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HEADMANSHIP AND THE RITUAL OF LUAPULA VILLAGES

IAN CUNNISON

THIS article is intended primarily as a contribution to the study of the village headman in British Central Africa.[1] While most reports from the area have paid attention to the headman's structural position, this has been specifically considered by Gluckman, Barnes, and Mitchell in ' The Village Headman in British Central Africa ' (*Africa*, xix, no. 2, 1949) and, more recently, by Mitchell in his forthcoming analysis of *The Yao Village*. The closely related question of the values attached to village life has received attention notably from Prof. M. Wilson in *Good Company*.[2]

Whatever form these societies take, the headman plays a key role in them. In acephalous societies the village headman was the head of the smallest and perhaps the only political group and was *ex officio* an important political personage. In societies with chiefs, the headman represents his chief to the people of the village. In both types the headman is a political representative of the group of more or less closely related kinsmen clustered around him in his village. Thus his person is a link between domestic and political life. He has to play his part with skill. His loyalty towards his kinsmen should not affect his loyalty towards his chief.

His own standing and power are directly linked to the standing and power of other headmen. If his followers leave him, they can do so only by going to another headman whose following thus increases at his expense, for they know no form of residence other than residence in villages. Gluckman (op. cit., p. 93) wrote: ' We see the political systems of these people as being rooted in the self-assertion of villages, the smallest corporate units, against one another.'

The political balance of village against village on the Luapula is maintained by the freedom which people have, and which they exploit, to go and live in whatever village suits them best. They move from one headman to another until they find a village which, in their own experience, is healthy, harmonious, free from sorcery and premature death, and where they prosper. These are the main values of village life on the Luapula, and it is the headman who is held ultimately responsible for the state of his village in respect of these qualities.

I hope that the account of Luapula village ritual in this article will show that a headman, to be successful, must be more than a good kinsman and mediator in domestic matters, and more than a good politician: he must also be ritually efficient. It will be shown that a headman's political role—one headman among a number of

[1] Field-work on which this paper is based was undertaken during 1948–51 for the Rhodes–Livingstone Institute. This article has been read and criticized in the course of preparation by most officers of the Institute, to whom I am grateful for comments. Fuller accounts of village composition, and of the historical build-up of the country, may be found in my *Kinship and Local Organisation on the Luapula*, Communications from the Rhodes–Livingstone Institute no. 5; and *History on the Luapula*, Rhodes–Livingstone Paper no. 21.

[2] *Good Company: A study of Nyakyusa Age-Villages*, London, 1951. It is clear that the nearby Bemba have village ritual that presents some analogies (cf. Richards, *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia*, 1952, p. 238). The fullest comparable material is in Junod's account of the Thonga, *The Life of a South African Tribe*, 1927, vol. i, pp. 288 ff.

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competing equals—which previous studies have emphasized, is vividly expressed and even clarified in village ritual. The ritual also exhibits those values in good village life which have been described by Wilson for the Nyakyusa. Beyond this the ritual emphasizes points of fission apparent in the structure of Luapula villages.

The Luapula River flows out of Lake Bangweulu, turns north and flows into Lake Mweru, thus forming the boundary between Northern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo. Kazembe is the Paramount chief over the east bank of the Lower Luapula Valley. The villages and their gardens are situated along the road which runs from one end of the valley to the other, a short distance from the edge of the Luapula swamps. On this road are long stretches where village follows village in an unbroken line. These villages are of various tribes. When Kazembe, of the Lunda, arrived there over 200 years ago from Mwata Yamvwa's country in the west, he found a number of villages already in position. Since his domination of the area groups of people have come in from all directions, although mainly from the Chishinga, Lungu, Tabwa, Bemba, Aushi, and Mukulo tribes of North-eastern Rhodesia. Once arrived, they formed villages. Few established villages die out. A village is known by the name of its founder and, on his death, his position is inherited in the female line. The successor takes not only the headmanship but also the name, the relationships, the wives, and some material object, such as the belt, of the deceased. Villages move occasionally but not very often; and even if they do their name and identity remain the same.

New villages are formed either when a man achieves a number of followers and applies to the chief for permission to form a village; or else when a band of immigrants comes to the country and likewise applies. The present rate of formation of new villages in the country is on an average between three and four a year.

Villages vary greatly in size; some consist of a mere handful of houses, but the majority comprise between twenty and forty. A small village is composed of some of the matrilineal kinsmen of the headman, and this remains the nucleus of the village however much it grows. In this paper I do no more than summarize the evidence I have on village composition. The headman always has with him some relatives of his own matrilineage (*cikota*). The rest of the village is made up of groups whose leaders have some relationship—perhaps very slight—with the headman. Such a group, whose members usually build near each other to form a distinct section (*citente*) of the village, is composed mainly of members of the matrilineage of the man who came to follow the headman. Leaders of village sections are generally followed only by their closest matrilineal kin, but headmen are followed by people with remote kinship links.

In the Luapula Valley are representatives of over twenty tribes and more than forty clans which cut across tribal divisions. Headmanship is an office, but the office belongs neither to tribe nor to clan: it is vested in the matrilineage, the *cikota*. This is the largest section of a clan which co-operates for any purpose and it is kept by genealogical fiction at a span of about seven generations. It is the exogamous unit. It is composed of the descendants of a group of clansmen who immigrated to the Luapula together. If a headman—or anyone for that matter—should die, his place must be taken by someone junior within his *cikota*. Thus the headmanship remains in the matrilineage, and the matrilineage is said to ' own ' the village, even though only a

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small part of the matrilineage may actually reside there. The matrilineage is widely dispersed up and down the valley. There are no strict rules of residence; in marriage, after two or three years in the village of his bride's mother, a man is free to move where he will, and the choice may be determined by factors other than kinship. Thus not only may there be members of more than one *cikota* in a village; there may also be representatives of different clans and tribes.

The headman (*mwinemushi*, ' owner of the village ') is not necessarily the senior member of his matrilineage. Its head is usually the man who is the latest successor of the person who led the group of clansmen from their ancestral home outside the valley. He may be of any age, as also may the village headman, and it is very likely nowadays that a young headman may be chosen in order to deal energetically with tasks imposed upon him by the Administration. His appointment must have the approval of his chief, and, if he is young, he has the additional task of running the village to the satisfaction of his matrilineage elders who may be living elsewhere. Once in office the headman is usually secure until his death, unless in his old age he hands over to a successor. He can be ousted by the chief, or by elders of his matrilineage, but not by other members of the village, whose only hold upon him is that they can leave him and go elsewhere. These comparative strangers in the village are living in a place which belongs to a matrilineage other than their own, and they have no strong tie, even of honour, to keep them in it. The general picture, then, is of a village composed of the headman and a nucleus of the matrilineage which ' owns ' it, surrounded by members of other, stranger matrilineages, who are free to move in and out as they like.

Villages used to be built very close to the swamp edge in a tangle of trees. There are still a few like this, but the majority have now moved back about half a mile to line the valley road. Houses are built nowadays mainly of sun-dried brick in streets—one street lining the main road, with others at right angles to it leading towards the swamp. A village has no obvious centre—no village rest-house, no general meeting-place for the discussion of village affairs, for conversation, or for eating. The headman's house, although for convenience it is generally near the middle of the village, is not necessarily situated there, and it is impossible to tell the headman's house from any other. The whole area enclosed by the houses is kept in a swept condition. What is not village is gardens or bush (respectively *mushi*, *mabala*, *mpanga*), and even land adjoining the village is ' bush ' if it is uncultivated.

To form a village a man with followers applies to the chief of one of the seven chiefdoms into which Kazembe's country is divided. A man may, without permission, move with a group of followers to form a cluster alongside his parent village, but in the eyes of the chief this is not a new village, for it does not involve the allocation of new land for habitation. If a man wants to be recognized as a headman by the chief and the Administration he must apply to be ' written ' (*kulembwa*) as a headman and to have his followers tax-listed in his name; and this requires a minimum of ten taxpayers among his followers. The modern word for ' to become a headman ' is *kulembwa*. If the village is to be set upon new ground, this ground is allocated by the chief.

There is no objection to moving to another chiefdom inside the country. There is, moreover, much movement between Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo, where the

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valley peoples are of the same origin and, until European administration, were all under Kazembe. The chiefs welcome strangers to their lands and each chief is anxious that his chiefdom should be thronged with people. In this way not only can he command more tribute and boast that he is a popular chief but he is also more likely to have his own pay increased, for this to some extent depends on the number of followers he has. But to the people, what makes their community a village is not the fact that it is written as such in the Administration books. It is the existence of the *nshipa*, the ritual foundation of the village.

The Ritual

In village ritual there are two main elements which are made effective by a third. The first is the *nshipa*, which I do not translate; the second is the *lukunku* or *musashi*, the calabash; and the third is the *nongo*, the marriage pot of the headman's chief wife, which is used for purification after intercourse. When a man succeeds to the headmanship this pot becomes the *nongo ya mushi*, the village pot.

Together these things are believed to protect the village inhabitants from mystical dangers on the occasion of a death or the birth of a still-born child within the village, or if a member of the village kills or finds dead in the bush a man, lion, leopard, or striped weasel. They are believed to keep wild animals and sorcerers out of the village and to attract and retain inhabitants.

The *nshipa* is installed at the first formation of a village, or again if the village moves its site even a short distance. It is referred to as *ciito ca bantu*, an instrument for calling people to the village. With it are usually associated anti-sorcery medicines, *miti ya kucingililo mushi*.

If the village has been moved and the *nshipa* is to be changed the old one is first dug up and thrown into a river. The headman and the magican whom he has summoned together cut a young *mutaba* tree (*ficus* sp.).[1] While doing this they loosen their belts. At night, when the people are still talking in their houses, the headman and his wife sit naked in front of their house, the magician with them. A piece of wood, the *nshipa*, is hollowed out and the magician inserts medicines and charms. The charms include one from the honey-guide bird. A duiker horn is forced into the wood, and more medicines are put into the horn. A hole is dug knee-deep. The headman's wife grasps his arm as he plants the sapling in the hole. A cock is killed, and the heart placed in the hole. The headman and his wife sit facing each other, the headman to the west. He places the *nshipa* between his legs and, seated, edges them forward to the hole. Together he and his wife fill up the hole with loose soil which they stamp down with a medicated stick. They then sleep together and, in the morning, wash ritually in the wife's marriage pot. The *nshipa* is thereby made effective. The wife then cooks mush in the pot, and the meal, with the cock as relish, is shared with the magician. The tree alone remains as evidence of the *nshipa*, which itself is never seen by the villagers. On the death of the headman the *nshipa* momentarily ' dies ', but is renewed automatically (*kupilibuka*, ' it turns over ') on the installation of the next headman.

[1] This tree was formerly used for making bark-cloth. It gives the best shade of any tree on the Luapula. It is the 'royal' tree of the Lunda, who were told, when they left Mwata Yamvwa's capital in the west, to plant it wherever they might conquer.

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The *calabash* is a small hollowed and dried cucurbit containing medicines and charms, which is kept in the roof of the headman's house. It is used for the purification of villagers as need arises. The calabash ' dies ' on the death of a headman and cannot be revived. To install it, the headman calls a magician versed in village medicines, usually himself a headman. The magician brings two calabashes with him—the one of his own village, and a new one. He brings appropriate medicines of plants and wood powder and charms of elephant, lion, and scaly ant-eater, and he and the headman together, by night, put them into the new calabash which, along with the magician's calabash, they hang on a forked stick over a discarded pot containing more medicines and charms. At sunrise the women of the village sweep out their hearths and take the ashes to a cross-paths to the west of the village. The magician buries the ashes under the old pot, washes the women's hands and feet in medicated water, giving them some of this water with which to replaster their hearths. Back in the village the magician lights a fire, using grass from a mole's nest as tinder, and the women take new fire from it. The magician then splits in two one seed each of groundnut, ground-bean, lentil, pumpkin, cucumber, sorghum, and finger-millet. One half, ' for the year that is past ', he throws on to the cross-paths, and the other half, ' for the year that is coming ', he puts into the headman's calabash. Finally he instructs the headman about tabus, such as bringing firewood into the village from an ant-hill. This ends the magician's work, for which he is paid perhaps £2. Next night, when the headman and his wife sleep together and wash in the wife's marriage pot, the calabash is made effective. To use the calabash for purification, the headman smears the face, neck, and hands of the contaminated person with oil which he has poured over the medicines in the calabash.

Nongo, the word for ' village pot ', is connected with the idea of chieftainship of any rank. One of the phrases meaning ' to open up a piece of country ' is *kuteke nongo mu calo*, literally ' to put the pot on the fire in the country '. This same word *kuteka* means both ' to put a pot on the fire ' and ' to rule '. This pot makes the *nshipa* and calabash effective when the headman and his wife wash in it after ritual intercourse, and it is their regular washing in it which maintains these elements in an effective state.

Two other rites are practised in many villages, though they are not regarded as so important. One is ' marking out a trail ' (*kukomo lukomo*), and is usually performed shortly after the formation of a village, or on a move to a new village site. The headman cuts pegs of wood and medicates them. He makes a wide sweep round the village site, hammering pegs into the ground at intervals. It is said that should the *nshipa* be a good one, the village will expand to this boundary. It is also said that wild animals and sorcerers would fear to cross the line into the village.

The other rite is ' standing in the smoke of medicine ' (*konto muti*). The headman builds a fire with medicines inside the village and calls the people to come and warm themselves. The smoke is supposed to spread to every nook and cranny of the village and make it safe from sorcerers and wild animals. The people who stand in the smoke are thus protected even outside the village and need never fear should they be benighted in the bush.

There are some minor differences in the charms and medicines used, but, for commoner villages at any rate, the main rites are the same.

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Purpose of the Rites

The rites, taken together, are held to have certain beneficial effects on the village. Both headmen and villagers require the ritual for the protection it affords against the very real danger of wild animals (lions and leopards) and the ever-present fear of sorcery.[1] They believe also that it helps to ensure harmony in village life. The headman wants the ritual in order to attract and retain villagers by the known safety and good living of his village. If a man comes across a *mupamba*, an evil omen such as the dead lion, &c., mentioned above, it is incumbent on him for his own safety to be purified before speaking or eating. He depends upon village medicines for this purification. If he has killed a lion or found a dead one, he comes silently to his village, with his fists clenched on a level with his shoulders, imitating claws; the headman sees him and knows at once what this means, and takes appropriate action. General purification must also be made when a death occurs in the village.

If the rites are effective, the result should be absence of premature deaths in the village; for these arise either from sorcery or from some moral lapse due to lack of harmony in the village. It should be noted that all these rites are concerned with the persons of the villagers: the headman takes no steps ritually to prosper the fishing or agricultural activities of his villagers. But if one inquires which rites are directed towards which ends the answers are confused. Some say that the *nshipa* is purely to attract inhabitants, others that it is also directed against sorcery. Certain elements have a clearer meaning to everyone. It is generally agreed that the honey-guide charm is used to attract villagers in the same way as the bird itself attracts men to something good—a beehive. If the headman should draw firewood from an ant-hill this would attract the wild animals which sleep upon ant-hills. The grass from the mole's nest with which new fire is kindled should make the village safe in the same way as the underground safety of the mole's nest protects the mole against its enemies. The uses of other charms have various interpretations. The scaly ant-eater, for instance, is said to be powerful since it has to be brought from far-away Tanganyika; again, its power is supposed to derive from its name, *nkaka*, which makes it *kukaka fyonse*—tie everything up, put village affairs in order.

The *nshipa* is regarded as the foundation of the village in that there is no village (*mushi*) without *nshipa*, and no *nshipa* without village and headman. The village, and village medicines, are held by the Luapula peoples to be necessary to all societies. They note with interest acts they have seen Europeans perform, like 'laying the foundation stone' and 'cutting the first sod' on mission stations; and they thought that the weather-gauge at Kawambwa, which the District Commissioner looked at each day, was the equivalent of the *nshipa* for the Government station.

Village medicines are still important in spite of the advance of Christianity, for belief in sorcery dies hard on the Luapula. Nevertheless there are headmen with long schooling in Christianity who fear the reproof of missionaries if they should lend themselves to such things. They realize, however, that if they neglected their medicines their villages would break up. A Christian headman will appoint a young pagan brother and his wife to be ritual heads of the village while he himself deals with the secular aspects of headmanship.

[1] Generally speaking, animals met in the bush are thought to be natural phenomena, but man-eating lions which enter villages, and even attack houses, are sent by sorcerers.

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The *nshipa* is closely connected with a certain place. Significantly it is buried in the ground. We noted that if the village moves, even so short a way that the new and old sites overlap, a new *nshipa* is required. After such a move it is quite common for a few of the old people to remain in their houses on the old site outside the new swept area. In this case peripheral houses remain outside the effective sphere of the new *nshipa*. Their occupants do not have its protection, and a death in one of these houses does not contaminate the rest of the village. If, during an interregnum between headmen, a man becomes seriously ill he is moved out of the village, since at such a time there is no one to purify the villagers. It is considered safe if he is moved to a house on the old site. Thus the *nshipa* is connected with those householders who form the heart of the village, where the area is swept, where no grass or gardens intervene, and where houses are contiguous. If a villager dies elsewhere the village need not be purified, even if the body is brought to the village for burial; it is dying within the sphere of the *nshipa* which contaminates the village.

The Headman and other Headmen

We consider the ritual first with reference to inter-village or inter-headmen relationships. There are 322 villages between Johnston Falls in the south and the northern border of Kazembe's country, each of them under a headman who has as much right as his neighbour to attract people to his own village. These villages are politically equal under the seven chiefs, and people move as they like from one village to another. A local saying claims that ' commoners move where they will, only chiefs remain in one place '. This is as true for headmen as for chiefs. Taken at any point of time the composition of a village is ephemeral. Not only individual householders but whole sections move in and out of villages. The people who move about are seeking a village which suits them and where they will prosper. The actual moves are easily made: the crop is cassava, which creates no storage problems; and the main industry is fishing, and fishermen are free to fish where they like. Moreover, there is a ready market in houses.

Although the swamps and the bush are dotted with temporary encampments for fishing, hunting, or other purposes, a man must have a permanent abode in some village. He has to be registered somewhere and may not go and settle *permanently* by himself in the bush. Nor may he go out and ' put the pot on the fire ' anywhere without the permission of the chief of the area, for the allocation of land for such purposes is one of the most important functions of Luapula chieftainship, and the whole policy of settling the country is in the chiefs' hands. Now that the chief co-operates with the British Administration he has to abide by the ten tax-payer rule and does not allow less than this number to form a village.

Advantages accrue from living in villages and people are blind to any advantages that might accrue from not living in them. What the people require is to live in safety, health, harmony, and prosperity. They must live somewhere in order to have a base for their activities. Politically this place is defined as a village. They can choose what place they want provided it is a place recognized by their chief, through the existence of a headman, for people to live in permanently. In some places they may live badly, their children may die, they may be ill, they may quarrel with their neighbours and become involved in cases. In another place they may live well, their

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children flourish, and the life of the village may be found harmonious. If they live badly—even if fellow villagers are content with their lot—they want to change their residence and they seek a village where they think they will live well. At the same time they do not want to live as complete strangers in a village and so they look for a ' good ' village in which there is someone who is related to them in some way.

Although they seek a good place it is only indirectly that the place is good or bad. A place can become ' rotten '—and this is the most frequent reason why villages move a short distance. The expression is *kubola*, 'to rot'; and *cibolya*, from the same stem, is the word for a deserted village site. But the radical cause of the rottenness of a village, why there are many deaths, diseases, and other misfortunes caused by sorcery, is believed to be the failure of the *nshipa*, for it should create conditions in a village which attract outsiders rather than repel them.

If children die young in a family it is because of sorcery directed against the family. It is always held that the sorcerer is in the same or a nearby village, since the sorcerer, in practice, must go in person to the house of his victim by night. Nevertheless, if the *nshipa* were working properly the sorcery, wherever it came from, would be rendered ineffective. Temporary moves may be made to another village in case of sickness to try out the influence of a different *nshipa*.

The popularity of a headman, and hence the size of his village, is directly related to the harmony and health of his villagers, as well as to his practical ability in settling disputes. That is to say, his popularity depends on factors which to the European mind remain beyond his control; but to the Luapula peoples the harmony and health of a village depend as much upon ritual efficiency as upon just administration and the maintenance of hygiene. In point of fact the headman in the village is an adjudicator only within his own matrilineage. Other family disputes are generally not within his jurisdiction, and in any case he has no formal judicial powers. Although his personality undoubtedly influences the cohesion of villagers, the blame for disharmony is eventually attributed to his working of the ritual. The people know well that a headman can succeed or fail according to his diligence or carelessness about the ritual. So if misfortunes of any kind make people move from a village the headman is indirectly blamed for them and suffers punishment for his presumed inefficiency in seeing his people drift away.

Now of course every headman is in the same position. Each tries to keep his villagers and to attract other adherents. A big village is the sign of a successful headman. Although headmen deny that they try to attract people from other villages, they yet claim that *other* headmen have medicine—*bwanga bwe tuta*—which they can sprinkle in rival villages to attract inhabitants to their own. Headmen therefore seek to guard against this by attention to mystical as well as practical affairs. Indeed, they have been taught at their installation that ' subjects are like grass seed, they fall aside ' and ' subjects are like grease, they melt away '.[1]

In this situation headmen have only one resource: they turn to magicians (*ng'anga*). Knowledge of village medicines is in the hands of very few magicians, and six out of the eight whom I knew were themselves headmen of old-established villages. Occasionally medicines may be handed down from a headman to a known successor, but magicians are the only advisers in the matter. Some magicians have long con-

[1] *Abantu ntongwe shilewila lubali; abantu nga mafuta baleitika.*

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nexions with particular villages, but there is no rigid tie between headman and magician, and a headman can change his magician if he wants to. Thus headmen compete against each other with the same or similar medicines—often indeed with the medicines of the same magician.

The choice of magician seems to depend largely upon the type of calabash which he sells, for some are easier to work than others when a purification is necessary. One type requires that the headman and his wife should have ritual intercourse before it is used on any occasion. Another type requires a special kind of oil which is difficult to procure. Others are more simple. One, the ' cock ', which is much in favour, purifies a village automatically after a death when the first cock crows on the following morning. It is only if things are going wrong that headmen discuss the merits of different magicians. Some headmen suspect that magicians may be bribed by other headmen to give them bad medicines.

No headman admits that his own medicine is *bwanga* (sorcery) for doing other headmen down. Headmen insist that theirs are good medicines (*muti*), designed to secure the harmony of their own villages. But they view other headmen as enemies and potential sorcerers. Nevertheless, commoners who know the ritual for the installation of the *nshipa* describe it as a *positive act of sorcery*. The reason is quite straightforward. To go outside naked at night is at all times to be avoided: it is to proclaim oneself a sorcerer, for *bufwiti*, the commonest kind of sorcery, requires that a man go naked at night to the house of his victim. A commoner who was with me when I was hearing a description of the *nshipa* rites exclaimed as the account proceeded: 'But this is bewitching the country! ' Charges of sorcery against rival headmen are seldom specific. I came across only one. The matter was informally discussed before Kazembe, who played down the charge and said it was obviously the fault of the ' offended ' headman, who could not keep his people in order.

Commoner villages all have medicines of the same general type. The few commoner villages whose headmen are also ritual ' owners of the land ' have different kinds of medicine, and there are special medicines for villages of chiefs and sons of the Kazembes, and for the capital of Kazembe itself. Chiefs are also headmen and their villages are larger (supposedly because their medicines are more powerful). They tend to despise the medicines of commoner villages, and do not fear the rivalry of commoner headmen. Thus commoner villages are seen to be ritually similar and in opposition to each other. The ritual implies both protection against the inroads of other headmen, in the medicines for the harmony of the village, and attacks on other headmen, in the honey-guide charm. But headmen of commoner villages are not ritually in a position to attack chiefly villages, because these have special medicines which are more powerful, and which no magician would dare give to a commoner headman for fear of losing the favour of the chief.

Headmen and Villagers

In kinship matters the headman has direct authority only over the affairs of his own immediate matrilineage in the village—and even here he may be overridden by older men or even by matrilineage elders from outside the village. The other sections of the village apply on kinship matters to their own matrilineage elders. In the practical matters of headmanship the headman also has to listen to all the elders of the village—

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the *bacilolo*—to whatever section they may belong. An analogy often noted with the position of the newly appointed headman is that of the girl at puberty, unable to answer back, in a position only to listen to the rules propounded by her elders. But in the matter of ritual the headman is truly head from the start. He alone is responsible. Shortly after the new Kasebula was installed he went round the village shouting an announcement to the effect that he was now headman and if anyone else wanted to shout against sorcerers (*kubile mbila*) they must first bring the matter to him and he would do it. This is a custom whereby, if it is obvious that a sorcerer is at work, the headman goes round at night, keeping strictly within his own village, shouting: ' You sorcerer, this is no way to behave, you had better stop, we know who you are.'

In addition to formal village ritual headmen in general are held to know many medicines both good and bad. *Bushing'anga* and *bukulu bwa mushi*—knowledge of medicines and headmanship—are more or less synonymous terms. People believe, in fact, that all headmen are sorcerers. This is simply part of a wider belief that success in any sphere cannot be achieved without the aid of bad medicines. Outstandingly successful fishermen, for instance, have killed off their relatives one by one and used their spirits to help drive fish into the nets. People with exceptional crops of cassava have managed, by setting medicines in their gardens, to attract roots from their neighbours'. Such is the nature of the system that there are many candidates for all positions of headmanship and chieftainship; and it is widely believed that the successful candidate succeeds only because others are afraid to put themselves forward lest, out of jealousy, he should later use sorcery to kill them. Likewise when a man succeeds to an office it is thought that he continues to live only because he has exceptionally powerful medicines to counteract the sorcery of jealous rivals who would be constantly out for his blood.

It is also said that the stronger medicines—good and bad—are known only to chiefs and headmen: medicines for warding off lightning or thunderbolts, or for sending these things, and the like. Of the dozens of recipes for medicines which I copied out of boys' notebooks there was only one village medicine, written by a boy who was himself the son of a headman. Otherwise the medicines were mostly of the types known to adults, consisting of panaceas for physical strength, sexual prowess, and popularity. Children know well that their own medicines are tame affairs. They know also that headmen have the real stuff; and it is this that prompted the remark I heard so often from children: 'All headmen are bad.'

Thus the headman's relationship to his villagers has a basis in his strong mystical prestige. Villagers are temporarily—while they are living under a certain headman—at the mercy of his medicines; they depend on him completely for protection against mystical dangers; at the same time he is feared because of the knowledge of powerful medicines which is held to be the stock-in-trade of his calling.

The Headman and His Matrilineage

The headmanship belongs to the headman's matrilineage. Villagers who do not belong to this matrilineage are not necessarily consulted about succession. The headman is chosen out of many dispersed members of the matrilineage for the position of special rank within it; for there is seldom more than one such political office in each lineage, and, of course, there are matrilineages without a headmanship or village

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to their name. Even if his name is senior, the headman himself may be a young man who has inherited it and so he may have to listen with respect to elders who are strictly his ' juniors '. Some of these relationships are made clear in the actions which follow the death of a headman or his wife.

When a headman's wife dies the village is left without its pot, which was her private property. It still belongs to her matrilineage and they remove it from the village. Thus the calabash ' dies ' and the village is said to ' become cold ' and ' die '. The headman's wife's family will be persuaded to find a successor to the dead woman as soon as possible, even before the normal *tobolola* payments, made by a surviving spouse, have been handed over to them. In the interim a magician is called to purify the village, and a brother or other clansman of the headman is appointed to look after the ritual side until a new wife is found. This caretaker (for whom there is no special title) sleeps with his own wife and they purify themselves in their marriage pot, to which special medicines have been added for the occasion. He is given the calabash to look after, which his wife's pot, now temporarily the village pot, has once more made effective. When the headman's new wife arrives, the caretaker and his wife are sent out of the village while the process of the wife's succession goes on. On the night when the headman has intercourse with his new wife for the first time, the other villagers are not allowed to have intercourse, the sanction being misfortune to the whole village. In the morning the villagers, including the children of the headman, leave the village and stand outside the boundaries while the new wife's pot is put on the fire, the headman gripping the pot and his wife gripping the headman's arm. The calabash is now effective again for use by the headman. Strictly it is only those who would normally have sexual intercourse at the time who are obliged to leave the village bounds, but in practice everyone gets out, including the young and the old. The pot is placed on the fire in front of witnesses—old people, if possible, of the headman's matrilineage, who have come, if necessary, from outside the village. Later a meal is cooked in the new village pot and is shared by the headman, his wife, and the witnesses from the matrilineage.

On the death of a headman both the *nshipa* and the calabash become ineffective. The calabash is thrown away into a river. The village is purified by a magician as before. This puts an end to the tabus on cooking food (strictly, of placing pots on fires) and on sexual intercourse within the village which are imposed at any death. But it is still important that no one else should die in the village, because there is no calabash for purification. The elders of the matrilineage are called in to arrange the whole succession. They appoint a caretaker who is ideally the son of the dead headman, and therefore of the clan of the headman's wife. It is wrong to appoint a man of the headman's matrilineage, since it may be difficult to persuade him to yield his position when the time comes for the succession of the selected heir. The succession takes place in a house other than that of the previous headman, with the caretaker and his wife away from the village as before and the villagers outside the village bounds.

In this ritual we see the distinction made between the headman's matrilineage and the other vaguely related groups. It is the headman's matrilineage that is in control of the ritual, even if it means coming from outside the village to control it. They alone are in the village as witnesses when the pot is placed on the fire, and they alone, with

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the headman and his wife, eat the meal cooked in the pot. Again, when the headman's wife dies the ritual is handed over to a fellow clansman of the headman. The other members of the village partake only in a negative way in the ritual. By abstaining from intercourse and getting out of the village they leave the ground clear for the effective ' warming ' of the village and the medicines by the headman and his wife supported by his matrilineage elders.

The Headman and His Wife

The headman's wife and her matrilineage are in a very special position, for they can make or break the village. The ritual depends upon her as much as upon the headman. It is their marital relationship that makes the village ritual effective. Without this relationship there can be no village so long as ritual is its mainstay. On his wife's death the headman is dependent upon her matrilineage for a successor, and if they do not send one the headman may not remarry (for fear of a disease (*cito*) which strikes any widower or widow who has intercourse during the time between the death of the spouse and the installation of the successor); and thus he is unable to work the ritual. The other role of the wife's matrilineage is to provide a caretaker after the headman's death. This appointment is made by the elders of the headman's matrilineage and is made quite explicitly for the reason that the person appointed must not be in a position later to usurp the headmanship. This is an important point when it is remembered that the headman's sons, of his wife's clan, generally live in the village with their father in order to have some of the reflected glory of headmanship. Here, then, is revealed the high importance of the wife's matrilineage, and at the same time the fact that it is ineligible for headmanship is emphasized.

To inquire why the headman's wife enjoys the important role she does is outside the scope of this paper since it would involve a discussion of symbolism in all ranks of chieftainship. Briefly, where a man's position implies mystical care of land and people he can effect this only through his marital relationship. And the chief wife is identified in speech with her husband: *mwadi e mwata* (' the queen is the king ') is a phrase often heard in connexion with Kazembe and his first wife. The mystical dangers from dead lions can only be annulled by 'owners of the land', and then only after intercourse with their wives; and both spouses have to step on a lion-skin to purify it and the country. A man can rule his country only when it is ' hot ', and it can be made ' hot ' only in this manner. Village headmanship is a minor form of this mystical control over land and people, but it contains the same elements as higher chieftainship and its working is in the same general form.

The Villagers among Themselves

We consider finally the question of the village as a unit. We pointed out that villages were stable, in that a village of one name endures although it may change its site. But the population is continually fluctuating, and the only permanence about this aspect of it is the fact that it always has a man of the same matrilineage as headman, and that he is always surrounded in the village by some of his matri-kin.

We have already pointed to the difference between the matrilineage which owns the village and the members of the other sections which compose it. This particular dichotomy was well illustrated in practice in the village of Kasebula. There was a fairly clear line of demarcation between the houses of the headman's matrilineage at

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the south end of the village and the others at the north end. Only the house of the headman himself was in a kind of enclave among the stranger groups. Moreover, when the villagers dispersed to fishing camps, those from the south went to one place and those from the north went to another. I lived in the south end, and found it difficult to persuade people from the other end to visit me much. It is not easy to say how general is this physical division. In the only other village in which I lived for any length of time this split was not so marked. In some villages there is another differentiating feature: a special graveyard, in the deserted village site, is reserved for members of the headman's matrilineage who die in the village, while other people are buried in the bush or among the gardens.

Only occasionally does a village unite for economic activities, and some villages never do so. If a channel is to be dug or deepened between the main swamp waters and the village canoe-park, this is done by the village as a team. If the village is situated in a part of the country where bush-pigs ravage the gardens, villagers unite in digging a deep ditch, inside which they all cultivate. In marriage, the instructors and go-betweens of bride and groom are found from members of all sections of the village. For children the village is nearly always the play unit.

Politically it is by the village that a man identifies himself: he carries the name of his village about with him on his identity card. All dealings between villagers and chiefs go by way of the headman, who likewise has to publish announcements by his chief to the villagers. If the chief requires tribute of cassava or of labour, this is done on a village basis, and the amount of tribute is assessed according to the population and the age of the village.

The unity of villagers under the headman is revealed in the ritual. It is notable first of all that the village ritual emanating from the headman works impartially: all the inhabitants, kinsmen and strangers alike, have to stand or fall equally by the village medicines. The headman cannot—and does not want to—discriminate through these against any one section. The young headman—to give the political counterpart of this—is told at his installation the names of all important elders in the village, and warned that if he does not do well, these people will not tolerate him and will leave him.

Residence in a village imposes certain obligations upon villagers while they are living in it. They cannot refuse tax or tribute; they have to recognize the headman as their political superior, and as a sort of policeman who can report them for keeping dirty houses, for rowdiness, or for undue drunkenness. Likewise a man when he comes to a village binds himself to observe the ritual tabus and prescriptions imposed on the village on certain occasions. He willingly does this; for what he seeks in a village are those things which are ensured by the proper working of village medicines. His co-operation and the co-operation of all his fellows is required on the ritual plane for the harmony of the village to be sustained.

If a man dies in the village it is not incumbent on a resident to attend the mourning unless he is a close kinsman. Yet ritually the death affects everyone, for all have to take part in the observation of tabus and all have to be cleansed of the death. Again, if a new headman is installed it is not essential for everyone to attend and lecture the new man on headmanship, although this is the custom; but ritually all must partake by leaving the bounds when the pot is put on the fire. They are forced into

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corporate action by virtue of their residence, and the sanction against neglect is misfortune to the village as a whole.

In village ritual the things that are ritualized are marital intercourse, fires, and cooking: things which are especially associated with the household of a man and his wife. Thus, from the point of view of the ritual, the married households appear as equal units in the composition of the village. Youths and old people are to a great extent excluded from the ritual. The emphasis is on the village as a collection of domestic units based on marital relationships and symbolized by their essential elements, sex and fire: elements which themselves are closely linked in symbolic association. It is, of course, these homes that are the basis of any village and the most satisfactory self-sufficient units. Old people and young people, in order to live well, must attach themselves in some way to this kind of unit, whether by being born into it or by being associated with it through some link of sentiment. Each of these households is independent in that it is at liberty to leave the village and settle elsewhere, but during its residence it is bound to other like units by equal participation in a common ritual.

Conclusion

If we take as given the fact that people require protection against mystical forces, it remains to be considered why, in Luapula society, the village and headmanship are so important in this respect, for, as we have seen, it is by virtue of residence in a village and under a headman that a man is protected. A man residing temporarily away from a village in a fishing or hunting camp, where there is no headman, must take his own measures for protection if he requires it. One can at present do no more than suggest that the reason should be sought in the essential nature of Luapula society, made up as it is of dispersed matrilineages, where the residential pattern is the village composed of only slightly related groups. Land and water are plentiful and rights in them are not vested in villages, clans, or lineages. Thus although the headman has a position of authority, he does not enjoy a multiplex authority in his relationships with the stranger sections under him. Towards them the headman is political head only. He takes no part in the discussion of their kinship matters; villagers are not bound to him for the provision of garden land and fishing rights. In the old days the ancestral worship of the headman did not bring blessing upon the stranger groups living under him. The stranger groups, for their part, have no voice in the choice or removal of a headman and can express their dissatisfaction only by leaving the village. Thus the headman lacks the natural authority which dependence upon him for kinship, economic, and religious matters would entail. It is only politically that his authority is effective; and this, in a village of one or two hundred inhabitants, is not extensive. There is little to it apart from the fact that a man follows a particular headman to build and live in his village, to be written in his books, to pay tax and tribute labour with others under him.

Those, then, who seek a place to live have no strong links of kinship or of economic or religious interest to guide them. Political allegiance is irrespective of these interests. People no doubt go where they have some kinship connexion, but there always remains a choice. It is this situation in which the ritual condition of the village as a unit has point. It is because the economic, kinship, and religious bonds among villagers are weak that the village as a unit is emphatically ritualized.

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What is visible at this level of political life is the movement of people from village to village. Each man in his own experience sees that a village is bad, so he leaves, or good, so he stays. To Europeans the goodness or badness of a village depends not upon the ritual but upon things like chance and personality; and a village is big because these intangibles have created conditions in which people can live together without discord. We see the ritual as an unnecessary adjunct to which is wrongly ascribed the state of the village. But whether the matter is approached African or European fashion, the drive behind the moves which distribute people among various headmen is the search for those virtues which the village, the smallest political unit, ought to have.

Résumé

L'OFFICE DE CHEF ET LE RITUEL DANS LES VILLAGES DE LA VALLÉE DU LUAPULA

Le village constitue la plus petite unité politique parmi les peuples de la vallée du Luapula de la Rhodésie du Nord. Afin d'être reconnu comme tel par le Chef du District et par l'Administration, un village doit comprendre un minimum de 10 contribuables. L'importance des villages varie, mais, presque toujours, ils consistent de 20 à 40 foyers. Le chef du village est membre du matrilignage qui est considéré comme étant 'propriétaire' du village. Le droit de succession à l'office de chef est assigné à ce matrilignage dont, dans tous les cas, certains membres habitent le village, bien que d'autres soient dispersés ailleurs. D'autres groupes ayant des liens de parenté plus ou moins proches avec le chef, peuvent se joindre au village si celui-ci jouit d'une bonne réputation en ce qui concerne le bon accord, la prospérité et l'absence de maladie. Le nom et l'identité d'un village subsiste, ainsi que son emplacement. Quelquefois, cependant, un village tout entier peut être déplacé; par contre, la population d'un village change constamment au fur et à mesure du départ des gens pour diverses raisons, ou de leur installation dans le village. Le but de chaque chef est d'attirer des gens à son village et de les retenir lorsqu'ils s'y installent. Tous les rituels du village décrits dans cet article constituent des moyens de protéger un village des malheurs, d'augmenter sa prospérité et de maintenir à l'intérieur le bon accord, afin de lui permettre d'acquérir et de garder une bonne réputation et de faire accroître sa population. La bonne ou mauvaise renommée sont également attribuées à la personnalité du chef, malgré le fait, ainsi que le signale l'auteur, que son pouvoir politique soit minime et que son autorité, en ce qui concerne les affaires pratiques, s'étende uniquement sur les membres de son propre matrilignage; en outre, ceux-ci peuvent comprendre des hommes plus anciens que lui-même et il est obligé de suivre leurs conseils. L'importance du chef dépend donc, en dernier ressort, du degré de succès avec lequel il accomplit les rituels du village. La femme du chef joue un rôle important dans ces rites; elle l'aide à enterrer le *nshipa*, qu'il faut établir chaque fois qu'un nouveau village est créé, ou qu'un ancien village est déplacé. Son pot de mariage (*nongo*), dans lequel elle et son mari se lavent après des rapports sexuels, rend efficace la calebasse utilisée pour la purification du village après un décès ou un malheur. Après la mort du chef, ou de sa femme, le village est purifié par un sorcier et un gardien est nommé par les aînés du matrilignage du chef jusqu'à ce qu'un autre chef ait été installé ou que le chef ait trouvé une autre épouse.

Par suite de la nature spécifique des villages de la vallée du Luapula, où les habitants ne sont pas attachés par des liens puissants de parenté, ou par des intérêts communs religieux ou économiques, les rituels du village constituent le principal facteur d'intégration et le village manifeste plus clairement sa qualité d'unité par rapport aux rituels.

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