

**There Used To Be Order**

**Life on the Copperbelt after the privatisation  
of the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines**

**A thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Social  
Anthropology**

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## Abstract

The thesis examines what happened to the texture of place and the experience of life on a Zambian Copperbelt town when the state-owned mine, the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM) was privatized beginning 1997 following the implementation of structural adjustment policies that introduced free market policies and drastically reduced social welfare.

The Copperbelt has long been a locus for innovative research on urbanisation in Africa. My study, unusual in the ethnographic corpus in its examination of middle-income decline, directs us to thinking of the Copperbelt not only as an extractive locale for copper whose activities are affected by the market, but also as a place where the residents' engagement with the reality of losing jobs and struggling to earn a living after the withdrawal of mine welfare is re-texturing simultaneously both the material and social character of the place.

It builds on an established anthropological engagement with the region that began with the Manchester school. This had done much to develop a theoretical approach to social change. The dissertation contributes to this literature by reflecting on how landscape and the art of living are interwoven and co-produce possibilities that, owing to both historical contingencies (for example, market fluctuations) and social formation (the kinds of networks and relationships to which one has access, positions in a nascent class structure and access to material means) make certain forms of inhabiting the world (im) possible, (un) successful for oneself and others.

Ethnographic fieldwork using qualitative research methods was conducted over a two-year period between 2007 and 2009 with a core of close informant relationships from which a wider network was established. This was complemented by two quantitative neighbourhood surveys to measure the scale of observable phenomena.

The author makes a case for an anthropology of "trying", an expression often made in response by Copperbelt residents to how they are getting on. It is one that indicates an improvised life and offers an analytical approach to exploring the back-story to the residents' observation that in the (ZCCM) past there used to be order.



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## Introduction

### **‘There used to be order’: Life on the Copperbelt after the privatisation of the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines**

The sale of the Zambian state-owned mining conglomerate, the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM), in the mid 1990s left a majority of mine town residents anxious about making a living and sustaining life. In the formerly middle-class suburban area that is the focus of my study, residents dug wells in their backyard for water and cut trees that lined the streets to fire bricks moulded from the clay of anthills that dot the landscape. They also planted crops in their backyard and in the open spaces of the parks and golf club lawns. In the dissertation, I explore people’s experiences of the texture of place and the shaping of life on a Zambian Copperbelt town following this sale, part of the widespread implementation of structural adjustment policies that introduced free market policies<sup>1</sup> and drastically reduced social welfare in Zambia.

The study, which focuses on a low-density former mine suburb in the Copperbelt town of Luanshya, where I lived in the years 2007 to 2010, demonstrates how this transformation has influenced the urban character of the mine town; how its inhabitants seek a livelihood in very trying times; how they enskill themselves; negotiate the moral and spatial boundaries of the free market; and make sense of their lives and change. Copperbelt residents say that in their recent past “there used to be order”, whereas the present is characterised by uncertainty and incoherence. The thesis describes how they navigate this present to “get by” and “get on with life”. I use an exploratory ontology that values *trying* as a way to open up possibilities, even in the likelihood of encountering impossibilities.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1991, after its first multiparty elections since it had become a one-party state in 1972, Zambia adopted full-scale free-market policies.

My work departs from previous ethnographies on the Copperbelt that, although they have done much to highlight the social and political situation, have paid less attention to describing how its inhabitants engage with it as a place. By drawing on theoretical and methodological perspectives in anthropology that emphasise performance and movement, I attempt to break from the systemic representations of the Copperbelt that do not account for the effort, experimental action, poetic and textural engagement with place and authority of everyday life in constrained circumstances.

### **The Copperbelt as place**

To open, an extract from my journal.

Walking in the early morning, on the streets of the Copperbelt town, Luanshya, I get fleeting moments of the same buoyancy I felt as a child walking down the roads of the Copperbelt. It had rained in the night, the light is soft and the air is fresh. I watch the children emerge from their homes, heading to school in their school uniforms. They seem so pensive. I watch them, they watch me, and I dodge the potholes full of water. I cross to the other side of the road, away from the house with the manhole that spews sewerage onto the road. I approach the house with the lovely garden and the only reasonable stretch of flamboyant trees on the road. I walk past it. On these walks, I go past the shiny new little metal Coca Cola shop selling bread and cell phone talk-time. The shop is in front of a house painted with Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck cartoons; I think it also serves as a nursery school. I walk past another little shop, a wood off-cut cabin with a vividly and naively painted side profile of a man with a 'table' cut. It is a barber shop located near the road and outside a house shaded by mango trees.

There is a stretch of the walk I do not like, and that I particularly dislike at midday when the hot sun beats on my head. A road largely devoid of trees, its apparent barrenness broken by the

termite eaten stumps of yesterday's trees. Then there is the detour I like. It is to a place framed by memory; it reminds me of my childhood summer afternoons at the public pool, of picnics and fountains. It is the town's public pool. Amidst everything else, I find it a truly beautiful place, an Olympic size pool and pared down Grecian-like change rooms set on the shorter sides of the pool, palm trees, fountains and more so, looking like yesterday, like the Copperbelt I knew then! I have been to the pool on many mornings, the guards there allowing me to walk around it. I have not swam in it, though I have wanted to and planned to on many occasions, because I am not sure it is cleaned. It looks clean and one morning I found one person swimming in it. The thing is, I have seen the overgrown tennis courts, rat-infested recreation halls, the desolate but still beautiful golf course and wondered, can the swimming pool have escaped their fate, is there something I am missing?

There is a stretch of the walk I like. On most mornings on this stretch of the road a rooster struts, followed by some hens. During school holidays I also see the little group of children who sit out early by the road, outside their home, watching people go by. I remember as a child being curious about where people went, my world bounded by the routines that did not take me very far – other than the imaginaries of places beyond my experience. One morning, while walking the rooster's stretch of road, I happened to look to the house on my left, which had a street shop, this one a metal cargo container painted red. The house was a large old red brick bungalow in the same style as most others in the area, and, from its long front veranda, to my surprise, streamed out a flutter of chickens, ushered out by three children. I was amazed at the sheer number of chickens that streamed out of the house.

### **The Copperbelt as I remember it**

I spent most of my childhood on the Copperbelt, growing up in a small mining company town called Kalulushi that had been built in the 1950s. A

third-generation Copperbelt resident, I considered the Copperbelt my home. My paternal grandfather, born in 1918 in what was then known as Fort Johnstone in Nyasaland (now Malawi), had migrated in his early twenties to work in the Wankie coal mines in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and then on to the Copperbelt town of Mufulira in 1948, where he had been employed as a general worker on the mines. He met my paternal grandmother while she was visiting an older sister who had married a mineworker. My paternal grandmother's family had moved from then Fiera (now known as Luangwa), a border town between Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique, to Southern Rhodesia where my great grandfather had worked before moving to Livingstone where he was employed as a shop assistant for the Sussman brothers (see Macmillan, 2005) and then moving with them in 1940 to Broken Hill (Kabwe) where they had opened a store. My father was born to my grandparents on the Copperbelt in 1949 and had grown up in a mine township in Mufulira, experiencing the Africanisation policies described in the latter part of this chapter that saw an improvement in mine-workers' welfare. He described to me how his parents, my grandparents, had moved from a three-roomed earth block house with communal ablution facilities to a four-roomed brick house with internal ablution and electricity in 1955.

My father, also a former ZCCM mine employee, had worked as a mechanical engineer at the mines. He had been initially been employed to work with Roan Copper Mines in the 1970s and his training and tertiary education were sponsored by the mining company.<sup>2</sup> The Roan Copper Mines together with Nchanga Consolidated Copper Mines later merged to

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<sup>2</sup> Though my father had gone to state-run schools in Mufulira the mines had provided support to them and had, at secondary school level, recruited pupils from there to join their jobs on training program or offered scholarships for tertiary education in mining related disciplines. My father had opted for an in-house training program with the Roan Copper Mines as an engineering draughts person. This had also entailed enrolment onto a City and Guilds Technicians' program. In-house trainees on such programs were accommodated in furnished single flats in a low-density area of the mine township. After my father had completed his in-house training he had applied to pursue a mechanical engineering degree with the University of Zambia, sponsored by the mines in 1974, and on graduation in 1979 returned to work on the mines.

form the fully nationalised ZCCM. I provide a background to the mines in the next chapter.

I attended a primary school that was run by the state-owned copper mining conglomerate the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM) in Kalulushi, Copperbelt. Throughout my seven years of education there, I had only one locally trained teacher, and that only in my last year. All the other teachers were British and Irish migrants trained in their countries.

As strange as it might sound today – this was at the height of the new post-colonial nation-building led by Kenneth Kaunda, then president of Zambia – it did not strike me, my parents, my classmates or my neighbours, as anything out of the ordinary. These schools were built after the colonial period, under Kaunda’s pro-active education policy. He believed that he could mix the best of all worlds by providing excellent formal education modelled on the Western system while preserving and nurturing African principles of solidarity, conviviality and reciprocal exchange. The school population was also mixed: one-third of the children were from the families of British migrant miners and mining cadres working and living in the Copperbelt; another third from migrant mining workers from Indian subcontinent and the Philippines; the other third were local Zambians. The provision of excellent education also served the purpose of attracting skilled labourers and managers in the mines who would have otherwise sent their children to boarding schools overseas, at a much higher cost. This would have made their move to Zambia much less attractive. Compared to most other state schools founded during the colonial period, there was no corporal punishment, and I was glad for that. Teachers did try to anglicise our names, but in retrospect, while it seems quite odd and even ludicrous, I don’t think my friends whose names were anglicised made much of this.

This melting pot of subtle oddities and creative opportunities was well in line with Kaunda’s syncretic approach to nation-building. As we were constantly reminded about “One Zambia, One Nation”, the catchy chorus to Kaunda’s public speeches, consciously or not, we felt it was inappropriate

to delve into our differences. Despite the long-term economic decline that started in the early 1980s and peaked toward the end of the 1990s, people like my family in the mining welfare system, with its large net of benefits ranging from housing to health and education, were the most protected. When riots about food shortages started in the urban areas in the mid-1980s, the people who had been most affected by the decline were from the non-mining sectors of the urban population.

Kaunda's socialist liberal dream was best symbolised by the mining system which was nationalised progressively from 1969 (see later in chapter). My school was one of the examples. With its idiosyncratic mix of African humanism, liberal socialism, Western standards of education and skill, and ecumenical religious spirit, Kaunda had created one of the most successful experiments in middle class formation outside the West. I only realised much later that we were *de facto* an elite, despite the humble backgrounds of my family and many of my classmates' families. At the same time, Kaunda's nationalism did not allow for global consumerism to penetrate in any major way the life of most Zambians until the change of regime to multi-party democracy in the early 1990s. Consumer goods were scarce, and Tip Top, the state-owned company that offered a substitute for Western soft drinks and DPB ice cream, also locally produced, were the most we could crave for. Protected by our benevolent dictator, a relatively stable welfare system, and shielded from the frills and trivialities of a fully-grown free market economy, my classmates and I had a carefree childhood, passing large parts of our time in a school system that fostered creativity and skill through a comprehensive program that included arts and sports. School competitions in the arts stimulated children to produce poetry, short stories, plays, paintings and sculptures. At that stage, my aspiration was to become an artist-scientist. At school or at home, nobody told me I couldn't. The era embodied the possibility of dreams into the future.

This idyllic view of my childhood sat in contrast to those of my parents, in particular my mother, who had not been raised on the Copperbelt and had worked outside the mine system. In her accounts of life on the Copperbelt,

she remembers queuing for basic commodities like sugar, soap, flour and cooking oil that were not available in the stores because of the inefficiencies of what was then a centrally controlled economy. These shortages made the running of domestic life a stressful activity. In addition, she felt that aspects of Copperbelt sociality, like the mine recreation clubs, provided men (the majority of the mine work force) with an escape mechanism that prevented them from dealing with the day to day difficulties of life in this period, as James Ferguson has eloquently described in his ethnography “Expectations of Modernity” (1999). For my parents, and others of their generation who came to age during the optimistic post-independence years that lasted until the late 1970s, the economic decline of the 1980s that Ferguson describes was a big blow to their social and material expectations of modernity. In addition, that Kaunda’s one party state fostered limitations of free speech, and the inefficient management of parastatals (Woldring, 1983) was also a source of general discontent.

My mother’s expression of this discontent led her to become a trade unionist, forming part of the movement that was instrumental in bringing the end of Kaunda’s rule. Her involvement in labour strike activity, though formal in this case, was characteristic of many women who, often with their children, took to the Copperbelt streets to voice their discontent and were crucially important in negotiating better conditions for mine workers. However, like Jacob Dlamini (2009) writing about growing up during the years of South Africa’s apartheid, our memories of the past were not coloured predominantly by strife but by the texture of other aspects of life. In the same way, the Kaunda years as they are predominantly narrated (Burnell 1994, Geisler 1992, Mills 1992) were not only of economic mismanagement and political repression, but also comprised other memories. Thus for me, and many of the children who grew up within the mine system in the declining years of the 1980s, this past was not viewed in the same way as my mother saw it, variously as one of consumer deprivation and political repression, but one of simpler pleasures.

While the colonial past, prior to independence in 1964, is woven into Copperbelt life in the landscape and layout of the towns, I argue that it is more of a sub-texture, one that is not as often referred to in Copperbelt resident's nostalgic memories of the past. What Copperbelt residents often refer to were the optimistic post-independence years of the Kaunda era, characterised by welfare largesse and a large developmental agenda, until the decline beginning the 1980s that makes the subject of Ferguson's ethnography. For Copperbelt residents today, the past is remembered as having been characterised by order, while the present and its future are characterised by uncertainty.

My idea of a seamless future that unravelled to reveal one's aspirations was disrupted in 1995, when my father, who was then working for a ZCCM subsidiary company and based in Lusaka, was retrenched. This was just a few months after I finished high school at the ZCCM-run Mpelembe Secondary School in Kitwe, on the Copperbelt. I remember it as a time of great uncertainty that underlined the precariousness of the middle-class life we had lived. Our family lived in rented accommodation, paid for by the ZCCM subsidiary. We owned no other property. The majority of the household assets were owned by the mines. My three younger siblings were still enrolled at mine schools that were heavily subsidised by ZCCM. My mother's income as a Personal Assistant in another parastatal that was yet to be privatised was not enough to sustain a middle-income way of life and status. Our situation was no different from what other former formal sector employees and their families were going through. People downscaled, found other ways of earning a living and attempted to cope with life, while others struggled or passed on. However, I was struck, and still am, at people's capacity to attempt to create new combinations for survival amidst great physical and psychosocial hardship.

The Copperbelt, so familiar to me, had, in its economic crisis, also become an unfamiliar place to me. My emotive experiences of the Copperbelt are moments of lightness quickly brought to ground by inconveniences like potholes that make me all too aware of the materiality of the place in which

I live. I have moments of wonder that spark my imagination and lapses of anxiety when I think about what the images I see signify. It is these feelings that made me want to undertake study of the Copperbelt. This is the way I went about it.

If I had to describe the moment that I began my fieldwork, I would say it began with the renovation of my fieldwork home, a process that I describe in Chapter Two. It provided me with the opportunity to become a direct continuous participant observer as it engaged me in a process of 'doing'. Bernard argued that this method of research is 'worth the effort' if 'you want to know what people do, and won't settle for what they say' (1994, p312). Tim Ingold (2000) made a similar point, saying that understanding skill cannot really be accomplished only by observing but requires doing. As I engaged in the making of my fieldwork home habitable in as short as possible a time, I became more aware of the constraints that hindered this process. It provided me the avenue to reflect on the difficulties that my Copperbelt informants had trying to get things done amidst social difficulties and uncertainties in the post-privatisation era. It also made me aware of the opportunities that emerged out of this context and the varying situations and skills that made some people better or less able to cope with their changed circumstances.

To depart from my own reflections on the Copperbelt as a place, I engaged in conversation with people I met on my walks, on public transport and in other public spaces to solicit their views on the Copperbelt today, the past and future, and their own life stories. Through this process, as well as the activity of renovating the house, I identified my key informants, who are presented in the various cases throughout the thesis. I conducted both informal and semi-structured interviews to elicit stories of their lives in relation to place. Sandercock (in Stiffel et.al, 2005) writes of the importance of telling the story of place from the perspective of those who experience it. Sandercock argued that the experience and story told of a particular place will vary according to the background and even world-view. These variations are important in that they draw attention to gendered and

intergenerational stories of place, for example as characterised in Chapter Six on Copperbelt youths' views of a future.

I was aware of the potential problems my informants would have had in describing things that are hard to explain in words. Henrietta Moore's (1986) call for attention to metaphors of people's everyday practice was useful in overcoming this problem. It was these metaphors, often presented in the lingua franca of the Copperbelt, Bemba, in which I am fluent, that provided a conceptual understanding of people's views of the social changes that the sale of the ZCCM mines wrought. In the stories they told of place they also allowed me to explore how power relations were enacted and how people's interests and values were framed, understood and justified.

I spent a significant portion of my research 'hanging out' with my key informants, observing as they went about their everyday activities, and noting my own and their impressions of social situations we encountered. I looked at what went on and what they did, but also how people behaved, tones of voice, bodily gestures, drawing loosely from Ervin Goffman's (1959) "Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" and Gregory Bateson's (1972) analysis of human communication. These observations are reflected in Chapter Five, which focuses on the performance of gender on the Copperbelt. The time spent with my key informants and their families also allowed me to build detailed case stories. Most of them lived in the former mining low-density suburb that comprised approximately one thousand lots and where my fieldwork home was located. As a result I encountered many of my informants daily enabling me to observe in close proximity their going-ons.

To establish the extent and scale of observed phenomena I conducted two surveys in the 'low-density' former mine suburb of Luanshya which formed the main hub of my research. The Manchester School anthropologists who did much urban anthropological research found this a useful method for collecting basic biographical data on income, household composition, and

social affiliations and people's perceptions. For example, a key material change that occurred with the re-privatisation of the mines was the sale of mine-owned housing to former ZCCM employees. In my initial survey of fifty-six households, conducted in July/August 2008, I asked questions regarding house ownership because my observations and interviews with key informants suggested that the privatization of housing starting from the mid 1990s might have affected settlement patterns. In the survey I asked residents whether they were the owners of the house or were renting, and if renting where the owners of the house lived; if there were people considered part of the household but who were currently not living there and if residents had a backyard garden, field or farm where they grew food and if so, where it was located. In a follow-up survey, this one of 100 households conducted in August 2009, I included questions on family composition and bereavements after hearing many accounts of death following the sale of the ZCCM mines.

In addition to the survey, I drew from secondary statistical data such as the national census conducted by the Central Statistical Office, and archival information housed in Lusaka at the National Archives and in Ndola at the mining archives.

Prior to the re-privatisation of the mines, the mining companies had kept very good archives. However, in the post-privatisation period, in particular in the case of the Luanshya mines, the gaps in the archives reflected some of the problems that beset the sale of these mines. Miles Larmer (2004) notes that the post-privatisation mining data and materials remain unarchived due to a lack of resources. From the archives I drew on news items from the *Mining Mirror* and the minutes of the town management board. These provided insight to my informants' views on the extent of the role that the mining company played in miners' lives.

There is a dearth of descriptive material about social differentiation and coping during the transition period to a market based economy and beyond in Zambia. Recently, a number of anthropologists have warned against the

current trend towards highly theoretical work with little empirical content and have called for a return to ethnographic description as both a useful endeavour and as the basis from which to explore and build theoretical concepts (Englund 2002<sup>3</sup>, Hart 2008, Hart & Oritz 2008<sup>4</sup>, Da Col & Graeber 2011<sup>5</sup>). My dissertation is an attempt to move in this direction. Nevertheless, many of the issues discussed here resonate with previous ethnographies, like James Ferguson's (1999) *Expectations of Modernity*, and the works of the Manchester School scholars (e.g. Epstein 1960, Powdermaker 1962, Wilson 1968). The study contributes to emerging scholarship and theoretical insights on everyday life in Africa within the context of the collapse of states following the end of the Cold War and widespread implementation of economic liberalisation policies (De Boeck and Plissart 2006; Piot 2010). My thesis describes the Copperbelt as I have come to understand it through the research.

### **Social variation and change: After Ferguson (1999)**

The long run of mine operations since the end of the Great Depression in the 1930s (the biggest recession to hit the mining industry until the long slow decline of the industry in the 1970s) lent to the general perception of the relative stability of the mines and the company welfare system. A number of the key anthropological studies were conducted during this period. These included Godfrey Wilson's (1968) account that covered the economic effects of industrialisation in the region and its interrelationship to the local, regional and global political economy; Clyde Mitchell's (1954, 1969) work on the perceptions of new urban dwellers of urban life, social status and urban social networks; Arnold Leonard Epstein's (1958, 1981) examinations of urban identity and political affiliation in the urban areas

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<sup>3</sup> Harri Englund (2002) in his work on the experience of migrancy in Malawi calls not just for an analysis of what he refers to as the rhetoric of globalism but for its exploration in relation to how it is "embodied and situated" in place.

<sup>4</sup> Hart & Oritz (2008) argue that an exploration of the political economy of the free market should move beyond the analysis of its ideology to look to its empirical realities.

<sup>5</sup> Da Col and Graeber (2011) in the foreword to the first issue of HAU the Journal of Ethnographic Theory call attention to contemporary anthropologists the theoretical richness to be found within ethnographic concepts.

and Hortense Powdermaker's (1962) descriptive observations of urban life on the Copperbelt. Most of these studies, other than Powdermaker's, which drew on multiple modes of analysis, were in the structural-functionalist tradition that were in vogue then, but differed from the prevailing model in that all addressed questions of social change within urban contexts. The cohort of these studies, collectively referred to as the Manchester School, advanced methodologies that dealt with social change, and scalar analyses that linked their informants to a wider macro-political context, both regional and global. Situational analysis and the 'extended case' method were notable methodologies developed for exploring the more complex dynamics of urban life. Here, individual and group interactions and their networks were observed in order to elucidate social structure.

However, James Ferguson's (1999) major critique of these earlier studies was that they assumed that social change was linked to a developmental discourse that was seen as progressive, and thus adhered to a problematic belief in the myth of modernity. A key aspect of the myth that Ferguson questions had to do with the belief that as people migrated from the rural areas to the Copperbelt towns they progressively became permanent urban dwellers with weakened rural ties. Ferguson challenged this belief by drawing on his ethnography of the region in the late 1980s, exploring the life trajectories of retiring mine workers who he followed over a number of years. Through cases of retiring miners, Ferguson shows how miners had either maintained rural kin ties and went on to settle in their rural homelands, or how even when they had opted out of a rural homeland retirement and had settled on the outskirts of the Copperbelt, they had reasons as to why they would not retire to their rural homeland. Amongst these reasons, Ferguson notes was a real material, and not just psychological fear of witchcraft that stemmed in the cases he describes from a failure to consistently maintain rural kin relations. Through these cases Ferguson challenges the linear notion of rural to urban migration and permanence in the towns, show-casing the range of strategies that Copperbelt retirees undertook to get by. These clearly showed a straddling

and negotiation of rural life. He underlines how a rural retirement was an option even for long-term residents of the towns.

Ferguson further sets about demystifying the myth by drawing attention to the social variations that could be seen on the Copperbelt. Variation for Ferguson was not only to be seen in retiring miners' livelihood and spatial strategies, but also in representations of themselves. He draws on a stylistic notion of personhood that draws from Judith Butler's notion of performativity and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus as embodied competence in practice to show the variation in Copperbelt residents' stylistic representations of themselves. Where as the Manchester School had used situational analysis to explain stylistic presentation of the urban and the rural as located within a framed structural social context, Ferguson locates his within an individualistic agency that does not give primacy to structure, but describes a more fluid social setting and wider range of performative practices. Ferguson describes Copperbelt residents' self-presentations as ranging from the cosmopolitan to the localist, and as signifying a repertoire of town-like and rural-like behavioural competencies which, he says, are dispositions learned through circumstance and choice of social interactions.

It is here that Owen Sichone (2001) takes issue with James Ferguson's ethnography of the Copperbelt, arguing that Ferguson downplays the social historical context that affords Copperbelt residents' options and behaviours. Similarly Francis Nyamnjoh (2001) calls attention to the dichotomous trap that Ferguson finds himself in when he categorises people's stylistic repertoires into cosmopolitan and localist. Nyamnjoh argues that rather than a choice of drawing from here or out there, people are drawing from a repertoire of things, that have themselves been so mixed it is hard to conclude where they are coming from. Ferguson's work on the Copperbelt (1990, 1992, 1999) has thus spurred debate on the academic orthodoxy about rural-urban migration patterns (see Palmer 2000, Potts 1995, Macmillan 1993) and also drawn attention to Copperbelt resident's own conceptualisations of their world – their sense of loss, nostalgia for a

modern past, and their characterisation of various styles of personal representation.

In the context of Copperbelt residents' settlement patterns Ferguson has made a strong case that the standard narrative of linear progression from rural to urban migration did not account for the myriad ways that Copperbelt residents straddled these spaces and drew on them to get by. What this meant in practice is that even though Copperbelt residents themselves may have mapped out some kind of trajectory in the form of a 'plan', as Ferguson's inquiry into what mine workers planned to do following their retirement suggests, what happened in reality was what Ferguson describes as a 'bush' (1999, p78) or a 'full spread' in options and variation that resisted being neatly mapped (1999, p20-21). An example of this departure from the plan is particularly well presented in Ferguson's case of Mr Paul Mukande (1999, p152-158) who, in his post-retirement plan of returning to 'the land' settled on the outskirts of rural Copperbelt and sets about to establish a farm. Initially all seemed to go well. Mr Mukande also had grander plans that included a small emerald mining venture and a larger more permanent house to replace the temporary structure he was living in. However, several things went wrong. His farm was on land with ambiguous tenure, the cement for building the permanent house was damaged when soaked by the rains, and he failed to find emeralds in his digs. In an ideal world of well laid plans Mr Mukande would have conducted some background work to ensure his land was on secure tenure, bought a tent to keep his bags of cement dry, and known that the odds of finding emeralds were stacked against him. But in the world of the Copperbelt, as Ferguson observed, plans tended to be based on unrealistic expectations, and enterprises often did not end well.

In my own study I will be exploring similar expectations with the view to developing a theoretical approach that accounts for both Copperbelt residents' aspirations and efforts. I refer to this as "*trying*". I show how, for Copperbelt residents in times of hardship, the unpredictability in the outcomes of their efforts made them increasingly perceptive of the

opportunities and possibilities that had the potential to emerge from chance encounters. My aim is to engage with questions of social change and variation, but unlike Ferguson, engage too with the peoples' perceptions and engagements within a changing *material*, and not only *social* landscape. From this approach and building on Ferguson's example of Mr Mukande, I posit an ecological approach drawn from Ingold (2000), in which residents are immanent in the environment, and in turn, the environment is immanent in them. This position sees people and environment not as separate but as mutually constituting. Just as persons' characters or personalities are seen or perceived in relation to other persons, so too is the character of the Copperbelt as a place perceived in relation to what it affords to the persons who live there. Also, just as persons are affected by one another's moods, so too, do the energies of a place, mutually comprising people and things in movement, in rhythm, affect persons and the character of place.

**Chapter One** focuses on the changing character of life and social welfare services in the mining towns of what was once the most urbanised country in central Africa, describing the variation of services provided by mining companies over the years. These ranged from minimal at the time of the industry's establishment in the 1920s to a period of largesse between the 1950s and the late 1970s, and then a slow decline following the slide in world copper prices. It shows how the withdrawal of the mines from welfare provision from the mid 1990s to the present has radically altered not only people's well being, but also the character of the urban areas, leading to the observation that towns have lost their order and have become like "villages".

**Chapter Two** engages with the methodological and theoretical ways that the Copperbelt has been presented, in particular with the most recent ethnography of the Copperbelt, James Ferguson's (1999) "Expectations of Modernity". It argues for a phenomenological engagement and analysis of the Copperbelt. From the point of method, I argue that understanding places, in particular how people engage with them, requires the researcher

to engage in a process of ‘doing’. As mentioned above, for me this was the renovation of a house in the former low-density mine suburb within which I focused my research. It was through this process that I got to know most of my research informants, and learnt through practice what my informants often told me, that ‘you can’t plan’. This notion challenged my ideas of agency that had strongly been influenced by my architectural training and the anthropological work of Alfred Gell; the idea that if one can impose order and establish patterns, then in turn one can trace out a network of patterns and relationships. It was difficult to ‘order’ the field, but I argue that rather than giving up entirely any attempt to do so, fieldwork and analysis should be approached as a continual process of ‘trying’; experimentation, and in turn agency, should be seen as a blob of blurred signifiers that indicates an ever moving intent that is entangled within the also ever changing environment. These arguments emerge throughout the thesis and are addressed again in the Conclusion.

In **Chapter Three** I trace the trajectories of former ZCCM employees living in a low-density former mine neighbourhood. I also detail how they attempt to make a life in what has become a difficult economic context. Despite the long economic decline from the 1970s, the privatisation of the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines beginning 1997 brought to an almost complete halt one of the biggest experiments in middle-class formation in sub Saharan Africa. The disappearance of the old ZCCM system and its *de facto* control of socio-economic differentiation sparked new processes of ‘class’ formation. The new classes have come to rely on working for oneself and an ethos of self-reliance. With the absence of a formalised work structure, the erosion of welfare, and amidst a difficult economic reality there has been a resort to improvisational strategies in an attempt to make a living. Some have made it, others have not, and the middle class has dwindled.

Copperbelt women have long played an important role in supplementing incomes from wages from the mines and lobbying through their participation in strike action for better living conditions. Until the

privatisation of the mines, much of what women did took a back role from the core business of mining. Increasingly, on the periphery of formal mining in Zambia, it is not uncommon to find women and children working at mining dump sites, spaces that in the Zambian imaginary are occupied by young male copper thieves, popularly known as Jerabo's (jail boys). **Chapter Four** describes women's work at these sites that fall outside the regulatory boundaries of legality. Here, workers are called illegal miners but workers have crafted an alternative moral economy to justify what they do. The chapter examines how Copperbelt residents see and engage with the copper industry after its re-privatisation. It explores local understandings of private and public ownership, and how an ideology of accumulation is received after decades of state and local narratives against selfishness. Women working at these sites ask, if the market for copper is open, why is it not open to them? Their question and the substance of the chapter provide a perspective of residents' engagement with copper from the home and yard to the copper mining sites.

The proliferation of house-keeping courses that had been offered to women on the mines underlined the expectations of their role in the town and the ideal of domesticity. The representation of the Copperbelt as home to 'loose women', eager to extort the wages of miners through vice that had been perpetuated in the early days of mining persisted well into Ferguson's (1999) ethnography, decades after the 1930s when the mining companies were not sure whether to let women into mining towns. In the present context, many former male mine employees say they do not know how they would have survived the harshest periods that followed the sale of the mines were it not for the industriousness of women, a value strongly linked to the traditional or customary ideal of womanhood. **Chapter Five** thus explores how Copperbelt women straddle these gendered expectations of domesticity and describes where they find places for pleasure and harmony. It reflects on Copperbelt women's communicative modus operandi, and shows how the nuances of this affect spill into their broader economic and social life.

**Chapter Six** draws on Zambian popular music to explore how Copperbelt residents conceptualise life in difficult times. For many residents, life has been hard and also mired with the experience of death. While they describe themselves as ‘suffering’, there is also the hope that this suffering may end. This belief does not necessarily play out as a clear plan for a future. The possibilities of what the future may bring emerge from the environment and people’s engagement with it and each other. This may be good or bad, it cannot be predetermined. Zambian popular music urges people simply to go on, to endure. The extension of this temporal experience of life is expressed in the urging of people to literally ‘top up’ on their lives.

In **conclusion**, I call for an Anthropology of trying. Especially in contexts of uncertainty, this approach assumes that there are numerous paths and journeys that can be embarked on in learning about the world. These multiple paths create different rhythms and resonances that are perceived beyond objective observation. It is an approach that resonates with Copperbelt residents own approach to life. Lives of hardship, no longer under the attempted regulatory control of the mines, has become an exploration of how to survive and maybe become successful. In understanding the spatial boundaries of transition, Copperbelt residents do not edge around prescribed boundaries such as private property, they are prone to trespass. People’s improvisational activities unfold in variation within the environment. This is perceived as villagisation, a visible marker of the changed urban character, which also points to the numerous attempts at trying in a context unconstrained by strong regulatory structures.



## Chapter One

### **Mining, Welfare and Urbanisation: The Wavering Urban Character of Zambia's Copperbelt**

Zambia's changing fortunes in copper mining are mirrored in its urban growth and welfare trajectory. The fluctuating world market price for copper has had a direct bearing on the urban population's levels of material welfare and deprivation. In this chapter, I explore this in two main parts: the first, an historical review of mining's impact on urbanisation, the second an overview of the current urban and welfare circumstances of the population following the privatisation of Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM). This account sets the stage for the discussions in subsequent chapters.

Urbanisation on the Copperbelt since the mines came into production in the 1930s was synonymous with rural to urban migration, spurred on by the idea of a better "modern" life in the towns. Several studies from the 1990s suggest that the decline of the industry affected urban processes. These argue that Copperbelt residents were moving from urban to rural areas and settling and seeking subsistence livelihoods in the "bush" on the outskirts of Copperbelt towns (Ferguson 1999; Hansangule *et al.* 1998; Potts 1995). The 2010 census indicates that Copperbelt residents were moving to the capital city, Lusaka, which would tally with the perceptible shift of Lusaka's *lingua franca* from Nyanja to Bemba. Furthermore, data from the 2000 census shows shifts in regional livelihood diversification patterns, with the economically active in mining falling from 3.4% of the country's total labour force in 1990 to 1.3% in 2000, while those active in agricultural activities grew from 50% in 1990 to 72% in 2000 (CSO 2003). On the other hand, since approximately 2004, some rural areas are emerging as small-scale mining outposts, such as those in the new mining area of the North Western Province. They are becoming more "town-like" as former subsistence farmers and semi-foragers turn to small-scale mining joined by

“old” Copperbelt in-migrants and others from as far away as Lusaka who are moving in to benefit from a boom in copper.

While these trends have not changed the cosmopolitan nature of the Copperbelt, which, from its early years attracted a migrant population composed of various African groups and transient Europeans, they have influenced Copperbelt residents’ perception of the “urban”. This has been in the context of the acute urban poverty that followed the mines’ privatisation, retrenchments and withdrawal of social welfare provisions. Copperbelt residents complain that their urban areas have lost their sense of “urban order”.

These changes have laid bare the fallacy of the idea of the urban as modern, which the former neat façade of the Copperbelt towns could imply. Myers (2003, p56), when considering African colonial cities, notes that the planned ideal of the modern city never materialised as these places “became reframed within the African idioms of urban life, dependant on uneven and unequal development of power by individual householders, or religious institutions, or ideas of space and on customary neighbourly understanding”. I explore these ideas further in later chapters.

Following Zambia’s independence in 1964, President Kaunda tried to address the relation between the rural and urban through his philosophy of Humanism, attempting to reframe urban life by transposing “African” values based on the idealisation of village life into the towns, and encouraging an African conviviality of giving across extended urban and rural kin, devolving the welfare of the state in urban areas to the rural through the “family” (Kaunda and Morris 1966). This theme informed Zambian state policies for the first few decades of national independence when copper underwrote the country’s economic prosperity.

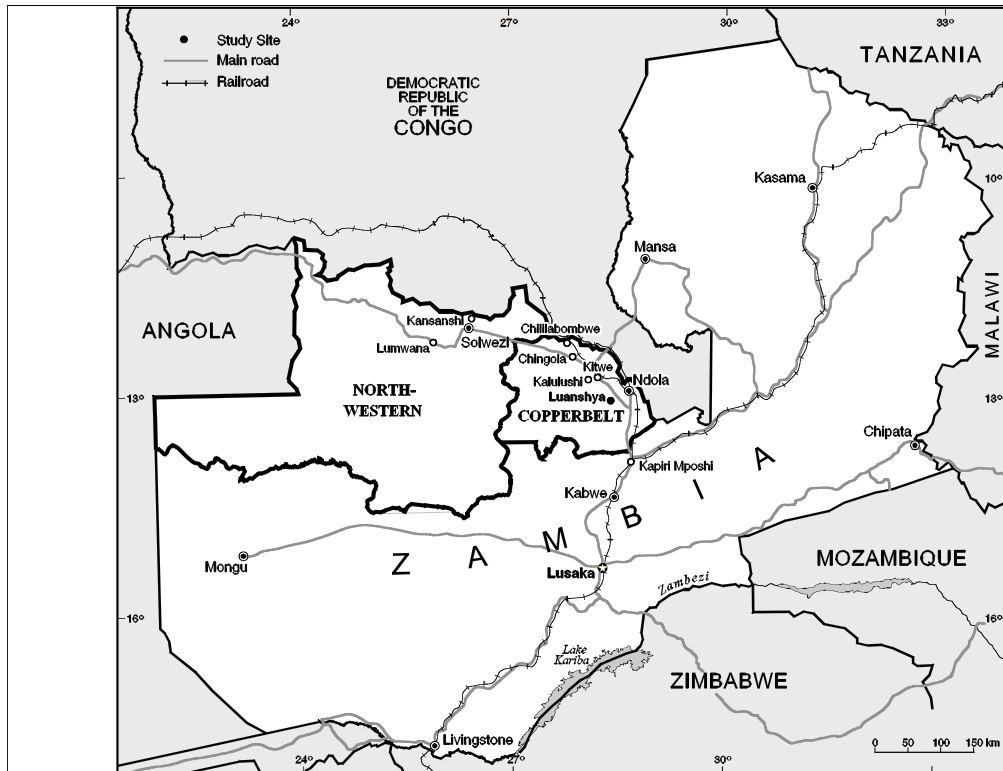
## **Copper: Historical conduit of urbanisation and social welfare**

### *Emergence of the Copperbelt*

Artisanal copper mining had long been practiced in the region between the Zambezi and Congo basin. Nineteenth and early twentieth century European prospectors' accounts attest to extensive ancient copper working and writers speculated that copper had flourished as a currency during the slave trade and thereafter become dormant with the abolition of slavery (Bradley 1952). This suggests a centuries-long history of copper production, affected by dips and rises in international trade.

Industrial copper mining in Zambia was facilitated by Cecil Rhodes's acquisition of mineral rights through the Lochner concession, which was held by the British South Africa Company (BSAC) and which covered most of the western half of Northern Rhodesia/Zambia. The confirmation of copper deposits by Frederick Burnham, a scout of the BSAC, was the catalyst for mining development. The nature of the ore deposits necessitated deep-shaft mining and the lack of a transport infrastructure to take the minerals to ports delayed investment in the area for a decade (Coleman 1971).

The construction of a "Cape to Cairo" rail line reached Ndola in 1909, creating a corridor along which towns with an urban character were destined to develop. The BSAC's concession was exploited by the two mining houses, Rhodesian Selection Trust (RST) and the Anglo American Corporation (AAC), which were dominant until the early 1970s. Large-scale commercial farming did not emerge in the area due to the acidity of the soils of the copper mining region, as Clifford Darby (1931) had already noted in the 1930s. Thus there was a stark contrast between the urban mining strip and the rural subsistence-farming zone adjacent to it.



**Figure 1: Map of Zambia**

Source: Cartography by M. Shand, University of Glasgow, based on United Nations Population Division map, <http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/zambia.pdf>

***Coalescing urban growth and welfare awareness in the Copperbelt, 1909-1939***

Many of the early African migrant mine workers stayed in unhealthy camps, which, as in the case of Luanshya, were plagued by malaria and black-water fever associated with swampy areas (Schumaker 2008). By the 1930s some of these camps had been improved by the efforts of public-health experts, engineers and vanguard town-planners, who were influenced by the garden-city movement and endeavoured to apply these ideas to build small, liveable mining towns. The towns that developed around mining activity included Kabwe (formerly Broken Hill) in the Central Province, where lead was mined; Luanshya; Kitwe; Mufulira (my father's birthplace); Chingola; Chililabombwe; Kalulushi; and Ndola, which served as the administrative and commercial centre. As African settlement increased on the Copperbelt, it attracted considerable academic interest, (Mitchell 1954;

Epstein 1958; Powdermaker 1962). The parallel setting-up of colonial administrative centres resulted in towns with a dual administrative system consisting of the mines and local councils (Mutale 2004).

This early mining period was not characterised by any coherent plans for the welfare of African miners. In fact, the mining companies had a negative attitude towards the permanent settlement of African miners in the towns. They preferred to use male migrant labour, discouraging the presence of African women and children. Despite this attitude, the competition for labour with the more established mines in the region and the need to feed workers meant that the mining companies actively supported agricultural activity, carried out primarily by women cultivators who sold food to the mine-workers; and thus in turn implicitly accepted the presence of women (Chauncey 1981). Subsistence plots were provided by some of the mines, first in Broken Hill (Kabwe), then more widely by Roan Antelope mine in Luanshya, where 2000 agricultural plots were in use in 1935 (Chauncey 1981; Wilson 1968). This stimulus to the surrounding agrarian economy was helpful to the indigenous African population on the Copperbelt and to the unemployed workers who remained *in situ* during the recession of the early 1930s, that had occurred soon after copper production had been initiated in 1929. Their agricultural activity provided a vital subsistence resource and a supplement for miners' families until the period characterised by ZCCM control.

### ***Centrality of large-scale mining companies as providers of urban welfare, 1940-1960s***

Following major strike actions in the 1940s and a Commission of Inquiry to look into concerns raised by the workers, the mines adopted a welfare orientation. This was at a time when copper was bought at a stable fixed price by the British colonial government to support the Second World War effort. Thereafter, the post-war boom in world demand for copper enabled the resumption of market-based trade. The colonial government's adoption of a welfare orientation was outlined in the first ten-year development plan,

which provided for infrastructural developments such as urban housing and other facilities. The implementation of this plan improved living conditions in the towns particularly for both European and African service workers, as housing and recreational facilities were built outside of the mine townships and compounds.

Conditions for the African workforce on the mines also improved as the mining companies, spearheaded by Sir Ronald Prain and RST, built housing for families and provided the opportunity to progress into skilled jobs in terms of a policy of Africanisation. Prain (1956) argued that this was developed for the long-term stability of the Copperbelt mining industry and the fostered development of a pool of skilled Africans in towns. Africanisation was based on the pragmatic policy of employing African workers in skilled jobs to replace European workers who were more costly to hire.

Mining revenue played an important role in funding infrastructural development in the country. During the colonial period, the mining houses paid mineral royalties on copper production to the BSAC and a tax on company profits to the state. After independence and the expropriation of the BSAC's mining rights, the mining companies paid royalty taxes of 13.5%, export taxes of 40%, when the price of copper went beyond US\$300 per long tonne, and corporate tax of 45% to the state (Lungu 2008). This revenue financed the implementation of the five-year transitional development plan that followed the country's independence in 1964. Despite many attempts both before and after independence to distribute this revenue evenly across the country for the development of the sparsely populated and infrastructure-poor rural areas, mining revenue was mainly spent on the urban areas of the Copperbelt Province and the capital city, Lusaka.<sup>6</sup> This use of government revenue for the development of urban areas was remarkable in view of the colonial government's concern that

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<sup>6</sup> A larger portion of this income was allocated to developing commercial farming and infrastructure for white settlement in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) connected with the 1953 formation of the Central African Federation consisting of Nyasaland (Malawi) and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia).

“over-urbanisation” would result in the rural areas being drained of people, and the urban areas being unable to cope with the influx of large numbers of people (Heisler 1971).

The towns on the Copperbelt, in what many describe as the golden era of the 1950s to the 1970s, had much to offer in terms of the residential lifestyle of those who stayed in the areas administered by the mine companies. There was decent subsidised housing that had been transformed since the 1940s from African mineworkers’ bachelor quarters (measuring about 20 square metres with communal ablution facilities) to family homes (measuring over 50 square metres with indoor plumbing by 1952 – see Mutale 2004). For recreation, mine employees had the option of sports clubs, libraries, theatres, cinemas, and ballroom dancing facilities, which were also open to their families. Hortense Powdermaker (1962) provides a vivid description of life on the Copperbelt in these times. The mines also had good schools and health facilities, and offered various skills-training programmes, including adult literacy. While the wage disparities between Africans and Europeans that characterised the colonial period prevailed even in the post-independence era, wages were high enough to enable workers to save towards the purchase of a car. This prosperity contributed to the self-confidence of the country (Fraser 2010).

However, it was also this period that consolidated architectonically the spatial order of modernism and thus the texturing of colonial hierarchies within the environment and, in the process, inscribed these as natural. This ordering of space and spatial activity through public health regulations, the promotion of certain recreational activities and training based on notions of ideal domestic life are what Devisch, writing on similar processes of colonial state-building in the Congo, refers to as a form of social engineering (1998, p225). Thus the welfare orientation of the mines was not only a material manifestation of the pragmatic benevolence of the mines, but also had, as Devisch (*ibid*) argues, a discursive character that attempted to etch into the environment the categorisations and ideologies of colonialism.

Following the country's independence in 1964, efforts were made by the post-colonial state to address the problematic racial and classist categories of the colonial state through a humanist philosophy coined in the phrase "One Zambia, One Nation", as well as significantly to expand welfare. It failed to undo colonial legacies, and colonialism's categories, in particular those pertaining to class, continue to colour the character of place.

### ***Mine nationalisation and gradual decline of urban welfare, 1970 – mid 1990s***

Various reasons have been given for the decline of urban welfare in Zambia, and the Copperbelt in particular, as world copper prices plunged in the mid-1970s. Firstly, the Mawo Economic Reforms of August 1969 allowed the Zambian government to take over the mining companies by buying a majority stake in them and tied politics to economics in a way that reduced the flexibility of the business sector. Partial nationalisation of the RST and AAC mines in 1970, and the cancellation of the mining companies' management contracts in 1973, allowed the state to influence the running of the mines, leading to retention of the labour force even as production was falling due to the drop in world copper prices and reduced investment.

Secondly, the Zambian state failed to diversify its economy, dooming the country to over-reliance on a single commodity, copper. Thirdly, the price of copper was subject to flexible market pricing, making the country, and the Copperbelt in particular, extremely vulnerable to the rise and fall of the market. Fourthly, following independence, the country failed to create an alternative to the flexible market pricing of copper. A cartel of copper-producing countries, Cipepec, was created but it did not succeed in cushioning Zambia from the vagaries of the world market (Fraser 2010). Fifthly, bad timing and poor luck prevented Zambia from benefiting from policies intended to increase state revenue from copper (Ibid). Soon after the partial nationalisation of the mines in 1970 when the state could have benefited

from a mineral tax of 51% and 45% corporation tax, a global recession began. This setback forced the Zambian government to reconsider its tax system and offer incentives to investors through a lower tax rate (Lungu 2008).

In spite of these handicaps, the state extended the Zambianisation program, a continuation of earlier Africanisation policies. The mines expanded in-house job-training, built new trades schools for the mines, and a technical secondary school, Mpelembe, that in 1983 served a third generation of Copperbelt residents, many of whom went on to study engineering subjects to service demand for skilled labour in the mines. In an attempt to reduce the wage bill for expatriate workers, on which the mining industry was still dependent, ZCCM built primary schools offering superior quality education in each Copperbelt town so as not to have to pay for schools abroad for expatriate workers' children. If there had been a change of fortunes in the world price for copper, this continued investment in education and building skills could have paid off for the country. As it was, world copper prices did not improve.

In an attempt to reduce the country's foreign exchange spending as earnings from copper dwindled, the government scaled up import substitution, encouraging the fabrication of industrial components and consumer products locally. Towards the late 1970s, the country began to be besieged by regular shortages of basic commodities like bread, cooking oil and soap as the country's national debt deepened. In the mid 1980s, under pressure from the IMF and World Bank, the state sought to reduce the amount spent on subsidising maize meal for urban residents by introducing a coupon system for the urban poor, and many urban residents had to queue for hours for their supply of maize meal. People working for the mines however did not have to do so as they had a separate distribution system, one of several privileges mine employees enjoyed.

Kaunda's failure to see through these reforms was put down to the vulnerability of his government which had become a one-party system in

1971 under his continued leadership since independence, and which was increasingly viewed as overly repressive. However in 1989, with rising food prices and discontent over the lack of political freedom, popular riots started by the university union on the Copperbelt forced Kaunda to declare early elections in 1991. Frederick Titus Chiluba, leader of the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy, won by a landslide vote, dislodging Kaunda from his long sojourn as president.

Despite the heavy criticism of the mismanagement of the country's economy and mining sector by Kaunda's government between 1970 and 1991, in retrospect many Copperbelt residents remember it as a time when they could at least eat a daily meal. While a few Copperbelt residents over the age of fifty, such as one of my key informants, Mr Mubita<sup>7</sup>, a former ZCCM employee resident in Luanshya, attribute the decline of the economy to the departure of the "whites", with reference to the nationalisation of the mines and "too much politicking", some of the younger generation, born in the 1970s, who experienced childhood in the lean years of Kaunda's socialist-cum-capitalist experiment, blame the abandonment of the African socialist model for the decline in the economy. Bissell's (2005) cautionary note on nostalgia is valid here in that it is useful to take into account "multiple strands of remembrance" (2005, p216). The years of decline that followed were, for the younger generation, recalled in an article in the *Lusaka Times* (26 March 2010): "Zambia: Those were the days!", as times of simpler pleasures, free from the anxieties of a consumer culture that took root in the privatisation era. This generation, never having experienced the 'golden era', are sometimes critical of re-privatisation, which is seen as an interruption of the Kaunda government's attempts towards self-determination.

The full extent of social welfare provision by the ZCCM mines was well captured in a 2000 Rights and Accountability in Development (RAID) report that estimated the social cost of privatisation of the mines. The report

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<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, I have used pseudonyms throughout the dissertation to protect the welfare of my informants.

estimates that in the early 1990s the large ZCCM mine divisions such as Luanshya had been spending approximately US\$ 20 million a year on social welfare (RAID, 2000, p162). Expressing the extent of ZCCM companywide social provisioning, it reports on what was spent on in the years between 1990 and 1997:

The array of capital purchases or facilities rehabilitated is astonishing: the relaying of sewers, the replacement of municipal pumping stations, water reticulation, the sinking of boreholes, the provision of a new chlorination plant and a one million gallon reservoir; the installation of an electricity substation to power a local cinema, floodlights at a local sports ground, the upgrading of electrical supply systems; home ownership schemes, the demolition of defunct housing, the building of new houses, road rehabilitation, the repair of streetlights, expenditure on the local market, money to revamp a telephone exchange; the provision of libraries, training and youth schemes, the rehabilitation of women's centres, the building of shelters for mourners at local cemeteries; hospital refurbishments, the purchase of X-ray equipment, ventilators, blood banks, mortuary chambers, pathology labs, the construction of entire health centres; the purchase of laundry equipment, furniture, typewriters, fridges and cookers, kennels for the dogs of the mine police, a lawn mower, a fish pond, and three Tata buses. (RAID, 2000, p162).

The end of this array of services and facilities following privatisation was experienced by Copperbelt residents as a loss of a way of life.

### ***Privatisation policy – 1995 onwards***

The Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) government, under the leadership of Frederick Chiluba, came to power with a programme of widespread economic reform centred on the privatisation of the mines. After a lengthy debate over whether the mines should be sold and, if so, whether as a whole or broken up in parts, the mines were eventually offered as “unbundled” units that roughly coincided with mining operations in each mining town. Thus the sale of mining divisions of the ZCCM commenced in 1995 with the sale of the Luanshya mines to the Binani Group. This was not a transparent process and was dogged with allegations of corruption which, in the end, besieged Chiluba's administration (Van Donge 2008). In the case of the sale of the Luanshya mines, these dodgy dealings in

subsequent years served to obscure ownership of the mines and had a devastating and destabilising effect on the residents of the town (Gewald and Soeters 2010).

During this time, an estimated two-thirds of the ZCCM work force was laid off. Without enough money to pay retrenchment benefits, the state opted to sell the mine housing stock to sitting tenants, most of them mine employees. A cash benefit package for retrenched miners was, in most cases, paid after a delay of three years. Many Luanshya residents remember this period as one of extreme suffering, with families resorting to eating mangoes, foraging for wild fruit in the nearby forests, and turning to the “bush” to cultivate.

Fraser and Lungu (2007) recount the effect that the sale of the mines had on the mining industry in Zambia. They point to the casualisation of labour and the resultant weakening of the mine-workers’ union. Larmer’s (2007) in-depth historical study demonstrates how the union had hitherto played a central role in lobbying continually for better wage and living conditions on the Copperbelt. Fraser and Lungu (2007) point to the inability of the Zambian state to monitor and regulate the mining industry, a failing that Haglund (2010) notes resulted in numerous abuses, including violations in health and safety practices and an incoherent investment culture that encouraged patronage. This inability had serious repercussions for the collection of mining revenue.

By way of illustration, *The Post* on 9th February 2011, reported allegations of irregularities in Mopani Copper Mines tax remittances with the falsification of copper revenue to avoid taxes. This was deemed especially underhanded given that mine privatisation had, it emerged, involved secret development agreements that had offered very generous benefits to the mines. Corporate tax had been offered at 25% and mineral royalties at 0.6%, zero taxes on customs duties, and up to twenty-year tax breaks. With rising copper prices from 2004, this tax rate began to seem extremely unfair to the Zambian populace, and under pressure from civil society and the

urban-supported opposition party, the Patriotic Front (PF), the government - led by Levy Mwanawasa - was forced to engage in a re-negotiation of the development agreements, which resulted in the introduction of a windfall tax in 2008.

Unfortunately for the country, just as this new tax was being put in place, copper prices that, in the early half of 2008, had been approximately \$8,000 a tonne plummeted to \$3,000 a tonne. In response, the mines laid off workers, many of whom were just beginning to feel confident about the economy. In Luanshya, the mines, which had been taken over by JW & Enya in 2004, were placed under care and maintenance, sending the town's residents into a wave of economic despondency. Around this same time, Levy Mwanawasa died. Following an election held in October 2008, which was strongly contested by the PF, Mwanawasa's vice-president, Rupiah Banda, running on the MMD ticket, was ushered into office, albeit amidst election irregularities (*Mail and Guardian*, 5 November 2008). The PF had developed a strong following in urban Zambia for articulating social concerns in contrast to the abstract rhetoric of economic growth of the MMD (Larmer and Fraser 2007).

Amidst fears that a windfall tax would further frighten investors out of the country, the state backed away from implementing the tax. But the government's 2009 decision was seen as misguided when copper prices rapidly rose to reach all time highs of \$10,000 a tonne in the first half of 2011. Many advocated a re-introduction of the windfall tax. The country's rapid copper fuelled growth led to an announcement in July 2011 of the country's fast journey to middle income status. Many viewed the announcement as a cynical political ploy in an election year. While it cannot be argued that some sectors of the population have not benefited from this economic boost, amid signs of increased consumption amongst a "re-emerging" middle class, much of the population still struggles to earn a living. In neighbourhoods of Copperbelt towns such as Luanshya, the landscape still displays the ravages of the withdrawal of the mines in infrastructural maintenance.

## **Present urban welfare on the Copperbelt**

The previous section has provided an historical account of Zambia's heavy reliance on copper production, the organisation of the copper industry, the capricious influence of the world copper price, and the rising success and later dismal plunge in urban welfare related to the state of the copper industry. The following section teases out the implications for the here and now, drawing attention to how the urban population's welfare and social identity are faring, beginning with the effects of privatisation on people's urban way of life.

### ***Privatisation's impact on housing***

The privatisation of state industry went hand in hand with the privatisation of urban housing, which had mainly been tied to employment from the colonial period onwards. The sale of housing to private individuals was enacted in 1997 by a presidential decree that stated that parastatal and council housing would be sold to "sitting tenants". This shift in policy had a huge impact on settlement in urban areas, and on the character of the Copperbelt. A formal job with the mines on the Copperbelt had previously meant a guarantee of shelter of a reasonable standard.

When the mines were privatised, beginning in 1997, the new owners were unwilling to take up these costly social responsibilities, and the administration of the mine townships was transferred in 2002 to the local authorities through a World Bank-funded programme. This meant that former mine employees, who had previously received free water and subsidised electricity had to start paying bills. Many struggled to do so (Kazimbaya-Senkwe and Guy 2007). To meet the demand for water, residents of towns like Luanshya, which had been hardest hit by privatisation, initially drew water from an industrial supply that, during the mining period, had been used to water gardens. When this supply was closed, some dug wells in their backyards, and in the dry season, when the

wells dried out, begged for water from neighbours who still had piped water. To meet their energy needs, many residents turned to charcoal-burning, chopping trees from the nearby forests and, occasionally, their yards and the residential streets of the town.

A lack of maintenance of neighbourhood infrastructure was readily visible in pot-holed roads and the disappearance of storm water drains that had filled with silt over the years; darkened roads at night that had once been lit by street lights; burst water-pipes that, it was speculated, were vandalised to allow the illegal drawing of water; and sewer over-spills due to blockages, sometimes arising from an attempt to fertilise and water the acidic soils for commercial vegetable gardens. A garbage-disposal service, however, continued, though as many residents reported there was little to dispose of as poverty had ensured that what some discarded was useful for others.

Crime was a major concern with the end of the mine-policing system and poverty contributed to its increase. As the social realities on the Copperbelt changed, so too did residents' recreation activities. Grass sprouted in the cracks of the asphalt tennis courts of the mine recreation area in Luanshya. Fields of maize were planted here and there through the town. Anthills at the golf course were broken down to make building bricks. The local cinema was converted into a church since few could afford cinema-going. The squash club was converted into a drinking-place.

On the domestic front, residents who had previously competed to win a best-garden award, which the mines had put into place as an incentive to beautify the neighbourhood, no longer grew poinsettias, gardenias and other flower-bed plants. Nor did many bother to tend to their lawns, and dry swept-up patches of earth appeared around houses, reminiscent of the dry-earth surroundings of village homesteads.

It was not only the impressions of the rural that gave rise to discussion of the Copperbelt becoming village-like; it was also the economic activities that residents engaged in. While women's social life in particular bears

some resemblance to aspects of village life (as I describe later in the thesis), Copperbelt residents see themselves as modern. For this reason, they bemoan their towns that were “beginning to look like villages”, pointing not only to the towns’ changing physical appearance, but to forms of sociality and mutual support that were suppressed or discarded when mine administrations dealt with town infrastructure and welfare needs. As residents adopted new forms of livelihoods, material landscapes were being reconfigured, infusing social relations with altered needs and meanings reminiscent of village life.



**Figure 2:** House front yard with maize stalks. In the background, smoking room for sausages made for sale. Photo by Mulemwa Mususa, December 2008



**Figure 3:** Pot-holed road partially filled in with flux stone sourced from the mine dumps (see Chapter 4 on economic activity at the mine dump sites).

Photo by Mulemwa Mususa, December 2008



**Figure 4:** Luanshya mine recreation centre.

Photo by Mulemwa Mususa, December 2008

Edward Casey (1997) argues that space should be seen in its “two-ness”, one dimension that colours the temporal experience of being or dwelling in

a “place”, and the other that traces paths, from, to, and beyond this temporality. This means thinking about the Copperbelt not only as an extractive locale for copper whose activities are affected by the market, but also as a place where the residents’ engagement with the reality of losing jobs, and struggling to earn a living amidst the withdrawal of mine welfare, is re-texturing simultaneously the material and social character of the place. What this implies is a blurring of boundaries in activities that connote the modern, and thus urban: for example, the formal copper mining economy, and those implied by a subsistence livelihood, the village.

A term that well embodies this process of the urban becoming like a village, is villagisation, defined by René Devisch (1996, p573) as “a process of psychic and social endogenisation of modern city life, that allows the migrant to surmount the schizophrenic split between traditional, rural and ‘pagan’ life as against the new urban Christian world”. While Devisch is writing of Kinshasa in the 1970s, his description of a process that allows for several possibilities of living in the environment, and that resists the tendency towards linearity of urban narratives remains apt. It enriches what Ferguson (1999, p221) observed to be a situational stylisation of social life on the Copperbelt that drew on idiomatic identification of persons as being *uwa kumushi*<sup>8</sup> “from the village” or *uwa kutown* “from the town”; similar to Filip de Boeck’s (1998) observations of the Aluund people and their pragmatic relationship to the environment in the context of hunger in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This view in relation to thinking about place regardless of how it is *politically* categorised (urban or rural), focuses much more on what a place affords its inhabitants, and the affective experiences it generates. For example Copperbelt residents increasingly turned to foraging mushrooms, caterpillars and fruit for food from the nearby forest. This pragmatism also enters Copperbelt residents’ conception of themselves and their position within a changing world. It recalls Wim Van Binsbergen’s (1998) concept of the virtual village that refers to people who avoid identifying solely with the town or the village. What had come

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<sup>8</sup> Bemba is the lingua franca of the Copperbelt.

to the fore as a key concern, despite the visual references to the loss of the aesthetic order of the town was a pragmatics of engagement. As one informant told me, “what is the point of having a nice lawn, when you can use your garden to grow food?” What all this illuminated was the Copperbelt residents practice ‘converged’ lifestyles with often internally discordant modes of social interactions as described in this chapter.<sup>9</sup> This could be interpreted as going beyond Devisch's (1996) psycho-social notion of villagisation to encompass tangible lived experience. To cite just a couple of concrete everyday examples, the tendency was manifested in more meals cooked on charcoal braziers and more water collected from wells or poached from neighbours. It also informed neighbourly interaction and forms of sociality people define as ‘rural-like’, trespassing and conflicting with the Copperbelt’s erstwhile nuclearising family life and residents’ sense of modernity.

***Informalisation of working lives: Agriculture and small-scale mining to the fore***

Before privatisation, the end of mine employment had necessitated moving out of one’s urban house and retiring to one’s home village, a rural resettlement scheme or to some peri-urban area. With the sale of houses in the privatisation process, retrenched and retirees could opt to stay in their urban home, or if not, generate a rental income from it (see Chapter Three). Many Copperbelt residents gained a house as part of their retrenchment packages at the time of the worst social economic depression between 1997 and 2003. The house and its yard became an important asset in sustaining urban livelihoods, with retrenched former miners staying in the lower-density former mine suburbs and carrying out agricultural activities that

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<sup>9</sup> Bank (2011) documents analogous contested place-making between urban modernity and rurality in the sub-urbanisation of Duncan Village in the South African city of East London.

included growing vegetables, rearing chickens and pigs and fish farming. Other residents in addition to backyard farming also had fields or farms<sup>10</sup>.

In Luanshya mine township, following the loss of jobs, many residents started growing food in an area designated for future mine development. When plans got underway to develop this area in 2004, the new mining company evicted the farmers and built an electric fence around the perimeter, forcing the cultivators to move their fields further into rural Luanshya and Mpongwe. Cultivation now entailed walking long distances and camping in the “bush” during busy farming periods. Some residents decided to settle in these areas, and either sold or rented out their town property. These moves explain why Luanshya’s annual population growth rate between 2000-2010 was only 0.3%, while that of Mpongwe the nearby farming block grew by 3.6% (CSO 2011).

This movement to the rural outskirts, and to forest reserve areas, resulted in several land rights problems (Hansangule *et al.* 1998). Land contestation was not only confined to agriculturalists, but also to small-scale, mainly illegal, artisanal copper miners who emerged alongside the privatisation of the mines. Small-scale and illegal mining activity has contributed much to informal livelihoods of not only Copperbelt residents, and those of the new mining areas of North Western Province, but also to those members of the general Zambian public who were willing to migrate to exploit this opportunity (see Chapter Four). On what people call the “old Copperbelt”, women and children work on the copper-mine dumps, trespassing on the larger mine company’s property to retrieve flux stone, a by-product of copper processing, which is then sold as building aggregate in the manufacture of concrete blocks. This industry has thrived in tandem with the rise of the small-scale building industry, spurred on by expanding home-ownership and the construction of out-buildings for small livestock, as well as the maintenance of pot-holed roads.

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<sup>10</sup> Out of 100 households surveyed in August 2009 within a low density former mine township in Luanshya, 39 had fields or farms. These ranged in size from 1 hectare to 50 hectares, most of which were located on the periphery of the town.

In the “new Copperbelt” in North Western Province, small-scale mining camps have emerged in the bush, either at older mine camps like that of Kalengwa mine, which was abandoned in the early 1980s, or, more commonly, in customary areas, under traditional authority. The populations of these camps have fluctuated since 2004 corresponding to fluxes in world copper prices. The majority of these camps have no basic services due to their rural location, but nonetheless, socially, the camps have an urban character that contrasts with the surrounding countryside (see Chapter Four). They could also be described as “rurban slums”, as they accommodate a densely concentrated migrant population who are squatting on rural customary land.

### ***Global mining boom, urban resurgence and the expanding poverty gap***

With Zambia named amongst the ten fastest growing world economies in the world between 2011 and 2015 by the *Economist* (6<sup>th</sup> January 2011), there is increasing pressure on the state to tax copper-fuelled growth. The economic growth has sparked an increasing rate of urbanisation (CSO 2011). The urban/rural split of the population in the 2000 census was 35/65 moving to 39/61 in 2010. The average annual population growth rate in the 1990-2000 decade was 3.0% for rural and 1.5% for urban areas contrasted with 2.4% for rural, and 4.8% for urban areas during 2000-2010 (*ibid.*). On the Copperbelt, the drop was more radical, with the decade 1980-1990 measuring an average annual growth rate of 1.9%, which dropped to 0.1% in 1990-2000, recovering to 2.2% during the years 2000-2010 as a result of the copper boom.

The region with the highest growth was Lusaka, which had an average annual growth rate of 4.7% during 2000-2010 (CSO 2011), reflecting its continued status as the country’s premier city. Lusaka’s growth does not, however, reflect a decent standard of life for the majority, but rather the fact that the city offers diversified and better opportunities and services. The minimum cost of living per month for a family of six in December 2010 for

Lusaka was calculated at ZMK 2,897,430. The average monthly income for a family in an urban low-cost settlement, which comprises 80% of all settlements in Lusaka, was ZMK 645,326, while civil servants like teachers and nurses earned from ZMK 1,300,000 to ZMK 3,450,000 (JCTR 2010).

In contrast, in the rural district of Mufumbwe in North Western Province, where there is a combination of informal and formal copper mining activity, the residents of the area consumed on average 900 calories a day<sup>11</sup>, a deficiency of more than half the 2400 calories required per day (JCTR, 2009). In comparison with the Copperbelt and Lusaka, there is little social infrastructure, with residents having to travel on average more than sixty kilometres to access the mission hospital at Kasempa. With these inequalities and deficiencies in income, many Zambians feel they are not benefiting from the copper boom.

### ***Foreign investment***

Given the highly visible impact that changing foreign investment in copper has had on the welfare of the Zambian population, local perceptions and attitudes towards foreign investors in mining are continually expressed in people's everyday discourse on the Copperbelt. There is a general recognition of a major shift in responsibility for infrastructural and welfare provisions onto Copperbelt residents. A question often posed in local discussion is: "what kind of investment is this, if they (foreign investors) can't build houses for us?" reflecting the still widely held expectation that mining investment will lead to modernisation for its employees.<sup>12</sup> Lumwana Mines plc, which is developing a green-field site in the North Western Province is perceived by Copperbelt residents as a prime example of good investment because "they are building houses"<sup>13</sup>. The construction of

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<sup>11</sup> This average does not take into account the fluctuations in food consumption that vary seasonally between lean and bountiful months.

<sup>12</sup> N/Western Province elders urge FQM to build modern structures. *The Post*, 8<sup>th</sup> February 2011.

<sup>13</sup> However, the local rural population living in the vicinity of the new mine are increasingly concerned about the potential degradation and pollution of their environment,

housing for many Copperbelt residents is also seen as a gauge of mine-investors' commitment, showing their willingness to accept responsibility for the workers' welfare, as had been the norm in the years of mine-welfare largesse. In Luanshya, people frequently commented that JW/Enya, who owned the Luanshya mine at the beginning of the copper boom in 2004, had made no signs of planning new housing. Apart from the rehabilitation of the public swimming pool and the former mine hospital, the company did not undertake any major infrastructural development. The temporary nature of its stay was further highlighted by the conversion of offices into residences for some expatriate staff. When, in 2008, the mine was placed under care and maintenance, it confirmed the dim view of Luanshya residents on the short-term nature of JW/Enya's investment.

In 2009, the Luanshya mine was purchased by the China Non-Ferrous Metal Mining Company (CNMC). Despite general resentment towards Chinese investment on the Copperbelt, many residents of the town expressed relief because this purchase was perceived as more sustainable in the longer term, largely due to significant investment in developing the infrastructure of the mine and the well publicised construction of what was to be the largest copper smelter in the Copperbelt. Others though were worried because there was no evidence that CNMC was building any large-scale housing development and the Chinese management were staying in the old general manager's residence, which had been sub-divided into flats. One resident noted, "they like to stay together", a practice confirmed by Lee (2010) in her study of Chinese enclaves in Zambia and Tanzania. This mode of living contrasted with that of former British managers who "wanted swimming-pools immediately after they arrived".<sup>14</sup>

The Chinese mining company's spartan approach to settlement and their willingness to work long hours alongside the Zambians are applauded as evidence of a strong work ethic. However, these are also problematic for

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in-migration from the old Copperbelt, and what the overall benefit to themselves will be from the mine.

<sup>14</sup> In contrast, Lumwana Mines and First Quantum Minerals in the new mining area in North Western Province have planned golf courses.

Zambians because Chinese presence and work practices alter the playing field for labour negotiations which were previously conceptualised in terms of the moral inequalities embedded in the disparity of labour and living conditions between African and European mine workers, and later between African manual labourers compared to the managerial and political elite. According to Mr Hu, a Chinese citizen with business interests in Zambia, Zambians can no longer afford a work ethic and life style inherited from the British; he extended his criticism further to observe that if Zambians learnt “not to spend on Coca-Cola” their incomes would go further. Though President Kaunda had made a similar argument in the years of the copper decline, it is one that does not sit well with a majority of Zambians who point out that the majority are living below the poverty line and struggle just to meet their basic needs.

Emerging with new investment in the new mine areas of North Western Province, new mining activity, while welcome for many of the old Copperbelt residents who are taking up jobs there, is proving a major threat to the immediate livelihood of its rural dwellers. In Musele chiefdom, which lies in the district of Solwezi, where First Quantum is developing its Trident Mines - a greenfield site -the people of the chiefdom have been involved in a dispute with the state and the mining company over the legitimacy of the land acquisition process for mining and surface rights.<sup>15</sup> While the Zambian state can issue prospecting and mining licences as it has rights over minerals under the ground, to gain access to surface activities on customary tenure the state needs the consent of traditional authorities who are the custodians of this land. The majority of Zambia’s land (prior to an ongoing land audit) falls under the aegis of customary tenure. The state and investors increasingly have to engage with traditional authorities and the people occupying this land in order to alienate land for development activities. Rohit Negi (2013) who conducted extensive research in the new

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<sup>15</sup> An article published 17 October 2013 by Paul Carlucci highlights the challenges rural communities face with new mining development in North Western Province: ‘When companies meet communities: copper storm brewing in North Western Zambia at <http://thinkafricapress.com/zambia/when-companies-meet-communities-copper-storm-brewing-north-western-fqm-actionaid> (last accessed December 10 2013).

mining areas of North Western province writes about how these relationships have come to be reconfigured with the emergence of mining activity, casting traditional authorities as some of the key purveyors of development in Zambia.

In North Western Zambia, rural dwellers' fortunes, much like those of the older Copperbelt residents, have varied with the large injection of capital in these areas. Some rural residents (as described in Chapter Four) have "made it", while others have been dispossessed of their land in not very well executed resettlement programs. Zambia's resettlement guidelines provide only a paltry compensation for forced resettlement. The long running absence of the state in rural affairs, as well as the often repeated statement by urban dwellers and Zambian politicians that "chiefs are selfish people", has fed into the contemporary subversion of traditional authorities, many of whom rely on hand-outs from the state. This view has justified the state's position in casting itself as the fairest arbiter of rural peoples, and has limited traditional authorities' abilities to negotiate on behalf of their people. Though the Zambian state has long espoused decentralised governance, it never fully committed to it and revenue collected from mining activity is centralised rather than managed by regional authorities. This has led to disaffection with the sharing of revenue particularly from high growth areas and has fed into federalist impulses of regions like North Western province and the other rural hinterlands. These are seen as a threat to the idea of a unitary Zambian state.<sup>16</sup> The process for the acquisition of land for investment activity and the negotiation and distribution of revenue collected from it are seen by many as unfair to rural residents, who, due to the long deprivation in investment in education, seem unlikely to benefit directly from mining activity through employment.

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<sup>16</sup> The recent 2012-2013 constitution review process revealed that all the regions in the country opted for political devolution (email correspondence with Dr Rodger Chongwe, chairperson of the constitutional review process on 30 May 2013.)

## **Diversification from copper**

Efforts are being made to attract new investment to diversify away from copper production that disproportionately contributes 11% to gross domestic product, and realised over 80% of the country's foreign exchange earnings in 2010. Regulations were put in place in 2009 to mine uranium in the North Western and Southern Provinces of the country. The viability of oil production and diamond mining is being explored in the Western part of the country that borders with Angola and Namibia. Gold is being mined by FQM at Kansanshi as a by-product of copper-mining operations.

The dramatic decline in living standards from the 1980s to the present day has renewed efforts both on the state level and the individual level to promote investment in agriculture. The Zambian state has been wooing displaced Zimbabwean commercial farmers and South African farmers worried about potential land redistribution to invest in the country. In the new mining areas of North Western Province, mines like First Quantum Minerals Ltd are beginning to experiment with supporting local out-grower schemes using high-yield techniques of conservation farming to supply the mines with fresh vegetables. Meat and grain production in close proximity to the mines is also encouraged to enhance food supply and provide alternative livelihoods for the long run.

At a household level, many Copperbelt residents carry out backyard and small-scale agricultural activities not only for subsistence but also as a way to earn an income (see Chapter Three). Civil society organisations, especially the Pentecostal churches that preach a prosperity gospel, have also been active in promoting farming as an alternative means of livelihood. One sermon entitled "Getting back to God's Plan" prepared by a Luanshya pastor (Kasonka 2008), prescribes a formula for creating a Garden of Eden, which would include livestock, birds and fruit, and result in a "land flowing with milk and honey". This kind of plan characterises the experiments of many Copperbelt residents in self-sufficient small-scale agriculture and livelihood diversification, which some argue creates villagers in the town.

### **When the town becomes like a village**

As the economy declined towards the end of the 1970s, the state increasingly called on people to become self-sufficient. On the Copperbelt in the 1980s, the mines promoted various schemes such as fish farming, sunflower cultivation and processing, poultry farming and similar activities. While the latter activities might not have been adopted widely, many Copperbelt residents recount going *kuma bala* “to the fields” in the 1980s. There they grew groundnuts, maize, pumpkins and sweet potatoes, mainly for home consumption. Most of these farming activities were taken up by mine-employees’ wives, their children and visiting relatives. The men, as several of my interviewees readily admitted, were to be found at the various recreation clubs that the mines offered while their relatives farmed. Agricultural activities intensified in the more difficult years following the sale of the mines. A kind of pragmatism towards livelihoods set in as the number of waged labourers on the Copperbelt declined as a consequence of massive retrenchments. With reduced income, going to rural areas became less viable as progressive years of reduced remittances from those in wage labour in the towns increased the harshness of rural poverty. In addition, the movement of rural kin to the towns decreased, in part because the public transport sector was increasingly privatised and the previous benefits of a decent education in the towns became hard to support with the introduction of user fees.

The increase of urban poverty in the previously better-served Copperbelt towns resulted in shifting exploitative capitalist relations from the mine to the home. Several incidents during the period of my research indicated that extended-family members, who because of circumstances like the deaths of parents, were living with former mine employees on the Copperbelt, were made to work long hours often without pay in the small enterprises that emerged. Neighbourly relations also became more fractious, as families without access to running water siphoned water from their neighbours. This usually occurred in the dry season when the wells they had dug in their

backyards were completely dry. In retaliation, their neighbours closed off outdoor water supplies. Such difficult relations concerning basic needs suggest that while the towns were increasingly like the village in visual and material terms they were far from the ideal of convivial village life.

If this process of villagisation is conceived as people's pragmatic approach to the realities of their changing material environment, one that encompasses multiple possibilities of dwelling and livelihood, then it is hard to see the Copperbelt as a place that is either urban or rural. Rather than dichotomizing the Copperbelt as urban or rural, modern or rustic, or viewing it as in transition to becoming modern, it is best seen as textured by possibilities and constraints in an altered environment. In this way, places change, not because of an abstract structure that stylises an idea of the modern or urban, but because our rooted engagement and entanglement with the environment grounds our experience and conceives of a reality that is readily discernable in what we do.

## Chapter Two

### “You Can’t Plan”: Dreams, practice and order

Despite the continual decline of the mining industry through the 1980s, many Copperbelt residents, particularly those working for the mines, could not conceive of a time when the industry would come to a standstill. Many of my Copperbelt informants recounted their belief that even after receiving retrenchment benefits - in the first instance, a house, and much later, a “lump sum cash” – there would be new, and possibly even better jobs in the mines. This view, quite out of step with the social realities described in Chapter One nevertheless had taken hold, spurred in part by the notion that a liberalised economy that people had agitated for against UNIP and Kenneth Kaunda would deliver. Shopkeepers in Luanshya described how miners receiving cash benefits had, despite the uncertainty of their futures, embarked on short-lived extravagant spending and lifestyle choices. Opinion was divided amongst them as to whether the spending sprees were as a result of mine workers’ recklessness and inability to plan beyond the next pay cheque or a consequence of an inability to conceive of a future without the mines<sup>17</sup>. Rather they remembered the past with nostalgia.

Hope as an idea for the future. Does a life looking in a rear view mirror<sup>18</sup> (Nyamnjoh, 2001) preclude hope? If not where would it lie? I found that life on the Copperbelt is not just one of getting by, or just a nostalgic look into the past, but also a place of ‘unrealistic’ expectations and flights of

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<sup>17</sup> There was an awareness amongst many of the residents of Luanshya following temporary closure of the mines in 2000 that there were still copper mineral deposits, such as the Muliashi deposits. As of 2010 these were being developed by the new mine owners, the Chinese mining company NFC Africa.

<sup>18</sup> An aspect of Ferguson’s book that Francis Nyamnjoh (2001) takes up in his review is on how Copperbelt residents conceptualise their future amidst hardship. Ferguson notes that it was not only commentators on the Copperbelt industrialisation that bought into the myth of modernity but also its own residents, such that a description of a hard life in the present could only elicit a nostalgic look to the past, where a prosperous modern future had seemed a reality. Nyamnjoh, draws on a vehicular metaphor in his reading of Ferguson, writing that, “like a driver with little prospect of advancing, their (that is Copperbelt residents) only chance of pulling out appears to be looking in the rear-view mirror” (see Chapter Six for a discussion on how Copperbelt residents perceive their lives).

fancy, where impossible dreams are dreamt. Later, I give examples of these forays, such as one instance in which a family planned an ice-cream parlour in a depressed neighbourhood where people struggled to have a meal, or the couple who borrowed close to a billion kwacha to set up an oil processing refinery. These examples, I argue, are not unconnected to Edward Nkoloso's<sup>19</sup> vision of a Zambia entering the space age at the cusp of the country's independence in 1964, or Kenneth Kaunda's last desperate vision of a "Heaven on Earth"<sup>20</sup> in the wane of his power. While these journey's into 'space' could be derided as millennial cults, I argue that these forays into the 'impossible' are another iteration in the attempts for livelihood and a harmonious life, that, like many religions, offer potentials of existence that stretch beyond the immediate environment and hint at a life that can emerge, maybe not in that place, but in another. However, these journeys, which could be described as hopeful, are at the same time pragmatic. Many Zambians say of the future, "we'll see when we get there". This view recognises the constraints of action and hurdles that might emerge, but does not preclude movement towards an uncertain future. It is an approach that requires "doing", even if, like Edward Nkoloso's vision of astronauts training for a trip to the moon, the prospects look crazy in the immediate context.

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<sup>19</sup> At the time of Northern Rhodesia's (Zambia's) independence from British colonial rule, Times Warner circulated a story that today still does the rounds online. It reported that Edward Makuka Nkoloso, a science teacher, had set up a space program called the Zambia National Academy of Science, Space Research and Philosophy in the outskirts of the Zambia's capital. There, using swings and rolling drums to simulate the conditions of space he trained a youthful team of astronauts who, with a cat, were to compete with the USA and former Soviet Union in the race to the moon. (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward\\_Makuka\\_Nkoloso](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Makuka_Nkoloso), last accessed 10 December 2013.)

<sup>20</sup> During the 1991 campaign for his and his party's UNIP re-election Kenneth Kaunda, who had then ruled the country for 27 years (since 1972 as a one-party state), had proposed turning over one-quarter of the country's land mass to a yogic Maharishi group who where to have helped turn the country into an earth-friendly agrarian paradise in addition to encouraging meditation amongst the country's populace as a practice to promote calm and peace. Kaunda subsequently lost the elections and the scheme (which was seen as odd by the majority of the populace) was never implemented.

### ***Theorizing through doing: a phenomenological engagement with the Copperbelt***

In this chapter, I introduce the theories and methodology that underpin the whole thesis. These draw mainly from a phenomenological engagement with the Copperbelt. As such my approach mixes methods and theoretical discussions with practical examples, starting from the perspective that in order to understand a people's experience of place the research must to engage in a process of 'doing', a direct participant observation. This is line with the ethnographic tradition that is grounded in concrete examples rather than just abstract theory. In this approach, I am inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu who sought to reconcile the tensions between knowing the world as we see it and as we experience it (Bourdieu, 1977). However, drawing from the work of Tim Ingold (2000) that posits a material phenomenological experience of the environment, and from Edward Casey (2001) and Gaston Bachelard (1969) who explore the imaginary of place as we experience it, I describe the Copperbelt as a *textured place*. Following on from James Ferguson's (1999) ethnography on the Copperbelt in the 1980s, which broke from the linear narratives of progress on the Copperbelt and drew on performance theories, I build on his work, by not only describing what happened later, but also by analysing it through an ontological approach embedded in the material environment.

My aim is to describe the texture and experience of life on the Zambian Copperbelt, and not just offer an explanatory framework about social relations on the Copperbelt. I build on Ferguson's theoretical departure from a mappable representation of the Copperbelt that characterised many of the earlier ethnographys of the region, to include those 'unintelligible' and 'noisy' aspects of life (1999, p.36). Ferguson's work offered a brilliant critique of the myth of modernity and the teleological assumptions that underpinned the anthropology of the Copperbelt. I offer a view on how Copperbelt residents reconcile the myth, represented in the fantasy of the plan, to the realities of living and dreaming in contexts of uncertainty.

I found that Copperbelt residents had not lost their capacity to dream. Rather their dreams had taken a nostalgic turn, recounting a past within which the future could have been planned, and alternatively having taken a fanciful turn that, on cursory observation, seems out of place. This ‘future imaginary’ and the ways of being it invoked became both clearer to me and a site of reflection when I embarked on looking for a house to buy following my employment with the Copperbelt University and the process of renovating it which began my fieldwork in Luanshya in August 2007. With this introduction of my entry into the field, I hope to set the context for a discussion on the methods and theories I draw on to think through what I observed during the course of fieldwork. They also situate my observations about the villagisation of the town (presented in Chapter One) and the stories of how Copperbelt residents went about trying to make a life and ‘get on’ with life in a place that many said had ‘lost its order’.

### **The search for a house on the Copperbelt**

I had began looking for a place to buy in the Zambia summer of 2006, a year and half after becoming a lecturer in the Architecture department at the Copperbelt University located in Kitwe.

#### ***Where on the Copperbelt?***

I embarked on my search for a house the conventional way by looking in the property sections of the country’s three main newspapers, the independent *Post Newspaper*, and the state-sponsored *Times* and *Daily Mail*. I initially looked for places located in Kitwe, but many of the places I saw were outside my budget<sup>21</sup>. In addition, in Kitwe, the commercial hub and most populous Copperbelt town with a more diverse economy than the region’s other towns, I found it more difficult to establish both the validity of property sale offers and trust with the sellers. In one incident when I

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<sup>21</sup> My budget, including cost of renovations which I knew were very likely was ZMK 65,000,000 (approximately US\$ 13,000), to be financed by some savings, an employment-attached loan from a commercial bank and a long term loan from a friend.

went to view a property advertised in the papers, the supposed sellers turned out to have set up a scam in which they had engineered to have a gemstone dealer holding a little pouch of stones to wander onto the property, supposedly lost, asking for directions to the industrial area where he could polish the gems. What alerted me to the scam was that the property sales newspaper I had perused had a section torn out which matched exactly the piece of paper the gemstone dealer had scrawled the address he was looking. While this incident was more obviously an attempt to scam, in the other cases, especially where property was being sold following the death of the title deed holder, ownership and inheritance were often contested as it was a widespread practice not to leave wills by the deceased<sup>22</sup>.

As a result of these issues I widened my search to the other Copperbelt towns. Chingola, where the Konkola Copper Mines owned by Vedanta are located, was a possible option. Long known as one of the neatest towns of the Copperbelt, Chingola had weathered better the infrastructural decline following re-privatisation. However, the heavy machinery and traffic of trucks carrying copper ore coming from the Kanshanshi mines in Solwezi, the emergent new Copperbelt, from the mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo and KCM itself to the Mopani Copper Mines smelter in Kitwe meant that commuting to Kitwe from Chongola would be risky as the road that connected the two towns was considered one of the most dangerous on the Copperbelt. Mufulira, the Copperbelt town whose mine had been part of the Rhodesian Selection Trust mines and where my father was born, was out of question, not only because the shortest route to Kitwe still connected one to the dangerous Chingola – Kitwe road, but also because it is known to have one of the worst air qualities<sup>23</sup>. Ndola, the administrative centre and former industrial hub of the Copperbelt, like Kitwe, had higher property prices. Kalulushi, the most recent of the mine company towns on the old

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<sup>22</sup> In the absence of a will the intestate succession act of 1994 proposes the division of property between children, spouse and dependants, as well as parents of the deceased if still living. There are frequent disputations over the distribution of resources.

<sup>23</sup> Glencore's Mopani Copper Mines located in Mufulira had been cautioned in 2012 by the Zambia environmental agency over air quality pollution, particularly acid mist. See Mail and Guardian newspaper article, "Zambia halts copper treatment plant's operations", 6<sup>th</sup> March 2012.

Copperbelt and in closest proximity to Kitwe, was also outside my budget. That left Luanshya whose economy was hardest hit following privatisation and whose property prices as a result were the most depressed.

In the end, I found the place in Luanshya through a property agent who had advertised it and several other properties in the newspapers. The agent, a former civil servant who had retired from Lusaka to Luanshya because the cost of living was cheaper, had been selling the house on behalf of a former ZCCM employee, Mr Mumba, who wished to use the revenue from the sale to finance the building of a house in Ndola where he planned to relocate. The house which was located in the former low-density mine suburb that used to be administered by the mines. It was Mr Mumba's second property. In 2006, he had been leasing it out for rental income of ZMK 300,000 (about US\$60) a month. Mr Mumba had another home in Luanshya where he and his family lived, located in the high cost council area, the part of town previously managed by the local authorities. In contrast to many of the other town's residents Mr Mumba, an engineer, was doing quite well financially as he had established several work contracts with the new mines on the Copperbelt. I bought the house from him for ZMK 55,000,000 (about US\$ 11,000), with the aid of a lawyer to draw up contracts.

The house had been a bargain as most properties were at that time in the town. Luanshya was then considered likely to turn in a ghost town<sup>24</sup>, with little hope of reviving the copper industry that had been the backbone of the town's economy. Pragmatic reasons justified why I bought a place there. It was one of the few places I could afford to buy a house. Also Luanshya was a forty-five minute commute to work in Kitwe. While its depressed economy did not make it the best place to invest in property, it offered the security of a home. My father, a casualty of the retrenchments in 1995 during the privatisation of ZCCM assets, unlike like other Copperbelt-based former employees, had not gained a house as part of his retrenchment

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<sup>24</sup> The Post newspaper writer Joe Kaunda reported on 4th November 1999 that, "Luanshya risks turning into a ghost town".

package.<sup>25</sup> The months of anxiety about where we would move following the loss of his job made me seek to ensure that I never found myself in a similar situation.

### *Not clearcut aspirations*

Like other Copperbelt residents I had met, I was also prone to fanciful ideas. Several of my Zambian colleagues had asked me why I had done the foolish thing of buying property in Luanshya when I could have invested in a piece of land in Kitwe or Lusaka where, over the course of my service at the university, I could have built my own house. It was not uncommon in the urban areas of Zambia for people to spend upward of half decade building a house, financing the construction according to variable revenue streams. This often put people in confrontation with the local authorities who were mandated to repossess land that lay idle, especially in the capital Lusaka where the demand for land was high.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the slow and highly centralised land administration meant many miners including my seller, Mr Mumba, did not yet have title deeds, other than a letter of sale from the mines, and the house at the point of sale was in the name of the former mining company ZCCM. This was baffling to my European friends who asked why I would take such a legal risk. The only surety was a contract of sale drawn up by my lawyer and signed by myself, the seller, the agent and two other witnesses. In 2010, Mr Mumbi did eventually get title deeds and contacted me to begin the process of transferring the deeds to my name, but several things could have gone wrong in between.

Like many other Copperbelt residents, even those in stable jobs such as the one I had at the Copperbelt University, I explored other livelihood options. I was influenced in large part - like others - by the need to maintain multiple options and not to rely on only one stream of revenue. This need to

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<sup>25</sup> Unlike many other ZCCM employees who occupied ZCCM housing and had thus gained a house as part of their retrenchment package, the subsidiary company located in Lusaka had not owned its own property and had rented from the private market.

<sup>26</sup> Land for which building permission had been obtained had to be developed within a period of 5 years.

maintain a range of options reflected people's increasing sense of precariousness of life, an aspect I explore in greater depth in Chapter Six. With a good friend and colleague, also a female lecturer in the architecture department at the university, I set about a number of economic forays. In 2005, we tried to open a tea-room on the main university campus but this idea failed because the union that managed the property we planned to rent stalled and did not reach a decision to lease it to us. A year later an ill-advised venture to Lumumbashi the centre of the copper mining region Katanga in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the quest of establishing links to manufacturers and suppliers of woven raffia fabric for interior design commissions was curtailed by our being quickly distracted by the city's buildings and architecture. Temporarily forgetting we were in a war torn country, we took photographs that resulted in our apprehension by the city's plainclothes secret police and resulted in us losing half the money we budgeted to buy the fabric. Our more successful work was in small architectural consultancy commissions often by clients who approached the university.

One venture that my colleague and I engaged in made me aware of the shifting economy of the Copperbelt. After years of low prices, the price of copper began to pick up in 2004. This brought the entry of venture capitalists and other opportunists looking to cash in on the copper boom. I met one such venture capitalist who pointed out the Copperbelt forest<sup>27</sup> and its reforestation potential to create a green economy for the region. At the time, he envisioned that in view of the push towards a green economy, mining companies, especially copper mines that are great polluters and cause significant destruction of trees and the ground, would want to offset these negative effects by replanting indigenous forests.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, he said, the country then did not have the regulations in place to create a

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<sup>27</sup> Copperbelt towns like Luanshya had been established in the middle of *miombo* woodland. Some of this woodland had been cleared to establish pine and eucalyptus forests which, following the sale of the mines in the mid 1990s, were being settled by retired and retrenched urban Copperbelt residents seeking agricultural livelihoods. See Hansangule, Feeney and Palmer (1998).

<sup>28</sup> There are growing markets where you can exchange carbon-offset activities for "credits" then sold on special markets.

carbon market. In a utopian view, I imagined that the implementation of this mechanism would result in jobs in agro-forestry, especially for a town like Luanshya that is completely surrounded by forest, and hence the revival of the town. A female colleague and I had drafted a position paper to be tabled at parliament outlining how Zambia could participate in a green economy. However, a member of parliament who had seemed keen on this initiative during the initial meeting had in a follow-up meeting been more eager to tell us that he had been offered a position on the board of a copper trading company. He had conveyed his reluctance to talk about the position paper by trying to urge us to have a drink with his coterie of male party cadres at his parliamentary accommodations, a situation that my colleague and I read as open to ambiguous interpretation, and as such we abandoned our pursuit of this avenue.

During fieldwork, I realised that there were other people like myself who had set out on a particular course on the hope that at some point something might change to shift the game in our favour. While my female colleague and I had set out on a course that had little chance of success, the fact that we went as far as we did on a chance encounter highlighted the flexibility and permeability of the social context. This made me realise, early on in my fieldwork, to look at how overly ambitious dreams, and a call to religious symbolisms, for example through prayer, play out in practice.<sup>29</sup> As such, my approach to fieldwork overall was grounded in bodily material practices that owes to a spatial framework that emphasises what people do and their perceptual engagement with place and situations. This approach draws from the work of Ingold who elaborates on cultural variations not as inherent traits of peoples and their environments but as emergent from both social and material relations. Ingold challenges the idea of embodiment, whereas in Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) notion of habitus, skills are seen as inscribed (or circumscribed) on the body by various structures of society.

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<sup>29</sup> Naomi Haynes (2012) writing on pentecostalism on the Copperbelt for example looks beyond the 'spectral' qualities of prosperity gospel to how it fosters social relationships and exchange by promoting visible displays of material wealth that in turn play into expectations of moral obligations and reciprocity based on the hierarchies signified on those who are living well and not so well.

Rather Ingold (2000) sees the body as interactional and in continuous transformative movement, engaging people and environment in a process of becoming. As I show, Ingold's work was useful in thinking through how Copperbelt residents conceptualise the practice of living; as Ingold describes it a "wayfaring" movement towards an uncertain futures.

The renovation of the house that I summarise below enmeshed me in a process that allowed me to engage quite intensively with the broader macro-economic issues affecting Copperbelt residents. It sets the context for the chapter on the informal copper economy. As a 'making' activity that was both material and social, it provided me with insight into how people navigate practical life in an informalising economy and where capital is scarce. Very much like the options and variation in business ideas, I found that people's interactions were improvised within the possibilities of what they could manage within the given social and material constraints, that in themselves were also not so stable. The renovation of the house that was to be my fieldwork home was an opportunity for me to reflect on the nature of this practice.

### ***The Renovation of the House***

The house, one bedroom with a generous sized living room and dining room, and a closed veranda, was structurally sound but in a bad state of repair and needed much work. It sat on a large plot, 30 by 60 metres, that characterised the low-density former mine suburb, which, like most other yards in the area was not maintained. After drawing up a schedule of works and costs, I set about looking for tradespeople who could help me execute the repair work. I was uncertain about where to begin my inquiries.

As a start, for the more urgent plumbing work I opted to contract a plumber from Kitwe recommended by a colleague. While he did reasonable work in installing new pipes, as the old ones had rusted through, it was not entirely satisfactory as there were leaks due to the pipes not being laid precisely to gradient. I knew however that this did not reflect on the work ethic of the

plumber but rather that in addition to not having a good set of tools and measuring equipment that was well calibrated, like many of the regions young tradesmen he had been inadequately trained in some of the abridged courses that had been offered by well meaning non-governmental organisations following the closure of mining company trades schools on the Copperbelt. Also, the contraction of the region's economy meant that many received little experience on the job due to the dearth of construction work.<sup>30</sup> This knowledge and my awareness of the changing political economy directed my attention towards older tradespersons who had gained a more solid technical education and experience in the heyday of the mines.

A few weeks after getting the plumbing done, I was in Lusaka visiting my parents when I happened to spy through the window of the minibus I was riding in a banner outside a hotel notifying of a meeting on traditional authorities' views on the country's 1995 Land Act.<sup>31</sup> Exiting the minibus before my intended destination, I decided to attend the meeting despite not having been invited to learn more about how chiefs felt about an aspect of the law that allowed - for the first time in the Zambian state - a conversion of land on customary tenure to state leasehold. During the lunch break I struck up a conversation with Mr Banda, the maître de hotel where the meeting was taking place. Mr Banda, who was in his late 40s, happened to be a former resident of Luanshya and had worked as a mine worker for the Luanshya mines under ZCCM and RAMCOZ before they were liquidated and he was laid off. Mr Banda, who had gained a house as part of his retrenchment package, had left his family in Luanshya to look for a job in Lusaka. He had found one running the restaurant of the three star hotel. His family was unable to join him in Lusaka because, combined with household

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<sup>30</sup> The award winning architect Walter Dobkins, who had designed the building that now houses the COMESA headquarters in Lusaka, whom I had interviewed for my Masters thesis had taken these factors into account in the design of the building which used more organic form that, in contrast to a linear design, allowed for the concealment of errors for builders not adept at setting out straight lines, and the use of familiar low tech building materials.

<sup>31</sup> The 1995 Land Act allowed the conversion of land on customary tenure to state leasehold land, but not vice versa, as well as vesting all land under the President of the country. As most of the country's land mass was under customary tenure, this act was criticised by both traditional authorities and activists as potentially dispossessing the rural poor by, in effect, privatising land.

expenses for his family and school fees for his children, he could only afford to rent in a nearby informal settlement. He also said he did not wish to subject his children to the difficulties and ‘morals’ of ‘compound’ life in Lusaka. By this comment, Mr Banda was referring to the villagisation of life in the informal settlements of Lusaka, where the expectations of convivial social relations more akin to ideas of village life fostered by material constraints such as the need to share communal taps, intermingled with city life where all-night bars blared music until the early hours of the morning. This was unlike the small town of Luanshya where Mr Banda’s family still lived in the low density former mine suburb where I had purchased a house.

Such chance encounters, and the opportunities they presented, were not uncommon and highlighted the fluidity of urban Zambian social experience. There was a tendency for people to ‘step outside of themselves’ and take chances. This ‘stepping out’ could be seen as a willingness to trespass social and material boundaries and, as the encounters in my research suggested, seemed to characterise a strategy that my Copperbelt informants drew upon to cope with the end of the certainties of the ZCCM system. This “wayfaring” beyond the established paths allowed people to perceive new opportunities. It was these very actions that led me to meeting Mr Lackson Mwale.

### ***Creating kinship - Mr Lackson Mwale***

Mr Banda happened to have a close friend, Mr Lackson Mwale, who had worked in the mines’ property maintenance department. Following retrenchment, Mr Mwale had set up a small construction and building works firm in Luanshya. Mr Banda gave me the contact details. When I called Mr Mwale to set up a meeting to conduct a preliminary assessment of the work that needed to be done on the house, he came over to my place within thirty minutes, with one of his assistants, Mr Zulu, a former mine worker who had been retired in the mid-1990s. After the social niceties of greetings, Mr Mwale asked me where I was from, saying I had sounded

Indian on the phone. I knew this was a query about my 'home village' and a way of establishing ethnic relations that went some way to setting the context for the social communicative strategies we were to engage in. Mr Mwale said he was from the Eastern province of Zambia. This established me as 'kin', as my paternal grandparents had hailed from the Eastern part of the country. Establishing that I came from the same 'home' region, allowed for a play of kin relations that extended the relationship beyond a straightforward business transaction and also allowed for breaking the alienation of capital. I became Mr Mwale's 'sister'. However, Mr Mwale had found a system that worked to reduce some of the liabilities that came with creating such familiarity. After looking around himself and going over the schedule of works, Mr Mwale told me that he usually preferred his customers to buy their own materials, though he could advise on the quality, the cost and where to get them. This, he said, was because he did not want to be accused of cheating, for example buying lower quality materials and charging higher prices for them. Also, this way, he said, he would only charge and be responsible for the labour costs.

Mr Lackson Mwale also became a valuable point of entry to my fieldwork in Luanshya, introducing me to his family and colleagues. His wife Rosemary and I were able to establish a common link, as she was an 'auntie' (again, a relationship anthropologists characterize as 'fictive kin') to a young woman she worked with in Kitwe who was at the time dating my cousin. Through similar entry, by establishing relationships with family members of my key informants, most of whom adopted me as fictive kin, I was allowed a reasonable degree of freedom to conduct my research and was easily able to explore how women, men and young people experienced life on the Copperbelt.

I met many of the people who became my key informants in the early days of renovating the house, and the services they supplied and advice they offered indicated the informalisation of the Copperbelt economy. For example, when looking for aggregate to make a cement mixture for setting a new feeder sewer pipe to replace the one that had burst in my yard, I was

referred to a woman who sold flux stone that was being dug from the copper dumpsites by women and children who were trespassing onto mine property to collect the flux. The sewer pipe itself was purchased in the hardware section of Chisokone market in Kitwe, the largest outdoor market of the Copperbelt. There, pipes such as the one I bought were manufactured in someone's backyard and as they were not tested by recognised testing bodies, I had employed my own methods of strength testing. When I had the misfortune of an attempted robbery, having been resistant to installing burglar bars for aesthetic reasons and cost, I relented, and the metal bars were purchased for a fraction of the prices found in the stores through an introduction by Mr Mwale to a wholesale supplier of steel bars. I found out later that the bars had been part of a large consignment destined for the mines and as such were tax-exempt, thus enabling the supplier to sell quietly on the wider market at a lower price, thereby undercutting local competition.

Informalisation and the inevitability of trespass characterised how most people lived on the Copperbelt. Limited access to capital meant that many people were looking for cheaper goods so they could afford to 'get on'. For example, when Mr Mubita, whose activities I present in greater length in next chapter on the improvised nature of Copperbelt livelihoods, decided to build his frontyard store, he could not afford even locally sold flux stone to use as a cement aggregate. Rather than abandon the construction of the store, he made several long trips with his wheelbarrow in the early mornings sweeping the little stones off a major road whose potholes were being patched.

Lack of access to money and credit did not stop people from carrying on with their plans. Bank loans were available mainly to salaried employees and larger, more established businesses. This allowed banks, such as the one from which I had borrowed money, to make monthly deductions directly through employers. Interest rates were high, ranging between twenty and twenty-five percent and loan repayment periods were short, averaging two years at the most. This meant that many people borrowed

from family members and friends; microlending institutions whose interest rates were even higher (often above thirty-five percent) with even shorter repayment periods; and from loan sharks who charged over one hundred percent on loans for the shortest repayment periods. For some of my informants who tended to bigger plans, and had a corresponding need for credit, like the case of the pastor and his wife I present below, the high cost of credit had serious consequences. However, those whose financial circumstances made it difficult even to borrow money from friends and family had to rely on other means, like Mr Mubita, to get things done without using money. How this section of the Luanshya population got on was hinted to me shortly after moving to the house.

On the day that I met Mr Mwale to assess what work needed to be done on the house, I met some of my immediate neighbours. They sat under a tree and I could see them through the scraggly lantana hedge that formed the boundary of the two properties. After Mr Mwale had left, the man who had been sitting on a stool near a mat where two women and a baby sat, wandered through the hedge. He introduced himself as Lazarus Nsofu. Taking me to introduce me to the women, the one with the baby turning out to be his wife, he asked if his wife, Sandra could work for me as a domestic worker in turn for accommodation in the ‘servant’s quarters’, a room at the bottom of my garden. I told them that I was not in need of a domestic worker and did not plan to lease the room at the bottom of the garden. However, when I moved in to the house a few weeks later, I found that Mr Nsofu, his wife Sandra, their baby as well as a Mr Nsofu’s young niece had moved in. The family had sat within a circle of mango trees at the bottom of the garden. Unsure what to tell them, whether to ask them to leave, I did not immediately approach them, and neither did they approach me. Eventually, loathing the task of having to ask them to leave, I resolved to employ Sandra for a couple of days work a week and Mr Nsofu, a day for a week of gardening, and in return they could stay.<sup>32</sup> This was unplanned expenditure for work I did not need, but the greater costs lay later in the water bills I

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<sup>32</sup> I found out later that a number of residents had been offering work for board in former ‘servant’s quarters’.

was to accrue. The Nsofus, being neighbourly, allowed those nearby residents whose water supply had been cut off to draw water from an external tap, which, previously blocked by the former owners, I had unblocked to enable to watering of a vegetable garden. Mr Nsofu, I was also to find, when I found a youth I did not know working in the garden, also occasionally subcontracted the gardening work for gifts in kind, the youth saying Mr Nsofu gave him things people did not want. During the period of Mr Nsofu and his wife's employment with me they did similar things that stretched the bounds of what I found acceptable and which inevitably resulted in me asking them to leave.

While what the Nsofu's did was socially risky, I came to realise in my encounters with other Luanshya residents that it was these risks that allowed them to extend the possibilities of their existence beyond the formal conventions of what was feasible or deemed acceptable.

Copperbelt residents, including myself, learnt more about the vagaries of the place we inhabited not by rigidly following a plan of action but by casting ourselves out into the flows and rhythms of life on the Copperbelt. We increased our knowledge of life and the place by what was referred to on the Copperbelt's everyday speech as "trying". Through this process, and successes and failures, Copperbelt residents textured both themselves and their environments.<sup>33</sup> Drawing from Thorsten Geiser's (2008) work on apprenticeship learning, one might describe me as having become an apprentice to life in Luanshya, increasing my knowledge by continuous improvised attempts. This learning process was not detached from that of other Copperbelt residents, as I learned from people like Mr Lackson Mwale and others, as they did in turn. A mutual learning of how to get on with life was fostered by what Geiser (2008) describes as an empathetic

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<sup>33</sup> Texture connotes the movement and the sensing of things, place and persons as they transform, shift, change; allowing for both 'smooth' movements (here drawing from the notion of smooth space as that which allows for movement that drifts or wanders), and the nitty gritty of place (as the movements that place the body in the immediacy of experience). (Casey, 1997).

“reciprocity of view points” as well as the sharing of “similar kinaesthetic experiences” (Geiser, 2008, p300).

However, Geisser’s approach is useful in thinking about phenomena experienced in the more immediate environment, it requires elaboration for those that seem to exceed or escape it.

### **Copperbelt Dreams and aspirations**

Despite the difficult and uncertain realities, many Copperbelt residents still had dreams for their futures. Some were fantastical and some, as Ferguson (1999) noted in his research, seemed to have an air of desperation. However, what appeared to be the millennial nature of these aspirations was not based only on disaffected or dillusional fantasies, but in belief that one could not know what lay in the horizon.

Jean and John Comaroff’s ideas about ‘millennial capitalism’ (2000) offer a useful starting point for thinking about things that seem to escape the present. In their work on contemporary capitalism they narrate how production, as a tangible expression of the making of things in the temporality of here and now, has given way to consumption, lending a spectral quality to the emergence of things that have been produced through processes invisible and intangible to those consuming them. This unknown aspect of the production of desirable goods has been of interest in anthropology in the study of cargo cults (see Lawrence 1971, Linstrom 1993), however, these studies have often tended to focus on identitarian discourse and power relations, seeing people who have cast their time and resources on improbable dreams and aspirations as marginal and their activities as expressions of disaffection with capitalism and modernity. My intention here is not to depoliticise the disjunctures that arise out of the inequalities of access to resources, but to draw attention to the ways in which they are localised and how persons try to bridge them and maybe move beyond the constraints of their circumstances. It is a view the

Comaroffs espouse in looking at how the abstract properties of capitalism happen in situ (1999, p295).

This view resonates with the recent work of Lisa Cligget *et. al.* (2007) on the Gwembe Valley, that reviews longitudinally how its residents have coped and made their lives in times of uncertainty and crisis, and how they have taken advantage of momentary economic booms. It contributes to the questions that anthropologists are increasingly asking, that is, how to make sense of human experience and explain it in times of crisis, instability and rapidly fluctuating social change. Many of these questions arose with the triumph of neoliberalism that saw the fall of state capitalism and welfare in the countries that had adopted socialist or communist orientations with political affinities with the former Soviet Union. Neoliberalism and the attendant structural adjustment policies that reduced social welfare as described earlier, has created a paradoxical mix of hope and despair; hope in the promise of prosperity seen in the few who had ‘made it’, and despair as a result of the erosion of people’s social safety needs and the abject poverty into which many fell. This paradox, I argue, has been key in contemporary anthropological studies in rethinking the concept of agency. The problem has been that if one takes an analytical approach to agency that sees people as willing action towards a goal, then when they fail to achieve their goals are we led to assume they have no agency and are fatalistically circumscribed by their circumstances and those ‘more’ powerful with agency, or can we think about it another way? Anthropologists working in other African countries that have experienced similar socio-economic stress are thinking through such issues through the lens of seeing people’s actions as continuous attempts to seize opportunities or chances (Johnson-Hanks 2005; Piot 2010). For example, Charles Piot’s (2010) study of post-Cold War biopolitics in Togo illuminates how “nostalgia for the future” shifts the hopes and aspirations of Togolese from the uncertainty of the present to the future. In his presentation of American Green Card aspirants, Piot shows, through the case of Kodjo (2010, p82), how a visa aspirant becomes an immigration consultant entrepreneur for those wishing entry to the USA. Piot demonstrates how Togolese are

willing to draw on what they had in hand to increase their chances and options. He gives an example of a man who was willing to use his disability as a strategy to gain a visa after hearing of someone who had gained on the grounds of his need for a hip replacement (2010, p4). For the Togolese presented in Piot's study, one did not know when one's luck might change (2010, p164). This is a view shared by my informants on the Copperbelt, a view that explains their engagement in less than feasible livelihood and economic ventures, as I describe below.

### ***Waiting for formal re-employment***

There were a number of former ZCCM employees who had appointed themselves as caretakers of former ZCCM recreational infrastructure. This included several who looked after the former ZCCM golf club, the pony club and the recreation centre. These appointments involved no remuneration. This employment was not just a voluntary activity but also a way to occupy time productively in a familiar setting. Former mine workers at these places waited in the hope of being re-hired should the establishments they were looking after were to re-open under a paying employer. In my discussions with them, they all had indicated that they had failed to become the entrepreneurs that the new market economy expected.

One such person was a Mr Kabemba who had held a supervisory clerical role in the ZCCM mines and had enjoyed playing golf in his spare time. When Mr Kabemba had been laid off the mines, he had used to his generous retrenchment package from the mines (when he eventually received it) to send his two sons abroad to study golf, one to Scotland, and the other with a scholarship to the USA. With most of the retrenchment spent, Mr Kabemba tried to raise chickens, but had been no good at it, and said he had come to the realisation that he was no good at manual labour, nor trade, and that his wife, the more entrepreneurial of the two of them, was now supporting them by offering a tailoring service. Mr Kabemba was part of an unpaid board managing the golf club, a job he did full-time, and one he said he could do well. The job involved providing a presence to

prevent the encroachment of subsistence farming and other activities onto the greens, and trying to host occasional tournaments – although there was hardly anyone playing golf at the time of my research. There was a sense from Mr Kabemba and others like him, that they were expecting a return to ‘normal’ (by which, they meant the order that had characterized paid employment on the mines) and would keep vigil till that time came, if it ever did. Their circumstance brought to mind Miss Haversham from Charles Dicken’s (1890) ‘Great Expectations’, living their lives in the decaying cocoon of yesterday, and waiting; living in a place that is a tangible reminder of a time when leisure fell into the smooth rhythms of a planned work day.

### *An Ice-Cream Parlour*

There were other dreams that seemed to hark to a past where ice-cream was an expected treat for children, such as Mr and Mrs Spaita’s idea for an ice-cream parlour. One afternoon in early 2008 I sat on a porch that was part of a storefront for a shop selling an assortment of household groceries in one of the most depressed neighbourhoods of Luanshya’s former mine suburbs. This space was where Mrs Spaita and her husband were selling ice-cream in cones. It was also where they had previously run a second-hand clothes store that had eventually been burnt down by jealous neighbours.<sup>34</sup> That afternoon, other than an ice-cream cone sold to me, they only sold one other. Despite what seemed to be a dismal business, the Spaita’s had a dream of setting up an ice-cream parlour. Mr Spaita, who was then working for Luanshya Copper Mines, had already undergone training in making ice-cream, and the couple, who had two children under the age of ten, were saving to buy a few more ice-cream making machines and find premises to rent. Mr Mwanja, a former workmate of Mr Spaita, was incredulous that they could even consider such a business. The question was, who could afford ice-cream when it was a struggle to have a meal a day?

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<sup>34</sup> I was surprised that they would set-up again in the same place after this experience, but this was characteristic of what I encountered – trying again (See Chapter Six).

### *A Used Oil Processing Business*

While the Spaita's business ideas were located in and based on a lifestyle of the past, others, like the Mwenyas, were anticipating a future industry, but one that unfortunately was overly ambitious as they did not have access to affordable capital nor had they properly assessed the viability of the business in the prevailing economic climate.

Mr and Mrs Mwenya who ran a charismatic Pentocostal church, one among many that had sprung up to fill the spaces vacated by former mining company recreational activities, had a grand plan to set up a large used-oil refinery to service the entire Copperbelt. With the re-emergence of the copper industry they envisioned that all that mining machinery and trucks would have a lot of used oil to dispose of that could be recycled. With a business proposal and using the revenue from the church and its tax-exempt status, they had secured a loan with the banks to purchase an old disused factory, the detritus of the region's former significant manufacturing industry. They had approached me informally for an assessment of what it would take to make the factory habitable. It was a significant amount that entailed them seeking another loan from the bank. Later they approached me to ask whether I would have the money to loan them, telling me that the bank had denied them the extra finance until they covered their existing loan which amounted to close to one billion Kwacha (about US\$200,000). One evening when I dropped by to visit them, I found out that they also owed money to a loan shark, who that very evening had threatened Mr Mwenya with a gun. Had it not been for his wife's intervention and passers' curiosity, the loan shark would have probably shot him. Outwardly successful, the Mwenyas, who owned two luxury cars (a Mercedes-Benz and BMW sedan) and lived in a house furnished with glitzy heavy furniture in an aesthetic commonly seen in the Nigerian movies that had become popular in Zambia, had, towards the end of my fieldwork, lost most of these assets. Mrs Mwenya told me they had resorted to borrowing money from micro-credit lenders for daily expenses.

The Mwenyas were characteristic of the highly ambitious business people who had emerged following the liberalisation of the country's economy. Their exhibition of wealth, was, as I had been persuaded by several businesspeople, an important aspect of the performance of building confidence amongst potential investment partners. To be a successful businessperson, you had to be seen as already wealthy; what Zambians refer to as *kulibonesha ta* (to show yourself). As I show in Chapter Three, this view also related to Copperbelt residents' views of class, which had shifted from status based on occupation and rank to perceptions of wealth and ability to get by.

The stories presented here provide a micro-understanding of the ways in which hope is crafted and experimented with in times of great uncertainty, and the future is imagined. They highlight that where hope, in the planning and expected outcomes may not be readily visible in the immediate environment, nevertheless it is thought of as lying "out there", in the horizon. The troubled side of this "out there" is reflected on in Chapter Six on young people's conception of the future and their ability to steer their lives. It responds to Ferguson's (1992) article "The Country and the City on the Copperbelt" where he writes, speaking of his Zambian informants apparent lack of "any morally positive images at all of a Zambian-made future" (1992, p85-86) that people's conception of the future may lie not in a mirror view back to the past (see Nyamnjoh, 2001). While the bleak narratives of self and the future that Ferguson recounts are still encountered in contemporary Zambia, they need to be placed within the context of Copperbelt residents' dreams and aspirations, as in the examples I have given in this chapter. My informant's dreams indicate that in times of trouble, Copperbelt residents were willing to speculate, even wildly, in the hope that something might change. This indicated not a lack of hope, but a hope that is cast way beyond the difficulties and hardship of the immediate present or even immediate future, and a belief that an iteration of activities within the present and the environment in which they inhabit may open up possibilities leading towards realising those dreams.

Rene Devisch's (2006) use of "borderlinking", a concept borrowed from Bracha Ettinger, offers a useful concept for looking at how Copperbelt residents work towards efforts that look improbable from a cursory examination of their circumstances. Borderlinking, in Devisch's work, is the bridge that transverses varying temporalities of becoming in the flow of persons and things; an intersubjective and intercorporeal experience that resonates both from the past, in the present and the future. I pursue his insights in the chapters that follow.

### **Putting ideas and doing things "out there"**

My informants frequently told me that *teti u planne*<sup>35</sup> "you can't plan", and indeed it seemed like their activities involved placing ideas and doing things "out there" and seeing what happened next, with the expectation that the most unrealistic might bear fruit, because the most realistic ones often came with crushing disappointment. This "putting things out there", is what Copperbelt residents often referred to as *ukweshwa* "to try". Trying is what created the possibility for things to emerge. Jennifer Johnson-Hanks (2005) writing of uncertain perception of the future young Beti women from Cameroon highlighted by their argument that one could not plan for reproduction or marriage provides a good description of what kind of action trying is. According to Johnson-Hanks (2005, p363) in the context of uncertainty that characterises much of life in Africa "effective social action is based not on the fulfillment of prior intentions but on a judicious opportunism" whereby "the actor seizes promising chances". This action, Johnson-Hanks (2005) argues, is not based on a utilitarian and Weberian notion of rational choice but rather involves the ability to "respond effectively to the contingent, sudden, and surprising offers that life can make" (2005, p376). As such, young Beti women, like Copperbelt residents tended to cast their lines wide in the hope of something taking concrete taking hold. This type of action requires responsiveness, I argue, a tuning in

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<sup>35</sup> All vernacular quotes in this thesis are in Bemba, the lingua franca of the Copperbelt or a slang version of it, unless indicated otherwise; translations have been provided by myself and my key research assistants, Hendrick Kapepa and Kasonde Mwenda.

to one's own conscious and unconscious abilities, and also to what the environment affords.

Johnson-Hanks further observes that “actors take advantage of whatever means are available and thus settle on a specific end out of many that would have been acceptable” (2005, p376). This point is applicable to Copperbelt residents as they address living in crisis. The experience is also akin to what Lisa Cligett *et al.* (2007) write of the Gwembe Tonga in southern Zambia who, ever since the construction of the Kariba Dam in 1958, have had lived uncertainly. Cligett *et al.* (2007) observe that the Tonga have responded to this uncertainty by making use of “whatever opportunities present themselves, and the uncertainty of the duration of those opportunities, in order to grasp what security they can at a given moment in time” (2007, p20).

What I observed of how Copperbelt residents went about living their lives amidst the crisis that followed the reprivatization of the mines and job layoffs, and their frequently offered statement “you can't plan”, challenged my ideas of agency. Prior to my engagement in fieldwork, my notion of agency was strongly influenced by my architectural training and the anthropological work of Alfred Gell (1998); the idea that if one can impose order and establish patterns, then in turn one can trace out a network of patterns and relationships.<sup>36</sup>

### ***Order, objectification and structure***

Anthropology, like architecture, has been trapped in the practice of giving precedence to form rather than to the processes that give rise to the conglomerations of things we perceive. Both draw on a notion of predictability and routine, anthropology in its focus on regularities in thought and action and architecture in form and function. Both are a

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<sup>36</sup> Gell's (1998) approach is to treat objects and humans as agents and he sees both participating in social interaction and the making of form, both social and material. However, in Gell's work, affect is not taken into consideration. By this I mean the affordances that are perceived in the environment in the process of going about living.

practice of abstraction, a reduction of experience in order to communicate something of the world.

In my study, the environment within which Copperbelt residents do things is not an abstract place. While Ferguson's use of performativity in characterising the Copperbelt demonstrates dynamism and movement without getting trapped in a teleological framework, it does not address how the landscape itself provides the surface and volume to study a connected world. In this way, partial understandings of the world within which we live are not disconnects (Ferguson, 2006), but rather a partial knowledge premised on a largely unconscious engagement with a wider, unstable, always changing whole.<sup>37</sup>

While much structuralism theory flirts with wholeness, thinking here of the work of Claude Levi-Strauss (1963), Michel Foucault (1975) and Pierre Bourdieu (1977), in this work the structure of the world is imagined as a web of influence, with people acting with various degrees of intentionality on a spectrum that ranges from fully constrained or entrapped within their position in the web and to actors fighting the constraints of their position. In this worldview the world is prescribed. It does not give rise to much surprise; the unexpected only arises due to someone not knowing the field and this can be remedied by looking for the underlying rules and patterns. In Levi-Strauss' work, the way to knowing the rules is to look for hierarchy, rank, taboos etc. For Foucault it is to look at how history gave rise to these formations such that even when people rally against their constraints they fail,<sup>38</sup> Bourdieu looks at the clusters of influences that give rise to the different ways in which people act out within a structure that is loosely determined by the behaviours and dispositions of the powerful. What is imagined in this view of wholeness is an interlinked pattern with people only able to move along pre-determined paths. This notion of wholeness is very much like the view of a flat world, where if one sailed too far one

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<sup>37</sup> By whole I am not referring to a notion of holism as a container of life, but as a medium through which our activities resonate and co-shape ourselves and place.

<sup>38</sup> An entrapment of rules and norms whereby people within the web imagine they are watched and self regulate.

would fall off the edge into an abyss of the unknown. But I was warned by a colleague on the Copperbelt who said, “it is not good to pin things down”, as it limits the possibilities of perceiving what could emerge.

Systems theorists (Bateson 1972, Bohm 2002, Oyama 2000) have argued that to study a part as separate from its whole simplifies and closes off understanding of the workings of wider phenomena, and results in circular reasoning that does little to advance what we know about the world. Drawing from an example by David Bohm, this would be like approaching a person with a stereotype of who they are, relating to them as such and in effect reproducing the stereotype (2002, p7-8). This, Bohm argues, limits our vision because “theories are ever-changing forms of insight, giving shape and form to experience in general” (Bohm 2002, p7). As such our movements in the world are guided by an illusory perception (2002, p9), that I would say involves an improvisory repetition of actions to order our always partial understandings, and increase our knowledge about our fragmentary and unstable notions of the world and how to navigate it.

Rather than to abandon structural explanations of the modern world, or their antithesis - it maybe useful to see them, like the architect’s initial thoughts, sketches, as unstable idealisations. This, as Friedrich (1988, p442) suggests, would be a precarious position between the classical and the romantic, the classical representing a clear traceable path to an ideal of harmony and the romantic, an exploratory path that grows into an unknown. As Ingold suggests in *Lines* (2007), drawing and writing as inscriptive practices of objectification could be seen as learning processes in the enskillment of telling a story. Thus those with sufficient skill are able to indicate traces that open up the mind, as experienced through their own knowledge of the world, to others. But within the modernising project, as in the classical, that places precedence on form (and here my own training as an architect resonates) the skill is related to attempts to ‘finalise’, close off and have a final say on what the world is.

A presentation on the quest for European excellence in research by the anthropologist Rane Willerslev<sup>39</sup> highlights the contradiction between the classical and the romantic. For example, Willerslev begins his talk by saying that a good theory is one that wipes out all other explanations, but then goes on to make a strong case for the importance of fostering the ‘free spirit’ which allows for those things that cannot be predicted to emerge. The idea of a grand theory that explains everything would not have sat well with many Copperbelt residents who, as I will show in Chapter Six’s exploration of their reflections of life and death through popular music, viewed life as an exploratory journey where outcomes were unknown and options encountered were to be mixed together to try to chance on new conglomerations for living. This did not mean that they did not seek to make a somewhat orderly life, a desire reflected in their nostalgia for the heyday of mining company welfare largesse, where the mine administration sought to order all aspects of mine worker’s lives, but that they were alert to the need to take advantage of emergent possibilities in their social and material environments.

### **It is difficult to contain the environment**

The Luanshya Township monthly report for October 1978<sup>40</sup> illuminates how the administrators of the mine township tried to contain the environment. I reproduce some of their concerns here.

#### 1. DANGEROUS TREES

Dangerous trees were found at 58 ‘Z’ and 116 ‘I’ Avenue and were reported to the Engineering Department (T) for cutting and action was taken.

#### 2. RE DISTURBING NOISE – MONGRELS

It was reported that mongrels at 66 ‘E’, 77 ‘E’ and 45 ‘D’ Avenue were disturbing neighbours by making noise. Owners of the

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<sup>39</sup> "Excellence should leave a trail of death" <http://vimeo.com/4072082> accessed on 3rd August 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Ndola Mining Archives document WM/EC/pcm 31/10/78 box reference 300.60.4

mongrels were warned to keep them under control at night and that was followed up.

How does one account for the things that spill outside the plan? My study, like Ferguson's, draws on performance and iterative practices, but departs from a discourse-centered approach to employ an ecological one, which takes into consideration Copperbelt resident's perceptions of their environment and their interactions within it.

The ecological approach employed here differs from the urban ecology of the Chicago school which, when looking for patterns in the processes of urban ways of life, used a scaled analysis that saw places as progressing from simple to complex and as such tended to posit interactions that were functional rather than generative. Rather, it draws from what is in the environment, which means acknowledging the perception of difference rather than emphasizing the exclusions that make for a neat fit. For example, while the anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker, an outlier of the Manchester school, cannot be said to have used an explicitly ecological approach, like Gregory Bateson (1972), well-renowned within it, her work on the Copperbelt and other areas employed an eclectic range of ethnographic and methodological perspectives in looking at society, in particular popular culture. Powdermaker's "Copper Town" (1962) describes the various transformations that were happening on the Copperbelt by detailed descriptions that, while they address social change, do not make a strong attempt to identify neat categories. This may have been because of her use of different ethnographic vantage points; she looked not only at African sociality (as was the case for many of the Manchester school anthropologists), but also European lifestyles within the same context. In describing the activities and aspirations of various research subjects, from the aspirations of school children, to cinema watching, domestic life and disputes, the variations in life and aspirations amongst the Copperbelt's European workers, the labour contests, Powdermaker (1962) presents a setting that is hard to contain within the boundaries of mechanistic or even categorical analysis. Whereas Epstein (1960) and Mitchell (1969) can be

argued to have worked like the Levi Strauss ‘engineer’ in attempting to ‘pin’ down as precisely as possible the social setting on the Copperbelt, Powdermaker (1962) on the other hand, resembles the Straussian ‘bricoleur’, making do with a patchwork of what was available and going on, thus hinting at the complexity of life that went beyond mere categorisation of urban or rural. I employ a little of this eclecticism in my study in describing the Copperbelt to draw in seemingly disparate phenomena that nevertheless form part of the experience and texture of being in a place.

### *Affect and texture*

Text, as a discursive, semiological practice has been of interest to anthropologists looking to understand people’s spatial engagements. A good example of this is Henrietta’s Moore’s (1986) “Space, Text and Gender”, an ethnography of the Marakwet of Kenya. Moore reads into the practice of social actors in the built environment using the idea of cultural text. She uses it not to look for meaning in the symbols in the environment but to look for social strategy and strategic interpretation or translations in the actions of the everyday use of the environment that are found in how social actors use space and act in it, and in how they tell their stories (1986, p75). Her approach relies on local translations or interpretations of action that are gendered and self-interested, and as such enact and reproduce relations of power. Power, as an underlying cultural text comes to the ‘surface’ in everyday practical action, and is told not in ordinary language (because of its elusiveness to straightforward description), but in metaphor. Moore draws on the work of Lakoff and Johnson to describe metaphor as a work of poetic imagination (1986, p76). Gaston Bachelard (1969) a phenomenologist, emphasised the importance of imagination in the understanding of space as experienced, and argues that metaphors become useful in the rhetorical manifestation of this experience. For Bachelard, the experience of space is poetic, and as such, the experience is an affective one. It is through poetry that text moves beyond the lingual domain to capture essences that are varied, nuanced, and textured.

However, for Henri Lefebvre (1992), texture, rather than text allows for the theoretical integration of the senses within spatial experience. Texture is an experience that does not reduce the things encountered by persons in the environment to mere objects, but to things that have resonances, linked to the rhythms in the continual production of space. I illustrate this in Chapter Six in exploring how the rhythms and sounds of popular music create a *communitas* of shared experiences. I show that Copperbelt residents' exploratory engagements with the world do not occur in a vacuum devoid of affect. The phenomenological basis from which I draw from is underpinned by perceptual engagement and dwelling within the environment. This implies a sensory engagement. And, as Fiona Ross (2010), drawing on the experience of getting lost, demonstrates, our perceptual engagement of the world is not just premised on a kind of detached spatial geography of a place, but also on our emotional and intersubjective engagements with place. This implies a sensory engagement with the world that is not only temporal but interconnected to other experiences through which we have learnt the world.

Edward Casey (2001a) provides a concept for understanding this type of dwelling. He has argued that space, the abstract notion that makes us part of a wider world, and place, as that which we inhabit and experience, do not need to be mutually exclusive, that the two can co-exist in what he calls the 'place-world'. He draws from Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*<sup>41</sup> to describe the 'place-world' as that which provides "an indispensable dimension of the body's role in emplacing human beings" (Casey 2001b, p716). Unlike Bourdieu, whose concept of habits is embodied and offers a dispositional *modus operandi* for action in the world, for Casey "habits are movements in space even as they are amassments of their own repetition and deployment" and as such he argues that they "dilate" rather than limit our being in the world. Indeed, they "are the very basis for our inhabiting the world" (1984,

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<sup>41</sup> *Habitus* as the embodied sets of beliefs and dispositions of a person that give them limitless options for action, or possibilities that in turn offer options for the shifting of this set of dispositions and beliefs (Bourdieu, 1977).

p296). For Casey, place is “open-textured, ever-altering, always challenging, never fixed” (2001b, p719). Casey uses the term ‘implacing’ to denote an active ongoing movement, a navigational process that is both objectifying in its search for signs, and exploratory in its employment of the experiential. He argues that ‘place’ is also one of the main ways in which we leave traces of ourselves in the landscape as the “world’s felt texture” (1983, p87). Casey further notes that “place is the congealing of this texture into discrete here/there arenas of possible action” (1983, p87). As an experience of here and there, place is both somatic, felt on the skin, and visceral in the depth of feeling that manifests itself in memories and affects like nostalgia.

As Filip De Boeck’s description of Kinshasa (2006) has shown, places have many invisible facets. On the Copperbelt, one of these is nostalgia, which provides a weave between the visible and invisible traces of the past. Some of these are the archaeological fragments of a planned garden city and a way of life, which despite the evidence of urban decay still lends to this vision in the treelined roads and the overgrown recreational centres. Nostalgia as encountered on the Copperbelt is both about loss and a romanticization of the past. As Casey, writing on the general aspects of nostalgia, notes, it is a “baffling combination of the sweet and the bitter, the personal and the impersonal, distance and proximity, presence and absence, place and no-place, imagination and memory, memory and non-memory” (Casey, 1987, p379). Nostalgia is also a layered experience that, as Ferguson (1992) shows, in the *Zambian post-independence political and moral discourses of the village* lent a romanticised vision that was intended to counter selfishness perceived in town life. As a moral discourse it was meant to serve as a mode of redistribution. In the contemporary period, reference to a home village, as I have shown through the example of my initial encounter with Mr Mwale, was a way to turn potentially alienating urban interactions into meaningful ones by means of linking to a place of a past origin. In this way nostalgia also serves as “a cultural practice that hinges on position and perspective; it should be seen as part of a social imaginary—that is, as

expressive and creative activity grounded in the dynamics of everyday life” (Bissell, 2005, p215).

However, as Ferguson observed, Copperbelt residents during the years of decline increasingly struggled to reconcile the romanticised idea of a home village to the loss and decay in the towns that made the reciprocal relations fostered in the moral discourse of the village come to be seen as parasitic. As the economy worsened, Ferguson notes that the village became a real option for those struggling in the towns. At the same time, particularly for urbanites who had not cultivated rural ties, the village had also become “an object of intense fear, often articulated as fear of witchcraft” (Ferguson, 1992, p89-90).

What Ferguson’s observations bring to light is that when nostalgia as a fantasy of a place out there or distant past becomes more immediate, it does not always sit easily with the realities of that imagined place. For example, while the state and mining companies lauded self-sufficiency, the reality is that for many self-sufficiency also meant uncertainty and precariousness, and the back to the land policy when put into practice meant a real confrontation with fears associated with the village. As I show in Chapter Four, working on one’s own with one’s own hands, also meant risky work and working even when unwell. The fear of witchcraft is not to be trivialised either. When conducting research in the rural districts of North Western Province, in Kasempa in 2008 I encountered an investigation by the police force into twenty-one murders tied to witchcraft accusations committed over the year.<sup>42</sup> Rather than focus only on a nostalgia of loss and regret, I prefer like Dlamini (2009) writing on everyday life in a South African township during apartheid, to draw also on those aspects of Copperbelt life that lend multiple perspectives and texture to the sense of place during a period of decline.

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<sup>42</sup> A personal example: In 2012 when running a workshop on community mine engagements in North Western Zambia, my colleagues and I encountered a man running for his life from a mob who wanted him to answer to an accusation of witchcraft.

Many of my informants' nostalgic fantasies were tempered by real anxieties that coated their experiences of the present. These manifested in various ways. One was in their aspirations for a harmonious life, a nostalgia for a maternal caring type of love similar to that encountered by Mark Hunter (2010) in his research in South Africa on love in a time of AIDS. This was elaborate in the love songs of Copperbelt popular artists Dandy Krazy and Macky 2, and in the complex domestic arrangements people sought. Karen Tranberg Hansen (1996) describes similar desires in her ethnography of women's lives and their aspirations for home-making in an informal settlement in Lusaka. Another way it manifested was in the loosening of the strictures of formality. There was the view that one had to wander outside formal boundaries in order to survive and maybe "make it" in an increasingly uncertain world.

### ***Informality and trespass***

The increasing spheres of informality offer a helpful place from which to look at these multiple ways of life. If informality connotes a propensity for trespassing (as I show in Chapter Four) it well describes Copperbelt residents "open textured", exploratory and improvisational way of being. One might describe this mode of life as being like foraging. Indeed a study conducted in 2005-2006 by Manyewu Mutamba (2007) on two communities, one on the outskirts of Mufulira and another in Kabompo North Western Province, shows that foraging (of forest products) forms an important part of livelihood. Foraging as an activity requires searching over a wide area for food and provisions. Within urban settings often characterised by rules of private property, foraging as a way of inhabiting place is bound to lead to trespass. But it is also likely to open up new possibilities for livelihood.

The options of less formal types of livelihood existed even during the tightly administered period of the mines. As Karen Tranberg Hansen and Mariken Vaa note, informal activities even when falling outside legal frameworks were not always seen as illegitimate by those involved (2004,

p7-8). On the Copperbelt, where mining activity employed few women, the informal economy was an important aspect of women's work and occasionally the mining company sought to bring it within the fold of formal livelihood strategies by allowing them to sell their produce, usually agriculture, in designated markets. However women's more lucrative ventures such as brewing beer were discouraged (Hansen, 1984, p227). In the contemporary Copperbelt, women's economic activities have expanded to include mining, albeit informal mining.

As the spheres of life governed by a state weakened by the adoption of free market policies expand, the informal economy, as Keith Hart (2008) notes, has become the real economy. Out of informality has emerged the invisible city, where, in the spaces where the formal modes of life have departed, one finds the hidden and not so hidden possibilities that sustain these places. In Luanshya, where the decay of town infrastructure has been in progression from the end of the period of state-run ZCCM mines, the town, as DeBoeck (2011) observed of Kinshasa, has increasingly been "banalized and reduced to its most basic function, that of a shelter. The built form is generated by a more real, living city which exists as an heterogeneous urban conglomeration through the bodies, movements, practices, and discourses of urban dwellers" (2011, p271). It is within such a landscape that Luanshya residents, like those of Kinshasa, some more skillfully than others, discover new itineraries and generate options where none seemed possible (DeBoeck, 2011, p272).

For many Copperbelt residents, the end of ZCCM was also an end to the mine township administrators' almost obsessive compulsions to try to maintain order in the mine areas and in turn smoothen the texture of the Copperbelt landscape. Copperbelt residents staying in the former mine township, especially male former mine employees whose lives had been more in tune with the work rhythms of the mine, lost their bearings, resulting in an affect of uncertainty akin to that which Ross (2010) describes regarding getting lost. This sense of losing one's bearings can also be related to the uncertainty in the process of giving form to things. As

I demonstrate in the remainder of the dissertation, Copperbelt residents ‘tried’, that is, they were not always sure and indeed maintained a kind of scepticism about what might emerge from the livelihood enterprises they embarked on.

### ***Making a living***

“Just try” was an expression I frequently heard when people encouraged their colleagues. As I describe in Chapter Three, some people were more successful than others in their enterprises. The variations in relative success coloured Copperbelt residents’ perceptions of class, which was increasingly connected to consumption. In the ZCCM past, former mine workers could track each other’s social climb as it was connected to career progression within the mine company hierarchy. In the post-reprivatisation period, former mine workers are engaged in multiple livelihood strategies. Their neighbours in the former mine suburbs now have more difficulty establishing how they are doing relative to others. Those who had become successful in contemporary Copperbelt were often accused of having drawn from dark magical sources to secure their success. There was a sense of awe and also suspicion, akin to the perplexity in how persons made a success of their lives much like Gell (1988) in his article the “Technology of Enchantment” describes in relation to how the work of a particularly skilled craftsman is perceived, as somewhat mystical, or enchanted. What this means in relation to how Copperbelt residents’ see each other’s livelihood activities, is that what people do to become successful goes beyond the skillful execution of tasks at hand to encompass something beyond what can be readily seen. Gell (1998) illustrates this in his reference to Malinowski’s ethnography of Trobriand Island coral gardens to describe how Trobriand Islanders try through magic to harness nature, using metaphorical evocations to the ideal garden. In these magical chants of the ideal garden, pests left the soil and plants swiftly took root. Rather than seeing, as Gell does, the chants as a template from which the ideal garden is drawn, they can also be seen as poetry, an evocation of feeling, and hence energy in the attempt to harness the uncertainty of nature’s flows and the

intangibilities that wreak havoc over any process of giving form. This implies an affective engagement with doing. In this way, as in the case presented in the next chapter of Mr Mubita's call to his wife to share his vision for his backyard projects, they can also be seen as a call for an emotional engagement, what Gieser (2008) would describe as a call for empathy.<sup>43</sup> In looking at how people make a living in places where they are also experiencing great psychosocial stress it is important, as I show in the later chapters to explore the areas from where they draw the 'energy' to keep going and trying.

### ***Making things***

Early on in fieldwork, I met informants like Mr Mubita and his colleague Mr Mulenga (see Chapter Three) whose livelihoods, like many other Copperbelt residents', had embraced self-sufficiency and using one's hands, for example in the building of a water well. How do we learn to dig and build a well? Asking this question highlighted those aspects of life, such as tasks and techniques of the body, that rely little on spoken word. These drew me to one of Ingold's central questions, if we come to know the world by dwelling<sup>44</sup> in it, and through our engagement in it, how do we increase our perceptual knowledge of certain aspects of it, to be able to give form within it?

Studies of livelihood in anthropology and other disciplines such as sociology and the new development studies have often tended to focus on the social relations of making a livelihood. What has been less of a focus

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<sup>43</sup> For Geiser, empathy is the tuning into another person's perceptual engagement with the world (2008, p310-311) that forms a crucial part of apprenticeship learning. I would also say that it involves tuning into the texture of place, and exploring what it affords us. This is clear for those who work with their hands, as it is an engagement that traverses the mind/body split that as Fisher notes "allows us to resolve the tension between the cultural and the physical in our interaction with objects" (2004, p5). But in interactions that are less obviously physical and material the affordances are less visible and may inhabit the more ephemereal aspects of life like music, dance, poetry and other energetic/ vital source that imbue places with invisible qualities or texture.

<sup>44</sup> For Martin Heidegger (1962), to whom a phenomenological approach is widely attributed, the nature of human experience is a concern of man's situatedness in the world – what he calls dwelling – and revealing or making accessible that which is hidden in this experience.

are the material aspects of livelihood, and the skills and tools people draw on to sustain themselves. I explore these here, contributing to the growing interest in anthropology in re-engaging the issues that had fascinated the early discipline; tools and skills. While Ferguson was generally correct in what he observed on the Copperbelt, by focussing on the linguistic pragmatics of performance, such as the stylistic variations in Copperbelt identities, he omitted a realm that too is crucial in describing a process of becoming. To illustrate this point, when Copperbelt residents talk about the place becoming like a village, it is not just in its appearance, as I outline in Chapter One, but also in the broader sensory realm. When people regularly rather than occasionally use firewood to cook, they begin to smell in ways people associate with the countryside, even though they may not reside there. Also when people engage in more strenuous activity in the process of generating a livelihood in a depleted context, their bodies begin to take on the form and appearance that reflects the characteristics of a rural lifestyle, where the body is nourished according to the seasonality of food available and shaped by production's regimes of labour. As such, Copperbelt residents' view of the village is perceived too in the changed physical appearances; leaner faces, darker complexions, sun burn from working out in the sun.

This extra-sensual perspective, in which people and environment are engaged, not in a conscious reshaping of themselves and the landscape, but are unintentionally co-shaping each other, goes beyond Bourdieu's (1977) notion of habitus as an embodied realm of socially influenced dispositions. Copperbelt residents' are not only shaping their identities and environment, they too are being shaped by the things they do. The cumulative effect of their social and material experiences is not just internally inscribed but spills beyond their bodies as they go about giving form to the things that sustain them as living organisms. This way of being can be seen as giving form to the 'unconscious' of our interaction with the world. The unconscious I refer to here is not the object but the flow of mind as entangled with other organisms (Bateson, 1972) and the world. It is complex, difficult to grasp, in that it often eludes our objectifying attempts know the grain of the world.

However, in order to make things, or create forms, we try to conceptualise stable objects that guide our attempts to increase knowledge. For example, conceptualising categories like social, cultural and economic capital as embodied offers Bourdieu a model that separates and distills within the body, a prototype for the workings of society. In an ethnographic study of the engineering firm ARUP, Penny Harvey (2009) observed that engineers use models as a predictive tool to try and understand the uncertain outcomes of giving form. Harvey looks at the model as “point of contact between different ways of knowing, [that] could operate as a site of provocative overlap, drawing out what does not fit rather than simply looking for neat accommodation” (2009, p272). In this way methods or theoretical engagements operate very much like tools that guide our points of entry, distill and separate the complexities of the things we work with.

If we had to draw from Ingold's conception that life flows and is not static, the point of contact that Harvey refers to becomes like a fisherman's line. To cast, one needs minute improvisations, that are influenced not only by the throw of the line, but the drag of water, the wind, the musculature of our bodies, the heat of the sun, and the many intangible things we cannot always readily describe or may not be aware are factors in our casting. Thus these places of contact are where one tries to harness, distill and separate, sometimes successfully, other times not, the variables we perceive or anticipate. This is a common approach in scientific experiments. The variables are numerous and uncertain as are the interactions, so the model is continuously adjusted to try and harness these flows better. Trying, or experiments, then are knowledge seeking, aimed at getting to know the complexities of the world in our attempts to create forms within it.

## **Conclusion**

In the cases presented through the rest of the thesis, it becomes clear that my informants were engaged in a continuous process of trying to “get on” and live. This was not detached from what their bodies could physically do

or from the skills and tools employed. As I found out myself, it was difficult to ‘order’ the field, but I argue that rather than giving up entirely any attempt to do, life - like fieldwork - should be approached as a continual process of ‘trying’, experimentation, and in turn, agency should be seen as a ‘blob’ of blurred signifiers that indicates an ever-moving intent that is entangled within the also ever changing environment and our histories. As such my application of Ingold to thinking through the Copperbelt is heavily influenced by a pragmatic engagement to the environment that draws on an experimental approach to getting things done.<sup>45</sup>

Ingold’s approach is useful for understanding the on-the-ground constraints of fieldwork that can only be appreciated by engaging in the physical and social tasks of the research process where as researcher I become an active participant. This demanded an exploratory approach, one in which the wayfarer revisits a place they had been to before with the open expectation that the environment will reveal something new (Hallam and Ingold, 2007). It resonates with a view of agency that was more fitting within an uncertain and textured world. As such in the renovation of my house in Luanshya, I learnt, like other Copperbelt residents, that in a context of uncertainty it was better to look out for possibilities beyond one’s initial plans, and to try; that is, maintain a hopeful stance toward the future.

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<sup>45</sup> Ingold (2000) argues that we come to know the world by physically engaging with it through practice and through a constantly adjusted perception of it in relation to our bodies.



## Chapter Three

### “Getting by”: ‘Improvising a life’<sup>46</sup> on the post-privatisation Copperbelt

Prior to the privatisation of ZCCM, large sections of Copperbelt towns had been under the direct control of the mining company, which provided social infrastructure, basic housing and services, and oversaw general urban management (see Mutale 2004, Kazimbaya-Senkwe and Guy 2007). ZCCM-owned housing and other physical infrastructure were allocated to employees to occupy or use, according to employment rank and family space requirements. Other mine employees lived in neighbourhoods known as ‘*ku maini*’, divided into low, medium and high-cost (or high, medium and low-density) areas. These divisions also indicated employee rankings within the company hierarchy. A promotion often meant relocation to higher-cost housing. Privatisation of ZCCM and the sale of its assets spelt the end of this clearly demarcated social hierarchy. When wholesale privatisation took off, miners<sup>47</sup> were offered the houses they occupied at a subsidised price that was to be deducted from their terminal benefits in retirement packages. The subsidised sale of houses allowed ZCCM to make up for its inability to pay terminal benefits in full. With the economic hardships that ensued for most miners and the success for a lucky few in the liberalised market economy, some Luanshya residents moved up and some moved down these social scales and the physical spaces that corresponded to them. Wide variations in the physical infrastructure of houses became clearly visible in the varying degrees of dilapidation and renovation, indicating inequalities amongst residents in the same neighbourhood; residents who had once been of a single social class.

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<sup>46</sup> The term “Improvising a life” is a play on the title of Mary Catherine Bateson’s (2001) book “Composing a life” which explores the creative potential of lives in complex times.

<sup>47</sup> Reflecting local usage, I use the term ‘miner’ to refer to any ZCCM employee, regardless of the actual job role or management position.

In Luanshya, as in the rest of the Copperbelt, the privatisation of the mines and the ensuing major downsizing of the workforce marked the start of an unprecedented economic crisis, with drastic effects on the local population.<sup>48</sup> Many leased out their houses and left to seek employment elsewhere. The vast majority of those who stayed behind initiated an array of economic activities to ‘get by’<sup>49</sup> including subsistence agriculture in their backyards<sup>50</sup> and on the outskirts<sup>51</sup> of Luanshya. Despite the enormous difficulties of the economic transition period, the result was an impressive outburst of small-scale enterprises cutting across spatial divisions and class groupings in the local socio-economic landscape.

This chapter focuses on the lived experiences of former miners from Luanshya living in the high-cost neighbourhood (*kuma yard*, in local parlance). The ‘European area’, as it had been known, was built in the 1930s just after copper production began at the Roan Antelope Mine in 1931. The first black families moved into these houses in 1963. By the 1980s, the high-cost neighbourhood comprised predominantly higher-ranking black mine employees.<sup>52</sup> More specifically, the chapter explores the

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<sup>48</sup> As I have already described, the residents of Luanshya arguably experienced the worst effects of the ZCCM privatisation process. The mines in the town were the first to be privatised. They were sold to Binani, an Indian Company, and were renamed Roan Antelope Mining Company (RAMCOZ). RAMCOZ was liquidated in 2000 and the mines were later bought by J&W/Enya, and renamed Luanshya Copper Mines (LCM), during a wave of higher international copper prices from 2004 onwards. Most retrenched ZCCM miners received their terminal benefits only in 2003, three years after RAMCOZ went into liquidation. Former miners were left with a house, some cash (the remainder of their terminal benefits) and uncertain employment prospects.

<sup>49</sup> In a survey I conducted in August 2009, 45 out of 100 households had run a business from their residential premises in the previous year, with the most common activity being rearing poultry (24 out of the 45 households), followed by running a little grocery store (14 out of 45 households), and 5 had been moulding bricks for sale.

<sup>50</sup> 77 out of 100 households surveyed had a garden on their residential premises, used for subsistence agriculture.

<sup>51</sup> 39 out of 100 households surveyed had a field or farm on the outskirts of Luanshya, or in another district adjacent to Luanshya, e.g Mpongwe and Masaiti. Only 4 farms/ fields were over 70km away from Luanshya (200km, 140km, 120km and 70km). The largest farm mentioned in the survey was 150 hectares, and smallest 1 hectare.

<sup>52</sup> Despite African advancement policies being widely adopted after independence, as well as the 1969 Matero Declaration that advanced Zambianisation as a policy to replace white expatriate labour with black Zambian employees, a colour bar was still very evident in the work place. White employees occupied higher employment ranks in the mines as a result of the shortage of black skilled labour (see Burawoy 1972). This colour bar was reflected in the social and spatial geography of the Copperbelt. It was only in the mid 1970s that more black Zambians took up management positions in the mines. Arguably, it was the country’s protracted economic recession, from the mid 1970s and lasting well into the

role that former miners' newly acquired houses play in their livelihoods and the small-scale economic activities carried out in their backyards. The first part tackles the local perceptions of the relationship between the past (during ZCCM administration) and the present (marked by wholesale privatisation). This is followed by three brief accounts of local informants' life trajectories after privatisation. The emerging features of these lived experiences will be dwelt upon in more detail in an extended case study of a former miner's experience of housing and of the innovative, small-scale economic activities carried out in his backyard. These cases are indicative, but not necessarily prescriptive, of the social situation on the Copperbelt. They suggest the conditions that create variations in socially observable data, such as perceptions of suffering, assessments of who is 'doing okay' and who is 'doing well'. These observations, as Max Gluckman (1961, p. 9) noted, can also indicate how a particular social system operates, for example, by illuminating the micro-political economy of the context. While it may be possible to map out particular individual trajectories from case studies and quantitative data from surveys, I intend to demonstrate, drawing on work by Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold (2007), that living is a series of improvisations. 'Scripting' social life misses the processual aspects of living (Hallam and Ingold 2007, p1) and, I argue, theoretically trivialises the temporal praxis of "getting by". This chapter describes improvisations in the livelihood practices of Luanshya's former mine employees and demonstrates the different directions they have taken after the homogenising influence of ZCCM. The overall aim is to show how structure, from a micro-political perspective, is woven. It also describes how the disappearance of the old ZCCM system and its *de facto* control of socio-economic differentiation sparked new processes of 'class' formation.

### **Class on the Copperbelt**

Class formation and social mobility on the Copperbelt has been of interest to social scientists studying the region ever since the establishment of the

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1990s, that forced mines to reduce their expatriate wage bill, freeing up higher ranking jobs and thus housing in the high-cost neighbourhood for blacks.

copper mining industry at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From studies of the proletarianization of African rural migrants to the copper towns, and the transformation of their lives in the urban spaces that characterised Manchester School's urban anthropology to those that looked at the configuration of labour from the work place to the household, this anthropology has been formative in methodological, descriptive and theoretical terms. For example, Michael Burawoy's (1972) seminal workplace ethnography looked at the Zambianization policies that were meant to indigenise the work force, make local and expatriate pay scales equitable and wean the country of a reliance of expatriate technical expertise. Jane Parpart's study of gender, class and the household illuminated women's roles and their stake in labour and class struggles in the Copperbelt's mine towns. In many of these studies, as Ferguson (1999) notes, the idea of progress that fed into expectations of upward mobility was central. And as Ferguson points out in his critique of the modernization narrative - a narrative that Copperbelt residents too bought into - was that this modernity failed to materialise. What residents were left with, as Ferguson observed, was a sense of downward mobility characterised by a nostalgic backward looking gaze to the country's modern past.

A more recent study of class and social mobility on the Copperbelt in the post re-privatisation Copperbelt is Monisha Bajaj's (2009) study of the notion of transformative agency amongst former and current school pupils of an alternative school on the Copperbelt town of Ndola. Drawing on pupil diaries and interviews, the study revealed that the idealised notion of transformative change that formed a key component of the school's pedagogy ill-equipped its former pupils to deal with the much harsher social and economic realities that characterised Copperbelt and Zambian life more generally. Bajaj found that the former pupils who coped and adapted better to the changed circumstances of the Copperbelt were those that adopted a more pragmatic approach to life. Bajaj demonstrates this pragmatism in the presentation of the case of Christopher, a former pupil of the school whom he interviewed in 2004. After graduating from the Copperbelt University, Christopher expected to get a job, but when he failed to do so went on to

create opportunities for himself, making money from tutoring, a service he had already been providing to other students (2009, p563). A similar type of pragmatism characterised my informants' engagements with what they could do to get by. This, I argue, points towards an "improvisory agency". I illustrate this type of agency through the case of Mr Mubita, whose experimental engagement with opportunities involved not only being aware of the possibilities of enterprise in the social environment but also, as I will show in the case of his water well building colleague Vincent, on how this experience involved a learning too of the materiality of the environment they occupied. As such, in this chapter rather than seeing class as embodied or inscribed within a 'habitus' of learned dispositions as Bourdieu (1993) suggests, I argue that class on the Copperbelt is emergent within fluctuating political, social and economic conditions, and also by multiple strands of remembering the past; and that varying conditions and skilled practice make for the social distinctions perceived amongst Copperbelt residents. These differences are not only perceived in material or symbolic goods, but also in contrast to the recent past.

### ***'Akale twale ikala bwino'* – 'In the past we lived well': Life in Luanshya before privatisation**

It is hard to talk about one's current situation or way of life without contrasting it with the past. Following Gillian Feeley-Harnik (1996), I argue that the past is narrated as the 'interactive' experience we have with the environment and others premised both on our memories and markers of our memories. In this case, the markers are the phrases used to talk about space in Bemba, the lingua franca of the Copperbelt. *Kuma yard* ('at the yards') refers to the low density housing areas, like the one under study. *Ku komboni* ('at the compounds') usually refers to low-cost housing areas. As I show, these expressions can mark the separation and sometimes opposition between particular spaces and lifestyles. They can also hint at movements across these symbolic and concrete spaces. For example, one of my interlocutors, Grace, remembered that when her husband was promoted in the mid 1980s, the family moved from Roan Township (a high-density

mine area) to the low-density mine area under study. Shortly after moving to her new home, Grace was preparing a meal of dry fish when her husband ‘advised’ her to cook the fish outside because it would make the house smell like *ku komboni*. This reprimand, based on an alertness to social markers of distinction, echoed the high level of social control that the mining company exercised over the social practices of the residents of the mine neighbourhood. One former mine employee staying in the area told me that in the mid-1980s he and his wife had kept over 500 chickens in their backyard for sale. Even though neighbours bought chickens from them, someone from the neighbourhood reported their activities to a white manager who, while applauding their entrepreneurial spirit, insisted that they remove the chickens from their yard as the mines differentiated leisure and productive space in such a way that gardens were deemed inappropriate for production and entrepreneurship.

Despite the company’s attempts to control social life, my informants look back to the ‘good life’ before the privatisation of the mines with more than a hint of nostalgia. As one informant, a black Zambian miner living in *kuma yard* before the privatisation of the mines put it, he had ‘lived a good life’ (*bale ikala bwino*). He had lived in a three-bedroom bungalow with a garden of expansive lawns bounded by a hedge of bougainvillea. His wife did not have to work. If she did, she too worked for the mining company. In her leisure hours, she relaxed with other women at the recreation centre, learning how to knit or bake Victoria sponges. The miner’s children attended the mine’s trust schools, staffed by a predominantly white expatriate staff, where the language of instruction was English and where every November they celebrated Guy Fawkes night with a bonfire and fireworks. After a day of work, the miner headed to the mine club for a drink, usually the Zambian brewed lager, Mosi. At the weekends he played golf and occasionally took his family out to one of the Copperbelt dams for a swim and a picnic. From an outsider’s perspective, these aspects of Copperbelt life closely evoke middle class aspirations and a European colonial lifestyle.

However, a number of disjunctures hinted at a very different reality. To return to the miner I describe above: a number of extended family members frequently paid visits and at times established themselves for longer periods. His wife travelled to Luapula, a rural province of Zambia bordering the Congo, to buy fish. On return she sold some of it from her home or through her husband's work mates. This income supplemented the leisurely lifestyle of the family and became crucial during the economic decline in the 1980s and throughout the 1990s. After a day practising for the school play, *Oliver Twist*, the children roamed around the surrounding forest to gather wild fruit, to fish or to trap birds, all the while chatting in Bemba. During the rainy season, the family went out to fields (*kuma bala*) allocated by the mining company on the outskirts of town to plant groundnuts, maize or pumpkins for home consumption.

In the words of Victor, one of my informants, 'ZCCM looked after our world. Things were okay, they did not look like this, and we had time for lots of recreation. We did not suffer.' This summarises the feelings of most of my informants. Some attribute the decline of ZCCM to the Zambian state's increased interference in the mining industry through nationalisation. One informant, Mr Mubita, put it succinctly: 'there was too much politicking'.

### **'*Twali cula*' – 'We suffered': catastrophe and resurgence after privatisation**

The contrast between the 'golden era' of the nationalised mines and the immediate aftermath of re-privatisation could not be more striking. Retrenched, waiting for their terminal benefits and with no other avenue for a stable income, miners and their families went through an intense period of financial and socio-psychological struggle. In informal interviews and conversations, I heard how families had gone without food or had lived on one meal a day, and how children who attended fee-paying private schools

dropped out because parents could not afford to pay the fees.<sup>53</sup> Luanshya informants described the crisis experienced between 1997 (the privatisation of Luanshya mines) and 2003 (the year when most retrenched workers received their terminal benefits) with the simple and straightforward expression: *'twali cula'* ('we suffered'). Hardship was not confined to the mining area's residents. Most businesses that relied on the incomes of miners closed, affecting the livelihoods of residents living in other areas too.

People used a number of different strategies to get through the crisis. A small survey of 56 households, which I conducted in the high-cost mine suburb of Luanshya in July to August 2008, revealed that only half of the households had one member employed in the formal sector (either in the mines or in other jobs), whereas, in 1997, all the households in this area had at least one member working for the mines. Most people ended up in self-employed economic activities. As one informant put it, 'we suffered, but we have learnt how to use our hands'. 'Using one's hands' became a much heard expression, hinting at the new opportunities opened up by the crisis. On the one hand, it is reminiscent of idealised notions of rural self-sufficiency<sup>54</sup>; on the other, it describes the concrete experience of engaging in productive activities independent of any formal economic system. It also draws attention to increased scepticism about the positive effects of working for the privatised mines. As one informant put it, 'the President said [to an investor] "come to mine for cheap labour" [...] It is better to work for yourself than to be treated as a slave in your own country'.

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<sup>53</sup> The mine trust school started charging market rate fees, but offered a grace period for the children of former mine employees in view of the crisis. State schools too showed leniency in pressing for fee payments.

<sup>54</sup> Declining living standards, a growing external debt and declining copper revenues on which the state depended for foreign exchange increasingly directed Zambian government policies from the late 1970s towards self-sufficiency in order to reduce import costs. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, ZCCM supported agricultural skills training among its employees, as part of the country's, 'Back to the Land' policies, intended for retirees (see Ferguson 1999), and also to increase the economic self-sufficiency of its employees and their families. In a personal communication, David Phiri, former chairperson of Roan Copper Mines, noted that few miners had then been willing to take up farming, despite the incentives offered by the mines, including land, inputs and skills training. Such initiatives by a mining company were not new. During the colonial period, the mines had allocated plots on mine land on the outskirts of mine neighbourhoods to encourage food production amongst miners' families (see Wilson 1942).

My data also demonstrate the central role that the house plays in the microeconomics of coping in the aftermath of privatisation. Of the fifty-six households in my sample, only four had sold their houses. Sixteen heads of household had left Luanshya to seek employment opportunities elsewhere and currently rent out their houses. Their tenants include self-employed business people from other Copperbelt towns; formal sector employees, such as bankers, civil servants; and, in three cases, long-term Luanshya residents involved in business, who moved from the high-density, local authority administered neighbourhoods of Luanshya. Of the sixteen who rented out their houses, six left for other Copperbelt towns, two lived in Lusaka and four left the country (three for the United Kingdom and one for Botswana). Other owners remained in Luanshya, using the house as a source of income in different ways. Four owners rent out rooms as resident landlords; some even moved into the servant's quarters and rented out the main house. Another three moved to the informal settlements on the periphery of the town and rented out their houses. In sum, half of my respondents earned rental income from their houses. Rentals are on average 500,000 Zambian Kwacha (ZMK) (approximately US\$100) per month for a relatively run down house. Large houses in good condition may fetch as much as ZMK 2,000,000 per month in rent from successful business people. Demand for housing is likely to rise with the recent entry of professional and managerial workers coming to Luanshya in connection with the prospects of increased mining operations. Such rentals constitute a considerable source of income, given the harsh economic conditions. In October 2008, the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR), which carries out a monthly basic needs basket survey, estimated that a family of six in Luanshya needed ZMK 1,203,330 to purchase a basic basket of goods. A miner employed in the now-closed Luanshya Copper Mines could, at that time, earn as little as ZMK 800,000 per month and a supermarket cashier earned around ZMK 300,000 per month.

In addition, the house provides, through the backyard, an important source of subsistence. Out of the fifty-six households surveyed, thirty-seven have a

vegetable garden in their backyards. In most cases, the produce of these gardens is intended for subsistence. Twenty-four houses in the sample also carry out agricultural activities on larger plots located elsewhere, predominantly in the peri-urban areas of Luanshya. Half of these households sell most of their produce, while the other half use it for subsistence. Many of those who sell their produce have a stall at their home. Others sell maize to the Food Reserve Agency (a parastatal agency that buys maize from local farmers). Produce is also often sold to marketers and trading is a common informal economic activity. Also common is the rearing of poultry in backyards, while livestock farming, such as of pigs, can occasionally be found in the neighbourhood. One of my informants attempted to establish a fish farm in his backyard.

During ‘the ZCCM times’, residents experienced similar working conditions and received comparable salaries. For the most part, this inhibited major socio-economic differentiation. Now, the unstable economic conditions, the inherent risks involved in the new wave of informal activities and the differing degrees of ingeniousness and luck have all contributed to a significant widening of socio-economic inequalities and a general process of socio-economic differentiation. These differences are clearly perceived by people living in Luanshya. In the eyes of my informants, some people are seen as *abale ikala bwino* (‘those that are living well’), some as *abali fye* (‘those who are just okay’), and others as *abale cula* (‘those who are suffering’). Drawing on these local categories, I offer three short accounts of the differing trajectories of informants who faced the transition from the privatisation of ZCCM to the present day. To varying degrees they capture local ideas about ‘trying’, that is, continued attempts to earn a livelihood, and *kulibonesha* (‘showing off’). A common response to the question ‘how are you?’ is ‘we are trying’, while *kulibonesha ta*, a performative way for people to express that they have ‘arrived’, involves practices intended to show the value of consumer goods, such as driving – and frequently changing – expensive cars, wearing flashy clothes, being seen at expensive establishments and throwing ostentatious parties. What is being evidenced in Luanshya may be the emergence of new

‘class’ categories based on conspicuous consumption and its performance. ‘Class’, here, is understood more in terms of perceptions of wealth and material goods than in terms of structural economic positions defined by relations of production.

In Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, Hansen (2005) writes that tightening socio-economic constraints are significantly limiting young people’s social mobility, their ability to secure a house, a job and raise a family. This trend is evident in Luanshya, though unlike in Lusaka, it cuts across the spatially defined territories of *kuma yard* and *ku komboni*. As such, it is worth noting that in the high-cost neighbourhood of Luanshya, a desperately poor family will reside next to a very well-off one. Drawing on Ingold (2000), I argue that the relative levels of success evidenced amongst the residents of this neighbourhood are due to the varying abilities of residents to adjust themselves skilfully to ever-changing conditions. These skills, as Ingold argues, are not embodied as some prior knowledge, but are learnt in the process of engaging through practice with the social and physical world. An example of this engagement is evidenced in the extended case of Mr Mubita and his colleague Vincent presented later in this chapter, which highlights how Copperbelt residents have come to rely on exploiting small windows of opportunity. However, Luanshya residents generally hold that very few people are doing very ‘well’. In the following accounts we witness the extent of this in the livelihood activities of Gibson, generally considered to be ‘doing well’, Lackson who is ‘doing ok’ and Theresa, who can only be described as ‘suffering’.

#### ***‘Abale ikala bwino’ – ‘Those who are living well’***

Gibson Musonda, a former mine employee in his early forties, whose rank within ZCCM was equivalent to that of a shift boss, has managed to exploit new avenues brought about by crisis. Close associates and other people outside his network of relations identified him as a clear example of a successful businessman. Before joining the mines in 1993, Gibson had tried his hand – unsuccessfully – in small-scale trade, leaving this to join the

mines to work as a ‘timber man’, with a trade certificate in carpentry. During the ZCCM era and through the Binani administration of the mines, he had stayed employed and had lived in the high-density neighbourhood of the mines. When RAMCOZ liquidated, its assets were stripped in a process described by a miner working for them:

We were surprised to see the new mine owners, the Indians, selling everything. They sold the copper that was waiting on the belts, they sold machines, and they even sold the cars. The next thing we were not getting paid, sometimes for four months. We even heard that they had *inkongole* [debt] everywhere, even with ZESCO [the state-owned electricity company].

While Binani was selling off its assets, Gibson was ‘helping’ himself to small items the investors ‘would not want’. When the other mines on the Copperbelt were privatised shortly afterwards and started buying mining equipment from private suppliers, Gibson established himself as a mine supplier from the ‘small things’ he had purloined. When RAMCOZ was liquidated in 2000, Gibson continued his business by supplying other mines outside Luanshya and had by then accumulated enough capital to set up various other businesses, including transport and grocery stores. Gibson now lives in a large, well-kept house with an expansive green garden and owns three ‘big’ cars. He furnished his living room and veranda with heavy leather seats and glass-topped side tables, all clear markers of status. He is married and has three young children. His wife wears expensive clothing and keeps up to date with the latest Nigerian fashion (increasingly, a major status marker among emerging economic elites). Some, baffled by his ‘unexplained’ wealth in a context where most people are struggling to get by, call him a Satanist. Gibson is a clear example of *kulibonesha ta*’.

***‘Abali fye’ – ‘Those who are okay’***

Lackson Mwale, a former miner in his early forties, was considered by my informants to be one of ‘those who are okay’. Lackson’s experience is similar to that of most residents in the high-cost area under study. He had worked for the mines as a supervisor, a position he had risen to after joining the mines in 1989 with only a secondary school certificate in hand. Lackson had made use of the mines’ in-house skills-training facilities and had trained in metal fabrication, timber work and general construction. When he was retrenched, he left his family in town and moved to the ‘bush<sup>55</sup>’ on the outskirts of town to farm. He stayed there for a year until his wife asked him to move back, as she had taken a job as a clerk in the formal economy in Kitwe and would be able to support him and their three children. Several of my male informants had talked about how their wives had supported them in the worst of the crisis through small-scale enterprise. Many of these women started their activities during the 1980s, in response to the worsening economic conditions of the mine sector.

When Lackson moved back to the family home, bought as part of his retrenchment package, he took a loan from his wife and established a small construction company doing building maintenance and small-scale road works. He was very thankful to his wife; as he put it, ‘if it was another woman she would have left me, [but] my wife supported me’. Despite the economic difficulties, Lackson invested a considerable amount of time and resources in modifying his house. He added an extra bedroom, made the main bedroom self-contained and he expanded the living room. Even though the furnishings in his house were old and in some instances worn, Lackson has a large screen television, a DVD player and a music system, all placed on a steel and glass display cabinet. Technological gadgets are perceived by most people as markers of high status. Another sign of the

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<sup>55</sup> The town of Luanshya is surrounded by indigenous forest, forest plantation and small to large scale farming activities. Residents farming on the outskirts of the town often say they are going into the bush to farm.

aspirations to ‘make it up’ is the considerable investment Lackson and his wife have made to send one of their children to a private primary school (a former mine trust school, recently privatised). Alongside the aspirations of social advancement, Lackson is aware that he needs to secure a material base that is not dependent on external economic conditions. With his family, he continues to grow maize in the outskirts of town. In his words, ‘it is important to be self-sufficient’. He also uses his backyard to increase the family’s subsistence base. He grows maize during the rainy season, as well as tomatoes, spinach and onions. While these backyard activities started during the ZCCM period, they intensified from 1997 onwards.

***‘Abale chula’ – ‘Those who suffer’***

Theresa Miti is in her fifties and is the wife of a former ZCCM mine employee, who had worked for the company from 1983 and had risen to the rank of mine captain after joining the mines as a trainee engineer. Theresa has little formal training, having left school half way through secondary education. During the ZCCM era, she had carried out small-scale economic activities, such as knitting jerseys for sale, a skill she had learnt from her friends. She had also engaged in the sale of agricultural produce, travelling to North Western Zambia to buy beans for sale in Luanshya. When I met her, her husband was working on short-term contract in one of the privatised mines under a subcontractor in Kitwe and had not visited the family in three months. Kitwe is an hour away by bus and bus fare costs ZMK 24,000 (approx. US\$5) for a return journey. Theresa hinted that he might have established another household in Kitwe. Theresa was staying with her six children, the youngest of whom was sixteen, and two grandchildren in the house her husband purchased as part of his retrenchment package. Theresa’s family is having a hard time ‘getting by’. As Theresa puts it, ‘my husband does not make enough to send home’. To supplement her husband’s remittances, Theresa, like many other women in Luanshya, makes a meagre income digging flux-stone from the huge mine

dumps left from the ZCCM era. Her youngest son and one of her grandchildren help her. She sells the flux-stone to other locals, who use it for construction work on their plots. The incredible burst of economic activity (often bordering on the illegal) concentrated around the mine dumps is a clear example of the creative strategies employed by Luanshya residents to get through the crisis. In Theresa's yard, where her children usually sit braiding each other's hair or cutting vegetables in preparation for the evening meal, stones from the dumps are piled high for sale. Theresa is HIV positive and so are two of her children.<sup>56</sup> She is on ARVs, but struggles to get the appropriate nutrition to deal with the medication and the illness's side-effects.

Despite living in a high-cost, low-density area, Theresa's house has no electricity or running water. These services were cut in 2003 and 2004 respectively, after the household failed to pay arrears. The lack of access to a stable water supply makes it difficult for Theresa to engage even in those so-called subsistence activities that have been booming in Luanshya since the privatisation of the mines. Theresa grows maize during the rainy season, but cannot sustain other forms of vegetable production during the rest of the year. The limited income base also made this household vulnerable to other changes that came with the privatisation. As a result of the privatisation process, the everyday maintenance and administration of this high-cost area was transferred from ZCCM to the local municipal authorities. This meant that residents started paying 'land rates' to the local authorities, an additional cost in an already tight economic situation. Theresa now fears that the local authorities might 'grab' the house for failure to pay land rates.

The interior of Theresa's house though very neat and homely, with doilies to cover the worn seats, had none of the usual electronic goods that are social indicators of material status, the kind of goods bailiffs usually pounce on. Theresa's fear for the house being grabbed also reflects wider social

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<sup>56</sup> About 16 percent of Zambia's population is HIV positive, according to the Central Statistical Office of Zambia (2005).

practices where women often lose out in property after the death of a spouse (Catell 2003), and indicates at the difficult economic circumstances of women who have been left alone. My 2009 survey of 100 households in one section of a former mine housing area<sup>57</sup> in Luanshya, revealed that of twelve households that were living on less than ZMK 500,000<sup>58</sup> (about US\$ 100), the lowest income bracket in the area, six of the nine were headed by women whose husbands had passed away after 1999.

### ***“Trying” – Life as journey of attempts and improvisations***

The three case studies portray the skewed and uncertain places in which people find themselves in the present. They also indicate the ways in which gender, choice of production activity, marital status, moralities, household composition and situation make the steering of a life journey differ from one informant to another. Gibson tries, Lackson tries and Theresa tries, and the distinctions among them are not for a lack of effort.

Unlike development discourse with its teleological understanding of transition, Copperbelt residents see life in the transition as a journey undertaken in the midst of an ideological ‘pot hole’ without a clear map. This can make steering difficult, and consequences both various and unforeseeable. Indeed the metaphor of a precarious journey has been taken up in contemporary popular music in Zambia and has become a way of portraying suffering and crisis in Zambia. For example, the lyrics of the popular song ‘Oh no’ by the artist Petersen from his 2005 album *Munyaule* encapsulate this notion of a journey that is too frightening to contemplate,

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<sup>57</sup> The entire former mine high-cost (or low-density) housing area, Old Town and New Town, comprises about 1123 houses. The survey in August 2009 was conducted in Old Town.

<sup>58</sup> The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, which carries out a monthly basic needs basket in Zambia, indicated that a family of six in Luanshya in August 2009 required ZMK 1,462,850 for their monthly household needs. My survey of August 2009 revealed that thirty-seven percent of the households surveyed were living on less than this amount, while the rest (nine percent of whom were living in the higher monthly income of above ZMK 5,000,000 - about US\$ 1,000), was living above this mean.

suggesting that it is better not to look *'sinifuna nakulanga'* ("I don't even want to look") and that all one can do is 'try'. The themes of Petersen's music are to be found in other popular Zambian songs, such as *'Kaya'* ('I don't know'), by the artist Danny (2005), who sings about the uncertainty of the future and the fear of a young death. (I explore this theme further in Chapter Six). The notion of suffering is also seen in the dramaturgical moments of the popular dance songs of the musician Mozegater, in which Zambian party-goers dance in a moving circle in a parody of suffering. Mozegater's songs combine the style of morale songs heard at football games with funeral songs to create what he calls *'Chiunda'* ('noise') music. He, like Petersen, sings of the attempts to make a livelihood and the precariousness of these ventures. His lyrics from the song *'Chikokoshi'* include statements such as *'yali survival'* ('it was survival'), *'business ya nwen'* ('the business sinks'), *'ala boyz cali bipile'* ('oh boys it was bad'). Like other Zambian artists, he links suffering, death and livelihood strategies as a social commentary on life in Zambia. Some people make it, others don't – what happens in between is a series of improvisations to extend life, *uku toping'a* (literally 'to add on', popular Bemba slang in reference to extending life using HIV/AIDS anti-retroviral medication).

Improvisation implies that effort, circumstance, relations, possibilities and materials coincide in ways that make things possible. The case study of Mr Mubita, whose story I draw on in the next section, attempts to show the experimental nature of improvisation. His case embodies the notion of trying. Following on from the three cases above, his demonstrates that structure and agency do not exist on two polar ends, but are lived out in continuous practice.

### **'Experimenting' in the backyard: household economics in the neo-liberal Copperbelt**

Mr Nathan Mubita, who is in his mid fifties, lives with his second wife,

Susan, and their two children in a large, two-bedroom house in *kuma yard*, having divorced his first wife, with whom he had two children. Mr Mubita joined the mines in 1979 with an incomplete secondary education to work first as a pump attendant then rising swiftly through the employment ranks. Despite his limited schooling, Mr Mubita approached his livelihood challenges scientifically – by which I mean experimentally. Of particular interest to me was the array of activities in Mr Mubita’s yard. At a first meeting at his *kantemba* (streetside store), on entering his yard I noticed the orchard of orange trees, banana plants, dried maize stalks, a water tank, a partially-completed chicken run and a run-down house and unkempt lawn. The contrast between the lawn and the agricultural set up was striking. A complex network of irrigation pipes differentiated Mr Mubita’s yard from any other I had seen. As I got to know him better, I gradually realised that his yard is an excellent example of the recent wave of informal economic activities sparked by the privatisation process. His activities not only represented wider trends in the area, but also showed a distinctive mark of creativity and innovation.

***Hardship and innovation: Mr Mubita’s backyard informal activities***

Mr Mubita refers to his several activities as ‘experiments’ and ‘pilots’. The first was the construction of a *kantemba* in early 2003, before he received his terminal benefits from the liquidation of ZCCM. This is how he started out:

You see, a few houses away from mine down the road, there used to be a small *kantemba*. One day I went there asking for some sugar, you know these small units packed in plastic bags by *kantemba* owners, yes. So I asked [the store owner] if he would loan me some on credit and some buns for my kids. Now I had gone there whilst he was packing these units from a new packet of sugar. He said that he could only give me the goods after somebody had bought at least one of the plastics as it was bad luck

to loan ... without having sold anything first. He was very superstitious. So I waited for two hours before any one bought the packet of sugar and was allowed the credit facility. So as I was there I observed the little boy run the business and said to myself, if this boy can do it, why can't I? It seemed profitable enough. So I went to a shylock (moneylender) and borrowed K100,000. I was expected to pay back with fifty percent interest. This was in 2003.

Mr Mubita then constructed a store out of timber off-cuts and some nails he had bought with the help of his son. He stocked the shop with sugar, painkillers, a 'pan' of buns, ten packets of tea, some pencils and biscuits. With these, he opened for business.

When he received his terminal benefits late in 2003, he spent the money on his son's college education, a water tank with stand, a well, tomato seedlings and orange trees. He planted a batch of Israeli-origin tomatoes in his backyard from which he yielded a return of K10,000,000 from an initial investment of K600,000. Within the current economic context, this is a considerable sum of money, more than enough to kick-start other small-scale entrepreneurial activities. Mr Mubita used the proceeds to start the construction of a chicken run. He obtained the plan for this from Yielding Tree, an agricultural shop that held a stand at the agricultural and commercial show in Kitwe, which he had attended on invitation from a friend. The chicken run is situated in the backyard and its walls are at roof level. To date, the construction is still incomplete.

Another successful project is the orange tree orchard that takes up almost the whole large front yard. Another experiment is visible on one side of the house, where Mr Mubita planted two varieties of banana, one indigenous and the other exotic. The indigenous variety is more successful in agricultural terms and it has higher resistance to disease; however, its value on the market is lower. He considered the possibility of establishing a vaster banana plantation, but later abandoned this idea, because the cost of water

needed for it would have offset the yields.

In the backyard, maize stalks lay drying from the recent harvest. Mr Mubita said that he would soon start planting another batch of tomatoes and onions for home consumption and sale. There are also a costly water tank and the incomplete rectangular concrete block building intended for the chicken run. In a little room at one end of the chicken run is a concrete-lined well that he had designed and built with a help of a young man Vincent who worked as a gardener in the neighbourhood. His entire yard is crossed by a series of pipes, his 'irrigation experiment'. Mr Mubita created his own DIY version of a drip irrigation system, as he could not afford to buy a standard one. His modifications were intended to save on water bills,<sup>59</sup> which would have been comparably higher with a standard drip irrigation system. Mr Mubita's activities well encapsulated what was increasingly valued, that is self-sufficiency and working with one's hands.

### **To work with one's own hands**

Self-sufficiency had been promoted as a policy by the Zambian state and on the Copperbelt by the then-nationalised mines, especially during the 1980s in the early years of the country's economic decline. However, on the Copperbelt, it only came to the fore during the worst of the economic crisis that followed the sale of the mines. Then, the residents of town like Luanshya were forced to draw on a range of social and materials skills to get by, as well as the dexterity of their bodies, as they were required to work more with their hands. Drawing on the case of Vincent who helped Mr Mubita construct his backyard well, as well as the activity of digging the well, I aim to show how social life, like the practice of making things, comprises a continuous series of improvisations. I also demonstrate how the

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<sup>59</sup> Kazimbaya-Senkwe and Guy (2007) detail the domestication of water in Luanshya after the privatisation of the mines. Mine employees did not pay water bills during the ZCCM era.

sensory aspects involved in a process of improvisation play a role in how we learn and try. Vincent and Mubita's "experiments" also point to pliability and the notion of mutual permeability, or *ukusankaya* the process of mixing ideas, things and oneself in the practice of trying to make things work.

### ***Vincent and the construction of the well***

I interviewed Vincent when I found out that he had helped Mr. Mubita construct his well and that he had dug wells for quite a few people in the mine area under study. Vincent Bwalya was born in Luanshya in 1978, and had grown up in the mine township of Mpatamatu in Luanshya. Vincent described himself as self-employed with his work involving *ukulima amabala* (cultivating fields), cutting grass and hedges *muma yard* (in the yards) and digging and repairing wells, as well as the odd jobs in construction such as plastering.

His father worked for the mines as a shorer of excavated pits and tunnels until he retired in 1989 and moved to Mufulira. Vincent, then a young boy, had moved with the rest of his family – his mother, three sisters and four brothers – to Mufulira. There the family had set themselves up in Chibolya, a council-run township where other retired miners unwilling to return to their rural 'homes' had settled. Vincent's family main source of livelihood was farming on land they had acquired on the outskirts of Mufulira. There they grew maize, sweet potatoes and groundnuts for home consumption and for sale locally and in Lusaka.

When Vincent married Sheila, they stayed in the former mine low density suburb in a 'servant's quarter', a one room with detached ablutions. They met the cost of their accommodations by working in lieu of cash payment, Sheila working as a maid, and Vincent doing the gardening. In 2000, he

moved back to Luanshya where he had procured a job as a casual labourer with the RAMCOZ mines though he quit this job shortly after joining and started doing agricultural 'piecework' because of the low pay. Following the liquidation of the RAMCOZ mines and associated job layoffs, many miners turned to farming. This was fortuous for Vincent as there was significant demand for casual labour for agricultural work. Other than clearing and cultivation of fields, Vincent also started sinking wells at some of the farms he worked, charging in 2000 and 2001 about ZMK150,000 (or US\$30). Following the privatisation of water utility services in the mine township that necessitated former mine workers paying for water supply, Vincent's activities extended to sinking wells in the backyards of mine township residents. This is how he met Mr Mubita, whom he had heard wanted to sink a well from one of his customers.

### ***How Vincent learnt to build wells***

When Vincent's parents moved to Mufulira and started farming on the outskirts of the town they decided to sink a well in order to grow vegetables outside the rainy season, which was from November to early May. Vincent says he learnt how to sink wells from the man whom his father had hired to dig the well. The man had asked Vincent to help him by hauling the earth he dug up from the well via a bucket attached to a rope. Vincent had watched the man and tried the digging himself. Following this experience, when he had heard that his parents' neighbours were looking to sink a well, he offered to do it for them because felt he could do the job, but did not request payment. These were unlined wells. Later, Vincent learnt how to make lined wells from Mr Mubita.

Vincent says he gained the most experience in sinking wells in 2001 when he had a lot of clients wanting to sink wells at their backyards and farms. He charged K300,000 (about US\$60) in 2008 for sinking an unlined well, a job that took approximately four days of work to complete. He charged

around K500,000 (US\$100) for a lined well, excluding the cost of materials like cement and wire reinforcement that the client had to buy. The job usually took six days. Though Vincent says his well sinking rates varied for '*abaya kaya*' (his kinsmen), denoting real and fictive kin, on further query I had found that his rates did not vary much, but mode of payment did as he extended longer repayment terms to 'kin'. I also found that he used the notion of kin as way of establishing a convivial client relationship.

The first thing Vincent did when he was approached for a job to sink a well was to make query about his potential client's reliability when it came to paying for the job. As many of the commissions he got were in the low-density suburb where he lived, he was easily able to find out by asking other piece-workers in the area who might have previously done a job for the person, or making queries at the *katembas* (little front house stores) where they might have shopped. He opted not to risk working for those he heard were unreliable payers, because, he said, '*teti ubombe fya mahala* (you cannot work for nothing)', as '*abantu balishupa ukulipila ikongole* (people are a problem when it comes to paying back a debt)'. Vincent informed me that he was especially careful not to take on jobs that might not be paid for because many of his clients were unable to pay the full sum of the job, and paid in installments, with a negotiated retainer that ranged from a tenth to half the full amount, and the rest paid on completion of the job. Sometimes he says, some clients had struggled to pay the outstanding amount on completion, and this payment was then further broken up in two payments. He did not mind being paid in installments as long as he was informed prior to taking on the job. He had however, had problems with clients that made him go back to collect small payments over long periods of time and those that he says never intended to pay the full amount. These jobs he treated as a loss.

Vincent did not differentiate the cost of a well based on its depth but on its type. Most wells around the mine area were between 8.5 to 9 metres in

depth, but, because of the topography, were in some cases deeper or shallower than this depth. These variations sometimes created problems with regard to payment. He gave one example where he was commissioned to sink a well for a woman who sold plants from her back garden. Vincent told me that when she had contracted him to sink a well they had agreed on a price of ZMK 300,000. He says he had explained to her the general specifications a well, telling her that it was likely to be a depth of 8 metres. However, Vincent says that when he dug the well he found water at depth of 5.5 metres and he dug an extra metre as usual, for a total depth of 6.5 metres. Vincent told me that despite the fact he found water at that depth, his client was dissatisfied and would have preferred that he dig deeper to the depth of 8 metres. He told me that she had been adamant despite the technical difficulties, not to mention the danger to himself that digging further would have entailed, arguing that she would only pay a third of the agreed price. Vincent informed me that he had decided not to push her for the rest of his money telling me, “if only she had told me she did not have the money”. Vincent had read his client’s insistence on a deeper well and her failure to pay for the job despite the fact that they had found water as a strategy to avoid paying for it. Such incidents, though not frequent were not uncommon, and caused Vincent inconvenience especially for jobs where he contracted a colleague to help him with the construction of a well.

Explaining the division of labour when he sank wells with a colleague, Vincent said that when he did all the digging himself, and his colleague did the work of hauling the dirt out, he got two-thirds of the payments, and his colleague a third. He explained that if they shared the digging and hauling out of dirt from the well, then the payment was split in two. The biggest risk in the job according to Vincent was to the person inside the well digging, and as such the understanding was that that person was paid more. Sometimes clients opted to take on the responsibility of hauling the dirt out themselves, or getting someone else, like their gardener, to do it to reduce the fee. In reference to Mr Mubita, Vincent said, ‘*for example bamudala balikosa, so bale ibombela*’ (for example the old man is strong so he did the

work himself’, whereas referring to another client he said, *‘bamudala abe ikala pa number three bali bonfya aba bombi* (the old man who stays three houses down used his worker). These observations by Vincent did not only indicate which client was willing to literally work with their hands, but also pointed to the type of working relationship. I had observed Vincent work with Mr Mubita on his other backyard project and seen that they appeared to share a collegial working environment. Vincent too appeared to take great pride in this garden in contrast to others that he had worked on.

In explaining the details of payment in Vincent’s well sinking business, my aim is to highlight some of the factors that newly self-employed business persons encountered on the Copperbelt. One of the key issues I found many small businesses faced were delays or non-payment for goods and services, and this played a key role in whether a business succeeded or not. Whereas people like Vincent, operating in a relatively small geographical area, were able to make queries about whether or not a client was likely to pay, those doing business with strangers and dealing with large amounts of money in the absence of collateral were sometimes forced to come up with creative ways of getting payment. One such way was the threat of cosmological violence as reported in the story “Copperbelt Tortoise Shocker!” on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007 in the Times of Zambia.

Residents of the Copperbelt have in the past few months been awakened to a rude shock as incidences of animals and birds descended on some unsuspecting families with warning messages in letters strapped on their backs.

Some shrewd businessmen who have found this phenomenon as the best and quickest way to retrieve their monies from people who owe them have perpetuated this bizarre practice.

In history, it is pigeons that were known as the best senders of mail in far-flung areas to communities. Dogs have also been known, if well trained, to send parcels and messages to others.

But the stories coming out of the Copperbelt in the past two months have been rather odd. Letters delivered on tortoise backs and pigeons to a number of people who allegedly owe large amounts of money and apparently fail to pay on agreed dates have rather unsettled many, including those that may not be superstitious.

Because it is strange for anyone to see a tortoise strapped in clothes and beads and an envelope on its shell addressed to them, some people who have been owing tortoise senders have been quick to pay back what they owe because of fear of being killed through witchcraft.

During the course of my fieldwork, three persons in the former mine suburb in Luanshya had encountered such threats; and in one case, the monies owed were paid back with help from extended family members who feared the threat of witchcraft would also befall them.

I return now to the physical, practical aspects of making the well in Mr Mubita backyard to draw attention to the affordances of the environment and the modes of Vincent and Mr Mubita's engagement with it. This is crucial in thinking through how people get by. Anthropologists outside those who study material culture tend to focus much more on the social, cultural, political and abstractly economic possibilities that a place affords, and often tend to forget what the phenomenologically-experienced lived world affords (this includes not just the earth, flora and fauna, but things like weather). How do people improvise within all these contingent variables?

### *The techniques of sinking a well*

Vincent sank lined and unlined wells for his clients. Unlined, unprotected wells are not considered safe for producing water for domestic

consumption. Nevertheless, I found that in addition to being used by the residents of Luanshya to water their backyard gardens, they were also used for cooking, the cleaning of vegetables, washing of dishes and bathing. Those residents that relied on them as their main source of water collected drinking water from neighbours who had running tap water. In these cases, children were usually sent to ask for water from neighbours and, for the few who had outdoor taps like myself, the children sometimes just wandered into the yard to draw water without asking. Vincent was usually commissioned to dig unlined wells because many of his clients could not afford a concrete-lined well. Unlined wells provided Vincent with follow-on maintenance work, as walls were prone to collapsing, especially during the region's rainy season from November to early May.

The first lined well that Vincent had ever built was with Mr Mubita who had initially explored the option of sinking a borehole in his backyard but had been deterred by the cost; more than twenty times the cost of building a lined well. Mr Mubita had however looked at the technical specifications of a borehole and figured that he could make the concrete lined casting of the hole himself. He commissioned Vincent to dig the well and together they set about building a lined well, both learning in the process as they went along. According to Vincent, "Mr Mubita had the idea, *elyo ifwe twa landa po, twa nsakanya* (then I had a say, we mixed ideas)". In what follows, I describe how Vincent and Mr Mubita built the well so to give a sense of the skill, techniques and some of the difficulty they encountered in building it.

#### Digging the well:

Set out the perimeter of the well, usually 80 to 100cm in diameter, and dig a hole till you find water and a further metre beyond the point where you find water.

The well is dug using a short spade or shovel and a solid pitched bar known locally as *umungwala* and a chisel. The *umungwala* is

used to soften the ground around and within the perimeter of the well, using stabbing motions. After this has been done, the short shovel is used to dig and shovel the dirt out. The chisel is used break up rock when it is found when digging inside the well.

One man digs inside the well, and the other man stand outside to haul dirt out via a bucket attached to a rope. Vincent advised digging a well in during the country's dry season, not only to avert the threat of being buried should the rain-softened side walls collapse in the absence of shoring but also it allowed one to reach dry season ground water level, making the well usable for some period during the dry season.

When breaking sharp stones, in particular white crystallized stone that were very sharp and often encountered in the Luanshya mine suburb, Vincent advised wearing leather gloves to avoid cutting ones hands.

Vincent also cautioned that the person hauling the buckets of dirt had to be careful not to spill any of its contents onto the person digging inside the well because even the small stones falling on the body could cause excruciating pain because *'umu bili ulakaba, noku piba sana* (the body gets hot and very sweaty). He also noted that wearing shoes when digging inside the well was very uncomfortable because feet tended to get uncomfortably hot and swell.

Preparing the mould for the lining for the well:

Prepare two drums, oil drums that are about 1 metre in height and eighty centimetres in diameter for making the mould for the concrete lining. (Mr Mubita had bought the oil drums from a vendor who sold second-hand hardware products). The bottoms of the drums need to be cut out and one drum has to slightly bigger than the other so the concrete mixture can be poured in between

the reinforced space in between the two drums. The space between the two drums should be about two and a half inches. Making one drum bigger than the other can be done by cutting out a longitudinal section out of the second drum and cutting the first drum length-wise then welding the cut longitudinal section from the second drum to the first drum to make it wider.

Place reinforcement wire in the space between the two drums. Mr Mubita used the interlinking wire normally used to make fences and used a section from his own boundary fence.

Make two pairs of centred opposite holes to go through the oil drums, approximately fifteen centimetres from the top. The holes should be about fifteen millimetres. The holes are used to insert two steel rods that will make a central cross to which a chain will be attached and used to lower the set concrete mould into the hole. These holes should be sealed with sticks before the concrete mixture is poured into the mould and allowed to set.

Other holes, randomly placed, should be made. Sticks too should be placed in these before pouring the concrete mixture. These holes are created as weep holes for when water is poured into the space between the drums in the concrete curing process.

Making the lining:

Vincent and Mr Mubita mixed half a pocket of cement with two wheel-barrows of flux stone (a crushed stone obtained from the mine dumpsites with a powderlike, grainy sand) and small stones of about 5mm texture (which had been sourced by a night time sweep of roads that were being rehabilitated in the town). They mixed this on ground cleared of organic matter with about forty litres of water.

The concrete mixture was poured into space between drums and allowed to cure for eight days, with water being poured over it twice a day to aid in the curing process. When cured, the oil drums were removed to create the next mould.

Mr Mubita and Vincent made concrete moulds to line the entire length of the 8.5 metre well. This required 10 concrete moulds.

Making a chain block and frame:

Create a sturdy frame to place centred over the well to which a chain block will be connected. The chain will be hooked to the crossed rods centred in the mould, and the mould be lowered into the well. Mr. Mubita's sturdy frame was a hollow steel pipe of about 10cm in diameter (scavenged from waste near the mine plant area) cantilevered from the concrete block wall of his chicken run. The chain block was supported from the steel pipe.

Lowering the mould into the hole:

Pass two steel rods through the holes at the top of the mould. Vincent advised that the rods must not go right through the holes as they would stop the descent of the mould into the well by getting stuck to the sides of it. Vincent also noted that having this technique also allowed their removal by chiselling around them to prise the rods out for re-use.

Making the well cover:

Vincent and Mr Mubita made a precast concrete cover for the well. It comprised two half leaves of metal from the cut bottoms of the oil drums and was made using a similar method to the concrete lining; that is, they reinforced it with wire, created weep holes and used the same concrete mixture. When the cover was cured they passed a strong synthetic rope through the weep holes of the precast concrete cover to make lifting it easier.

It is to this well that Mr Mubita installed a water pump and devised a drip irrigation system for watering his garden.

When Vincent was contracted to build a lined well for one of Mr Mubita's neighbours, Mr Shona, who planned that it would supply water to a fish pond he was planning to make, both Vincent and Mr Mubita worked on the job, sharing the payment equally. Mr Mubita made the lining, and Vincent did the digging of the well. Mr Shona's gardener hauled the dirt up from the well. Mr Mubita and Vincent revised the technique they had developed for the well by changing the way in which the concrete mould was lowered in the well. They did this by doing away with the chain block that had caused them problems in centering, which had required the construction of a sturdy frame to support it, and which had caused the loss of several moulds that had dropped and broken in the process of lowering them. The following is a variation of the building of a lined well in the absence of a chain block that they had heard of by hearsay.

Set out the perimeter of the well, a diameter of about 80-100cm.

Place the precast concrete mould to sit on the outline of the well's perimeter.

Dig within the confines of the hole the mould. Once you dig to a depth of half a meter, dig around the edge of the wall to create space for the concrete mould to slide down to that depth.

Continue digging and once the top of the first mould is at ground level, place the second one to sit of the outline of the perimeter of the well.

Dig to the next half metre, then dig around the edges of the well to allow the moulds to slide down to that depth.

Repeat the procedure to the required depth of the well, which is the point plus a metre below where water is found.

The advantage of the variation they used for Mr Shona's well was that it minimized the use of other tools such as the chain block and reduced wastage of materials like cement, because the concrete mould was unlikely to break in this process of lowering it.

In describing in detail some of the technicalities in building a well, I aim to indicate some of the skill employed in construction and the innovations and variations employed in their making, as well as what the makers learnt from the process. Much of the material used in the construction of the wells Vincent worked on, other than the cement, were salvaged recycled materials. This required an alertness to what was lying around in the environment. It also inserted the enterprise of building the well into the wider informal economy, as evidenced in the aggregate used to bind the cement - flux stone that was sourced from the copper mine dumps characteristic of the Copperbelt landscape.

### **Individual agency in a fluid environment: the 'informal' as primary site of analysis**

The innovative ways in which Mr Mubita turned his backyard into an economically productive site that guaranteed his family's livelihood provide a useful gateway into the lived experience of the transitions on the Copperbelt. Mr Mubita's 'pilots' and 'experiments' provide an excellent example of the improvisations involved in the process of earning a livelihood, and capture the essence of the Zambian expression of 'trying'. This case links to the earlier three accounts in showing that the story of the liberalisation of the Zambian mining industry and the ensuing economic crisis is not only about winners and losers (see Fraser and Lungu 2007). It is also about the creative process of trying to earn a livelihood through on-going effort, the ability to take advantage of and manipulate social situations, and the garnering of new moralities to justify and explain

economic activities that fall outside the remit of the formally legal. The cases presented in this chapter also show that in the self-sufficient livelihoods that have come to the fore on the Copperbelt, skill, the body, social life and the physical environment are indissoluble in the process of making a living and sustaining life, and that each of these has to be taken into account in the analysis of the micro-political economy and social mobility. However, they also illuminate that none of these factors are fixed; that skill can be learnt and improved on; that the strength of the body is variable, including both in its extension through the labour of other people and in its ability to carry out certain tasks; that social relations can be manipulated; and that the physical environment is pliable.

The cases presented in this chapter show people who are attempting to carve out a livelihood independent of formally structured employment. This reflects the practice of most Luanshya residents, even those with formal jobs. What the cases also suggest is that opportunities are largely perceived *in situ*, commonly expressed as '*twala mona inga twa fika*' ('we shall see when we get there'). Mr Mubita perceived he could run a little store by his home after observing a young man sell his goods. Gibson observed the opportunities available in supplying the mines with goods from the stripping of the liquidated RAMCOZ. Vincent learnt how to sink wells by observing and helping out the man who had come to sink a well by his parents' farm and learnt with Mr Mubita how to construct lined wells. While this may seem like a simplistic observation, I would argue that perception plays an important part in the process of making a livelihood in a context where anxieties about the future make forward-planning difficult. This kind of perception highlights the possibilities that could be obscured in the volatility of the transition period. As such, while the harsh material and psychological realities of the ensuing economic crisis have tinged the experiences of former miners living in *kuma yard* with more than a hint of nostalgia for a 'golden' past, where the mining system provided a stable economic base and a wide range of social services, the crisis has also opened up new opportunities and has stimulated people's creative agency in devising survival strategies to make it through this difficult transition.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Contesting Illegality: Women in the informal copper business on the Zambian Copperbelt**

The extent of the expulsion from Eden experienced since the ZCCM period is clearly captured by the striking view of copper waste dumps, a common feature of the Copperbelt landscape. On one side of the dumps, large excavators scoop out chunks of flux stone that will later be reprocessed in local plants to extract copper. On the other side of the dumps, it is not unusual to see small groups of women and children busy digging and sorting out flux stone and copper ore with only the support of sieves, picks, hoes and shovels. The result of the work of these small gangs fuels the informal trade in copper ore to foreign buyers and of building materials to local residents.

This chapter draws on ethnographic research carried out in July-August 2008 in two copper dumpsites, one located in the Copperbelt town of Luanshya, an urban setting, the other in the North Western Province (increasingly referred to as the New Copperbelt) district of Mufumbwe, a rural setting. There I observed women and children working on the sites and carried out informal interviews with informants both on site and at their homes. This chapter asks: why are women and children involved in these activities? What does their involvement tell us about the drastic restructuring of the local economy? How do these activities change the way people talk about the 'free market'? How is illegality justified and pursued as a legitimate moral strategy? My aim is to provide some answers to these questions and to contribute to a deeper understanding of the informal economy of the Zambian Copperbelt and the body politic of neo-liberalism in this context.

The chapter suggests that the dual economy of the copper dumpsites highlights important features of the experience of boom and bust on the Copperbelt and in Zambia and Africa more widely. Firstly, the formal and the informal, legal and illegal economies are increasingly coming together under an unspoken social contract where cunning local entrepreneurs (named by some as ‘copper thieves’) ‘redistribute’ the wealth produced by the mines through kinship and other local networks. The Organised Crime Watch of the Southern African Institute for Security Studies describe these processes as generating criminal networks on the Copperbelt (Institute for Security Studies 2009). Locally, understandings are less black and white. While this trade is illegal and the mining companies that own the dumpsites prohibit informal digging and mining, mine employees and policemen routinely turn a blind eye in implicit recognition of the dumpsite workers’ basic needs. This chapter suggests that illegality has become a legitimate survival strategy in the eyes of many living within the economic context of a failure to meet local needs and a political context featuring an ever-diminishing state intervention. The elaboration of an alternative morality to justify illegality should thus be seen as part of the creation of a narrative to explain the growing importance of informality as a way of inhabiting the world and making a living, as demonstrated in the previous chapter. Informality connotes a propensity for trespass which, in the context of improvisational livelihood-making, casts people outside formal legal systems, and in turn leads to contestations over ownership and control.

Within a discussion of power, the chapter contributes to an understanding of the body politic of neoliberalism in this context. This may be understood in a Foucauldian sense as the forces, emanated through the ideological and material structures of society, that impact the negotiating body of the actor, in this case women and children working at the mine dumps. However, rather than seeing structure as stable, it can be seen – like neoliberalism - as an ideological sketch that allows us to engage with it as a theme that emerges through various stories of the attempt to create a free market. As I show through the engagement of informal miners at sites that were once under the formal control of mining companies, the assertion of free market

ideology and private property is not a given thing, or object, but is entangled with various contestations for economic action, giving rise in turn to the emergence of varying interests.

Secondly, economic shifts are driving changes in gender relations on the Copperbelt. The chapter shows how the 'spirit' of neo-liberalism's 'free market' has co-opted women's and children's bodies into modes of labour in what are clearly recognized as unequal circumstances by the subjects themselves. While the more lucrative aspects of the informal trade in copper is dominated by men who operate as middle men to copper ore buyers and organize labor gangs, women and children are an increasingly significant feature in this trade. They are perceived by some as harder working, less likely to cause trouble, more likely to escape prosecution for trespass, and more willing to work for smaller profit margins. While these perceptions often hold true, the dumpsites are also spaces in which the distinctive moral and political voices that women have long constructed and defended on the Copperbelt find new articulations.<sup>60</sup>

### **The sites of study**

As discussed in Chapter One, between 1997 to 2000 the massive state-owned conglomerate Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM) was broken up and transferred into the ownership of a range of international private-sector investors. The mines in Luanshya were amongst the first to be broken off from the vast ZCCM and sold as a package as the Roan Antelope Mining Company of Zambia (RAMCOZ). The deal also included the Baluba mines and a greenfield site at Mulyashi. The initial purchaser was Binani, a consortium of Indian investors, who, although acknowledged as metal traders, did not have the same extensive experience running mines as the preferred bidders, the mine company First Quantum.<sup>61</sup> RAMCOZ

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<sup>60</sup> See Jane L. Parpart (2001) who indicates that the moral political voice women lend to economic struggle extends to the articulation of the constraints against patriarchal power and the perception and construction of the good woman.

<sup>61</sup> The Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines and the Zambia Privatization Agency faced a lawsuit in 1997 over the decision to sell the Luanshya mines to the Binani Group of

initially retained all 6,294 of the former ZCCM workers (Mwaba 2004), but the inexperienced management of the company struggled from the very beginning to raise capital, run the mine, and pay employees and suppliers.<sup>62</sup> In Luanshya, suspicions were rife that the investors asset-stripped the company and, in 2000, the liquidation of RAMCOZ represented the first major setback of the Zambian privatization process. The company laid-off all but a few care and maintenance staff. The failure of the company to provide even redundancy packages, known as ‘terminal benefits’, let alone secure pensions, meant many residents of a town built in the ‘bush’ in order to service the mine, experienced immediate and profound material and psycho-social difficulties (see Chapter Six). In 2003, many people’s hopes were briefly raised when a severance benefit package was agreed to by the mines, including an option to purchase the company houses still occupied by former miners, and a considerable sum in cash. This short-lived injection of cash caused an outburst of informal economic activities, often the only hope for most to make a living, as I have described in earlier chapters. It also facilitated a glut in spending, as the predominantly male former mine workforce lived a short 'high life'.

Mr Sanga, a Luanshya general dealer, described miners as ‘big spenders’ and ‘careless with money’, saying that during that period it had not been unusual for a mine worker to spend up to ZMK 10,000,000 (in some cases a third of the cash benefit) in a single shopping spree; and a Mrs Muleya, a hairdresser, mentioned in passing that she had to obtain an injunction to prevent her husband from selling the family house, the only asset remaining, after her husband had spent his entire cash benefit. These stories were not unusual, or historically unprecedented. The lack of fiscal discipline among male mine workers was noted by colonial anthropologists

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Companies “Zambia’s ZCCM sued by South African mining company” *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, October 8, 1997. For a discussion of the justification to sell the mines to Binani rather than First Quantum see Francis Kaunda (2002)

<sup>62</sup> The *Panafrican News Agency* on November 2, 2000 reported, “Zambian copper mine faces closure due to debt” and describes RAMCOZ’s failure to settle workers’ salaries, service bills to the mine drilling company Mpelembe Drilling, and settle a significant debt – of more than twenty million US dollars to the energy company Copperbelt Energy Company.

such as Epstein working on the early Copperbelt, and was a concern that ZCCM took up in workshops for retrenched and retiring workers (Epstein 1992). Men's perceived unreliability of men was one of the factors that Copperbelt women (and men too) told me drove women to seek an income, usually in the informal sector.

Expectations of a return of modernity to Luanshya were raised again in 2004, when a new wave of foreign investment started to flow into the Copperbelt to finance a rapid expansion of copper mining, due to the rapidly rising copper prices caused by the dramatic economic growth of China and India and the resulting increasing demand for raw materials. In practice, however, formal employment did not increase much, and where jobs were created, the conditions of employment were considerably worse than during the ZCCM period. On the other hand, what the new boom did was to sustain and expand the fast-growing informal economy that replaced the increasingly diminished arena of formal wage labor on the Copperbelt. Neo Simutanyi (2008) and Alastair Fraser and John Lungu provide a general picture of the negative effects of wholesale privatization on the livelihoods of people living in the Copperbelt, even during the boom (Lungu and Fraser 2006). However, the boom they document ended just as fast as it started, in the aftermath of the credit crunch in September 2008, increasing the prominence of the informal economy as the primary source of income for Copperbelt residents.

The residents of the rural mining site of Kalengwa in Mufumbwe district did not experience the radical changes that the residents of Luanshya did, as mining operations had ceased in the early 1980s. During that period, the mining staff had either been absorbed into the other mines of the then newly-formed ZCCM, and a few retired. Apart from a small indigenous population, this left a few civil servants, teachers who ran a school, and a few retirees who had decided to settle in the area. Until about 2004, Kalengwa attracted few outsiders as it was not very conducive for settlement. Sixty kilometres away from the district centre of Mufumbwe, it can only be reached by a dirt road in very bad condition. The mining site

and settlement in Kalengwa is surrounded by dense miombo woodland. The soil in the area is stony, making it unsuitable for agricultural activity. In addition, residents complain of a peculiar taste to the water from the wells, potentially hinting at some kind of contamination of the water table. The residents of Kalengwa before the copper boom had subsisted on fish, some hunting and small-scale *chitemene* - slash and burn or shifting cultivation. The large mounds of the waste copper ore left from the mining operations in the early 1980s remained largely ignored by the residents. It was not expected that these large mounds would again contribute to their livelihood, and they were little more than a backdrop where children played.

At the Luanshya copper mine dumpsite women tended to work relatively independently. In contrast, at the Kalengwa site, work at the dumpsite has increasingly been enmeshed into a gang labor system. This might be because of the looser controls the mine in Kalengwa exercised over the space, and its general remoteness, making it harder for the state and mining companies to scrutinize activities there.

### **The emergence of the informal economy in Zambia**

Since the transition to democracy and the free market in 1991, the regulatory forces of the Zambian state have contracted, diminishing the surveillance capacity of the state that characterized the country under Kenneth Kaunda. This contraction was partly chosen by a new government that declared itself committed to a 'market-oriented economy' and partly imposed by the spending cuts of structural adjustment policies implemented under pressure from donors, which reduced the manpower of the civil service and its institutions. Regulatory aspects of the Kaunda era government, characterized by a widespread paranoia about being watched, loosened. This was an important precondition for the emergence of increased informal economic activities in the country. It was not that unregulated economic activity did not occur previously, but it had been much more tightly constrained. During the colonial period women had engaged in the illegal brewing of beer, and other informal economic

activities and had gone to great lengths to conceal them (Chauncey Jr. 1981). In the Kaunda era, an operation known as the Special Investigation Team for Economy and Trade (SITET) investigated business transactions, including those in the informal sector, as part of the regime's aims to centrally control the economy. One of my informants, Mrs Mwaba, who had actively worked in informal cross border trade during the Kaunda era, narrated how, on several occasions, she had been followed by officers of SITET and questioned about how she got access to foreign currency. The limitation placed on the procurement of foreign currency had led to a black market in currency exchange, one that Mrs Mwaba participated in.<sup>63</sup>

In the 1990s, following the democratization of political life and the adoption of market principles, informal economic activities became much more visible.<sup>64</sup> This visibility was also precipitated by the dramatically worsened economic conditions and the massive formal sector job losses that accompanied privatization. Though the economic system 'opened up' and there was a great spurt of entrepreneurial activity, there were several contradictions in the regulatory system that was supposed to institute the new free market ideology. These inconsistencies are revealed in Hansen's recent study on the eviction of street vendors from the city centre of the Zambian capital Lusaka and attempts to relocate them to a newly constructed market (Hansen 2004). Hansen describes how, on one hand, the central state promoted informal sector activity as part of the free market system, with informal trade institutionalized through a vendors' desk established at State House (the official residence of the Zambian presidency). On the other hand the Lusaka local authorities - who after 1996 and particularly 2001 had gained relative independence through the increase in members of parliament and councillors from opposition parties - initiated forced removals of vendors and enacted a series of regulations and practices to keep them off the streets. The local authorities drew on public health discourses of law and order, highlighting the illegality of street vending.

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<sup>63</sup> A black market in foreign currency thrives in the urban areas of Zambia, David Chibesa writing for the *Times of Zambia* describes its working in an article titled "Forex seekers revisit Katondo Street" December 24, 1998.

<sup>64</sup> Street side and front yard stores have become ever more visible in Zambia's cities.

These actions, Hansen notes, all occurred when greater economic difficulty drove more people to informal sector activity. Hansen notes that marketeers, urged to move to the new markets, complained of the high rates and rentals being charged for trading space. In the context of great economic hardship this was not surprising. Since Hansen's study, there has been gentrification of informal sector trade in the city centre of Lusaka. In 2008, the new markets charged higher rentals - of up to ZMK 1,000,000 for a store per month. These were amounts that many street vendors could not afford. The promotion of gentrification by the state eager for tax revenue that could only be collected with a degree of formalization is a far cry from the surveillance of the centralized economy of the Kaunda era. In the seemingly chaotic context of economic life in Zambia, the dispersal of market ideology through entanglement of both macro- and micro-political economic relationships significantly impacted ordinary people's efforts to get by in free-market Zambia. Hansen (2004, p.62) thus argues that, rather than treating it as an ideology or a function of the regulatory regime, we need to examine the "meaning and empirical realities" of particular markets.

***Sebana Wikute* "Get Embarrassed but Get Full": The moral economy of the informal sector**

On the Copperbelt, the contrast between the 'nationalized' past and the 'privatized' present is clear: many people feel they are not benefiting from foreign investment and that the cause is the investors' greed. The nationalized ZCCM mines had operated as the financier of the socialist vision of Zambia under the Kaunda regime. According to the dominant account (see Adam and Simpasa, 2010), this is precisely what led to the failure of the company to set aside funds for the capitalisation of new mining investments, and thus to modernise production and provide a long-term developmental model. The moral economy of mining was not, however, simply a calculation of long-term business strategy. In the minds of many Copperbelt residents, the mines were theirs. This sense of ownership was fostered not only by an affective relation to labor but also in

the ways in which the mine company permeated many other spheres of mine workers' lives. For example, ZCCM provided nappies and formula for babies born to mine employees, they issued subsidized food and toilet paper to the household, they also provided recreational facilities at the mine clubs where alcohol could be purchased on tab, and housekeeping lessons for mine workers wives. While these social provisions were welcomed, people resented the control that the mine company exerted in family life. Bridget Bwembya a former mine worker in the social welfare department of ZCCM informed me that her department had authorized the disbursement of salaries to wives who had complained that their husbands neglected their financial responsibilities in the home. The entanglement of the mines with workers' families mirrored the early period of mining on the Copperbelt when the mine company had relied on women's agricultural and other labor to minimize the costs of care and stabilize its male staff; it also created a platform where women could actively place their claims for a better livelihood and could be involved in politics (Chauncey Jr. 1981; Parpart 1986; Larmer 2007). Women still aim to make political claims about mine revenues and the gendered distribution of work and income in the deinstitutionalised, post-privatization world. In 1998, for example, a year after the sale of the ZCCM Luanshya mine, the *Times of Zambia* reported that mine workers, aided by women and children, rioted over the delays in the payment of housing allowance and the unfair dismissal of a mine workers union official (Kayira 1998). As is discussed below, women and children working in the illegal mining sector have also rioted over the unfairness of the workings of the 'free' market.

Complaints over livelihoods on the Zambian Copperbelt cannot only be seen as a struggle for resources between a proletariat and those who control the means of production. There is an affective dimension at play, which draws upon a discourse of selfishness that James Ferguson had identified when he carried out fieldwork in Zambia in the 1980s. Ferguson (1992) noted that mineworkers increasingly directed the critique inwards, as a negative assessment of themselves. Rather than seeing this self-directed critique as only the rhetoric of an anxious imagined community as reflected

in the musings of a Zambian intelligentsia, this moral critique needs to be examined in relation to the corporeality of practices of livelihood and social proprieties (Ferguson 2003).

To describe this in practice in the contemporary period, I draw on the case of the Luanshya family of Mr and Mrs Phiri, who have had relative success in the post-privatization economy of the Copperbelt. During the toughest period on the Copperbelt, following mine workers' retrenchments after Binani's collapse and before workers received their cash benefits, many Luanshya residents say they suffered. They described a situation where they were lucky to have a meal; some said they subsisted at times on raw mangoes. The Phiri family, in contrast to many of their neighbors, did not go hungry even though their business in informal trade, established long before privatization, suffered. Mrs Phiri narrated in various conversations how neighbors who, in better times, had been careful only occasionally to visit at meal times, took to visiting almost every single day during meals. While Mrs Phiri understood what drove her neighbors to flout these social conventions, which she summed up as *sebana wikute* ("get embarrassed but get full"), the awareness of their own potentially precarious economic situation led the Phiris to having meals at irregular times to avoid being perceived as selfish when they failed to offer their visitors a meal. The perception that they fared better than their neighbours still persisted. Their neighbours pointed out to me that the Phiris had never become thin like the rest of them. During the copper boom, that encompassed my fieldwork in Luanshya, the Phiri family's prosperity stood in stark contrast to their neighbours whose circumstances, though slightly improved, were still mired in difficulty. This contrast led to accusations of Satanism levelled at the Phiris who, despite their generosity in offering various assistance, of food, palliative care, time and money for the organization of social events like marriages and funerals in their neighborhood, were still perceived as selfish. This strained relations amongst them and their neighbors, as they felt they were being fleeced. Several attempted thefts at their home intensified this feeling.

The incidence of theft in the former mine townships of Luanshya is widely perceived to have risen. In my first survey in 2008, all but three of the fifty-six households mentioned security and theft being a problem. During the year and half of my fieldwork in Luanshya, I experienced two attempted break-ins and in another instance found the external copper piping of my house stolen. There were also other transgressions that Luanshya residents would not necessarily have frowned upon, such as the instance I described in Chapter Two, where Lazarus Nsofu and his family moved into the domestic quarters at the bottom of my garden in the expectation that I would employ his wife. When I mentioned that I had not consented to either employing his wife nor them moving in, I was reasonably asked what I intended to do with the space. To have an unoccupied building would have been too selfish indeed. In another incident, on returning home, I found two women I had not met before helping themselves to some vegetables I had planted in the back garden. Upon seeing me, they cheerfully shouted, “we are just stealing some vegetables from your garden”. Surely, living alone, I could not have eaten all the vegetables in the garden.

While such 'helpings' were common and indeed deemed acceptable, many residents had become worried about what was seen as the raiding of maize crop during the harvest season. Maize is largely grown as a subsistence and small-scale cash crop in Zambia. This was considered 'theft', unlike the 'helpings' described above, and it led many residents to camp out in their fields located in rural Copperbelt as a preventative measure. It also led to field owners adopting violently threatening behaviour, such as chasing off would be maize thieves with axes. By highlighting these practices of 'theft', I do not mean to portray that this is a new occurrence on the Copperbelt. Indeed, the *Mining Mirror* - the mining industry newspaper on the Zambian Copperbelt – February 27<sup>th</sup> 1981, “Explosives Thefts to be Curbed”, reported on the theft of explosives from the mines that resulted in cases of injury like that of an elderly man who had been using explosives to catch

fish in the Kafulafuta river on the outskirts of Luanshya.<sup>65</sup> My research highlights the intensification of these activities amid worsening living conditions, loosening social regulations and proprieties on one hand, and on the other, the protection of private property. As Fiona Ross (2010, p.40) argued, proprieties, in this case, the obligation to respect private property, cannot always be thought of as positive.

The increasing informalisation of livelihoods across the social spectrum of actors on the Copperbelt also suggests the inevitability of trespass and a garnering of new moralities to justify economic activities of uncertain legality. This view is best expressed in the philosophical musings of Zambia's first president, Kenneth Kaunda, who said: 'The hungry stranger, could, without penalty, enter the garden of a village and take, say a bunch of bananas or a mealie cob to satisfy his hunger. His action only became theft if he took more than was necessary to satisfy his needs. For then he was depriving others' (Kaunda and Morris 1966). The tactical aspects of this morality, if one follows Michel de Certeau's (1988) concept of tactics, is one where actors are in the continuous action of creating new itineraries for moral action amidst dominant narratives such as capitalism's demand for respect for private property.

Actions such as the eviction of vendors of Lusaka's streets or the prevention of poaching of resources of food and shelter may occasionally be seen as selfish and also violating the integrity to life. The commonly heard expressions, *twali chula* "we suffered", *ku toping'a* "to extend life", and *twala mona inga twa fika* "we shall see when we get there" underline these daily struggles of survival. While struggle and hardship characterizes the fate of many in Zambia, few are considered to have "arrived", an expression to describe those seen as successful.<sup>66</sup> Struggle and success are in Zambian linked on a continuum, represented by the image of the

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<sup>65</sup> During the period of my fieldwork in Luanshya, a former mine employee staying in Roan Townships had used explosives suspected to have been stolen from the mines to commit suicide by blowing himself up in his house. "Luanshya Miner Blows Self Up," *Times of Zambia*, December 31, 2007.

<sup>66</sup> As of 2009, about 86 percent of Zambians were living below the poverty line.

everyday, a shirtless malnourished man, urged to tighten his belt and who struggles to survive amidst a rhetoric of fiscal restraint and free market ideology. On the other end is the corpulent image of the *apamwamba* “those on top” who represent the excess, indolence and violence of greed. These two images highlight the corporeality of the relations and realities of economic life in Zambia. They also contextualize the narratives presented below of women who work at copper dumpsites. Before privatization, these women would not have compelled to eke out a living in the harsh working conditions of the dumpsites.

### **Ukumbomba ichipuba (*to work foolishly*): *exploitation and informality***

Residents report that informal activities in the ZCCM period saw women in Luanshya involved mostly in small-scale trade of goods such as second-hand clothes and vegetables. The children spent most of their time after school exploring the surrounding forests, playing sports at the Luanshya recreation centres or reading in the local library. Most mine-workers and their families in Luanshya had, for most of their working life, been employed by the mines, as had their fathers and their grandfathers. Mine-workers and their families were ill-prepared for retrenchment; most assumed they would be re-employed after foreign investment took over. Their expectations were not met and, before and during the privatization era, many have remained jobless.

While Binani’s ‘asset stripping’ was widely considered immoral and a symbol of the corrupt nature of both the privatization process and foreign investors, it also represented a continuity with a process of decline. The collapse of RAMCOZ was a disaster for all involved in a sense the company, government and community all suffered. Nobody was getting fat. The moral economy of formal and informal work has been transformed by the copper boom, and the possibility of massive profits.

“These investors want to take everything, even the waste that ZCCM left”. As she dug up flux stone with her shovel at one of the main dumpsites of

Luanshya, Rhoda reflected on the new wave of activity brought about by the copper boom. Rhoda's husband was a casualty of privatization. Like many other miners he passed away soon after losing his job. Rhoda was left to support six children on her own from the meagre income that she made digging flux-stone.<sup>67</sup> Her 14 year-old son worked with her at the dumpsite, helping her ferry bags of fluxstone, using a wheelbarrow. These were emptied and piled in heaps by the side of the street. For Rhoda, foreign investment after privatization clearly coincided with a marked worsening of living conditions. The sense that foreign investment has done little to improve the lives of Copperbelt residents can also be captured by a Bemba expression used to describe work at copper dumpsites, *ukubomba ichipuba* (“to work foolishly”).

The newly acquired houses have provided a temporary safety net. However, many Luanshya mine workers only received their cash benefits several years after retrenchment and many mine workers had been forced to rent out their house or sell and move to the peri-urban outskirts of the town. Women whose husbands died following the privatization of the mines lost even the safety of the house. Cultural practices of property-grabbing by the relatives of the deceased and the Zambian state's interstate law (that distributes inheritance to wife, children and dependants) in many cases forced the sale or rental of the house, in order to facilitate the sharing of the inheritance amongst beneficiaries who did not always reside together. Take for example, the experiences of Mrs Ziyembe, a widow with two young children. When her husband, a mine company medical officer, died in 2002, his relatives demanded she sell the house located in the low-density former mine suburb of Luanshya immediately after his burial in order for them to collect their share of the money. Mrs Ziyembe explained that, considering she had been a good wife and reluctant to attract the ire of her late husband's relatives, she sold the house through a dubious legal aid officer

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<sup>67</sup> On average, a dumpsite worker manages to sell about four tonnes of flux stone per month. Market price at the time of this part of the study in July 2008 was ZMK (Zambian Kwacha) 70,000 per tonne. This would mean an income of ZMK 280,000 per month. Most underground miners in the bottom rank would make anything between ZMK 300,000 and 1,500,000 per month. The majority of them are not permanently employed.

who, apart from addressing issues of inheritance, predominantly operated as an estate agent. He sold the house and duly gave Mrs Ziyembe's late husband's relatives their share, but retained hers and her childrens, claiming to have found a smaller and cheaper house they could move into. The smaller house turned out to have been sold by the owner to two buyers other than Mrs Ziyembe. When she attempted to claim back her money, the owner failed to pay it back and claimed it had already been spent. The absence of a written contract other than the word of the legal aid officer made it difficult to get back the entire amount, and she could only claim a small amount – the re-sale value of the sale of a few second-hand household items collected from the seller's home. Forced to rent in a high-density former mine suburb, but unable to afford utility bills, Mrs Ziyembe now draws water from her neighbours, and sparely uses charcoal for cooking. She, like many other Luanshya families, illegally occupied land belonging to the mines for farming in an area aptly named *Mai Lange* ("shown by myself"); much of this land has been recently re-appropriated by foreign investors during the current copper boom (see also Hansangule, Feeney and Palmer 1998).<sup>68</sup>

The stories of many women working at the Luanshya copper mine dump mirror the difficulties faced by Mrs Ziyembe. The women know that while their hard work is unlikely to bring success, it at least provides for the minimal household basics. It also provides for a small income to purchase other goods, such as agricultural produce and second hand clothes for re-sale.

### ***Ukuibombela (to work for one self): everyday life at a copper dumpsite***

Despite the perceived exploitative nature of working informally on the copper dumpsites, women are often pragmatic about the need for an

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<sup>68</sup> In a study carried out just after the privatization of the mines in the mid 1990s, Hansangule, Feeney and Palmer anticipated these contests for land on the Copperbelt. The pressure for usable land is so great that most residents now use their backyards for agricultural activities and small-scale trade.

income, no matter how meagre it may be. Mary, a digger at the Luanshya dumpsite, said she worked there because:

I need to feed my family. My husband got a job as a casual [worker] with a contractor at the mines in Chingola. He gets very little, not enough for him to share with us, so he has sent nothing since he went to work there six months ago. I don't mind working; besides he looked after us when he worked for the (ZCCM) mines. You see, us women here, if we got jobs we would work, even for these new mines, we are working right now. You see over there, the woman with a shovel, she can dig, she can be a miner. These mines only want to employ *abwapwa umulopa mumishipa* ("those who have no blood running in their veins").<sup>69</sup> Who will employ our children? They are still sleeping in our homes. So we come to work."

The current decline in formal employment has pushed more and more women into the informal economy. Whereas these informal activities supplemented household incomes during the ZCCM period, now they have become the main source of income for most. Women and children are now increasingly expected to produce income for the household. In many cases, they are forced to do so by the death of a male breadwinner.<sup>70</sup> In some cases, children are pushed into dumpsite work by the death of both parents.

An average working day at the Luanshya dumpsite lasts from sunrise to sunset, approximately twelve hours, with a short lunch break on the site of about thirty minutes. Women and children all complain of respiratory problems caused by the residual dust. Workers are also regularly harassed and beaten by the mining companies' security officials, who are instructed by mine management to discourage illegal digging. Several informants told me that the reason that women and children were normally the ones

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<sup>69</sup> This statement expresses a criticism of the perceived continued engagement of the elderly in economic life well past the period they would have been expected to retire. Ann Schlyter's 2004 study on ageing in Zambia cities corroborates these views.

<sup>70</sup> My own survey data show that, for example in a Luanshya street comprising twenty-households, eight women have lost their husbands in the period between 1998 and 2008.

working on the dumpsites is that they are less likely to be prosecuted than men. Media reports of young men being shot dead at private mine sites show that the threat to life is real and that locals take pragmatically dangerous decisions to earn a livelihood (Times of Zambia 2009).

Despite these difficulties, the women interviewed prefer to face these challenges rather than embark on transactional sex and sex work, one other option open to them. As one informant put it, “it is easy to go with a man for ZMK 20,000 but what will happen to your children when you die? *Kukosa pa ku sheta* (‘you have to be strong to be able to eat’).”<sup>71</sup> The reference here is to the risk of contracting HIV-AIDS through sexual intercourse.<sup>72</sup> Women also typically prefer dumpsite work to micro-finance initiatives aimed at starting up other informal trades. The reasons given are that family responsibilities are at such a high level, emergencies are a regular occurrence and it would be difficult for them to repay the loans. All in all, dumpsite work offers an opportunity to earn an income with no start-up capital costs and a great degree of autonomy. Any group of women and children can join the Luanshya dumpsite and start digging and selling flux stone without the involvement of any formal or informal third party.

### ***Pa illegal twali beula (during illegal, we made good): ‘illegal’ livelihoods***

The new ideology of entrepreneurship and market competition is now mixed with the anxiety of destitution in a world of scarce (and almost entirely privatized) resources and non-existent public welfare intervention. These two factors together have led to the rise in informal and illegal activities. Many participants in these illegal activities clearly feel entitled to bypass Westernized notions of private property in the name of survival and individual gain. My informants all show a pragmatic approach that values economic self-sufficiency above wage labor. Informants see wage labor as limiting creativity and the space of individual agency; they also see it as an

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<sup>71</sup> Comment made in a group discussion with copper dumpsite workers on July 19, 2008 in Luanshya.

<sup>72</sup> According to the Central Statistical Office numbers from 2007, 14.3% of the Zambian population is HIV positive.

exploitative form of labor, where the employer gains much more than the employee. The newly rediscovered valuation of individual agency through self-employment constitutes an important break from the past. At the same time, it also shows a deep distrust of any form of economic development connected to the recent wave of foreign investment. This distrust also constitutes the foundations of the implied moral legitimization of illegality; illegal activity is regarded both as a necessity for survival and a morally justified act of redistribution. If, as they see it, foreign investors are here to “take everything”, then there is nothing wrong with taking some of these resources away from the investors. Informants often mention a Bemba proverb to make this point: *ubomba mwi bala alya mwi bala* (“one who works in a field, eats from the field”). Peter Walker and Pauline Peters’ (2001) work on land use in Malawi brings home similar arguments: when people illegally appropriate resources from private spaces they are not actually putting forward a claim over the ownership of these resources, but rather they are pointing out the unfair usage of the same resources by the legal owner.



**Figure 5:** Street lined with heaps of flux stone from nearby mine dumpsite.  
Photo by author.

## **Trying to make it on the new Copperbelt**

The case of Kalengwa mining dumpsite, in the rural “new” Copperbelt, shows what these contests for resources entail in practice and how privatisation is radically changing socio-economic dynamics on the ground. The workforce on this dumpsite is mostly composed of women and children. Informal operations at the dumpsite involve scavenging flux stone for copper extraction and surface mining of copper ore. Although the mine was sold to a group of local investors as far back as 1982, no formal mining took place until 2008, when a dispute about licences between two contending owners was resolved in favour of one of them. Since 2004, however, the mine dumpsite has been informally run by ‘illegal’ miners who came from as far away as Lusaka to exploit the opportunity of selling flux stone and copper ore on the thriving local and international markets fuelled by rising copper prices. Formal operations resumed in April 2008 and the ‘illegal’ workers rioted shortly afterwards to oppose the owner’s decision to stop all informal mining on his site. A compromise was then reached and informal miners were allowed to continue their operations, but could now sell only to the mine owner. In practice, the informal miners continue to sell part of their produce to other buyers. At the outpost there is no state law enforcement; the mine employs its own private security that occasionally confiscate copper ore accumulated for sale to other buyers. What is clearly at stake here is the very notion of legality and illegality. Informal miners rioted both to claim their rights over what they saw as a precious material resource “abandoned” by the state and to make a point about the exploitative nature of “foreign” investment. According to my informants, the general feeling was that it was unfair for the owner to stop an activity that has become the primary source of subsistence for so many destitute people.

In practice, the recent copper boom and the absence of any control over the dumpsite created a mini-boom in itself for the dumpsite workers. Informants remember this period as *pa illegal* (“during illegal”). The relatively high profit margins were also the main reason behind the

involvement of many men alongside the women and children. This also shows how unequal gender dynamics tend to structure informal markets as well as the formal economy. Women and children are now predominant in the dumpsite workforce following the resumption of formal control. The overtly patriarchal family structures<sup>73</sup> institutionalised through the formal employment of men in mining and their values put a cheaper price on women and children's labor. Women, who feel more compelled than men to provide for the basic needs of the household, now undertake activities that are not seen as viable by men.

Sarah, a woman in her early thirties, had moved to Kalengwa in 2006 from the Zambian capital with her husband and her four daughters. During the height of illegal activity, Sarah and her husband used the proceeds from the copper ore sales to establish other successful informal activities. Three of her children work on the dumpsite. Sarah herself makes and sells a powerful local brew called *lutuku* to the local male population. Her husband set up a pig trade and he is now based in the capital. Sarah reminisces of the good times of *pa illegal* when she used to sell twenty containers of *lutuku* in a day:

*Pa illegal twali beula* ('during illegal we made good'). In a day I sold twenty containers of brew, I would get people coming to buy drink very early in the morning. This place was like town; there were small businesses and minibuses. If you had to ask a young girl to collect water for you, they would answer you back saying 'did you give birth to me?' Many people left this place with sexually transmitted diseases. We made money. You see the house over there? The woman there built herself a house of concrete blocks and iron sheets and bought herself two trucks. Those from the villages came here with no shoes and left the place with shoes on their feet. It was paradise for them. *Amahule* ('women involved in transactional sex') from town came here with almost nothing

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<sup>73</sup> See chapter 5 for a more nuanced discussion of gender and domestic arrangements on the Copperbelt.

and got copper from boys from the villages by sleeping with them.

Other women had to buy 10 tonnes [of copper] for 3.5 million.

Before the formal owner regained control of the mine, the copper boom created unprecedented wealth for people like Sarah, who would have otherwise had very few opportunities in the post-privatisation formal economy. In Sarah's words, there was a sense of liberation and excitement about the new opportunities afforded by the 'free market'. However, free market and legality are not complementary concepts in this new world-view. Furthermore, the resumption of 'legality', which coincided with the involvement of the mine owner in mining activities on the ground, is regarded by many as contrary to that very spirit of entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency.

Katherine, a woman in her early sixties, is still involved in the buying of copper ore from the informal miners, despite the new rules imposed by the mine owner. She arrived in Kalengwa in 2006 from a distant Copperbelt town. The first time I met her, she appeared distressed, talking to a small crowd outside her second-hand clothing store. The mine security staff had just confiscated 800 kg of copper ore that she had stashed in her shop. She spent ZMK 2,000,000 on buying the copper and she would have made ZMK 2,800,000 by reselling it. Katherine buys copper ore from children who scavenge and dig around the perimeter of the now fenced mining area. She pays the children ZMK 2,500 per kilogram of copper ore, considerably more than the rates offered by the mine owner. He buys low-grade copper ore at ZMK 1,500 per kilogram, and on rare occasions he pays up to ZMK 2,000 per kilogram for higher-grade copper ore. Katherine perceives the interference of the mine owner in her business as unfair and against the values of market competition:

They told us not to buy copper, what do they expect us to do? The people here, they did not cultivate because they were mining; now one buffalo [a two and half litre of ground maize] costs ZMK 5,000. People are now buying on credit, where will they get the

money? Me, I am a widow, my husband died because there was no work when the mines closed. I look after eight children; only three are mine, the others they are orphans I look after. Me, if I had to stop buying, what will happen to the children here? I buy at a fairer price than this European<sup>74</sup> does, I give them ZMK 2,500 per kilo; and because I am buying in small quantities I give them clothes for copper [...]. The market for copper is open! The government is only allowing Europeans to buy, what about us? I can go to the customs office, borrow from the government and do my own work. No, nothing for us Africans, we have no rights. They are taking gold, diamonds, what about us? We can organise ourselves into groups and get ourselves a license, we women can do it! [...] Here, my daughter, there is no government. We are the ones helping the people.

Katherine's words come full circle and echo Rhoda's concerns about the greed of foreign investors. They also indicate the perceived absence of government in everyday life. This, again, provides further legitimacy to 'illegality'. If government is not willing or able to intervene to remedy the imbalances of foreign investment, then in local eyes it is only too fair that the 'people' take it upon themselves to produce and redistribute wealth. For many, the people involved in the illegal trade of flux stone and copper ore are not undesirable outlaws, but popular heroes.

***“A man cannot work for this small money”***

While some women who had travelled to the mining outpost in North Western Province had made their fortunes, others had not been so lucky. Matilda, a single mother who had been digging for copper in trenches six to eight metres deep, noted that if the state had been serious about investment there would be no children, pregnant teenagers and old women digging in the mines. Desperation, she said, is what drove them to work in such harsh condition for so little money; *‘abaume teti ba bombe fo tu piya utu, nomba*

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<sup>74</sup> The owner of the mine is a Zambian of foreign descent. In the Zambian context he is seen as a 'foreign' investor despite of his Zambian citizenship.

*umwanakashi teti amone abana balala ne nsala* (“a man cannot work for this small money but a woman can’t watch her children sleep with hunger”). Matilda and the other women and children who dug for copper in the main mine area were not employed by the mine owner, but were allowed into the premises to dig for copper as long as they sold to the owner. During an interview the mine manager informed me that he allowed the ‘illegals’ into the mine premises because if he did not there was likely to be trouble in the area (referring to riots that took place in April 2008). When I had commented that I had noticed more women than men working at the mine, he had said that women were more willing to work and “caused less trouble”. One of the few men who worked at the mine had told me that those who caused trouble or complained about how much they were paid were “tortured like we are Al Qaeda”.

Bana Jane, an elderly woman in her late sixties, had returned to the mining outpost after three months away, arriving in April 2008, just after illegal mining activities had been curbed by the licensed mine owner. She had travelled with her grandchildren who dug for copper, but the lower prices paid for the commodity by the mine owner had made Bana Jane seriously contemplate returning to her village in the North Western district, Kabompo. Bana Jane provided childcare for mothers who were working in the mine and she waited in the area because rumours abounded of the mine owners pulling out from the site, paving way for another surge of illegal mining. However, she was also aware that she had to leave the place in time to prepare her land for cultivation before the rainy season (November to March). The little money she made in the outpost she had planned to use to buy maize seed and fertilizer to avoid being destitute like the others who had failed to cultivate the previous season because of the ‘copper boom’.

### **Growth of informal mining**

The cases presented above describe illegal mining activity just before the end of the copper boom of 2004 to 2008. Illegal mining on the Copperbelt was not a livelihood activity that emerged only because of higher

commodity prices for copper. The copper boom attracted more players eager not just to survive but “to make it”. A *Post* Newspaper article dated July 24, 2000, titled “Zambia is on a potential volcano” anticipated the burgeoning informal mining on the Copperbelt by residents desperate to make a living in what was increasingly seen as a lawful activity. The article reports on a letter written in complaint by Patrick Chilufya Bowa, Inter-trade Institute Director to an Inspector General of Police Silas Ngangula over the arrest of twenty youths for illegal mining. The article cites Mr Bowa offering a solution to what he saw as the failure of the state to create alternative livelihoods for retrenched former ZCCM miners. He argues for bringing “bonafide small scale miners, illegal miners and retrenched miners into the mainstream small-scale mining commercial activity in line with Zambia's status as a mining nation.” Later in July 16, 2001, *The Post* reported that the Zambian government, in recognition of informal mining activity, would begin to issue artisanal mining licences to illegal miners in order to curb foreign investors’ unfair advantage. By 2007, when the late Zambian President Mwanawasa suggested that investors should consider passing on mine dump sites and unused mine pits to former mine employees as a way of reducing illegal mining and helping sustain livelihoods, informal mining was an established economic activity on the Copperbelt (Times of Zambia 2009)<sup>75</sup>.

Those involved in the informal copper business may not openly welcome formalization. The increasingly tougher stand taken against illegal mining activity, such as the reported strengthening of an anti-copper theft squad and the suggestion of measures to stop the activity are not likely to stop illegal mining, nor the danger associated with this livelihood activity.<sup>76</sup> While the most severe dangers posed by informal mining activity are

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<sup>75</sup> Help Us to Solve Illegal Mining Problem KCM Asks Partners, 18 April 2009.

<sup>76</sup> See for example, “Anti-copper theft squad to be boosted,” *Times of Zambia*, June 12, 2009. A byline, “Illegal mining must be stopped,” *Post Newspaper*, June 11, 2009, suggests measures like fencing of mine dumpsite to prevent the 'unlawful' activity of illegal mining.

caused by an unsafe work environment, an increasing danger is the violence with which mine property is being protected.<sup>77</sup>

### ***Women's presence in informal mining***

Dwindling employment in the formal sector on the Copperbelt has pushed more women into informal economic activities that previously had served the purpose of complementing their husbands' wages. Retrenchment and death have been the main causes for the rapid decline of income from formal employment. The informal sector has now become the primary site of livelihood.

The dominant role of women in the informal sector is closely related to local social expectations that women provide for the household's basic needs (see also Schlyter 1999; Hansen 1996). The involvement of women in illegal labour under harsh working conditions at the mine dumpsites also indicates the contradictory nature of local perceptions of women's bodies. Women are doing what was previously seen as men's work. The few men who still work as low-level mine labourers in the formal sector are witnessing the rapid casualization of their employment. Paradoxically, women and children are strategically inserted into the dangerous flows of illegal labour because they are seen as "soft" legal entities, and therefore are unlikely to be prosecuted. Their bodies are physically disciplined by beatings and by the confiscation of the products of their labor by mine security.

However, women have had no trouble inserting themselves into mining work. Much of the work they carry out at the mine dumps adopts similar bodily techniques to those employed in agricultural work, and though dangerous, is not physically dissimilar in activity. Women dig, they sift through dirt, they do heavy lifting and carrying. The tools employed are not

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<sup>77</sup> Reports of deaths are common in the newspapers. For example, in June 2009 eight illegal miners at the Chambishi Metals mine in the Copperbelt town of Kitwe died after a tunnel they were working in collapsed "Eight illegal miners perish," *Times of Zambia*, June 11, 2009.

very different from those that they carry with them to work their fields; shovels, hoes and picks. As such, when I encountered women and their children coming from working at the mine dumps, in the tools they carried and the attire they wore, they could have been coming from cultivating their fields. Thus, despite the unexpected presence of women and children in informal mining, their participation forms part of their everyday taskscapes,<sup>78</sup> similar in activity and bodily movements to cultivating the fields.

As I describe in the next chapter, the impetus for women to engage in informal mining is also driven in part by the expectation of the industrious woman (a social expectation by men and women themselves). In their performance of gender, Copperbelt women not only cultivate bodily comportments that are variable and nuanced across multiple identities or ways of being in varied social situations, they also employ a similar traversing or trespassing into places along the realm of social, bodily and material possibility. This does not mean that this trespass is minimally contested.

Gender inequalities to women's disadvantage also reflect in subsequent trade relations once the copper ore is mined from the dumpsites. At all stages of the supply chain after the initial digging, men control flows, prices and access to informal and formal markets. Women's bodies and their work are thus made invisible, as Kathreen's case study shows. These concerns cast a different light over local understandings of global capitalism and strongly affect women's negative perceptions of their power position vis-à-vis the (male-dominated) 'free market'. Women's awareness of global copper prices, and of the very minimal share they manage to appropriate, further contributes to these perceptions. Women involved in the informal copper business are also aware of the unfair advantage foreign investors have over local entrepreneurs in appropriating the largest share of the profits.

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<sup>78</sup> Ingold (1993) describes taskscapes as a temporality of movements and activities that are similar or related.

My findings suggest the informal sector does not constitute a separate and discrete sphere from the formal sector. Rather, as Castell and Portes (1989) noted in their analysis on the workings of the informal economy, the two are interdependent and interact in complex and non-obvious ways. The inequalities of global capitalism reflected by the increasing casualization of labor and the worsening living conditions on the Zambian Copperbelt are coupled by gendered dynamics that constrain women and children into precarious and dangerous illegal activities in order to guarantee some level of subsistence to themselves and their households.

Fear of destitution, the exploitative nature of capital, and the absence of the state in welfare interventions set the framework for illegality as an economic strategy that is locally perceived as legitimate in ensuring survival and small-scale capital accumulation. The justification for pursuing economic activity that violates the 'rule of law' needs to be contextualized against the real possibility of starvation. The state also loses legitimacy in local eyes since it is seen as a constellation of factional interests pursuing their own perpetuation of wealth and power in close alliance with foreign investors, with little concern for local development. These perceptions lead to the paradox that a loss of legitimacy of legal action is what ultimately legitimates illegal action as a viable economic and political strategy.

The contestation for control of the Kalengwa mine-dump between the illegal miners and the 'legitimate' mine-owners hints to a possible alternative understanding of power. In the classic Foucauldian analysis of relations of power, power is assumed to be concentrated spatially along certain nodes of control. The possibilities for decentering these nodes of power tend to be quite limited due the historical accumulation and consolidation of an archaeology of discursive mechanisms and disciplinary violence. Pierre Bourdieu intergrates these power-building mechanisms into the body as a cumulative of social and cultural capital that is given as *a priori*, and enacted as a dispositional attitude outwards into the world. In both these often referred to views of power, little account is taken of the

confluence of events that give rise to the possibilities of the emergence of novel forms or conglomerations of power.

While it is easy to acknowledge that there are interactions of factional interests of power that disadvantage several individuals, these relations are not structured in dialectical opposition. The world in which mining trespassers and legitimate mine-owner operates is one and the same, and legitimate mine-owners, just like the less privileged, have continuously to negotiate for an advantageous position. This requires they improvise, or compromise with the emerging factional interests of illegal miners. Placing this discussion within the broader discussion of contestations of power, I draw from Susan Oyama's (2000) work on developmental systems theory, that departs from a cumulative, archeological and thus teleologically inclined perspective of factional interest to focus on improvisational emergent growth. Informal miners on the Copperbelt are immersed in processes for livelihood where contestations for power emerge not as a separate discourse or solely discursive effect but as a consequence of the material and social conditions they encounter as they go about their business and lives.

The discussion in this chapter points to the nuances of local views about what constitutes legitimate action and about the relevance of Westernized notions of legality and illegality. Actors draw on multiple ontologies and moralities. These include moral obligations that are not only social but material and phenomenological in the way experience is seen as integral to bodily corporealities. Harri Englund (2008) for example quoting Max Gluckman's work on jurisprudence amongst the Lozi of Barotseland writes that morality, as expressed in moral obligations, cannot be looked at in separation from the constitution of personhood, itself an unfolding of both material and affective practices (2008, p.34). These practices in turn are embroiled in the enfolding of time in contestations of how and in what personhood is constituted, and give rise to the emergence of other types of relationships.

From the perspective of formal law, what is seen as a breakdown in law and order – enacted in the policing and prosecution of illegal miners – could also be seen as an opportunity. Zigon, writing on morality and ethics in post-Soviet argues that it's important that scholars “see the ways in which moral dispositions themselves are shaped and reshaped” (Zigon, 2007, p148). Unlike his approach, which calls for the observation of the moment or event of moral breakdown and ethical demand (as presented in the moral dilemma, for example, which presents for the individual faced with it a moment calling for tactical or strategic action), I argue that it is important to observe both the performance and the movement across that temporality and others.

In the next chapter I demonstrate this by examining women's negotiations of gender roles and identities across various ideals of domesticity present in Copperbelt interactions. In the social history of the Copperbelt these have generally been presented as broken or fractious. In the chapter, I show that women navigate multiple roles, sometimes easily, sometimes less so, in their quest to produce harmonious relations.



## **Chapter Five**

### **Performing gender on the Copperbelt**

Much has been written about the fractiousness of familial relationships on the Copperbelt. Often posited in terms of a tension between modern and traditional concepts of family, they have offered little in terms of illuminating women's own views of domestic harmony and expectations, and their places and experiences of pleasure. This is not to deny that the problems in marital and familial relationships identified by prior anthropologists studying the Copperbelt exist (see summary in Ferguson 1999, p189-204). Indeed on the whole, one does not have to look far to find disheartening family relations. One of the most recent anthropological studies on the region by James Ferguson (1999) has argued that framing the problems affecting Copperbelt families as a structural dissonance between modern and traditional concepts of family (a perspective often held by Copperbelt residents themselves), has obscured has led to a failure to question "how progressive it is to project what is fundamentally a bourgeois image of a normative European family onto the diverse domestic arrangements of the Copperbelt" (1999, p205). It is this view, which has been responsible for perpetuating a sense of the brokenness of Copperbelt families – one that has done little to allow for the exploration of the ways in which women, old people, and children get by within an economy that has long been dominated by the formal employment of men – that Ferguson (1999, p205) critiques.

More recently in anthropology, there has been increasing interest in understanding concepts and the place of romantic love in Africa (see for example, Cole and Thomas, 2009; Johnson-Hanks 2007), and the places of conviviality and aspects of life that foster imagination and hope in otherwise difficult social contexts (see Ross 2010). By drawing attention to these areas, Cole and Lynn (2009) and Ross (2010) motivate an empathetic engagement with the people they represent and their lives. It is from a

perspective informed by these works that I explore how Copperbelt residents, women in particular, reconcile customary and Western ideals of marriage and relationships; what they desire and their views of the issues that beset these relationships; and how they try to carve out space for economic independence and pleasure.

In the context of gender studies in Zambia, my aim in this chapter is to follow on from Karen Tranberg Hansen (1997) study “Keeping in Lusaka” which did much to shed light on the “home front” and the issues that occupied women. The prior more formal and visible presence of men on the mine towns has meant that representations of women (mainly as a result of interviewing mainly male informants as Ferguson rightly pointed out) have tended to posit a largely chauvinist worldview that characterises the male-dominated work-force of mine towns (1999, p188). However, in studies of the Copperbelt Hortense Powdermaker’s (1962) “Copper Town” provided a vivid insight from the diaries of her research assistants who kept account of the going-ons in the domestic front in Luanshya. George Chauncey (1984) and Jane Parpart’s (1986, 1994) studies on the nexus of women’s labour, marriage, class and the economic of the household on the Copperbelt provide a historical and structural analysis of the macro- and micro- political-economic issues that extended labour and gender struggles beyond the household. Henrietta Moore and Megan Vaughan’s (1994) study of gender, nutrition and agricultural livelihood in Northern Zambia, while not on the Copperbelt, nevertheless provides an excellent account of how changing dynamics of urbanization and welfare from the early establishment of the Copperbelt influenced rural life, including how male migration to the Copperbelt impacted the processes of matrilineal marriage amongst the Bemba, the largest migratory group to the Copperbelt. Audrey Richard’s (1956) account of female initiation rites in rural Northern Zambia provides an ethnographic account of the female initiation rites that Thera Rasing’s (2001) study shows persisted to the contemporary period on the Copperbelt and continue to be an important part of how women’s gender is conceptualised.

In these studies, including the more classic Manchester School texts of Wilson (1942) and Mitchell (1957, 1961), a picture emerges of Copperbelt women as as ill- used by their husbands and boyfriends, but also out to assert their social, economic and sexual independence; and as women who have broken from traditional norms and etiquettes - brash, cheeky, money-grabbing and fashion-conscious. This characterisation is not out of place with how Copperbelt women are characterised even today. However, absent from this picture is insight into Copperbelt women's attempts to reconcile and find harmony within a contradictory changing environment.

### **Copperbelt views on the root of family and marital problems**

In late 2008, over the course of a supper I hosted in Luanshya for some colleagues, all long-term Copperbelt residents, a debate began about the reasons for disharmony in Zambian marriages. None of the five guests were married at the time, though two of the guests, in their late forties, were widowed.

Initially my guests had argued that the problems in Zambian marriages arose from the expectations and obligations of having to support extended family members.<sup>79</sup> It emerged though over the course of dinner, by general consensus, that the problems that beset urban Zambian marriages – from relationships with relatives, marital infidelity and money – were not simply as a result of the tensions emerging from a nuclear model of family and a wider extended notion of family, but rather, as one guest suggested from the confusion that urban dwellers had in interpreting a customary notion of marriage, what they called “traditional marriage”, and a “modern one”, represented in the Western ideal of a contractual and monogamous relationship. The argument was that this confusion affected all aspects of life – including relationship aspirations, social expectations and proprieties, interactions, and modes of communication. Giving an example of the problems that may arise from the style adopted to communicate within a

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<sup>79</sup> All but one of my guests was supporting relatives.

marriage, one guest spelt out that within the ideal “traditional marriage” a couple was effectively able to address issues within a marriage by a deployment of symbols and actions that stemmed from a “cultural education”, such as was bestowed through female initiation rites, and consultation with traditional marriage counsellors, otherwise known as *banachimbusa*. In a “modern marriage”, by contrast, the proper means of communication involved ‘explaining yourself’ in as direct a manner as possible. The gist of their argument was that in a ‘proper’ traditional marriage there was a greater reliance on symbols and other non-verbal modes of communication that sought to transmit affect through a bodily material engagement in the environment. This was in contrast to a more direct modern or ‘Western’ communication style that was more loquacious and direct, and tended to abstract from the environment by ‘over analysing’ what was said. From this example, my guests were in general agreement that the root as one guest said “to the confusion in Zambian marriages” was that both systems were in play, resulting in misinterpretations of what was conveyed.

However, when my guests also said that Zambians “had no culture”, that Zambian men did not know whether they wanted a traditional or modern wife, and commented about “modern-looking women” who trapped married men by playing out the role of a “well taught” traditional wife, they indicated the ambiguity, fluidity and improvisory nature of Copperbelt residents’ gendered domestic expectations, actions and representations. During the course of my research, I found that in contrast to men, many Copperbelt women did not engage with these two systems as separate, but rather, as Thera Rasing (2001) noted in her research on Copperbelt in the mid 1990s, they saw Western norms as part of a range of repertoires that included social mores associated with tradition (2001, p188). Women experienced social misunderstandings as a dissonance that underlay the tension in straddling what Ferguson (1999) referred to as ‘streamlined’ expectations of domesticity and those conventions that revered compliance to a muted way of being in the environment, particularly in the presence of men or senior women. On the Copperbelt, this meant that women were

expected to project “progress” in how they kept their homes and raised their children, and yet at the same time were expected to go out and find a means to get by, but in ways that maintained their respectability as proper traditional wife rather than as “brash modern women”.

### *Exploring the problems from a theoretical angle*

To explore the notion of dissonance in the gendered expectations of domesticity, I draw loosely from Gregory Bateson’s conceptual framework for the analysis of human communication. Bateson (1972) noted that human communication involves the use of multiple logical types, both verbal and non-verbal. He lists a selection of these as play, non-play, fantasy, sacrament, metaphor; and non-verbal communication such as posture, gesture, facial expression and intonation (1972, p206-207). By logical type, Bateson refers to that which can be abstracted from interaction that is drawn on here as a useful tool for formal analysis. Although Bateson differentiates between the verbal and non-verbal, in practice they are entangled and inseparable, in that fantasy, play and metaphor can be evoked in bodily gesture, intonation and posture. In addition, these logical types invoke movement, they are temporal, shifting and as such in the analysis of social interaction and in reading or communicating ways of being, what they leave are not fixed readings of a situation but impressions from that interaction or observation. As in musical impressionism, the focus in the analysis of the cases I present in this chapter is not so much on the “clarity in structure” but rather on the “harmonic effects”, or the “tone”. This approach lends itself well to the less visible aspects of life. It also allows for a discussion of power as a dissonance in the tone of habitual expectations. This is not to deny the more outwardly visible manifestations of gendered contestations of power, as I have demonstrated in Chapter Four, but I argue that it is not enough to focus on these without also assessing the more hidden aspects of gendered power relations and how they are inscribed and generated within a wider body polity.

An early proponent of identifying and examining the hidden aspects of power in gender relations was Henrietta Moore. In her brilliant study of gendered spatial everyday practices amongst the Marakwet in Kenya, Moore draws on the idea of cultural text as a way of not simply looking for meanings in the visible symbols of place and action, but of looking beyond, into people's strategic interpretations or translations of their actions as they go about their everyday lives (1986, p75). As not all that the Marakwet did was easily explainable in words, Moore (1986, p76) drew on Lakoff and Johnson's concept of metaphor as a work of poetic imagination to read into not only what was said but also what was done, for example in how recurring everyday domestic activities come to be inscribed within place and rendered as natural, and thus serving as a way of legitimating gendered and power relations. A metaphor is a logical type that is not literally translatable as such it is open to multiple meanings and readings. Thus in Moore's analysis of gender and power relations amongst the Marakwet, gender and power, were not one thing, but were subject to multiple contestations and transformations, not all of which were readily visible.

On the Copperbelt, this invisible realm was also shrouded in the symbolism of female initiation rites that the anthropologist Thera Rasing (2001) noted play an important role for Copperbelt women in the making of respectable womanhood. There is widespread social discourse about the rites and their place in the making of gender relations. That these rites were shrouded in secrecy also allowed Copperbelt residents to make their own interpretations of what was ideal or not in this customary view of womanhood. As a practice stemming from rural life and enacted in what Rasing argues is almost unchanged format, they provide for Copperbelt women a ritualised link to the rural area that allows women better than men to embody the village in the town – and hence customary notions of tradition – while at the same time negotiating their place within the urban as modern women.

## **Female initiation rites and the making of woman hood on the Copperbelt**

Female initiation rites are a common practice across almost all ethnic groupings in Zambia. They foster the transition to womanhood when a girl reaches puberty, after the start of her first menses. The most well-known study is Audrey Richards' (1956) study of the Chisungu female initiation rite among the Bemba, a matrilineal group in Northern Zambia who comprised the largest section of mining migrant labour to the Copperbelt at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>80</sup> Richards' study of the ritual is illuminating in highlighting the performative aspects of the making of gender, and the engagement of the body as a discursive site. This drew my attention to bodily gesture and its communication of moral values. Wim van Binsbergen (2003), writing of female initiation rites amongst the Nkoya in central western Zambia, looks to the affective and interactional aspects of the rite, showing that ritual goes beyond the time and space of its enactment. More recently, Rasing's (2001) work<sup>81</sup> on the *chisungu* rites in Mufulira, conducted with mostly Catholic women, shows that these rites, similar in form to those Richards had studied almost half a century before, had not died, even in the face of the attempts of early mission Christianity, but had endured. Both Richards (1956) account of the rites in rural Northern Zambia and Rasing's (2001) urban Copperbelt study give excellent descriptive accounts of the *chisungu*, providing their form and function, the way that values and virtues of womanhood are performed and learned through songs, dance and the symbolisms of the *mbusa*<sup>82</sup> clay models. Through these means, moral insights are passed on. The *chisungu* trainers, known as *banachimbusa* who, in Rasing's study also identified as Christian, are the female diviners who link the transition to womanhood to a broad African cosmology whose underlying ethos is a generative *communitas* mediated by powerful women.

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<sup>80</sup> A more detailed discussion of the effects of these migrant labour on rural communities in Northern Zambia is provided by Henrietta Moore and Megan Vaughan (1994).

<sup>81</sup> Conducted in the mid 1990s mostly amongst a Catholic women's group who lived in a low-density suburb on the Copperbelt town of Mufulira (Rasing, 2001, p17).

<sup>82</sup> *Mbusa* means "things handed down".

Though I did not conduct a survey on how many of my female informants had undergone female initiation rites, a discourse of the importance of these rites was common, not just amongst women, but also among men. It is usually couched as a narrative of the “ideal traditional woman”. Rasing found that only four of her sample of 120 women who had grown up on the Copperbelt in the 1970s had not been initiated (2001, p12). This indicates that female initiation rites may not have been uncommon at the time of my research. In discussions with some of my female informants, as in Rasing’s study I found out that these rites were often carried out over school breaks over a period ranging from a week to a month and unlike the periods before the worst effects of the economic depression on the Copperbelt, where some young women had been sent to their “villages of origin” to be initiated, more often than not the rites were conducted within the towns and nearby ‘bush’ of the Copperbelt. Women who did not undergo these rites at puberty usually underwent similar training prior to marriage, often tagged to the kitchen party, a kind of bridal shower that I describe later in this chapter.

*Chisungu* rites are an individual and not age-group coming of age ceremonies. At the core of these rites and as evidenced in the narratives of Copperbelt residents are concerns on the management of sexuality, fertility and production of food for the household.

The *chisungu* training covered a woman’s relations with her in-laws, handling marital problems (for example, being cautioned not to reveal the household secrets, which really related to keeping domestic matters private).<sup>83</sup> It covered learning about sexuality, for example in how to please a husband, but also the cosmological danger of sex for which purifying rites were passed on to the novice. The training also involves significant harshness, in some reported occasions spilling into outright cruelty and

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<sup>83</sup> Though domestic privacy was valued, as Hansen (1997) demonstrates in her study of women’s lives in an urban informal settlement in Lusaka, women tended to take intimate domestic problems to the public local courts. I made similar findings in Luanshya.

abuse.<sup>84</sup> This hardship is intended to serve as a lesson and experience for enduring hardship in life and in marital relationships, and, as observed by Richards, is used as “a gauge to check if ready for marriage” (1956, p123). Indeed many Copperbelt women refer to marriage as the *shipikisha club* or “endurance club”. Despite the instability of marriage noted by many anthropological observers of the Copperbelt, there is still a reference to a Bemba cosmological view of marriage, still relevant today that Richards (1956, p34) observed mystically linked man and wife by a mutual reliance on needing to ritually purify each other, when either engaged in cosmologically dangerous affairs outside marriage.<sup>85</sup>

The *Chisungu* rite does not serve as a ritual to learn womanhood *per se*. The process of knowing gendered ways of being starts, as Richards observed, from the times that a girl is very young, for example helping out in childcare roles, helping in the kitchen and in the garden. Richards (1956) noted that the training in the *Chisungu* ritual involved the learning of a secret language that drew on song, dance and *mbusa* clay models. This training was not, she argued, discursive (1956, p127). Both Richards (1956) and Rasing (2001) observed that novices spend much of the time sitting and looking downwards, dancing and doing some singing. From these actions, both scholars concluded that the learning was not instructive or directive but drew more from metaphorical evocation. Rene Devisch (1993) writes that “metaphoric production in ritual breaks away from linguistic ones which impose a hierarchy between body, senses, and cognition and thereby limit the capacity to generate meaning and empowerment in ritual practice to coding and communication” (1993, p43). In this way the rite, as a process of metaphoric evocation works not as a “text, a predication, or an expose, but, primarily as “showing, spelling out something by displaying its ingredients or motto” (1993, p43). I suggest that this is precisely how the *Chisungu* ceremony plays a role in the making of womanhood.

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<sup>84</sup> Times of Zambia, 8<sup>th</sup> February 2003, Alangizi: Victim relives counselling nightmare.

<sup>85</sup> In a nutshell, if extra-marital affairs were not admitted to and ritual cleansing did not take place, the ensuing pollution could cause the death of innocents, with babies being particularly vulnerable (see Richards 1956) for a more detailed discussion of this and the Bemba cosmological world view.

As such, in the employment of bodily comportment such as being still, or undertaking the various activities that require the novice to jump and use other parts of the body such as the mouth to carry out various tasks (like digging and planting seeds, moving on one's back, hanging from a house post, dancing and singing and being shown *mbusa* models), the *Chisungu* rites urges a tuning into to the multisensory realm of the body. As Henrietta Moore argues in her (1999) re-analysis of Richards' account, draws attention to the way in which the "bodily praxis of the initiation rite literally incorporates its moral teachings" (1999, p12).<sup>86</sup> However, in these performances I would argue (as does Devisch for the gynaecological healing cults amongst the Yaka in Congo) that, "ritual encourages the senses, emotions, and *habitus* to be very active and informing the participants to what is going on in an endeavour in which physical, social, ethical, and spiritual [dimensions] are interactive and weakly demarcated" (1993, p43).

This indicates that the meaning of the rites resonates beyond the bounds of praxis. For example one of the most important ethos of the *Chisungu* rite is respect or *umunchishi* as a basis for fostering both kin and wider community relations. In Devisch's view of ritual, the communication of respect would not only be a dramaturgical expression of the social order and norms, in which actors behave as mere vehicles for their transmission, but would also be generative of other forms of meaning-making and life transmission. Devisch notes Turner's seminal account of ritual excludes "bodiliness, senses, and emotions" and cosmology (1993, p252).

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<sup>86</sup> Moore (1999) draws attention to the amount of time invested in the "preparation, presentation and handling of the *mbusa*" clay models. Audrey Richards also describes this. Writing of the making of a clay snake, Richards notes that it took almost an entire day. The women worked on it until it was neat and well presented (*ubusaka*). Once presented to the young initiates, it was dismantled. Moore also notes "in the many of the individual rites of the *chisungu*, instructors and initiates use the mouth as much as possible to handle the *mbusa* and complete various tasks – embodied transfer of knowledge by mouth from one woman to another" (Moore, 1999, p12).

## **Umunchinshi “Respect” – *The ethos of gendered proprieties on the Copperbelt***

A woman was expected to conduct and carry herself with *umunchishi*. A woman who carried herself with respect was one who gave respect to her elders, both women and men. *Umunchishi* was shown in various ways. In the way you greeted your elders, for example, kneeling to the floor or a slight curtsy if standing; not interrupting or intruding when older people were speaking, and only speaking when invited to do so; bearing gifts to share when visiting extended kin as acknowledgement of reciprocal relationships; sharing food; and observing the rules of avoidance with regards to in-laws. Showing deference in the company of elders or social betters was extremely important, often communicated in bodily gesture by looking downwards, with slightly hunched shoulders and speaking in a tone that was loud enough to be heard, but not too high as to sound authoritative.

Even though this was considered the appropriate way for which a woman to conduct herself, as I write in the next section, I was aware that I too embodied multiple ways of being, both consciously and unconsciously. These were entangled in both the visible and invisible aspects of social and material interactions, an awareness of which I needed in order to be competent and not misinterpret social situations in which I found myself.

### **Umunchishi in a social situation**

In November 2008, a close female work colleague Jane from the Copperbelt University and I were invited by one of our male workmates Peter to join him on a visit to Ndola see a female friend of his, Margaret, whom he held in high esteem. He explained to us that Margaret was a high ranking civil servant and a widow about a decade older than Jane and I. Peter and Margaret had been friends from their university days in the late 1980s. Peter had invited Jane and I because he thought Margaret, who was a bit socially isolated because of her job, would benefit from having new friends, and he thought we would gain in having a female mentor to offer

us, in his words, “broader perspectives on life”. So off we went to Ndola to see Margaret. This visit was illuminating to Jane and I as it highlighted the gendered nuances of social interaction and communication in urban Zambia.

When we arrived at Margaret’s home in a plush suburb of Ndola close to lunchtime we found Margaret having her hair braided in the company of a group from her church that she met with occasionally for prayers. This was a little perplexing because from the many effusive things Peter had said about Margaret, I did not get the impression that she was an overly religious person.<sup>87</sup> After Peter greeted Margaret with a friendly embrace and proceeded to introduce us, Jane and I were a little unsure of how to greet her. If we had to draw on the cues provided by Peter, an informal handshake would have been fine. However, the fact that she proceeded to sit down after she had hugged Peter meant that this would not be possible, and in fact signalled that she expected a ‘traditional’ greeting that required us getting on our knees to shake her hand. This we did, and thus it communicated that we acknowledged her social standing, both as an older woman and a high-ranking civil servant.<sup>88</sup> She appeared pleased with this, because she went on to jokingly ask Peter where he had acquired two beautiful girlfriends, and whether she should be jealous. At this, Peter had laughed, and said he brought her two younger sisters. During this interplay, Jane and I did not laugh, as this would have showed too much familiarity,<sup>89</sup> but nonetheless, despite feeling slightly discomforted, we sat down after greeting the members of her church prayer group. After making small conversation in which Margaret asked us about our work at the university

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<sup>87</sup> The majority of Zambians identify themselves as Christian. Outward appearances of practicing the Christian faith were especially important for women in identifying themselves as morally upstanding.

<sup>88</sup> The custom of showing what Audrey Richards (1956, p48) described as “extreme deference” to age is not uncommon on the Copperbelt. This custom, as well as the prevalence of female initiation rites modelled on the Bemba rites, indicates the influence of Bemba practices on the Copperbelt, largely as a result of the large in-migration of the peoples from Northern Zambia in the early mining days. However, as Debra Spitulnik (1999) notes of the lingua franca of the Copperbelt, Bemba, the fluidity, hybridity and inventiveness of the language could also be applied to spheres other than language.

<sup>89</sup> As Thera Rasing observes, young women in the company of older women usually did not speak unless invited to (2001, p112).

and our social lives, we left after it became apparent to Peter that we would not be invited for lunch as he had expected. Margaret though did invite us to her place again for dinner, as long as we prepared it. By asking us to prepare the meal for which we were invited as guests, Margaret was indicating her acceptance of us within a “traditional” family-like setting, of which we would be incorporated as “younger sisters”, and, in a show of respect to her age and seniority, we would be expected to serve her.

A week later, we were at her place, preparing a meal for a dinner party that comprised Margaret, Peter, Jane and I and three other guests. As is often the custom in Zambia when formally entertaining guests, there were numerous dishes to prepare; three meat dishes of beef, chicken and fish; a variety of vegetables; nshima, rice and potatoes. We also made a dessert – not usually requisite for meals in Zambia. The preparation overall is lengthy and labour-intensive because even in upper middle class homes such as Margaret’s people tend not to buy pre-cut ready-to-cook ingredients. Thus Jane and I spent the evening cooking, serving drinks, cleaning up afterwards as well as being guests.

The experience was not unusual to either Jane or I who then as single, childless women often found ourselves taking up this role at large family gatherings. While in the post-mortem of the dinner we were critical of having to play a similar role, commenting ironically that we had been ‘badly’, though some would say ‘well taught’ on how to behave, we were also aware that by being tasked to prepare the meal Margaret was signalling her acceptance of us into her home. By serving Margaret, Jane and I had acknowledged Margaret’s social status and thus shown her respect.<sup>90</sup> As Richards had noted, Jane and I as younger women were expected to accept the dominance of older women (1956, p48). However, our subsequent interactions with Margaret were varied, and there were more social

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<sup>90</sup> Audrey Richards noted that social relations predominantly consisted “of the giving and receiving of services” and that “status derived from the ability to demand service” with “giving service as an expression of respect” (1956, p46-47).

occasions when we did not need to work serving her and we were treated more or less as equals.

Despite having a general sense of “knowing” that was attuned to gender, age, status, was subtle and called on the careful attention to almost invisible cues of what to do, or what was expected, I had found myself on several occasions out of step, reading some social interactions wrongly or being misunderstood. Similar to Bateson’s schizophrenic bind, it was not always clear how one was meant to behave and I was sometimes blind to the social cues, or if they were there, failed to interpret them correctly. While at times this being out of step was a result of a deliberate attempt to assert some kind of autonomy in refusing to behave appropriately or as expected in terms of idealised traditional mores, at other times it was as a result of another type of habituation that stemmed from the other rules of social interaction and comportment I had learnt from the ZCCM-run primary school I had attended which had, in the 1980s, been staffed by a large expatriate British staff. At school, looking down when being addressed by someone in authority was considered rude, as was not explaining oneself when asked to. In contrast, in my interactions with family and family friends, as was similar to other Copperbelt young persons, one looked downwards when being addressed by an elder, and questions as to why one had done a particular thing were often rhetorical: one was not expected to respond. Socialisation and learning about the world outside formal education setting was much as Devisch described amongst the Yaka; listening as a form of attentiveness as a way to tune in to the broader meanings of what was said.

In general, women more than men were expected to embody a more ‘traditional’ habituation, at the same time some men expected their friends, lovers, wives and/or mistresses to project what was perceived as a more progressive modern outlook, either in appearance or manners. In the playing out of such expectations, misunderstandings were easy. For example, an interaction where a woman looks straight into the face of a man she is talking to could be misread as bold and she could be subject to

unwanted attentions; on the other hand a downward glance could be perceived as coquettish.

It was in the analysis of situations such as these that the Manchester School adopted situational analysis to explore Copperbelt identities in a social setting that was considered to be rapidly changing from rural to urban. Members of the School came to the conclusions that Copperbelt residents enact both rural and urban identities dependant on social context. It was and still is a useful framework for looking at identities, in this case gendered ones. However, a Batesonian perspective on communication may also illuminate the misinterpretations that may arise out of multiple modes of communication such as that set out in the example above. Secondly, if we are to draw from Rene Devisch's notion of borderlinking,<sup>91</sup> the emotions of protagonists may not be readily visible in the gendered performances of daily interaction and tasks. For example, despite Jane and my genuine desire to make a new friend, we were also mildly resentful of having to adopt a subservient role. However, our habituation to this role meant that we took it up without breaking step, thus not disrespecting Margaret who expected to be served as an older woman. In this way, all of us were connected to a body politic that was not only based on an ideal of appropriate behaviour but one that resonated with feelings of resentment, pleasure, shame and other emotions arising out of various interactions. This is reflected in the subtle cues of bodily comportment, where even the person performing an approximate of a bodily gesture of respect, for example, kneeling, can still offer clues to their feelings of resentment, either by exaggeration, feigning the movement slightly or a number of other subtle cues that too may be open to misreading.

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<sup>91</sup> A cosmological view of the world that does not see human interaction and communication happening in discrete territories, but is woven through the body (bodies) by rhythms, and in turn resonances that lie beneath and beyond the surface and frame of what is visible to analysis.

Thus a woman who did not ‘carry herself’<sup>92</sup> with respect would be referred to as having no shame. For example, in disciplining young persons, an adult might ask, “*taunfwile insoni?*” (‘haven’t you felt shame?’) Just as when Copperbelt residents say *sebanya wikute* (“get embarrassed but get full” – see Chapter Four), the shame of subverting moralities in order to get by and survive, shame as a painful feeling of humiliation and distress and as a loss of respect and honour, becomes not only emotive but also bodily. Similarly, behaviour like extra-marital affairs, excessive drinking, not observing respectful in-law avoidance and symbolic seclusion for menstruating women<sup>93</sup> are not only seen as shameful and disrespectful but, as I mentioned earlier, they are also seen as polluting and dangerous in that they can cause illness and even death to innocent parties who are part of this cosmological view of *communitas*.

Thus the desire or aspiration for the respectable traditional wife in popular Zambian discourse should not only be seen as a somewhat chauvinist discourse critical of modernity, but one that also goes beyond this surface to indicate to the experiential and existentialist struggle to reconcile ways of being and behaving that are locally understood as modern or traditional.

### **Reflections of modernity and tradition in ideas of marriage in Zambian media**

To reflect on the gendered narratives of modern and traditional ideas of marriage in the popular realm, I present extracts from articles from the Zambian media. These stories provide some insight into how the narrators use examples and metaphors from the material and embodied expectations of womanhood to criticise what they see as modernity’s erosion of

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<sup>92</sup> The idea of ‘carrying’ one self with respect in contrast to conducting one-self with respect implies a habituation that did not merely seek to display respect, but indicated an embodiment of those mores. For example, sometimes a person was said to *ukwi finya* (carry themselves with “heaviness”), implying an excessive embodiment of those values that literally weighted them down, in contrast to someone who was described as conservatively rigid.

<sup>93</sup> This can range from full avoidance of preparing meals, or may be limited to not adding salt to meals.

traditional values. While largely based on a nostalgic view of the “village” or “tradition”, they nonetheless reflect, as shall be seen in the cases presented later on, contemporary practices and preoccupations such as class and global inequities.

One story titled “Trouble in the Womb” by The Journey Man, a popular columnist for the *Zambian Post Newspapers*, published 1<sup>st</sup> March 2012, reflects on the abuse and rape of the maternal figure, a powerful symbol in the cosmologies of many *Zambian* groups. As a generative figure, the maternal figure embodies and encompasses both male and female gender. In the story, the author writes of how a midwife, traditionally a role undertaken by *banachimbusa*, urges a mother-to-be (presented as mother nature *Zambia* and with the desired characteristics of a generative, sharing and interlinking being) in the throes of a long and painful labour to reveal the truth of who is responsible for her pregnancy. In the story, the mother, who has escaped from her local but abusive husband with whom she had numerous pregnancies all of which had resulted in stillbirths (indicating that he/ or she had been unfaithful and had thus brought misfortune on the innocent lives of the babies), seeks liberation by courting foreign outsiders who then betray her trust by raping her. The rape results in a pregnancy and difficult labour. The pregnancy’s genesis raises for the mother and midwife the anxiety that she may give birth to a monster.

This story is a betrayal of the maternal figure by the state that dishonours it by denying the reciprocal and convivial values it embodies, and allows an indolent and abusive masculinist view to pervade. The maternal figure turns to the outsider and instead encounters the rapacious entry of capital that pillages its fruits and from this interaction potentially spawns a monster. As a reflection of power relations, the story hints to the erosion of feminine ‘power’ embodied in the powerful figure of the maternal within a modern context. It also reflects the importance of fertility and children, for many *Zambians* considered a hallmark for adulthood and the gaining of societal respect. Thus even though there is largely a preoccupation of sexual mores

in discourses of respectability, fertility and children may afford respect even to those considered to have behaved immorally.

Another story by the same author, titled “Modernity” and published 4<sup>th</sup> October 2012, reflects on the “demon” that possesses the village girl he married and loved. It changes not only her outward appearance and behaviour, but also he fears, his own moral outlook on the world.

“She was from the village. Many had told me not to marry this woman but you see, when you are in love, the ears fail. I followed my heart and married her anyway.

The early days of our marriage were blissful. Now things are different. I don't know what demon now possesses my wife...

...She used to cook me *munkwani*, *bonongwe* and *gwada* but now she says these dishes are for the poor, beneath her. She had nothing when I first met her. She was only a village woman with little education and no material possessions. Now she laughs at the poor. I am surprised.

She had this captivating dark skin, without a blemish. Her skin was the colour of the finest clay. Her hair was shiny black. Sometimes she would tie it in fascinating and alluring knots of the *mukule* kind...

...She bleaches her skin now. She has an orange face, like a ghostly character in an Alfred Hitchcock movie. Now she also has long and artificial eyelashes. Her face now scares me. She calls this look modern. I call it lost...

...When I first found our maid in our bedroom making the bed I chased her. This action on my part led to my being severely chastised by my wife.

She defended the maid. She said that she couldn't keep the house by herself, that she needed the help of the maid. I wonder whether she was really listening to herself when she said those words.

Does she know just how ambiguous she sounded when she said that she needed the maid to help her? So now, for fear of annoying my wife, the maid enters and leaves our bedroom as if she was a licensed occupant of that room.

When male visitors come to our home these days, my wife no longer genuflects as she greets them. She even shakes their hands instead of merely cupping them from a distance.

Sometimes, she comes to the sitting room to chat with them, wearing only a pair of shorts or a mini-skirt. When I tell her to cover her bare legs with a *chitenje*, she accuses me of morbid jealousy. One day I even caught one of my friends looking up her legs leeringly.

I couldn't blame him but my heart badly hurt. It reflected very poorly on me, I achingly thought.

These days I catch myself looking at the maid in a strange way. When doing this, I have dirty thoughts on my mind. I worry about this. Now I see that my maid has buttocks. I had never seen them before. My wife has changed. I fear that now she is changing me.

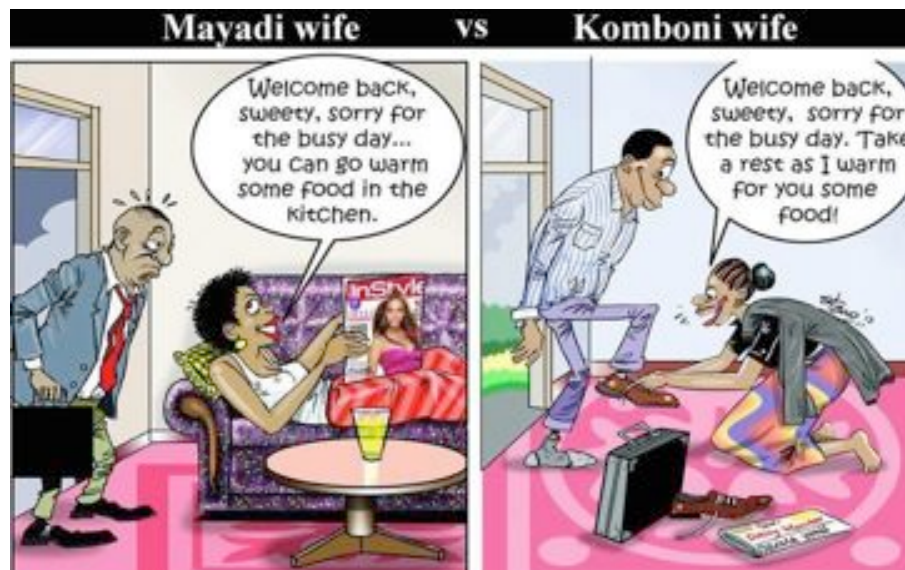
Instead of dressing for me, she now dresses for work.

Maybe I am really old-fashioned, a cultural dinosaur. But then, when a way of life is beneficial, should one abandon it, pilgrim? I refuse to adopt ways that are alien to me, ways that could endanger my very survival and prosperity. Or should I?"

Discussions of whether to adopt ways of being that are associated with modern or traditional poles are like the debate with my dinner guests taken

to public forums. For example, the popular radio station Radio Phoenix spurred an online debate on the similar topic by posting an image on their facebook page on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2013 (see below) and asking their followers whether the picture presented a “true reflection of *Mayadi* wife vs. *Komboni* wife” (wife from the yards or low-density suburbs and wife from the compound or high-density suburb), or, as Ferguson categorises it, the cosmopolitan or localist. These categories on the Copperbelt reflected virtuality in imaginings of place, where the *Mayadi*, pointed to the modern and urban, and the *Komboni* to the traditional and rural.

The image and the question elicited various responses, but in view of the discussion in this chapter, several writers pointed out that the representations in the image did not reflect domicile or area of origin, but indicated whether or not the woman embodied customary traditional values.



**Figure 6:** Mayadi wife versus Komboni wife.

Image courtesy Radio Phoenix

Female commenting: “First picture shows a couple that got together with total disregard for traditional pre-marital counselling and guidance. The second picture shows you a very lucky guy who married well. Have seen real life examples of both cases and problem was not domicile but content of heart and mind,

especially of the woman since she is by tradition and by biological design the homemaker.”

Male commenting: “Its neither *mayadi* nor *komboni*, think its about being cultured and showing respect to a husband.”

Other comments reflected the social expectations that women should be hardworking.

Female commenting: “Nope... These days so called "*mayadi*" or "polished wife" is very busy working and has no time to lay around in the sofa reading a mag just waiting for the man to come home with the bucks and waiting to 'take off his shoes!'”

Male commenting: “It all depends on the status of the *mayadi* wife, if she also works then its normal but if she stays home the whole day watching movies and magazines then she is a problem .The *komboni* wife is doing the right thing coz she was home the whole day.”

Yet others commenting on the post, debated on which representation reflected the caring spouse.

Male commenting: “This is a serious misrepresentation... Are we trying to say the those in "*Mayadi*" are more caring than those in "*Kombonis*" or the opposite; this is pure NEGATIVE in all senses.”

Female commenting: “If the opposite where true for the *mayadi* arrangement, would anyone care? I think the tendency for men is to demand to be taken care of when they don't make an effort to show even better care for their partners.”

While another, a female writer took umbrage to the untidiness of the localist wife that she also saw as signifying exploitation writing, the “second

picture shows how a wife is supposed to be, but should keep herself clean not look like a slave.”

At the same time that women were expected show *umunchisi*, which both men and women also associated with a showing of care and also as a comportment to show respect for oneself, they were also expected to project an air of worldliness that was becoming especially to men who wanted to project themselves as modern, or cosmopolitan. This may have meant dressing in a way that was considered stylish and within reason, being able to contribute and give an opinion in conversation. Men also desired that women contribute a livelihood to the home, but as I show in the cases presented, this aspiration was also tempered with a tendency to try to inhibit women’s activities that fostered this economic independence. In my observations of interactions and ways of being in place on the Copperbelt, and also in my own actions, I realised that peoples repertoires of being were variable, nuanced and fluctuated. Neither men nor women were fully versed in their perceptions of how they were expected to be. In addition, the expectations of what they wanted a partner to convey in various interactions, or how they expected them to behave was at times fuzzy, and occasionally went against what they vocalised. All these interactions played out as Copperbelt residents sought places of pleasure and harmony, and while women in particular also tried to maintain social proprieties.

### **Women’s leisure on the Copperbelt**

When a young woman who had moved from the capital city Lusaka to the Copperbelt asked me, “What do young Copperbelt women do for fun?” I was initially at a loss. What did they do indeed for leisure?

I realised in my everyday encounters with women on the Copperbelt that their predominant realms of amusement were embedded in the tasks they engaged in everyday. Play as a pleasure seeking activity was to be found where women sat in the yards, or by the side of a stall getting their hair braided, or as they walked in the companionship of their friends to buy

some tomatoes, or visiting each others homes. Through this I realised that play for many women meandered along with the many other activities they engaged in.



**Figure 7:** Young women at a small front yard store in Luanshya.  
Photo by Mulemwa Mususa, December 2008.

The kitchen party however, was the social event that women, young and old turned up at expressly to have fun. Mainly held on weekends it was a space where men are, for the most part, excluded, although of late it has become a trend for the prospective groom to arrive with a bouquet for his bride-to-be. The kitchen party was modelled on an abridged version of a traditional marriage ceremony and a Western bridal shower. It is a pre-wedding event, which in many ways is considered more important than the wedding itself, even by the potential groom, as it provides the couple with starter household items. The kitchen party was the highlight of many women's social occasion; it allows them to wear fine clothes and interact unfettered by the presence of men, where in other mixed social situations women would be expected to show decorum in their comportment and interactions.

Wedding gifts were often presented to a marrying couple at kitchen parties. These would usually be arranged as a pile in full view of all the guests, or

as has become common, they would be displayed as in a store with gifts from the family and friends of the bride on the left, and those from the prospective groom's family and friends on the right. There are several features of the celebratory finale of the Bemba female initiation rites in the kitchen party, such as dancing to traditional drumming and the immobility of the bride-to-be (who sits through the entire party on a mat looking downwards and sometimes covered in a blanket). Gifts, ranging from cooking sticks and pestles to electrical appliances like irons and sometimes refrigerators, are presented to the bride-to-be, who never looks up, as are instructions on when and how to use them. These presentations are often playful, sometimes accompanied by bawdy jokes and dancing. At these parties, women drink alcohol freely, and even at the Christian ones, where alcohol is not served, some guests nevertheless smuggle alcohol in their handbags. Buffet food is also served. Much store is given to the marital counsellor and the drummers, who are usually female and are paid in cash, alcohol and cloth. The success of a party is often judged by the amount of alcohol and the atmosphere created by the drummers and the 'matron', an older woman usually with extensive social networks and some status within her family and community.

For many women, being able to attend a kitchen party meant having means to provide a gift. Being able to attend these parties regularly also meant that women needed to have some access to an independent income. As the majority of the Copperbelt women I interviewed struggled to make ends meet, many of those who formed part of a regular kitchen party circuit turned up to these events with gifts from their own kitchen parties or those of their daughters or other female relatives. For family members and close friends to the bride-to-be, the pressure on their pockets was even greater because they were also required to contribute a sum to the hosting of the party that would go towards hiring of the marital counsellor, the drummers, food and drinks. The agreement to contribute to the kitchen party was often elicited as pledges during the numerous preparation meetings, which also provided women another opportunity to socialise.

However, kitchen parties not only offered women a liberating space for fun, they were also very valuable as a place to network and expand their business opportunities. As a number of women on the Copperbelt were involved in trade, for example selling clothes and other items bought from China, Dubai, South Africa and Tanzania, they needed a broad customer base to which they could sell these items. Also as many of these goods were paid for in monthly installments, they needed to understand who was connected to whom in chasing up their payments. Women who were unable to attend kitchen parties were also thus denied the potential to grow their businesses. Amongst my informants, one such case was Susan, Mr Mubita's wife.

***Mrs Susan Mubita – A woman whose husband stops her from attending kitchen parties***

Susan and Mr. Mubita married in 2003 in what Susan described as a simple wedding ceremony. Lobola (bridewealth) was paid to her family. Before meeting Mr Mubita, who had been divorced for several years, Susan, who was born in the early 1980s, had worked as a dress-maker in Roan township, a high-density former mine suburb. There she had a reasonable number of clients till she moved briefly to Kitwe in 2003 to stay with a 'aunt', really a former neighbour. In that same year the 'aunt' said she knew someone who wanted to marry her, and introduced her to Mr. Mubita. There had been no kitchen party for Susan because neither Mr Mubita nor her family then could afford it. Susan seemed disbelieving, implying that Mr Mubita could have helped her fund the kitchen party as they met shortly after he had received his retrenchment benefits. Mr Mubita however used his benefits to pay for the college education of the two children from his first marriage and to set up the business enterprises I have described in Chapter Three.

Susan was sceptical of Mr Mubita self-employment activities. The problem, she said, was that Mr Mubita 'wants to do things himself, he survives through hard work'. She felt he would have no problems finding a job given

the new copper boom, but said that ‘he refuses to work’, adding, ‘Life is very difficult my sister, especially as a mother of two’. Mr Mubita himself was keen to be self-sufficient. In one interview he vocalised what he saw as Susan’s lack of support for his activities and comparing Susan to his first wife who “was very industrious, she was a businesswoman, she baked cakes, scones etc. which she sold to people, she learnt to bake from the sisters.”<sup>94</sup>

During visits to their place, I had observed that Susan appeared to take little interest in Mr Mubita’s business activities and seemed to spend a lot of time indoors with their baby, unlike other women in the area I had interacted with, who, even with small children, spent a lot of time outdoors where they could interact with passing neighbours or go visiting the homes of their friends and neighbours. On the occasions that I had seen her alone manning the little store Mr Mubita run in his front yard, I had heard her tell customers to come back later as she did not know the prices of some of the items. On one occasion I had met her running along the road looking very distressed because, while she had been left in charge of the shop, they had been robbed while she had been indoors changing the baby’s nappy. Susan’s distress and her lack of knowledge of the pricing of items in the store suggested the control Mr Mubita exerted over their household finances.

Mr Mubita’s views on the management of household finances were also illuminated in a conversation I had with him on the benefits systems of the mines. According to Mr. Mubita, following the privatisation of the mines benefits and other amenities “started fading”. According to him, the removal of a benefit that caused the biggest protest that of the child allowance. “Women and children protested that they wanted it to remain fixed. Sometimes children would abuse the parents when they were not given the money saying it was theirs and so certain parents, especially us men, were happy it was withdrawn”. He said that wives did not get any

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<sup>94</sup> Church mission sisters who apart from the mines, run home-making classes.

money directly from the mines, but were entitled to use mine facilities such as the hospitals and recreation facilities. However, Mr Mubita also described situations where women entitled to collect their husband's pay cheques saying, "What would happen is that the wife would approach the welfare section and log in a complaint explaining the problem, and if they were convinced they would get her details and during the pay day, the wife would go and get the pay cheque and the money. The husband would not be given the money, no matter his protests." According to Mr Mubita, some men had voluntarily asked their wives to collect their monthly pay, but that this was uncommon. This tallied with what was frequently recounted by my female informants, who complained that their husbands allowed them little access to their earnings.

Susan did not make her own money. She claimed that clients for her dressmaking business had dried up when she had moved to the low-density former mine suburb to live with Mr Mubita. She put this down to a class difference: "The people here are different; they like expensive wear, so they go into town". This could not have been the only reason though, because there were other reasonably successful dressmakers in the area, mainly doing alterations on second-hand clothes bought from the town's markets which were also patronised by those who lived in Roan Township. Second-hand clothes were generally cheaper than buying fabric and making a new item (see Hansen 2000). The main reason seemed to be her social isolation.

Susan's contact with her former friends, most of whom lived near her parents in Roan Township had dwindled over the years. She attributed this to her having cut back visits to her parents because one can't go with "bare hands"<sup>95</sup> and "Mr. Mubita wants me to stay home". Once, I had found her despondent at her home because Mr. Mubita had refused to give her money to attend a kitchen party. She had needed K120, 000 (about US\$ 24) to attend. On this occasion she had mused about her options for an independent income from something like trade, but discarded it, noting that

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<sup>95</sup> Susan recounted that her parents who were farming in the 'bush' were struggling, and remembers when she stayed over they went to bed without eating.

the women she knew who were running their own businesses such as stores selling second-hand clothes, or doing *makwebo* (cross-border trade) to as far away places as Dubai and China, all had start up capital and she did not have any. Susan observed that such business was risky because people would buy goods on credit, but then fail to pay.

Attending kitchen parties could have extended Susan's opportunities. In some cross-trading business activity, groups of women would pool resources to have one of their friends travel to buy goods and thus save on travel expenses. It also allowed a lower threshold of entry into a business. Also, as one woman cynically pointed out to me, having a younger woman, such as Susan in a *makwebo* group was also helpful because in freight and customs negotiations the men who normally facilitated these processes tended to be more amenable to helping a young attractive woman than an older one. It was notions and ideas about such interactions, where young women were potentially egged on by others that made men uneasy about not only about *makwebo* but also kitchen parties. Both activities were unpopular with men because of the perception that they encouraged women to "behave badly".

Though many women, both married and single, socialised as well as engaged in business activities largely separately from men's sphere, men as well as women were concerned with the proprieties of these activities and how they appeared to others. In these spheres, marriage offered a level of respectability whereas single women were often the subjects of rumours concerning their sexual and moral conduct. Situations such as Susan's were what influenced older women to keep some of their earnings hidden from their husbands.

### **Women keeping economic secrets**

In 5 July 2005, the BBC 2 series *Africa Lives* broadcast a documentary called "The Real No.1 Ladies Detective Agency" based on a private detective agency in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia that employed mainly

female investigators. One of the cases pursued by the investigators was that of a female teacher who was suspected by her husband to be having an affair. It turned out that the woman was not having one, but was instead setting up a small business without her husband's knowledge. This, the male head of the agency said, was, according to "our culture" tantamount to adultery.

During the course of conducting fieldwork in Luanshya, I learned that most of my female informants were keeping economic secrets from their husbands. Those who weren't were perceived by their female counterparts to be foolish. It was thought that their openness would only result in disappointment, or more pointedly, disenchantment in their husband's ability to look after their children. Women, especially older ones, urged those women inclined to sharing everything with their husband to keep something away for a rainy day. Women's economic affairs, especially when making an independent business, were a source of great domestic strife in on the Copperbelt. I was told that if men were aware that their wives had money, even if it was kept for something else, they would pressurize their wives to part with it. The Domestic Health Survey of 2007 indicated for instance that women who were more likely to have experienced physical abuse where those who were working and were paid in cash (2007,p276). Some NGO projects, like the Lusaka Peri-Urban Slum Upgrading project, supported by CARE international, had, in recognition of these problems, even designed mechanisms into their programmes to ensure that women involved in slum upgrading activities would not be paid in cash, but in kind - in food parcels - to prevent men diverting what women earned from the household.

Women were anxious too to hide their earnings from their husband's relatives. In the largely matrilineal groups in Zambia, the husband's matrilineal relatives, in particular a man's eldest sister's<sup>96</sup> children customarily had claim on their uncle's property. As a result, as Hansen

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<sup>96</sup> In matrilineal societies such as the Bemba, the majority on the Copperbelt, a man's older sister is considered a classificatory male and has significant say in his household affairs.

noted in her research on urban households in informal settlements in Lusaka, when a woman's husband died it was not uncommon to have his relatives descend upon the household and grab everything (1997, p97). Also just as Hansen had observed even the *Zambian Intestate Act of 1989* that was put in place to ensure that a widow and her children were not left destitute and which allowed them to sue property-grabbing relatives did not prevent the continuation of this practice (1997, p97). The Act, implemented in the absence of a will, apportioned the deceased person's property roughly as follows; twenty percent for a surviving spouse or in the case of polygny shared between spouses, fifty percent to children (both legitimate and illegitimate) apportioned according to their educational needs, twenty percent to the deceased parents, and ten percent to other dependants. As I found in my fieldwork in Luanshya, deceased husband's relatives found creative ways in which to use the Intestate Act to assert what they viewed as rightful inheritance descent within the matrilineal system, and even people placed to help widows understand the Act, such as legal aid counsellors, used it for personal gain. For example, as I sat in the office of one of these legal aid counsellors, a Mr Bwalya, I heard him persuade a widow whose husband had left nothing but the house that had been part of his retrenchment package to sell it in order to give a share of the proceeds to the deceased man's relatives, even though the sale would have left the woman and her children homeless. Mr Bwalya had allayed her fears of homelessness by telling her that he had on his books a property in a high-density neighbourhood that she could buy from the proceeds of the sale of the family house. Mr Bwalya ran from his legal aid office a brisk real estate business. When I interviewed Mr Bwalya later, he argued that the Intestate Act was unfair because it disrespected the "culture of the people", and the "Zambian extended family". Mr Bwalya also thought it dangerous for the widow and the children not to respect this "culture" because of retributions relatives may mete out. While Mr Bwalya did not mention the fear of witchcraft, one woman, the widow of a former mineworker who was renting a room for herself and her children in a one-room servants quarter in the low-density suburb in which she had once owned a home, told me she

had given up the family home for fear of her children being bewitched by her late husband's relatives.

It was not only the period following the death of a spouse that the relatives interfered in matters of household property. Mrs Mwenya introduced in Chapter Two, as one of a young couple that had tried to set up a used oil processing business informed me that her husband's relatives had been very upset when they found out that he had bought his wife a car. According to Mrs Mwenya, it had been taken as such a serious matter that the relatives had convened a family meeting where her husband had been advised that buying such big gifts for the wife would make her proud and unmanageable. When narrating this incident, Mrs Mwenya was of the opinion that her husband's relatives were concerned that "he loved her too much", and that "he would do anything for her" and that because of this, they could not control him.

Mrs Mwenya husband's relatives' worry that she would become proud indicated a concern with what Copperbelt residents debated as being the end of the extended family. Though many people had long supported their relatives, and still did, though under great financial stress, the loss of men's formal jobs meant that few could divert incomes to their relatives as they did before. The fact that following the massive layoffs in the mine many women had unofficially become the breadwinners in their household's meant that they could have a greater say in how and whether they supported extended family members. As one woman, who ran a successful backyard poultry business put it, "for many years I looked after my husband's family. They would come here, and even say bad things about me. I kept quiet. My husband would give them money then fail to buy clothes for the children. Now he has no money, so I tell him, if they want to come and stay here they must work." With increasing economic independence some women were able to have a greater say in matters of the household – though at some social cost, with the risk of being called fast and/or having their husband "under petticoat government" as one informant told me, using that very Victorian phrase that speaks to colonial influences on the Copperbelt.

***Mrs Phiri – a woman whose husband is under petticoat government***

Mrs Phiri, introduced in Chapter Four, against whom neighbours in Luanshya levelled suspicions of Satanism due to the relative success she and her husband enjoyed, was much more than her husband, the visible head of their household. A successful businessperson, as her husband was ready to admit, she had been key to helping her family weather the worst of the town's economic crisis. She managed, with the help of her husband, their children and the occasional extended family members, a diverse portfolio of small investments, that included a landscaping business, trade in hardware and household goods, transport and grain marketing, and foreign currency trading. In my interactions with the Phiri's they appeared to me to have a solid and happy marriage. However, several neighbours spread gossip that Mrs Phiri was "fast", and that her husband, a mild-mannered man, feared confronting her over her supposed infidelities because he was "under a petticoat government", implying that he had failed to control his wife.

That Mrs Phiri had significant say in how the household was run was clear, and Mr Phiri was unstinting in his admiration of how his wife run their business and household. Mrs Phiri appeared to hold, at least within the spheres of her home, a comfortable reconciliation of the traditional values of *umunchinshi* and the values of a Christian marriage, in speaking of love and the need to respect the head of the household. She was active in a Catholic women's church group, and emphasised the values of a Christian marriage and family-life, ensuring that her daughters participated in the lay activities of the church. Mrs Phiri also frequently attended kitchen parties and was seen as a popular matron to host these parties.

Despite the good relationship Mrs Phiri appeared to share with her husband, she was adamant in her opinion that men should not have full knowledge of how a woman kept her books. Her view was that if men knew how much women were earning they would not take their responsibilities seriously and

would be tempted to “squander” the income. So Mrs Phiri conspiratorially told me that even though Mr Phiri was a good man, she did not tell him all her earnings and pointing out that it was easy to hide what she was making especially in her informal foreign exchange earnings, because “the dollar is always changing”.

In addition, Mrs Phiri considered Mr Phiri a soft touch with regard to his relatives. One afternoon when visiting the Phiris, I noticed that Frances, the eleven year old nephew of the Phiri’s was not around. He had been a visible feature of their home, normally to be seen washing dishes, feeding the chickens and running small errands. The orphaned son of Mr Phiri’s late sister, he had been brought to live with the Phiris to provide him with a better education in the town, after having stayed with another relative in a rural area in Eastern province. When I asked after Frances, Mrs Phiri told me that she had asked him to be sent to the ‘village’ to live with another of Mr Phiri’s sisters because he had been ‘lazy’, wanting to play after school rather than do household chores. There she said, “he would learn real work”. When I responded that it was unsurprising that he wanted to play as he was young, she justified her actions by saying that times had changed and no one could expect to “stay for free” as they were no free services being offered any longer. Mrs Phiri’s actions reflected a general mood, giving rise to what was perceived as the breakdown of convivial extended family relations. The increasing domestication of business enterprise, added to the further exploitation of unpaid kin, increasingly without recourse to other areas of reciprocity such as clothes and occasional gifts of money. This as I point out in Chapter Six, contributed to young persons taking up risky modes of livelihood.

While envy may have played a part in gossip that circulated about Mrs Phiri, part of her notoriety stemmed from her business activities that required her to network beyond the kitchen parties she attended and hosted, and her church’s women’s league group. Mrs Phiri herself was aware of how these interactions appeared to others. For example, I met her once in the town’s small centre talking to a young man who helped her sell and buy

foreign currency to workers in a mining camp in the Democratic Republic of Congo, just over the border with the Copperbelt town Mufulira. Mrs Phiri had introduced me to him as her business colleague, her manner warm and affectionate towards him, noting that he helped her get the best foreign currency rates. Later, in the day, over by her place, Mrs Phiri used the example of the young man to highlight how people in the town were very concerned about appearances and tended to misread social situations. She said, “People here like to see what they like to see, so the way you saw me greeting that boy, someone else would have said, that is Mrs Phiri’s boyfriend. People like to think bad things of others. You see the way Mr Phiri drops Ida off by her place and gives her a hug, she is my best friend, and we have known each other for a long time. I trust her. But people would say Mr Phiri is always at Ida’s place, even if I am the one who tells him to take her there”.

What Mrs Phiri was also highlighting was the general suspicions that were rife in relationships between men and women, which she blamed squarely for men’s poor behaviour and the failure of women to mould the men into what they wanted. She commented,

When I started seeing Mr Phiri, the first time I went to visit him he did not pick me up from the station. When I saw him, I cried, I told him, ‘how can I know you love me, if you are not even there to meet me the first time I come to see you’. I want to be loved, I told him that if I am not loved, I could die.

Mrs Phiri went on to explain that a lot of women failed to have happy relationships because they had not learnt good ways to live together as a man and wife from their parents. She also laid a lot of the blame with traditional educators, *banachimbusa*, who prepared women for marriage, who, she said, urged women not to voice their displeasure at their

husbands' misdemeanours, encouraging a stoicism that had no place in a society where women's rights were more respected.<sup>97</sup>

Despite Mrs Phiri's criticism of the *banachimbusa*, her own daughters, who were also staunch Catholics, had undergone the traditional initiation rites under the training of *banachimbusa*. I heard her at one time even tell one of her friends who was unsure whether to have her daughter initiated that it would be wise for her to do so otherwise she would might fail to marry or 'hold' a marriage. What Mrs Phiri was pointing out was that in a social context as dynamic and fluid as the Copperbelt, a woman could not rely on meeting a man who did not uphold customary notions of domesticity. It was not only the expectations of men that Mrs Phiri was concerned about with regard to the marital options of her daughters, but what kind of reception they would receive from their potential in-laws. There was still largely concern that an uninitiated daughter-in-law would attract ridicule from her new relatives, and possible mistreatment at their hands. Similar concerns, as well as the unclear expectations of men are illuminated in the case of David, a widower who was seen as highly eligible for re-marriage.

### ***David – A widower eligible for re-marriage***

David, a widower in his early forties, had been dating two women. He had two children with his late wife who had passed on a decade before, and was being helped with their care by his late wife's younger sister who had moved in shortly after the funeral. The presence of his sister-in-law had led for sometime to rumours that his late wife's relatives had foisted him with a 'replacement' wife, now rarely implemented custom of some of the matrilineal groups in Zambia like the Bemba.

A successful corporate executive, working in private practice, David lived a comfortable life, epitomizing James Ferguson's category of 'the

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<sup>97</sup> Here Mrs Phiri was referring to the generally widespread discourse on women's rights supported by various NGOs, multilateral and bilateral organisations, which also fed into government policy.

cosmopolitan'. When we first met, he introduced himself by his first name. Highly sociable and well travelled, he often hosted meals at his well-presented home, with its landscaped gardens and an interior with a collection of African art. David was considered highly eligible for re-marriage, but eluded it, stating he that he did not want his children to have a stepmother, and that he did fine as both a father and mother figure for them.

David's girlfriends Carol and Brenda, on the face of it could be seen as having a 'modern' outlook. Carol was working within the NGO sector and Brenda was a banker. Both were widows, each with a single child, and they lived what appeared to be independent comfortable lives. Unlike the majority of my informants on the Copperbelt, they where able to afford a leisurely lifestyle, that included the occasional holiday "abroad" within the sub-Saharan African region. David, Carol and Brenda's lifestyles were quite unusual on the Copperbelt, as they represented the small section of country's working professional's with earnings above ZMK 5,000,000 after taxes (approx. US\$1,000) per month.

Unlike other informants on the Copperbelt who I had observed expected their girlfriends to take on a domestic role, which tended to blur the line between girlfriend and wife, David went out of his way to ensure that his girlfriends did not behave like wives. This was because a person, who in the Western sense could have been said to be dating, could be sued either for what was seen on their part as a conjugal relationship, or for 'wasting one's time'.

In an incident David offered to explain why he was taking a temporary break from Carol, he had said that while it was nice to be with a 'well-taught' (i.e. initiated) woman, it was better that she behaved as such in private and not in front of his friends. Carol had allegedly informed him that dinner was ready by kneeling at the threshold of the living room where he was entertaining his friends. This act indicated for David a propriety that was out of place in relation to how he saw their relationship. I had previously observed his sister-in-law and domestic worker, as well as

gardener kneel at a little distant before him to make some request, so it was not the act in itself that was a problem, but what it signified of their relationship to others. It turned out that Carol's kneeling was not the act that most upset him, but the rumours that circulated about her that David heard courtesy of a concerned friend. The rumour was that Carol regularly consulted traditional healers and *banachimbusa*. In conversation conducted amongst a mixed group, David queried of the women folk in the group, why they needed to recourse to what he called "primitive methods" to catch a man and yet as I had observed he also appreciated her modesty and education in these matters. His concern though, as well as for the other men in the room was the use of what he called "sneaky methods" to elicit affection, and he was worried about what women had fed him. Here, he was referring to love potions that in the popular realm were perceived to 'tame' men and focus their affections on the person who set about to entrap them.<sup>98</sup> In addition, Carol's innate reserve, precisely that which gave her a respectful demeanour and would have had her characterised as someone with *umunchishi* did not endear her to some of David's friends, who considered her unfriendly and *uwai finya* "some who carries themselves heavily".

Around the time that rumours circulated about Carol's visits to traditional healers, David's relationship to Brenda appeared to get closer, with David telling colleagues that he was considering remarrying. Brenda, unlike Carol, was loud and engaging; on social occasions she circulated widely and appeared to have no worries in expressing contrary social opinion. However, David was concerned about how Brenda would be received by his relatives, who he said expected traditional conventions to be observed. In addition, he was worried that the fact that she was from a different tribe from him (he was Bemba and she was Lozi), would be used by his relatives to alienate her. This, despite inter-tribal marriage being widespread. In voicing his doubts about whether he would marry Brenda, David said he

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<sup>98</sup> This fear of love potions reflected a fear of a loss of agency, or autonomy by men similarly noted in other studies in the region by Wilson (2012) on Malawi and Goebel (2002) on Zimbabwe.

was worried that the expectations of his family would change her and turn her into someone who was “no longer fun” and that he would rather continue their relationship as it was to maintain their friendship.

As David learnt, it was difficult however to remain friends with women once they got married, even if the relationship was platonic. For many of the older Zambian generations and some of the young, there was no such thing as a platonic friendship, with the Bemba saying *koswe tayikala apepi ne mbalala* “a rat cannot be left near groundnuts” used to caution on such a relationship. When Charity, a female executive and David’s best friend, whom he had known since childhood and with whom he had a platonic relationship - to the scepticism of many - got married, he found it increasingly difficult to socialise with her openly. According to David, Charity’s new husband was a traditionalist, and would not have condoned her meeting him. This was not because Charity’s husband viewed David with any suspicion, but as David explained, it was because Charity’s husband, a considerably older and respectable businessman, did not want to attract ridicule from his peers by his wife in his words, “consorting with a younger man”.

There was a perception of social danger in befriending unattached young men. Young men were seen as only interested in playing around, and as such being seen to hang around them was likely to risk being labelled as “loose” or as “moving around”. Hansen made a similar observation in her research in an informal settlement in Lusaka, where being single and conducting a single lifestyle as a woman also implied being loose (1997, p135-136). These aspersions on the sexual conduct of single women interacting with men indicated for Hansen a society that was overly concerned with sexual misconduct (1997, p135). For example, sexual relations conducted without cleansing rites were a danger to innocent persons. However, it was not only the aspersions of sexual misconduct that concerned women’s interactions with young men. Young men were also considered as not as eligible as older men, as, by contrast to older men, they were unlikely to have proven themselves in looking after a household. This

ability to “take care” of a woman and those related to her is what made married men, divorcees and widowers more eligible than single unattached young men. This outlook was illuminated to me in the case of Idess, a young woman who was on the look out for a husband.

***Idess – “Looking for someone to look after me”***

When I met Idess, she first narrated her difficulties saying, “My dear it is not easy”. Idess was not born on the Copperbelt but in Luapula province in 1980. At the age of seven, she had been sent to live with her mother’s brother in Luanshya as a way for her to get an education in what were seen as the better schools of the Copperbelt. In 2000, the year that she completed her secondary school education, her uncle was retrenched from his job in the mines. Life in her uncle’s household had been busy as she carried out many domestic chores requested by her aunt, her uncle’s wife, but she had not been treated that differently from her uncle’s children and the orphaned child of her aunt’s late sister.

However, life became hard when, following getting his retrenchment package, her uncle decided to move in with a Lamba woman on the rural outskirts of the Copperbelt town. The rest of the family however remained in the former mine house that formed part of his retrenchment package.

Idess says that following her uncle’s departure, her aunt started expecting her to do more work, helping out growing food in a field on the perimeter of the town. Her aunt also started asking her when she saw her talking to a certain man if he had given her something. While this could be seen as a direct and quite brutal way of the aunt to ask Idess to transact herself, it could also be seen as Liv Haram (2005) notes in her research on love and relationships in Tanzania, as an attempt by her to normalize Idess’s

relationship with her male friend, by enfolding him into a sharing of food and resources seen as a respectable form of reciprocity.<sup>99</sup>

When Idess's aunt got ill and eventually passed away, Idess was left looking after her cousins, two of whom were under the age of five, three were teenagers still at school and the ten year-old niece of her aunt. Idess's relatives refused to take on the children, saying they still had a father, and only took on her aunt's niece.

In the period following her aunt's death, her uncle had moved back to the house with his new wife, which pitted him against his older children who accused him of killing their mother.<sup>100</sup> Idess herself told me that she could not live with her uncle's new wife, whom she suspected of having entrapped him with "roots",<sup>101</sup> and expressed her desire to have her own house, and get married.

I had bumped into Idess a number of times in town in the company of various men, who ranged in age in my judgement from thirties to sixties. Her demeanour in these interactions was strikingly different from the times I had met her at home or amongst her female friends, when she was vocal and often boisterous. In her interactions with these men she looked much more subdued and on all the occasions I had met her the men seemed to be asking her when they would see her again. Idess would say she would call them only she did not money have cell phone airtime; on two occasions I witnessed her being given money. Other than the respectful deference I read in her demeanour, it was also clear that Idess was engaged in some form of courtship. When I queried her when she was among her female friends as to whether she was seeing anyone, she told me how a young "working class

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<sup>99</sup> It was not uncommon for men in Zambia and on the Copperbelt, whether stopping by to see kin, lovers or platonic friends, to also bear gifts of food. For example, Peter, a friend and colleague from the university would after a trip from outlying rural area present gifts to Jane and I of fish, mushrooms or vegetables from that area. This formed part of a mutually reciprocal relationship, because on the occasions that Peter visited either of our homes, he was also often welcomed to a meal, or likewise received gifts of food.

<sup>100</sup> A reference to the possibility that she had died from AIDS.

<sup>101</sup> Roots used in this context meant love potions.

man”<sup>102</sup> had offered to marry her, but how 'lies' being told about her had resulted in marital negotiations not going beyond *kambale*<sup>103</sup>. Her friends told her she was at least lucky she had not fallen pregnant with him because a young man *teti akusunge* “couldn’t look after her” and that it was even better to have a child with an older married man as they were more used to the responsibility.

Despite the increasing idealisations of love for love’s sake, and as detached from material goods, as vocalised in Zambian contemporary music,<sup>104</sup> material exchanges, often referred to in development aid circles by the very value laden term “transactional sex”, still forms the basis of most courtship on the Copperbelt. This exchange as in Idess’s case took the form of cell phone airtime, money, clothes and food. A gift of money on the Copperbelt for both the giver and the receiver I would argue was not seen as belonging to a separate realm from other gifts such as food, say the way it would be seen in the ‘West’. Money was as easily given away as food, and not to give it when one had it was seen as stingy. When Idess’s friends referred to older married men as more responsible, they were also referring to the fact that in Zambian marriages, especially those involving matrilineal groups such as the Bemba, son-in-laws would have been engaged in the sharing of gifts with their in-laws as a way of showing respect or *umunchinsi*. However, as many young people did not have the means and resources to do so, due to high youth unemployment, it was also these views of Idess and her friends that made many young men anxious about their relationships with them, suspecting them of seeing older men on the side, who they saw as killing young women like “flies”. This was also in reference to the fear of HIV/AIDS whose effect I discuss in Chapter Six.

This anxiety by Copperbelt and Zambian young men also reflected in their views of women who were dating “white men” or “foreign men” whether

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<sup>102</sup> A reference to a formal sector employee, regardless of rank.

<sup>103</sup> A contribution of money to the potential bride’s family to open bride price negotiations.

<sup>104</sup> For example the Zambian female artist, Nalu, in her song “House, Money, Car” (2005) asks what remains in a relationship when a couple falls upon hard times if material goods are the basis of it.

they were Zambian nationals or not. Such women, as in the case below of Beauty, were likely to be characterised as loose and only interested in money, possibly reflecting the paternalistic nature of foreign capital on the Copperbelt and the long running disparities in wages between local and expatriate staff. As such when Idess jokingly requested me to help her find a “white husband” because in her view they did not behave badly “like us Africans” she was then also communicating a need to be looked after.

***Beauty – A woman interested only in money***

When I first met Beauty she was walking down one of the town’s potholed roads. She made an incongruous sight on the Copperbelt town’s street. A tall, graceful, slender woman with short-cropped hair and dressed in a dark pinstripe skirt-suit and stilettos, with an air of polish, she would not have looked out of place in a fashion magazine. Curious, I had said hello, and thereby began a conversation that provided some insight into the life of women on the Copperbelt characterised as ‘loose’ and “interested only in money”.

Beauty, I found was not working in a bank, as I had initially presumed from her attire, as banking was the only profession I could think of as an industry in the rather economically sleepy town at that time. Rather she was a businesswoman, who ran, I was to find, a rather unsuccessful restaurant, as well as occasionally trading in clothes imported from South Africa that would be sold on credit to a network of female clients. She was also pursuing a marketing course, taking evening classes in another nearby Copperbelt town. After telling her about my research interests and my background growing up on the Copperbelt, Beauty, unlike a few of my female informants who were a little more reticent, was open and happy to talk about what was going on in her life in relation to the region’s mine economy.

I learnt that she had moved from Western Zambia as a young girl, where she had lived with her mother, a widow and other siblings, to stay with her

aunt,<sup>105</sup> her mother's sister who was married on the Copperbelt and worked as a nurse in the mine hospital. Her aunt, who had three other female children, also became widowed when her husband died, according to Beauty from depression following his retrenchment from the mines. Following this, life became very difficult, with her aunt struggling to support her cousins and herself, at that time all teenagers. Her aunt then decided to migrate abroad to work as a nurse, with two of the younger children joining her later. Beauty and one of her cousins were left in the house that the family had gained as part of the retrenchment package from the mines, receiving initially subsistence money from the aunt who was abroad. This money allowed Beauty and her cousin to complete their secondary school education. For reasons that Beauty could not elaborate on, the remittances from abroad dwindled, and Beauty and her cousin were forced to take up paid work rather than go to college. Beauty found a low paid job as a bartender, but her cousin did not, forcing them to put the house on rent, and move into a 'servant's quarter'. Both started dating, but described these relationships as just *ukwangala* 'playing', connoting a courtship not necessarily leading to marriage. It was during this phase that she got pregnant and had a child with a boyfriend who was unable to support her. Beauty's son had just started attending primary school when I met her in 2007. She said the boy's father did odd jobs and was still living with his parents.

At the time I met Beauty, she was staying in a rented three-bedroomed house in a former low- density mine suburb. Her rent, she later told me, was being paid by her current boyfriend Craig, an expatriate mine manager, one of a wave of foreign mine workers hailing from South Africa, Australia, the United Kingdom, Peru and China who began to move into the Copperbelt with rising copper prices. Craig was already married and had a family, but like other expatriate workers moving in then, had moved without his family

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<sup>105</sup> Beauty had moved to stay with her mother's sister not fully for economic reasons, but through a kinship system that allowed the 'adoption' of children by members of the extended family. In this case, Beauty's aunt had liked her disposition, and had requested her mother that Beauty live with her and treat her as one of her daughters.

because there were few good schools and housing in the area.<sup>106</sup> I also found out by chance that he was also ‘keeping house’ with another woman, Bwalya, who like Beauty was also running a restaurant, but unlike her, had a much more successful enterprise. While Beauty knew of Bwalya, as the two moved generally in similar circles, neither, as far as I knew had ever confronted one another over this arrangement.

While Beauty’s relationship with Craig was often described as commercial and driven by a need of money by both her critics and sympathisers, in practice it resembled a settled familial domestic arrangement. According to Beauty, Craig settled the rentals and paid for her son’s school fees and her college tuition, as well as provided a monthly household income, for which she had to account for. She in turn provided meals, got his laundry done, arranged for the servicing of his car, booked their holidays, as well as his trips abroad to visit his legitimate family and was his companion for social gatherings. Their relationship was conducted openly among his peers, some of whom had similar arrangements. Beauty told me though that they often had arguments about money, as she claims he refused to give her money outside the basics of what was used for running their household and her personal care. Beauty needed the extra money to help her mother and her siblings, whose expectations for help had risen when she had started seeing her ‘white man’.

Once, when at her home, I had seen Beauty adopt the demeanour of the traditional wife, semi-curtseying when serving Craig his drink, and calling him “ba” Craig, adding the prefix that connoted respect. Later, when I asked her about this, she laughed and said in Bemba *kaili fye ashile umukashi kubusungu, pantu ta mutasha* “that is why he has left his wife in the west, because she doesn’t thank him”. Here she was referring to local customary notions of *umunchinshi*. However, in the times that I had bumped into Beauty at a popular beer garden on the Copperbelt in the

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<sup>106</sup> An estate agent and the few expatriat workers interviewed during a survey confirmed the lack of decent accommodation, citing the dilapidation of much of what was available on the market.

company of Craig and his other friends and their partners, Beauty's behaviour had often been openly flirtatious. Her behaviour would probably not have been unlike that characterised by Ferguson and other anthropologists who had observed women in these social settings. What was surprising about Beauty's behaviour at the beer garden was that it sat in sharp contrast to how she presented herself at home, and at the restaurant she ran. There she appeared relaxed and more demure, either chatting with her staff while cleaning fish or vegetables, or talking to her customers and passer-by's with whom I had observed she was often generous offering meals and cash to some of the people that loitered the shops hoping for 'piece work'. On the occasions I had visited her restaurant, I had witnessed how she would not demand that clients settled their bills there and then and she would often press that what I ordered was on the house. The variation in Beauty's behaviour reflected how she drew on a repertoire of various ways of being, not only to project a certain style, that is, the modern woman in a bar, or the traditional woman respecting the customary ideal of generosity, but also her conscious or unconscious adeptness at weaving relationships and modes of comportment across various settings.

As in Beauty's case, it was not uncommon to encounter amongst both expatriates and local Zambians the setting up of wives "on the side". These extra-marital affairs that resembled more polygamous arrangements without the consent of the wife were a source of worry to the women residents of the older Copperbelt. Like the stories of the Lamba women that characterised the establishment of the Copperbelt, stories about enticing Kaonde and Lunda<sup>107</sup> women were circulated as fear-mongering for women whose husbands had found work in the new Copperbelt of North West Zambia. It was not only women, who worried about the fidelity of their husbands; as Ferguson points out, men too had suspicions their wives' fidelity (1999, p185-186).

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<sup>107</sup> Ethnic groups found in North Western Province.

In 2009, after not having seen Beauty for almost a year, I bumped into her walking her son to school, looking very different from her usual immaculate self. When I asked how she was doing, she told me she was doing badly. She was looking for a job, but had little prospect of finding a reasonably paid one, as she had not completed her marketing course. She had been evicted from the house she had been renting and was struggling to meet household expenses. Not having time to talk, I agreed to meet her later in the week. Unable to meet then I enquired after her some weeks later and found that she had left town.

I heard varied accounts for her departure, and the decline in her fortunes. In one account, she was said to have fallen in love with a good-looking local young man, notorious for his reputation with women. This young man had in these accounts only been interested in getting money from Beauty, running her already poorly performing businesses into the ground, and coercing her to get money from her boyfriend Craig to finance a trade in car spare parts. The story went, that when Craig found out about this relationship, he ‘chased her’ from the house. In another account, Craig’s wife had found out about Beauty and Bwalya and forced her husband to terminate both relationships. In a third story that circulated about Beauty’s departure, after Craig discovered her relationship with the young local man and had ended their relationship, she had gone on to date a married Zambian man, who had taken her on as a second wife. When Beauty re-appeared in town some months later, still dating Craig, the gossip that went round was that Craig had forgiven her for her indiscretion with the young man. I later learned from Beauty herself, that she had accompanied Craig to an outlying rural mine post in the North West province where mining explorations were being carried out.

One of the assumptions that underlay the rumours of Beauty’s departure was the idea that she could not have had genuine affection for Craig, and that she could only turn to a Zambian man for both love and marriage. Like in the Zambian popular songs by the late renowned electronic guitarist Paul Ngozi “Half Muntu, Half Mwenye” and more recently the artist Petersen’s

song “Maoffals” (2012) who sing about Zambian women’s relationship to Asian men, and the unlikelihood of an outcome of marriage in these relationships, they also reflect a discourse of the racialised other that was antithetical to Kaunda’s nation building of the motto “One Zambia, One Nation”. While obviously not colouring the large landscape of the terrain of Copperbelt domestic arrangements, relationships such as Beauty and Craig’s were more visible with increased mining activity, especially in the rural outposts of North Western Zambia. However, despite the ‘othering’ that formed part of the narrative that criticised women who had relationships with ‘foreigners’, ‘outsiders’ were brought into the fold of Copperbelt customary ideas of domesticity.

### **Summary discussion**

As Ferguson noted in his research on the Copperbelt, it was hard to find domestic arrangements that resembled the Western ideal of nuclear family, even though as he noted it formed part of a discourse that was a critique of what people saw as the problem with marriage and relationships on the Copperbelt. In what appears to be a contradiction, Copperbelt residents also looked to the customary ideal of marriage, referred to as a traditional marriage. Just as it was hard to find the ideal Western domestic arrangement, it was also hard to find one that looked like ideal of the traditional marriage that upheld values of respect towards elders and men, as well as reciprocal relations amongst kin. What one found was a variety of domestic arrangements, of which I have presented a small cross-section. However, many of the issues illuminated in these disparate domestic settings were of concern to the general population of the Copperbelt.

There was a concern over the management of household finances. As Hansen (1987) noted in her study on the dynamics of gender and the management of the domestic sphere in Lusaka, younger married women on the Copperbelt found it harder than older women to have a say in how household finances were spent. There was a perception amongst many Copperbelt women that men were not very responsible in the handling of

money. As a result, women urged each other to keep what they earned (largely from informal sector activities) secret from their husbands, and in acknowledgement of the claims that a husband's relatives may have on a household's assets, women also kept their earning and assets secret from their husband's relatives.

This attempt by women to keep their earnings invisible from men's and others' gazes, is also reflected in the invisibility of female initiation rites that a number of Copperbelt women undergo, as well as in the popular female-only kitchen parties. The 'secret language' of the female initiation rite, a coalescence of a life-long education in the embodiment of moral values, like the expectation of women's industriousness, the sharing of food, and respect manifested in more visible form in the bodily comportment of deference, hides from view women's affective engagement with these norms. In their engagement with these moral values that esteem a customary ideal of womanhood that may appear subservient, Copperbelt women do not necessarily contest this ideal by discarding it in favour of a Western notion of female liberation, as represented in direct communicative approaches, but rather, they tend to undermine these values in ways that allow them to go about their business without being cast loose from social networks they may come to rely on at sometime. This means that while rumours and gossip may persist about a person and act as a social sanctioning mechanism, a woman labelled as fast or loose is unlikely to be socially cut off from interactions with other people as long as they draw upon a repertoire of relationship-making interactions, such as respect for one's elders and men, and reciprocity.

The key embodied lesson of the initiation rite that women who underwent it were expected to take away, was identified by Richards (1956) and reiterated by Moore (1999), was that of cleverness. Women were expected to be clever in how they negotiated a space for economic independence, a place for leisure and in their search for harmony or love. This, as in their livelihood activities, necessitated an improvisational approach to the performance of gender. Gender identity not as a static given, but as Moore

(1986) and Butler (1993) argue, is the enactment of recurring practices that are largely unconscious, are bodily, and in their everydayness tend to be inscribed as natural. This process of inscription, as a reiterative performance of what Butler calls the 'doing' of gender, constitutes a temporal condition of the subject. As such, she argues, the gendered subject is not a stable identity, but rather is unstable (1993, p95). It is this instability of the gendered subject that I argue provides the gap for the 'cleverness' to subvert the dominant narratives of the gendered expectations of domesticity represented in the symbolic ideals of either the traditional or Western ideal of family and relationships.

Copperbelt residents' engagements with these ideals were not a movement from one ideal to another, but rather, as Moore argued regarding people's interactions with the symbolisation across different bodies of knowledge, comprised the creation of homologies "between different levels of experience and different domains of life". As such, they were not "over-determining" (Moore, 1999, p15). This means that, "oppositions and symbolic principles are invoked, brought into play, but never resolved, never finalised" and that "there is only processual movement through them" (Moore, 1999, p15). The idealisations of the 'traditional' or 'modern' woman, as presented in the popular sphere, operate in the lived world for Copperbelt residents and urban Zambians like a symbolic template from which from multiple meaning are invoked, and in this way they work as Moore has argued like "technological systems" with which people engage (Moore, 1999, p22-23). Thus, the idealisation of a gendered identity is not fixed, but may be open to contestation where Moore says, "actors seek to freeze process and impose particular interpretations" (Moore, 1999,p15).

These processes, as reflected in the concerns of the previous chapter on women's involvement in the informal copper business, and here in their determination for economic independence, shows that Copperbelt women's elaboration of gendered identities were not detached from the materiality of their environments. Their growing importance in the support of their families and their presence in wider spheres of economic activity, albeit still

largely informal, was firmly, to use Edward Casey's (1987) term, "im-  
placing" them in the landscape, making the performance of gender on the  
Copperbelt not only discursive, but also material in its inscription and thus  
the characterisation of the environment.

However, this goes beyond inscription, as within the material and the  
discursive in the making and 'doing' of gender was also the emotive  
dimension, that pointed to an affective realm that was influenced by the  
variability, fluidity and contrariness in domestic expectations and social  
relations. These were in the aspiration expressed in Idess's desire to have  
someone to look after her; the need of a space for pleasure in Susan's  
complaints in her inability to attend kitchen parties; the clever plays of Mrs  
Phiri to maintain harmony and financial security in her household; and the  
social critique of Beauty's relationship with Craig as mercenary and devoid  
of love (as hinted in the gossip of her alleged infidelity with another man).  
Amidst the emotions expressed explicitly and implicitly was the awareness  
of the need to maintain social proprieties. This is elucidated in David's  
case, played out as a tension between in his desire to enjoy female  
companionship without the inhibiting stricture of his interpretation of  
marriage as represented in the symbolism of the customary or traditional.

The concern with proprieties was not predicated on a static structure of  
embodied social norms, but rather was relational to the wider environment  
in a way that becomes clearer in Chapter Six where I explore how people  
coped with the hardship and precariousness of life on the Copperbelt. In the  
next chapter, by drawing on popular music, I show how the body, emotion  
and environment are 'interwoven' through the rhythms that make the  
reiterative process of life. By pointing to this weave, that I prefer to imagine  
as the waves that interact through the medium of a place, the contestation of  
the interpretations of gender identities and practice, in my view, do not lie  
within a body as a structure of learned norms, nor only out there as abstract  
values, but rather, are enacted interactionally across all the spheres of  
phenomenological engagement, the body, emotion and environment, and  
within the rhythms of everyday lived experience. In this way, the problems

in marriage and relationships that Copperbelt residents identify as a failure to adequately interpret the customary and Western ideal of marriage reflect not disparity, but dissonance in the rhythms of the reiterative doing of gender.



## Chapter Six

### “Topping Up”: Life Amidst Hardship and Death on the Copperbelt

In the previous chapter I gave insight into the variations of the Copperbelt ‘home front’, and how women in particular are managing expectations of domesticity in an economy that had long been dominated by male work in the mines. In this chapter, I cast a lens on the experience of young people, and particularly on how they try to maintain a hopeful stance on a future that is mired by hardship and death. I argue, just as I have in Chapter Five, that it is important to examine the intersubjective experiences that are both readily visible and invisible in exploring how life in such contexts is conceptualised.

#### Introduction

The contraction of the benevolence of family patrons who had supported extended family members by extension of the benefits such as education and health, largely provided for free by the mines and the state, as well as the fear of falling into extreme poverty and the desire ‘to arrive’ – *ukufika* - in the consumerist world have led to many young people moving beyond the former securities of the extended kin system<sup>108</sup> to seek opportunities for themselves. This has seen many young people in addition to women entering the informal economy. For women, it has largely been to provide ‘food for the pot’ (Hansen 1996, p80); while for young men, many of whom do not live in independent households but with relatives, it has been driven

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<sup>108</sup> In a survey I conducted in August 2009 within the low density suburb in Luanshya which was the focus of my research, out of the 100 households surveyed only 20 could be described as nuclear, the other 80 included extended family members who comprised nieces, nephews, grandchildren and mainly mothers in law. Of the extended families, I observed in Luanshya, as Hansen had noted in her longitudinal study of everyday life in Mtendere from the 1970s to early 1990s, extended kin in urban households did much unpaid work (1996, p.101). In comparison to the period that Hansen carried out her study, this relationship seems to have become more exploitative, with little of the previous era benefits of clothes, toiletries, and education.

not only by a need to contribute, but also a strong desire for some personal autonomy - *ukwi monela* 'to see for yourself' or 'to fend for yourself' as it is locally known - outside the control of 'aunties and uncles'. This loosening of ties has also gone hand in hand with a reworking of moralities, *sebanya wikute* ('get embarrassed but get full'). As I described earlier in the thesis, this phrase covered the range of strategies to get by that included 'theft', begging and taking up any economic activity that had potential to harm or create social embarrassment amongst one's relations, for example in illegal copper mining<sup>109</sup> and transactional sex.<sup>110</sup> Undermining these strategies was the heavy presence of death that directly and indirectly correlated to precarious economic activity and changed circumstance.

This chapter is not a descriptive account of death and funerals on the Copperbelt. Rather, like Monisha Bajaj's (2008) description of how school-going youths in Zambia encounter HIV/AIDS as an ongoing process in making sense of death within everyday experiences, I address the notion of life when death abounds. Most of my fieldwork activities had involved following people as they went about trying to make a living, a lot of it labour intensive. Through these activities, the body had emerged as a thing over which people had little control, but which they used like a vehicle through skilful practice to try and find the paths from which the possibilities to extend its journey would emerge. The pitfalls, like potholes along these paths, damaged the body of the vehicle leaving it to the skilful improvisation of the driver to keep on and their willingness to 'top up' on her/his life. I use vehicular metaphors, often used in Zambian popular music and language, as a way of describing the anxieties of Copperbelt residents. This form of expression was not uncommon in the central African region in people's expressions of colonial anxiety (see White 1993).

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<sup>109</sup> For example eight illegal copper miners died at Chambeshi Metals Mine in Kitwe when a tunnel they were working in collapsed, *Times of Zambia* 11 June 2009.

<sup>110</sup> The HIV/AIDS statistics on the Copperbelt are some of the highest in the country at 17 per cent of the region population overall, after Central Province 17.5 per cent and Lusaka Province the highest at 20.8 per cent (CSO 2007:231).

In this context, life in Zambia is increasingly conceptualised as a precarious journey, one that could come to a halt anytime. Death in Zambia had become an inescapable experience of the everyday and woven into the social fabric of life on the Copperbelt. It was in the sounds of mourning that one heard frequently in the night and the everyday discussions of illness. It was in the *chitenges* (wrap clothes) that many women carried in their bags in readiness to attend a neighbour or work colleague's funeral; and in the living room suites of chairs set around the dying embers of a fire out in a front yard. It was also in the sheets of paper passed around the passenger of a bus for monetary contributions by a young boy or girl who had been orphaned. No one was untouched by it. At the Copperbelt University where I had worked between the years 2005 and 2008, it had almost seemed like there was a funeral every other week, of either staff or members of their families. Statistics confirm this grim picture. The Central Statistical Office (CSO) 2006 Living Conditions Monitoring Survey (LCMS) recorded that twenty-seven per cent of the households surveyed on the Copperbelt had experienced one death of someone aged between thirty and forty-four years in the twelve months prior to the survey being conducted. The leading cause of death, 19.8 per cent of all deaths recorded, was fever/malaria, a disease that in the Copperbelt town of Luanshya had been well controlled by 1931 following the beginning of commercial copper mining in the late 1920s (Schumaker 2008). Gleaning from the number of young people under the age of 18 who lost their fathers, from the CSO's 2007 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS), 8.4 per cent on the Copperbelt, the majority of the population dying within productive work age are men (2007:300). Of this age group 1.9 per cent of respondents recorded having lost their mothers, with 4.4 per cent having both parents dead (CSO 2007:300). These figures matched with what I found. During my fieldwork in Luanshya, I had observed that many of those who were having a harder time making a living, and who were adopting precarious livelihoods, were women, children and youth (See Chapter Four). For these groups, and in the general social scene of the Copperbelt, death was rarely explicitly discussed, but very much like John Lwanda (2003) writing on HIV/AIDS, health and

sexuality in Malawi, notes, discourses of death were to be found in the popular scene.

The fact that there is little of philosophical writing in Zambia does not mean that the place for thinking models and theorising about death and life in Zambia do not exist. This place is indeed everywhere. Fiona Ross writing of a post-apartheid community in South Africa noted that the residents had innovated ways to speaking indirectly of their difficult experiences of HIV and suffering (2010, p183). In Zambia, too, this creativity was to be found in popular culture, music, and drama and in the general conversational spheres of public life such as public transport, bars, kitchen parties and bloggers. A number of academics writing on similar places in southern central Africa such as Malawi and Zimbabwe and on Zambia itself have drawn attention to the importance of taking the nearer theoretical step that would be in the very places they study. For example Bawa Yamba (1997, p218) writing on cosmologies of turmoil and death and HIV/AIDS in a rural setting in Zambia argues that it is important to think through and take seriously discourses that seek to make sense of life and hardship in place, before making the analytical leap to a structural battle opposing modernity, colonialism or globalisation. Other work such as Maurice Vambe's (2008) study of popular music and death in Zimbabwe and Filip de Boeck's film titled *Cemetery State*, made in 2010, highlight that the analysis of place goes beyond text and discourse, and that the performative, in rhythm, dance and sound pitch are entangled and inseparable from the activity of living and theorising life. In Yamba's (1997) study, it was through the narration of various people's stories following the invitation of a witch-finder to a village in Chiawa whose divinatory method resulted in several deaths and local power struggles. John Lwanda's (2003) study, on the other hand, explored the perception of secrecy on HIV/AIDS discourse in Malawi. Lwanda found that rather than looking to the official discourse on HIV/AIDS, which implied an invisibility on the subject, one had to look to oral discourses, in particular popular music and vernacular language that, he argues, allowed for greater flexibility in the creation of meaning for words than English, the business language, which is seen as more utilitarian. It is

from these studies that I draw to talk about how Zambians theorise their lives amidst hardship and uncertainty.

### **We are suffering**

A common response to the greeting *mulishani* (how are you?) from the many young men who hang around the bus stations trying to make a living was usually *twa chula ba sister* (“we are suffering, sister”), *ya, tulekosa* (“ah, we are getting strong”) or just *fili bad* (“things are bad”). Suffering was not a temporal state, it meant a ‘trying’<sup>111</sup> life. This was a state that many Copperbelt residents and indeed many Zambians lived in. In illness and on the cusp of death, it meant a trip to the hospital as a last option, because of a lack of money to pay for consultation or medication. It meant finding food to prepare meals for the patient admitted to hospital and sitting by a sick relative’s bed all night to feed, bathe, change bedpans because of the limited number of nursing staff in the low-cost hospital wards (McPake et al. 2004, p14). It also meant working even when very ill, as I found in August 2008 with John, one of the few adult males working illegally on a copper dumpsite in Luanshya. He was clearly weak, having just been put on treatment for tuberculosis. In conversations with my informants many struggled to articulate an optimistic future. This sense of a less than hopeful future was well captured in the title of Miles Larmer’s (2004) article ‘If we are still here next year’ on the mine workers’ union in Luanshya and on the difficulty of carrying out research amongst people experiencing great difficulty. James Ferguson, writing on young Zambian intelligentsia’s musings of a newly market orientated, and democratising Zambia on an online magazine, also noted that the writers toward the end of the brief lifespan<sup>112</sup> of the online magazine increasingly struggled to imagine a hopeful future for the country (Ferguson 2006, p147). The experience of life in the present was often articulated as a struggle or a life of suffering.

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<sup>111</sup> Trying here meant in the sense of taxing, demanding, difficult, tough, hard, pressured, frustrating, fraught, arduous, gruelling, tiring ... or simply hellish, New Oxford American Dictionary, 2005.

<sup>112</sup> Main web activity from 1999 to 2003, archive found at [http://wayback.archive.org/web/\\*/http://www.chrysalis.co.zm](http://wayback.archive.org/web/*/http://www.chrysalis.co.zm)

Ross writing on life, illness and death in a post-apartheid community in South Africa argues that even in the speaking of illness, words often do not convey the ‘full weight of experience’ that may be transferred into the ‘body of another’ (2010, p186). This view, if we are to draw from Devisch’s (1993) work on healing cults with the Yaka in the Congo, sees illness, and in turn suffering, not just as something going functionally wrong, but as a dissonance in the entanglement of relationships and the multitude of things that sustain them, that include the social, spiritual and material (1993, p17). It is within this view that one sees that the transposition of a discourse of illness and suffering to the popular realm, such as music and dance is not only about its articulation, but also about healing. Devisch in his work on healing amongst the Yaka, argues that, ‘rhythm, dance and melody give the body over to the sense and the life world. They form a primary source of healing devices or crafts. Healing originates in rhythm that intertwines with intimate fellow feeling’ (1993, p259). In addition, that ‘dancing seeks to regenerate, re-empower and re-order the lifeworld’<sup>113</sup> (Devisch 1993, p72). My argument here is that it is through the popular scene of music and dance that one gets the experience of life amidst hardship in Zambia. Not as a perception of people having given up and having no future, but as a rhythm that ties the common difficult experiences of trying to earn a living, and one that urges people to ‘take out their strength’ (Dalisoul 2009) and go on into an uncertain future.

### **We try**

Most times we are running  
But today we still have to find  
Those with luck build houses,  
And money to sell cigarettes

But why,  
Us every single day we try  
Everything we do turns bad

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<sup>113</sup> By lifeworld, Devisch connotes a phenomenological experience of the world.

Suffering every single day we cry  
But we try

Oh no, I do not want to look  
I just want to close my eyes  
My soul-life suffers

As in the lyrics above of Petersen's song *Oh No* (2005) trying was evident everywhere I looked on the Copperbelt town of Luanshya where I did most of my fieldwork. Mr Mubita, with his backyard 'experiments' and 'pilots', a laboratory of agricultural experimentation presented in Chapter Three. There was Mr Chilufya who after two failed attempts to establish a fish farm waited an extra year to see if modification to the lining of the pond would make a difference to how much water seeped from the pond. Then there was single mother, Jane, who kept looking for new contacts within the mines to gain leverage into the male-dominated and network-based mine-supply business. Aaron, who after the chickens he was rearing died from disease because he could not afford the medicated chicken feed on the market, took to making his chickens drink aloe-vera as an alternative remedy. 'Besides,' he said, 'maybe doing away with these chemicals will make us live longer'. Then there was my neighbour who kept trying to find reasons for me to cut the trees in my backyard, not specifying why he wanted me to do so, until I discovered that he wanted to fire the bricks he was moulding in his backyard.

It became clear during the course of my fieldwork that a notion of agency which presupposed that a neat line of intention and action would not work.<sup>114</sup> Many of my informants were aware of this. Many of the activities that Copperbelt residents engaged in were trying, that is, they were frustrating, demanding and difficult, and required numerous attempts. Repetition and trying new combinations, what was referred to as *ukusakanya* – a creative mixing of things (the tangible and intangible),

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<sup>114</sup> A processual approach to agency that allows for accounting for the generative movement of life, that in nature never results in exactly the same product even within the same species puts paid to the idea of neat casual links (see Oyama 2000; Ingold 2011).

became commonplace. The practice of making a living in this context of uncertainty took on an experimental nature in the way in which livelihood was sought. As one informant in Luanshya told me, ‘you can’t plan life in these conditions’ (See Chapter Two), referring to how he was looking after his late daughter’s child, and two young girls from his wife’s side of the family, all orphans. The implication was that if at some time in the pre-privatisation past of the mine one could plan for a future, that time had gone. It was also in the notion that people found it increasingly difficult to establish stable patterns. As one news item quoted on the loss of copper jobs that ensued following the global economic crisis of 2008: “Life is very hard. I have to pay bills and rentals. I am living like I don’t know what tomorrow will bring, as if I was not employed. My children have been sent back from school [because I cannot pay the fees].”<sup>115</sup>

The most stable thing I found in my interaction with Copperbelt residents was their memories of the past. Many hungered for the good old days.

The past was not as David Lowenthal argues a ‘foreign country’ (1985). For Copperbelt residents the past was in the lived-in remnants of the town’s dilapidated infrastructure and in the incongruity of a well-spoken and obviously highly-skilled person trapped in an emaciated body draped in tatty clothes. As an editorial in *The Post* newspaper highlighted:

Luanshya is in crisis and deserves serious government attention. It is very difficult for workers, retrenched or otherwise, to go for more than six months without any source of income. Workers are not like peasants who can survive on nature – roots. Workers depend on wages and without that they are literally condemned to death.<sup>116</sup>

It was not just wages that the mines had provided. Mr Mubita, and other former mine workers told me how the mines had provided milk and large

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<sup>115</sup> ‘Copper Loses its Shine and Copperbelt its Jobs’, *Africa News* 20 February 2009.

<sup>116</sup> ‘Luanshya in Crisis’ *The Post Zambia* 1 October 2002.

buns for food at work, and how medical check-ups for chest problems that were concomitant with working in mines were regular. The end of these facilities, especially for the few who went on to get jobs in the newly privatised mines,<sup>117</sup> had a negative effect on their health. They talk about how their entertainment was taken care of in the recreational sports offered by the mines and the social clubs that not only catered for employees but their families too. Mr Mubita and other Copperbelt residents pointed out to me in various ways, how the absence of these benefits in the present had a negative somaesthetic<sup>118</sup> on their bodies. Lucky Zulu, a Luanshya-born artist, told me of how, when his brother could no longer afford to buy Mosi Lager at the mine club he used to frequent before being laid off from the mines, he took to drinking cheaper illicit brews. This, he informed me, eventually damaged his brother's liver and ultimately resulted in his death. The lack of safe recreational facilities, such as those that had been provided by the mines was blamed for risky social behaviours. At the time of my research, the former squash club had become a nightclub and drinking place frequented by adults, but also underage children. The cinema had become a Pentecostal church, the tennis club's courts had become overgrown by an itchy weed and its clubhouse catered for a drinking crowd.

An overwhelming majority of the residents of Luanshya that I talked to during the research period blamed the withdrawal of the mines, not only for the physical dilapidation of the town, but also for the degradation of their society as a whole. This was pointed out to me in the way that young people 'loitered' in the neighbourhood at night rather than during the day, their drunkenness and the stories of violent incidents that residents claimed were previously unheard of in the town's mining heyday. In some of these stories, physical and social degradation merged to highlight the loss of

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<sup>117</sup> The Luanshya mines had been the first to be sold in the privatisation of the state mining conglomerate the ZCCM. They were first sold to the Binani Group in 1997, to be named RAMCOZ. RAMCOZ was liquidated in 2000. In 2004 the Luanshya mines were taken over by JW and Enya, a Swiss registered company; this went under care and maintenance at the end of 2008, and was eventually bought by NFC Africa, a Chinese company.

<sup>118</sup> Somaesthetic is a term coined by Richard Schusterman (2000) to refer to the aesthetic cultivation of the body. In this case I use it to refer to the negative aesthetic cultivation of the body. The term aesthetic is used in its broader definition as the experiential sense of life or being.

order. In one account, I was told how a former ZCCM employee had blown himself and the house he had been instructed by the courts to share with his estranged wife up with explosives pilfered from the mines. Another was a story of a crazed ex-boyfriend who murdered his ex-girlfriend after breaking into her parents' home through a door, which, my informant pointed out, like many others I had observed in the mine suburbs, was so weathered by a lack of maintenance it could easily be kicked in. In this account, a contrast was made between the girl, who in attempting to maintain her virtue by using both her hands to prevent a wrap she was wearing from slipping in front of her father who had come to help her, and that of her boyfriend, who took advantage of this momentary defencelessness to stab her.

In these tragic stories the integrity of the body is affected by changed social and material circumstance. If we are to draw from Richard Schusterman (2000), and look at the corporeality of life, not just as body and mind, but body in mind and mind in body, this creates an understanding of nostalgia and trauma not as a shadowy fragment of mind, but one that is part of a body shaped by changed circumstance. The big fear for parents was that this changed situation, as one pointed out in the absence of streetlights, was that 'children could do whatever they wanted'. For young people it was not just about doing what one wanted, but also about the difficulty at avoiding the dangers that lay in life. As Peter, a 17-year-old praise singer and dancer I met practicing for a nativity play, mused on the narrative for a short film he planned to produce which told a story based on a young woman who is raped by her teacher and infected her with HIV: 'corruption is everywhere even for those that try to lead a God-filled life, they get dribbled (literally their ball taken away from them)'.

This loss of control, an inability to steer one's life was underlain with an anxiety about the possibility of seeing *Another Day*, the title track of the popular Zambian musician K'Millian (2006). This experience for Copperbelt residents was akin to a generalised fear of a kind that Linda Green would describe as a 'chronic condition' that thrived on uncertainty

(1994, p230) and of the kind that Danny sings in the lyrics of in his song *Kaya*, 'I don't know' (2005):

The friends I grew up with, I do not see, even that one.  
When I ask about this one, and ask about that one.  
They are all finished, finished and overturned.  
It gives me great fear when I look into my future.  
Will I see this coming year?  
I don't know.

Popular Copperbelt musicians Macky 2 and Dandy Krazy describe this uncertainty as the difficulty in steering one's life. They sing, *life yandi ila nshupa unkwesha imwee ndafulungana* ('my life gives me difficulty driving') in their song *Life Yandi* (2010). In steering their lives, the musicians are also referring to the mobility described by Katherine Gough writing on youth in Lusaka as the 'moving around' that should be done in order to find a job (2008, p248). Another Copperbelt musician, DY2K, describes it as a fear of the loss of control in the lyrics of the song *Nyamuka, Nyamuka* 'Get up, Get up' (2009):

My heart rises and rises over things I did not want.  
Over things I did not want.  
My eyes are looking, looking at things I did not want.  
Over things I did not want.  
My hands are touching, touching.  
Making me touch things I did not want them.  
Over things I did not want.

My heart that likes Marias<sup>119</sup>  
It has brought me troubles my dear.  
Now look I stay with fear.  
Now what I am to do?

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<sup>119</sup> A common expression used to describe a funeral hearse, referred in this context as an attractive woman who is 'death walking', an elliptical way to talking of an attractive woman who may be HIV positive.

A common response to addressing uncertainty and the awareness of not being in control was readily discernable in the public in the practice of praying. Often before the embarkation of a long distance bus journey on public transport, a 'briefcase' clergyman would pray with the passengers and 'pledge' their lives into 'God's hands'. Prayer was also in other public spaces; it was in the hospitals as visitors prayed loudly by a patient's bedside; and in the sight of heads bowed quietly in prayer at a fast-food joint before partaking in a meal of chicken and chips.

Another way in which many young people dealt with anxiety was in the oblivion to be found in *tujilijili*, little packets of lethally high alcohol content priced the same as lollipops. *Tujilijili* were to be found in the very same places that sweets were sold, the bus stations and markets, where it was not uncommon to see young men breaking out in dance to the songs recounted in this article as they blared over a cacophony of loud speakers. Both of these activities, prayer and the drinking, implied a fatalist attitude to life, one where agency, the intentional ability to influence outcome was not in the hands of the subject, but lay beyond them.

### **Senseless death**

I had not heard from Lackson Mwale, one of my key informants in Luanshya, for several days after having arranged for him to introduce me to a metal fabricator for some work I was doing. I called his wife Rosemary who told me that he had travelled to see his brother who had been involved in a work accident in the north-western region of the country. When I caught up with him a few weeks later, he told me in great grief and frustration that his brother had died. He recounted the events leading up to his brother's death. On having travelled to see his brother, who had been injured in a work accident up in north-western province, apparently as a result of an epileptic incident, he decided to take him to a generally well-run mission hospital in the region. Up to then, his brother had been recovering in a room he was renting in the area and moving in and out of consciousness. Lackson described how at the hospital his brother had been

placed on a ventilator to aid his breathing and had been making a good recovery. He also told me how he decided, having seen the rough conditions his brother was living in, and the danger manual labour posed for an epileptic, that when his brother recovered fully, he would take him to stay with him in Luanshya where he need not engage in physical labour. It was unfortunately not to be so, because one night as Lackson sat by his brother's bedside, there was a power blackout. The ventilator that was aiding his brother's breathing shut down. Lackson described how in panic he called a nurse for help as he watched his brother struggling to breathe, and how the nurse could do little to help other than hope that the hospital's back-up power generator kicked in on time. It did not, and his brother died.

Deaths such as these were not uncommon. They highlighted for many a nation that had "lost the plot". Elias Chipimo, a presidential runner in Zambia's 2011 tripartite elections, entered politics after witnessing the ineptitude of the country's accident emergency services and the sorry state of health facilities following a car accident that had claimed his mother's life and seriously injured his father (Chipimo 2010, p9–10). The agenda of the political party Chipimo formed, the National Restoration Party (NAREP) was to rebuild a nation that, in the eyes of many Zambians, had gone renegade on the promise of the early independence period.<sup>120</sup>

Writers to the editor of the main independent newspaper, *The Post*, described what they saw as the country's malaise in a number of letters. In one, titled 'Zambia: A nation of defeat and hopelessness',<sup>121</sup> the author says:

Living in this country is scary and depressing. It is like living in a house where no one is working but somehow you are managing to pay the rent and utility bills. Grace of God? I don't think so. It's just over Kaponya culture.

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<sup>120</sup> The years following independence in 1964 to the mid-1970s are considered the most prosperous.

<sup>121</sup> *The Post Zambia* 1 March 2010.

The editor, in response to this letter, offers a view on what was ailing the country, arguing that:

It would have been better if our country was on autopilot. We say this because the autopilot machine on a plane is able to steer the aircraft in the right direction. What we have is not a government running on autopilot, it is a government in free-fall. In fact, if it was a fighter jet, one would be excused for suspecting that the pilots had ejected and were allowing the plane to fall.<sup>122</sup>

While these two letters paint a fatalistic picture of a country in ‘free fall’, the insertion that this is due to ‘Kaponya culture’ in the first letter indicates that there is more happening that points to an inventive unplanned striving for survival embodied in the character of the *Kaponya*.

The chaotic and disorderly life in Zambia is represented for many in the persona of the *Kaponya*. These are the young male call boys, bus conductors, street traders who run the country, many agree efficiently, albeit in a way that is hard to place in a linear sequence of activity. Hazel Zulu, writing in the state national newspaper, *The Times of Zambia*, provides a decent description of what the *Kaponya* does, she says:

I was driving into town two months ago when I got caught up in the capital city traffic jam. All the parking spaces were full to capacity. I was in a state of panic and confusion when suddenly one *Kaponya* came to my rescue. *Apa ba sister* (here my sister), he showed me a parking slot that he had ‘reserved’ for anyone who was ready to give him some ‘lunch’ money.<sup>123</sup>

The *Kaponya* are the young persons who are perceptive to the tiny gaps that offer an opportunity to make a living on the margins. They are stylised by musicians such as Dandy Krazy for the manner in which they talk, an unfiltered straight talk, usually in the slang of Copperbelt’s lingua franca,

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<sup>122</sup> ‘A Nation in Hopelessness’ *The Post Zambia* 9 April 2010.

<sup>123</sup> *Times of Zambia*.

Bemba. They are also the embodiment of an uncertain livelihoods and the staving off of hunger that Dandy Krazy (2010) sings in the song *Tubombela Akabwali* 'We work for an nshima'.<sup>124</sup>

### Trying amidst hunger

The *Times of Zambia*<sup>125</sup> in a story titled 'Man gets 20 years for murder', reported on two brothers, the children of a Luanshya mineworker who had been laid off and imprisoned for murdering a man who had refused to share his *nshima*. Cases of murder involving food often made the home-news section of the *Times of Zambia*<sup>126</sup> and in these, hunger was, just as Filip de Boeck had studied amongst the Aluund in Zaire, seen as an overturning of trans-corporeal relations of reciprocity and conviviality around food (1994, p257). When stories such as those reported in the *Times of Zambia* were recounted, people tended to express their dismay over them by talking about how things had gone mad *ifunti fya li pena* or how things were turned upside down *fyali pendamuka*. As in Chapter Three, they also offered an opportunity for people to talk about how some people were doing better than others.

The privatisation of ZCCM had been preceded by the development of stark inequities amongst Copperbelt residents, especially former mine employees who had enjoyed a wide range of social benefits across all ranks. Those perceived as doing well felt under pressure to be generous to less well-off neighbours. The Phiris, for example, a relatively comfortably well-off family in Luanshya described earlier, told me how, during the worst periods that followed the sale of the mines, they had taken to having their meals in secret and outside regular hours to avoid having to share with neighbours who tended to drop by at meal times. An inability to share food was frowned upon. I was informed that a man who had kept pigs in the backyard

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<sup>124</sup> *Nshima* is a stiff maize meal porridge, a staple of Zambian meals.

<sup>125</sup> 7 October 2009.

<sup>126</sup> *Times of Zambia*: 'Woman Nabbed for Murder of Hubby' 20 March 2007; 'Robber Raid Ndola Filling Station' 18 August 2009; 'Man Gets Three Years for Manslaughter' 28 February 2009; 'Wife Killer Goes in for Four and a Half Years' 16 March 2010.

of his home in a low-density former mining suburb in Luanshya had been reported to the local authorities for creating a public health nuisance. He was reported not for the slaughter of pigs in his backyard, but allegedly for not having shared the pork with his neighbours. Apart from of the immorality of not sharing food, its absence experienced as hunger has often been used in Zambian political rallying, for example Dandy Krazy's song *Tubombela Akabwali* (2010). The music video to this song offers snapshots to the pragmatic reality of youth trying a life amidst hardship. Dandy Krazy draws on the imagery of those employed in the informal sector, such as marketeers, public transport bus conductors, window cleaners, stone crushers and shoe menders. Lyrically, Dandy Krazy draws on the experience of hunger, highlighting the corporeality of the experience of working for little:

We work for *akabwali*  
We get paid on Sunday only a mealie meal *ata*  
Now, you are killing us  
You deflate our stomachs we suffer.

The children cry of hunger  
Mummy mummy my strength is finished, I am hungry  
Yesterday just *nshima*  
In the morning I 'sponged' porridge without salt  
Doesn't daddy keep some salt?  
Just that night he got paid

The use of the expression, "we only work for an *nshima*", ties historical experiences of revolt against the state and employers, such as in the food riots that began on the Copperbelt in 1986 and 1990. Opposition politicians have also used the affective and corporeal experience of hunger as a rallying call for revolt. Zambian artist Cullen Chisha's (also known as 2wice) song *Tomato Balunda* 'Tomato is expensive' (2000) became a rallying song for those opposed to the post-privatisation President Chiluba standing for an unconstitutional third term in office in 2001. The same song

appeared on a programme for campaign songs for the Patriotic Front (PF), which enjoyed popular support, especially among youth on the Copperbelt and Lusaka prior to the 2008 presidential by-elections. In their campaign the PF, which eventually won the 2011 national elections, unseating the Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) who had been in power since 1991, poached Dandy Krazy's song *Donchi Kubeba* 'Don't tell them' (2011). The PF used it to imply that their supporters, mainly poor young urban youth, could receive handouts that normally included clothes, food, cash and alcohol freely from the MMD, but kept silent on *donchi kubeba*, who they would vote for.

### **Youth and fatalism**

'Young people need to be active' was a comment made in reference to the dilapidation of the sports centre. Church-going children were seen as worryingly secretive, while those going to bars were viewed by an older generation as nihilistic. For young people themselves, these activities were better than 'doing nothing at home'. They were also acutely aware of their own fragility. As one young man put it, "everyone wants to live, but it is difficult, things are overturned". Metaphor is often used by youth, as previously noted by Bajaj to describe the precarious and 'random' nature of life usually in relation to contraction of HIV/AIDS (2008, p321). Youth also say often with irony that 'to stay/live' these days, one had to be a *tamanga* (a runner), be quick and alert. This alertness, quickness, sits in contrast to the miner, who did not need to 'run after his life', but go through the routine of going to work, and wait for a salary at the end of the month. As one shopkeeper in Luanshya told me:

The miners should not have been given their benefits all in one go; they did not know what to do with the money. It should have been given in instalments, like a salary, what they were used to. Instead, they would go to the bank and demand for their money whenever they wanted. When they would come into my shop, spend big with their children, holding two sausages in each hand ... now I see

them, no longer who they were, I feel very sad for them, some even come to ask me for some bread, saying I spent a lot of money in your shop.

Apart from poorly managing their finances, I heard during fieldwork how miners' families had broken down, with parents turning a blind eye to their children's activities. One former miner told me how he had chastised the daughter of one of his former colleagues whom he had found soliciting for money in a bar.

My own sense initially and the view of my adult informants in Luanshya was that overall young people seemed bent on a trajectory of destruction. This view is not uncommon to sociological writing on youth in Africa (Leclerc-Madlala 1997; Mufune 2000; Meyer-Weitz 2005; Bajaj 2008; Pugh 2010). It presumes that young people living in difficult economic circumstances had a death wish and mindlessly lived a hedonistic lifestyle of drink, multiple sexual partners – activities that they should clearly know would lead to an early grave. In addition, this view assumed that youth in these situations passively let go, giving in to an inertia that allowed for exploitative situations and a failure to take responsibility. These assumptions have fuelled the development of projects in behavioural change and empowerment, the first to curb what is seen as a death drive, and the latter to animate to take responsibility. These discourses are gendered, especially in HIV/AIDS campaigns that attempt to control men's excesses and shake women's docility. While these views may ring true, they paint a myopic picture, one that does not take into account the wider very visible empirical evidence, in how people, like the residents of the Copperbelt, try to sustain their lives through numerous economic activities. Despite the fact that many do not make it beyond the bread line everyday, even with failures such as the loss of goods through fire,<sup>127</sup> confiscation of goods by local authorities, clamping down on illegal trade and the

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<sup>127</sup> A fire at the biggest market on the Copperbelt, Chisokone Market in Kitwe breaks out almost every year.

demolition of housing and little shops,<sup>128</sup> security forces brutality against illegal copper mining (see Chapter Four) and the theft of crops, many do not give up. It is hard to see fatalism or passivity in these actions. It is also hard to perceive, for those who have spent anytime on the Copperbelt, or indeed in any other African city, in the energy and sounds of people carting trolleys of goods, pushing goods through bus windows in sweltering heat and rain, or in the images and stories of women who carry their sick children on their backs on foot, for the lack on transport money, or spend hours going house-to-house looking for a little piece work washing clothes. Popular Zambian musician Dalisoul, in his song *Shansa* (2009), captures this re-iteration of life in the song's lyrics:

Be optimistic, stick with the (wheel) barrow till you also find.  
Be optimistic, stay till you arrive.  
Take out your strength because it is the only thing the world wants.  
Don't be scared to go further.

For example a lizard will fall from a tin roof, but do it again!  
A thief will steal, get caught but when he comes out will do it again!  
Chisokone (market) will burn, people will cry but goods will return again!  
Don't leave good things to go by you, try again!

### **Sound and rhythm in trying**

By drawing on the resonant, in sound, evocative words, images and bodily movements, the social commentary on life in Zambia through music serves to provide a linking narrative on the experience of living. It is these reverberant experiences, the songs of political rallying, the jubilation of dance and the sounds of death through wailing that remind many Zambians, without the recourse to an explicit discourse of death, of the fragility of their lives. If we were to draw from Henri Lefebvre's and Catherine's Regulier's (1999) rhythmanalytical project, popular music in Zambia could be seen as channelling to make sense of what has become a highly

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<sup>128</sup> Much of this was carried out under the 'Keep Zambia Clean and Healthy' campaign launched in 2007 by the late country's president Levi Mwanawasa.

disruptive, disorderly rhythm of life that throws too many unpleasant surprises. In the morale-boosting songs, Zambian musicians, just as Judith Brown (2001) writes on the expansion of the possibilities in information technologies, urge people to keep on trying; to attempt not one but different paths to explore and open up the world. Contemporary Zambian music thus should be seen not only as an articulation of the experience of life, but also as metaphorical evocations to life, even in the context of death. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the celebratory funeral song *Bakalila* 'They will cry' (2007) by the artist Mozegater.

I first heard the music of Mozegater in a club in Kitwe as I saw a crowd galvanised to the dance floor to move in a parody of suffering. The club drew an intergenerational crowd, and I observed as young, old men and women in variation lifting their hands to their heads, and shaking them as one who had received terrible news would. They limped and clutched their stomachs, and at the chorus of the song wailed as one would at a funeral. The song, as I found out later in interviews with Mozegater, is his creative attempt to make 'noise', what he calls *Chuinda* music. It is a sound that combines the morale-boosting songs heard at sports events, known as *booste* and the sounds and speech narratives heard at funerals. The song evoked the experience of death for the living that was all around. It reminded me of an expression I had heard in explanation of the general tendency not to leave wills, *bushe ukailosha pa ku fwa* 'will you dream of yourself at your death'. In *Bakalila*, Mozegater sings:

They won't believe it, they will come crying  
Some, the gossips will come to see how thin I got  
Listen, the ones who care, crying 'come back and take me too'  
Myself, I am dead  
I am resting, its all quiet, and you busy crying

Oh, this child you cry of is gone today  
The children will be crying and looking sorrowful  
The child of life and air has gone today ...

*Iyelele iyelele* (wailing)

You should take me to the grave ...

Please don't stop me

You don't know how much I have suffered

When the time for death arrives in Zed

There is no rising from the dead

You cry Zambia, ama guys and ama girls, it is crying

Kitchen party, chachacha, weddings and all, in the clubs, no size

De Boeck, writing on Kinshasa, highlights that death in contexts of great uncertainty is often collapsed into the temporal experience of presence, as a space of not there, but of now (2005, p20–1). To make noise is to evoke feeling, and to displace the mourning of oneself not to some time in the future when you can't 'dream of yourself' because you are dead, but to the time of the living. Raising *ichimwela* 'boosting morale' or 'making vitality' and wailing linked birth, death, celebratory events, success and failure on the same continuum of life. Music, David Coplan argues, writing on Basotho migratory songs, boosts flagging morale and allows the poetic expression of situations of hardship in times of transition (2006, p226). In the Copperbelt context where the frequency of death was a constant reminder of the fragility of life, music, in its rhythmic sounds, added energy to the body seen as vulnerable to the vagaries of life. It also allowed for the articulation of unspoken fears. The often unspoken fear when someone close was admitted to hospital was whether or not they would come out alive. Complex conditions that required costly diagnostic tests were often not conducted. For residents on the Copperbelt this meant travelling to Lusaka to the state-run University Teaching Hospital where one could access specialist units and surgeons. Even then, tests were often not carried out because the facilities were either not operational or reagents for blood tests and other procedures were not in stock. Private health centres charged prohibitory costs for the same tests. As a result, failure to find out what was wrong in the biomedical sector led people to try out other remedies. This

ranged from traditional healers, to the country's burgeoning sector of alternative Chinese remedies.

### **Trying to live**

In health-seeking behaviours, the general experience for Copperbelt residents was one of frustration and ambiguity. This was especially so when families considered health-care costs. This often put them in the difficult position of having to use meagre earnings that would have been for food on tests and medication. In cases where it was unclear what was ailing a patient,<sup>129</sup> I observed elliptical talk that alluded to the idea that what actually ailed a patient was some undiscovered strain of HIV, especially in cases where the patient was emaciated. A typical scenario was that of orphaned 16-year-old Annie who died of a belatedly diagnosed heart condition. Annie had been staying with relatives of her father's on the Copperbelt, who had taken her in following the deaths of her father and later her mother. In 2008, when I got to know her she was always busy doing domestic chores in her uncle's household. Later some months before she died in 2009 she had seemed listless, and complained of tiredness. Her aunt and cousins put this down to laziness, and even voiced suspicions that she might be pregnant, even though it was apparent from the amount of time she spent on chores that she had little time for a social life. When her condition obviously became worse her aunt had taken her to the local clinic where they had run a malaria test, usually the first line of inquiry. The test, I was told, had come back negative, but they had put her on anti-malarials anyway. Her aunt had dropped in conversation that Annie's parents were taken 'by this disease that has come to finish us', the implication being that Annie might be HIV positive. A couple of weeks later, her aunt told me that she had gathered the courage to take her for an HIV test, and this too had come back negative. Meanwhile Annie had been getting weaker. Eventually an older sister of Annie's who had married and lived in another town

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<sup>129</sup> The general approach to diagnostics, recounted by the experiences of those who fell ill that I talked to during fieldwork, was that either one had malaria or was displaying symptoms of HIV infection.

insisted on taking her to Lusaka to see a specialist. The specialist, according to Annie's aunt, had diagnosed her with an enlarged heart. Annie died shortly after.

In the aftermath of Annie's death, rumours and suspicion of foul play began being directed at Annie's uncle whose small-scale business, like others in the neighbourhood, had begun to pick up due to increasing copper prices. He was accused of having sacrificed Annie to Satanists. Several of their neighbours argued that Annie's relatives on the mother's side of the family should have looked out for her and taken her to a diviner, which would have outed the culprit early on. Another said that they should have seen a Chinese doctor on the Copperbelt who was well known to treat heart conditions. The accusation was that the family should have explored various options. The extension of the temporal experience of life is expressed in songs like Petersen's *Musiye Atoping'e* 'Leave him/her to top up' (2008), lyrics that urge people to keep on trying to live, and literally 'top up' to extend their life:

On this earth there is plenty that kills us  
Death does not respect anyone  
Those who wait for handouts it stirs (literally twists)  
Taking those too who dither  
Over death, there is no one who has power  
We can hangout today,  
Tomorrow we are throwing you  
Water kills, and cars kill too  
Life kills, it has no spare tire  
When you get sick it is to look for remedies  
And stick with them till the last hour  
Just top up on your life, for long life.

Petersen's song and those of other Zambian musicians presented in this chapter direct us to thinking about life as a journeyed experimentation, in which one fills in along the way the possibilities of life.

## Summary

Life in places like the *Zambian Copperbelt* has been hard, for many mired with the experience of death. While *Copperbelt* residents describe their lives as that of suffering, there is also the hope that this suffering may end. This belief does not necessarily play out as a clear plan for a future, but as a precarious one. The possibilities of what the future may bring emerge from the environment and people's engagement within it and each other. This engagement cannot be predetermined and what *Zambian* popular music urges is for people to go on. Thus when the musician *Dalisoul*, sings "take out your strength, it is the only thing the world wants", he is not only talking about the movement of physical strength, but also the movement of feeling, a resonance that *Ingold* argues arises from "people's mutually attentive engagement, in shared contexts of practical activity" which he writes lies at the heart of sociality (*Ingold*, 2000, p196). Luck or bad luck are in this view not abstract concepts, but occurrences that resonate and impact the body, and the capabilities of people's engagement with the world. The awareness of the fragility of the body in this uncertain world has given way to morale-boosting narratives, like 'take out your strength, it is the only thing the world wants', raise *ichimwela* or 'make vitality'. This vitality, in the context of hunger, suffering and the depression of death is what sustains the energy of places of great physical and psychosocial stress. The energy lies in the affective realm and is perceived in music and dance rhythms that imbue and literally move the body. This means scholars must look beyond the daily struggle and dangerous behaviour of youth to the sounds that animate their lives.

## Conclusion

### Making life out of disorder

The future in the case of Copperbelt residents is not one that they can clearly map out or plan; it is one that unfolds uncertainly to the opportunities and possibilities as well as the constraints they encounter. *Twala mona inga twa fika* 'we shall see when we get there' is an apt expression that Copperbelt residents use to talk of future. For many, especially young people, speculation on what the future holds is too frightening, because the picture painted by formal analysis of the context is too grim. A short life, illness, unemployment and an inability for stable family life. To accept this fate, this map of the future, is to deny life. Life, or living does not go along one path; it is not, as Hallam and Ingold argued centripetal, but rather centrifugal, "seeking to cast wide" (2007, p13), and thus emanating from the bodys' movements and efforts to intermingle and entangle with those of others. To live life along a straight line in an uncertain and unpredictable environment is to court collision with death. Copperbelt residents learn to improvise, and to wander. By wander, I do not mean that Copperbelt residents are going through life aimlessly, but that rather, that they do not necessarily follow a fixed point. Their actions are not leisurely, they are effortful, tuned in to both hazards and opportunities. Their daily struggles to get by and or maybe make it, imply a willing, but one that does not imply direct causal outcomes. They try.

### Trying as agency beyond a plan

Bagozzi and Warshaw (1990) in a social psychological study of weightloss behaviour outlined what they called a theory of trying. A theory of trying according to Bagozzi and Warshaw is a conceptual map that seeks to anticipate the results of an individual's series of attempts towards a desired goal that is nonetheless difficult to achieve. An individuals' attitude, as well as their prior experiences, all contribute to what they observed in their study

in variations of outcome (Bagozzi and Warshaw, 1990). However, in the thesis I have argued the Copperbelt residents actions were contingent not only on an individual's attitudes or desires, but also by the affective resonances that went beyond the body of the individual and to the wider lived environment. Trying here lay not only with the individual subject but was in the intersubjective realm, that, as the previous chapter demonstrates, linked the affective resonances of hope and despair with the lived experiences of dwelling.

Copperbelt residents' actions in the world were not guided by a clear plan but rather by an illusory and fragmented perception of it. I have argued that getting to know what to do in an uncertain world involves an improvisory repetition of movements to order the partial understandings of it. Understanding this requires a phenomenological understanding of the environment and not just an abstract one. Such an understanding is akin to a person learning to stand, through a repetition of actions, such as bouncing to lever oneself of the ground, grabbing onto a table a chair – actions that are effortful and opportunistic in the search for aids in the vicinity. They may eventually get to stand. What is less clear in this example, in contrast to, say, someone learning to swim, is an awareness that there are wider media that in themselves are unstable, and less explicit but interacting with the practice of trying to stand. To go back to the example of the person learning to stand, a gust of wind that topples the chair, or makes the person fall back to the ground reveals happenings that may not be expected or readily perceived<sup>130</sup>. When Copperbelt residents had an idea or dream, they were aware that it was not possible to maintain its singularity as their life circumstances made this difficult. But this did not mean that they stopped trying or hoping to achieve something from it. The idea was more like a line cast wide, in the hope of something concrete taking hold. Such action requires responsiveness, a tuning in to one own's conscious and unconscious abilities, but also to what the environment affords. When Copperbelt residents spoke of the future and said, "we shall see when we

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<sup>130</sup> The gust of wind would be what Bohm (2002) refers to as the implicit order, and the explicit order that which can be readily perceived.

get there”, this view was based on the awareness that the environment too unfolds in variation, and that as such, one’s actions needed to be in tune with these changes. This view of action, an agency that is not based on clear intention, is not unique to the Copperbelt and is to be found in emergent writing on life in crisis such as Johnson-Hanks (2005) work in Cameroon. Johnson-Hanks (2005, p363) argues that in the context of uncertainty, it is the ability to seize opportunities rather than fulfillment of a prior intention that allows promising outcomes. Trying, from this perspective, thus goes beyond performative stylisation or positioning to engage body and environment in the process of doing.

### **Villagisation as manifestation of trying in place**

Copperbelt residents efforts leave traces of themselves within the environment they inhabit. Their attempts to make a living, find harmony and a rhythm or energy to life in hard times, as well as the multiple contestations they engage in culminate in both the visible and invisible efforts in the making of place. As such what has come to be known as “villagisation” reflects not only a representation of aspects of town resembling rural life, but more broadly a temporality in the continual becoming of place, affected by the changing rhythms of the everyday. It reflects an awareness of Copperbelt resident’s view of themselves and their actions in a changing world. In observations of the town becoming like the village, rather than seeing modes of life in the town and the village as separate, a borderlinking perspective (Devisch 2007, p107), linking the affective and conceptual world is useful in being able to reconcile what is seen and not seen in place and how they are connected (2007, p107).

Taking this view further to encompass the material entanglement of persons and their activities in place, borderlinking highlights how villagisation is intercorporeal in the awareness and cultivation of body habits and intersubjective in the moral discourses that link the ‘distant’ or invisible world of the village in town and in turn those from other places. In addition, villagisation connotes a pragmatic engagement of people and their world.

As I have illustrated throughout the thesis, Copperbelt residents live converged lifestyles that do not always settle well and reflect dissonances across various ideational modes of sociality. I have drawn from Lefebvre and Regulier (1999) to argue that the rhythm of life on the Copperbelt is no longer the attempts towards structured monotony that the ZCCM mining system tried to foster, but is wavering, perceived in the contingent character of those doing well and not so well. Villagisation is a manifestation of these unpredictable rhythms of life, reflecting the recombinant of effortful improvised attempts to make a life in a place that has lost a sense of order.

### **Improvisational livelihoods**

Even though Copperbelt residents explored a variety of livelihood options, most of these involved working with one's hands, such as in their agricultural activity in their backyards and on the outskirts of the town. A notion of self-sufficiency underpinned much of this activity; a need to fend for oneself. Distinctions in the relative success of persons working for themselves were visible, highlighting how well (or not) some residents were able to cope with the changed welfare situation on the Copperbelt. It was not only one's circumstances that indicated who was doing better, but also how skillfully a person was able to perceive and draw upon the social and material resources available, as well as negotiate moral boundaries. The skill employed in these livelihood-seeking activities was aimed at increasing knowledge and required a willingness to try, as was illustrated in Vincent and Mr Mubita's activities in building a lined well. Trying thus could be seen as a series of attempts towards activating opportunity. It is experimental and improvisory. However, as illustrated in Chapter Six, it is not detached from what the body can physically do, nor from the skills and tools one can employ. These are not limiting factors, as neither the body, nor skills or tools remain the same over time; they can be modified, or new combinations or energies in the case of an ill body can be found to allow the continued reiteration of doing something to earn a living. In this way improvisation, as that ability to follow the possibilities that open up in the course of going about life and making things, was characteristic of

Copperbelt residents' engagements with their social and physical landscapes. Improvisation directly relates to Ingold's notion of 'skillfull dwelling' that enfolds people in the movements of life and living. It is entangled with and complementary to the notion of trying – the hopeful going on with one's aspirations and dreams, even in the face of numerous challenges and constraints that tend to throw plans off-course.

### **Trespassing and negotiating social and moral boundaries**

Copperbelt residents perceive that the political economy of the region and the country has been 'overturned' like a pot of spilt milk, leaving bare a context where moral boundaries are flexible and negotiable, and where an illegal livelihood is less shameful than the experience of hunger. Through efforts to get by or get on, Copperbelt residents were opportunistic, taking advantage of places laid bare to exploitation by the weakened regulatory context that followed the reprivatisation of the mines. This way of going about is well illustrated in the modus operandi of the *Kaponya* (described earlier) who well illustrate Ingold's notion of the wayfarer or wanderer and highlight the performative basis of this way of seeking a living. Copperbelt resident's movements following deregulation became more like the *Kaponya*. In their seizing of the small gaps of livelihood opportunities, they tend to trespass, not only on private property (as was the case with the informal copper miners), but also on people's sensibilities of customary notions of respectability, while at the very same time offering possibility for life in a place of much uncertainty. I use the idea of the *Kaponya* to show what trying is as a dispositional attitude toward the world for Copperbelt residents, as simultaneously a reckless wander, an attempt to create chances, and at the same time to entreaty relations.

For example, when the *Kaponya* walks, they swagger as well as stagger, and when they speak, they affect a raspy slightly broken drawl, a performance that is akin to an intoxicated man. However, in their entreaties to sell a good or offer a service, they at the same time, perform suffering, drawing on the intersubjective morality of hunger, and a notion of

personhood whereby suffering is not individual but relational. Kathy Linn Guerts (2003) writing on cultural logics of the Anlo in Ghana noted that their notion of morality was sensorial, perceived both in movement and dispositional feeling and characterised in speech in onomatopoeia (2003, p189). There, a person walking *lugulugu* (or horsing around) indicated the possibility of becoming an “aimless irresponsible person” (Guerts, 2003, p189). There are striking similarities between this view of morality, and what in Bemba on the Copperbelt was referred to as *ukwenda enda*, or in Zambian English, to be *movious*, described as “moving around” (Gough, 2008). The *Kaponya* thus does not only display the capacity to trespass in his aimless, slightly reckless wander, but also, in the portrayal of suffering, draws on the morality that one should share to prevent the other from hunger. Both affects are sensorial. This, I argue, demonstrates that trying is not something that exists separate from the body and its sensing abilities. It is not rational choice derived from a mental ability to drive oneself in a particular direction. Rather, it is from the body, as an organism inhabiting the environment, that one perceives the possibilities and potential constraints.

In the engagement with ideas such as those that protect private property, Copperbelt residents, like those who work at the copper mine dumpsites, do not see rules as fixed, but rather as pliable, their boundaries open to exploration and trespass. Workers at these sites draw from alternate moral codes in the customary realm, like sharing, to justify their presence there. This does not mean that Copperbelt residents discard the notions of private property. Instead the notion of private property and its related concept of free markets, is entangled with African notions of reciprocity that value sharing, and communality, as well as an entreaty to perseverance when life gets hard. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the domestic expectations of Copperbelt residents. For Copperbelt residents, as in domestic arrangements, life unfolds in variation, and plans, like the ideations of gender described in Chapter Five, are more like tools that provide an exploratory extension into the world that hone in and attempt to reiterate symbolisms from a variety of ideational systems. As Moore

argues, symbolism and its enactment in ritual are largely about managing lived experience and not just its representation. They encompass actions that are also “sensuous, physical and practical, and not simply ideational and intellectual” (1999, p8). As in female initiation rituals, Copperbelt residents are reiterating and improvising certain bodily movements and practices, not to fit with an abstract outcome but to give movement and a sensing direction so as to insert oneself into a flow of life through which pleasure and not just hardship can be found.

### **Trying**

The notion of trying brings together from the previous chapters the experimental, poetic, processual and textural engagements with place, while at the same time including the anxieties and uncertainties that come with making of a life in difficult circumstances. Trying as such can be seen not only as continual attempts to do something, but also as that which captures its other definition, of something that is difficult, annoying and hard to endure. To this end, I would argue for an anthropology of trying, that in relation to talking about the archi-textural character of a place, captures the effort (or sweat) of our habitation within the world, rather than just the playful and poetic. An anthropology of trying draws on theoretical and methodological perspectives in anthropology that emphasise the performative, movement and the senses. It attempts to break the systemic structural representations that often do not account for the effort, and experimental, poetic, processual and textural engagements that residents have with place and circumstance. As Latham and Conradson (2003, p1904) write of the ethos of the performative movement, such an approach would have us delve with a lot more openness into the epistemologies of the places we study, and be more willing to experiment and diverge on various paths in how we think through them. On the Copperbelt, this mixing would not be out of place, and has formed a crucial part in how residents address the curved balls life throws at them. In the practice of fieldwork this would mean not taking too much stock in trying to establish clear patterns in action along threads, but to view the field as a volume. If the volume was

imagined as a liquid within which we were contained and our movements and others reverberated through it, as the immersed fieldworker we would be sounding out not points and networks (Gell 1998; Latour 2005) nor lines or threads (Ingold 2007) but rhythms in unfolding wholes (Bohm 1980, Ingold 2011). As such, in thinking about life and end of life, there needs to be greater appreciation of people's attempts to live and make a life, especially a re-analysis of places where it has been assumed to have ended.





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