maize a year; seed maize and fertilizer are difficult to get, and after marketing their crops and peasants have to wait for months until they get paid. In 1969 the name of the district was changed from Mankoya to Kaoma, wiping out the last traces of official recognition that originally the district was Nkoya land. The two main Nkoya Chiefs, Kahare and Mutondo, continued to maintain a state-subsidized royal establishment, as guaranteed under the 1964 Barotse Agreement (the 1969 alterations did not affect this point). But they were denied the status of senior chiefs, and their subsidies were substantially lower than those received at Naliele.

The Nkoya keenly resent their lack of success in wider society, which they blame on their history of deprivation. By the mid-1970s, the Nkoya could boast only one university graduate (junior partner in a law firm). In addition, a few dozen had, through their good fortune, political credit and education, managed to occupy middle-range positions in government institutions and private enterprise in the urban areas. A similar small number were established as modern farmers in Kaoma, Mumbwa and Namwala districts. Among these people, the pressure from poor relatives and the stigma of belonging to a despised ethnic group is severely felt, and some go through periods when they deny being Nkoya, and no longer honour claims to kinship support.

The majority of the Nkoya, meanwhile, are still dependent on labour migration for their family income, and have only unskilled labour to offer. They maintain to some extent a pattern of circulatory migration and family separation which for others in Zambia is increasingly a thing of the past. The Nkoya presence in the urban areas along the line of rail is limited and has a rapid turnover: it even seems to be declining under the effects of a shrinking market for unskilled labour, and the increasing competition from people from areas that have more established urban footholds (easterners in Lusaka, northerners on the Copperbelt).

Above I have rendered this stereotyped experience as a collective representation among a set of people³² — recent history as most Nkoya today would see it, and not history as a detached historian with free access to all relevant sources would write it.³³ For instance, the extent and variation of nineteenth-century Lozi and Kololo control over the eastern part of what is now Western Province remains a problem which crops up again and again in Nkoya oral sources: some admit established tributary relations, others stress the common origin between Nkoya and Lozi, and still others deny any Lozi domination over the Nkoya prior to colonial rule. How, and where, to distinguish between history as self-expression, and history as a detached outsider's undertaking? The point is crucial, since the Nkoya today are a people united not so much by the distinguishing features of a common language, culture, or rural production system, but by a particular conception of their recent past. They define themselves mainly as the bearers of a common history, and (as came out very clearly in the course of my work sessions with the chiefs' councils at the two main Nkoya royal establishments in the district) they expect from the explicit formulation, and circulation, of this version of history an internal mobilization and an outside recognition which, when translated into political and economic benefits, will remedy their predicament through government appointments and development projects coming their way.

In this emic version of their history, their misery is set off against delusions of past grandeur and of immense geographical extension, comprising all speakers of Nkoya, Mashasha, Mbwela and related dialects, and their descendants, throughout Zambia's Western, Northwestern, Central and Southern Provinces. It is not so much the redefinition of history in the hands of an ethnic group,

but rather the creation of history as an aspect of the contemporary emergence of an ethnic group.

The Nkoya today would thus appear to be a case of what Abner Cohen (1969: 2) has so aptly termed *retribalization*:

a process by which a group from one ethnic category, whose members are involved in a struggle for power and privilege with the members of a group from another ethnic category, within the framework of a *formal* political system, manipulate some customs, values, myths, symbols and ceremonials from their cultural tradition in order to articulate an *informal* political organization which is used as a weapon in that struggle.

Devised
by Nkoya

During the colonial period various attempts to confront Lozi domination led to utter defeat. Chief Kahare Timuna was temporarily demoted in 1923 (Gluckman 1968b: 95). When in the 1930s Watchtower agitation in Mankoya district was challenging the Lozi administration, the latter banned the preachers and threatened with demotion the Nkoya chiefs siding with them (see van Binsbergen 1981b: 344f., nn. 73, 77, and references cited there). Soon after the creation of the Naliele court, the incumbent of the Mutondo chieftainship died under what the Nkoya consider to be suspicious circumstances; ten years later his successor Muchaila was dethroned and exiled to Kalabo for ten years (Shimunika, in press; anonymous, n.d.). Witchcraft cases in Mankoya district in the late 1950s, directed in part against the local Lozi establishment, were vigorously quelled (Reynolds 1963). In 1960 a Nkoya-based ANC³⁴ branch was refused registration, as 'it was felt that any political organization in the Nkoya area would stir up long-standing secessionist agitation among a subject tribe against the Barotse government' (Mulford 1967: 223). Attempts to organize a Nkoya tribal association along the line of rail, and a political party largely on a Nkoya ethnic basis, were also undertaken about 1960, but failed, partly due to difficulties arising from the recently enacted Societies Ordinance.

It was probably no coincidence that my research among the Nkoya took place in a period when the tide seemed to turn for the Nkoya, due to a number of developments at the national level in Zambia. The same move that led to the alteration of the district name from Mankoya to Kaoma, implied far-reaching measures that all but dismantled the remnants of the Lozi state within the Republic of Zambia, and that marked the defeat of the strong Lozi

faction within the Zambian government (Caplan 1970: 223). This diminished the extent to which non-Lozi west Zambians would be dependent on Lozi patronage for a political career; in fact, the former became likely allies of the state against the Lozi establishment. The integration of ANC into UNIP in 1972 relieved former ANC candidates from the stigma of disloyalty, and the one Nkoya candidate, defeated on an ANC ticket in 1968, was victorious for UNIP in the 1973 and 1977 general elections. He became the first Nkoya MP (representing, though, only part of the area inhabited by Nkoya). Yet he might just as well have identified as Lozi (and in fact often does): his father was Lozi, but he spent part of his childhood at one of the Nkoya chief's capitals, from where his mother originated. In addition, a few Nkoya became appointed, non-elected members of the Kaoma Rural Council, partly on the strength of their traditional offices. No Nkoya played leading roles in UNIP at the district level (Regional Office) or above.

Modern Nkoya politicians rely not only on their roots in the Nkoya royal families, but also try to instil a sense of new possibilities existing at the national and district level, now that Lozi power is so clearly on the decline. They stir up a new ethnic pride. Thus they create a local following; their action manages to pull local people, distrustful of the independent Zambian state and of UNIP, back into national political participation. One of their proudest achievements is that in the newly-established party branches, for the first time in Zambian history, well-known UNIP songs (such as *Tiyende pamodzi*) are now sung in Nkoya translations. Besides their political activities, they also further the interests of traditional leadership, instigating discussions about the rate of subsidies for Nkoya chiefs, the revival of chieftainships that were abolished in the colonial era, and the creation of senior chieftainships among the Nkoya. A sign of the changing tide is the reinstatement in office (1980) of Chief Muchaila Mutondo, decades after his demotion and exile. Besides these political activities the new leaders availed themselves of the new economic opportunities, particularly those the Tobacco Board of Zambia is creating in the district. In this context they act as employers of agricultural wage-labour and as entrepreneurs in the retail trade.

In addition to active Nkoya politicians in recent times, a major builder of Nkoya ethnicity has been the Rev. J. M. Shimunika. Born about 1910 as a member of the Mutondo royal family, he is rumoured to have been a *nganga* (diviner-priest) before his

conversion to Christianity, which came to the district in 1923 (after A. W. Bailey's abortive attempt in 1913-14). Shimunika was a teacher, an evangelist and finally a pastor with the South Africa General Mission (now the Africa Evangelical Fellowship; its missionary activities have led to the creation of the Evangelical Church of Zambia). Shimunika's translation of the New Testament and the Psalms was published in 1952;³⁵ his Old Testament translation was completed in the 1970s. In the 1950s he published a short pamphlet in the Nkoya language, *Muhumpu wa Byambo bya Mwaka* (anonymous n.d.), which is a selection taken from his larger work, *Likota lya Bankoya (The History of the Nkoya)*, which is now in press (Shimunika). Instead of boosting Nkoya morale, *Muhumpu* created internal animosity, because of the allegations it contained about the weak stand of a particular Nkoya royal family *vis-à-vis* the Lozi. Educated Nkoya of a younger generation than the Rev. Shimunika's have invested a great deal of time and energy in order to enable me to publish *Likota* in a form that is to avoid similar animosity in future.

My research was firmly supported by both traditional office-holders, and their kinsmen, the Nkoya modern politicians. Without the introductions extended by the latter, a substantial part of my data could never have been collected. But in the first year of my Nkoya research this element was still absent. The eager support the Nkoya townsmen in the compounds offered me at that stage derived from a less sophisticated perception of my possible role, but was likewise cast in ethnic terms. The following episode brings this out clearly:

By May 1973 I had decided to add some systematic, quantifiable census data to my observational and participatory urban data as acquired so far. I prepared a mimeographed one-page questionnaire, and administered it to scores of Nkoya assembled for a girl's puberty ceremony in a Lusaka compound. One elderly man showed a healthy suspicion, and wanted to know why I needed the basic information I had asked him. But before I could explain my intentions at length, he was scolded by his fellows: 'You better answer him, you stupid fool. Otherwise we are never going to have a book about ourselves, like the Lozi have and all those other tribes!'

This eagerness to tell their tale, to have themselves put on the ethnographic and historical map, was even the main force behind

my initial concentration on the Nkoya, during my urban research. Confronted with the very strong force with which this emerging ethnic group positively attracted me, I had no reason to resist.

Nkoya ethnicity, the articulation of modes of production, and the dialectics of consciousness

With the preceding two sections of this chapter, we may have gained tentative insights into the nature of Nkoya ethnicity which could not have been arrived at through consistent application of the classic tribal model. The contemporary Nkoya situation turns out to have many of the ingredients stressed by current interpretations of ethnicity in the Central African context. Underneath a strongly situational and manipulatory surface which is particularly apparent in urban and middle-class contexts, there is a genuine Nkoya identity, but it is based not so much on primordial attachment to a way of life, culture and language, but on a collective sense of deprivation in the course of a shared recent history. Expecting to extract, from the state and the party, goods and services which until recently have been denied them (see Bates 1973), peasants identifying as Nkoya on the basis of this historical consciousness give voting support to politicians from their midst; the latter, linked to Nkoya royal families, but likewise, through their education and careers, involved in modern economic life, explore the possibilities of ethnic identification, and actively further the building of Nkoya ethnicity in an attempt to safeguard their own positions (see Molteno 1974), as well as to serve their people's interests at the same time. Their efforts at retribalization converge, and sometimes coincide, with those of local intellectuals. Just like everything social, Nkoya ethnicity turns out to be man-made, and even amazingly recent; but to realize that the Nkoya are not a 'natural', primordial unit bestows a social and historical meaning on Nkoya-ness, instead of — as I thought in my first disappointment — depriving it of meaning.

However, showing how one particular unit of study, the tribe — already subjected to so much criticism — is inadequate in the Nkoya case as well, goes only half-way towards solving the problem of the unit of study. I shall now carry the argument further, sketching the wider sociological implications of the picture of Nkoya ethnicity presented above, and arguing that the structure

of the social field, which thus becomes visible, solves the problem of the unit of study for us.

I have discussed Nkoya ethnicity as a form of consciousness which may lead on, situationally, to social and political mobilization, but which primarily is a process of self-definition among a set of people perceiving themselves as sharing a common history of deprivation. One of the major tasks confronting the social sciences today is the development of a sophisticated theory of the conditions under which particular forms of consciousness relate to particular social, political and particularly economic processes. As has been argued by Kahn in the article referred to above (1981), an idealist, culturological position, such as that taken by those looking for primordial attachments, is just as untenable as a vulgar-materialist position which, against all evidence, posits a simple one-to-one relationship between economic conditions and the attending forms of consciousness. The task is fundamental, on the one hand because the social sciences in themselves are a form of consciousness; on the other because it is precisely by the phantasms of consciousness that conditions of deprivation, injustice, exploitation persist — just as they are actively challenged, and altered, as a result of an emerging, truer consciousness.

What further insights into Nkoya ethnicity can we gather if we subject this form of consciousness to a Marxist-inspired contextual analysis?

In order to answer this question, let us briefly review the history of the social formation of the Kaoma district, in terms of the articulation between successively emerging modes of production (see van Binsbergen 1981b: 258–63).

In the nineteenth century dramatic changes took place in that social formation. By the end of the eighteenth century, the social formation was already a highly complex one, in which, as a result of the emergence and articulation of various modes of production in previous centuries, various mutually dependent branches or forms of production³⁶ co-existed: highly developed hunting and gathering; rather crude fishing and farming; a limited form of domestic slavery;³⁷ and petty commodity production (particularly ironware) for local trade circuits. Clan chieftainship was largely concerned with ritual functions concerning the land, and with exclusive claims to certain proceeds from hunting, which were locally consumed or hoarded but were not yet circulated in long-distance trade and tribute.

Oral tradition, and written documents relating to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,³⁸ as well as the converging evidence from scholarly studies of neighbouring areas,³⁹ suggest the following trends for the period starting *c.* 1800. Small militant groups coming in from the north brought a new, more exalted style of chieftainship, as well as some of the economic prerequisites (better crops, cattle, and cattle-raiding) with which to generate a surplus on which such chieftainship could thrive. Domestic slavery was greatly increased, and lost the earlier kinship connotations of pawnship. Between local communities and the emerging chiefly courts, and between courts of different importance, tributary networks were developed, along which travelled not only the products of local branches of production, but also slaves in increasing numbers. This process was further intensified by the advent, around 1850, of long-distance trade in the hands of Mambari and Swahili caravan traders, and the marked ascendance, some 200 kilometres to the west, of the Luyana/Kololo state. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century the economy of that state became largely dependent upon slave labour; hence large raiding expeditions for slaves and cattle were organized, and they extended well to the east of the Nkoya lands. Whereas in the social formation before 1800 a domestic mode of production could be said to be dominant, the later period saw the gradual subordination of this mode to tributary and, via long-distance trade, mercantile-capitalist modes of production. The new modes of production emerging in the nineteenth century were closely linked to each other. Most if not all slaves were controlled by chiefs and their office-bearers; this gave these nobles unique opportunities to have a local surplus generated, available for long-distance trade. It appears that domestic slavery rapidly declined to a trade in humans from which even close kinsmen (notably sisters' sons) were not excluded.

The precise inter-relations between the tributary and the mercantile-capitalist mode of production await further research. Both were still groping to establish themselves, and both never attained the full realization of their respective models. But what is important here, and fairly well documented, is the subordination of the domestic mode of production to these two other modes.

As the penetration of the capitalist mode of production in the social formation of Kaoma district proceeded (and as this social formation itself became integrated in a much wider formation:

Northern Rhodesia, the capitalist world), the tributary and mercantile-capitalist modes of production (having gained dominance in the nineteenth century) were encapsulated and largely destroyed. That colonial rule was committed to the spread of capitalist relations of production no longer requires a lengthy discussion. Very soon after its imposition (1900) the flow of commodities into the area would be channelled through the rather ill-equipped rural trading stores, but particularly through the purchases by labour migrants at their distant places of work. Long-distance trade was forced to an end. The tributary mode of production was destroyed by colonial legislation abolishing slavery and tributary labour. Government subsidies allowed some of the chiefs and aristocrats to keep up the remnants of a political and ideological pre-capitalist structure, after the relations of production underlying that structure had been radically altered.⁴⁰ These subsidies were paid out of the revenues from hut tax, a direct form of surplus extraction imposed by the colonial administration, and one that soon forced people to sell their labour for money, after the rapid breakdown of local participation in the agricultural market (van Horn 1977: 154f.). The circulation of traders, commodities and slaves (the local manifestations of extraction by an as yet invisible mercantile capitalism) had given way to the circulation of money and of labour migrants, and many people had become directly (though seldom permanently) involved in capitalist relations of production.

The contemporary Nkoya situation provides a good illustration of the articulation of a domestic mode of production, stripped, to a considerable extent, of the remains of the tributary mode, and articulated to the dominant industrial capitalist mode. The old branches of production organized by kinship are more or less surviving, although they have been encroached upon by state control (alienation of land for game reserves and (para-)statal agricultural enterprise; and prohibitions on hunting). Likewise they have been eroded by the exodus of male labour; the penetration of capitalist consumer markets (all clothing, most implements and some food, are now bought from outside); and the introduction, on a limited scale, of cash-cropping and agricultural wage-labour.

Adult males participate as migrants in the urban capitalist economy, and a minority of them manage to set up and maintain urban nuclear families which, if continuously successful in town,

are going to contribute directly to the reproduction of the capitalist sector. However, the footing of these urban migrants is particularly insecure; and many of the members of their households may ultimately end up in the rural sector. While remaining in town, these migrants can find greater security in the domestic domain by participation in dyadic networks as well as collective ceremonies and rituals, which encompass both urban wage-earners, recent arrivals, urban drop-outs about to return home and people without any participation in the urban relations of production: women and villagers. The domestic sector extends well into the urban areas, and into the households of the urban wage-earners. Religious and ethnic ceremonies, mobilizing a large proportion of the 'Nkoya' population of a particular town, provide a setting for this interpenetration, as well as a means to recirculate money earned in the urban capitalist sector to those debarred from it. They are an instrument of articulation, and notably one which syphons resources back into the domestic sector, contributing to the latter's reproduction rather than to its exploitation.

Armed with this cursory analytical view of the articulation of modes of production as determining the Nkoya situation today, let us now return to their collective view of Nkoya history. Seen as a possible response to the articulation of modes of production, it is a crucial feature of the Nkoya view of their history that no distinction is made between those aspects of local decline that were due to national or global processes of the penetration of capitalism as mediated by the colonial state (and that, therefore, affected the people of the district in a way unrelated to them being, or not being, Nkoya); and those that more directly reflected intrusion by other Africans (Lozi, Angolans). Analytically, only the latter — if still only superficially — could be dealt with in ethnic terms. The colonial state served the creation of capitalist conditions, and the attuning of pre-existing non-capitalist modes of production to these conditions. However, the colonial state realized its aims partly by furthering a neo-traditional indigenous Lozi administration, sanctioning the latter's hold upon the peripheral groups in Barotseland, as well as allowing the settlement of large numbers of Angolan immigrants — not, of course, near the centres of Lozi presence, but in the same outlying areas. The Nkoya clearly perceived the Lozi and the Angolan immigrants, but failed to detect the forces of the colonial state and of capitalism behind them. Therefore, the colonial state remained fairly neutral

in the conscious historical perception of the Nkoya. The frequent expressions of Nkoya protest in the colonial period, if they did take on any political overtones and were not entirely clad in religious forms (see van Binsbergen 1981b: 58f. ch. 4, and for sources pp. 344–6) were directed against Lozi domination, and not against the state. One of the most shocking aspects of my fieldwork in a newly-independent country was to hear peasants, as a standard turn in their everyday conversation and certainly not prompted by interviewing, praise colonial conditions and the economic and political security they had implied, in contrast with the situation after independence. The penetration of capitalism had numerous structural effects on the local society (wage-labour, migrancy, monetarization of bridewealth, fragmentation of productive units and of settlement, partial dismantling of traditional authority by divorcing it from its exploitative economic base). But in so far as these effects were not welcomed (they often were), they were blamed on the Lozi. The negative aspects in the Nkoya collective experience came to be almost entirely perceived in terms of ethnic conflict. Even the modern national state is for the Nkoya primarily veiled under ethnic perceptions. For the Nkoya today the modern state of Zambia is largely considered a remote affair of the Bemba, Tonga, Lozi and Chewa, in various shifting alliances; Nkoya peasants even frequently use the word 'Zambia' when from the context it is clear that they exclusively refer to the 'line of rail': the area extending from Livingstone, through Lusaka and Kabwe, to the Copperbelt — and the part of Zambia where the capitalist mode of production is the most manifest and dominant. As recently as 1973, when the district authorities staged meetings in the villages in preparation for the general elections, these meetings were boycotted or challenged because they were in the hated Lozi language; and the two opponents of the one Nkoya candidate were primarily unattractive since they were known to be Mbunda or Luvale.

This ethnic fixation, however, enables Nkoya politicians to look to the post-colonial state with new expectations, now that the main perceived enemy, the Lozi ethnic group, is no longer so closely allied with the state as it used to be in the colonial era and in the first years after independence.

It would be foolish to accept the Nkoya's one-sided view of history, and to attribute their predicament entirely to the effects of Lozi domination. As a 'Lozi subject tribe', the Nkoya were

exposed to both Lozi and European imperialism. Historically these followed each other in quick succession, and the two could be argued to be indirectly related also in the pre-colonial period,⁴¹ for both were specific forms through which the penetration of the capitalist mode of production was ultimately effected. After 1900, the class alliance between the Lozi aristocracy and the colonial powers led to fundamental changes in the type of economic exploitation to which the people in the eastern periphery of Barotseland were subjected. The taking of slaves, and the payment of tribute, within two decades after the imposition of colonial rule had completely given way to forms of taxation which virtually reduced the Lozi to an administrative presence, whereas the economic exploitation was achieved through the mechanisms of labour migration as furthered by the colonial state. In that period, the deprivation on the surface (in the field of chieftainship, educational and medical facilities, etc.), for which the Lozi were blamed, ultimately sprang from the logic of imperialism. From this angle, Nkoya ethnicity, even in the powerless form in which it expressed itself during the colonial period, had the effect of obscuring such class-consciousness as might have emerged among the villagers in the first decades of their incorporation into capitalism. Indirectly, such ethnicity appears as an ideological effect of imperialism.

Interestingly, among the non-Nkoya inhabitants of western Zambia, the prevailing stereotype about the Nkoya is not that of people deprived under the impact of Lozi domination, but that of hunters drinking honey-beer, expertly playing their xylophones, hiding in the forest from the responsibilities and vicissitudes of modern life, uninterested in commercial farming, and actively furthering truancy in their children. In other words, people who can afford to shun participation in modern life because their old ways are still fairly intact — rather than people who have been denied access to modern life as a result of Lozi machinations. This would suggest, as a possibility, that it is precisely the relative viability of their non-capitalist modes of production which prevented them from successfully manipulating capitalism to their own lasting benefit. But of course, stereotypes are not enough to go by.

The French School of Marxist anthropology (see Meillassoux 1975; Rey 1971, 1973; and the extensive discussions elsewhere in the present book) has two illuminating insights to offer for an understanding of the Nkoya situation. First, capitalism penetrating

the Third World has a well-defined interest in the partial survival of encapsulated, non-capitalist modes of production: for these are the niches where a new labour force is reproduced and where a discarded labour force is taken care of, at virtually no cost to the capitalist sector. And second, capitalism makes inroads into these non-capitalist modes of production by means of class alliances between capital, on the one hand, and the exploiting class-like groups in the non-capitalist modes of production, on the other.

What the Nkoya resent in their situation today, from this perspective would appear as common features of a labour reserve in a context of peripheral capitalism: lack of capitalist amenities that serve the reproduction of the labour force (schools, hospitals); and the limited size of local capitalist markets for labour and petty commodities (cash crops). But the other side of the coin is that, in their area, non-capitalist modes of production have persisted throughout the colonial era and, even if made subservient to the reproduction of labour for capitalist markets, still proved to be viable. Hunting, fishing, collecting and subsistence agriculture, organized on a kinship basis, even today are still economically vital undertakings, especially in the eastern part of the district. Of course, these forms of non-capitalist production cannot in themselves supply the cash needed today for clothing, tools, transport, etc. Moreover, none of these forms persists unaffected by capitalism. For instance, the Nkoya hunter today is often a youth who does not own the gun and ammunition he uses, but offers his skills to the owner of the gun in exchange for a portion of the bag he brings home; and this owner is usually at the same time a senior kinsman of the hunter, a village headman, and a retired labour migrant who has purchased a gun out of the proceeds of his sale of labour in the capitalist sector, and who sells most of the meat thus procured. Relations of production in hunting combine capitalist aspects (separation between worker and means of production, and between worker and product, and sale of this product as a commodity) with forms of authority and reciprocity proper to domestic and tributary modes of production outside capitalism.

These historical relations of production can survive, more or less, only if they continue to be embedded in the social, judicial and ritual forms in which they used to be enshrined in the past; or, more accurately, in forms mimicking these historical ones. Although these forms do not derive from a capitalist logic, it is not in the interest of capital to destroy them. And in some cases,

particularly those where capital can strike a class relationship with exploitative elements in the older modes of production, it actively supports them. For a different part of Africa, Rey (1971) has argued how the monetarization of bridewealth was one way to synchronize the interests of capital and village elders: thus the latter could continue to exploit male youths through their control over marriageable women, but now in a form which forced these youths to go and sell their labour as migrants. This process took place also among the Nkoya. But an even more striking form of class alliance formed the subsidies which the state paid to chiefs. Due to historical circumstances which we need not enter into, in Barotseland these subsidies were higher than anywhere else in Northern Rhodesia, and the Nkoya chiefs shared in them. At independence, this state of affairs was reinforced, and in recent years the subsidies have even been substantially increased. Paid out of state revenue, and in the early years consisting of a fixed percentage of the revenue from hut tax, these subsidies amount to a sharing out of the fruits of capitalist exploitation to the remnants of a tributary mode of production. Capitalism, while reproducing still a substantial part of its labour-force via an encapsulated *domestic* mode of production, such as found among the Nkoya today, in its turn reproduces an encapsulated *tributary* mode, at least in its symbolic and ceremonial form of councillors, retainers, *kapasus*, royal musicians, a palace of sorts. In passing we note that Nkoya chiefs benefit from an updated form of a treaty between the colonial state and the Lozi aristocracy; so surely the Lozis' effect on the Nkoya experience was not entirely negative.

Much more important is that we now find, in the political economy of that area, a reason for the Nkoya's insistence on the existence and persistence of their 'tribe'. As a distinct culture and society, in other words as a tribe, the Nkoya have never existed. However, to the extent to which the persistence of historical forms in an encapsulated, neo-traditional version is part and parcel of the mechanisms of the reproduction of cheap labour, and to the extent to which the articulation of modes of production in the expanding social formation to which the Nkoya area belongs, crystallizes around a state-subsidized neo-traditional chieftainship,⁴² Nkoya ethnicity can be considered a product of this situation of articulation.

In this perspective, the view of ethnicity as a primordial attachment to a tribal model dating back to pre-colonial times

becomes more than bad social science: it becomes part of the ideology of capitalism itself — but I am sure that advocates of that view would have equally nasty things to say about the conception of ethnicity advanced here.

In the juxtaposition between non-capitalist aspects of Nkoya rural society and capitalism, the specific features of the former take on a new function: they are to be the legitimation of kin-based claims of assistance, and the resulting security through which people peripherally participating in a capitalist order seek shelter in non-capitalist relations of production which exist in the shadow of, and in servitude to, that capitalist order. Nkoya ethnicity is the expression of this problem at the level of consciousness: by stressing the viability, splendour and antiquity of the non-capitalist modes of production, it struggles to keep them intact, so that the individual worker in the process of peasantization and proletarianization can effectively benefit from what remnants of these non-capitalist modes still exist. Their survival has become both problematic and vital — hence they need ethnicity to endow them with rather more reality and resilience than they in fact possess.

Also the role of modern politicians is thrown into relief. At the level of the state's organizational and ideological apparatus (government and the party), these leaders represent a new phase in the class alliances by means of which capitalism imposes itself on pre-existing modes of production. Combining traditional elite connotations, ethnicity-building and their own capitalist enterprises, they represent solutions for the contradictions inherent in articulation. Through their activities in the retail trade, agricultural development schemes (for which they hire wage-labour), and their supervisory capacity as members of party and local government bodies, they further capitalism at the same time as helping to buttress non-capitalist modes of production against capitalism by the emphatic support they give to traditional authorities and the Nkoya ethnic identity in general. They further incorporation in the national state, but in a form that conceals the exploitative and manipulative elements of the political process, and of their own role; and thus, as political and ideological brokers, they legitimate the state in the eyes of the Nkoya, and at the same time further Nkoya interests within national and subnational political areas.

Under these conditions it would be ludicrous to expect, with John Saul (1979), the Nkoya to display explicit surface manifes-

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tations of class struggle, albeit in the ideological idiom of ethnicity. Both the incorporation in the Lozi state in the course of the nineteenth century, and the peripheral integration in capitalism, objectively can be taken as forms of class formation: the imposition of new form of exploitation. It would not be altogether unjustified ultimately to attribute the depth of emotion and the vehemence of expression attending Nkoya ethnicity today to a form of class struggle seeking in vain to break through. This, I realized much later, is probably an important reason behind my own emotional identification with the Nkoya.

The analysis of Nkoya ethnicity in terms of the articulation of modes of production brings out both the limitations of ethnicity and its power. In their ideology of ethnicity the Nkoya express a partial interpretation of historical developments: they identify the Lozi as their suppressors, but fail to recognize the forces of capitalism and colonialism that lie behind Lozi domination. In this respect there would be some reason to consider ethnicity, with Mafeje (1971), as 'false consciousness'. Yet such a characterization would be less adequate in so far as it underestimates the very real power of ethnicity — its emotional appeal. In the perspective of an articulation of modes of production we have the beginning of an explanation of why ethnicity can take such a powerful hold on people: ethnicity is revealed as an ideological reaction not to phantasms of the imagination but to very real conditions — the uprootedness resulting from capitalist penetration.⁴³

However, the trappings of ethnicity, under conditions of articulation and class alliances, prevent the Nkoya from adopting anything remotely resembling a revolutionary consciousness. Considering the remarkable choice of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary ideological positions available in the district in the 1970s — from Maoist Chinese building the Lusaka-Kaoma highway, through MPLA and SWAPO guerrilla camps, to the South African sponsored adventurer Mushala — the Nkoya have not exactly shown an inclination towards left-wing radicalism, to say the least.

Conclusion

Seeking to project himself against the surging flood of data, the researcher tentatively cuts out a field of study for his personal

attention; and since he is studying people who themselves are constantly constructing and reconstructing their reality, he may be tempted to let his analytical distinctions coincide with folk distinctions. What the would-be Nkoya expected from me, in this context, was that I would lend my own intellectual resources, access to national and international media of publication and scholarship, not for the production of a more penetrating and thus liberating form of knowledge and consciousness, but for the buttressing of their own emerging ethnic illusion. It was up to me to describe 'the Nkoya' in all the historical glory of their nineteenth-century chieftainships, and to enlist, among the present-day population of Zambia, a maximum number of inhabitants of western and central Zambia as *de facto* or potential members of the 'Nkoya tribe'. I have described how I was at first caught in this trap, and how I scrambled out of it by the adoption of the analytical framework of modes of production and their articulation, which not only belong to a different realm of discourse from that in which the Nkoya consider themselves a tribe, but that also explodes the whole notion of the Nkoya, or some such groups, as a unit of study. What remains is a complicated picture of relationships, informed by Marxist anthropology, history and political economy, and far removed from the Nkoya experience and from the unit of study it seemed to suggest. There is no obvious, let alone a natural, unit of study that is more likely than others to give insight into the sorts of relationships which I have tried to disentangle in this argument. A simple spatio-temporal delimitation would not do either: the picture of a field of specific relationships which emerges as the major result of my Nkoya research is neither geographically contiguous (for it extends far beyond the Nkoya chief's areas of Kaoma district, into urban Zambia, North Atlantic metropolises, and my own department), nor historically defined — extending as it does from the twentieth century into the eighteenth.⁴⁴

Instead of a clear-cut unit of study as a source of security for the field-worker and as a handy artefact to be manipulated by the cross-cultural comparativist, we thus end up with an awareness of interesting questions and possible sources of inspiration; an interdisciplinary outlook; and the intention to analyse the dialectics of consciousness not only among the people selected for study, but also within the realm of scholarship, and ultimately, in one's private reactions as a researcher.

The emerging picture, while explaining to some extent the nature of Nkoya-ness, helps, I hope, to eradicate the stereotype of bounded ethnic groups which happily lend themselves to cross-cultural analysis. As the Kaoma district governor exclaimed during a heated political meeting, in preparation of the 1973 general elections:

This nonsense has to stop! Chief, you must control your people!
There are no Nkoya! 'Nkoya' does not exist!

Neither do the Lozi, Bemba, Tonga or Ndembu, unless as phenomena at the level of consciousness, whose dialectics we — as the producers of a different, and possibly more liberating, sort of consciousness — should trace and explain, instead of adopt. Our results may at first puzzle, disappoint or infuriate the people we are writing about; but ultimately we may manage to show them their own situation in a form less veiled by the phantasms produced by their political-economic conditions.

Notes

- 1 Earlier drafts of this chapter were presented at the *Journal of Southern African Studies*/Social Science Research Council Conference on the Interactions of History and Anthropology in Southern Africa, Manchester, September 1980; and at the African Studies Centre's Africa Colloquium, Leiden, February 1981. An earlier version was published in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 8, 1: 51–81; it is here reprinted in a revised version, by the kind permission of the journal's editors and of the Oxford University Press. I am indebted to R. Buijtenhuijs, C. Bundy, R. Frankenberg, P. Konings, A. Mafeje, C. Mitchell, C. Murray, T. Ranger, P. Worsley and especially P. Geschiere for comments and criticism; for full acknowledgments concerning my research into 'Nkoya' ethnicity, see van Binsbergen (1981b): 5f. The approach as developed in this chapter was greatly influenced by the discussions of the Amsterdam Work-group on Marxist Anthropology; however, for reasons set out in the Preface to the present book, this chapter could not benefit from specific discussions within the work-group.
- 2 Quoted on the jacket of Colson (1970); this quotation is meant to illustrate the uncritical use of the tribal model in anthropology as manifested by the *Times Educational Supplement* review, not as an adequate description of van Velsen (1964).
- 3 Some progress, however, has been made with regard to the religious aspect of modes of production, see Houtart (1980), Houtart & Lemercinier (1977), and with special emphasis on articulation, van

- Binsbergen (1981b).
- 4 Cf. Meillassoux (1964); Terray 1969; similar criticism also in Kahn & Llobera (1980): 88: 'these writers appear to share the view that "societies" as conceived by traditional anthropology are relevant units of analysis.' Rey, however is a different case: without explicitly discussing the problem of ethnicity, in his monograph (1971) on the Mossendjo area (Congo-Brazzaville) he takes not a 'tribe', but the region as his unit of analysis.
- 5 This point is argued at great length in van Binsbergen (1981b): chs 1, 7, 8.
- 6 This is already clear from the book titles of Colson (1958, 1968, 1970), Watson (1958), Turner (1968a, 1968b), Colson & Gluckman (1951), Gluckman (1957, 1965), Cunnison (1959), Marwick (1965), Scudder (1962). This selection does not include articles and papers; studies by Rhodes-Livingstone researchers outside rural Zambia; or studies (like Richards 1939) not published under the aegis of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute.
- 7 Mitchell (1956, 1969), Epstein (1958), Gluckman (1960), Harries-Jones (1969).
- 8 Van Velsen (1964, 1967), Turner (1968a). Strictly speaking, of course, van Velsen's work was not a direct contribution to Zambian rural anthropology, based as it was on field-work in Malawi. its impact on both rural and urban studies in Zambia was, however, immense.
- 9 J. van Velsen, personal communication, September 1980.
- 10 Gluckman (1968a); cf. Gluckman (1945), where the concept of tribe is used in the same fashion. One would have expected a lengthy discussion of the problem of tribe in Gluckman's *Closed Systems and Open Minds: The Limits of Naivety in Social Anthropology* (1964); but apart from a cursory remark relating to Bailey's research in India, little of relevance can be found here. The book is about the uses and limitations of anthropologist's naivety vis-à-vis other disciplines, not vis-à-vis their own. Hence, I suppose, the statement by Gluckman (p. 199, n. 44) that he considers himself to possess an 'expertise on tribes' . . .
- 11 The sub-title of Long (1968).
- 12 Perhaps the last time that, on the basis of his own field-work, a researcher discussed temporary social situations in rural Zambia in terms of a 'tribal community' was Johnson & Bond (1974). However, in his monograph, Bond (1976) did much better than that. Meanwhile the Zambian material remains available for non-field-workers to take their pick. Thus Sharp (1981) discusses an Afrikaans South African M.A. thesis, on ethnicity in Zambia, by J. H. Booyens, PUCHO, 1978. Based on library research, Booyens's argument is built on the notion of nineteenth-century tribes (*ethniee*) founded in primordial attachments and insurmountable mutual hostilities. Sharp points at the close links between such a view of ethnicity, and the ideology of Apartheid.
- 13 Lancaster (1966, 1971, 1974, 1977). The title of Lancaster's book (1981) follows the Rhodes-Livingstone pattern in its loosely-descriptive

- use of the tribal label. Poewe's work is remarkably free from tribal illusions (1978, 1979, 1981), in which she continues the pattern set by Cunnison.
- 14 Extensive reference, however, is made to Gluckman's work on Barotseland. Gwyn Prins's (1979) dismissive review of *Roots* (as the book is affectionately called among Southern Africanists, who have already accorded it the status of a modern classic) seems to imply that the book could have done with rather more anthropological inspiration.
 - 15 On the crucial significance of the specialist audience in the process of methodological and theoretical innovation, see de Groot (1966): 27f.
 - 16 Cf. Kuper (1977b, 1980). Quoted in this context, these references do not do full justice to the type of regional comparative analysis Kuper is engaged in.
 - 17 My field-work was conducted alternately in Kaoma district, western Zambia, and Lusaka, from February 1972 to April 1974; September–November 1977; and August 1978.
 - 18 Douglas (1964), Richards (1950), Turner (1967), van Binsbergen (1981b); the latter study, however, does reflect on the problem of the unit of study, cf. (1981b): 13f., 66f., 136f., 216f.
 - 19 See van Binsbergen (1979): 31f. for a discussion of this problem with regard to the definition of kin-groups among the 'Nkoya'; the significance of situational aspects in the description and analysis of religious phenomena is stressed in van Binsbergen (1981b): 37f., 84, and in the Introduction of van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers (in press).
 - 20 Notably, an exploration of regional patterns of religious change throughout southern Central Africa; see van Binsbergen (1981b).
 - 21 See Helm (1968); Gutkind (1970); Godelier (1973). While the concept of 'tribe' is under heavy attack in modern anthropology, we should not ignore the fact that outside this discipline, and particularly in political science, there is a considerable amount of literature that still attaches primary, or at least independent, significance to ethnic factors (such authors as Bienen, Rotchild, LeVine).
 - 22 Luyana (see Givon 1971) is the old court language among the Lozi. It has managed to preserve itself despite the rapid and universal adoption of the southern Bantu Kololo language in the first half of the nineteenth century. Luyana and Kololo (= Lozi) are not mutually intelligible, but Luyana and Nkoya (or Mashasha) are.
 - 23 See van Binsbergen (1981b): 21, where this point is argued at greater length.
 - 24 It was reported, as such, by G. H. Nicholls, 'Notes on the natives inhabiting the Baluba sub-district', 1906, enclosure in KTJ 2/1, Zambia National Archives, Lusaka; Stirke (1922): 63; Smith & Dale (1920): vol. 1, p. 94; Clay (1946): 4; Shimunika (in press). For a daring, but historically untenable approach to male puberty ceremonies in this part of Zambia, see de Heusch (1978).
 - 25 Cf. Colson (1964, 1968). In her 1964 chapter she critically assesses the tribal model as applied to pre-colonial Africa. However, the greater sophistication vis-à-vis tribes in Colson's later work does not seem to affect the validity of my observations concerning the implicit, loosely

- descriptive use of the tribal model in much of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute work, including her own. Further see Lancaster (1974), Roberts (1976): 63f.
- 26 See Tabler (1963a); Nicholls (see note 24); reports on the Gielgud-Anderson expedition to the Kafue Hook, BSI/93 and KTJ 1/1, Zambia National Archives, Lusaka; Shimunika (in press), Bailey (1913, 1914), Smith & Dale (1920), Holy (1975).
 - 27 Shimunika (in press); interview, Naliele Royal Establishment, Kaoma district, 28 October 1977.
 - 28 Livingstone (1858). In addition to the sources mentioned in note 26, and the official tribal and linguistic maps published over the years by the Surveyor General, sources on this point include: Merle *et al.* (1933): 'tribal map'; Fortune (1959, 1963); and Mankoya District Notebook, KSX 4, Zambia National Archives, Lusaka.
 - 29 Adopting Lancaster's (1974) approach.
 - 30 The Lozi prefix *Ma-* instead of the Nkoya form *Ba-* points to the fact that the administrators' perception of the Nkoya as an ethnic group reflected Lozi views, rather than the local people's self-perception. The word *boma* means district centre in tropical English.
 - 31 The probably more substantial pressure from the side of Chinyama chiefs coming in from the north is not reflected in collective Nkoya memory as documented in my data — probably as a result of two factors: extensive assimilation of Chinyama and Mbwela/Nkoya elements over the past centuries, and the considerable geographical distance between the main sites where I conducted oral historical research and the area where the Chinyama impact was primarily felt. See, however, Derricourt & Papstein (1977), Papstein (1978).
 - 32 A very similar case are the Luvale as studied by Papstein (1978, 1980). My discussions with Robert Papstein since 1974 have greatly contributed to my understanding of Nkoya history and its crucial role in Nkoya ethnicity.
 - 33 For the history of western Zambia, see Mainga (1972). Dr Mainga's work is particularly resented by modern and traditional Nkoya leaders today because of the way she handled the oral materials presented to her at the Nkoya chiefly capitals; however, this is not the place to assess whether such resentment is justified. Further see Caplan (1970); Stokes (1966); Mulford (1967): ch. vi; Prins (1980); Ranger (1968). For approaches from a Marxist point of view, see Clarence-Smith (1979); Frankenberg (1978). On the Nkoya specifically: Clay (1946); Shimunika (in press), anonymous (n.d.); van Binsbergen (1981b): chs 4, 5, 7.
 - 34 ANC = African National Congress, the political party from which UNIP (= United National Independence Party) branched off in 1959; in 1972 ANC was incorporated in UNIP as part of the creation of 'one-party participatory democracy' in Zambia.
 - 35 *Testamenta ya Yipya/Nyimbo*, (1952).
 - 36 The term 'branch of production', for a complex of productive activities that can be meaningfully distinguished within a mode of production, derives from Terray (1969). Beach applied this term successfully to the

- pre-colonial Shona economy (1977), although his argument is essentially non-Marxist. A related concept is that of 'form of production', defined by Le Brun & Gerry (1975: 20) as existing for instance, 'at the margins of the capitalist mode of production, but . . . nevertheless integrated into and subordinate to it'. For a preliminary description of branches of production in the social formation at Kaoma district, see van Binsbergen (1978): however, that analysis is theoretically still very defective. A much revised version is forthcoming in *Africa*.
- 37 Oral evidence on this institution and its historical development is scanty, but we may surmise that what was involved was actually a local version of the institution of pawnship, postulated by Douglas (1964) to form a general feature of clan structures in the Central African matrilineal belt.
- 38 In addition to oral traditions I myself collected, there are four collections systematized by their collectors/authors: Clay (1946); Ikacana (1971); Shimunika (in press); anonymous (n.d.). Extensive treatment of this material and relevant archival data is in my forthcoming monograph on the Nkoya.
- 39 Mainga (1973); Papstein (1978); van Horn (1977); Clarence-Smith (1979).
- 40 Stokes (1966); Caplan (1970); van Horn (1977): 155f.
- 41 Materials for such an interpretation could be gleaned from: Mainga (1972); Prins (1980); Roberts (1976): 115f.; Flint (1970).
- 42 This is an important point. Allegiance to a particular chief tends to form a focus for a Zambian's perception of his or her rural home and ethnic affiliation. This is reflected, and reinforced, in Zambia's administrative procedures. Since independence in 1964, ethnic affiliation has never been asked by census enumerators — in 'One Zambia One Nation' (one of UNIP's main slogans) ethnic affiliation officially does not exist; but a person's chief appears on a citizen's National Registration Card.
- 43 This interpretation of ethnicity as an ideological response to the articulation of modes of production comes close to my analysis of religious, as distinct from ethnic, mobilization in the case of the Lumpa church in northern Zambia; see van Binsbergen (1981b): 48–65, 266–316.
- 44 If one were to define the concept of social formation as the particular interrelationship between various articulated modes of production at a given time and place (Terray), rather than as a specific interrelationship between infrastructure and superstructure at a given time and place (Godelier), such a concept of social formation might in fact begin to provide the sort of unit of study under which to subsume the present analysis of ethnicity in terms of, among others, a response to the articulation of modes of production. However, such a social formation would have to be considered, Wallerstein-fashion, in the context of the total world system, since the dialectics of Nkoya ethnicity refer at the same time to the provincial, the national and the intercontinental level; the analytical gains of adopting such an expanding, and theoretically contentious, unit of study would then be very limited.

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Chapter 7

Marxist theory and anthropological practice: the application of French Marxist anthropology in field-work

Wim van Binsbergen and Peter Geschiere

Introduction¹

Is there a case for a Marxist approach in anthropological field-work?

The present collection of papers explores the relevance of the theories of French Marxist anthropologists for empirical anthropological analysis. Our work-group's interest in these theories sprang mainly from the fact that here, we hoped, new perspectives were to be found for the analysis of our own field-work data. The preceding chapters may have indicated in what ways these Marxist theories can be used for interpreting specific sets of anthropological data. However, our project equally raises questions as to the relevance of these theories for the actual practice of anthropological field-work — for data collection itself. As has been emphasized in chapter 1 by Geschiere and Raatgever, our own field-work, in its design and execution, was still little influenced by Marxist theories. Moreover, in general it is as yet far from clear to what extent these theories have specific implications for the practice of anthropological field-work. Therefore in the present chapter we shall embark on a discussion of these practical implications, leaving the more theoretical evaluation of the French school to Reini Raatgever (ch. 8 below).

The main issue in this chapter is in what way these theories are to be used in the earlier phases of the anthropological empirical cycle: to what extent do they suggest new starting-points and new leading questions for the anthropologist in the field? Of course this question is related to the wider problem of whether a Marxist