

SPEECH DELIVERED BY PROFESSOR WIM MJ. VAN BINSBERGEN, AT THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL PRESENTATION OF A COPY OF THE BOOK '*TEARS OF RAIN: ETHNICITY AND HISTORY IN CENTRAL WESTERN ZAMBIA*' TO THE HONOURABLE ARTHUR WINA M.P., MINISTER OF EDUCATION, REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA

May 13, 1992, Ministry of Education Headquarters, Lusaka

Mr Honourable Minister of Education, Sir,

It is my great pleasure to appear before you today in order to present a recently published academic book, thus discharging a duty which honours you in your capacity of Honourable Minister of Education. At the same time this occasion brings out the achievements of our universities both in this country and abroad. Finally it reflects on the wonderful history and well-deserved place in contemporary society of the people who form the subject matter of this book: the inhabitants of Kaoma district and all those who, in the Western, Northwestern, Southern, Central and Copperbelt Provinces, now identify under the historic name of the Nkoya.

Mr Honourable Minister, Sir, as the custodian of our educational system in the broadest sense of the word, your responsibility ranges from the humblest and remotest village school to that proud achievement of Zambian intellectual independence, the University of Zambia. As a former lecturer at that Institution, who for many years also had the honour of being an Affiliate at that university's Institute of African Studies, I regard this book as a product of the imaginative academic policy in this country. During the colonial period, the Institute's predecessor, the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, was one of the world's most famous research institutes in the humanities and social sciences. There the profound changes taking place in our society were documented and analyzed in a way which set the pattern for many decades to come. Thriving upon that tradition, and renewing it, the University of Zambia has managed to remain a leading institution in the region, even in the face of economic and political challenges. And today, in a renewed Zambia, the world is looking also to this university with a new expectation. Maintaining the ties of international cooperation which have always been the hallmark of scholarship, a taste of future potential may be given by the present publication, whose realization would have been impossible without the generous support, over many years, from the African Studies Centre, University of Leiden, The Netherlands. As a professor representing two universities in the Netherlands (both the University of Leiden and the Free University, Amsterdam), and as President of the Netherlands Association of African Studies which encompasses all our researchers in this field, I can assure you that the international academic community is keen to support the intellectual potential which is there in Zambia today.

Mr Honourable Minister, Sir, this is a book about the history of a Zambian people which until recently scarcely knew its own history, its roots and identity – let alone that this history was known to their brothers and sisters belonging to other cultural and linguistic groups in Zambia and abroad. Fragmented in internal divisiveness, far away from the mainstream

of educational and economic opportunities, scattered over so many districts, and selectively disfavoured by the colonial power, the people described in this book for many decades could see themselves only as victims, rather than as makers, of history. Yet now that their history is brought to the open, by the present book, we realize how rich it has been in heroic and royal splendour and achievement, and how central this people's rightful place is among the many peoples who, in harmonious diversity, constitute the Zambian nation. And we also realize that only those who have found their roots, those who have regained their self-esteem, those who look to their future in a proud awareness of their past – that only those are in a position to meet their fellow-citizens as equals and thus make a meaningful and lasting contribution to the national community. In this way the history of the Nkoya people is truly representative for the history of the Zambian nation as a whole.

Mr Honourable Minister, Sir, I have called you the custodian of our educational system. Now, since in human society it is only education which enables individuals to be aware of the past in order to prepare for the future, I do not hesitate to add that you are the custodian of our history and of our culture. Their riches place Zambia in a unique position among African nations and indeed among the nations of the world. At the same time it is only through a painstaking and objective study of this culture and this history that we can be freed from the biased obsessions of the past. Twenty years ago, when I embarked on the study which now led to the present book, any insistence on cultural, linguistic and ritual identity was condemned and suppressed as so-called expressions of tribalism, and was considered the root of all evil in the post-colonial society. Today, having identified and partly overcome some of the real evils threatening our society and polity, we have learned to appreciate that identity, of the individual, the family, the village, the clan, the ethnic and language group, is not a stumbling-block but a stepping-stone to national dignity, understanding, cooperation and success.

Mr Honourable Minister, Sir, it is significant that this book should be published at the moment when both the Nkoya people and Zambia as a whole appear to be coming into their own. I sincerely hope that this slight contribution to our Zambian scholarship will find its way to our bookshops, universities and secondary schools, and to the people who form its subject matter. If your duties may allow you to find the time to read this book, you will see how these very people have contributed in the most generous way to the production of this book, as informants, as critical proof-readers, and as sources of inspiration and encouragement.

This contribution was made possible by precisely those traditional leaders whose ancestors are discussed in this book, but also by the modern political office-bearers of the area – some of whom are honouring this little ceremony today with their presence – and by the area's cultural association named Kazanga. Their past, but also their hopes and aspirations for the future lie enshrined in the present book; and it is those spiritual values, even more than the physical product, that I shall now officially hand over into your care.

I thank you.