

In the beginning: the early Luyis

The genesis of the 'original' Lozi peoples is a matter for conjecture. Over the last 140 years or so, they have preferred to be known by the name given to them by the invading Makololo but before that were known as Luyi (loosely translated as 'foreigner'), Aluyi or Luyana. For most Lozis, but particularly the ruling class, it has been and continues to be important to locate their roots in the original Lozi homeland, Bulozi, the flat floodplain of the Upper Zambezi River and to assert that their ancestors always lived there. The plain was known in the time before the invasion of the Makololo in the 1830s as 'Ngulu' and 'Lyondo', which also mean 'sweet potato' and 'weapons' respectively in Siluyana, the language spoken by the Luyi, now found only in court circles.¹ For ease of reading, in this chapter, the early Lozi will be referred to as Luyi and the floodplain by the name it is known now, Bulozi.

The history of the Luyi before the coming of the Makololo is told through the medium of story-telling and via the records set down by European missionaries and other visitors close to the turn of the twentieth century. These were dictated and censored by Lozi monarchs such as the great Litunga Lewanika and those close to the court who have an interest in purveying a certain construction of the past. Virtually all Lozis are aware to some degree of the early myths and legends concerning the infancy of the Lozi nation while parents and village story tellers delight in recounting the deeds of some of the figures from this period, not least as the era is bound up in magic and fantastic deeds. And whilst the history of the Luyi is bound up in myths and magic, this in no way diminishes its importance or relevance to the Lozi national consciousness today. The meanings embodied in the stories that are narrated here impinge directly on the way that Lozis identify themselves in the world today and link the past to contemporary notions of citizenship and subjectivity. A knowledge and understanding of this history is, therefore, implicit to an understanding of Lozi identity over time and space.

There is a certain logic to the Lozi claim of originality in Bulozi. Lozi historians, certainly since the restoration of Lozi hegemony in the Upper Zambezi Valley following

¹ Interviews with Inengu Muyunda Ananyatele, Limulunga 12 to 30-07-2001.

the overthrow of the Makololo Sotho regime in 1864, have used the earliest memories handed down in oral testimony through the generations to establish the Lozi nation, in particular the Kingship, the Buluzi homeland, political community and culture in time and space. This chapter provides some narrative and interpretation of the early period of Lozi history that bestows a deep sense of pride of place in the universe as well as core components of Lozi identity which in turn help to negotiate notions of citizenship and subjectivity experienced today. Central to the myths and legends that articulate this era are the Lozi creation myths which will be examined from oral texts in use today. Various characteristic virtues and a sense of good and bad behaviour are also established during this time. Key among these are intelligent strategies employed to deal with the exigencies of the time, some of which exist to the present day, heroic deeds, valorous behaviour, kindness and good sense or pragmatism which in Lozi culture is perhaps one of the most prized virtues.

By locating their origin and claiming both primogeniture and preponderance in Buluzi, the Lozi effectively eliminate the possibility of any other group claiming that land as their 'national' homeland. Langworthy suggests also that this helps to maintain a hierarchical distinction between the original Lozi and the various sub-groups,² between 25 and 35 in total that have been absorbed since earliest known times.³ Yet whilst many Lozis try to insist that their ancestors have always lived in Buluzi, there have been one or two attempts to locate their beginnings with the Rozwi or, those that Coillard called the Banyai south east of present-day Barotseland.⁴

The most commonly offered explanation for their origin, however, is a stepped migration from the north, specifically from the Lunda-Luba empires of the Katanga region of present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Gibbons, the English major, sent out to map the full extent of the influence of the Lozi King, Lewanika, at the end of the nineteenth century, was told that the 'Aälu', as he refers to them, prior to

² H. Langworthy, *Zambia Before 1890: Aspects of Pre-colonial History* (Longman, London, 1972), pp. 48-49.

³ M. Gluckman, 'Economy of the Central Barotse Plain', Rhodes-Livingstone Papers 11, (Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, Livingstone, 1941) and more recently Prince Akashambatwa Mbikusita-Lewanika in Africa Lineki Courier, Issue No. 2, 2001, published in Lusaka.

⁴ F. Coillard, *On the Threshold of Central Africa: A Record of Twenty Years Pioneering among the Barotsi of the Upper Zambesi* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1897), p. 224.

arriving in northern Buluzi, 'dwelt two hundred miles to the north-east on the middle Kabompo' and that the people found there around 1900 were remnants of the original Luyi people who had moved from the Katanga region.⁵ Oliver and Atmore describe how certain groups migrated south and west from that region after the Luba hunter Chibinda Ilunga moved into the territory controlled by the Lunda, married Lueji, the granddaughter of a minor Lunda Chief and later became the Mwata Yamvo.⁶ It seems that Kinguri and Chinyama, brothers of Lueji, were not satisfied with the alien leadership of Chibinda and left to form new areas of influence elsewhere. According to Oliver and Atmore, Chinyama is credited as having gone to the Zambezi valley.

Hall locates this migration, albeit under a different leader, at around 1700 and suggests that the journey may have taken as much as twenty years.⁷ Yet, elsewhere, the Luyi are also said to have arrived in Buluzi around the mid-1600s,⁸ which would be prior to the rise of the first Mwata Yamvo from which the ancestors of the Lozi are often said to come, casting doubt on the accuracy of the above story. Langworthy and Mainga agree that the early migrants were probably a relatively small group, maybe a large clan or group of families.⁹ The names of early Luyi leaders that have been passed down are liable to have been titles and, as such, not likely to have referred to individuals but were probably ascribed to groups. Of further relevance is the suggestion that wherever these offshoots settled, they would set up a 'scale model of the parent kingdom' presumably adopting similar rituals and customs.¹⁰ If this were the case then it would help in establishing the suspected links between the Lozi and the Lunda-Luba empires as will be seen later. Such links appear ever more likely in the light of identical place names and cultural practices. Hall points to the use of Imuba and Namayula as place names in both Lunda and Lozi lands as well as the wearing of necklaces of white stones and of feathers in the headdresses of rulers of both groups.¹¹

⁵ A. St. H. Gibbons, *Africa from South to North through Marotseland* Vol. I (John Lane, The Bodley Head, London, 1904), p. 143.

⁶ R. Oliver and A. Atmore, *Medieval Africa 1250-1800* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001), pp. 181-187.

⁷ R. Hall, *Zambia* (Pall Mall Press, London, 1965), p. 20.

⁸ L. Gann, *A History of Northern Rhodesia: Early Days to 1953* (Chatto and Windus, London, 1964) p. 14, M. Mainga, *Buluzi under the Luyana Kings* (Longman, London, 1973) Mainga, op. cit., pp. 213-214 and Langworthy, op. cit., p. 49.

⁹ Ibid and Mainga, op. cit., p. 24.

¹⁰ Oliver and Atmore, op. cit., p. 183.

¹¹ Hall, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

It would still seem unlikely that the Luyi arrived directly from the Lunda Empire as the evidence afforded to Gibbons above testifies. An offshoot such as that of Chinyama would probably have initially located in the region immediately to the south of Katanga, currently occupied by the Lovale, Buluzi lying even further to the south. The Lovale of today have customs and habits more closely aligned to the Lunda than to the Lozi. Langworthy even goes so far as to suggest that the political systems of the Luyi and the Lunda were so different that this would rule out the origin of the Luyi being the Lunda Empire. Mainga's conclusion is that there was a Luba migration to Buluzi that then became overlain by Lunda rule.¹² Nevertheless, the Luyi most probably originated from a region to the north of the Zambezi-Congo watershed as an offshoot of another political entity which could have been either the Luba or Lunda spheres of influence. Meanwhile, their political structure had evolved somewhat by the time of the first recorded Luyi tradition. They probably entered the Upper Zambezi valley in the early part of the seventeenth century under the leadership of a female chieftain, possibly the semi-mythical Mwambwa who appears in Lozi history as the founder of the nation.

The early Luyi lived in clusters in Buluzi, the plain of the Upper Zambezi Valley. It is quite likely that the plain was not thickly populated when they arrived, particularly if this was before the seventeenth century, as before this time the plain itself may well have been flooded for most of the year and probably resembled a giant swamp. Certainly, there are few references to the plain prior to the seventeenth century and early Portuguese explorers made efforts to circumnavigate the area when attempting to cross the African continent from west to east and vice versa.¹³ Kayongo promotes the suggestion first made by Livingstone and later by the late twentieth century geographers Grove and Goudie that Buluzi, like the great depressions of the Kalahari, was actually a giant lake. These lakes, it is suggested, started drying up for a large part of the year as a result of climate change resulting from overgrazing and deforestation in southern Africa in the first half of the second millennium.¹⁴

¹² Mainga, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

¹³ K. Kayongo, *Reciprocity and Interdependence: The Rise and Fall of the Kololo Empire in Southern Africa in the Nineteenth Century* (Almqvist and Wiksell International, Lund, 1987) pp. 53-57.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

In interpreting oral history, it appears that the Upper Zambezi floodplain was a difficult physical and human environment in which to settle when the Luyi first arrived although Hall claims that the conditions they found were ideal for a settled and highly organised life.¹⁵ Unquestionably, it provided attractions not found on the surrounding higher ground. The floodplain was treeless which meant that livestock, particularly of the bovine variety, could be reared without fear of the dreaded tsetse fly so prevalent in the rest of the sub-continent. Meanwhile, the annual inundation of the Zambezi waters meant that a fertile layer of silt was deposited over the underlying Kalahari sand providing fertile and nutrient-rich soil in which crops of a wide variety of fruit and vegetables could be grown. On the surrounding higher ground, by contrast, the Kalahari sand is exposed at the surface while the predominant vegetation consists of Mopane woodland. Little nutritious vegetation exists for livestock and up to the 1980s the range of the tsetse fly extended virtually to the floodplain edge. In these woodlands however, iron ore had previously been found and smelted and there is evidence of pottery production from as early as the sixth century.¹⁶ It is not clear who were the people who inhabited the forested regions surrounding the floodplain but the San (Kwengo or Twa) were almost certainly one of the groups present.

Given that Buluzi would have been a very much wetter environment than it is today, having most probably been a semi-permanent lake, it seems likely that there was minimal habitation before the Luyi and other similar groups who the Luyi gradually overcame, went to live there. Although not supporting this theory, Mainga points out that no Stone Age sites or remains of Iron Age settlements have been found in the plain although both have been excavated in other, higher areas of present-day Barotseland,¹⁷ a factor confirmed by Fagan.¹⁸ This does not preclude the possibility, however, as any evidence would be subject to removal or degradation by the annual flood. What is clear, however, is that the exigencies of the environment for the early Luyi in Buluzi, particularly the annual inundation of the plain by the waters of the Zambezi followed by drought and severe heat, together with other human factors caused the Luyi to make

¹⁵ Hall, op. cit. p.21.

¹⁶ A. Roberts, *A History of Zambia* (Heinemann, London, 1976), pp. 39-41

¹⁷ Mainga, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

¹⁸ B. M. Fagan, *A Short History of Zambia (From the Earliest Times until A.D. 1900)*, (Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 1966), pp. 58 and 82.

adaptations to their political structure and this, as will be seen, included a change of gender in their leadership.

As described above, on arrival in Buluzi, the early Luyi lived in small clusters but are generally believed to have collected around the area between the Zambezi and present-day Kalabo (see map in Appendix 1c). The present-day village of Libonda is said to have been the first capital and it was here that the first Luyi rulers lived and where the earliest Lozi oral history and creation myths begin.

The language spoken by the ancestors of the current Lozi peoples was Siluyana, the language of the Luyi people, which is very rarely heard today as it is spoken by only a very few who are associated with royal ceremony or duties. Siluyana was claimed by Jacottet at the end of the nineteenth century to be close to the language spoken by the Herero and the Ovimbundu,¹⁹ which, Mainga suggests, points to an Angolan link for the early Luyi.²⁰ However, given that all the Bantu groups gradually migrated over the second millennium into central, south-east and south-west Africa, the linguistic similarities are not surprising and do not detract from the Lunda-Luba theory. It is said that only three people today are able to recite a good proportion of the traditional Siluyana praise sayings and poems. Even these individuals, two of whom were interviewed during the course of field research for this work, admitted to having only weak conversational skills in the language which became eclipsed in the mid-nineteenth century by the language brought by the Makololo, a Sesotho tongue known originally as Sikololo and later as Silozi. All of the Luyi names in the creation myths and early history that follow are Siluyana names unless stated to the contrary.

Creation myths

According to some Lozi myths and legends, the Lozi God, Nyambe (literally 'no speaking' or 'one who does not speak'), was living in the Libonda area with his wife, Nasilele ('one associated with long things'), and mother, Ngula (various meanings including mother

¹⁹ E. Jacottet, *Etudes sur les Langues du Haut Zambèze* (E. Leroux, Paris, 1896), p.128.

²⁰ Mainga, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

and 'pregnant'), both of whom he had made.²¹ Nyambe made the forests, the river (Lyambai or Zambezi), the plain (Ngula now Buluzi) and all the animals and plants.²² Included amongst the animals was Kamunu ('human being') who quickly distinguished himself from other animals, for example by learning from and copying Nyambe in carving a canoe and forging iron.²³ And, whilst impressed by Kamunu's intelligence, Nyambe became increasingly tired and disappointed by the behaviour of Kamunu to the other worldly things that he, Nyambe, had created. In particular, Nyambe disliked the constant copying of virtually everything he did.²⁴ Thus, Kamunu went hunting and killed animals for food with a spear he had forged and Nyambe would scold him. Every time Kamunu killed an animal, it seemed that some other misfortune would befall him such as his cooking pot breaking, his dog dying and so on. One day Kamunu killed an elephant, whereupon his own child died only to be seen later on at the home of Nyambe where Kamunu continually went in order to report his misfortune and ask for forgiveness, medicine and help.

Exasperated, Nyambe moved several times to try and escape the pestilential Kamunu until finally, in desperation, he crossed the Lyambai (Zambezi), presumably from the west where the early Luyana settled, arriving first on an island. Yet Kamunu found his way to the island and regularly brought Nyambe animals and fish, presumably as tribute or for food as the story goes that Nyambe accepted these but refused to eat them as 'they were his children'.²⁵ Later, Nyambe fled to a mountain but even there, Kamunu found him. Finally, Nyambe crossed the river again and met with the animals, telling them they must be afraid of Kamunu before ascending to Litooma (heaven) on a spider's web.²⁶ The eyes of the spider were put out on the advice of Nalungwana (a wagtail) so that it could not direct Kamunu who was bound to try and follow.²⁷ Kamunu

²¹ A. Jalla, *History, Tradition and Legends of the Barotse People*, translated from the Sikololo of A.D. Jalla (Colonial Office, African no. 1179, 1921).

²² A. Jalla, *Litaba za Sicaba sa Malozi*, revised with the orthography approved by the Zambian Ministry of Education (Bookworld Publishers, Lusaka, 1996) pp. 1-7. M. Lisimba, *Lozi Names in Language and Culture* (CICIBA, Libreville, 2000), pp.131-132.

²³ Jalla, 1921, op. cit., II.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Jalla (1921), op. cit., p.2.

²⁶ Ibid and interviews with Wakuñuma Wakuñuma, local historian and Headmaster of Libonda Basic School, Libonda, 16-08-2001. Jalla claims Litooma was the place that Nyambe fled to before ascending to heaven while Wakuñuma and most other Lozis say that Litooma is the name of Nyambe's place in heaven.

²⁷ Jalla (1921), op. cit., p. 3.

was left alone to live and die in the earthly world after being refused medicine by Nyambe to prevent disease, destruction and death. Lisimba asserts that death became a divine punishment for Kamunu's disobedient behaviour.²⁸ For man to achieve the right reach the nirvana of heaven it may be necessary to be returned to earth several times in various forms (human, animal or bird).

Another version of events, ruling in Libonda village today says that Nyambe and Nasilele had a daughter, whom they named Mwambwa.²⁹ Indeed, Nyambe is said elsewhere to have created for himself many wives (this story certainly exemplifies and legitimises polygyny) and had children by all of them.³⁰ Later on, Nyambe is said to have fallen in love with and had relations with Mwambwa whose name means 'one who is being talked about'. This caused a quarrel to ensue between Nyambe and Nasilele during which the enraged Nasilele beat her daughter. Nyambe is said to have been so upset by this behaviour that he called his servant, Sasisho and announced his 'return' to heaven.³¹ Sasisho wondered how they would ascend but Nyambe asked a spider to spin its web so that he and his servant could climb to heaven leaving Nasilele, who died a few weeks later, to languish behind on earth.

Yet another version claims that Nyambe was the first person known and that all Luyis originate from Nyambe, whose village was Litoma-ndi-wa-Nyambe (heaven, the home of Nyambe). Here, Mwambwa is said to have been the first wife of Nyambe and the first female chief, the origin of Mwambwa being unclear here. The Barotse royalty are said to originate from Mwambwa as do all the Luyi. Mwambwa was given the title Njemakati meaning 'A woman from whom the Kingdom originates'. In this version she is also credited with giving birth to nine other children including a daughter named Mbuyu.

Finally, Muuka says that all Luyi believed in the existence of one great God, Nyambe 'who was conceived of as the creator, the merciful, the almighty and the giver

²⁸ Lisimba, op. cit., p. 132.

²⁹ This version was recounted by Wakuñuma (see note 26) and corresponds to that told by local historians such as Maliwa Liyaali (65), Nayaka village, 19-08-2001.

³⁰ Jalla (1921), op. cit., p.3.

³¹ No explanation was offered at any interview, or is evident anywhere in existing literature for *Nyambe's* arrival from heaven.

of all things. He was, by nature, without flesh and bones'.³² Muuka claims that prayers were said to him in the mornings and evenings and offerings made of seeds, hoes, spears and cattle. Here we can again see what Muuka refers to as 'spread-eaglim' by which the creation of the universe is correlated with the origins of the Barotse Kingship which claims divine paternity from the time that Nyambe was on earth, what Muuka refers to as 'the behaviour of a splinter group bent on asserting its own autonomy and separate identity' thus 'we can easily appreciate this functional link'.³³

Shortly after Nyambe's ascent to heaven, Mwambwa gave birth to a daughter who was called Mbuyu or Mbuywamwambwa (literally 'Mbuyu of Mwambwa') despite having had no male friends suggesting that the child may have been Nyambe's. The relationship between Nyambe and Mwambwa involved here might have been brother-sister, which would denote correlation again with Lunda customs where incest between royal males and their queen-sisters was a common enough habit.³⁴ Then again, maybe the term brother, sister or daughter is not meant literally. Mwambwa had two villages – Sifuti in Nyala (Kalabo) district and Sangaulu (where Mwambwa eventually died), located in the fork between the Zambezi and Kabompo rivers, which is where, it is claimed, Mwambwa eventually died.³⁵ Some say that it was Mwambwa that brought the Luyi to settle in Bulozhi, the first settlement being at Sifuti and the second at Imuba erected on a large termite mound that the Luyi built up.³⁶ From these two villages, the Luyi spread into the plain although Mwambwa and her child remained at Sifuti.

Mwambwa, a popular leader,³⁷ ruled the Luyi peoples as queen until she died (and was buried at Sangaulu) when Mbuywamwambwa took over the chiefship. This succession is common to all versions of Lozi history recounted for this work demonstrating that the earliest rulers of the Luyi peoples were, in fact, female. Discounting for a moment, the tradition relating to Nyambe, it is Mwambwa, then, who is credited with leading the Luyi when they first came to Bulozhi.³⁸ Yet Mwambwa did not, it seems, rule dictatorially but

³² L.S. Muuka, 'Colonization of Barotseland in the 17th century' in Eric Stokes and Richard Brown (Eds.), *The Zambesian Past: Studies in Central African History* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1966), p. 250.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Oliver and Atmore, op. cit., p. 182.

³⁵ Interview with Buxton Simasiku (Induna Amulimukwa), Mwandu, 01-09-2001

³⁶ Ibid. and Muuka, op. cit., pp. 250-251.

³⁷ Interview with Induna Nawa Matakala, Limulunga, 13-07-2001.

³⁸ Interview with local historian, Inengu Muyunda Ananyatele, Limulunga 12 to 30-07-2001.

utilised the services of Chief Councillors or Indunas otherwise known as Makwambuyu, referred to later by Mainga as 'full-blooded Lozi aristocrats'. One of these, Yutoya, was clearly closest to her, being referred to variously as her Natamoyo (a title that almost certainly did not exist at that time),³⁹ and alternatively as a brother to her daughter, Mbuyamwambwa and it is from Yutoya that one version of the name of the plain is derived, 'Ngula ta Yutoya'.⁴⁰ Mwambwa, it is suggested, also used the services of one of her sons, Sokanalinganga, quite extensively in ruling over the Luyi domain.⁴¹ It was during a discussion with the Makwambuyu that a decision was taken to broaden the area occupied by the Luyi in order to extend their agriculture and grow groundnuts, cowpeas and sorghum.⁴²

Simulyangumba, whose family is still in existence, was chosen to lead a group of people east to Luena and, once there, they settled in Njonjola in what is now the land of the Nkoya peoples who are stated elsewhere to have been under the domination of the Lozi and who were ruled over by Chief Kahare,⁴³ who Mainga says also claim common ancestry with the Lozi and Lovale rulers.⁴⁴ The name of the Luena village they settled at became known as Kooya, later corrupted to Koya or Nkoya.⁴⁵ This confirms Van Binsbergen's deduction that the name Nkoya never referred to a people. At interview, the current Induna Amulimukwa asserted that at this time there were no people named Nkoya, instead there were just people known as Baulima meaning cultivators.⁴⁶

When his mother died, Sokanalinanga (referred to in Mainga's text as Sihokanalinanga of the Nkoya),⁴⁷ took his mother's drum, variously known as Mutango, Matongo and Munduko and went with it to Mwito. The drum was beaten by Yutoya and kept in Mwito until the time when Mbuyu took over as Chieftainess.⁴⁸ Since it was a royal drum, Sokanalinanga did not allow anyone else access to it and it was eventually taken from him by force on behalf of Mbuyu by a royal prince by the name of Isimwaa who was charged with the installation of Mbuyu. He took the drum to Yeta, a brother to Mbuyu and future King, who became the new 'Natamoyo' for Mbuyu (and gained responsibility for beating the drum). Sokanalinanga then moved from Mwito further east to the Kaonde area extending the Luyi field of influence still further from the Bulozhi floodplain.

³⁹ The title Natamoyo, normally occupied by a royal prince, is explained more fully in Chapter Seven.

⁴⁰ Interview with Inengu Muyunda Ananyatele, Limulunga 12 to 30-07-2001.

⁴¹ Interview with Buxton Simasiku (Induna Amulimukwa), Mwandu, 01-09-2001

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Mainga, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁴⁵ Interview with Buxton Simasiku (Induna Amulimukwa), Mwandu, 31-08-2001

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Mainga, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁴⁸ Interview with Buxton Simasiku (Induna Amulimukwa), Mwandu, 31-08-2001

Early political development

As stated earlier, when Mwambwa died, her daughter, Mbuywamwambwa took over the queenship and despite declaring abstinence from sexual relations proceeded to give birth to as many as eleven children. It is always said that the identity of the father of Mbuywamwambwa's children is either not known or is a closely guarded Lozi secret, most likely the former. The numbers of children ascribed to both Mwambwa and Mbuywamwambwa vary according to the version of history being told. Different oral traditions ascribe different numbers of children to Mwambwa and Mbuywamwambwa and in some versions there is also a tradition that Mbuywamwambwa gave birth to human children with soft horns of human tissue and calves alternately. This should perhaps be understood in the context of the position of cattle as revered symbols of wealth and status in Barotse culture.⁴⁹

It is said that during Mbuywamwambwa's reign, the Luyi peoples felt that they needed a leader who would rescue them from the waters of the annual flood that each year drowned the crops and wrecked homesteads (rainfall in the catchment area of the Zambezi as well as in Buluzi itself would have been much higher than today) and that this should be a male. In addition, it was felt that a male leader would be likely to be a better hunter and a more able traveller.⁵⁰ The latter requirements suggest that hunting contributed a significant amount to food and clothing at this time, that cultivation was not so advanced and that significant damage was being incurred as a result of the flood. Later, when referring to the annual migration to the plain margins now known as the Kuomboka, it was said that 'a woman could never have come up with the idea of Kuomboka'.⁵¹

It is said that the Luyi clan gathered to discuss a successor to Mbuywamwambwa and that Nambula ('born during the rainy season'), a servant of Mbuywamwambwa overheard and reported the discussion to the queen. Mbuywamwambwa was upset and disappointed with her subjects but, as she loved her people and did not want to

⁴⁹ Interviews with Inengu Ananyatele, Limulunga, 11-07-2001, Induna Nawa Matakala (83), Limulunga, 13-07-2001 and Buxton Simasiku (Induna Amulimukwa), Mwandu, 01-09-2001. Lists of possible progeny of Mbuyu are suggested in Appendix 2.

⁵⁰ Induna Nawa Matakala, Limulunga, 13-07-2001.

⁵¹ Ibid.

disappoint them, she decided to announce that she was tired of ruling and wished that the people should elect a new leader. Overall, it seems that Mbuywamwambwa was respected even if it was not felt that a woman was the best choice as leader. Alternatively, Lozi historians are not prepared to have criticism levelled at one of the founders of the Lozi Kingdom. Siluyana praise sayings describe Mbuywamwambwa as:

*A daughter to Mwambwa
She was a woman who bore men and cattle
Through her we have a cousinship with Lundas
She was the mother of the Kingship, related to Nyambe*⁵²

Alternatively:

*Mbuyu, daughter of Mwambwa is a woman who gave birth to a cow and to a human and is a uniter of the Lundas and the Luyis through the birthright of the Mwambwa clan.*⁵³

According to the latter version then, Mbuywamwambwa is greatly honoured in Lozi culture as a dignified leader, a 'uniter' of the Lundas and Luyis.⁵⁴ This then serves to confirm the earlier theory that the first Luyis were not Lundas. The aspect of dignity, especially in carriage and comportment, becomes a feature of Luyi and later, Lozi royalty by which they are able, universally, to be distinguished from commoners. It is also suggested by the same correspondent that many essential aspects of contemporary Lozi culture originated during the reign of Mbuywamwambwa including, as the above praise sayings suggest, cattle rearing. Indeed, when the Lozis give praise to their longhorn cattle that figure so highly in Bulozhi in terms of wealth and prestige, they often use the Luyana term *Ngombe a Mbuyu* meaning the cattle of Mbuyu.⁵⁵ Some mention of the physical appearance of the Luyi royals is also relevant here. Mbuywamwambwa is remembered as being black, having big ears and being tall and slim. Significantly, these

⁵² Interview with Inengu Muyunda Ananyatele, Limulunga 12 to 30-07-2001.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

are still commonly held perceptions amongst Lozis of how a true Lozi should appear and certainly many do possess these features today. The reference to big ears in this context probably refers to the ability of the queen to hear of whatever happens throughout the land, thus there must have developed during this period some system of communications incorporating a reporting structure.

The rearing of cattle is claimed to have begun in this era and undoubtedly this would have added greatly to the productive capacity of the Luyi and encouraged their wish to remain in the plain. Maybe cattle were already in the plain when the Luyi arrived and they simply learnt to obtain dairy products, meat and skins from them. Like many pre-modern forms of production and wealth accumulation, cattle soon took on mystical and ritual symbolism and that is seen in the story of Mbuywamwambwa giving birth to human children and calves alternatively.

Some organisational structure seems also to originate in this era. The assumption made here is that the bands of Luyi who first arrived in the plain were not very well organised except in terms of their leader. They were most probably roving clans or associated families. Once settled in the plain however, a degree of organisational structure appears with the appointment of councillors and the use of information gathering with which to plan ahead in terms of gathering new skills and defence. Drums are also defined as symbols of power from the earliest times. Care is taken to give these drums names, a common practice in Lozi history, and throughout central and southern Africa. The ability to remain in the plain, meanwhile, would be tested by new threats as other groups arrived and from internal competition within the newly coalescing clan.

Inauguration of the Kingship

In Mbuywamwambwa's place, the Luyi 'elected' Muyunda Mwanasilundu, commonly known as Mboo, a nickname given to him by the councillors who are always described in tradition as Indunas. Mbuywamwambwa, meanwhile, lived on into the reign of the second male ruler, her eldest son, Inyambo. Mboo, it seems, was chosen for his skills, both in leadership and as a renowned hunter, being in the habit of going out and

bringing meat for the palace and the Indunas. He was the second eldest of his mother's children, chosen over his eldest brother, Inyambo. The Indunas had come to respect him (the Lozis tend to use the verb 'love' in this respect). To the people he was friendly, respectful and courageous and as a result was 'loved' by all. To some, Mboo was the son of Nyambe.⁵⁶ To most others, however, he was the second son of Mbuywamwambwa. A great deal of significance is attached to Mboo. His nickname means shyness or embarrassment, this being ascribed to his overdue birth, for overstaying in his mother's womb. The name *Mwanasilundu* means 'a huge mass when born'. According to some Lozi historians, Mboo knew that he was someone who had to be loyal to the Luyi people out of respect to his mother whom he had inconvenienced by his late birth.⁵⁷ A different version at Libonda, meanwhile, says that Mboo's full name described his bravery and wisdom.⁵⁸ After being elected leader (he is referred to as the first Lozi King), Mboo moved first to Libonda, which he made his capital (although Jalla claims that he built first at Ikuyu⁵⁹), and then to Ikatulamwa, situated on the banks of the Zambezi (also known as Kambai – meaning face of the Chief),⁶⁰ a village that disappeared (but was rebuilt elsewhere) as the course of the river migrated.⁶¹

Mboo soon set about subduing other groups in the Kalabo area who presumably were competing for supremacy at this time, specifically, according to Jalla, the Mishulundu, Namale, Imulangu, Upangoma, Liuwa, Muenyi and Mambowe.⁶² Evidence of all these names can be found in the Kalabo district where the Luyi first came to stay. The parent group of the Luyi now became known as Mbowe or Mambowe.⁶³ In much of the tradition on Mboo, mention is also made of the 'Andonyi', an enemy that came from the west that proved a formidable foe. The notion of enemies and bad witchcraft

⁵⁶ A. Jalla, *Silozi-English Dictionary* [Revised and Enlarged] (United Church of Zambia, Lusaka, 1982), p. 224.

⁵⁷ Interview with Buxton Simasiku (Induna Amulimukwa), Mwand, 01-09-2001

⁵⁸ Interview with Wakuñuma Wakuñuma, Headmaster of Libonda Basic School, 14 to 16-08-2001

⁵⁹ A.D. Jalla *History, Traditions and Legends of the Barotse Nation*, translated copy of original Sikololo manuscript located in document archive of the Institute of Economic and Social Research (INESOR [old Rhodes-Livingstone Institute]), Lusaka, dated 1909, p. 1

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ The original Ikatulamwa was washed away but another village of the same name now also stands on the banks of the Zambezi to the west of the original.

⁶² Jalla, *History, Traditions and Legends...*, p. 5.

⁶³ M. Mainga, 'Origin of the Lozi: some oral traditions' in Eric Stokes and Richard Brown (eds.), *The Zambesian Past: Studies in Central African History* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1966), p. 244.

emanating from the west was to become a recurring theme during this era. As in so many of the Lozi myths, this threat to the well-being of the Luyi could only be overcome with the help of magic, usually supplied by a 'doctor' from the 'south' meaning the southern portion of Buluzi.

Jalla's account speaks of the way that Yeta, who was apparently a son of Mwambwa, and had obviously been given the responsibility of guarding fords across the 'river' (Zambezi), was withdrawn. Maybe Yeta had not served the purpose with which he had been entrusted although no direct criticism is made and Yeta was to become the third Lozi King. The 'doctor' in this case instructed that a young girl had to be fetched who had to pound the doctor's medicine in a mortar and pointing the pestle in the direction of the Andonyi, cursed them, comparing them to a variety of trees which were known to die (this is very interesting as virtually no trees were to be found in this part of the plain), presumably of old age. The Andonyi, with whom the Luyi must have clearly been in some sort of attritive conflict, now started to be seized by fever and this rendered them powerless permitting the Luyi to kill them in large numbers.⁶⁴ Thus the Andonyi were repulsed from the Luyi homeland although they retreated only as far as the western boundary of the flood plain, where the Lukona forest begins from where they continued to harass all those who passed through.⁶⁵ It is suggested here that the Andonyi might well have been the Mbunda who were to share much of Luyi/Lozi history in the ensuing years, indeed, right up to the present day. Meanwhile all peoples from the west were termed Wiko or Mawiko, a term (sometimes used deprecatingly) in use up to the present day as far east as Kaonde.

Mboo appears as a particularly inspired leader, one correspondent saying he had qualities that a mere mortal commoner could not have.⁶⁶ An example is a seat he had made from reeds and Makenge roots called Lubona, which was peculiar in that it was so designed that when Mboo sat on it his feet could not touch the ground but would need to be rested on some sort of support.⁶⁷ Another is the creation of the Nalikwanda. One of the prime reasons for making the change from a female to a male ruler, it is said, was

⁶⁴ A. D. Jalla, *History, Traditions and Legends of the Barotse Nation*, 1909, p. 1.

⁶⁵ Mainga, *Buluzi under the Luyana Kings...*, p. 25.

⁶⁶ Interview with Inengu Muyunda Ananyatele, Limulunga 12 to 30-07-2001.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

to deal with the threat from the annual inundation which killed most of the Luyi livestock and drowned people and villages alike.⁶⁸ Mboo came up with the idea of a boat or rather a barge with which to transport people and valuables to higher ground. The first barge, called *Njonjola*, was constructed of local reeds called *Mefalingi*, which were sewn together using Makenge roots and fibres. It was, it is said, constructed in parts, the sides finally being attached to the base. Clearly, this sort of craft was not very sturdy or long-lasting and soon the need for wood was realised. The sort of wood that was desired was that from which planks could be made and three sorts were chosen as suitable, *Mulombe*, *Muzauli* and *Munyonga*. The latter was chosen specifically for the base due to its low density, providing good floatation properties. Quite where the technology or idea of using planks came from is a mystery. Clearly, as there were virtually no trees in Bulozhi, it seems unlikely that this method would have developed locally. The reed and fibre boat would have been an indigenous product using materials available locally. The question is intriguing and no answer is readily available.

Three carvers were sought by Mboo for the *Njonjola* which was constructed at a village called Liaylo at the place of a man called Akabeti. Spears (*mbinji*) were sought from people living in the forest east of the plain (where iron working had been known for centuries past) and these were used to make holes in the planks using fire and through these holes were passed *Makenge* fibres (roots), which were used to join the planks together. Locally available bitumen-like glue called *Lingongwe* (made from the bark of certain trees) was then used to seal the holes. Paddling sticks were made under the supervision of Mukulwembowe, the Chief Rainmaker at Nakato village. These early barges were decorated with vertical dull scarlet and creamy white stripes using dried clay and chalkstone or dried *Makenge* root for the creamy colour. The object was to create shades of light and dullness, which were to resemble the designs on the altars used to worship the Luyi God, Nyambe. Later, the stripes changed in colour to black and white and were said to resemble a zebra's stripes but this was not the original purpose. Thus the early *Njonjola* was decorated to look like a giant altar.

⁶⁸ Interview with Induna Nawa Matakala, Limulunga, 13-07-2001.

Finally, the chief carver, Induna Nambayo would be called to supervise all the carvings and to launch the barge for testing. The barge Njonjola became known also as *Linene* meaning 'a wide thing' and later as *Nalikwanda*, the name by which it is known today. This latter name means 'for the people' meaning that it was for the use of all those who could paddle and who lived in vulnerably low areas when the flood, known as *mezi a lungwangwa* (water that consumes everything) rose too high. The purpose was to transport people to higher ground for safety. Later, the Nalikwanda was for the sole use of the King who led a train of barges and canoes in the procession known as *Kuomboka*, which heralded the move to higher ground of much of the Lozi nation between early March and April depending on the height of the waters. In the pre-Makololo era this migration did not take place to any particular or regular location, it could be to any higher ground that was deemed safe. Later, when the use of the plain margins was included, families had regular flood-time homes where they took their cattle, and Kings would also choose their own Kuomboka destination. It was only during the time of Yeta III in the twentieth century that a set destination was ordained. More discussion of Kuomboka takes place in Chapter Seven, the purpose here being to locate this very potent symbol of Lozi culture and identity in the reign of the first Lozi male monarch, Mboo.

Meanwhile Mboo had other, more human difficulties to deal with, specifically competition with siblings who, although it is not admitted in Lozi tradition, probably challenged for the leadership of the Luyi resulting in unsuccessful contenders moving out. Most accounts of the time of Mboo describe a process of handing out new areas of influence to brothers and sisters. Thus Mwanambinje moved to Nayaka, the next village south of Libonda, although this was later given to Mboo's sister, Njikana. Mbuywamwambwa, had, by this time, moved to Mukono.⁶⁹ Meanwhile Inyambo was given Sikuli, Mwanawina was given Sikongo and Yeta was given Mwandu (not to be confused with the Mwandu on the Zambezi opposite Caprivi which became the royal capital in the far south of the Kingdom),⁷⁰ Mbikusita ('a zebra that kicks') went to rule in Mukola, Namakau ('a digging tool or hoe') was given Salondo or Kwandu and Mange

⁶⁹ Interview with Her Highness the Mboanjikana Kandundu, Libonda Royal Palace, 17-08-2001.

⁷⁰ Indeed place names from the early period of the Luyi crop up in several locations across Barotseland which can prove confusing for the newcomer.

was given Nakanda, a forest area.⁷¹ This indicates a substantial broadening out of Luyi influence in the region. Not everyone appears to have been satisfied with Mboo's retention of the Kingship, however, and tradition tells of two individuals who challenged their ascribed position in relation to Mboo and later moved on to found their own princedoms and extend Luyi influence still further.

One of these was Mboo's younger brother, Mwanambinje (often spelt Mwanambinye), whose name means 'child who moves with spears'. The two brothers, it is said, regularly sparred with each other. Examples of the competitions indulged in were shooting arrows across the Zambezi and pitting their fighting bulls against one another. In many of these bouts, Mwanambinje would be the victor causing considerable resentment and jealousy on the part of Mboo so that eventually Mwanambinje left (or was expelled) to seek 'new pastures'. Mwanambinje (who was endowed with great powers of magic) is credited with having been the first Luyi/Lozi leader to subdue peoples south of Buluzi including the Mbukushu on the right bank of the Zambezi in what became Caprivi, who were apparently fracturing under the stress of succession disputes. It is from these succession disputes that the Subia are said by the Lozi to have emerged.

A similar dynamic occurred with another brother, Mange, who made for the eastern plain margin and wooded higher lands beyond that. The ability to relocate and elude compliance with existing authority, thereby avoiding internal conflict, came about due to sparse populations and the availability of land not already claimed as a homeland by other groups or where the existing status quo was easily overturned as in the case of regions inhabited by the Khoi-San. Both of the above protagonists set out with a band of followers, some of whom were appointed councillors in a political structure replicating the one left behind, which could then be planted in the areas in which they settled. This may be seen as one explanation for the rise in Barotseland of a number of royal centres

⁷¹ Interviews with Her Highness the Mboanjikana Kandundu, Libonda Royal Palace, 17-08-2001, Inengu Muyunda Ananyatele, Limulunga 12 to 30-07-2001, Wakufuma Wakufuma, Headmaster of Libonda Basic School, 14 to 16-08-2001 (who places this allocation at the time of Mbuywamwambwa's abdication and the election of Mboo), Buxton Simasiku (Induna Amulimukwa), Mwandu, 30-08-2001 and Mainga, *Bulozi under the Luyana Kings*, op. cit., p. 25. All these accounts differ slightly as to who went where as would be expected.

with similar political structures. Eventually, as will be seen, the Luyi clan and its King became more and more powerful, overrunning and reclaiming these other centres of influence and posting consuls who governed through institutional capacity identical to the central authority of the King. For those left behind it is said, Mboo distributed various administrative duties. By this method, commoners were brought into the sphere of government through appointments in matters of spiritual, military and judicial importance including the traditional Kuta or council. This may also have been a strategy to discourage further competitive lust.

By locating the political organisation of the present as primordial and timeless, Lozi historians and contemporary structures of power are able to create the impression of irreducibility and inviolability. Indeed, the Lozi system of governance has fascinated, confused, frustrated and constrained attempts to change the system both from within and without. Failed attempts at modification by the British South Africa Company (BSAC), the British colonial administrative system and its intermediaries such as the academic Max Gluckman, and the post-colonial governments of Kenneth Kaunda and Frederick Chiluba are all testament to the enduring quality of Lozi governance infused though it became in the mid-nineteenth century with Makololo influence. This, it is argued here, is due to the way that Lozi Governance and the umbilical cord to the Kingship are pivotal to Lozi identity and citizenship. Thus an attack on a Litunga, even an unpopular one, or the Barotse Royal Establishment is interpreted as an attack on the Lozi nation and usually results in a closing of ranks behind the Kingship which is the active as well as symbolic manifestation of 'Loziness'.

The story concerning the end of Mboo's rule whilst Mbuywamwambwa was still alive is not without significance. According to local legend, a period of darkness suddenly descended upon Buluzi and as much as a week passed without sight of the sun, an unheard of occurrence in that region even today. People and animals rose and slept but this had no impact on the continual darkness that befell the country. This worried the people and, according to the custom of the day, when a mystery occurred that could not be explained, a diviner was called and consulted for an explanation. The

diviner discovered that the ancestral spirits were annoyed because the Luyis had appointed Mboo to the Kingship when, in fact, it should have gone to his elder brother, Inyambo, an unworthy decision. Following this discovery, Mboo apparently politely resigns from the monarchy in the same manner as his mother before him and is replaced by Inyambo. Undoubtedly this is a benign interpretation put on competition between early Luyi leaders probably during the reign of Lewanika at the turn of the twentieth century that were then dictated to gullible missionary writers such as Jalla who produced what was to become the 'authorised' history of the Lozis, still in use today.⁷²

It is a matter of conjecture as to what the period of darkness referred to could have been. Maybe a week of heavy continuous storms or perhaps a solar eclipse (clearly not lasting a week) are responsible, but it is relevant that the natural environment is again used as a participant and as a backdrop to events that are core to Lozi history and to Lozi consciousness. In addition, the notion that the Kingship could be passed down to the eldest son is interesting here in that this was not a custom that was followed in later Lozi history. Thus perhaps these two factors are convenient ways of explaining how the performance of one of the founding monarchs of the Lozi Kingship, so central to Lozi identity, may have fallen below expectations, resulting perhaps in some kind of putsch. The idea that Mboo, like Mbuywamwambwa before him, would have politely resigned from office is somewhat implausible to say the least, but entirely in keeping with the way in which the Luyi/Lozi Kingship is intended to be perceived from the viewpoint and interests of the Second Lozi Kingdom.

Certainly Mboo is remembered today with considerable fondness. His praise sayings promote admiration:

Mboo mwana silundu
Silundu lwanga manji
Silundu sa makumba
Ana ku kumanga litunga naya

⁷² A. Jalla, *Litaba za Sicaba sa Malozi*.

*Nayo litunga naye, na ku kumanga
Naye, u Muyunda wa Ikatulamwa
A kuyunda mbu telela*

*Mboo the bright one
Who accommodates all the people in his heart
Is likened to a bunch of fibres tied together
The people loved him and he loved them too
Muyunda of Ikatulamwa, a village that once visited
Will not be willingly departed from
Because of his (Mboo's) hospitality*

This praise saying and others like it imply a bond or bargain between the Lozi people and their King. He would rule over them with care and provide protection and succour whilst the people (his supporters) would also protect their King from overthrow. As already implied, little open criticism of a King/Litunga is permissible in Lozi culture. If there was fault, then criticism would be directed at an advisor or the *Ngambela* (Prime Minister) who would probably be punished in place of the King. Also, the Lozi nation protects the Kingship even if a less than unanimously popular King occupies it.

Another aspect of Kingship and of the indigenous Lozi belief system is the added relevance and importance that attaches to Kings after their death, from when their influence increases. Departed Kings are regularly consulted at their closely guarded cenotaphs for advice and approval (this aspect of tradition is explored in more detail in Chapter Seven). Thus the cenotaph of Mboo, reified along with Mbuywamwambwa as founding parents of the Lozi order and system of governance, must be visited by all Litungas upon their accession to the Kingship. Upon the death of Mboo, the first King of the Luyis was buried in his capital, Ikatulamwa, in a specially designed courtyard known as *Limbwata*. The following morning, however, the courtyard built around his grave and a mound of earth put on the grave, had disappeared. A trail was found leading out of the village and leading to nearby Imwambo village. In that place the courtyard fence was found together with the earth mound. At some point in time after

this event (when is not clear), the old village of Ikatulamwa was washed away as the Zambezi modified its course and the surviving inhabitants all moved to a new village given the same name. After the discovery of the transferred grave and the subsequent washing away of the original Ikatulamwa, the Luyis concluded that the spirit of Mboo had not wanted to be buried in Ikatulamwa and that this was a portent of events to come, a message from the spirit to the people that had been ignored.⁷³ From that time onwards, each King designated his eventual burial place, which is always at a different location from his capital. It also marks the inauguration of what Mainga refers to as the 'royal graves and ancestor cult',⁷⁴ discussed in detail in Chapter Seven. Suffice it to say here that the legend concerning Mboo's transfer of his own gravesite for posterity is indication of the belief that, on departure from the world of mortals, a Litunga, far from losing control, actually gains in power and influence over the mortal world.

Twelve Litungas are said to have reigned over the Luyi in the period between the abdication of Mbuywamwambwa and the arrival of the Makololo (a chronological list of Lozi monarchs is given in Appendix 2). Of these, ten displayed qualities that define the ideals of the Lozi consciousness and two, Yeta Canute and Mwananyanda, of whom little is written, demonstrate qualities of which the Lozi consciousness strongly disapproves. Mboo, of whom this chapter has already spoken was renowned for his inventiveness, his hunting prowess, his pragmatism and his magical powers in dealing with intruders. His brothers Mwanambinje and Mange were also both renowned for their magical powers, while Mwanambinje, whilst only a prince, is renowned for founding the southern Kingdom and for pacifying other peoples as far south as the Chobe/Linyanti/Mashi/Kwando. Mboo's successor, Inyambo was remembered as a great hunter while Yeta ya Musa (Yeta the kind one) was known for his gentleness, kindness and care for people as well as for the flora and fauna. These first three kings are associated intimately with the foundation of the nation as they were all of one generation, Mboo and Inyambo both being sons of Mbuyuwamwambwa while Yeta is spoken of generally as their uncle (a brother to Mbuywamwambwa), a brother to the latter.

⁷³ This version of events was provided by Inengu Muyunda Ananyatele, Limulunga 12 to 30-07-2001 and a similar one is recounted by Coillard, *On the Threshold...* p. 595.

⁷⁴ M. Mainga, 'A history of Lozi religion to the end of the nineteenth century' in T.O. Ranger and I.N. Kinambo, *The Historical Study of African Religion*, Heinemann, London, 1972), p. 96.

After Yeta passed away a new generation of Kings took over led by Ngalama the son of another of Mboo's brothers, Ingalamwa who had not risen to Litungaship. Ngalama was a warrior king known for his fierceness and determination. The kingdom expanded under this Litunga who set about eliminating the fledgling princedoms set up by Mwanambinje and Mange and consolidating these southern and western extensions to the original Bulози homeland. The conquest of Mwanambinje is a story of magic and heroism with Mwanambinje thwarting Ngalama's armies by magic until, finally tired by the continuing onslaughts, choosing to sink into the earth with his people at his capital Imatonga, on the southern plain near to Senanga rather than be captured by Ngalama. This led to the acquisition by the Luyi kingship of the *Maoma* drums which Mwanambinje had captured from the Mbukushu and which were to become a symbol of Lozi power.⁷⁵ His cenotaph is still upkept and visited by Litungas today. The symbolism of the site is expressed today by the existence of palm trees that are said to have grown from the poles to which Mwanambinji's cattle were tied so long ago.

The stories of Ngalama's conquest of Mange, by contrast, teaches present-day Lozis the quality of loyalty for it is said that Mange's people failed to rally to his cause when Ngalama's forces came to deal with Mange who ran into a lake to escape his pursuers. Instead Mange's followers ran away and the descendants through all generations to this day are known as the Makwanga (failures) for their weakness when their chief was under pressure. Even today people living in the area in which Mange is said to have perished suffer the reputation gained from this event which may have taken place 250-300 years ago.⁷⁶ All Litungas from this time to the present day are descended from Ngalama who by all accounts did not make any plans for succession having any known sons killed at birth.

This did not stop at least two sons from being spirited away, however, and when Ngalama died, one of these, Yeta Nalute, was appointed Litunga but he turned out to be

⁷⁵ Mwanambinje had attempted to share these with Ngalama who became his son-in-law through marriage to the former's daughter, Notulu. However, it is said that Ngalama could not be satisfied with only one of these symbolically powerful drums, closely associated with the ability to bring rain which Mbukushu chiefs were believed to be endowed with since earliest known times and so turned on his father-in-law.

⁷⁶ Interviews with Chief Sikwa and his people, Nambinje, 21-07-2001.

very unpopular due to his penchant for eating human flesh. This is interpreted as a habit picked up while in exile with the Mbunda to the west (Wiko), where all bad things were said to emanate from. As a non-swimmer, it is said he was drowned after being enticed onto a canoe believing he was going hunting. The canoe was deliberately sunk, it being a cardinal sin to spill the blood of a Litunga. Yeta Nalute was followed by another of Ngalama's sons, Ngombala, who was an empire builder like his father. He had to deal with insurrection on the part of the Subia in the south, originally subdued by his great uncle, Mwanambinje, but took this further by extending the lands under Luyi influence beyond the Victoria Falls and up to Hwange in present-day Zimbabwe. Returning from the Falls, Ngombala then sailed up the Kwando, subduing peoples such as the Yeyi, and Mbukushu, posting sentinels on the way and finally making allegiances with the Mbunda in present day south-eastern Angola, offering them hospitality in Bulozhi should they ever need it before re-entering the Bulozhi plain from the west.

Next came Yubya who was loved so much that, when he was taken ill, he was locked in a little house with no door so that the angel of death could not take him away. Alas, that Litunga died as others had before which taught the Luyi that God was all powerful and omnipresent. Yubya is also known for dictating that Indunas who obtained tribute could keep a small portion for themselves, probably a pragmatic decision at the time. Mwanawina was known for his good looks. Mwananyanda was another bad king who had large numbers of his people killed but invented the famous Liwale dance for women.

The great Litunga Mulambwa is revered by in Lozi history, not least by the Mbunda who dwell in Barotseland alongside the Lozi. It was Mulambwa who welcomed two branches of the Mbunda to move to the kingdom after they left their homeland beyond the Kwando River to the west, honouring the offer first made by Ngombala. A section of the Mbunda peoples, sometimes known as the 'Old Mbunda' have lived in Bulozhi ever since and their two chiefs, Kandala and Ciengele, hold high office in the Lealui Kuta paying regular homage to the Litunga although, while there are Mbunda Indunas, there are few opportunities for Mbunda progression in the traditional establishment. Mulambwa was also known as a law-maker, including the rather weird

law that a thief should not be prosecuted but rather given land or title to encourage him not to repeat the offence. Meanwhile Mulambwa stands out along with Mboo and later Lewanika as a landmark Litunga who reigned for maybe 50 years, an unparalleled period during that epoch. Finally Silumelume and Mubakwanu, both sons of Mulambwa are remembered only for their foolishness in fighting over the succession of their father which led to the ease of invasion of the Makololo in the late 1820s.

These paragraphs then, contain a distillation of hundreds of stories handed down over the generations and distorted in the various parts of the old Lozi kingdom. Yet there are clearly grains of truth in each, not least **as** the same stories crop up so many times in different areas albeit with different nuances. Each Litunga as well as the errant princes Mwanambinje and Mange is remembered for something vital. Only two have negative connotations and these like Sipopa who followed later, who also became unpopular, were rewarded by having their cenotaphs chosen for them in remote places where people did not live. The memories of these Litungas and princes serve to tell the Lozi of today of the evils of cannibalism, ill-temper and cruelty. All other Litungas of the period are remembered for good characteristics such as intelligence, kindness, hospitality, beauty, bravery, hunting prowess and pragmatism as well as for magical powers and comportment that encourage Lozis today to revere their heritage and also to continue to respect institutions such as the Kingship. The supremacy of the original Malozi among the family of groups that make up the nation also comes through the ages although of course no such thing as a pureblood Lozi exists.

Summary and conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter, the history of the period between the arrival in Bulozhi of the first Luyis and the end of the first Lozi kingdom after the death of Litunga Mulambwa, handed down in orally transmitted stories, purveys many founding components of Lozi state formation, custom, ritual and cosmology. Meanwhile, many of the cultural values appertaining to the nation today, which are described in more detail in Chapter Seven, are rooted in the Luyi era. On reflection, apart from the short shrift given to the two bad kings Yeta Nalute and Mwananyanda, it appears that the history handed down has been carefully crafted so as not to embarrass or in any way lead to

perceptions of internal conflict in early Luyi political formation, with the exception of the reconquering of the fiefdoms of erring princes who sought to dilute the power of the Luyi kingship. This is an enduring theme regardless of the factual variation between various versions and is testament to the Lozi sense of propriety and protection that is afforded to the institution of Kingship in all corners of the realm. Also, this is a history that serves the additional purpose of rooting the Lozi people and the Lozi state, with its political structure very similar to the one found today, in timeless perpetuity in Bulozhi. It also links the Lozi kingship directly to the God, Nyambe, the founder of life on earth. Van Wimsbergen found very similar stories among the creation myths of the Nkoya, who are claimed in Lozi myths and legends to have come under Luyi domination soon after the founding of the Luyi dynasty in Bulozhi.⁷⁷

Analysis and interpretation provides clear indications that the early Luyi arrivals were limited in numbers, probably a large family clan that settled initially in a comparatively small area of northern Bulozhi and found conditions attractive but exacting. The physical environment was nothing like that obtained elsewhere and difficulties were clearly experienced in maintaining subsistence in the floodplain until the introduction of cattle rearing and extended cultivation outside of the initial settled area. The vagaries of the climate and the annual flood that varies in height and extent from one year to the next were also major factors. Conflict with other intruders on the plain was another feature that occupies early Lozi history as does the use of magic to overcome these threats. It seems likely that population levels and density were considerably less than is the case today. Internal conflict amongst the contenders for power in the ruling family is concealed by way of attaching blame to poor decision-making on the part of commoners electing their leader, causing offence to the spirits of ancestors and to God. Added to this was the need to expand the limits of influence of the Luyi people as an answer to insufficiencies in locally produced food supplies and that obtained in the form of tribute. Conflicts are solved with the help of magic and superhuman effort. The Lozi God, Nyambe, is shown to be the first and founding person in Bulozhi and thus provides legitimation for all future Lozi domination of the floodplain and surrounding area.

⁷⁷ Van Binsbergen, *op. cit.*, pp. 359-364.

More recent contributions to Lozi history accept that other people may have been present in the region but that they were largely confined to the margins of the floodplain. Scientific analysis suggests that there might be some logic and correctness to this as the floodplain may well have been a virtually uninhabitable watery expanse prior to the time when the Luyis and other similar groups arrived from the Lunda or Luba Empires to the north. Other peoples may have attempted to gain access to the region where the Luyis settled but were repelled. Finally here, the history of this era is shown to be a founding component of the 'national history of the Lozis', and forms a significant fund of Lozi heritage that can be bought into by Lozis when constructing their identity and sense of belonging to something. Particularly since the overthrow of the Makololo invaders in 1864, Lozis have been able to accept citizenship and provide subjectivity of the metaphysical entity that is the Lozi nation and take possession of the limited and simultaneously inclusive and exclusive membership it offers.

The relevance of environmental change and adaptation is paramount in this segment of Lozi history. One can only imagine the reaction of the early Luyis to the vista that greeted them on arrival in the plain. The flatness of the plain, the extremes of weather found there, the exigencies of the annual flood, the power of the River Zambezi and of the animals that lurked therein have only been hinted at in this chapter. But the imprint of the environment exists in everything that was created whether in physical form as with the creation of the first Nalikwanda and grass-built huts or more subjectively as in the creation myths surrounding Nyambe and the ability of the Luyi queen Mbuywamwambwa to bear calves as well as humans. The imprint of the physical environment that has been handed down is as potent and vivid as it is to any newcomer to Buluzi today and forms an irreducible layer of identity for Lozis once acceptance of their primogeniture in Buluzi has taken place. Even the name that Lozis give to their King in Siluyana, *Litunga*, meaning earth or holder of the earth, is directly connected to the environment. The King is seen to hold the land on behalf of the people. The physical environment will continue to be a recurring theme throughout this work.

In the contemporary era, Lozi parents still talk to their children of the early ancestors so virtually everybody has a rudimentary knowledge of the myths and stories

pertaining to the early period. In terms of citizenship and subjectivity, the constructed history of the early period is very important in giving root to the nation and the Lozi consciousness with all its defining characteristics. The link to the present is provided by the cenotaphs of departed Kings maintained and guarded by the *Limbote* (gravekeepers,, singular - *Nombote*) through whom messages and requests for advice are passed to and from departed Litungas who are more powerful than the living which is why their graves have been visited and honoured by all Litungas, Ngambelas and other Lozi notables throughout recorded Lozi time.

This earliest period of Luyi history is relevant then in describing the way that one group of ancestors of the present-day Lozi arrived and dealt with the exigencies of the time. Mwambwa and Mbuywamwambwa, assuming that these were separate people, clearly had Lunda connections, Mwambwa almost certainly being pure Lunda. On arriving in Buluzi, there must have been pluses and minuses to be weighed up in making the decision to remain. On the positive side, here was a land that was not yet thickly populated, that responded to cultivation, a skill that the Lunda brought with them and probably existed amongst any Luba remnants living in the plain at this time. Yet, in the beginning, this clearly did not cater sufficiently for the needs of the Luyi thus the need to send out a party to colonise other parts of Buluzi.