Rural Connections, Urban Styles

Theorizing Cultural Dualism

In an era of decline, expectations of urban permanence have been disappointed, and Copperbelt workers have been increasingly obliged (whether they wish to or not) to contemplate and plan for rural futures. Indeed, migration on the Copperbelt has been, in recent years, more a matter of leaving the city than coming to it. But while coming to town is a chapter in a well-rehearsed story (urbanization), fleeing it opens up a tale not quite so easily told. Social scientists, confronted with the apparent anomaly of urban-to-rural migration, tend to abandon the familiar “-izations” of the modernist narrative for premodern circular time: thus the movement of urban Copperbelt residents to rural areas in northeastern Zambia becomes “return migration,” “circular migration,” or simply “going home.” But many who leave town, of course, are life-long urbanites; many, indeed, are not even going to any place that could plausibly be called “home” even in an ancestral sense (see chapter 4). The path “back” to a rural area is thus neither automatic nor easy, and the ubiquity of rural “retirements” for Copperbelt workers in recent years raises a number of questions that demand to be answered: how do urbanites manage “going home” to rural areas after living most or all of their lives in town? In the years prior to rural retirement, do workers maintain close relations with rural communities or kin? What social and economic preparations have to be made? What assets are required to negotiate the transition successfully? What are the material and social obstacles encountered by those on whom such a transition is increasingly forced?

A classic literature, as well as my own previous experience in Lesotho (Ferguson 1994a), prepared me to expect that the answers to these questions would be centrally concerned with the forging and tending of social and economic bonds linking urban workers with rural kin. I expected my interviews and discussions about rural retirements to center on such matters as visits “back home,” remittances sent to relatives, and rural investment of urban earnings. These issues did indeed turn out to be important. But I was surprised to find that inquiry about retirement plans and obstacles to rural settlement very often produced discussions that centered less on such straightforward social and economic matters than on what we might call the cultural characteristics necessary for successful rural retirement. In considering how one might succeed or fail in the task of “going home” to a rural area, workers turned quickly from questions of remittances or visits to matters of dress, styles of speech, attitudes, habits, even body carriage.

A pervasive and familiar dualism structured the way that most Copperbelt dwellers spoke about such matters. Contrasting styles of urban dress and comportment, workers said, reflected a fundamental difference between “town ways” and “village ways.” But what they described in one breath as a difference between urban and rural might in the next become a contrast between “modern” and “traditional,” “European” versus “African,” or even “educated” versus “uneducated.” As in the 1950s (Mitchell 1987), people operated with stereotypical images of urban and rural virtues and vices and mapped these differences onto contrasting urban modes of life. Like an earlier generation of social scientists, ordinary Copperbelt residents seemed to feel that only some urban residents were truly and properly “urbanized.” Indeed, the English term “urbanized” was sprinkled into people’s conversations with surprising frequency. “Urbanized” people (or, in Bemba, benda kalale) might conceive of themselves as superior to the more “traditional” or less sophisticated urbanite, who could be seen as “backward,” and designated by the derogatory Bemba term kamsisin (a diminutive form of “villager”). Alternatively, the “urbanized” might themselves be construed as morally and socially inferior by more “traditional” town dwellers, in whose eyes they appeared as confused Africans who had lost their roots and “forgotten who they are,” and who cared only about money. But if the relative merits of “town ways” and “village ways” were in dispute,
the meaning of this contrast for rural retirement was not. For the one
thing that everyone seemed to agree on was that for those seeking
to leave urban life and settle in rural communities, being “too urbanized”
could be a problem.

Such perceptions fit well with the standard social scientific meta-
narratives of urbanization that I reviewed in the last chapter. Indeed,
they fit a little too well. For while the idea of a progressive transition
from rural tradition to urban modernity seemed to me manifestly in-
adequate to explaining the course of recent Copperbelt history, my
informants had little hesitation in relying on the most clichéd dualist
stereotypes of modernization theory in their understandings of urban life
in general, and of the cultural politics of rural-urban migration in par-
icular. They spoke as if their lives were suspended—as the title of a
standard text on Zambia has it (Burdeotte 1988)—between two worlds:
one modern, industrial, urban, and Western, a Gesellschaft world of
money and technology, of mines and concrete and electricity; the other
rural, traditional, and African, a Gemeinschaft world of family and com-

munity, of grass huts, cloth weavings, and clay pots.

Urban workers’ conceptions of town and country, and of the cultural
differences among urbanites, were (it became increasingly clear) not simply compatible with the modernist metanarratives of social science; they were a local version of them. Modernization theory had become a local
tongue, and sociological terminology and folk classifications had be-
dconscieriously intermingled in informants’ intimate personal nar-

ratives. Indeed, even workers with little formal education might com-
plain about “these traditional extended families of ours,” or worry that
“by now I am so urbanized, I would have trouble going back home,”
or reflect on the difference between “nuclear families” and “matrilineal
clans” (using these English words). Listening to informants discuss the
contrast between “the village” and “the town,” or “African” tradition
versus “European” modernity, I often had the unsettling sense that I
was listening to an out-of-date sociology textbook. It became clear that
even if modernization theory had had its day at the level of social theory,
it would still require to be attended to as an ethnographic datum. As in
the case of ethnicity (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992b), that which once
presented itself as explicans was beginning to make itself visible as expli-
candum.

The dualist habits of thought that automatically opposed urban mo-
dernity to rural tradition were so well entrenched, both in my own in-
tellectual traditions and in the folk-wisdom of Copperbelt society itself,
that I often found them colonizing my own thoughts about the urban
cultural contrasts I was observing, even though I knew better. On one
such occasion I sat in the afternoon shadows of the new, shiny, and
ultra-modern ZCCM headquarters building in Lusaka, watching a
group of women carrying water to some thirsty laborers who were
working outside the building. As they approached the steel and glass
office building, the women walked quietly, in single file, with jars of
water balanced on their heads. There was nothing unusual in seeing
women carrying water in the heart of a metropolis where taps often ran
dry, and where even many of the better neighborhoods were forced to
rely at least occasionally on hand-carried water for their daily needs.
But instead of the usual plastic or tin containers, these women were using
old-fashioned clay pots. Combined with their “traditional” cloth wraps
(fitenge) and head cloths (fitambala), the visual effect was striking.
There, at the foot of a gleaming new office building that would have
counted as up-to-date in New York or Los Angeles, stood a party of old
women who looked as though they might have been sent to meet Liv-
ingstone.

Even as I was having the thought, I knew how badly such images
misunderstood the cultural contrasts of urban Zambia. From the simple
observation of a group of urban women quietly doing their jobs, my
own cliche-infested imagination had in a split-second spun out an only-
too-familiar web of associations, turning the poor women into incarna-
tions of (1) rural life, who somehow “really” belonged in a village,
not a city; (2) a “traditional” past, somehow out of place in the “mod-
ern” world; and (3) indigenous “African” ways, in colorful contradic-
tion with “Western” metropolitan culture. It was time to get back to
reality: these were urban women, not villagers; they were living in the
present, not the past; and they were working—quite free of any evident
contradiction—as wage-laborers, employees of a giant, modern capital-

ist firm.

The analytical challenge here would appear to be to keep such ap-
propriate skepticism toward the modernization story close to hand while
at the same time taking seriously the place that it occupied in the con-
ceptions of my informants. As I insisted in chapter 1, the narrative of
an emerging urban modernity set against the dark background of a static
rural tradition is a myth, but to say this is not to be done with the matter.
On the contrary, myths are socially and cosmologically productive; in
this sense, they require to be analyzed, and not just refuted. With such
aims in mind, I devote this chapter to reviewing the genealogy of what
is sometimes termed the dualist approach to urban culture in Africa, and
to developing an alternative theoretical approach to cultural dualism,
via an elaboration of an idea of what I call "cultural style." A deliber-
ately rather abstract presentation of the contrast between what I will
call “localist” and “cosmopolitan” styles here is meant to lay out a
framework for analysis; the more detailed ethnographic material nec-
essary to support and flesh out the argument will be introduced, piece
by piece, over the following three chapters.

THE PUZZLE OF CULTURAL DUALISM

The Africans seemed to me to be hovering in the
balance between the loin-cloth and the LSE blazer.
Which would they choose?

(Praenkel 1959, 134)

Ethnographic accounts of the cities of southern Africa have long been
tied to an evolutionary, dualist model of social and cultural change.
Whether the terms of description were “primitive” and “civilized,” “tra-
ditional” and “modern,” “precapitalist” and “capitalist,” or even “ru-
ral” and “urban,” cultural differences in southern African towns have
inseparably been tied to an idea of transition between two fundamentally
different types of society. This view of cultural life as divided between
a passing, rural tradition and an emerging, urban modern society has
been particularly pervasive in the anthropological study of the Copper-
belt.

At the heart of the dualist paradigm is the idea that southern Africa
is the site of a meeting, or clash, between two analytically distinct types
of social and economic systems: on the one hand, the older, rural, “tribal”
systems; on the other, a new, modern, industrial system, usually
associated with an “urban way of life.” Dualist approaches give different
accounts of the sorts of interactions that occur between these two sys-
tems, but they are united in seeing a general historical or evolutionary
progression from the first, tribal social type toward the second, modern
one. Because the tribal systems are conceived as essentially rural and the
modern one as largely urban, dualism understands this process of mod-
erization to entail (if not equate to) a transformation known as urban-
ization.

Africans in town, in this perspective, might be urbanized in the literal
sense that they reside in urban areas without being urbanized in the
broader sense of having left behind a tribal social system for a modern,
industrial one. In his classic study Townsman or Tribesmen (1961),
Philip Mayer explored the apparent paradox of urban Africans who
remained, even after long urban residence, “tribal” in their attitudes and
cultural practices. Among migrants to the South African city of East
London, some were Christian converts who took on many of the signs
of membership in the wider, white-dominated society; these migrants
called themselves the “School” people. But other migrants from the same
areas rejected Christianity, schooling, and other European cultural
forms, and self-consciously enacted Xhosa tradition by wearing blankets
and smearing themselves with red ochre, thereby earning themselves the
label, “Red.” But the Reds were not recent arrivals from the countryside
who had not had a chance to learn urban ways; they were long-term
urban residents who deliberately set out to keep themselves apart from
the “European” city and its ways, and laid plans for the day they would
eventually return “home” with money to invest in their rural home-
steads. In their relations to the urban society that surrounded them, the
Reds were insular and conservative—“encapsulated,” in Mayer’s for-
mulation. Where School migrants and permanent town dwellers devel-
oped diverse and widely spread social networks, the Reds avoided ties
wider than the local ones that bound them to each other, and to their
home areas. While their existence was in some sense urban, then, they
were not, in Mayer’s terms, “urbanized,” since they insisted on holding
on to “preurban patterns” of behavior and values; in Epstein’s phrase,
they were “in the town, but never of it” (Epstein 1967; Mayer 1961).

The anthropologists associated with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute
developed a related, but significantly different, approach to cultural
change in southern African cities. In distinction to those who saw urban
Africans as “tribesmen in town,” authors such as Mitchell, Epstein, and
Gluckman emphasized that migrants arriving in town became thor-
oughly “urbanized” very quickly. They did not blindly continue inap-
propriate rural customs but quickly adapted to a new social setting. The
behavior of urban Africans thus had to be understood in the context of
the urban institutions that they inhabited, and not in relation to the
rural, “tribal” system that they had left behind. As Gluckman famously
put it, “an African townswoman is a townswoman; an African miner is a
miner,” acting primarily “within a field whose structure is determined
by the urban, industrial setting” (Gluckman 1961, 69). The rapid situ-
ational shift performed by the migrant moving from a rural social system
to an urban industrial one, Mitchell pointed out, tended to get confused
with the much slower systemic transition whereby preindustrial social orders gave way to industrial ones (Mitchell 1966, 1987). Against the idea that urbanization or “detribalization” was “a slow, long-time process,” Gluckman insisted that urban modes of behavior were adopted (and “tribal” ones shed) “the moment an African crosses his tribal boundary to go to the town” (1961, 68–69).

Where apparently “urban” and “tribal” elements coexisted, the RLI anthropologists emphasized the way that appropriate behaviors and values were situationally selected. Such things as allegiance to a chief or displays of ethnic pride reflected not fixed and essential “tribal” attributes but repertoires that skilled actors could draw on in appropriate settings. The same worker who bowed down to his chief during a visit home might be a leading union organizer back on the mines a few days later. What is more, apparently “tribal” patterns of action in town were often responses to the demands of the contemporary urban setting rather than holdovers of old rural practices. Thus Mitchell, in a famous essay (1956a) that anticipates much more recent work on “the creation of ethnicity” (cf., e.g., Vail 1989), showed that “tribalism” in town was not simply a persistence of rural tradition but entailed the creation of ethnic categories and stereotypes for use in urban life. To be “tribal” in the rural sense meant to participate in a rural social system, to show allegiance to a chief, and so on. Urban “tribalists,” on the other hand, might have no relation to such rural systems at all; instead, they were using ethnic categories to forge social networks and to order and classify the masses of strangers with whom they had to interact. Moreover, the point could be generalized. Even where urban practices seemed to resemble rural traditions, they had wholly different significances and social logics under urban conditions. An urban institution, Mitchell insisted, “is not a changed rural institution: it is a separate social phenomenon existing as part of a separate social system” (1966, 48).

Yet in the end, the RLI emphasis on situational selection was not so much a rejection of dualism as a refinement of it. The fundamental idea of distinct and separate tribal and urban social systems was retained, as was the idea of an evolutionary transition between the two. In the countryside, Africans could be analyzed as members of what Gluckman called “traditional tribal societies” (1971) in town, they were part of “modern society” having been swept up in the African “industrial revolution” (Crehan 1997, 55–62). The contemporary importance of “tribal” systems for urban Africans was downplayed, in a rejection of the essentialist caricatures of “primitive Africans” beloved of colonial reactionaries. But the idea that urban Africans were caught in between two distinct systems continued to be at the heart of the RLI conception. If long-term urban residents still saw themselves as “part townsfolk and part countryfolk,” this was just a reflection of their involvement in “two contrasting and in many respects disparate social orders—the social order of the small-scale, predominantly traditional rural social relations and the large-scale, urban social relations” (Mitchell 1969b, 176); a “tribesman” could “participate in both worlds by moving from one to the other,” while “his participation in the cash economy in the towns . . . leaves his obligations and duties to his rural kinsmen and his general involvement in the tribal social system unchanged” (Mitchell 1962, 233). Urbanization thus involved both a rapid situational switching between these two frames (as circulating migrants crossed back and forth between them) and a gradual evolutionary transition of the entire society from the small scale to the large scale (Mitchell 1966, 1987; cf. Wilson 1941, 1942; Wilson and Wilson 1968). And the progress of this evolutionary transition could be indexed by the degree to which migrants quit the traditional tribal system altogether for the modern urban one, by ceasing their switching and becoming “permanently urbanized” (Mitchell 1951, 20). For the RLI anthropologists, the “industrial revolution in Africa” was well under way but far from complete; migrants still were positioned between two separate social systems (Mitchell 1966, 47–48)—one tribal, traditional, and rural; the other industrial, modern, and urban. A townsman might be a townsman, but urban Africans operated “within a developing system that is marked by the continuing conflict of different principles of social organization” (Epstein 1958, 140); ideas of “transition,” “partial urbanization,” and “low urban commitment” were brought into the analysis at key points to explain the otherwise anomalous failure of urban Africans to exhibit suitably “urban” behavior (see discussion of Mitchell below; also Epstein 1967; Mayer 1962).

That was in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s and 1980s, a much more far-reaching critique of dual society theory was developed by researchers influenced by neo-Marxist historiography and dependency theory. In the new conception (anticipated in interesting ways by Wilson 1941, 1942), there were no longer two coexisting systems, “tribal” and “modern.” Instead, rural and urban institutions had to be conceived as parts of a single socioeconomic system, in which accumulation at the urban centers was made possible by the exploitation of rural labor (key texts in this development were Johnstone 1976; Wolpe 1980; Bundy
gradual and evolutionary or abrupt and situational) from small-scale, rural tradition to large-scale, urban modernity. Cultural practices, such work began to suggest, could not usefully be sorted into which of two social systems they belonged to, the tribal or the modern. For both apparently traditional practices like bridewealth and apparently modern ones like working for wages required the same sorts of explanation; both had to be situated within a social world that included both the rural and the urban, and, within which migration was not a passing phenomenon of transition but a durable feature of the regional political economy (see also Moodie 1994).

In the most general theoretical terms, then, the whole dualist premise that the culturally complex societies of southern Africa are to be understood as transitional hybrids or combinations of two “basic,” pure social types has become very hard to swallow. As Terence Ranger has elegantly put it, the idea that so-called traditional cultural forms are in some way in “contradiction” with modern industrial society “belongs to a universe of inevitable transitions from one clear-cut type of society to another, a model which seemed convincing for a relatively brief moment of European industrialization but which now seems more and more the exception rather than the rule” (Ranger 1985, 153). The urban, industrial societies of southern Africa, it seems clear, do not belong to such a universe, and dualist accounts of Zambian urban culture are therefore regarded nowadays with a theoretically well-justified suspicion.

The puzzle in all this, however, is that my fieldwork with Zambian mineworkers in Kitwe revealed not only the class divisions that the literature would lead us to expect but also a cultural bifurcation remarkably similar to those that Wilson (1941), Epstein (1948, 1981), and Mitchell (1956a, 1987) had described for an earlier era. We might well reject the terms in which these authors described this duality (primitive/civilized [Wilson]; tribal/urban [Epstein]; low urban commitment/high urban commitment [Mitchell]), but the ethnographic fact of a certain cultural duality remains to be explained. Among the copper miners with whom I worked in Kitwe, it was impossible not to distinguish two contrasting cultural modes, which I will call “localist” and “cosmopolitan,” for reasons to be explained shortly (cf. Hannan 1996, 102–111; Merton 1957, 387–420).

The extremes of these two contrasting modes were immediately visible and obvious. On the one hand were the cosmopolitan workers, relaxing in bars and clubs, drinking bottled beer or liquor, listening to
Western or "international" music, speaking English and mixing languages with ease, dressing smartly (and even ostentatiously), and adopting an air of easy familiarity with whites like me. On the other hand were the localists, drinking in private homes or taverns, preferring "African" or home-brewed beer, speaking the local languages of their home region, dressing in drab or even ragged clothes, listening to "local" music, and presenting to a white foreigner like me an impression of intimidation and sometimes even servility. Localist stylistic markers seemed to distinguish those who had a strong sense of continuing allegiance to a rural "home" community—those who visited often, adhered to "custom," and displayed a strong ethnic or regional identity. Cosmopolitan style, on the other hand, marked the distance a worker maintained from "home"; it signified a shrugging off of localist cultural traits, and often a rejection of rural ties, along with an embracing of Western-dominated transnational mass culture.

The image of a rural home was crucial here, and styles were spoken of largely in terms of their rurality or urbanity. But we must be careful, as I noted at the start of this chapter, to take this commonsense mapping with a grain of salt. For the styles thought of as "rural" were often practiced by life-long urbanites, and are not well interpreted as a perpetuation or transplantation of rural ways in an urban context. Indeed, as I will argue, localism was (no less than cosmopolitanism) a specifically urban style. And the very idea of a rural "home" turns out to be more than a bit complicated in practice, as the chapter to follow will show.

It is important to note, too, that this duality of cultural style did not map neatly onto expected differences of other sorts—such as education, occupation, social status, length of residence in town, and so on. So-called modern economic occupations and institutional attachments by no means excluded localist style, and cosmopolitan style was no straightforward index of social status or education. At the very highest levels, those with professional employment and education did normally exhibit a cosmopolitan style. But so, in a different way, did many prostitutes and street criminals, who had their own ways of distancing themselves from the expectations and proprieties of "home." Indeed, both cosmopolitanism and localism had their high and low forms, their respectable and disreputable versions (see chapter 6). And people of precisely the same occupation, education, and salary could differ markedly in their cultural tastes and orientations toward "home." On the mines, at least, it was not unusual for a foreman or a section boss to be more of a localist than many of his employees.

This, then, is the puzzle of cultural dualism on the Copperbelt: how are we to square a well-founded suspicion of dualist models of society and culture with the ethnographic fact of a persistent sort of cultural bifurcation—one, moreover, that informants insisted on conceptualizing in terms of tradition and modernity, the old and the new, the rural and the urban? Were the old dual society theories right after all? Or is there another way of conceptualizing the contrast between localism and cosmopolitanism?

FROM SITUATIONAL SELECTION TO CULTIVATED STYLES: HOW TO GET FROM MANCHESTER TO BIRMINGHAM

Culture and society, claimed Kroeber's Anthropology textbook of 1948 (1963, 75), are counterparts, "like the two faces of a sheet of paper. To each distinctive culture there corresponds, necessarily and automatically, a particular society: to Hottentot culture, the Hottentot nationality, to Chinese civilization, the Chinese people."

In this conception, which has been the unremarked common sense of most twentieth-century anthropology, cultural differences may be read unproblematically as a difference between analytically distinct "societies" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b). But how, in such a theoretical frame, is one to deal with the common situation in which cultural differences are located within "a society"? One temptation has been to see the society as itself a composite, a "plural society" made up of different racial or ethnic subgroups, each of which, like a society, possesses its own subculture (see, e.g., Kuper and Smith 1969). Alternatively, in the case of a cultural duality like the one I have described above, an evolutionary pluralism may be invoked, so that cultural differences are seen to reflect the simultaneous presence of two social systems or two developmental stages within a single social formation. It is such a view that has allowed L.A. Zambian to be persistently described as suspended "Between Two Worlds" (Burdette 1988), "a developing system that is marked by the continuing conflict of different principles of social organization" (Epstein 1958, 240), whether those "different principles" are conceived in terms of tribal society versus industrial civilization, tradition versus modernity, or even a domestic mode of production versus a capitalist one (Mitchell 1962, 1969b; Wilson 1941; Wilson 1968; cf. Binswanger 1981). Such dualisms haunted the RLI anthropologists' understanding of urban cultural contrasts, even as they sought to escape them. For
while trying to counter one sort of dualism—one that would stigmatize urban Africans as necessarily “tribal,” rural, and “primitive”—they ended up embracing another, what Mayer called the “alternation model” (Mayer 1962; cf. Epstein 1967), which required circulating migrants to snap back and forth between cultural orientations as they moved between two completely different social systems, “spatially and socially distinct,” as Watson put it (1958, 6).7

In searching for an alternative way of conceiving cultural difference and its relation to social organization, one place to begin is with approaches to subcultural style developed in the Birmingham tradition of cultural studies. Dick Hebdige’s approach to the study of youth subcultures, for instance, shows how a notion of style as “signifying practice” can help to explain how difference is actively produced and used within a society (Hebdige 1979). The spectrally and self-consciously “different” styles of punks, “mods,” “teddy boys,” and other groups in 1970s Britain are interpreted by Hebdige neither as total ways of life, nor as mere deviance, but as specific and semiotically complex forms of social action that must be interpreted in the context of material life and social relations. Difference here cannot be conceived (in the usual anthropological style) as located between analytically distinct cultures or social systems; it is continually produced within the logic of a class society.10

Recent studies of gender extend this insight. Differences of gender, after all, cannot here be reduced to any sort of combination of sub-societies, stages, or social types; they are at the heart of every social system, and indeed of social reproduction itself. Difference, feminism has taught us, begins at home. And recent work on gender suggests that the enacted differences of gender can be usefully conceived as the motivated stylistic performances of historically and socially located actors. The work of Judith Butler (1990, 1993), in particular, helps to show that difference is not simply given but continually produced in the context of power relations. Gendered subjectivities, as well as a range of masculine and feminine styles, emerge not simply as a mechanical effect of structure (the old “sex roles” of functionalist sociology) but as a form of self-fashioning in which there is room for subversion, ambiguity, and play. At the same time, however, such self-fashioning does not imply free creation by an individual, for gender is a performance crafted under a “situation of duress,” and in response to social and economic compulsion.12

This argument suggests that the concept of style can serve as a quite general analytic tool by being extended to include all modes of action through which people place themselves and are placed into social categories. Specifically, I use the term cultural style to refer to practices that signify differences between social categories. Cultural styles in this usage do not pick out total modes of behavior but rather poles of social signification, cross-cutting and cross-cut by other such poles. Masculinity and femininity, for instance, form (in at least some contexts) stylistically opposed poles of signification in contemporary American society (which is to say that styles can be contrasted along this axis)—but this does not imply, say, a unitary “masculine” mode of behavior. For this axis is cross-cut by, for instance, class styles, so that an upper-middle class style of being masculine may be strikingly different from a working-class style of masculinity. Other stylistic axes may be added as the analysis requires. Sexuality, for instance, may cross-cut both gender and class. So, for instance, the stylistics of masculinity and femininity may take quite different forms among lesbian and “straight” women, just as the enactment of a gay male identity has specific class forms. The performative enactment of social categories can thus be recognized and described in terms of a number of analytically distinct stylistic dimensions.

I use the term style specifically to emphasize the accomplished, performative nature of such practices. RLI ethnographers like Epstein and Mitchell suggested that different styles could be slipped on and shrugged off manipulatively, in response to the situation (Epstein 1958; Mitchell and Epstein 1955; Mitchell 1956a, 1956b, 1987). Such a view was a logical extension of the idea, well established in the British social anthropological milieu of the 1950s, that culture was merely a kind of costume in which social structural realities were clothed (see, e.g., Leach 1954, 1970, 16). Watson, in rehearsing the standard RLI critiques of the concept of detribalization, made the clothing analogy explicit. He claimed that “a man can participate in two different spheres of social relations and keep them distinct and separate. He need not transfer the behavioral patterns of one sphere to another”; “tribal areas” and “towns” are “two economic and social spheres,” “spatially and socially distinct.” Instead, Watson claimed (quoting Meyer Fortes), “All the skill and behavior learned in the towns ‘drops off like an old coat when the labor migrant returns home’” (Watson 1958, 6–7).13

In its time, as I have noted, this argument formed an important corrective to essentialist ideas of an unchanging rural African unable to adapt to urban conditions. But what such situationalist corrections missed is the fact that situational shifting of style is possible only to a
limited degree. Like linguistic dialect or accent, cultural style tends to stick with a person; a style requires not simply a situational motive but an internalized capacity that can only be acquired over time. To take an obvious example, the cultural-stylistic gap that separates, let us say, a successful university professor and a successful leader of a prison gang in the United States is not one to be bridged simply through “situational switching.” It would be an unusual gang leader who could perform stylistically as a professor simply by deciding to; and it would be perhaps an even less probable professor who could pull off the stylistic performance required to be a successful leader of a prison gang. It is no different on the Copperbelt; having style is a matter of successful performance under demanding circumstances, and bringing the performance off requires not simply a situational motive but a whole battery of internalized, nontrivial capabilities acquired over time.

Cultural style, then, is first of all a performative competence. Bringing off the performance involves not only abstract knowledge but also a certain “ease,” which, as Bourdieu has shown, is related not only to knowledge but to the mode of acquisition of that knowledge over time (1984, 68–76). Thus it is not simply a matter of choosing a style to fit the occasion, for the availability of such choices depends on internalized capabilities of performative competence and ease that must be achieved, not simply adopted. Cultural style thus implies a capability to deploy signs in a way that positions the actor in relation to social categories. It is a form of signifying practice—a form of practical signifying activity.

Style has too often been seen as a secondary manifestation of a prior or given “identity” or “orientation,” which style then “expresses.” Yet as Butler has shown convincingly in the case of gender, seeing style as expressive may be putting the cart before the horse, presupposing as it does a distinctive subject or type of actor who is logically and temporally prior to actual stylistic practice. As Butler insists, the actor may be constituted in the deed; the performance of difference is one of the ways that distinctive subjects and social types are themselves constructed and made to seem natural. Indeed, one of the most powerful effects of gendered styles, she argues, is the production of an illusion of naturally and self-evidently different types of person, to which styles simply give “expression.” Moreover, as the case of “gender trouble” that Butler discusses show, the relation between gendered subjectivities and gendered performances is complex, with plenty of room for irony, parody, play, and ambiguity (Butler 1990).

Conceiving of cultural style in this way thus means significantly bracketing off, or at least holding open, questions of identities or commonalities of values, beliefs, worldviews, or cognitive orientation within stylistic categories. That members of cultural-stylistically distinct subgroups of a society share such commonalities is an unexamined assumption of a great deal of subculture theory in anthropology and sociology. Such groups may, of course, have such commonalities. But the assumption that they must, or that shared experiences and values are logically or temporally prior to stylistic practice, is unwarranted and has caused an enormous amount of confusion. It is a way of turning specific shared practices into a posited shared “total way of life,” “culture,” or “way of thought,” a way of converting particular stylistic practices into badges of underlying and essential identities. This amounts to moving too quickly from what is really and concretely shared (a look, a manner, a way of dressing) toward the often merely imputed or asserted “depths” that are supposedly being “expressed”—alienation, traditional values, or what have you.

Anthony Cohen (1985) has emphasized the way that members of communities united by shared symbols commonly differ radically on the meaning of those symbols: notions of the “proper” way of life, values, or practices implied by the shared symbols are various and contradictory even as the symbols are taken as proof of the fundamental cultural unity of the group (the flag, apple pie, “our way of life”—but what is “our way of life”?); cultural style unites differences in a similar way. Those participating in common stylistic practices are united in sending similar stylistic messages, but they may at the same time have very diverse motives, values, or views of the world. A category like “localist” does not define a point of view or a set of values, still less a subculture; it defines a mode of signification. People enter into such modes of signification for reasons (as I will stress below), but the relation between styles and the people who cultivate them is more complex than is captured in the idea of style as an “expression” of distinctive identities, values, or orientations. Not all British punks were alienated, nor are all Zambian localists “traditional”; cultural style need not map neatly onto an underlying cultural orientation or event, as Bourdieu would have it, a “habitus.”

Such an emphasis means moving away from the quest to locate underlying “real” identities and orientations that “lie behind” or are “expressed in” styles, and moving toward the enacted, performed surface of social life. Such a move goes against well-entrenched methodological habits, since anthropologists have always been eager to get beyond mere forms to the “content,” the deeper secrets of what they mean. We tend
to efface the actual performances of social life for the content of what they mean; our field notes, like writing itself, tend to record much more of "what the informant said" than of how he or she said it (Conquergood 1997). But in the study of style, the how is all-important, and the old idea of culture as the ideational content of expressive behavior is inadequate. For although style always involves knowledge, it is a practical kind of knowledge: more "knowing how" than "knowing that." Whether it is knowing how to act tough on a street corner or how to "sit like a lady" at a formal dinner, style entails a kind of knowing that is inseparable from doing; thus it is necessarily to do with performances and never with ideas alone. Like riding a bicycle, cultural style is a kind of skilled social action you do with your body, often with little conscious elaboration or awareness.

The analogy of culture as clothing has a long history in anthropology, but we might do better here to think of culture as fashion. And in fashion, of course, the key is not wearing a particular outfit but being able to wear it, being able to (as they say) "bring it off." Clothing is a mere collection of garments; fashionability is a performative capacity, an ability to effect the right look through an effective combination of garments, social sense, and bodily performance. Style, in this sense, is not achieved simply by having certain ideas or adhering to certain norms; it is a matter of embodied practices, successfully performed.

Performative approaches in social theory, of course, have a long and distinguished genealogy, going back, in one direction, to the founders of the symbolic interactionist tradition of sociology (Mead, Goffman, Garfinkel), and in another to the work of Kenneth Burke. These approaches have been associated chiefly with so-called microlevel social analysis, involving the intensive study of small-group interaction, the analysis of conversational encounters, and similar exchanges. They have been rightly faulted for having little grip on larger sets of social relations, historical structures, and political-economic determinations. As Giddens has complained in a penetrating critical appreciation, all the attention is focused on the metaphorical stage where the interaction takes place, while crucial questions of power and structure are glossed over or ignored. How was the stage set? By whom? Why? Who are the players, and how did they get to be players? (Giddens 1993: cf. Hannerz 1986).

New poststructuralist approaches to identity that rely on the metaphor of performance are vulnerable to a similar critique, as Weston has recently shown. In a brilliant and far-reaching critique of Judith Butler, Weston (1993, 11, 13) argues that,

Like symbolic interactionism, performance theory elaborates an extended theatrical metaphor that works very well to illuminate the mechanics and mythologize the origins of gender's production. Unfortunately, metaphor does not a theory make. Despite performance theory's overt commitment to respecting differences of race, class, history, and culture, its restricted focus on process leaves little room for the complexities and contradictions that appear as soon as [events are] viewed in sociohistorical context."

The same idolatry that makes performance theory so appealing, with its promise of a personal/political empowerment, cannot explain what motivates a given presentation, why a person assembles one type of montage rather than another, how the content and signification of gendered presentations shift over time, or what a given presentation means to the women who engage in gendering.

There is no reason to conclude that it is necessary to choose between performative theory's attention to enacted styles and Weston's call for attention to the wider field of political-economic structures and social relationships that might explain such things as "what motivates a given presentation" or "why a person assembles one type of montage rather than another." But one approach cannot be simply added on to the other. Before performance approaches can be integrated with political economic analysis in a meaningful and theoretically principled way, there is a good deal of work to be done in the area that lies between the microsociological logic of the social situation and the global and regional structures of the political economy.

"Consider gender," invites Butler, "as a corporeal style, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (1990, 139). Yet gendered styles are constructed, Butler herself emphasizes, always under a "situation of duress," which makes the enactment of gender "a strategy of survival within compulsory systems." I propose to view the stylistic contrast between localism and cosmopolitanism in a similar spirit: enacted under a "situation of duress," such styles are motivated, intentional, and performative but not simply chosen or lightly slipped into. They are, like gender, "strategies of survival under compulsory systems," in this case the compulsory political economy of rural-urban relations in the deteriorating economic space of late twentieth-century Zambia.

My analysis centers specifically on the contested economic and political relations between urban workers and rural allies who seek to make social and economic claims on them. By situating urban workers within this nexus of political and economic contestation, I aim to relate
specific signifying practices of urban workers to relations of power embedded in their immediate social contexts. In tracing the ways in which urban culture is shaped and constrained by the power relations between urban workers and rural allies, I hope to bring the political economist's concern with power and struggle and the field-worker's understanding of "on-the-ground" social relations together with the cultural analyst's view of specific, enacted styles. The goal, in the end, is what we might call a "micropolitical economy" of cultural practices.

I have emphasized, against the claims of situationalism, that styles have a certain durability, that they are not easily acquired or effortlessly slipped off when they cease to be convenient. Stylistic competence, I have emphasized, is a practical, empowering asset that is achieved at some cost over a long period of time. This aspect of the cultivation and development of style as a scarce and valuable asset suggests a key point of linkage between cultural styles and their immediate political and economic contexts.

First of all, cultivating a viable style requires investment, in a material sense, and the practical economic difficulties of acquiring stylistic competence force painful choices. There are first of all economic issues. As Weston (1993, 23-34) has emphasized, style is a material practice.

In a material world, bodies are not passively inscribed by signs; they are inscribed by people who select items of material culture from a restricted range of options, and arrange them according to imaginations that are shaped by historical developments. When a lesbian opens the closet door to put together an outfit for the evening, the size of a paycheck limits the choices she finds available.

Cultivating a viable style thus requires investment, in a very literal sense, and the difficulties of cultivating more than one stylistic mode at the same time are formidable. Economic constraints thus work in favor of stylistic specialization. For miners, after all, resources are limited: you buy clothes for your parents or for your girlfriends; a miner cannot afford both. Either you drink in a bar, or you save money for a trip home; you cannot drink in a bar often and go home often.

But there is also the question of investment of talents and energies, manners. No doubt he learned a great deal, but at the same time he undoubtedly lost a certain foothold in the more cosmopolitan society of his schoolmates.

The discussion to this point risks overstating the extent to which cultural style is a product of calculated choices and individual achievement. Clearly, there are structural constraints on stylistic development, and actors never just freely choose their own style. Just as subjects are interpellated by categorical systems (Althusser 1971; Hall 1983; cf. Gupta and Ferguson 1997), so are the possible avenues of cultural style laid down in ways that constrain the choices of even the most inventive social actors. Yet there remains a powerful sense on the Copperbelt that there is a certain amount of play, that a great many aspects of social life are not rigidly determined but left up to creative improvisation. Everyone who has worked on the Copperbelt, I think, has been gripped by this sense of possibility. 21 Style in such a structurally "loose" setting is very badly apprehended as a simple product of a passive socialization (or even, as Bourdieu [1984] would have it, "inculcation"); it is clearly at least in part an activity, a motivated process of self-making. This is clear, for instance, in the case above where my research assistant consciously and deliberately sets out to make himself a competent localist by socializing with the old men. But self-consciousness about matters of personal style and its social relevance was surprisingly common among the miners I interviewed (see, e.g., the case of Mr. Mukande discussed in chapter 4).

It is this dimension of active and even purposive style-making that I am trying to capture with the idea of the cultivation of style—style is neither simply received (as in socialization theory) nor simply adopted (as in the Manchester school's idea of "situation selection"); it is cultivated, through a complex and only partly conscious activity over time. The idea of style as a cultivated competence implies an active process, spread across historical and biographical time, situated both within a political-economic context and within an individual life course. Such a complex process involves both deliberate self-making and structural determinations, as well as such things as unconscious motivations and desires, aesthetic preferences, and the accidents of personal history. All I want to suggest here is that an exploration of the relations between the interested cultivation of style and a changing political and economic context will help us to understand some of the forces fostering and promoting cultural localism (I treat the subject of cosmopolitan styles more systematically in chapter 6).
Speaking of style breaks with the old dualist concern with traditional and modern orientations by making it possible to talk about cultural difference without smuggling in assumptions about social typology and evolutionary teleology. Conceived as modes of signifying practice, the styles I have called "localist" and "cosmopolitan" are not the sign of membership in two co-present societies, one traditional and the other modern (the famous "men [sic] of two worlds" fallacy so familiar in African urban studies). Nor is there any assumption that the two somehow form a necessary historical sequence—successive rungs in the ladder of urbanization and modernization. Cosmopolitans and localists alike are members of a single society; they represent not the co-presence of two different social types or evolutionary stages, but contrasting styles within a single social setting. Cosmopolitanism and localism are thus understood as coeval social phenomena (Fabian 1985)—both live options in the present, with neither owning any monopoly on the future. Gone are the evolutionary assumptions that linked localism and rural attachment to a disappearing tribal society and migrant labor system while seeing in cosmopolitanism the emergence of the "main line" of permanent urbanization and modernity. Instead, both halves of this stylistic duality are here conceived as part of the "full house" of urban variation, two branches of the same "bush" of coexisting differences (see Gould [1996], and the discussion in chapter 2, pp. 42-43).

An equally fundamental difference between the present analysis of cultural style and older approaches to cultural change lies in the very different conceptions of culture underlying the two approaches. Mitchell, for instance, in his summary of a lifetime of urban studies in southern Africa (1987), also identified two different modalities of urban culture, but he conceived culture as a set of normative beliefs. He explored the difference as a difference in values and orientations held by individuals and proceeded to probe these different values and orientations by means of questionnaires. The RLI anthropologists' most developed attempt to explore cultural localism was Mitchell's extensive survey of "African perceptions of town life" in Southern Rhodesia in 1965 (1987, 98-334). Because this work is instructive of the way in which the RLI-Manchester anthropologists thought about culture, and of the way in which my approach differs both from the Manchester school, and more generally from conventional methods in urban sociology, I describe the study in some detail here.

Mitchell surveyed 1,392 persons in educational institutions—secondary schools, teacher training colleges, and adult education. They were asked, as background variables, to state their age, sex, educational level, father's occupation, father and mother's educational level, and length of residence in town. They were then asked to agree or disagree with a list of thirty-two statements expressing attitudes toward town life. The sample bias in Mitchell's study, of course, is obvious, as he surveyed only students. Only slightly less obvious is the bias of the setting: a questionnaire given in schools by teachers cannot help but be received as a test, for which there are "right" and "wrong" answers. But much more important than either of these evident limitations in the methodology is the exclusive focus on explicit normative statements. For the informants "urban commitment" was measured simply by asking them to agree or disagree with statements such as the following:

A man should return to his rural home before he gets too old.

A townsman should always help his relatives who live in the rural areas by sending them money and clothes.

Towns are bad because there women learn to wear short and tight dresses.

Boys who have grown up in rural areas do not know how to behave properly.

When the responses to such questions were correlated with the set of "structural factors" indexing the social locations of the respondents, the results proved difficult to interpret. The differences in normative responses were related only very weakly to structural factors such as education, father's occupation, proportion of life spent in town, age, and gender. At the end of extensive statistical analysis, 90 to 95 percent of the variance was left unaccounted for, and Mitchell was obliged to admit that: "we have not been able in this analysis to capture the most important features influencing attributes toward features of town or country living: they may, in fact, be purely personal to the respondents" (1987, 127).

Mitchell's way in to the cultural dimension here was to focus exclusively on what we might call explicit and formally expressed ideology, or even simply opinion. Mitchell identified two dimensions of urbanism (1987, 68). The first he called "urban involvement," by which he meant the network of social and economic relations with which an urban African was bound up. "Urban involvement" could be described through direct objective observation. The second dimension of urbanism Mitchell called "urban commitment." It referred to the "cognitive aspect" of urbanism; it included the individual attitudes, values, and orientations proper to urban life. This aspect was not directly observable but could
be grasped only by getting inside the head of the informant, hence the questionnaires.

We have here the familiar pair: society and the individual, what happens "out there" versus what happens "in the head." The missing term here, as so often, is culture—the socially negotiated and continually contested frameworks of meaning that mediate between the two. Mitchell's essentially psychological concept of perception does not do the same work as the modern semiotic concept of culture, as Mitchell mistakenly believed. The result is a familiar impoverishing of culture through its reduction to individual attitudes and norms.

It is by now a familiar theme in the anthropology of legal and political systems that people are capable of holding conflicting norms simultaneously and drawing on the contradictory normative repertoire freely according to the circumstances (Bailey 1969; Comaroff and Roberts 1981; Moore 1978). Thus, in the example, "Townes are bad because there women learn to wear short and tight dresses," whether a miner or a worker agrees or disagrees may well depend on whether the woman he has in mind is his daughter or a harmaid. Working only with such de-contextualized and inherently ambiguous statements of normative principle, it is not surprising that Mitchell found his results hard to interpret. Nor is it surprising that he and other Manchester school anthropologists could reduce cultural style to a matter of "situational selection"—if culture is conceived as the norms or opinions held by individuals, then everything depends on the situation, because the situation determines which norms will apply or be invoked.

But localism, conceived as a modality of cultural style, is not a matter of believing in certain norms. As I have argued, it is performative. You don't believe in localism, you do it. Localism is not a set of opinions; it is a capability, a performative competence. With this in mind, it is clear that the problem is not so much that Mitchell used questionnaires as it is what he put on his questionnaires. His questions were all of the form: "Agree or disagree with X," where X is a normative statement of custom, preference, or propriety. But to ask informants to declare their cultural allegiance to localism or cosmopolitanism on a questionnaire may be fundamentally mistaken; they are already declaring it all day long in other ways. What Mitchell was trying to get at is undoubtedly important, but it is not something to be declared as a set of propositions or statements. In a famous response to a critic who pressed her to explain what she had been trying to express in one of her dances, Isadora Duncan replied: "If I could explain it, I wouldn't have to dance it." Cultural style, like dance, has this core quality of being fundamentally unstateable. If a questionnaire is to be used, it might be better to use it to survey for diagnostic signs: Not "what do you think of town life?" but "what kind of beer do you drink, how often do you buy shoes, how does your girlfriend wear her hair?" The task here would be not to collect opinions but to inquire into publicly exhibited signs.

At the same time, however, it is necessary to realize the fundamental polyvalence of such signs. Like a rudimentary set of props in a theatrical production (in which the simple wooden stick that was used in the first scene as a sword may appear in a second as a gun and in the third as a fishing pole), stylistic elements acquire their meaning only in use. Just as the wearing of a hat can suggest very different things depending on how and where one wears it (askew, backwards, into a church), so the stylistic implications of wearing a sport coat are not a simple matter of whether or not one wears it: but of how one wears it: with a shirt and tie or (like the unemployed youths of the street) over bare skin with a humble demeanor (like a good localist) or with a swagger (like a township tough). Like theater props, elements of cultural style mean different things as they are used to mean different things by skilled performers. The fundamental "unit" for the analysis of cultural style is thus not the stylistic trait but the stylistic performance.

A second point is that localism was, for the RLI anthropologists, always a residual category. The social order was conceived as a hierarchical continuum from Europeans at the top, down to high-status educated Africans, and finally to low-status traditional Africans. As Wilson claimed (1942, 15), "Africans cannot but wish to gain the respect and to share the civilized status and the new wealth of the Europeans, whose general social superiority is always before them." This valuation of European culture extended to "Europeanized" Africans, with whites serving as a "reference group" setting a standard in terms of which blacks ranked themselves. Mitchell (1956a, 14) put it like this:

The civilized way of life thus provides a scale along which the prestige of Africans in urban areas (and to an increasing extent in rural areas) may be measured. At the top of the scale are the lower professional and white-collar workers and successful traders, who are meticulously dressed, have European furniture in their houses, speak English to one another, read the local newspapers printed for the European public, eat European-type foods, prefer Western to traditional music, choose bottled beer in preference to traditionally brewed beer. At the bottom of the scale are the unskilled laborers of all types, whose standards of living differ but little from that of rural villagers, who have no furniture, eat traditional foods, know no English, and are un-
Figure 2. The RLI model of social stratification and urban culture.

This idea is illustrated in Figure 2. Note that what I have called localism is here interpreted as a failure to achieve "Europeanness." It is by failing to become "Europeanized" that one ends up, by default, "tribal." The picture is very different if we conceive localism in positive terms, as a specific achieved stylistic competence. In this conception, localist style would comprise an alternative scale of valuation and prestige, coexisting with the cosmopolitan prestige scale. This idea is depicted in Figure 3 (which illustrates an idea and does not involve actual metric or plotting of "data points"). The two axes here measure not attitudes, values, or orientations, but two different sorts of stylistic competence. The diagram is oriented in such a way as to suggest that both axes move "up" as they move away from the zero point but in different directions; the two kinds of stylistic competence represent different kinds of "moving up" in social terms. Any individual can be ranked according to competence in terms both of localist style and of cosmopolitan style, and thus placed in a two-dimensional Cartesian space. Thus person "A" in the diagram has high competence in cosmopolitan style but very little ability to perform localist style; person "D" is in the reverse situation with impressive localist abilities but little cosmopolitan capability. Persons "B" and "C" have more balanced stylistic repertoires, with principal competence in one mode but some capability in the other as well. A great variety of possible mixtures of stylistic skills is thus possible. But it is important to note that the distribution of people in this stylistic space is not random. A few virtuosos may excel at both cosmopolitan and localist styles. But stylistic competence is costly and difficult to acquire. Positions in the hypothetical stylistic space therefore tend to cluster near the two axes—people tend to specialize, that is, in one stylistic mode or another. (This, of course, is a way of restating the ethnographic fact of cultural duality with which we began.) One reason for such specialization is that not all of the theoretically possible positions in the stylistic space are equally viable in social practice, for reasons that will be discussed shortly.

What this way of formulating the problem suggests is that both axes must be analyzed; it is necessary to discover what social and economic forces are at work promoting or inhibiting each of these two coexisting cultural styles. In contrast to the continuum view (Figure 2), both sorts of competence are positive achievements (with, as we shall see, positive social utility—though in different arenas); neither is residual. An individual does not acquire localist competence by falling to be cosmopolitan; indeed, it is perfectly possible to fail to achieve either sort of competence (e.g., person "E" in Figure 3, who has no corresponding location in Figure 2).

With respect to the cosmopolitan arm of this grid, it is clear that the
PEOPLE WATCHING: "This is the sort that drinks kacasu"

A tired-looking old man walks past fixing shoes by the side of the road. Moses identifies him as one who neglected his relatives and was not able to go home. "But he was never anyone to notice in town, either."

While many of the people we have been watching seem to be arrayed between the fashionable and the respectable, Moses explains that some unfortunates, like this man, never achieve either sort of distinction. He shakes his head and observes, "This is the sort that drinks kacasu [kacasu being an illegal, harsh-tasting, and often dangerous distilled liquor]."

*This short description, like the other 'people-watching' boxes to follow, comes from notes I took as I sat in central city locations in Kitwe and Mufulira with my research assistant, Moses Mwepu, and asked him what he could glean or guess about passersby from their appearance.

simple diffuson of "superior," "European" cultural forms is not a sufficient explanation for a form of stylistic practice that needs to be explained as a positive social fact in its own right. In this respect, it would seem that labels like "Europeanized" and "Westernized" are nearly as inappropriate as the more obviously offensive "civilized," though for different reasons. To begin with, it is far from clear that "European" and "Western" are appropriate labels for tastes and practices that include (in today's cosmopolitan Copperbelt scene) Congolese rumba, West Indian reggae, black South African theater, and African nationalist political rhetoric. As Appadurai and Breckenridge have suggested (1988, 1), we must be wary of the view that "the burgeoning cosmopolitanisms of the world are but thin replicas of an experience we in the West are connoisseurs of 'always already.'" And as Hannerz has pointed out (1987, 536), it is necessary to recognize that "there may be several centres, conflicting or complementary, [which] may not be the products of colonial or post-colonial periods (for Ahmadu Bello, the northern Nigerian politician, the real Mecca was not London; Mecca was Mecca)."

At the same time, however, it should not be obscured that, de facto, cosmopolitan styles in urban Africa are dominated by Western and Western-derived cultural forms; and that such cultural domination is hardly an accident. A thorough analysis of the roots of cosmopolitanism on the Copperbelt would have to give due weight not only to the considerable effects of political colonization, but also to the cultural colonization that comes with the economic dominance of the Western multinational corporation, the distinctive valuation of skills and styles proper to the capitalist workplace, the powerful effects of Western styles of schooling, and a great many other matters that are not well captured in recent anthropological images of a "global cultural ecumene" or an "intercontinental traffic in meaning" (see Appadurai and Breckenridge 1988, 3; Hannerz 1987, 547; cf. Foster 1991). I return to the question of cosmopolitanism in chapter 6. Here, I continue to pursue the analysis of the micropolitical-economic logic of localism by developing an idea of "cultural compliance" (next section)
and showing its importance in understanding urban-rural mobility (chapter 4) and gender relations (chapter 5).

CULTURAL COMPLIANCE: 
THE SOCIAL LOGIC OF LOCALISM

As a first approximation, I suggest that the key area to begin to look for the social foundations of localism is urban-rural relations. Localism does not come from rural areas, lingering in the cities out of inertia (the infamous “tribesmen in town” hypothesis). Localism is an urban style, not a rural one. But it is an urban style that signifies a micropolitical economic attachment to rural allies. Localism is linked to rural life; that is, not because it is an extension of it, and not because it resembles it, but because it signifies it. To understand this complex relation between cultural localism and rural attachments, we need to look more closely at the nature of the relation between town and country in Zambia.

The Copperbelt proletariat is, as I argued in chapter 2, characterized by an enduring relation with the countryside. The precipitous decline of Zambia’s urban economy in recent years has meant that retired or laid-off workers have found it much less desirable (often virtually impossible) to stay in town. The marginal economic activities available to retirees, such as petty trading, small business, or employment as domestics or security guards have become much less viable options in the depressed urban economy. The other urban option, staying with employed children, is similarly curtailed when the children are impoverished, unemployed, or have themselves left town. In such an economic climate, few mineworkers can avoid contemplating one or another sort of rural future, and the overwhelming majority of retiring mineworkers today are returning to distant and often unfamiliar villages they call “home” (see discussions in chapters 4 and 5, pp. 123–133, 195–203). The continued relevance of rural retirement means that most mineworkers are obliged to consider some social nexus of relatives “back home” as an unavoidable part of their life’s social context.

Mineworkers in the big, anonymous cities of Zambia’s Copperbelt might seem to have left behind such bonds of kinship for the wide open spaces of modern urbanism. Certainly such workers are often highly mobile, “shifting,” as they often put it, from one job to another or one town to another with little or no great ado. What is more, even the apparently fixed anchor of a “home village” (often invoked by urban workers) is very misleading, since rural kin are often widely dispersed, and “returning home” can mean many different things in practice (see discussion in chapter 4). Even the question of who counts as “the people back home” is often quite an open one, as will be shown in chapter 4.

But so long as workers are compelled to contemplate return to rural “home” areas as a response to mandatory retirement, layoff, or infirmity, some set of durable relations with kin must continue to exert influence. It is not simply that workers drop in and out of rural communities—sometimes under their sway and sometimes independent of it. Workers intending to return (or even imagining that one day they might) cannot consider themselves even temporarily isolated from their kin. Spatially, of course, they are no longer living among rural relatives. But socially, such a neat separation does not exist. There is a steady stream of family members coming to visit, to seek jobs, to demand lodging, and so on. Reports of one’s habits, way of life, and comportment of course regularly reach one’s rural relatives in this way. And this is only one possible channel for such potentially damaging information. The apparent anonymity of the city is deceptive, where local alliances are strong and social networks very large. As the result of a vigorous rural-urban traffic in news and gossip, workers know that their conduct in town will likely help to shape their reputations in the villages, too. A miner may assume that even such apparently personal details as where he drinks and how many girlfriends he has will likely reach home with bewildering speed. The behavior of absent urban workers is known, considered, and judged within nexuses of kin on whom they may well one day be obliged to depend.

The central social categories here are, on the one hand, urban workers; on the other, rurally based allies. Rural kin are often economically dependent on wage earners, but this dependence is not a one-way relationship. Both sides of this relation have power, but different kinds of power, and in different degrees depending on circumstances often imposed from without. As Binsbergen hinted long ago: the key to cultural localism in urban Zambia is control exerted by rural kin over urban workers, and the challenge is to understand how it is effected (Binsbergen 1977, 509; cf. Geschiere 1997). In this chapter and the next, I aim to show how this rurally based control works, and what implications it has for understanding localism.

The power of rural allies is very largely contingent on the necessity for urban workers of returning to and depending on a rural support
system at retirement or some other point in life, as Gluckman and others have repeatedly stressed (see, e.g., Gluckman 1961; Watson 1958). But the necessity for doing so is historically variable. Workers in the booming economy of the 1960s could often settle permanently in town, relying on employed children or "informal" economic pursuits to support themselves after retirement. More recently, the urban economy of Zambia has gone through a radical contraction, as I have described (chapter 1). For the great majority of workers today, retirement or layoff means leaving the city, like it or not.

This shift means that as the urban economy contracts, the relative power of rural-based kin over the urban wage earner increases. And this micropolitical shift (itself conditioned by the larger political economy) has important effects at the level of cultural style. Rural allies have a clear interest in some elements of the localist package, such as payment of remittances; the receipt of bridewealth, clothes, and other gifts; the education of nieces and nephews; and visits home. Other, more purely stylistic elements, such as dress, language, or drinking styles, serve as symbols of allegiance to rural allies and signal a willingness to comply with their conventions of propriety. Localism is in this sense a stylistic package, in which some elements function as signs for others.

Localist gestures are thus at once a repudiation of cosmopolitanism and an affirmation of loyalty to rural allies. The rural relatives' interest is not immediately in the gesture itself but in the alliance for which it stands. But the gesture itself helps to cement that alliance, as well as to signal it, by disqualifying and devaluing the worker in more cosmopolitan contexts. Just as committed "punks" who dye their hair purple or cover their skins with tattoos not only signal their repudiation of the corporate ladder but also effectively bar themselves from it, so localist gestures not only signal rejection of urban futures, they also help to make them impossible.

So long as urban workers are or feel themselves to be obliged to return at some point to their "homes," their rural allies are in a position of relative power. They can command not only economic tribute but also what I call cultural compliance—that is, compliance with the whole localist cultural package. Cultural noncompliance, on the other hand, may be (and is) penalized by a variety of sanctions, some of which I will discuss in a moment. What I am suggesting here is simply that the micropolitical context of an ongoing contestation concerning rural control over the earning power of urban workers is central to understanding why workers cultivate certain of the vast range of stylistic possibilities and not others. A style has micropolitical weight to carry, and in this context, some styles are more viable than others.

With this analysis in mind, let us return to the observation with which I began this chapter: the salience of cultural characteristics in the descriptions by informants of the difficulties faced by ex-workers who return to rural areas. Again and again, when I asked about the kinds of things that would make rural retirement possible or impossible, easy or difficult, I was referred to matters of manners, conduct, speech, and dress. Visits home and material support were important, of course. But just as important were knowledge and respect for rural expectations and proprieties. To succeed in "going back," I was told, one needed to have, and to know how to show, "respect" (machinshi) and "regard" (in-tambo). One who lacked "respectability" (bucidambo) and engaged in "showing off" or "being pompous" (kukukuswa), in contrast, would surely be rejected by rural society.

A failure to maintain social contact, with its implications of a refusal to share the fruits of one's labor, could itself be seen as a lack of respect and a form of selfishness. Failure to visit and provide gifts to one's kin over a period of years not only left one socially isolated; it actively insulted the people to whom one was by custom obligated and might well provoke not only indifference but angry retaliation. One informant, asked to describe the sorts of things that could lead to a worker having problems upon returning to a home village, put it in the following terms:

Like I said before, Doctor. If you haven't been visiting them. Which means, for some years. For example, been here in the mining area for some twenty years and you haven't been visiting them. So they'll get furious, saying "Oh, he has been working without looking after us." Maybe you weren't sending them goods, blankets, things of that nature. So they'll think, "he has been selfish," so they are saying. They'll just kill you and grab all the goods from the immediate family.

But more subtle forms of insult could be located in a worker's style, in the details of speech, dress, or body stance, as well as in comportment around elders or relations with women. Not knowing (or in some cases not caring) how to conduct oneself was to risk grave offense, and possibly to provoke retaliation. For a displaced urbanite who could not manage to dress and act "like a villager," my informants insisted, nor
PEOPLE WATCHING:

"They have not respected anyone—who will respect them?"

As we watch the passersby in Mufurira city center, Moses observes a number of people who are "showing off" and "being pompous." The unemployed youths who promenade past us, called lambwaza, are prime offenders. A swaggering youth with bright red pants is, Moses declares, "just trying to call attention to himself." A woman with a slit in her skirt is "showing off her legs" and displaying disrespect. He contrasts her with a woman in the traditional chitenge wrap, who is showing proper modesty and respect.

Some women are identified by Moses as prostitutes (amahule), a category that shades into other, more ambiguous terms. Bachenende or "champions" are women who hang around bars, dressed in seductive clothes with makeup. They are "champions," Moses explains, in that "they know the art of having boyfriends and entertaining them very well." Such women are considered attractive, but dangerous for their promiscuity, and for their presumed mercenary motives (see discussion in chapter 5). Women who are too flashy, or in any way in modest in their dress, risk having such labels attached to them. The male analogues are hasebsi, suggesting a man who runs around with many women, who never stays at home, who improperly shows off his wealth (a rogue/playboy/show-off, perhaps, if one were to try to translate).

These are people who "move around a lot," Moses explains. "Moving around" is an expression that comes up often in our conversation. It implies both physical mobility and sexual promiscuity (for men as well as women) and may also suggest moving from job to job, or even crossing national borders. Someone who "moves around a lot" is someone with no fixed loyalties to particular places, jobs, relationships. Such people do a lot of shifting—an English term widely used on the Copperbelt to refer to changing a residence or job or sexual partner. What will become of such people when they get old? "They will be alone, and no one will receive them. They have not respected anyone—who will respect them?"

PEOPLE WATCHING:

"He insults them already with his manner"

I ask Moses to pick out someone who, from his impressions, he guessed might have trouble going back home. He readily identifies a lambwaza black marketer selling bread. He is "one of those who have no respect for their elders. He insults them already with his manner." This will cause trouble if he tries to go home? "If he tries to go home, he will be the first one to be bewitched!"

only might become unpopular; many believed such a person could be at mortal risk.

They'll say he is pompous, trying to show off. 'Cause you are dressed properly on Monday, on Tuesday you are dressed properly. They expect somebody to dress properly, but only on Sunday when everybody is going to church and not to the fields. They'll think you are pompous.

JF: Would that make people jealous?

Yes. Yes. They may try to kill you. For showing off. That's one thing they don't want. They don't want somebody pompous. All they want is that once you get there you start your lifestyle.

But given the durability of style, it was not always so easy to "start their lifestyle," as the cases in the following chapters will illustrate. For many urbanites, who had spent their lives cultivating a cosmopolitan style, insulating, "pompous" manners came naturally and proved hard to unlearn.

Language was a special flash point. Most town dwellers spoke a distinctive dialect of Bemba that immediately marked them as urbanites. Only some town dwellers were also able to speak the language of their home areas (whether Bemba or some other language) "properly." It was said that a person raised in town could only learn proper speech by taking some care over it, and paying attention to one's parents and elders. Those who did this (like my research assistant, mentioned above, who made a point of spending time hanging around old men) acquired an ability to switch linguistic codes with some facility, but many lifelong urbanites made little effort to acquire such stylistic competencies, and sometimes paid the price when they were displaced to rural areas with the economic hardships of the 1980s. As one young man explained
PEOPLE WATCHING:
"His back will just be permanently like that."

Watching one lantwaza youth, Moses explains that he will be physically unable to go back to a village and farm when he is older. Why? "The way he is walking. Look at that. The way he is throwing his shoulders back and forth. By the time he is old, he can be as if he is lame. His back will just be permanently like that."

when I asked if those with "urbanized" speaking habits might run into trouble "back home," "Oh, sure. They won't live long there. 'Cause in the village, there is a certain rule for respect. You got to respect and there are certain ways to follow." He recalled the story of a cousin of his who had encountered such difficulties:

My cousin was taken to Luwingu District when he failed [school] in Kabwe. He was used to the town language. So when he was talking, he was only talking to my aunt there in the room in a good manner, but the language he was using, she thought he was being insulted. She said he was insulted by just using the town language. It is very different. So she felt she was being insulted. She ran home to Chingola and told us that your cousin is very bad, using bad language. In actual fact, it wasn't that abusing language. He was just trying to explain, but the language that he was using was very such different from what they use there. So she thought she was being insulted. So the chap was brought back here because they couldn't understand one another in that way.

From the point of view of the more cosmopolitan workers, their "bad language" was simply fashionable and showed that they were up to date and connected with a wider world (see discussion in chapter 6). But from the point of view of localists, cosmopolitanism was nothing more than a form of showing off—a transgression of the rules that localist compliance demanded; and a demonstration of a willingness to ignore or insult the people back home and those who symbolically identified with them.

The concept of cultural compliance requires, of course, that rural kin did in fact have significant power over absent workers; that the "customary rights" of rural allies rested not merely on normative principles, but on effective sanctions. In the view of the workers (a view largely confirmed in the case histories presented in the next chapter) the sanctions available to rural allies were both powerful and effective. Sanctions included ostracism, gossip, withholding of aid when in need, sorcery and sorcery accusation, burning down of houses, and even—in some accounts—assault and murder.

In discussion of the powers of rural neighbors and kin, the subject of witchcraft or sorcery was especially prominent. In my interviews, the matter came up constantly. But while few could discuss the pragmatics of rural settlement for long without hinting at the dangers of witchcraft, the subject was a sensitive one. For many years, colonial and postcolonial government officials have actively campaigned against witchcraft beliefs. Many Christian churches, too, rail against such beliefs as anti-Christian. In this context, informants often displayed a certain reluctance to state fears about witchcraft of which they expected me (a white foreigner) to disapprove. If I were bluntly to ask "Do you believe in witchcraft?" the answer would often be the formulaic, "No, I am a Christian." But in the thick of discussions on substantive matters, witchcraft was simply one of the obvious dangers of rural settlement, along with malaria, lack of transportation, and poor medical care. One worker stated insistently that he did not believe in witchcraft, even before I had approached the matter in any way; but later in the interview, he responded to the question, "Is the witchcraft in that [his home] area much of a problem?" with a twenty-minute discussion of all the various ways in which sorcerers set about killing people.

Such fears about witchcraft undoubtedly expressed social anxieties. As has long been observed, witchcraft beliefs provide an idiom for the discussion both of social obligations and attachments, and of the dangers of violating and betraying those obligations and attachments. When informants insisted that it was one's matrilineal kin who had the greatest power to bewitch one, because they knew where one's umbilical cord was buried, for instance, they were expressing powerfully the fact that one betrayed those to whom one was morally connected only at some risk. To say that such kin might bewitch one was, among other things, a way of saying that one was tied to them in a way that was not entirely voluntary or optional; those who knew where your umbilical cord was buried were also those who had power over you (see chapter 5, pp. 196–198, for a discussion of the gender politics of such modes of symbolizing social attachment and obligation). As the classic literature shows, fear of witchcraft has long been an effective sanction used by rural kin to help enforce customary norms of generosity and social and economic leveling on returning migrants (Marwick 1965). Indeed, the most common response I received to the question of what would prevent urban
workers from “going home” when they left urban employment referred to
tears of witchcraft and the social, economic, and cultural demands
that might be levied by neglected and resentful rural kin. Why would a
worker resist going home? “Some, they do fear to be bewitched. They
haven’t been visiting their relatives, so once they get there they will think
that they came with plenty of wealth. So they try to bewitch them so
they get the wealth those people came with.” In most cases the uncle of
that very person who has come gets the goods.3

There is no doubt that invocations of witchcraft provided a vivid and
powerful vocabulary for talking and thinking about the social antago-
nisms that vex rural-urban kin relations. But I came to doubt the utility of
treating witchcraft simply as an idiom for the expression of social
conflicts. It is easy to agree with the classic writers on the subject that
the apparently irrational, superstitious fear of bewitchment is not so
irrational after all if we consider the way that imaginations of harm-
doing are linked to all-too-real social hatreds and resentments. And it is
easy to concur with more recent writers on the subject that ideas of
bewitchment reflect not simply the social-structural tensions of a “tradi-
tional village society,” but the way that the modern capitalist economy
is experienced and conceptualized.2 But there was a literalness and a
materiality to discussions about witchcraft that my anthropological
training did not prepare me for. Consider the following explanation by
one retiring miner of why witchcraft was making him uneasy about
returning to his home village: “One may get sick or die due to one’s
relatives. The relatives may think you have come with a lot of money.
They will kill you thinking that you are refusing to give them enough
money. Then, if you are killed, they will share the property.” Did he
know of any cases, I asked? His father and sister had been killed in this
way, because his father was getting too rich, and “they didn’t want a
strong man in the village.” How were they killed? Rat poison, he ex-
plained, had been put into a pot of sweet potatoes, which his father and
sister then ate.

Another mineworker reported that men who go “home” and show
off there, trying to prove they are better than the others, or seducing
local women, might “suddenly die.” Did he mean that others might kill
such a man, I asked? “Yes,” he said. “They might beat him to death.”
 Might such a man be killed by witchcraft, I asked?

Yes, because he is showing off in that way. Well, I don’t know if they can
be bewitched. Yes, just because there is witchcraft as some people say there

is, now I see that, I know only that they may beat him. Now witchcraft, yes.
... If I can see witchcraft, witchcraft that I know very much is where they
use poison in the food. Not bewitching only, but in the food, that’s when I
can know that there is witchcraft. [Laughter.] I am not sure!

This informant showed some ambiguity about the applicability of the
label of witchcraft but had no doubt at all that lethal levels of violence
might be directed at “show-offs.”

Such accounts suggested a vague mystical fear of spiritual powers
which was not very specific and concrete set of fears that your neighbors
or relatives might do things like beat you to death or put poison into
your sweet potatoes. The tone of such discussions was often not at all
mystical but discursively pragmatic and prosaic; generally, such in-
formants presented me not with abstract discussions about supernatural
beliefs but with quite immediate fears about specific relatives who might
commit specific acts of violence against them. In this context, it is sig-
nificant that in my interviews with retiring miners, the terms “jealousy”
and “witchcraft” were used interchangeably. Informants did not have a
great deal to say about spirits, charms, and cosmologies; more often,
they simply spoke bluntly of the danger that “someone might kill you.”
Whether it was by burning your house in the night, placing a charm
under your bed, or slipping poison into your beer, was not the main
question.

To understand the significance of the miners’ fears, it may be neces-
sary to think more seriously about witchcraft as a practice. Anthropol-
ologists working in Central Africa have sometimes distinguished between
“witches” (conceived as essentially supernatural beings) and “sorcerers”
(understood as ordinary humans with learned malevolent skills) (Evans-
Pritchard 1937). But both have always been treated essentially as
categories of attribution. Anthropologists working in Zambia have
nearly all accepted the dogmatic premise of British colonial ideology that
“real sorcerers” do not exist.20 Marwick was only expressing an ac-
cepted orthodoxy when he insisted that “from the investigator’s point
of view, the relationship between sorcerer and victim is an imaginary
one” (1965, 129), and sternly reminded himself and his readers “that
denominations of ‘sorcerers’ in the local community were not in fact responsible
for others’ misfortunes but were unfortunate people whose social posi-
tions or eccentric personalities had made them unpopular” (1965, 14).

As a result of this premise, anthropological approaches have either
analyzed witchcraft as a belief system or focused on the sociology of
witchcraft attribution. Both lines of investigation have been very productive. And a vigorous skepticism about witchcraft claims is clearly called for, given the evident ease with which accusations may be used or abused to attack personal enemies, or to persecute weak or despised categories of people. But blanket refusals to even contemplate sorcery as a literal practice make it impossible to give due weight to a connection that became increasingly important in the course of my research, between witchcraft and sorcery, on the one hand, and mundane violence, on the other.29

The potential significance of such a connection is made clearer if we realize first how inadequate a translation is “witchcraft” for the concepts in question. In modern English, witchcraft refers to mystical or magical harm-doing (as opposed to “real” harm-doing); almost by definition, it does not “really” exist. But the category of killings attributed to unbwanga (the usual term in Bemba and related Zambian languages; cf. Siozi bololo), does not pick out acts according to their magicalness but according to their sneakiness and illegitimacy. Relevant here is Lan’s observation from Zimbabwe (1985, 153) that “any illegitimate killing is regarded as witchcraft.” Poisoning, for instance, is not witchcraft in English, but in Zambia it is often considered unbwanga. The Linguist Doke, for instance, reported for the Lamba (1931, 306) that

[i]n the Lamba mind a distinct difference between akapondo, a murder, and infwezi, a warlock. The former does his work openly, using weapons, stabbing, shooting, or beating, but the infwezi kills with unbwanga and acts secretly. In the ordinary way poison would not be called unbwanga or unuwwezi, but when it is secretly administered, with intent to kill, then it is so regarded.

No one would claim that illegitimate harm-doers, poisoners, or sneaky killers do not exist, or that only superstitious minds are capable of believing in such things. Murders occur in every society, and there exists considerable ethnographic testimony for the specialized knowledge and use of poisons in South-Central Africa, supported in some cases by autopsy and laboratory tests (Gilges 1974). It is interesting to note in this connection that when I asked one informant to explain why some regions of the country are more dangerous than others with regard to the risk of witchcraft, his reasoning was solidly materialistic: dangerous country contains river valleys where a great variety of dangerous plants grow; dryland savannah country, in contrast, is relatively safe. Marwick himself discussed cases involving the use of “European magical substances” such as potassium cyanide (said to be sometimes stolen from

the mining industry) and noted that “Cewa classify such poisoning as sorcery, since they regard European medicines and chemicals as belonging to the same general category as their own magical substances but as being stronger” (Marwick 1965, 75, 160).

The incidence of such acts of violence may well have intensified in recent years, as the social strains of economic decline have manifested themselves in the form of conflict over resources and social allegiances in communities all across the country. Scudder, for instance, has claimed (quoted in Potter 1988, 4) that

[that] village violence has always occurred sporadically in the past, as incidence and malevolence appears to have increased significantly in recent years. During 1983, there were a number of cases . . . where men died after the insecticide Roger had been added to their beer. Roger was also being used more frequently to poison an adversary’s livestock, including cattle, smallstock, dogs, ducks and chickens. No household that was trying to better itself during trying times could consider itself immune from the possibility of attack by jealous neighbors.

With such considerations in mind, when we encounter informants who fear their neighbors, and suspect unbwanga in the sweet potatoes, we might at least leave open the possibility that they know what they are doing. Rat poison is not just an idiom.30

Allowing the possibility that sorcery should be analyzed not only as a belief system but also, at least in some cases, as a form of violence has at least the merit of allowing different questions to be asked.31 For the inquiry need no longer rest with such time-worn topics as “how is it possible for people to believe such things?” or “why are certain people accused of doing such things?” Instead, relevant questions become (at the most specific) “why would these people want to assault this man?” and (at the most general) “why does the threat of violence loom so large in the thoughts of urban men contemplating their rural retirements?”

At both levels, I suggest, answers must be sought within the micropolitical relations linking urban workers and rural allies (cf. Gescheere 1997). As the cases presented in the following chapter will show, witchcraft must be understood here as both an idiom and an effective mechanism of control of workers by rural kin.

In the next chapter, I explore a set of actual cases in which urban workers sought to settle in rural areas and faced the social pressures and sanctions that I have described. The cases illustrate how the sorts of cultural contrasts that I have discussed here figured in the social process of “return” migration. They also help to give some empirical sub-
stance to the encounter with rural allies that looms so large in the theoretical model I have developed but remains to be ethnographically explicated. Having seen something of what “going home” really entails, and how it may inflect urban cultural styles, we move on to an account of the urban imagination of the family and the gendered politics of household formation and dissolution (chapter 3). Finally, in chapter 6, we return to the matter of cosmopolitanism, which it may by then be possible to see in a different light.

"Back to the Land"?

The Micropolitical Economy of “Return” Migration

To get a good understanding of the ways that the harsh political-economic realities of the Copperbelt’s recent past have conditioned workers’ urban lives, we must have a view of the range of different ways in which workers have experienced and dealt with these realities. But to capture that “full house” of variation—to convey the sense of a real “bush” of possible trajectories, thick with branches and not a spindly tree with a few sparse (ideal types)—we need to move from the general analytic model developed in the last chapter toward the ethnographic concreteness of actual lives played out over time. For that reason, the ethnographic exposition here turns toward a set of case studies of the life trajectories of particular mineworkers. Before presenting the cases, though, I must say something about the social and economic landscape within which these workers made their choices and then faced the consequences of those choices.

BACK TO THE LAND?

When Copperbelt mineworkers end the wage-laboring portion of their lives—at the official retirement age of fifty-five or (as in many cases) well before—they are expected to “go home”; that is, to return to a village of origin, or at least to a rural area where they have some relatives. Many mineworkers have over the years done this, or something like it. Many others have not (see discussion in chapter 2). But by the mid-