

Beyond Paternalism: Pluralising Copperbelt Histories

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Introduction

The centrality of copper mining to the social life of Copperbelt communities is the undisputed starting point of the rich Copperbelt historiography.¹ The pervasive influence of colonial/postcolonial paternalism has been a particular focus of such work. Bruce Fetter, for instance, described how the Belgian colonial mining company Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (UMHK) created a ‘totalitarian sub-culture’, through food supply, housing and welfare services, including schools, hospitals and recreation clubs, which regulated many aspects of employees’ lives.² Yet the post-independence level of control over workers’ lives of the nationalised mining conglomerates Générale des Carrières et des Mines (Gécamines) and Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM) in the 1970s and 1980s was arguably even greater.³ This latter company operated a ‘cradle-to-grave’ policy, providing mineworkers’ households with light bulbs, window frames and even nappies. The titles of prominent academic works reflect this perceived dominance of mining paternalism to Copperbelt social life. Following severe economic

¹ Miles Larmer, ‘At the Crossroads: Mining and Political Change on the Katangese-Zambian Copperbelt’, *Oxford Handbooks Online* (2016), DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935369.013.20.

² Bruce Fetter, ‘L’Union Minière du Haut-Katanga, 1920–1940: La naissance d’une sous-culture totalitaire’, *Cahiers du CEDAF* 6 (1973), pp. 1–40.

³ Benjamin Rubbers, ‘Mining Towns, Enclaves and Spaces: A Genealogy of Worker Camps in the Congolese Copperbelt’, *Geoforum* 98 (2019), pp. 88–96; Miles Larmer, ‘Historical Perspectives on Zambia’s Mining Booms and Busts’ in Alistair Fraser and Miles Larmer (eds), *Zambia, Mining, and Neoliberalism: Boom and Bust on the Globalized Copperbelt* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 31–58.

decline on the Zambian Copperbelt since 1980, James Ferguson speaks of previous ‘expectations of modernity’ induced by copper mining, while Patience Mususa’s ethnography ‘There Used to Be Order’ juxtaposes ZCCM policies with a neoliberal ‘fending for oneself’ after privatisation.⁴ On the Congolese Copperbelt, similarly, Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu examines the trajectories of ‘*Bana Shaba*’ (children of copper) who have been ‘abandoned by their father’ (the mining company), whereas Benjamin Rubbers puts ‘paternalism in question’, by tracing the consequences of fading mine company welfare policies after 2000.⁵

In contrast, this chapter looks at both the limitations and problems in assuming that mining paternalism was necessarily all encompassing or fundamental to the functioning of Copperbelt communities. Highlighting the diversity of people’s responses to paternalism, this chapter explores not only how Copperbelt residents acted within mining’s paternalistic framework, but also how they challenged and/or opposed it and how they reacted to its demise in the 1990s. Crucially, paternalism did not affect all Copperbelt residents equally. What can we learn about Copperbelt social dynamics by examining the experience of charcoal burners, market vendors and seamstresses, alongside mineworkers? Based on 100 oral history interviews conducted in Likasi (DR Congo) and Mufulira (Zambia), this chapter focuses on the daily lives of diverse urbanites on both sides of the border. In doing so, it challenges assumptions about the relationship between mining and Copperbelt communities. The persistent image of the Copperbelt as a node of urban ‘modernity’ has tended to marginalise scholarship on for example female farmers or radio programmes recounting rural marital traditions. Yet this diversity, it is argued, was an integral element of Copperbelt communities. This chapter thus pluralises and challenges notions of what being a ‘copper society’ entailed.⁶

This chapter also makes several contributions to existing literature. First, it jointly examines the Zambian and the Congolese Copperbelt, which

4 James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Patience N. Mususa, ‘There Used to Be Order: Life on the Copperbelt after the Privatisation of the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines’, PhD Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2014.

5 Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu, *Bana Shaba abandonnés par leur père: Structures de l’autorité et histoire sociale de la famille ouvrière au Katanga, 1910–1997* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001); Benjamin Rubbers, *Le paternalisme en question: Les anciens ouvriers de la Gécamines face à la libéralisation du secteur minier katangais (RD Congo)* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2013).

6 Timothy J. LeCain, *The Matter of History: How Things Create the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

the historiography has predominantly treated as separate entities.⁷ Second, it provides a history of everyday experiences among a broad segment of Copperbelt communities. Third, it uses oral history as a lens to write a social history not dominated by the institutional views of governments, mining companies or trade unions.⁸ Taken together, these approaches challenge assumptions about the role of mining and paternalism in Copperbelt social history by exploring leisure activities and social relationships beyond the workplace.⁹ After a brief historiographical background, which situates the case studies of Mufulira and Likasi and explains the methodology, the chapter is organised in thematic sections on mining and work ethic; leisure and culture; non-mining occupations; and gender on the Copperbelt.

Social History through Oral Sources in Likasi and Mufulira

The towns of Likasi and Mufulira have both depended heavily on copper and cobalt mining and processing industries. Likasi, once described as ‘Congo’s prettiest town’, is a mid-sized agglomeration famed for the tropical mansions built for UMHK’s European workforce. Established as an urban community in 1931 under the name Jadotville – which changed to Likasi in 1965 – it remains the second most important urban and industrial centre of Haut-Katanga after Lubumbashi.¹⁰ Apart from the city’s economic prominence, it has played a key role in the complex history of colonial/postcolonial Katanga. Jadotville was a laboratory of political participation, one of only three towns in the Belgian Congo where the first local elections were organised in 1957.¹¹ It was a theatre of war during the Katangese secession (1960–63), where Katangese *gendarmes* defeated UN soldiers after

⁷ Enid Guene, *Copper, Borders and Nation-Building: The Katangese Factor in Zambian Political and Economic History* (Leiden: African Studies Collection, 2017).

⁸ Patience Mususa, ‘Mining, Welfare and Urbanisation: The Wavering Urban Character of Zambia’s Copperbelt’, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 30, 4 (2012), pp. 571–87; Iva Peša, ‘From Life Histories to Social History: Narrating Social Change through Multiple Biographies’ in Klaas van Walraven (ed.), *The Individual in African History: The Importance of Biography in African Historical Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 89–113.

⁹ Dibwe dia Mwemba, *Bana Shaba*.

¹⁰ Jean Omasombo (ed.), *Haut-Katanga: Lorsque richesses économiques et pouvoirs politiques forcent une identité régionale*, Monographies des provinces de la RD Congo, Tome 1 (Tervuren: Royal Museum of Central Africa, 2018), p. 148.

¹¹ Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, *Nouvelle histoire du Congo: Des origines à la République démocratique* (Brussels: Le Cri, 2012), pp. 428–9.

a prolonged siege in September 1961.¹² Decades later, the mining industry's decline fuelled long-standing internecine tensions between purportedly 'Katangese' city dwellers and 'migrant communities' from neighbouring Kasai, resulting in periodic violence in 1992–93.¹³

Correspondingly in then Northern Rhodesia, Mufulira town, the 'place of abundance', was established in 1937 following the discovery of copper deposits in 1923. Mufulira mine has consistently been one of the largest copper producers in the Zambian industry.¹⁴ The town's 1967 development report attributed 'its origins, expansion and viability to the copper mine'.¹⁵ The report noted that 50% of those employed in Mufulira worked for the mine or ancillary services, or depended on commerce with the mining population.¹⁶ Mufulira relied on mining not only for economic activities, but also for its administrative, social and cultural life, as mine taxes funded local government services and the mines sponsored sports teams. The town struggled after the 1970 disaster, a massive tailings inrush that caused temporary mine closure and 89 deaths. Mufulira only recovered from the protracted economic crisis with the development of deep-level mining in the 1980s, which boosted production.¹⁷ The choice of Likasi and Mufulira, both secondary towns built around the mining industry, provides a cross-border perspective on Copperbelt social dynamics. This chapter considers the Copperbelt as 'a single region, officially divided by a colonial/postcolonial border, across which flowed minerals and peoples', creating striking differences and commonalities.¹⁸

Copperbelt historiography has hitherto focused on mineral production, mineworkers and politics. The Rhodes-Livingstone Institute (RLI) in Northern Rhodesia and the *Centre d'Études des Problèmes Sociaux Indigènes* (CEPSI) in the Belgian Congo set the scene with studies of urban social life,

¹² Erik Kennes and Miles Larmer, *The Katangese Gendarmes and War in Central Africa: Fighting Their Way Home* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), pp. 61–77.

¹³ Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu, 'La réharmonisation des rapports entre les Katangais et les Kasaiens dans la province du Katanga (1991–2005)', *Anthropologie et Sociétés* 30, 1 (2006), p. 127.

¹⁴ Miles Larmer, *Mineworkers in Zambia: Labour and Political Change in Post-Colonial Africa* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

¹⁵ National Archives of Zambia, Mufulira Review of Development Plan, 1967, p. 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁷ See: Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines archives (hereafter ZCCM-IH), 15.3.7D, 'The Mufulira Mine Disaster', 1970; ZCCM-IH, 18.7.4C, 'An Interim Report of Mining at Depth, Mufulira', 1987.

¹⁸ Larmer, 'At the Crossroads'; Rubbers, 'Mining Towns, Enclaves and Spaces'.

kinship and political organisation.¹⁹ These institutes aimed to identify and help solve the ‘issues’ arising from the ‘modernisation’ of Copperbelt urban communities. Authors such as J. Clyde Mitchell and Ferdinand Grévisse in the 1950s assumed a clear rural–urban dichotomy, asserting that ‘towns and cities everywhere stand out as distinct social phenomena.’²⁰ Although these researchers did pay attention to the socio–cultural life of mineworkers and their families, notably in Hortense Powdermaker’s *Copper Town*, they rarely focused on non-mineworkers.²¹ In the 1970s and 1980s John Higginson, Bruce Fetter, Charles Perrings, Jane Parpart and George Chauncey produced detailed Copperbelt studies.²² In this same period, the University of Lubumbashi became a source of knowledge production on Katanga’s colonial and contemporary social fabric. Researchers such as Bogumil Jewsiewicki, Johannes Fabian and Augustin Mwabila Malela studied the socio-economic and political dynamics, and leisure practices of mining communities.²³ To them, the study of the Copperbelt highlighted that industrial communities across the world were subject to comparable structures and faced similar

¹⁹ Lyn Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology: Fieldwork, Networks, and the Making of Cultural Knowledge in Central Africa* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Benjamin Rubbers and Marc Poncelet, ‘Sociologie coloniale au Congo Belge: Les études sur le Katanga industriel et urbain à la veille de l’Indépendance’, *Genèses* 2, 99 (2015), pp. 93–112.

²⁰ J. Clyde Mitchell, ‘Theoretical Orientations in African Urban Studies’ in Michael Banton (ed.), *The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies* (London: Routledge, 1966), p. 37; Ferdinand Grévisse, *Le centre extra-coutumier d’Élisabethville: Quelques aspects de la politique indigène du Haut-Katanga industriel* (Brussels: CEPPI, 1951).

²¹ Hortense Powdermaker, *Copper Town: Changing Africa – The Human Situation on the Rhodesian Copperbelt* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

²² John Higginson, *A Working Class in the Making: Belgian Colonial Labor Policy, Private Enterprise, and the African Mineworker, 1907–1951* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Bruce Fetter, *Colonial Rule and Regional Imbalance in Central Africa* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983); Charles Perrings, *Black Mineworkers in Central Africa: Industrial Strategies and the Evolution of an African Proletariat in the Copperbelt, 1911–41* (New York: Africana Publishing, 1979); Jane L. Parpart, *Labor and Capital on the African Copperbelt* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983); George Chauncey Jr., ‘The Locus of Reproduction: Women’s Labour in the Zambian Copperbelt’, 1927–1953’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 7, 2 (1981), pp. 135–64.

²³ Augustin Mwabila Malela, *Travail et travailleurs au Zaïre: Essai sur la conscience ouvrière du prolétariat urbain de Lubumbashi* (Kinshasa: Presses universitaires du Zaïre, 1979); Bogumil Jewsiewicki, ‘Collective Memory and Its Image: Popular Urban Painting in Zaire – A Source of “Present Past”’, *History and Anthropology* 2, 2 (1986), pp. 389–400; Johannes Fabian, *History from Below: The ‘Vocabulary of Elisabethville’ by André Yav. Text, Translations, and Interpretive Essay* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 1990).

challenges. Although scholars paid some attention to women or manual labourers, they still centred their analysis on mineworkers, framing Copperbelt communities as part of the global dynamics of class struggle.²⁴ The 1990s saw a new wave of scholarship by Ferguson and Dibwe dia Mwembu, who studied social change on the Zambian and Congolese Copperbelt in a context of decline.²⁵ Such works clearly showed awareness of non-mineworkers and broader social dynamics. Recent studies by Rubbers, Mususa and Miles Larmer have further highlighted the precariousness of mining and the resilience of Copperbelt communities.²⁶ This chapter contributes to this reframing of the historical study of the Copperbelt, by pursuing a bottom-up approach to the social history of these dynamic communities. It foregrounds the experiences of those urbanites that did not directly depend on mining. Always a numerically significant group, their role became all the more important in the wake of the mining industry's economic decline from the mid-1970s onward.

By drawing on oral history with a more diverse range of Copperbelt residents than previous research, we challenge the established historiographical focus on mining companies and political and economic change on the Copperbelt. Oral sources can provide a more diverse picture of Copperbelt historical trajectories, especially as mining and government archives are so rarely concerned with individuals not employed by the mines. Oral sources 'help us to understand relationships between structure and agency, revealing how individual lives, social processes, institutions, and contexts affect one another'.²⁷ However, previous oral history research in the region has tended to reinforce the emphasis on mineworkers and to a lesser extent their wives. We therefore include more varied and contrasting individual stories, while asking how these 'fit into, challenge or alter dominant theories of social change'.²⁸ This chapter argues that mineworkers should not be understood as a separate group, different from the rest of Copperbelt urban society, as the experiences of both mineworkers and non-mineworkers were influenced but not determined by mining. All our informants were long-term residents

²⁴ Bogumil Jewsiewicki, 'Anthropologie marxiste et recherche empirique', *Cahiers d'études africaines* 26, 101/102 (1986), pp. 265–9.

²⁵ Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*; Dibwe dia Mwembu, *Bana Shaba*.

²⁶ Rubbers, *Paternalisme en question*; Mususa, 'Mining, Welfare and Urbanisation'; Miles Larmer, 'Permanent Precarity: Capital and Labour in the Central African Copperbelt', *Labor History* 58, 2 (2017), pp. 170–84.

²⁷ Lisa A. Lindsay, 'Biography in African History', *History in Africa* 44 (2017), p. 23.

²⁸ Peša, 'From Life Histories to Social History', p. 89.

of the Copperbelt, having lived there since at least the 1970s. (We interviewed 50 people in Likasi and 50 in Mufulira; 30 people had an in-depth follow-up interview.) To reflect population diversity in Likasi and Mufulira, we sought a range of informants in terms of occupation (mineworkers, council employees, farmers, traders, teachers, artists and ‘housewives’), gender (we interviewed 34 women and 66 men) and residential area (mine townships, city council areas and informal settlements). An open-ended questionnaire served as a guideline to these interviews, covering topics such as education and upbringing, work life and marriage, as well as leisure activities and religion. Most of these interviews took place in people’s residential homes, though some preferred to be interviewed in their workplace.²⁹ The next sections draw extensively on this interview material.

A Culture of Mining: Work Ethic, Welfare and Paternalism

Copperbelt historiography has usefully explored how mining companies sought to develop a specific work ethic among their labour force. Mineworkers were supposed to be punctual, hardworking and disciplined – qualities inculcated through schooling, on-the-job training and social services. In addition, paternalistic policies, in the form of food rations, housing, medical care and welfare provisions served to ‘stabilise’ the workforce and distinguish it both from rural dwellers and other urban residents.³⁰ In the 1940s, UMHK’s Doctor Motoulle remarked that the company wanted workers to ‘love their work and stay attached to it as long as possible.’³¹ Recent authors have similarly argued that mining companies on the Copperbelt were much more than employers, as ‘*kazi*’ (salaried employment) structured the everyday lives of workers and their families, not only in the workplace but also through company provision of beer

²⁹ Interviews were conducted between May and August 2018. Special thanks go to Pierrot Monzi Kalonga in Likasi and Grant Chisapa in Mufulira. They proved indispensable in contacting interviewees, facilitation and translation of interviews.

³⁰ Jane L. Parpart, “‘Where Is Your Mother?’: Gender, Urban Marriage, and Colonial Discourse on the Zambian Copperbelt, 1924–1945”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 27, 2 (1994), pp. 241–71; Timothy Makori, ‘Abjects retraité, jeunesse piégée: Récits du déclin et d’une temporalité multiple parmi les générations de la “Copperbelt” congolaise’, *Politique africaine* 3, 131 (2013), pp. 51–73.

³¹ L. Motoulle, *Politique sociale de l’Union Minière du Haut Katanga pour sa main-d’œuvre indigène et ses résultats au cours de vingt années d’application* (Brussels: Institut Royal Colonial Belge, 1946), pp. 11–12.

halls, music and sports.³² A focus on mining, work culture and paternalism still dominates historical understandings of Copperbelt social life. Such a focus problematically obscures the experiences of non-mineworkers and it does not help explain opposition to paternalism, which became particularly pronounced once economic decline set in from the mid-1970s onwards. While our interviews clearly bring out the importance of mining companies on the Copperbelt, they also highlight a paternalistic dependency that many resented. This section, on the one hand, highlights Copperbelt residents' critiques of paternalism and its overwhelming social control, criticism which became particularly pronounced in the context of economic decline since the 1980s. On the other hand, our interviews give clues that people resisted or evaded mining companies' paternalistic controls, even in the 1960s and 1970s.

The promotion of a work ethic among mining communities started in schools, as personnel managers from the mines would visit schoolchildren to recruit potential workers.³³ By various means, including apprenticeships, mine companies sought to direct the modes of thought and behaviour of their prospective and existing workforce. Senior ZCCM employee Patson Katwisi therefore remembers the mines as 'very disciplined'.³⁴ Not only in the workplace, but also at home, employees and their families were subject to the control of the mining company.³⁵ Gécamines officials, for instance, represented the town of Likasi as an embodiment of modernity, an aesthetic which was proudly internalised by certain workers. Jacques Magenda, a Gécamines chemist, asserted: 'We had a good house in those days, it was 'modernised' ... Likasi was called Congo's prettiest town.'³⁶ Yet these ideals of 'cleanliness' and 'beauty' were maintained through pervasive social control. Valérienne Ngoye, a welfare worker, recalls how until the 1970s, 'inspectors would come to sensitise us about cleanliness. If we did not keep our house clean, we would be sanctioned. They would confiscate our ration tickets. ... It was a good system.'³⁷ Although some welcomed this control as contributing to order, Euphrasie Joa, married to a mineworker, grudgingly

32 Dibwe dia Mwembu, *Bana Shaba*; Johannes Fabian, 'Kazi: Conceptualizations of Labor in a Charismatic Movement among Swahili-Speaking Workers', *Cahiers d'Études africaines* 50 (1973), pp. 293–325; Rubbers, 'Mining Towns, Enclaves and Spaces'.

33 Higginson, *A Working Class in the Making*.

34 Interview, Patson Katwisi, Mufulira, 1 August 2018.

35 Marcelo J. Borges and Susana B. Torres (eds), *Company Towns: Labor, Space, and Power Relations across Time and Continents* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

36 Interview, Jacques Magenda, Likasi, 7 June 2018.

37 Interview, Valérienne Ngoye Mudimbi, Likasi, 9 June 2018.

recounted that ‘agents would perform unannounced visits to check if the houses were clean’.³⁸ This attempt to police public space also becomes evident in the account of Jérôme Kipili, who was councillor (*chef de cité*) of a Gécamines neighbourhood in Likasi in the 1970s: ‘Gécamines was very rigorous ... I had to know every family personally, to help bereaved families, to take charge of the relatives of Gécamines workers.’³⁹ A further expression of Gécamines’ ubiquitous social control of Likasi was Trabesha, a peripheral neighbourhood where ‘deviant’ workers and their families were relegated. Councillor Jacques Kibombo explained that ‘if you behaved badly, they would move you to Trabesha, the neighbourhood of the unruly (*la cité des indisciplinés*)’.⁴⁰ Through such measures, Gécamines discouraged drunkenness, quarrelling, theft and violence and encouraged punctuality, cleanliness, discipline and order. Though seemingly hegemonic, interviews evidence that mining communities could evade and subvert these measures of social control, as the following examples will show.

In Mufulira, many mineworkers and their families fondly remember the welfare provisions that mining companies provided until the 1980s. Tamarizika Nguni, a mineworker’s wife, praised the mine as ‘a source of livelihood’, claiming that ‘when you were working for the mine, you would enjoy, as you would get free electricity, water and housing’.⁴¹ Yet paternalistic policies were never universally accepted as beneficial. As early as the 1960s and 1970s, some members of mining communities critiqued social welfare provision for generating overdependence on the mines, referring to it as ‘spoon-feeding’.⁴² Mine nurse Gertrude Dhaka explains:

There was a dependency syndrome on the mines. The mines did all maintenance. You could not buy a light bulb without calling maintenance. Simple skills like fixing a light bulb became hard due to such dependency. Because of this ... many of our young people still cannot develop skills to earn a living.⁴³

Council employee William Chinda likewise suggested that because ‘everything was given’ to mineworkers, they tended to become lazy, while their wives ‘just stayed at home’. After privatisation, however, this situation has

³⁸ Interview, Euphrasie Joa, Likasi, 14 June 2018.

³⁹ Interview, Jérôme Kipili Mulunga, Likasi, 4 June 2018.

⁴⁰ Interview, Jacques Kibombo, Likasi, 11 June 2018.

⁴¹ Interview, Tamarizika Nguni, Mufulira, 3 July 2018.

⁴² Interview, William Bwalya Chinda, Mufulira, 8 August 2018.

⁴³ Interview, Gertrude Kabwita Kabinda Dhaka, Mufulira, 2 August 2018.

reversed and now ‘everybody must fend for themselves’.⁴⁴ Rather than simply a fond memory, nostalgia for paternalistic welfare provisions provides a way to criticise present hardships.⁴⁵

Likasi’s residents similarly resented the city’s dependence on Gécamines’ paternalism. When comparing Likasi to Lubumbashi, ‘a big city with a lot of opportunities’, trade unionist Ilunga wa Kumanza lamented Likasi’s reliance on Gécamines which ‘did not make our lives any better’.⁴⁶ Critiques also revolved around the inability to maintain the city’s beauty after Gécamines’ economic collapse. Kibombo regrets: ‘everything changed in 1990 ... nobody cared for the roads or public lighting anymore ... Likasi was built by Gécamines. When Gécamines experienced hardship, so did Likasi.’⁴⁷ Still, the ubiquity and numbing effects of mining paternalism, especially between the 1940s and the 1970s, undermined the extent of nostalgia for a *belle époque*. In the 1990s, when the disappearance of social welfare services left many members of mining communities feeling unprepared for a life outside of the mines, such criticism of Gécamines and ZCCM paternalism endured.

Existing scholarship has tended to reinforce the idea that an all-encompassing mining sub-culture, accompanied by benevolent paternalism, characterised the Copperbelt’s historical experience until the 1980s.⁴⁸ This section has nuanced such claims by demonstrating that, even if residents of Mufulira and Likasi welcomed the wealth, jobs and urban development industry had brought, they remained critical of the more negative effects of mining on social life. The memories of mining communities across the Copperbelt recorded here bring out striking similarities. On both sides of the border, Gécamines and ZCCM’s ‘cradle-to-grave’ policies evoked a mix of nostalgia and resentment. Whereas pervasive social control had perhaps brought certainty to everyday life, it left mining communities unable to fend for themselves once companies collapsed. The next section demonstrates that a vibrant social life took place outside of the orbit of mining companies.

⁴⁴ Interview, William Bwalya Chinda, Mufulira, 8 August 2018.

⁴⁵ William Cunningham Bissel, ‘Engaging Colonial Nostalgia’, *Cultural Anthropology* 20, 2 (2005), pp. 215–48.

⁴⁶ Interview, Ilunga wa Kumanza, Likasi, 8 June 2018.

⁴⁷ Interview, Jacques Kibombo, Likasi, 11 June 2018.

⁴⁸ Fetter, ‘L’Union Minière’.

Leisure, Culture and Social Life

Throughout the colonial and postcolonial period, Copperbelt towns were important centres of leisure activity. In the 1950s, Powdermaker portrayed the rich cultural life on the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt, suggesting that forms of entertainment such as cinema, radio and religion were enthusiastically embraced by residents as part of their distinct urban identity.⁴⁹ Mining company paternalism sought to dominate the cultural lives and leisure activities of Copperbelt communities. Congolese mines organised leisure centres (*cercles*) where workers could come to drink, watch theatre performances, play chess or read books. Mineworkers' wives attended the sewing and knitting classes organised in welfare centres (*foyers sociaux*).⁵⁰ In Zambia, beer halls were a popular form of entertainment, generating revenue for mining companies and municipal governance, but they were also important places of social exchange.⁵¹ Sports, football in particular, helped workers to relax after their shifts (see Chipande, Chapter 4). Such forms of entertainment created 'new urban social networks, communities, and identities'.⁵² Our oral histories however demonstrate that Copperbelt residents developed their own cultural pursuits and perspectives, in relation to but not determined by company provisions. Some Congolese mineworkers for example deliberately chose not to patronise mine-sponsored social facilities. Instead, they would go and drink in the *cit  * (public neighbourhood) to escape the mines' control. A focus on such assertion and cultural creativity puts mining paternalism into perspective.

In Mufulira the mines and the municipality organised a range of social clubs. These included sports (tennis, football, golf and draughts), theatre and cinema, as well as women's clubs for tailoring, cooking and house-keeping. Teacher Fridah Mwale explained how these provided complementary forms of knowledge, necessary to cope with urban life: 'At the club, we learnt how to sew and cook, at school we learnt how to write and read, and from the radio I learnt what was happening.'⁵³ Mufulira's workers generally praised the mine's social facilities as a form of 'caring' for

⁴⁹ Powdermaker, *Copper Town*.

⁵⁰ Dibwe dia Mwembu, *Bana Shaba*; Nancy Rose Hunt, 'Domesticity and Colonialism in Belgian Africa: Usumbura's *Foyer Social*, 1946–1960', *Signs* 15, 3 (1990), pp. 447–74.

⁵¹ Charles Ambler, 'Alcohol, Racial Segregation and Popular Politics in Northern Rhodesia', *Journal of African History* 31, 2 (1990), pp. 295–313.

⁵² Hikabwa D. Chipande, 'Mining for Goals: Football and Social Change on the Zambian Copperbelt', *Radical History Review* 125 (2016), pp. 55–73.

⁵³ Interview, Fridah Mwale, Mufulira, 6 July 2018.

employees. Samson Chama, councillor for Zambia's ruling United National Independence Party (UNIP) in the 1970s and 1980s, attested that 'clubs were very popular; nearly everybody wanted to go there to pass time'.⁵⁴ Simon Bwalya, a ZCCM employee, explains how 'Chawama Hall was a socialising place and it provided recreation for miners. After going home, we would go there and ... discuss work. It kept miners busy and relaxed.' Even non-mineworkers could attend, Bwalya describes: 'we would offer a bottle of beer and share ideas'.⁵⁵ Although the mines utilised leisure activities as a form of social control, individuals commonly circumvented this. Mine-worker Nathan Mwamba patronised an independent beer hall, rather than the mine beer hall.⁵⁶ Not only were closing times more flexible there, but mineworkers could also enjoy a drink outside the purview of their fellow workmates and supervisors. Occupational and class boundaries prevented certain forms of socialisation. Mine captain Kathbert Nchemba recalled: 'I was never mixing carelessly. I chose whom to go about with, who to speak to, what sort of issues I could talk about.' He added, 'as we were getting higher in the ranks, we were advised [by management] not to drink with our subordinates'.⁵⁷ Personnel manager Katwisi concurred: 'the mines knew that somehow we would not mix. For example, you would not find a sweeper with a manager drinking in the same place'.⁵⁸

Mining companies thus used recreation as a means of control, to discipline and segregate the workforce. Katwisi recognised that the mines had leisure activities

to keep us busy. They say an idle mind is the devil's temple. After work we wanted to put work aside, have a good time and go home. Because we were kept busy, we had no time to engage in bad habits.⁵⁹

Owess Sinkamba, ZCCM club organiser in the 1960s and 1970s, argued that 'it was important for the mines to invest in clubs', including sports, because 'this taught the boys and girls discipline'.⁶⁰ Clubs were designed to make youths amenable to social control, although youth read their own meanings into club messages. Councillor Chama remembers that in the 1970s social clubs were meant 'to solve unemployment among young men'.

54 Interview, Samson Chama, Mufulira, 27 July 2018.

55 Interview, Simon Bwalya, Mufulira, 1 August 2018.

56 Interview, Nathan Mwamba, Mufulira, 6 July 2018.

57 Interview, Kathbert Nchemba, Mufulira, 7 July 2018.

58 Interview, Patson Katwisi, Mufulira, 3 July 2018.

59 Interview, Patson Katwisi, Mufulira, 1 August 2018.

60 Interview, Owess Sinkamba, Mufulira, 8 August 2018.

According to him, the mines ‘knew that if they kept people busy, they would produce better results’.⁶¹ This applied to women as well, and in this respect ZCCM employee Boniface Lupale recalls that ‘mine management encouraged attendance of sewing and knitting clubs among women’⁶² (see Larmer and Taylor, Chapter 12). Nonetheless, the available forms of leisure were multiple and Copperbelt urbanites attended cinema shows, theatre performances and drinking venues in areas beyond mine control.

Apart from mine company leisure provisions, Likasi’s residents highlighted other social networks, independent from or only loosely connected to Gécamines. Faith and ethnicity-based associations were particularly important in making Haut-Katanga’s urban culture. The Catholic Church, a pillar of the Belgian colonial order, continued to play a central role in the everyday life of Katangese residents after independence.⁶³ Jacques Magenda alludes to the support the church provided him: ‘it stabilised me, it made me more responsible ... the church adopts you, it supported me spiritually during the Gécamines crisis’.⁶⁴ Catholicism helped councillor Kibombo integrate when he first moved to Likasi in the 1970s, providing social support: ‘I was a member of a liturgical group. The members advised me about the people and places I should avoid.’⁶⁵ Sculptor and painter Ferdinand Kakompe underlined the role the church played in his artistic training: ‘Everything I learned came from the church.’⁶⁶ Social activities, thus, did not merely centre on mine welfare provision. Independent leisure activities and alternative social networks were just as important in defining Copperbelt urbanism.

Art and media were, for instance, means through which the Copperbelt population discussed and redefined the boundaries between rural and urban spheres. Radio programmes such as ‘*Kabusha*’, a question and answer call-in show in Zambia aired between 1964 and 1990, proved extremely popular.⁶⁷ According to Bobby Kabamba, *Kabusha* was very educational because it ‘gave you wide experience of how to live and cope with different problems’,

⁶¹ Interview, Samson Chama, Mufulira, 27 July 2018.

⁶² Interview, Boniface Lupale, Mufulira, 12 July 2018.

⁶³ Reuben Loffinan, *Church, State and Colonialism in Southeastern Congo, 1890–1962* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

⁶⁴ Interview, Jacques Magenda, Likasi, 7 June 2018.

⁶⁵ Interview, Jacques Kibombo, Likasi, 11 June 2018.

⁶⁶ Interview, Ferdinand Kakompe, Likasi, 19 June 2018.

⁶⁷ ‘*Kabusha Takolelwe Bowe*’ (‘the one who asks questions never goes wrong’), presented by David Yumba; Debra Spitulnik, ‘The Language of the City: Town Bemba as Urban Hybridity’, *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 8, 1 (1999), pp. 42–5.

including workplace issues and those specific to urban life.⁶⁸ Mineworker Henry Longwane explains how through '*Kabusha* we used to learn about customs, traditions and ways of life, about how people should be living'. Importantly, such cultural expressions were in no way determined by the mining company. Longwane continued:

Being on the Copperbelt and coming from different areas with different customs, traditions and beliefs, it was very important to know about others. For instance, if a Bemba wants to marry a Luvale, they need to know what those people believe in, what they stand for.⁶⁹

Likewise, Likasi residents enjoyed adorning their walls with paintings of village scenes.⁷⁰ For Kibombo, such paintings were informative: 'I enjoy looking at how our ancestors lived. I have always lived in town and I do not know much about village life.'⁷¹ Far from the rural-urban dichotomy suggested in much Copperbelt research, connections to rural areas remained important even among 'permanent urbanites'. Rather than being either 'cosmopolitan' or 'localist', the Copperbelt urban population tapped into various social networks.⁷² In Mufulira, Tamarizika Nguni was member of a Nsenga social group, 'so that if there was any problem, suffering or death then all the Nsenga people would come together and assist.'⁷³ Similar forms of identity-based solidarity (socio-cultural associations) prevailed in Likasi.⁷⁴ Solidarity networks complemented and provided alternatives to mine welfare provision. After the collapse of Gécamines, these associations played an increasing role in their members' lives. Former councillor Kipili underlined how members of his association 'facilitated the recruitment [to Gécamines] of the children of their ... brothers.'⁷⁵ For councillor Kibombo these associations provided a safety net in times of hardship: 'we help each other at funerals, in case of illness, or when somebody is looking for a job'.⁷⁶ Paradoxically, identity-based

⁶⁸ Interview, Bobby Jackson Kabamba, Mufulira, 10 July 2018.

⁶⁹ Interview, Henry Longwane, Mufulira, 7 July 2018.

⁷⁰ Interview, Jacques Magenda, Likasi, 7 June 2018; Interview, Valérienne Ngoye, Likasi, 9 June 2018; Interview, Thérèse Kyola, Likasi, 7 June 2018; Jewsiewicki, 'Collective Memory and its Images'.

⁷¹ Interview, Jacques Kibombo, Likasi, 11 June 2018.

⁷² Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*.

⁷³ Interview, Tamarizika Nguni, Mufulira, 3 July 2018.

⁷⁴ Sandrine Vinckel, 'La violence et le silence: Politiques de réconciliation, relations interpersonnelles et pratiques sociales de coexistence au Katanga, RDC', PhD Thesis, Université Paris I, 2016, pp. 68–79.

⁷⁵ Interview, Jérôme Kipili, Likasi, 4 June 2018.

⁷⁶ Interview, Jacques Kibombo, Likasi, 11 June 2018.

associations fed into ethnic conflicts between ‘Katangese’ and ‘Kasaïens’ in Haut-Katanga in the 1990s, causing hundreds of casualties in Likasi.⁷⁷ More generally however, such associations provided the Copperbelt population with a social network independent from mining companies.

By paying attention to art, leisure and socialisation, it becomes evident that mining companies on the Copperbelt influenced the social lives of mining communities in multiple ways. In Likasi and Mufulira, mineworkers and their wives, children and friends attended mine-sponsored dancing, football matches and household classes. Yet these social facilities did not serve as simple instruments of control. Copperbelt communities appropriated the classes offered at welfare centres for their own purposes, to earn an income or to expand social networks. Moreover, numerous forms of leisure took place beyond the grasp of mining companies.⁷⁸ Identity-based associations or rural connections informed urbanism on the Copperbelt, just as much as beer halls and guitar music did.

Agriculture, Trade and Non-Mining Occupations

Historical studies of the Copperbelt have documented in great detail the emergence of an industrialised working class, as part of a modern urbanised society.⁷⁹ However, it is fallacious to assert that the majority of the Copperbelt’s population was ever employed by the mining industry – or indeed formally employed at all (see Tables 1.1 and 1.2). Since the first emergence of Copperbelt towns, activities such as trading dried fish or second-hand clothes and piecework have been widespread.⁸⁰ Larmer explains that

both Copperbelts did develop a large population of women and men ... engaged in economic activities both symbiotic with and parasitic on the mine economy – charcoal burning, growing food (illegally) on mine-owned land, beer brewing, and so on. This was an essential but still neglected element of their actually existing modernization.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu, ‘L’épuration ethnique au Katanga et l’éthique du redressement des torts du passé’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 33, 2/3 (1999), pp. 483–99.

⁷⁸ See: Parpart, “‘Where Is Your Mother?’”; Dibwe dia Mwembu, *Bana Shaba*.

⁷⁹ Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*; Dibwe dia Mwembu, *Bana Shaba*.

⁸⁰ Deborah Potts, ‘Debates About African Urbanisation, Migration and Economic Growth: What Can We Learn from Zimbabwe and Zambia?’ *Geographical Journal* 182, 3 (2016), pp. 251–64.

⁸¹ Larmer, ‘At the Crossroads’.

The historiographical neglect of non-mining occupations has caused a skewed image of Copperbelt communities as wholly or largely focused on formal mine employment. A more balanced view of Copperbelt social life needs to consider other livelihood activities. It was not only those labelled 'squatters' who engaged in informal employment; even senior mine employees often had subsidiary businesses to earn extra income.⁸² Moreover, the importance of non-mining occupations changed over time. As opportunities for formal employment contracted in the 1980s and 1990s, informal economic activities became an even more central element of Copperbelt urbanism.

Agricultural production has always been a very common economic activity on the Copperbelt.⁸³ Mineworker Dennis Tembo and his wife Iness Zulu in Mufulira explained: 'We grew up as farmers. If you do not cultivate, what is it that you can eat?'⁸⁴ Beyond being a rural practice transmitted to the urban Copperbelt, agricultural production could stabilise and/or supplement urban wages. Victoria Mwewa grew crops to earn extra income, to cope with her husband's erratic salary.⁸⁵ In Likasi, Valérienne Ngoye's family had a small field to complement the food ration provided by Gécamines: 'we were well served, but we still needed fresh vegetables'.⁸⁶ To some, Foster Kunda explains, farming symbolised the economic downturn since the 1990s: 'Way back there was nothing like farming in town, we relied on jobs, but now here in town we are also farming'.⁸⁷ Yet in fact, agriculture on the Copperbelt long predated economic decline and was a distinct adaptation to urban life. To senior ZCCM employee Levi Chushi, farming was a 'training ground' for his children and wife who had grown up in town.⁸⁸ Even if some wage earners had comfortable salaries, Elizabeth Malokotela explained: 'When it comes to expenditure, you cannot be buying everything. So the garden reduces some expenses'.⁸⁹ In Likasi in the 1970s, councillor Kipili's wife cultivated crops and had a few chickens: 'she did not do it out of necessity, but it provided something to eat and it allowed us to save

82 B. A. Kasongo and A. G. Tipple, 'An Analysis of Policy towards Squatters in Kitwe, Zambia', *Third World Planning Review* 12, 2 (1990), pp. 147–65.

83 Iva Peša, 'Crops and Copper: Agriculture and Urbanism on the Central African Copperbelt, 1950–2000', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 69:3 (2020), pp. 527–45.

84 Interview, Dennis Tembo and Iness Zulu, Mufulira, 6 July 2018.

85 Interview, Victoria Mwewa, Mufulira, 17 July 2018.

86 Interview, Valérienne Ngoye Mudimbi, Likasi, 9 June 2018.

87 Interview, Foster Chimfutumba Kunda, Mufulira, 20 July 2018.

88 Interview, Levi Aaron Chushi, Mufulira, 11 July 2018.

89 Interview, Elizabeth Malokotela, Mufulira, 2 August 2018.

some money'.⁹⁰ These accounts make it clear that urban agriculture on the Copperbelt had many functions and was not merely an activity driven by economic necessity. Instead, farming stabilised urban residence and diversified income sources, among the wealthy and among the poor. There were, however, many other ways to earn additional income.

Respondents' reasons to engage in piecework or trade were manifold. Trader Tamarizika Nguni explained: 'I did not want to be admiring things from other people and I wanted my children to live and feed well.'⁹¹ When he first arrived in Mufulira in the 1950s, Nathan Mwamba joined a club, which gave him access to piecework. He would line up in the morning to see which jobs were available and work until the contract was finished.⁹² After he finished school in 1969, Chrispin Chani worked for various private companies and in civil service. He explained that 'the differences in salary scales made me move from one job to another'. The conditions of service in government attracted him: 'There was no strict schedule, you could even come to work late.'⁹³ To improve food security, people engaged in all kinds of activities. While working for Gécamines in Likasi in the 1970s, Gaston Mutiti set up a small business, buying salt in a neighbouring village to resell it in town: 'It went very well, but maintaining the truck cost a lot of money. You earn a bit of cash, but then you have to use everything to replace broken parts.'⁹⁴ Boston Mwenya, ZCCM employee, bought fishing nets to take to Luapula Province, repurposing rural ties to engage in urban business.⁹⁵ Many women sold clothes, shoes or foodstuffs in the market to supplement household incomes. In order to sustain her family in Likasi in the 1980s and 1990s, Pauline Kingombe sold doughnuts, opened a beer parlour and traded second-hand clothes from Tanzania.⁹⁶ Through sewing skills acquired in a Gécamines welfare centre, Euphrasie Joa boosted her household income: 'when I could not make ends meet, my sewing activities would put some money on the table'.⁹⁷ William Chinda started trading from a young age, selling mangoes to contribute to his school fees. Later, he acquired a wheelbarrow to deliver maize flour to households. Chinda

⁹⁰ Interview, Jérôme Kipili Mulunga, Likasi, 4 June 2018.

⁹¹ Interview, Tamarizika Nguni, Mufulira, 3 July 2018.

⁹² Interview, Nathan Mwamba, Mufulira, 6 July 2018.

⁹³ Interview, Chrispin Chani, Mufulira, 16 July 2018.

⁹⁴ Interview, Gaston Mutiti, Likasi, 4 June 2018.

⁹⁵ Interview, Boston Mwenya, Mufulira, 10 July 2018.

⁹⁶ Interview, Pauline Kingombe, Likasi, 12 June 2018.

⁹⁷ Interview, Euphrasie Joa, Likasi, 14 June 2018.

attributed such ‘entrepreneurship’ to economic downturn and the discontinuation of paternalistic welfare policies in the 1990s:

Initially, most people did not think of businesses like trading, we relied on people from Congo to bring *salaula* [second-hand clothes]. Later on, when there was unemployment, we took over and we are making our own things now. In the 1970s, my uncle would put everything on the table, so I would go to the stadium for a show, and there was no need to start a business.⁹⁸

Such depictions romanticise a golden age that probably never existed. Trade, tailoring and agriculture were in reality part of Copperbelt life and urban identity from the very beginning. Furthermore, such activities, rather than being supplementary, were often central to household budgets.⁹⁹

Even senior mineworkers and civil servants engaged in activities to earn additional income. In Mufulira, Patson Katwisi explained:

My wife ... used to say that employment would end. ... She had seen some of our friends leave employment, retire and become destitute. So she asked: ‘Don’t you think we should do something so that we have something to fall back on if anything happens?’¹⁰⁰

Given their capital, skills and knowledge, senior mineworkers were more likely to have commercial farms in peri-urban areas, to run a transport business or to engage in profitable trade. Affluent Copperbelt residents practised agriculture to strengthen their socio-economic position. Jacques Magenda, a Gécamines manager, explained: ‘I cultivated ... to strengthen my home. I was a senior employee (*cadre*) and although the wages were good, you had to maintain your status.’¹⁰¹ These accounts, on the one hand, illustrate the blurred boundaries and interconnections between formal and informal employment: mineworkers used their salaries to set up farming or trading businesses, whereas second-hand clothes sellers relied on mineworkers as their clientele. On the other hand, these recollections show the inadequacy of considering formal mine employment as the quintessential expression of urbanism. Formal employment was a privilege restricted to

⁹⁸ Interview, William Bwalya Chinda, Mufulira, 8 August 2018.

⁹⁹ Patience Mususa, ‘“Getting By”: Life on the Copperbelt after the Privatisation of the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines’, *Social Dynamics* 36, 2 (2010), pp. 380–94; Alex Nyumbaiza Tambwe, Kasongo Nkulu, Kitaba Kya Ghoany, Kunkuzya Mwanachilongwe, Kaimbi Mpyana and Kayiba Bukasa (eds), *Le développement du Katanga méridional* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2015).

¹⁰⁰ Interview, Patson Katwisi, Mufulira, 1 August 2018.

¹⁰¹ Interview, Jacques Magenda, Likasi, 7 June 2018.

a small proportion of the Copperbelt urban population. More importantly, activities such as urban agriculture or trade did not merely serve livelihood purposes. Instead, growing vegetables or working as a tailor was central to establishing a place for oneself on the Copperbelt. Through these activities, individuals asserted a specific form of urbanism. Focusing only on formal employment neglects such creative and valuable ways of making a living on the Copperbelt.¹⁰²

Gender on the Copperbelt

Due to its history of industrial mining activity, the Copperbelt has long been imagined as a male-dominated environment. Evans explains how copper deposits ‘were mined, managed and administered by men – as wage labourers, breadwinners, trade union officials, civil servants and politicians’.¹⁰³ Women, in this context, have often been portrayed as and assumed to be docile housewives, enabling the male breadwinner model. Yet Parpart equally provided examples of independent women on the Copperbelt, who did not follow the directives of their ‘husbands’.¹⁰⁴ Female beer brewing, prostitution and trade on the Zambian and Congolese Copperbelt have been amply documented.¹⁰⁵ The economic crisis of the 1980s and 1990s turned gender stereotypes and inequalities on their head, due to ‘the declining economy, which has turned many women into important contributors to household welfare in the face of men’s shrinking incomes from wage employment’.¹⁰⁶ The Copperbelt thus provides a good test case to examine the changing nature and contestation of gender relations and roles. By centring analysis on women, this section reassesses the role of elder male mineworkers on the Copperbelt.

¹⁰² Peša, ‘Crops and Copper’.

¹⁰³ Alice Evans, “‘Women Can Do What Men Can Do’: The Causes and Consequences of Growing Flexibility in Gender Divisions of Labour in Kitwe, Zambia’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40, 5 (2014), pp. 981–98, p. 981.

¹⁰⁴ Parpart, “‘Where Is Your Mother?’”

¹⁰⁵ Benjamin Rubbers, ‘When Women Support the Patriarchal Family: The Dynamics of Marriage in a Gécamines Mining Camp (Katanga Province, DR Congo)’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 28, 2 (2015), pp. 213–34; Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu, ‘Les fonctions des femmes africaines dans les camps de l’Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (1925–1960)’, *Zaire-Afrique*, 272 (1993), pp. 105–18.

¹⁰⁶ Karen Tranberg Hansen, *Keeping House in Lusaka* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 103.

Historical accounts assume that men were primarily attracted to the Copperbelt because of employment opportunities. In Mufulira, mine-worker John Mule recalls: 'There was no job for young men in the village, so we came to the Copperbelt looking for employment.'¹⁰⁷ Unsurprisingly, in oral histories men tend to assert an idealised image of 'masculinity', promoted through education, formal employment and social activities. Council employee Chinda explains that young men were 'trained to be strong and find solutions'.¹⁰⁸

Some accounts suggest a clear-cut gender division of labour in the household, whereby a male breadwinner would cater for his wife and educate and discipline his children. In Mufulira, mineworker Nathan Mwamba attested that 'in those days women were not working'.¹⁰⁹ Yet what being a 'housewife' involved depended on definitions of work. Indeed, few women were formally employed, yet many earned a considerable income through trade or agriculture. Boston Mwenya declared that 'my wife was just a housewife', but went on to explain that 'she used to sell items at the market such as vegetables and other things'.¹¹⁰ Boniface Lupale's wife worked as a tailor and social welfare instructor for mineworkers' wives. Mine management encouraged the attendance of women at welfare clubs and in doing so inculcated specific gender norms and expectations.¹¹¹ Simon Bwalya recalls that 'women were supposed to keep the home together, they watched over the household'.¹¹² Yet trader Annie Lukwasa attested that stereotypical gender roles were far from universal. She recalls drinking beer with friends in front of her house, an activity which her husband condoned and to which the mine company turned a blind eye.¹¹³ Emeria Mweupe sold vegetables, fish and groundnuts in the market. Together with other female traders, she would go to distant cities, such as Lusaka or even Johannesburg, to order goods.¹¹⁴ Such examples show that some Copperbelt women have long enjoyed considerable physical and social mobility.

¹⁰⁷ Interview, John Mule, Mufulira, 12 July 2018.

¹⁰⁸ Interview, William Bwalya Chinda, Mufulira, 8 August 2018.

¹⁰⁹ Interview, Nathan Mwamba, Mufulira, 7 July 2018.

¹¹⁰ Interview, Boston Mwenya, Mufulira, 10 July 2018.

¹¹¹ Interview, Boniface Lupale, Mufulira, 12 July 2018.

¹¹² Interview, Simon Bwalya, Mufulira, 1 August 2018.

¹¹³ Interview, Annie Lukwasa, Mufulira, 18 July 2018.

¹¹⁴ Interview, Emeria Mweupe, Mufulira, 19 July 2018.

The economic recession of the 1980s and 1990s further challenged and sometimes reversed gender roles. Bobby Kabamba, an engineer with ZCCM, explained: 'Women are looking after men now. They are paying for schoolchildren through their businesses and marketing.'¹¹⁵ In practice however, gender roles on the Copperbelt probably always deviated from the male breadwinner model.¹¹⁶

In Likasi, Gécamines provided significant professional opportunities for women, occasionally even in management positions. Although she did not graduate from secondary school, Sarah Léontine Bulanda enrolled in typist training in a company school. Upon completion in 1968, she became a Gécamines secretary and eventually a mess manager.¹¹⁷ Valérienne Ngoye took courses in a UMHK household school, where she received instruction in sewing, cleaning and cooking. She became instructor (*monitrice*) in a Gécamines welfare centre, where she taught workers' daughters and wives household skills. Ngoye acquired further responsibilities and started advising the wives of managers, crossing class lines: 'They were under my care ... I visited them at home ... We sat together at the table and taught the children how to behave.'¹¹⁸ Beyond her advisory role, Ngoye could act on behalf of women with marital problems and sanction male workers:

It was called *action sociale*. For instance, if a man came home drunk ... I would give him two warnings and sanction him by withholding a part of his salary ... The women would come to me to complain, I had to take initiative.¹¹⁹

Stéphanie Mumba was the manager of Likasi's mine hospital launderette, supervising fifteen employees, including men demoted from higher positions. She recalls: 'Despite their age, they obeyed me. ... I learnt what it meant to be a manager: not being pushed around by employees, having authority, how to talk to a subordinate, how to give orders, punish the rebels.'¹²⁰ Gécamines thus offered these women employment opportunities that put them on par with – or even in charge of – men. This further challenged the position of men as household heads.

¹¹⁵ Interview, Bobby Jackson Kabamba, Mufulira, 10 July 2018.

¹¹⁶ Francesca Pugliese, 'Mining Companies and Gender(ed) Policies: The Women of the Congolese Copperbelt, Past and Present', *Extractive Industries and Society* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2020.08.006>.

¹¹⁷ Interview, Sarah Léontine Bulanda, Likasi, 6 June 2018.

¹¹⁸ Interview, Valérienne Ngoye Mudimbi, Likasi, 9 June 2018.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Interview, Stéphanie Mumba, Likasi, 6 June 2018.

Gender relations were a continuous topic of debate within households and among groups of women. Spouses discussed or argued about the sharing of household income and economic responsibilities. Numerous people recalled a play by Likasi's popular theatre group Mufwankolo (see Dibwe dia Mwembu, Chapter 11).¹²¹ The play depicts a greedy husband, who hides his income from his wife and always keeps his money in his pocket.¹²² One day he drops an entire monthly salary into the toilet. Ngoye recalled: 'The message is that a husband should not keep the money to himself, but share it with his wife.'¹²³ Theatre thus offered an effective way to discuss and reconfigure gender roles. Yet households approached the pooling of resources in different ways. Bulanda testified that 'my husband allowed me to manage the household budget'.¹²⁴ On the other hand, Euphrasie Joa's husband never showed her his payslip: 'I did not know how much he earned, he just came home with an amount of money that I had to manage, he kept a share to himself, to enjoy himself.'¹²⁵ Yet the different income patterns of men and women were often symbiotic. In Mufulira, William Chinda's wife was a trader. He would give her some money from his salary and she would order goods and prepare beer for sale.¹²⁶ Even if men were historically more often wage earners, this does not mean that women simply followed their lead.

The changing nature of life on the Copperbelt continually challenged and redefined gender relationships. Although government and mine company officials, through employment, schooling, church and social work, asserted certain ideals of masculinity and femininity, these rarely went undisputed. Men's salaries were too precarious and seldom sufficient to uphold a 'housewife' and the idealised family, particularly after the 1980s. Women earned an income and had much freedom to socialise and drink with neighbours while their husbands were at work. Nonetheless, some women voluntarily asserted an image of 'propriety', especially through church involvement or household classes. By upholding an idealised image of an elder male mineworker as household head, Copperbelt

¹²¹ Johannes Fabian, *Power and Performance: Ethnographic Explorations through Proverbial Wisdom and Theater in Shaba, Zaire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

¹²² Interview, Valérienne Ngoye Mudimbi, Likasi, 9 June 2018; Interview, Pauline Kibombe, Likasi, 12 June 2018; Interview, Jacques Kibombo, Likasi, 11 June 2018.

¹²³ Interview, Valérienne Ngoye Mudimbi, Likasi, 9 June 2018.

¹²⁴ Interview, Sarah Léontine Bulanda, Likasi, 6 June 2018.

¹²⁵ Interview, Euphrasie Joa, Likasi, 14 June 2018.

¹²⁶ Interview, William Bwalya Chinda, Mufulira, 8 August 2018.

historiography has glossed over its changing gender dynamics.¹²⁷ Female-headed households are no exception on the Copperbelt today and children rarely grow up in a nuclear family. Acknowledging such diversity is crucial to understanding historical and contemporary Copperbelt communities.

Conclusion

In 2009, Rubbers depicted memories of the past among Haut-Katanga's residents as 'the story of a tragedy'. Facing economic hardship and an uncertain future, Copperbelt urbanites made sense of their current suffering by invoking their 'abandonment' by the Belgians, or their subjection to diverse powerful actors, ranging from global capitalist companies to supernatural forces.¹²⁸ Although such pessimism towards history was present in some of our respondents' accounts of Likasi and Mufulira, most offered a more nuanced assessment of their personal trajectories and current predicament. The heyday of ZCCM and Gécamines paternalism was, for example, fondly remembered for the security it provided, but simultaneously resented for the dependency it created. More positively, many informants proudly spoke of their own agency when confronted with hardships, by relying on non-mining economic activities or religious and identity-based solidarity networks. The experiences of women particularly highlighted the adaptability of Copperbelt residents in a shifting socio-economic context. Some supported their households through informal activities. Others made money by working as tailors, relying on 'housewife skills' acquired in the patriarchal education system. A few actively pursued a career in mine companies, still too often perceived as an exclusively masculine sphere.

While the Copperbelt has been depicted as the spearhead of urban-industrial 'modernity' in Central Africa, oral history accounts suggest a more complex understanding of what 'modernity' meant in daily life.¹²⁹ Rather than revolving solely around mining, agriculture, either

¹²⁷ Arnold L. Epstein, *Urbanization and Kinship: The Domestic Domain on the Copperbelt of Zambia, 1950–1956* (London: Academic Press, 1981).

¹²⁸ Benjamin Rubbers, 'The Story of a Tragedy: How People in Haut-Katanga Interpret the Post-Colonial History of Congo', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 42, 2 (2009), pp. 267–89.

¹²⁹ See the Introduction to this volume; Jennifer Robinson, *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development* (London: Routledge, 2006); Garth Myers, *African Cities: Alternative Visions of Urban Theory and Practice* (London: Zed Books, 2011).

as a subsistence activity or as a means of entrepreneurship, was omnipresent on the Copperbelt. Radio shows and popular paintings brought depictions of village ‘tradition’ into urban living rooms. ‘Ethnic’ identities – connecting urban dwellers to their ‘ancestral’ roots – supported people when the state and mining companies collapsed, but could also be the cause of conflict. Most importantly, oral histories suggest that mining paternalism – though irrefutably important – did not dominate Copperbelt social life. Even when Gécamines and ZCCM provided schooling, food rations, housing and leisure to their employees, the mining companies never controlled Copperbelt communities. In order to understand Copperbelt social history, equal attention needs to be paid to independent bars as to mine-run beer halls and to petty tomato vending in addition to underground mining.

When analysed from a cross-border perspective, Copperbelt residents’ historical experiences are characterised by striking similarities. Although divided by a political border, Copperbelt oral histories bring out comparable challenges and opportunities. Accounts highlight how, on both sides, boundaries between formal and informal activities, gender roles, urban and rural, ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ or past security and present uncertainty were and remain fundamentally blurred. The oral history approach thus shows that Copperbelt social life was even more vibrant and creative than has hitherto been assumed.

Table 1.1: Mufulira mine employees and total urban population¹³⁰

Year	Mine employees	Urban population
1956	8,572	50,000
1961	9,472	80,600
1969	N/A	107,802

¹³⁰ We are grateful to Duncan Money for providing us with these figures. These come from the following sources: Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, *Census of Population 1956*, pp. 4, 76–78; Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, *Final Report on 1961 Census*, p. 25; George Kay, *Social Geography of Zambia* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1967), p. 95; Government of Zambia, *Census of Population 1969*, A7; Central Statistical Office, *Monthly Digest of Statistics*, Jan–Mar 1981, p. 2; ZCCM-IH, *Zambianisation Report – Mufulira Division*, December 1981–September 1985, p. 1; ZCCM-IH 5.5.1D, *Actual Labour Strengths by Grade as at 31 January 2000*; Government of Zambia, *Summary Report for 2000 Census*, p. 12.

Table 1.1 continued

Year	Mine employees	Urban population
1980	N/A	149,778
1985	8,355	N/A
1990	N/A	152,069
2000	4,554	143,930

Table 1.2: Likasi mine employees and total urban population¹³¹

Year	Mine employees	Urban population
1950	13,339	48,000
1955	17,892	64,000
1960	22,692	87,000
1965	27,103	99,000
1970	29,650	150,000
1975	32,840 (Total Gécamines)	170,000
1980	35,149 (Total Gécamines)	193,000
1985	33,045 (Total Gécamines)	220,000
1990	32,992 (Total Gécamines)	252,000
1995	22,257 (Total Gécamines)	288,000
2000	21,704 (Total Gécamines)	330,000

¹³¹ Until 1970, Quinquennial average for the Panda headquarters, Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu, 'Industrialisation et santé: Transformation de la morbidité et de la mortalité à l'Union Minière du Haut-Katanga', PhD Thesis, University of Laval, Quebec, 1990, p. 122. After 1970 we only have numbers for Gécamines as a whole (including Lubumbashi and Kolwezi); these numbers are derived from Gécamines Annual Reports. Urban population figures come from <https://populationstat.com/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/likasi>, n.d. (accessed 14 October 2020).