Mediation and social organisation in the politics of culture:
scenes from Southern African life

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The politics of culture

When earlier generations of researchers tended to define politics as the institutionalised struggle for scarce resources within a society, they also tended to see culture as the context, not as substance, of politics. In a political context culture appeared primarily as the somewhat static and unaffected framework defining the society, the resources worth struggling for within that society (e.g. power, privilege, wealth), and the modes of political action specific to that society and to a particular class of contested resources. Culture was the stage, not the play, let alone an actor. However, since the middle of the twentieth century a world-wide shift has occurred towards ethnicity, identity, culture, as a major stake in regional, national and international politics. And in the process, the social and political sciences have gradually obliged by shedding a reified, static notion of culture as an attribute of pre-constituted collective social actors (groups). They have instead recognised the *dynamics of culture* — the shifting and situational, mobilisational production of culture as well as the concomitant processes of self-definition of identities and groups — to constitute one of the central themes of politics, in our time and age but also in

the past, whose pattern is now often reinterpreted in terms of the politics of identity.

1.2. recognition and The constituting dynamics of mediation

I scarcely wish to enter the entangled forest of the definition of culture, and I hope I can get away with the statement that culture is about images, concepts, values, patterns of behaviour, shared models of the past, present and future. We have discarded the classic anthropological paradigm of the bounded, integrated, whole and unique culture, closed into itself and adequately represented by a unique ethnic name; and the view of global geographical space as a patchwork quilt of neatly localised, mutually exclusive cultures projected on the earth's surface. Cultural studies as an emergent discipline, and our general focus on globalisation, have brought us to recognise that items of culture (as under the above enumerative definition) are not typically restricted to a specific ethnic or geographical space. The real puzzle of culture and its politics is not the wide distribution of a specific cultural item in space and time, but its being *framed*, in other words its being publicly represented as particularly or even uniquely associated with a particular, named social group; such framing often occurs in the face of evidence as to a much wider distribution in space and time, of that cultural item. Once framed, the social fate of the cultural item is indicative of the social fate of the associated group in its immediate socio-political context.

This issue of *framing* raises the crucial question of how boundaries and unboundedness are at all produced and socially (and psychologically) maintained.

1.3. Forms of self-organisation impose boundaries to the global flow and thus produce identity

1.3.1. Boundaries and identity

Political processes, especially those of an imperial nature, have carved out geographical spaces within which a plurality of identities tend to be mapped out; this is the indispensable framework for the studies of ethnic and religious, communal identities; yet, as a social anthropologist interested in human subjects, their experiences and concrete interactions, I am particularly focused on the transactions at the grassroots level, where people situate themselves not so much in contiguous geographical spaces of political administration and military control, but in interlocking social spaces of interaction and identity. An unstructured diffuse social field cannot be named nor can it inspire identity; we need to concentrate on the

situations where through conceptualisation and interaction people create a bounded space which can be defined by the actors and set apart within the generalised and in principle unbounded flow of commodities, ideas and images.

The apparently unlimited and uncontrollable supply of intercontinentally mediated images, symbols, ideas and objects which is swept across contemporary Africa by the media, commodity distribution, the educational services, cosmopolitan medicine and world religions, calls for new identities. People seek to define new boundaries so as to create their identity in the face of this constant flow. By imposing boundaries they may either appropriate for themselves a specific part of the global supply, or protect themselves in order to keep part of the global flow at a safe distance. Eddies of local particularism which come to life on either side of the massive steam of world-wide, universalising homogenisation — I think there is handy, albeit much simplified, image for you as far as the cultural globalisation process in Africa is concerned. Such boundaries are in part constructed by human thought: they are conceptual boundaries, collective ways of naming and classifying contemporary reality: e.g. a classification in terms of 'old-fashioned', 'retarded' versus 'new', modern', 'world class' of such a wide variety of cultural items as: dress styles; variation in speech behaviour; gendered, sexual and conjugal roles; conceptions of law and order; visions of cosmology and causality. However, in order to express such conceptual boundaries in the converging social behaviour of large numbers of people, it is necessary that they are mediated, or rather constructed and ever again re-constructed, in interaction; and for such interaction as generates and maintains boundaries, the new formal organisations of Africa constitute some of the most obvious contexts. Many researchers of globalisation and related topics therefore now define their research sites no longer in terms of localised communities but of formal organisations: churches, ethnic associations, sport associations etc.

1.3.2. An example: The religious laundering of globally mediated items

An initial appreciation of the way in which such organisations create identity by imposing boundaries on the initially unlimited flow that globalisation entails, can for instance be gathered from the study of such a widespread phenomenon as the laundering of globally mediated commodities and of money in the context of contemporary religious organisations. Many African Christian churches appear[1] as a

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[1] E.g. in the context of the work, within the WOTRO programme on 'Globalization and the construction of communal identities', on Ghanaian Pentecostal churches by Birgit Meyer and by Rijk van Dijk; for a comparable case from Southern Africa, cf. the Zion Christian Church as

context for the managing of elements belonging to the inimical domain of commodities, consumption and the market. But we should not overlook that very much the same process is at work outside world religions yet (inevitably, since the problem presupposes the clients' extensive participation in the world economy) in a context of globalisation — among syncretistic or neo-traditional cults, which have their own forms of formal organisation. Here examples of such ritual laundering can be quoted from urban cultic practice among Surinam Creoles in the Netherlands and from an urban variety of sangoma mediumistic cults widespread in Southern Africa (cf. van Wetering 1988; van Binsbergen 1990).

If such organisations can selectively manage the global, and construct a security screen of identity around their members, they are at least as effective in keeping the local out of their charmed circle of identity, or allowing the global in only at severe restrictions. There is a remarkable variation in the way in which local religious forms can be voiced in a context where globally mediated religious forms are clearly dominant. The Ghanaian experience as recorded by Birgit Meyer (1995, 1996) is that in Pentecostal prayer camp meetings one can talk about ancestral deities (under the guise of the devil) and show that one is possessed by them. Here specific individual spirits are acknowledged and confronted, so that local identities (referring to the home village, the in group, ancestors) remain part of the identity which is recognised to be ushered into the new Pentecostal environment. In Independent churches in Francistown, Botswana, a very different situation obtains (van Binsbergen 1990, 1993c). Admittedly, there is a large number of different churches at work on the urban scene today, and although the liturgical and therapeutic style of most of them is remarkably similar, differences should not be ignored. My participant observation inevitably had to be limited to just a handful of such churches. Here at any rate ancestral spirits could only be mediated to the globally informed church environment in the most muted form possible: individual spirit were never named, but the church-goer (or in view of the fact that therapy is a prime motivation for church-going, 'patient' would be an appropriate designation) would collapse, moan and scream inarticulately, no attempt would be undertaken to name the troubling spirit and identify it in the patient's genealogy — its suppression and dispelling was the church leadership's recognised task.

Creating identity — 'a place to feel at home', to borrow Welbourn & Ogot's apt

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studied by Jean Comaroff, which started a debate about the political significance of these churches. Cf. van Dijk 1992; Meyer 1995; Comaroff 1985; Schoffeleers 1991; van Binsbergen 1993c; Werbner 1985, 1986.

expression first applied to Independent churches in Western Kenya,[2] — means that the church members engage in a social process that allows them, by the management of boundaries and the positioning of people, ideas and objects within and outside these boundaries, to create a new community which is principle is independent from whatever pre-existing community attachments they may have had on the basis of their kinship affiliations, rural homes, ethnic or political affiliations. How can we understand such a home outside home? The new home made afresh on the basis of chosen attachments in a voluntary association, often in a new social and geographical environment, partly disqualifies the old home, yet reminds of it and from this reminder derives part of its meaning and emotional satisfaction. The concept of virtuality helps us to understand these important operations in the domain of identity and self-organisation.[3]

1.4. The organisational nexus

While the appropriation of specific, globally available cultural items (such as the idea of a Christian church) and self-organisation appear as important dimensions in the above examples, three further aspects of the politics of culture need to be highlighted.

In the first place, there is *leadership*. Self-organisation is not a blind, spontaneous process automatically occurring in sets of people. It is the active mobilisation and transformation of social relationships in the hands of resourceful members or outsiders who take initiatives and who, at least temporarily and in certain aspects relevant to the selection of cultural items which defined the set in the first place, assert themselves as leaders, forging the categorial, merely nominal set of people into an interacting and structure social group, and organisation.

In the second place, there is *transformative innovation*. In the hands of initiating leaders -- but not necessarily exclusively in *their* hands -- the received cultural models are reshaped and combined with others available from differently mediated repertoires (e.g., in the churches, such repertoires as available from the cosmological structure of village life, with its cults of ancestors, royals, and spirits of the wild). In this process of bricolage, the organisational leaders may be assisted, may even leave

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[2] Welbourn & Ogot 1966.

[3] This section is an excerpt from: van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1997, *Virtuality as a key concept in the study of globalisation: Aspects of the symbolic transformation of contemporary Africa*, The Hague: WOTRO (Netherlands Foundation for Tropical Research, a division of the Netherlands Research Foundation NWO), Working papers on Globalisation and the construction of communal identity, 3; cf.

the initiative, to such among their followers who — without taking formative initiatives towards the set as a whole — come to discharge specialist roles vis-à-vis the selected and appropriated items of culture (in the church context: choir members, prophets, etc.). This process of what I have elsewhere, in a totally different context, called 'transformative localisation' (van Binsbergen 1997) makes for the bewildering variety of African independent churches today — and in general for the attractively creative dynamism to be found in the domains of modern African life where the localisation of globally mediated cultural items is especially manifest (styles of dress, music, church life, sports, party politics).

Lastly, *there is social-organisational context*. The internal self-organisation which is brought about by leadership and partially articulated by transformative innovation, can only make sense if situated within a much wider socio-political field which is organised along lines sufficiently similar to those governing the set's self-organisation so as to allow the latter to be incorporated in that wider organisation domain, under specific conditions and with specific gains. Subjectively, the production of identity and hence the reduction of feelings of alienation and uprootedness, may be the main purpose of self-organisation. Viewed more objectively, we could say that the internal organisation imposed by the leaders transforms an initially amorphous set into a structured organisation whose internal inequality makes for processes of extraction and accumulation, benefiting the leader in exchange for the unmistakable social functions they perform for the set. Often, the leader's transformation of the set is towards an organisational form (or its outside appearance) which are particularly recognisable and favoured within the wider societal context in which the organised set finds itself: a formal organisation (a church, a dancing troupe, a traditional healers's professional organisation etc.) within a nation-state which at east partially controlled by a bureaucratically organised state — and, beyond the nation-state, in an international community of donor agencies which are likewise bureaucratically organised and who prefer to deal with NGOs, *non-governmental organisations* including the type I described under self-organisation.

For clarity's sake, we may summarise and develop the argument so far with the aid of formal notation. A repertoire of globally available cultural items $C_{1...x}$, is appropriated and subjected to innovative transformation so as to become $C_{1_{t.}..x_{t.}}$. The internal leader (or a multiplicity and succession of leaders) L, under insistent reference to the appropriated and transformed cultural repertoire $C_{1_{t.}..x_{t.}}$, internally transforms an amorphous set of people A_0 into a internally structured group A_1. Given

the social-organisational format 'b' of the wider environment E_b, the internally structured group A_1 is then presented to that societal environment E_b by selectively highlighting or mimicking such features of A_1 as E_b favours: L publicly presents, to E_b, A_1 as A_2, $\approx A_b$. But the internally organised set is not exclusively defined in terms of its living up to the features favoured by the societal environment. In fact, in the same way as the leader has utilised the appropriation and transformation of the cultural repertoire into $C_{1_{t..x_t}}$, so as to bring about the organised group A_1, in that same way the leader will stress the specificity of (a selection from) the appropriated and transformed cultural repertoire $C_{1_{t..x_t}}$ so as to articulate the organised group A_1 within the wider societal environment. Therefore, before to E_b, A_1 is not only represented by L as A_2, and not only as A_b, but as $A_{b, C_{1_{t..x_t}}}$.

Far from needlessly complicating the discursive argument, the formal notation helps us to pinpoint with increased precision the nature of at least one, common, variety of cultural politics in the context of globalisation. For the viewpoint of the members of the self-organised set of people what have appropriated and transformed globally mediated cultural items so as to forge a new identity, it appears as if the leader in the latter's negotiations the with societal environment, valiantly asserts the group's newly-gained, precious identity: for the politics of identity revolves on recognition — usually the recognition of identities which are publicly presented with such intransigence that one finds it hard to believe that -- usually -- they had been adopted so recently! From the point of view of the state and the bureaucratically organised outside world in general, the leader performs a rather different task: serving as interface, she or he offers (in exchange for such differential remuneration as the outside world has to offer to local leaders: perks, prestige; and at a symbolic cost of paying homage to the strategically presented, identity-underlining repertoire of $C_{1_{t..x_t}}$) a manageable, recognisable foothold onto an otherwise amorphous and uncaptured set of people — and the wider social category from which they have been recruited. In short, the leaders are cultural mediators in a two way process, which subjectively produces and strategically recognises identity, but whose organisational nexus, in the last analysis, may well take priority over its declared cultural emphasis. The politics of culture is thus to a considerable extent a politics of organisational encapsulation, in which state hegemony and internal inequality, representation for recognition and internal symbolic innovation, combine in a very complex way.

Diagram 1. Selected topographical and ethnonymic references in Southern Africa as background to the present argument

1.5. The present argument

My aim in the present argument is to explore these general ideas by reference to three case studies derived from my ongoing research into aspects of Southern African life.[4] I will begin with a discussion of such mediation as takes place in the politics of culture in western central Zambia today. Here the protagonists are of three kinds: traditional rulers; a small rural elite whose members, after cosmopolitan careers, have organised a Cultural Association with ethnic overtone; and the state, as represented by national and regional politicians. I will then move on to Botswana, in order to discuss the dynamics of state registration and recognition of such forms of self-organisation as lead to African Independent Churches, traditional healers organisations, and an ethnic organisation. As a third, limiting, case I will explore such forms of cultural mediation as occur in modern urban environment, in the hands of traditional spirit mediums.

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[4]   For another such case study, an argument on the epistemology and sociology of knowledge of cultural mediation in the context of local management of natural resources among the Nkoya people of western Zambia who also feature in the present argument, cf. van Binsbergen 1999a.

2. CASE STUDY I: NKOYA ROYAL CHIEFS AND THE KAZANGA CULTURAL ASSOCIATION IN WESTERN CENTRAL ZAMBIA TODAY:[5]

2.1. Introduction

In western central Zambia today, the two royal Nkoya chiefs (Mwene Kahare and Mwene Mutondo) are reluctant senior members of the Lozi indigenous administration headed by the Lozi Paramount Chief — the Lozi having locally been hated and contested, ever since the early twentieth century CE, as an invading dominant group. The Nkoya chiefs's financial situation is miserable, conducive to the further decline of chieftainship and its courtly institutions. Nor can it justifiably be said that the chiefs exist on a plane outside the postcolonial state. Until recently they participated in many governing and representative bodies of the postcolonial state, and they have no formal source of income except from the state. The latter largely controls the reproduction (which is greatly defective, anyway) of chieftainship. Besides indirect influence over the lowest law courts with jurisdiction only in the field of family law and traditional political structure, the chiefs' main independent source of power is their continued control over rural land. However, this prerogative may be used, and is used, destructively. Issuing land to strangers hardly benefits the chief beyond covering part of his modest household expenses, but does lead to proletarianisation among the chiefs' local subjects and destroys the territorial basis for chieftainship.

The chiefs are heirs to precolonial rulers incapsulated in the colonial state and subsequently in the postcolonial state; their power base is declining. The chiefs are desperately experimenting with new strategies in order to survive. They are driven into the arms of new actors on the local scene, against whom they are rather defenceless. One of these new actors is an ethnic voluntary association founded and controlled by the chiefs' most successful urban subjects, often their own kinsmen. This non-governmental organisation has been amazingly successful in bridging indigenous politics and the state in a process of cultural mediation; gradually however the revival of chieftainship which this non-governmental organisation has brought about, is turning out to lead not to resilience but to impotent folklorisation if not annihilation of chieftainship, and as a result tensions are mounting between chiefs and

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[5] Field-work was carried out in Kaoma district and Lusaka, Zambia, from February 1972-April 1974, and during many subsequent shorter visits, the latest one of which was in September-October, 1995. **This section is based on an article due for publication in: E.A.B. van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal & R. van Dijk, eds., African chieftaincy in a new socio-economic and political landscape, Hamburg/Münster: LIT.**

the ethnic association.

One group of postcolonial actors which significantly have scarcely bothered to woo the chiefs are national and regional politicians. The end of the Kaunda/UNIP administration and the coming to power of Chiluba/MMD in 1991 further opened national opportunities for the Nkoya; they obtained one fully-fledged Nkoya MP for one of the district's three wards, and one MP/junior minister who is half Nkoya half Mbunda) for another. The third ward was carried by a candidate representing the Luvale, Mbunda, Chokwe and Luchazi groups[6] which since the 1920s have immigrated into the district and which are now numerically dominant. With the rallying for votes, and for a lasting following on a regionalist and ethnic basis, the political new men of the MMD government as from 1991 made a point of visiting the chief's capitals from time to time, kneeling and clapping hands in ceremonial respect, and leaving some tribute. It was however clear to them that the key to voting support was no longer to be found at the chief's capitals but at the meetings of farmers' co-operatives and development committees both in the villages and at the Nkeyema agricultural scheme, and among the politically ambitious chief's relatives who, after successful careers in the urban formal sector, had returned to the district to be commercial farmers. The latter have dominated the executive meetings and the massive annual festival of the Kazanga Cultural Association, the ethnic association which bundles local ethnic resentment. At the highest national level a similar attitude towards the chiefs could be discerned, when in 1993 the Brigadier-General G. Miyanga, as Minister without Portfolio third in rank in the Zambian government, went on a fact-finding mission to Kaoma district in order to ascertain the extent of Lozi-Nkoya ethnic conflict. The trip was covered extensively on Zambian television,[7] in a way which was greatly partial to the Nkoya point of view. Chief's capitals were visited, but most time was spent with vocal, educated Nkoya familiar with court circles but with an open eye to the wider world, and prominent in the Kazanga Cultural Association.

2.2. The Kazanga Cultural Association

2.2.1. The birth of the Kazanga Cultural Association

For a long time the urban component of the Nkoya village communities was not formalised into an ethnic association of the type we know from West Africa: an urban foothold keeping alive ties and obligations directed at the urban migrants's distant village home. Only in 1982 did the 'Kazanga Cultural Association' materialise as a formally registered society under the patronage of the Nkoya minister. This was an initiative of a handful of people from Kaoma district who, by their middle age, and against all odds, had made the grade from insecure circulatory migrant labourer to member of the capital's middle class. With the drop in copper prizes in 1975 Zambia entered into a crisis which has lasted until today. Therefore even the urban middle

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6   Closely related to one another by language, male circumcision, and identification with the Lunda heritage and with Mwatiyamvo; and as such much less different from today's Nkoya than the latter would care to admit; cf. my study of the vicissitudes of male circumcision among the Nkoya as an ethnic boundary marker, van Binsbergen 1993b.

7   'An olive branch for Kaoma district', 26 minutes production, Zambia Broadcasting Corporation, December 1993, videotape in the author's collection.

class could not ignore the economic developments which were meanwhile taking place in Kaoma district. Some returned to the district forever; other started a farm there but continued to live in town. Their enthusiasm for the Nkoya identity became ever more articulated, and its political and (through access to rural land and labour) economic potential they more and more appreciated. This brought these urbanites in close contact with the district's political elite, according them new credit in the eyes of the villagers from which they had earlier taken a distance through their class position and urbanisation. From the 18th-century name of a forest, via that of a nineteenth century dynasty and an early 20th-century, colonial district, the name Nkoya had developed to designate an ethnic group found in several districts, and at the same time a language, a culture, and a cultural project intended to articulate this newly emerged group at the regional and national level.

Founded in the Zambian capital, Lusaka, in 1982, the Kazanga Cultural Association has provided an urban reception structure for prospective migrants, has contributed to Nkoya Bible translation and the publication of ethnic history texts, has championed existing and dormant local chieftainships, and within various political parties and publicity media has campaigned against the Lozi and for the Nkoya cause. The association's main achievement, however, has been the annual organisation (since 1988) of the Kazanga festival, in the course of which a large audience (including Zambian national dignitaries, the four Nkoya royal chiefs, people identifying as Nkoya, and outsiders), for two days is treated to an overview of Nkoya songs, dances and staged rituals. What we have here is a form of bricolage and of invention of tradition (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). The details of the contemporary Kazanga festival I have treated elsewhere. In the present context, it is important to look at the association behind the festival.

2.2.2. The Kazanga Cultural Association as a formal organisation

The Kazanga Cultural Association is a society registered under the Zambian Societies Act, and as such a non-governmental organisation of the type so much stressed in Africanist literature of the 1990s. Its formal nature however is largely illusory. The Kazanga association has no paying members and no membership list. Its minimal financial resources derive from voluntary individual contributions, mainly from the members of the executive themselves, who in this way gain popularity and influence. On the other hand, an executive position accords one a petty source of income via expense accounts. The Societies Act requires an Annual General Meeting which is held at the evening of the second day of the Kazanga festival. In the absence of a membership list and of fee paying, this is in practice a meeting not of members but

merely of several dozens of interested persons. Executive elections mean that from these several dozens of interested persons groups of ten people are formed according to place of residence or of origin. Depending on which people happen to be present, such a group may comprise representatives from a few neighbouring villages, from an entire valley, from an official polling district as delineated by the Zambian state for the purpose of official elections, from a town at the Line of Rail (the urban areas of central Zambia), or even from the entire Line of Rail. With greater of lesser privacy these groups cast their votes for the available candidates, the votes are counted, the result announced via the festival's intercom system, after which the departing executive leaves under scorn and shame, while the new executive is formally installed and treats the voters to a 200 litres drum of traditional beer.

As basically a self-financing clique of successful urbanites and post-urbanites, the executive of the Kazanga Cultural Association has a strong class element. Only Nkoya who are (relatively) high-ranking in terms of education, formal sector career, church leadership, entrepreneurship, wealth, are eligible as candidates for the executive. Traditional status including royal birth or esoteric knowledge does not qualify. In principle all male Nkoya regardless of status have a right to vote for the executive, but in practice only a few score do vote who have the stamina to spend another night at the festival grounds after the two day's festival, and have cash to pay for transport home or have friends who offer to provide such transport. The class element in the Kazanga executive is further reflected in the shift, during the Kazanga Annual meeting of 1994, away from an executive dominated by respected and educated, but economically insecure urban dwellers, and towards an executive whose chairman and secretary are successful entrepreneurs, retired to the district after a brilliant career:

2.2.3. The political agenda of the Kazanga Cultural Association

With all the attention for ethnic cultural production and mediation at the Kazanga festival, it is clear that the Kazanga executive does not for one moment lose sight of the fact that the festival is primarily an attempt to exchange the one resource which one locally has in abundance, competence in symbolic production, for political and economic power. The national dignitaries, and not the royal chiefs, let alone the audience, constitute the spatial focus of the Kazanga festival, and a large part of the programme is devoted to the dignitaries' welcome speeches and other formal addresses. Since the political arena is indeed the right place (and not only in Zambia) to exchange symbolic production for development projects, political allocation and patronage, the harvest of the series of Kazanga festivals since 1988 is by now

eminently manifest in a marked increase of Nkoya participation at the national level, in representative bodies and in the media, and in a marked decrease of the stigmatisation to which they used to be subjected under Lozi domination until well after independence. Kazanga is an example of how an ethnic group can not only articulate itself through symbolic production, but may actually lift itself by its own hairs out of the bog.

The members of the Association's executive usually had a solid urban career and, for their generation (born in the early 1940s), a fair level of education. This makes them adept at operating bureaucracies and politicians. At the same time they tend to be the close relatives of the chiefs, usually spent their early childhood at chief's capitals, and have kept up contact with the courtly milieu to a sufficient extent to be accepted and understood there. This puts them in the unique position of being able to mediate between chiefs and state bureaucracies, or in general between the outside world of modern political and economic life, and the narrow horizon of the village society. Since village society contains, in addition to chiefs whose powers were evidently declining, large numbers of voters, as well as potential rural workers and clients of rural divisions of bureaucracies, politicians have an interest to honour the invitations to the annual Kazanga festival extended to them by the Kazanga executive; moreover, the respectful treatment and the colourful ceremony awaiting them there make them not regret their trip.

2.2.4. Why a formal organisation? Cultural mediation and structural bridging

Kazanga's political agenda however could only be conceived and executed within the wider framework of ethnic processes in Zambia, and throughout sub-Saharan Africa, today.

The formula of ethnic self-presentation through an annual cultural festival built, with much bricolage, out of an historic ritual, has been generally adopted in Zambia today. The television audience is regularly reminded of a growing series (now nearly a dozen) of regional festivals similar to Kazanga. Since all these festivals are created and maintained by ethnic associations, this reveals a recent revival of such formal organisations. They are at the heart of current cultural mediation processes in Zambia (cf. van Binsbergen, in press).

Cultural mediation constructs ethnonyms so as to mark ethnic boundaries, and pre-existing culture so as to fall within those boundaries and to offer distinctive boundary markers. The cultivated sense of a shared history makes sense of experiences of powerlessness, deprivation and estrangement, and kindles hope of improvement through ethnic self-presentation. The ethnonym and the principle of

ascription governing ethnic group membership by birth, then produce for the actors the image of a bounded, particularist set of solidary people. The vulnerable individual's access to national resources, and the formal organisations (in state and industry) controlling them, become the object of group action. In postcolonial Central Africa, ethnicisation increasingly includes the mediation typical of cultural politics. A set of people is restructured so as to become an ethnic group by designing a cultural package which in its own right constitutes a major stake in the negotiations with the outside world. One dissociates from rival ethnic groups at the local and regional scene through a strategic emphasis on cultural and linguistic elements; and at the national level one competes for the state's political and economic prizes via the state's recognition of the ethnically constructed cultural package. New intra-group inequalities emerge. The mediation takes place via brokers who are more than their fellow-members of the ethnic group in a position to exploit the opportunities at the interface between ethnic group and the outside world. Asserting the 'traditional', 'authentic' (but in fact newly reconstructed) culture appears as an important task and as a source of power and income for the brokers. Ethnic associations, publications, and festivals, constitute general strategies in this process.

Ethnicity displays a remarkable dialectics between inescapability and constructedness, which largely explains its great societal potential. On the one hand, as a classification system ethnicity offers a logical structure, which is further ossified through ascription and which presents itself as unconditional, bounded, inescapable and timeless. This is what made early researchers of Central African ethnicity stress primordial attachments. On the other hand, the social praxis of ethnicity as cultural mediation means flexibility, choice, constructedness and recent change. Together, these entirely contradictory aspects constitute a devise to disguise strategy as inevitability. This dialectics renders ethnicity particularly suitable for mediating, in processes of social change, between social contexts with each have a fundamentally different structure. Because of this internal contradiction, ethnicity offers the option of strategically effective particularism in a context of universalism, and hence enables individuals, as members of an ethnic group, to cross otherwise non-negotiable boundaries and to create a foothold or niche in structural contexts that would otherwise remain inaccessible; this is how recent urban immigrants (cf. urban markets of labour and housing) and citizens (cf. bureaucracies) use ethnicity.

Cultural mediation amounts to a conceptual and organisational focusing or framing, so as to make a social contradiction or conflict capable of being processed within the available technologies of communication, bureaucratic organisation, and political representation. The emergence of ethnic associations is one example at the

organisational level.[8] What the Kazanga Cultural Association basically does is to provide an organisational framework for bridging the state on the one hand, indigenous politics (and the rural society that it stands for) on the other.

Two contradictory processes can be seen to be at work at the same time in the Kazanga Cultural Association as a context of cultural mediation:

- the state on the one hand, the chiefs (and the rural society they stand for) on the other, are caused to be in constant interaction with each other (which makes for merging and blurring of boundaries in actual political and economic practice),
- yet at a level of the explicit conceptualisations, by the actors involved, this constant movement back and forth between what they construct as a traditional and as a modern domain, only reinforces their view that here two fundamentally different modes of socio-political organisation are involved.

The following table presents the outline of an actors' model which, from the point of view of the Nkoya elite, the Nkoya chiefs and most Nkoya commoners, would seem to sum up the structural differences between chiefs and the postcolonial state :

postcolonial state	*postcolonial state*
legal authority (the letter of the written word)	legal authority (the letter of the written word)
impersonal	impersonal
universalist	universalist
imported within living memory	imported within living memory
culturally alien	culturally alien
defective legitimation	defective legitimation
lack of cosmological anchorage	lack of cosmological anchorage

Table 1. A model contrasting chiefs and postcolonial state

This model allows us to make the point that the Kazanga executive as brokers are, at least in their own perception, truly bridging two fundamentally different structures.

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8   However, ethnicity is not unique in this respect. Elsewhere (van Binsbergen 1993a) I have presented a similar argument with regard to African independent churches and professional associations of traditional healers in Botswana, both forms of formal organisations present an organisational form in line with the logic of the postcolonial state (via the latter's Societies Act), while internally supporting ideological positions totally at variance with the principles informing the state.

Against the background of African ethnicity and cultural mediation, it is no surprise that they do so in an idiom of cultural mediation.

The important thing to realise is that such bridging consists in the negotiation of conceptual boundaries through concrete interaction, where objects and people are positioned at the conceptual boundaries between two systems, where they can serve as interfaces between the two. In the dialectics of social praxis, conceptually different domains are drawn, first, within such contradictory perceptions, motivations and exchanges as each single actor is capable of; and secondly, these contradictions are to be made convergent, predictable, and persistent over time by their being imbedded in the social organisation of such individual actors. In other words, structural bridging inevitably requires, beyond conceptualisation, effective social organisation. The modern formal organisation corresponds morphologically with the organisational logic of the state; at the same time, in the field of ideology and symbolism it can maintain as much continuity as is needed towards structural domains that are conceived according to a logic totally different from that of the state (like chieftainship). Therefore the mode of mobilisation which structurally bridges state and chiefs had to take the form of a formal voluntary association.

Let us now examine what in practice was realised of such bridging, by considering the actual interaction between the Kazanga Cultural Association and the chiefs of western central Zambia.

2.3. The chiefs and the Kazanga Cultural Association

2.3.1. Royal cultural revival in the Kazanga festival

Up to a point of disaffection, which was reached in 1995, chiefs have sought to use the Kazanga Cultural Association for their own self-presentation. But the complementary process has been much more manifest: the attempt, on the part of the Kazanga Cultural Association, to use, increasingly even to harness, chieftainship for its own combined purpose of ethnic articulation, access to the state, and personal ascendance in terms of political and economic power and influence on the part of the association's executive.

Kazanga's effective negotiation between the state, the chieftainship and the villagers insists on a new symbolic and ceremonial role for all four Nkoya kings together along lines which are all bricolage and thoroughly un-historical, but which do result in restoring the kings to a level of emotional and symbolic significance perhaps unprecedented in twentieth century Nkoya history. At the annual Kazanga

festival, the chiefs have grasped the opportunity to appear with all regality which they could summon and which their paraphernalia could earn them. Mwene Kahare, who used to be a somewhat pathetic, stammering and alcoholic figure dressed in a faded suit with ragged shirt collar, finally, in his seventies, appeared at the 1992 Kazanga festival covered in leopard skins and with a headband adorned with regal *zimpande* shell ornaments[9] — regalia he has most probably never worn since his installation in 1955 — formidably brandishing his royal axe in a solo dance that kept the audience breathless and moved them to tears. At the climax the king (for that is what he shows himself to be, in a performative revival of early 19th-century royal autonomy and splendour) kneels down and drinks directly from a hole in the ground where beer has been poured out for his royal ancestors — the patrons of at least his part of the Nkoya nation, implied to share in the deeply emotional cheers from the audience.

The successful emergence of the Kazanga Cultural Association initially promised to offer to the chiefs the opportunity for self-assertion that was well in line with their anti-Lozi sentiments. However, competition between the two Nkoya chiefs from Kaoma turned out to be a very severe constraint in this respect. The first few Kazanga festivals were staged at the capital of Mwene Mutondo, and were thus interpreted as a sign of his seniority over Kahare and over other royal chiefs from outside Kaoma district. A truce was struck by the adoption of new, special festival grounds smack at the boundary between either chief's areas. But this led to further complications as the above case of Mr Daniel Muchayila demonstrates.

Gradually, Mutondo dominance over the Kazanga festival and over Nkoya cultural mediation in general has dwindled. The suspiciously untimely death of Muchayila's successor Mwene Chipimbi in 1992 prevented Mutondo control over that year's festival (a successor is seldom installed within a year), and anyway rendered the Mutondo *lukena* (royal court) inappropriate as festival grounds in this time of mourning. Mwene Kahare's royal dance centres, of course, on a shrine situated at the hub of the festival grounds; but it is no longer the thatched shrine of the Mutondo dynasty, nor the Kahare dynasty's own wooden pole adorned with buffalo trophies, but a neutral shrub of the type found, as headman's shrine, in most Nkoya villages.

The traditionalist revival on the part of the Kazanga Cultural Association is not limited to Nkoya circles and western Zambia, as the following case reveals:

> *Kazanga, and Soli ethnic revival in central Zambia.* One of the most interesting developments

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9   Elsewhere in Southern Africa they are called *ndoro*.

around Kazanga occurred in Lusaka in 1995. The Kazanga band under the direction of Mr Tom Taulo, the composer and dance leader, also gives paid guest performances in beer gardens etc. in the Lusaka area. This has produced such popularity for the band that Kazanga Cultural Association was invited to play a major advisory role on the creation of the first Soli ethnic festival at Undaunda, 100 km. east of Lusaka. After extensive preparatory meetings in which the experiences of the Kazanga Cultural Association since 1982 were lavishly shared, both the band and the executive of the association's Lusaka branch were major official guests at the actual festival in October, 1995. It was almost exactly a hundred years after Mwene Mutondo Wahila, in the context of a diplomatic exchanges, across a distance of 500 km paid a state visit to the Soli Queen Nkomeshya. It is still too early to draw conclusions from the 1995 co-operation, yet is suggests that we are witnessing the formation of one large ethnic coalition (a 'mega-ethnic group') encompassing the whole of Central Zambia. The name 'Kafue' has already been suggested as its name, not only because this is the major river of this region, but also because this has been the historic name of various colonial administrative centres, at various locations between Lusaka and Kaoma district.

The Kazanga association has also been instrumental in reviving royal titles which did not survive Lozi expansion around 1900: the Shakalongo title, once senior to both Kahare and Mutondo, had for many years been carried by a mere village headman, but has now been reinstalled as that of a royal chief; and the reinstatement of Mwene Pumpola in Lukulu district has been imminent for some years. The Kazanga annual festival offers these new chiefs the opportunity to articulate themselves publicly, even if this means that for the time being they have to make shift in a cosmopolitan three-piece suit instead of leopard skin and other historic paraphernalia. However, their formal recognition and remuneration depends on the Lozi Paramount, whose refusal we have already discussed above.

After the enthusiasm of the first years of the Kazanga festival, it gradually became clear that the executive of the Kazanga Cultural Association sought to use chieftainship as a resource for ulterior aims, instead of furthering it as what the chiefs and their councillors had been led to believe during the colonial period: the hub of Nkoya ethnic identity. The dramaturgy of the festival was revised so as to make clear that not Mwene Mutondo, or the royal chiefs collectively, but the association's executive was hosting the festival; by 1993 the chiefs saw themselves reduced to the status of picturesque ornaments who had to put in a ceremonial presence, avowedly as exalted guests of honour but in fact as the most senior *performers* at the festival, who imprisoned in their royal shelter, next to that of the national and regional politicians, did not even have a chance to engage in conversation with the latter.

2.3.2. Interaction between chiefs and the Kazanga executive beyond the Kazanga festival

The interaction between the Kazanga Cultural Association and the chiefs was not limited to the Kazanga festival but gradually extended to traditional politics at the

chief's capitals themselves. Against the background of the postcolonial state and Zambian civil society, an extremely complex pattern emerged whose outlines are presented in diagram 1. It is difficult to imagine a better demonstration of the boundary crossings which are absolutely standard between the so-called modern political domain and the so-called traditional political domain. Moreover, the diagram makes it clear that the mediation between these two domains presupposes a third domain: that of the civil society, which in the Kazanga case concentrates on the executive of the Kazanga Cultural Association.

A number of specific cases bring out the fact that the Kazanga Cultural Association tried not only to further and revise, but actually to control chieftainship, and that this attempt was thwarted by the traditional guardians of that institution, the royal councils of Kaoma district. Although the Association managed to have one of its leading members installed in the chieftainship, the latter soon died (allegedly from a criminal act of poisoning), and his successor was a traditionalist lacking close ties with the Association. Outside Kaoma district, at the Kabulwebulwe capital in Mumbwa district where most of the Kazanga executive are strangers, they did much better. They played a major part in the election of the new Chief Kabulwebulwe, in Mumbwa district in 1994, and were guests of honour both at the funeral of the previous incumbent and at the installation ceremony of his successor. In the same year the throne of Mwene Kahare had to be filled after the aged Mwene Kahare Kabambi died in December 1993, after having ruled for 39 years. Here again, like at the court of Mutondo, the Kazanga Cultural Association's offensive intended to gain direct control over the chieftainship, but failed again.[10]

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[10]   It is interesting to note how the contradictions between the royal courts and the Kazanga association, which became manifest in the course of the 1990s, also have complements in the religious and political affiliations of the people involved on either side. The MMD **[explain]** had a strong appeal among aspiring urbanites, the very category that makes up the Kazanga executive. By contrast, the chiefs' courts largely remained loyal to what over the years had emerged as their main ally in the struggle against the Lozi: UNIP and its leader Kaunda, who only as recently as in 1990 had prevented a move by the Lozi Paramount Chief to abolish the Nkoya chieftainships. Mr Mayowe meanwhile dabbled in opposition politics and in 1994 was the district representative of the National Party, which carried the Mongu by-elections in early 1994; this lonely political stance in a UNIP-oriented rural environment helped to tilt the scales against him at the royal election. In the religious field Lozi/chief antagonism was temporarily suspended when Mwene Kahare welcomed the oppressive intervention on the part of the Seventh Day Adventist Church; however, most of the Kazanga executive have remained loyal to the Evangelic Church of Zambia, the first missionary presence in the region, since it had provided their formal education.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Zambian society at large

dance troup

Zambian nationals as commercial formers

other political parties

donor agencies

Seventh-Day Adventist Church

prominent town-dwellers

Kazanga Cultural Association

retired rural-dwelling career migrants

executive

Movement for Multiparty Democracy

Nkoya inhabitants of Kaoma township

expatriate commercial farmers

dance troup

other churches

United National Independence Party

INDIGENOUS POLITICAL SYSTEM

royal council (also law court)

retainers and musicians

other royal Lozi chiefs

Lozi chief at Naliele

villagers

dance troup

Lozi paramount chief

uniformed kapasus

royal council (also law court)

chief Mwene Kahare

discontinued c. 1980

chief Mwene Mutondo

retainers and musicians

uniformed kapasus

headmen

a specific relation is only claimed to exist between the actor at the origin of a line and the actor at the end of the line as indicated by an arrow; due to the complexity of political relationships, it is unavoidable that lines pass behind shields indicating other actors, but in such cases the absence of an arrow indicates that no relation is claimed

POSTCOLONIAL STATE

House of Chiefs

other MPs

MP for Kaoma East

National Assembly

MP for Kaoma West

MP for Luampa

Kaoma District Secretary

uniformed kapasus

District Magistrate

officers

Local Courts

discontinued c. 1980

President of the Republic of Zambia

Minister without Portfolio

various ministries

Kaoma Rural Council

secretary

officers

other district departments

executive, command

election, representation

influence
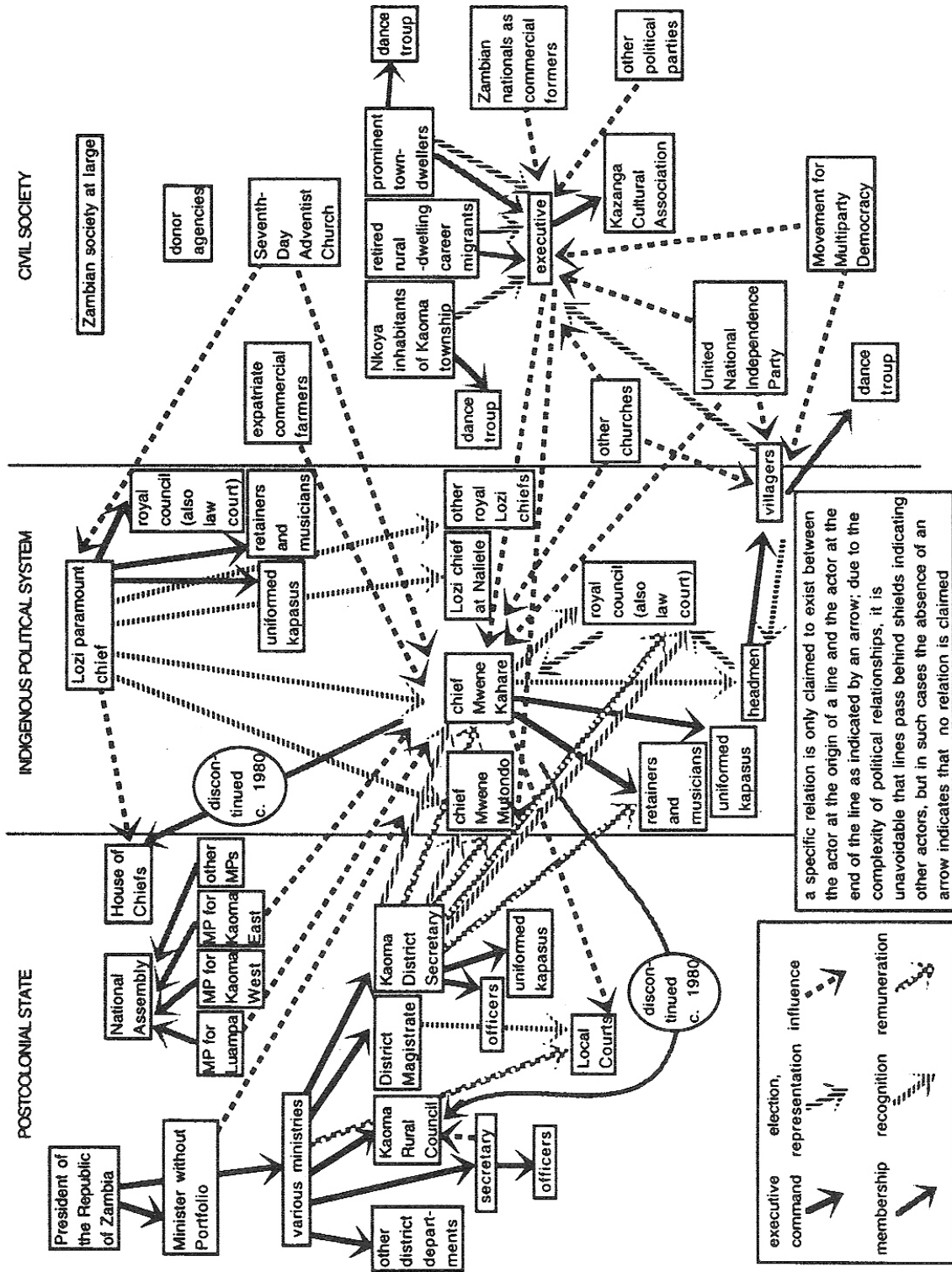
recognition

remuneration

membership

Diagram 2. Postcolonial state, indigenous political system and civil society: The background of political relations between Chief Kahare and the Kazanga Cultural Association executive

The breaking point in the relations between the chiefs and the Kazanga Cultural Association was reached in 1995. Then a great conflict broke out, in which the following themes reverberated:

- gender, now beginning to be a modern political issue in this rural area, has always been an underlying current in local chieftainship: in the 18th and early 19th century, all Myene were women.
- the Kazanga festival as a celebration of viable royalty, of the kingdom (the way the festival was celebrated in the 19th century), rather as a mere nostalgic production of performative fragments (as the festival has turned out under the Kazanga Cultural Association)
- conflict between court officials and Kazanga officials; the court officials feel that their power over chieftainship is being usurped by the Kazanga executive, and seek to reclaim control by insistence on proper protocol.

These senior headmen may have spent many years in distant urban employment but in middle age can afford to have no other commitment than the preservation of *shihemuwa shetu*, 'our custom'. Far from being a dying concern, traditional politics (even if no longer remunerated) has remained a central career goals for many men from western Central Zambia.

The interaction between the Kazanga Cultural Association and the chiefs has made clear that cultural mediation does not necessarily lead to resilience of chieftainship. In the Nkoya case it has led to folklorisation: the reduction of chiefs to nostalgic ornaments of symbolic production in a festival context which is dominated by ethnic brokers orientated to the modern economy and the state.

In the early 1970s the Nkoya neo-traditional court culture was marked by a rigid, wholly introverted splendour. The maintenance of nostalgic historic forms of protocol and symbolic, particularly musical, production (which no longer correspond with any real power invested in the kingship under conditions of incorporation by the Barotse indigenous state and by the colonial and post-colonial central state) reflected the fact that *boundary maintenance* vis-à-vis the outside world was at its peak. All this strikingly contrasts with the laxity of court life at the *zinkena* (royal courts) today. The drums are no longer played. Court protocol which used to be extremely strict and enforced by physical sanctions (only a century ago still by capital punishment), is hardly observed today. Chiefs are no longer recognised nor remunerated, and expatriate commercial farmers with their racialist labour relations are literally taking over the land.

Under such circumstances, Nkoya cultural mediation could even lead to the virtual destruction of the chieftainships that featured so prominently as a sign of ethnic identity, ethno-historical reconstruction, and the reinvention of tradition in the context of the Kazanga festival. The near future will learn if and how the current Nkoya royal chiefs, both of them new incumbents although in advanced middle age,

will meet these challenges.

Under the circumstances, the annihilation of the particular form chieftainship as found in western central Zambia is a serious possibility, which opens up further horizons of analysis. At an abstract level, the interaction between the Kazanga Cultural Association and the chiefs may ultimately have to be interpreted, not as mere *bridging* (which presupposes the continued independent existence of social contexts — chiefs and state — to be bridged), but rather as the *replacement* of one historic mode of organisation (that of the indigenous political system centring on the *lukena*) by another, formal, global mode of organisation (that of the state-registered voluntary association). Both modes organise the villagers of western central Zambia, by trading exploitation by an elite (the chiefs, the executive) for old and new goals (the chiefs: social and cosmological order, judicial and military regulation of violence, regulation of long-distance trade; the executive: ethnic cultural self-expression, economic and political access to the wider world).

In less than a hundred years, the formal organisation has established itself on African soil as the principal format for social, political, economic and religious organisation, complementing and often replacing time honoured, historic local forms of organisation. I have often stressed[11] that from a sociological point of view, this is one of the most significant transformations of African life, and one of the greatest blind spots in African studies today. We have largely contented ourselves with demonstrating why (for informal undercurrents, corruption, continued allegiance to older forms of organisation, lack of appreciation of legal authority etc.) the formal organisation cannot work in Africa, rather than acknowledging that defective or latent functioning of formal organisations is not peculiar to Africa, and can only be understood once the formal organisation in itself has been accepted to set the framework.

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[11]   Van Binsbergen 1985, 1993a, 1993c, 1997.

3 . CASE STUDY II: THE MEDIATION OF HISTORIC LOCAL CULTURE IN THE URBAN SPACE IN FRANCISTOWN, BOTSWANA[12]

3.1. Cultural Repertoires of meaning and the postmodern urban space

I shall continue my inspection of Southern African contexts of cultural mediation, with two shorter examples from contemporary Botswana. The first example takes us to the rapidly growing town of Francistown, the capital of Botswana's North East district.

To what extent has the contemporary urban environment managed to produce and nurture symbols which selectively refer to the state and the world economy, yet at the same time negotiate dilemmas of rural-derived identity and of urban-rural relations? What processes of the mediation of historical local culture take place in the urban setting? When we approach the topic of urban images from the point of view of meaning, we have to look for *such meaning as is enshrined in publicly articulated collective representations*, and then particularly those which, through their relative permanence, their anchorage in material forms of buildings, roads, spatial arrangements, are mediated through and at the same time constitute the townscape. We have to ask ourselves under what conditions such materially-expressed collective representations can at all be generated and perpetuated in the relatively new setting of an African town, whose fluid population (immensely heterogeneous when we look at geographical and ethnic origins, languages, creeds, life-styles and access to economic and political power) could rather be expected to have myriads of fragmented and mutually contesting parallel manifestations of meaning: the disconnected scraps of many different rural life-worlds the migrants left behind when becoming urban. It is particularly in the context of meaning that we see African towns as the arena where a migrant's specific, disconnected and fragmented rural-based heritage is confronted with a limited number of 'cosmopolitan' socio-cultural complexes, each generating its own discourse and claiming its own commitment from the people drawn into its orbit in exchange for partial solutions of their problems of meaning.
Let us sum up the principal cosmopolitan complexes:

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[12]   Field-work was carried out in Francistown and surrounding rural areas, and in Gaborone, Botswana, November 1988-October 1989, and during several shorter visits, the latest of which was in October 1995. This section is based on: van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1993b, 'Making sense of urban space in Francistown, Botswana', in: P.J.M. Nas, ed., *Urban symbolism, Leiden: Brill, Studies in Human Societies*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 184-228.

The post-colonial state: a principal actor in the struggle for control of the urban space; a major agent of social control through its law-and-order institutions (the judiciary, police, immigration department); a major mediator of 'cosmopolitan' meaning through the bureaucratically organised services it offers in such fields as education, cosmopolitan medicine, housing, the restructuration of kinship forms through statutory marriage etc.; a major context for the creation of new, politically instrumental meaning in the process of nation-building and elite legitimation; and through its constitutional premises the object (and often hub) of modern political organisations.

The capitalist mode of production, largely structuring the urbanites' economic participation and hence their experience of time, space, causation, personhood and social relations; involving them in relations of dependence and exploitation whose ideological expression we have learned to interpret in terms of *alienation* (the destruction of historic meaning); but also, in the process, leading on to modern organisational forms (e.g. trade unions) meant to counter the powerlessness generated in that process; and finally producing both the manufactured products on which *mass consumption* as a world-wide economic and cultural expression — in other words, as another, immensely potent form of 'cosmopolitan' meaning — depends, as well as the financial means to participate in mass consumption.

World religions, which pursue organisational forms and ideological orientations rather reminiscent of the post-colonial state and the capitalist mode of production, yet tending to maintain, in time, space and ideological content, sufficient distance from either complex to have their own appeal on the urban population, offering formal socio-ritual contexts in which imported cosmopolitan symbols can be articulated and shared between urbanites, and in which — more than in the former two complexes — rural-based historic symbols can be mediated, particularly through independent churches.

Cosmopolitan consumer culture, ranging from fast food shops to hire-purchase furniture stores displaying the whole material dream of a prospective middle-class life-style, and from video outlets and record shops to the retail shops of the international ready-made garment industry, and all the other material objects by which one can encode distinctions in or around one's body and its senses, and create identity not by seclusive group-wise self-organisation but by individual communication with globally mediated manufactured symbols.

The four cosmopolitan complexes each have their unmistakable manifestations in the townscape: in the form of specialised buildings, plots, quarters specifically set aside for state or industrial functions; and each offer both social organisation and meaning. However, these three cosmopolitan repertoires of meaning differ considerably from the ideal-typical meaning enshrined in the rural historic universe. Although all three are historically related, they are present on the urban African scene as mutually competitive, fragmented, optional, and more or less anomic or even — when viewed from a competitive angle — absurd. Yet together, as more or less elite expressions, they constitute a realm of symbolic discourse that, however internally contradictory, assumes dominance over the rural-orientated, local and historic repertoires of meaning of African migrants and workers.

The ways in which the cosmopolitan and the local idioms interact in African towns today, are ill understood for several reasons. Those who, as social scientists, are supposed to study these patterns of interaction are, in their personal and professional lives, partisans of cosmopolitan repertoires and are likely to be identified

as such by the other actors on the urban scene. Much of the interaction between repertoires is evasive and combines the assumption of rigid subordination with the practice of creative challenge and tacit symbolic resistance in private spheres of urban life where few representatives of the cosmopolitan repertoires have access. And whereas anthropology has developed great expertise in the handling of meaning in one spatio-temporal context (e.g. rural African societies) whose wholeness and integration it has tended to exaggerate, the development of a sensitive approach to fragmented and incoherent multiplicity of repertoires of meaning, each assaulted and rendered more or less meaningless by the presence of the other, had perhaps to wait till the advent of postmodernism as an attempt to revolutionarise, or to explode, anthropology.[13] Our classic predecessors in African urban studies worked on the assumption that the African urban situation was very highly structured — by what they called the 'colonial-industrial complex' imposing rigid segregation and class interests, by voluntary associations, by networks.[14] In the contemporary world, such structure is becoming more and more problematic, and the town, especially the African town, appears as the postmodern social space *par excellence*. Our greatest analytical problem here is that as a social space it lacks the coherent and unified structure which could produce a single, convincing repertoire of meaning ready for monographic processing; but this is not merely an analytical problem — it appears to sum up the essence of what urban life in Africa today is about.[15]

In the beginning of this paper I referred to African Independent churches in Francistown. These churches constitute only one example out of very many (van Binsbergen 1993a) which go to show that, as a result of the converging effects of state monitoring and the population's self-censorship and informal social control, the

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[13] Cf. Geuijen 1992; Kapferer 1988; Nencel & Pels 1991; Tyler 1987; and references cited there.

[14] Cf. Mitchell 1956, 1969; Epstein 1958, 1967.

[15] Multiplicity of meaning within a social formation consisting of fundamentally different and mutually irreducible sub-formations constitutes a condition for which postmodernism is not the only, and deliberately unsystematic, analytical approach. As a paradigm that preceded postmodernism by a decade in the circulation of intellectual fashions, the notion of *articulation of modes of production* is in principle capable of handling such a situation (e.g. van Binsbergen 1981; van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1985), were it not that its emphasis on enduring structure and a specific internal logic for each constituent 'mode of production' renders it difficult to accommodate the extreme fragmentation and contradiction of meaning typical of the urban situation. The various cosmopolitan and local historic repertoires of meaning available in the Francistown situation as discussed here cannot convincingly be subsumed under the heading of a limited number of articulated modes of production. Yet while deriving inspiration from the postmodern position, my argument in the present paper is a plea for rather greater insistence on structure, power and material conditions than would suit the convinced post-modernist.

public production of any local cultural tradition is anathema within the urban environment of Francistown today — unless under conditions of state orchestration, such as urban customary courts or Independence celebrations. For most purposes, traditional culture has gone underground in this town. This also makes it understandable why rival therapeutic institutions available at the local urban scene: herbalists (*dingaka ya setswana*) and spirit mediums (*basangoma*) offering more secluded sessions for private conversation and therapeutic action, continue to attract a larger number of clients than the population's massive involvement in healing churches would suggest.

> Ethnicity does play a role here, since Francistown is in the heart of Kalanga country, and the Kalanga constitute the most vocal and privileged ethnic and linguistic minority to challenge Tswana hegemony in Botswana. Yet this cannot be the entire explanation: Kalanga is not the *lingua franca* in Francistown (that is Tswana, which is also the mother tongue not only of the distant Tswana majority to the west and the south but also of some communities near Francistown), and as from the 1960s the town has attracted such large numbers of Tswana urban migrants that Tswana are now in the majority — but also Tswana expressions of traditional culture are barred from the public urban scene. More important, churches are about the least ethnically divided domain in Francistown society: many churches here are emphatically bilingual or trilingual in their ritual practice, and whereas it is sometimes possible to detect ethnic overtones in the conflicts which often lead churches to split, in general adherents live up to their stated conviction that ethnic bickering is not becoming in a context meant to express common humanity before the face of God (van Binsbergen 1994b).

One of the most characteristic features of Francistown has been the relative absence of publicly articulated carriers of cosmopolitan meaning in the townscape: it was, and (despite the building boom since the late 1980s) largely still is, *a town without street names, statues, monuments, striking public buildings, without spatially articulated public symbolism*. The White- and Indian-dominated two-street business centre with its modern architecture of banks and shopping 'malls', the new single-level civic centre, fast-food and video outlets, during the day is invaded by African people who only conditionally, awkwardly, for specific purposes of employment or consumption, venture out of their distant housing, preferably under elaborate protective clothing and make-up. The town's symbolic barrenness, even in the central district and certainly outside it, conveys the message that, for many of its inhabitants, it is merely a temporary and scarcely convenient space where cosmopolitan meaning, however implied to be dominant and inescapable, is seldom articulated, internalised, or shared, is always problematic, and often rejected; at the same time this state of affairs points, as we shall see, to fundamental contradictions in the relation between the state, capital and Christianity in the social formation of which Francistown forms part.

3.2. Cultural mediation as a specialism: Churches, sangoma lodges and the sacralisation of urban space

Architectural structures which dominate the townscape are those associated with the state and capitalism. This means that in Francistown only an inconspicuous role is reserved for one category of structures which in European and American towns is so visually dominant: churches. Imposing church halls and spires which tower over a town's main throughways and squares — this sort of thing is entirely absent in Francistown. The only church to be found in the old town centre, at the boundary between the Central Business District and the Central Area, is the Anglican St Patrick's Church, a brick structure whose modest dimensions and miniature spire reminds one of a village chapel in England; the back street on which it is situated, behind the civic centre, is named 'St Patrick Street', and this is virtually the only case of a Francistown street-name having religious (and thus universalist) connotations.

The only other church building which stands out near the town centre is the large, Zimbabwean-orientated Apostolic (*Vapostori*) Church on the main road passing Area W going to the Tati River. Several major cosmopolitan church missions, such as the Catholic Mission and the Seventh Day Adventist Mission, are located outside the African residential space and form little enclaves on their own. The outlying residential areas contain scores of church buildings. Some of them are of rather elaborate modern brick architecture,[16] but a far greater number is built on a self-help basis, in an architecture scarcely standing out among the surrounding houses, and displaying considerable reticence in self-advertisement: no sign, or a small hand-painted one.[17] Churches may attain a certain conspicuity at the residential-area level, but they are far from a marked presence in the townscape as a whole.

Basangoma (spirit mediums) and *baprofiti* ('prophets', i.e. leaders of African Independent churches) are the African Francistownian community's principal specialists in the articulation and manipulation of meaning. They are the only ones to actually sacralise the urban space in its own right through the creation of shrines and the staging of ritual and sacrifice in the urban context. It is true that the *sangoma*

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[16] Like the Lutheran Church of Southern Africa in Somerset East Extension, or the spectacular, bird-shaped church hall of the Guta Ra Mwari church in Area S; cf. van Binsbergen 1990b.

[17] The same reticence in self-advertisement is found among herbalists and other traditional healers, including the *basangoma*. Francistown has scores of healers, many of whom are officially certified as members of state-registered professional organisations, but very few of them display painted signs. People find their way to them by personal recommendation from kinsmen, friends, neighbours and colleagues at work.

shrines to a considerable extent evoke a viable rural social and cosmological order revolving on ancestors;[18] but at the same time items charged with cosmopolitan meaning (the lodge leader's relatively luxurious town house, modern furniture, emphasis on cash and on cash-bought paraphernalia and sacrifices, reliance on manufactured food and drink, even the ubiquitous plastic shopping bags) are far from shunned, and they are sacralised in the ritual process continuously going on at the *sangoma* lodges (cf. van Binsbergen 1999b). The *baprofiti*'s position is related but somewhat different: their reference is to the cosmopolitan repertoires of meaning much more than to the historic rural repertoire, and they impose severe limitations upon the selection from the modern society that their adherents are allowed to indulge in, yet they too offer ritual and symbolic ways in which the suffering and temptation engendered in that modern world can be alleviated and a person can return to it without being overwhelmed by it — ways which make that world once again an inhabitable place. In this way the *baprofiti*, too, sacralise and to some extent rehabilitate the urban space itself. Both types of ritual specialists offer a way out from the alienation which for most other Africans in Francistown is both an accepted fact and a major factor in their strictly utilitarian approach to the town as intrinsically devoid of (historic, rural) meaning, as anything but home.

> At this juncture, we should mention Richard Werbner's (1985, 1989) perceptive attempt to define aspects of the symbolism of African Independent churches in Zimbabwe and North East Botswana by reference to two axes: personhood, which he argues can be either framed or unframed, and space, which can be either bounded or unbounded. In this way he is able to pin-point specific differences in church idiom, and also to construe these differences as elements in an 'argument of images' which essentially addresses the dilemmas of displacement, movement and alienation in the context of migrancy, urbanisation and an eroded rural cosmology and economy. Werbner's approach certainly illuminates the specific form certain Independent church buildings take — as well as the absence of such buildings in other cases — but his post-structuralist abstraction from concrete social forms and situations renders it less applicable in the present context.[19] Nor does Werbner's interpretation exhaust the spatial symbolism at hand in the African Independent churches. His static insistence on doctrine and architecture fails to capture the spatial and bodily *dynamics* of group interaction. In many Independent churches this takes the form of a dancing chorus, a circular dancing movement, or even a 'planetary' movement with the dancers (as detached, impersonal 'atoms', once again?) turning both around their own axis and, jointly, around a common centre, where often the congregation's new-born children, novices, baptismal candidates, sufferers or sick are placed as if to have maximum benefit from the energy unleashed by the frantic yet carefully orchestrated movement of the congregation. Here, and in the not unrelated *sangoma* dancing ritual, we can see the (attempt of a) *group-wise appropriation and hence transformation of a small ritual space inside town, as an active way of confronting and exorcising the alienation which is paramount in the everyday living experience of the African*

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[18] Van Binsbergen 1990a, 1991b.

[19] Cf. van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers 1985b for a specific discussion.

workers in the urban space outside the ritual situation.[20]

The *basangoma* and *baprofiti* also specifically mediate between spatial symbolism in the rural homes and spatial symbolism in town. The town's river beds, in the African pedestrians' perceptions, are convenient passage-ways rather than boundaries. In the symbolism of the urban landscape they feature also in other capacities. The rivers (whose connotations of liminality may be obvious) have retained their historic rural symbolism as the abode of the ancestors, of territorial spirits and of the Great Water Serpent — even if they are dry most of the time. The urban rivers play an important part in the ritual of the town's *sangoma* lodges in that every novice has to be chased across one of them, dropping sacrificial coins and being beaten by the senior lodge members. Lodge members ritually wash their bodies outdoors in the thicket adjacent to the stream, on the occasion of initiation and bereavement. The rivers also play a role in the baptismal rites of the Independent churches, whose symbolism is historically African at least as much as it is biblical.

Hills are in a category akin to rivers. Nyangabgwe Hill does not only visually dominate Francistown. The etymology of this place-name contains virtually the only bit of shared historic collective consciousness among the local population: many Francistownians can tell you that the name derives from the Kalanga words for 'rock' and 'to stalk', and can offer the nutshell myth of a hunter mistaking a rock for a prey he thought to be stalking. This hill is only the tallest of a system of about ten hills around the confluence of the Tati and Inchwe Rivers, and on the tops of several of these hills there are archaeological sites, with *zimbabwe*-type fishbone-pattern brickwork revealing these places to have been residences of regional minor rulers incorporated in a powerful state (closely associated with the Mwali cult and the Kalanga language) encompassing much of northwestern Botswana and Zimbabwe until only a few centuries ago.[21] The contemporary ethnic consciousness of the Kalanga in and around Francistown lacks awareness of this glorious historical past and concentrates on their humiliation at the hands of the Ngwato (a Tswana sub-group) mainly in the colonial period. I suppose that in the technical legal sense these archaeological sites are national monuments, but in the sociological sense they are certainly not, since very few Francistownians are aware of their presence and

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[20] In this respect I can now see *sangoma* and Independent Church ritual to be far closer to each other in the confrontation of urban alienation than I suggested in an earlier analysis (van Binsbergen 1990a).

[21] Van Waarden 1986, 1988; Beach 1980; Tlou & Campbell 1984.

significance. The hills do however feature in the ritual of the (mutually closely related) Mwali and *sangoma* cults and in that of the, somewhat more distantly related, African Independent churches, as places of theophany comparable with the rivers.

The point about these 'traditional' (i.e. non-capitalist, non-statal, non-White) elements in the town, however, is not so much that they are there, but that *they have not been negotiated to become conspicuous elements in the publicly and centrally constructed symbolism of the urban space*. They are to a considerable extent underground, tacitly acknowledged and utilised by the African population as major components of their 'collective private' domain, but never articulated in the latter's interaction with powerful representatives of the state and of capitalism: civil servants and employers. They help to constitute the invisible but virtually impenetrable spatial and conceptual boundary which divides Francistown society, even despite the superficial appearance of both Whites and African elites, and African working-class migrants, as being increasingly united in a relentless pursuit of mass consumption and the other spoils of an economically viable more or less democratic post-colonial state. Or, impenetrable? The enlisting of the *sangoma* lodges by national and regional politicians, in order to embellish annual Independence Day celebrations with the colourful uniforms and spectacular dances, suggests that here, again, a form of external bureaucratic encapsulation goes hand in hand with the internal reproduction of historic meaning.

Ultimately, the interpretation of patterns and contradictions of meaning as expressed in the urban space consists in highlighting the struggles, on the part of the state and capital, to control both each other and civil society, including such vital ideological expressions as represent repertoires of meaning which are independent from and cannot be reduced to, the logic of the populist state, wage labour and mass consumption. A continued reliance on historic, rural forms is one such repertoire, and its main strategy turns out to go underground, to make itself invisible in the urban space except for those who already know. Kalanga ethnicity constitutes a closely related repertoire of meaning, and as I am arguing elsewhere (van Binsbergen, 1994b) it has great difficulty of articulating itself in the face of Tswana linguistic, cultural and political hegemony, and of the rewards the latter offers to those who accept to be Kalanga only in their inner rooms, while publicly submitting to Tswana dominance.

4. CASE STUDY III: THE STATE AND CULTURAL MEDIATION IN BOTSWANA: APPLICATION OF THE 1972 SOCIETIES' ACT[22]

4.1. Leaders and bureaucrats as cultural mediators: State-Monitoring cultural associations in Botswana

Such cultural mediation as takes place at the local level of Francistown, is complemented at the national state level, where under the *Societies Act* all voluntary organisations of a religious, recreational, professional and political nature are required to formally register with the Registrar of Societies. Unless they are exempted, which is the exclusive privilege of a handful of large, cosmopolitan churches, they are bound to annually submit returns on membership, leadership etc. allowing the state to monitor the association in detail.

Elsewhere (van Binsbergen 1993 and forthcoming) I am presenting a fuller study of these practices. Here I will limit myself to a few interesting cases.

4.2. A formal-organisational variant of the Mwali cult

Northeastern Botswana is the scene of a major territorial cult complex centring on the worship of the High God Mwali, with important rain-bringing and moral functions. The cult extends into adjacent areas of Zimbabwe and into Nothern Transvaal. The ancient cult organisation has spawned, as a modern formal-organisation variant, the Hosanna Religious and Traditional Association, registered on 16 April 1981.[23] In a

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22   This section is based on an extensive forthcoming study, a shorter version of which was published as: van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1993a, 'African Independent churches and the state in Botswana', in M. Bax & A. Koster, eds., *Power and prayer: Essays on Religion and politics*, Amsterdam: VU (Free University) University Press, pp. 24-56.

23   Gaborone, file no. H28/90/75 — I. The 'traditional' element in this association is so strong that Staugård doubts whether it is a church (1986: 83; on p. 84-85 Staugård copies the constitution of this society). Through his personal activities and those of his wife, the president of this association, the Mwali High Priest for the Southwestern region Mr Vumbu Ntogwa and as such probably the principal traditional religious authority in northeastern Botswana, does participate in two other churches of a more explicitly Christian designation; cf. Werbner 1989: 341, n. 3. However, the principles at work here illustrate the accepted attitude of various Registrars of Societies in the 1980s, and are not affected by our judgement as to the truly ecclesiastical nature of this association. Other examples will be taken from less peripheral or ambiguous church organisations. Incidentally, 'Hosanna' means: 1. biblical praise; 2. Mwali adept; 3. Apostolic follower of the Zimbabwean church founder Masowe (cf. Daneel, 1971: 86, 88, 178, 339-41; Werbner 1989: 257f)]. 'Hosanna' (2) is often pronounced, and written, as 'Wosanna.' It is possible that the word *hosanna* in the sense of Mwali adept has an origin independent from the biblical word — although I am inclined to doubt this —, but of course in a context of Independent

first reaction to this association's application for registration, the Registrar of Societies replied:

'Your society is a religious one and that should be reflected in the name.'[24]

Within three weeks this suggestion was adopted by the society, offering as the new name 'Mwali Religious Traditional Hosanna Association',[25] but registration was to meet with further conditions. In a long letter the Registrar of Societies cites a great many technical legal objections against the self-styled constitution which had accompanied the application — incidentally, along with letters of recommendation from headmen in the North-East district — but the principal objection lies not there:

'Your constitution is not in order due to the following: —
(1) Your preamble has no relevance to your society. You will recall that during our long discussion in my office, you reiterated that although your Association believes in the miracles of divine Mwali, you also practice customs handed down by the ancestors. This explains why your society is religious (although it is not a Christian society) and traditional. You can leave out the word Mwali and call your association 'Hosanna Religious and Traditional Association.'

The point may seem slight but it is of the greatest importance: without any reference to powers conferred by the law, the Registrar of Societies succeeds in deleting the crucial catchword, Mwali, from the society's name, and offers advice on the society's interpretation of its own goals and orientation. In a context of Tswana (particularly Ngwato) cultural hegemony in Botswana, where the sizeable language group of the Kalanga and the associated ethnic identity are constantly in the defensive, this deletion is highly significant: it excises, with the word 'Mwali', a major symbol of Kalanga traditional convergence and of multi-ethnic identification across the Botswana-Zimbabwe border. The Registrar of Societies uses his prerogatives to prevent a minority ethnic identity in Botswana to manifest itself publicly at the national level and gain respectability and recognition there. Of course one has to realise that 1978 was at the height of the Zimbabwean war of liberation, when border communities were considerably harassed as a result of hostilities spilling over from the Zimbabwean side; at the time, of course, relationships between the Mwali cult and the freedom fighters were close.[26]

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churches the phonetical convergence of the words offers endless opportunities for symbolic bricolage.

[24] Registrar of Societies to Hosanna etc. 20.3.78.

[25] Hosanna to Registrar of Societies, 13.4.78.

[26] Cf. Lan 1985; and general writings on the Mwali cult as cited above.

In the end the society had to enlist the — no doubt expensive — professional services of 'Mr Richard Lyons, Attorney, Notary and Conveyancer', as the name appears in the file. After further correspondence in which the Registrar of Societies insisted that, in the society's draft constitution, the provision for the management of property was insufficient, the society was finally registered in 1981. With the exception of 1983, when a reminder had to be sent by the Registrar of Societies, it has duly submitted its Annual Returns and the file reflects no further difficulties between the office and the association.

4.3. An ethnic association catering for the Kalanga minority: The Society for the Propagation of the Ikalanga Language

Although the underlying ethnic and political element in the registration of this society is unmistakable, its being mixed with traditional and international concerns may have been at least as important as its involving the Kalanga. For in a politically apparently far more sensitive case, registration — this time of a cultural association — did not meet with much objection: that of the Society for the Promotion of the Ikalanga Language (SPIL),[27] an initiative of students at the University of Botswana, and ever since its inception a source of heated debate both at the national and at the regional, Francistown level. In a letter dated 19th September, 1983, the Registrar of Societies did request specific cosmetic changes that did not affect the society's obvious nature as a focus of ethnic mobilisation. In response to a clause on the teaching of Kalanga in schools, he commented:

> 'According to the present government policy on education only Setswana and English languages are taught in schools and used over the radio. Could you please[28] amend this clause to ensure that it is in line with the spirit of the present government policy (...)[29]

And while the constitution of this ethnic association wisely opened the membership to 'all Batswana',[30] the Registrar, as in ethnic collusion with the applicants, comments sweetly:

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[27] File H28/90/258 — I, registered 7.8.84.

[28] Note the difference in tone from that applied in the Hosanna case.

[29] Registrar of Societies to Society for the Promotion of the Ikalanga Language, letter dated 19.9.83

[30] This is the term under which the citizens of Botswana are normally designated in Botswana colloquial discourse, but also — and this is the essence of Tswana hegemony — the ethnic designation for non-Kalanga, Tswana-speakers.

'Could you substitute the word Batswana with Citizen of Botswana to avoid any misinterpretation. May I be informed why the membership is not extended to any interested person.'[31]

This contrasting evidence on the handling of ethnic aspects of voluntary associations would suggest that the strategy of the state via the Registrar of Societies is not so much to prohibit but to control: to exercise influence upon these associations precisely by encapsulating them in a bureaucratic structure — rather than debarring them from the sort of recognition, stable internal structure and outside accessibility that functioning under the Societies Act might produce. Registration under the Societies Act is a major instrument in the politics of culture in Botswana. It seeks to uphold a situation where unimpeded continuity of historical cultural forms can be claimed while at the same time keeping the four cosmopolitan complexes firmly in control.

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have explored certain organisational and mediatory aspects of the politics of culture, such as they present themselves in various settings in Southern Africa today. While globalisation might be said to revolve on the world-wide circulation and availability of items of culture under modern conditions of communication and education, *I have argued that the politics of culture is about the framing of such items in organisational contexts in which the internal production and recognition of identity complements the external imposition of bureaucratic logic and control.* Here a special role is being played by *mediators*: both the leaders of identity-generating forms of self-organisation, and the state officials monitoring such voluntary organisations. The politics of culture, even under conditions of globalisation, is thus implied to be not just about ideas and images, but also about more or less enduring relationships within organisations; and the production of identity to be no aim in itself, but an often rather instrumental feature of the patterns of social organisation and organisational accommodation involved.

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[31] Registrar of Societies to Society for the Promotion of the Ikalanga Language, letter dated 19.9.83

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