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Ann Schlyter

RECYCLED INEQUALITIES
Youth and gender in George compound, Zambia

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I have returned to George compound in Lusaka many times since the sixties, in the framework of a longitudinal study on housing and urban community development. This time I interviewed youth, who were born there, about life in the town and their views on gender relations.

The last decade has been hard on the inhabitants and many of my old friends in George compound are deceased, while the new generations struggle to create a place in society for themselves. The young people told me about their tragedies and their hopes of achievements which often seemed to be out of reach. They welcomed me with their accustomed warmth and friendliness and demonstrated so much strength and humour that, while conducting the fieldwork, I was influenced by their optimism, although it sometimes seemed out of place.

My return home to read the printout of interviews and essays initiated a delayed shock; there are so many sad histories and depressing facts about poverty and subordination. I needed time to find enough distance, the strength to analyse the material and to try to understand it. Like the youth in George compound, I was born of parents who had moved to town, settled in a one-roomed dwelling, and found work. While I experienced a gradual increase of wealth and opportunities in the post-war growth of the welfare society in Sweden, the youth in George compound have been gradually impoverished and have watched the degradation of their environment.

Repeated rereading of my material has helped me to remember the positive signals and to find a tone for the report. In Europe, the image of Africa is biased by reports on catastrophes and I hesitated to add to this by writing about the everyday type of catastrophe that I met in George. On the other hand, who would benefit by silence about the everyday effects of the economic developments? Perhaps I have not found the “right” tone, but I have tried to reflect my young informants honestly, while retaining my academic ambition to contribute to the understanding of changes in gender relations and urban development.

Prior to this report, parts of the material presented here has been included in three published papers. An early version of Chapter Four was presented at the EADI conference in Vienna and published in “Journal für Entwicklungspolitik” (Schlyter, 1997). The volume “Changing Gender Relations in Southern Africa. Issues of Urban Life”, published in 1998 by ISAS, University of Lesotho includes a paper on youth and living conditions that
draws from the same empirical sources as Chapters Three and Five in this report (Schlyter, 1998 a). This part of the study was carried out within the second phase of the SAREC supported programme “Gender Research on Urbanisation, Planning, housing and Everyday Life”, GRUPHEL. Chapters Seven and Eight contain large sections of a paper published by the Swedish Association for Sex Education, RFSU, which also supported the field study economically (Schlyter, 1998 b).

I am deeply indebted to Jane Mwelwa, nurse aide at the local clinic in George compound, who worked with me as an interpreter and assistant. It was thanks to her extraordinary ability to create an atmosphere of mutual confidence with the youth, that many interviews became rich and interesting. Thanks are also due to my colleague, Gertrude Ngenda, former chairperson of the Zambian Association for Research and Development, ZARD, who organised the essay writing in the secondary schools which youth from George compound attended. She also supported me in many other ways. I am thankful to ZARD for allowing me access to essays submitted to them from youth around Zambia. It has been of great support to receive comments on draft versions of chapters from Mulela Munalula, Birgit Assarsson, Mai Palmberg, Mariken Vaa, and Anita Larsson. Madi Gray has, as many times before, improved my English language.

Lund in June 1999
Ann Schlyter
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1. Introduction

This report contributes to the understanding of changing gender relations, urban development and political transformation in Zambia by presenting a study of the reality facing young women and men born and raised in a poor peri-urban area, George compound in Lusaka. It voices the concerns of the youth about their gender identity and sexuality, their family situation, their urban place of living and the way this place is governed in a period of political transformation. These young women and men are usually not heard, although the urban youth is part of Zambia’s future.

Concerns raised by previous studies in George compound

This study was initiated in an effort to integrate some of the major concerns arising from the results of previous studies which I had conducted in George compound. Through focusing on urban development and housing, I had observed how living conditions deteriorated and how the political transformation from a one-party to a multi-party system brought about new problems at the local level, both in terms of urban management and in terms of democracy. Further, in studies of housing rights I had seen existing gender inequalities reproduced and new ones added, and I had seen how the threat of AIDS and early death increasingly became part of everyday life. The future did not seem bright. The question these studies raised was: What do youth in this situation see as gender inequalities? To what degree do they challenge inequalities, and to what degree do they accept them but adapt them to new urban conditions? In other words, are inequalities recycled?

Deteriorating living conditions

All over Africa there are cities with collapsing urban services, environmental degradation and poor and overcrowded housing conditions. Lack of urban services, such as fresh water and energy provision, places a heavy burden on all inhabitants and especially on the girls and women who take on the responsibility for their families by providing all the extra unpaid work needed.

Zambia has, like the global average, nearly half of its population in cities. After a decade of economic deterioration and a structural adjustment policy, the World Bank (1994) classifies forty percent of the urban population as poor. According to the Central Statistical Office twenty-seven per cent live in
extreme poverty which is defined by insufficient basic food intake. The situation in Lusaka is somewhat better but, still, the extreme poor count to about 165,000, and it is likely that many of them live in George compound (CSO, 1997a).

The inhabitants of George compound are not the only ones to experience deteriorating living conditions. It has not always been like this. The squatters, who settled in George compound after national independence in 1964, faced hardships, but believed in steady improvements. Their country was decolonised, the economy made progress and soon every child was in school. They had plans for their children and themselves.

Situated close to the area for heavy industry, George compound grew rapidly. Many young men who got jobs in the industries and wanted to bring their wives to town found it was a good place to settle. Young working class families filled the area. People lived in simple mud houses, but had optimistic views of a better future. Gradually they improved their houses and, in the seventies, their settlement was legalised and upgraded with the provision of roads and water.

In the early nineties, the future was less bright. George compound was a dense and deteriorating neighbourhood with, according to the 1990 census, a poor population of about 40,000 in the old parts and about double, if the adjacent areas are included. Fewer children than ever before in the compound’s existence were attending school (CSO, 1984, 1994). Although there were more than 5,000 teenagers only in the old parts, there was no secondary school in George compound. Less than half of the boys and less than a third of the girls were attending school. There were unemployment and health problems due to environmental degradation, under-nourishment and HIV. A large number of young men and women were on the threshold of adult life, but lacked the optimism of their parents. This is a study of their living conditions and of how they handle the situation.

Democratisation and community organisation

In international debates, the strategies favoured in order to cope with economic deterioration in urban neighbourhoods emphasise self-organisation, a strengthened civil society and involvement of non-governmental organisations.

Many countries in Africa have seen a process of democratisation, or at least a transformation from a one-party to a multi-party system. What this transformation has meant at a local level has not received much attention, although it is precisely at this level where the experiences of the youth are formed and it is they who have to develop and support the democracy in the future if it is going to survive.
Zambia was praised for its peaceful transition from a one-party to a multiparty system followed by general elections in October 1991. The Zambians exercised their democratic right to change their national government. The concern of this study is about the impact of changes at a local level. Under one-party systems, local communities are organised in the name of one party only. This was the case for a twenty year period in George compound. In previous studies I have found that the first years of transition were filled with confusion and disorientation. This study follows what happened during the first five years of multipartyism, specifically with regard to gender and generation.

Gender inequality

My concern with gender inequality in George compound is grounded in experiences gained during previous studies about women and housing (Schlyter, 1988 & 1993). I met desperate widows and divorcees who had been thrown out from their homes. It was not unusual for them to articulate their situation in terms of injustices done to women, while some cursed men and male power.

In an analysis of legal practices and informal solutions to conflicts over houses as property, deep gender inequalities were revealed. I made an effort to identify a dominating “gender contract”, which was defined as an unwritten social agreement regulating what was to be regarded as female or male and what is the right thing for women/men to do. While I found the breadwinner–homemaker contract dominant at an ideological level, I also found great uncertainty and an ongoing struggle over the most central paragraph in such a fictive contract. There was a clear division between men’s and women’s views:

– married women regarded themselves as persons of legal majority, while men wanted to see them as dependants and in male custody;
– women claimed joint ownership of matrimonial property while men saw themselves as the sole owners;
– women wanted joint control and pooled incomes, while men claimed sole control over their own income and often also over their wife’s income.

These were poor women and men of the first urban generation. They had been raised in rural settings. The gender difference in the views shows that with the urban experience, women as well as men reassess their views. But they do it in different ways. There is a women’s movement in Zambia pushing for women’s rights and educated women are engaged in the political discourse on gender. However, gender negotiations are not the preserve of the educated elite. I want to emphasise that gender negotiations are also going on among poor people.
This study intends to identify the views of youth regarding women’s rights and gender equality, but also their more general attitudes regarding how women and men should live together, about respect, parents and family. The youth are involved in negotiations about power in the intersection of age and gender. Gender inequalities have to do with power relations between men and women which are deeply rooted in gender identity, in body and sexuality. Research on how young people confirm or contest unequal gender relations has to look at how they view their own gender identity and sexuality.

No observer of the development of Zambia can avoid noting the impact of AIDS without being concerned. The threat of the HIV virus was a reality for every young person in George compound. They had witnessed deaths in their families and feared for their own lives. In 1994, every third woman in antenatal clinic care in Lusaka was HIV positive (Webb, 1997). Only two years earlier the figure had been considerably lower, still, fifteen per cent of pregnant teenagers were HIV positive (ZARD, 1994, Table 12). According to ZARD (1994, Table 13) the prevalence of the HIV virus was more than six times as common among girls as among boys in the age group fifteen to nineteen. In this study, sexuality was discussed with the youth primarily to gain an understanding of how gender relations are formed, and also to trace the impact of sexual education and AIDS propaganda.

Theoretical approaches and concepts

The concerns raised by my previous studies in George compound outline an area of research which includes issues related to housing and neighbourhood degradation, democracy, household and sexuality. Before more specific research questions are formulated and the research design is outlined, some theoretical approaches and concepts have to be considered.

My theoretical point of departure in developing a conceptual framework for this study of youth has been in gender studies and theories of a gender system (Hirdman, 1991). Women and men act within the gender system at the same time as they recreate or change the system. Contemporary theoretical development within several disciplines recognises an interdependence between human agency and structure. One inspiring example is Giddens (1984), who, in analysing social practices, pointed out the duality of structure. The youth in George compound are constrained by their social and physical environment, while at the same time they produce a social life in this specific context.
The gender system and the research design

Gender is the most basic social organising principle of a society and its members tend to accept gender divisions and hierarchies as natural and just. But they are not natural, they are created in social processes of negotiation between the sexes. In periods of rapid urbanisation, gender relations are bound to change due to new conditions for work and living. With rapid change it is easier to see that power hierarchies are not natural. Women and men in Africa are busily negotiating new gender relations. They may recreate old inequalities, and they may add new ones.

Gendered power structures are continuously maintained, or deconstructed and reconstructed by men and women at all levels of society. The design of this study was inspired by Hirdman (1991), who discusses gender negotiations at interpersonal, institutional and ideological/cultural levels. This study concentrates on views and perceptions held by youth. It can therefore be characterised as an analysis at an ideological/cultural level. At the institutional level I have, in line with my concerns, chosen to focus on politics and urban management. The study of households, family responsibilities and sexuality involve both institutional and personal levels.

There is a dynamic in the system as changes at one level can have an impact at other levels. This dynamic is described by Hirdman as a historical process. She identified two principles of logic according to which the gender system works: one of separation between male and female; and one of hierarchy, that is making the male the norm, hence subordinating the female. This theory has been challenged in the subsequent debate among Nordic researchers as being deterministic and not leaving enough space for women’s own actions in the process.1 I prefer to regard the logic as being based on empirical findings which have to be reassessed.

The findings presented by Milimo (1993), who has studied both urban and rural areas, indicate that the same principles are at work in the Zambian context: “The strict adherence to the traditional division of labour according to gender is what comes out most clearly” (p. 40). In the public sphere Milimo finds that most tasks are classified as male or female, while in the home there is no labour identified as male. Still the man is the “head of the household” and generally the view was held that “man is superior, woman inferior”.

While the theory of a gender system has been helpful in designing and conducting this study, it does not really help in finding explanations as to why young women and men reconstruct an unequal gender system. Hird-

1. In the Swedish journal of women studies, “Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift”, this debate has gone on for several years. See, for example, the December 1998 issue.
man, who is a historian, proposed the use of contract theories as a tool for analysis and understanding. A gender contract is defined as a social contract prescribing how women and men shall relate to each other in society. Any deviation from this invisible contract has to be negotiated. Negotiations are ongoing in action or in talking at all levels of society from the parliament to the bedroom, they may be verbal or take the form of actions. Negotiation is usually a peaceful process, but violence can be used as an ultimate resort.

In my previous study, which focused on women and their homes in terms of property rights, I made an effort to find a dominating gender contract and found that the ideal of a male breadwinner and a female homemaker was strong in George compound. On the basis of this fictive contract and on their different experiences, women and men negotiated their individual positions. Looking back, I think that my findings might have been more easily understood if presented in other terms. The concept of contract created some confusion, as sometimes it was interpreted in a less abstract way than intended, and led to discussions focusing on legally regulated contracts, such as the marriage contract only. What I really found fruitful was the notion of change coming about through negotiations.

This study takes its starting-point in the theories of gender as a social construction, although it includes an awareness of the fact that a human being is never only a social construct, but also a body. There is no way, this side of sanity, that a woman or a man can escape her or his physical body, and gender identities are closely tied to bodies. On the other hand, research has shown that issues that we tend to define as biological, for example, health and illness, are largely social constructions. In my opinion, the distinction between gender and sex is useful for theoretical purposes and also for the political implications, i.e. gender relations are basically power relations that can be changed by social and individual action.

Youth as problems or creative actors?

The definition of youth used by most UN agencies and also in official Zambian documents is that of persons between fifteen and twenty-five years of age. In this study the focus is on persons between fifteen and twenty born in George compound. It can be questioned whether youth is a social category with more in common than age as youth from different social groupings may not have much in common. Although the study is conducted within one poor urban residential area, some social differentiation can be expected. Identification and characterisation of such differences are important steps in the research work.

Youth is not just an age category but an intermediate period between childhood and adulthood, a period of life which has different meaning in
different cultures and historical epochs. It can be said that in Africa, for girls, youth as a period lasting several years is a rather new phenomena. In the pre-urban society, childhood was turned into adulthood in a few steps. Shortly after girls had their first menstrual period they were initiated through a series of rites, they got married, and they gained respect as adults by becoming mothers. Today in George compound, many young girls become mothers, whether they are married or not. A study of youth cannot avoid dealing with parenthood and family formation.

Unlike their parents or grandparents, who were the first generation in town, this generation has to make a living in a situation of unemployment. The boys' step into adulthood can no longer be manifested by taking up wage employment. The period of youth can be rather long and undefined. The young women and men have to find a way to survive, a way of being accepted in households and by society.

Development planners are faced with a population increase and lack of resources. Failing to provide schools and health facilities for all, the youth tend to be depicted as a problem (Osiei-Hwedi, 1985; Suuya, 1993; Kaemba, 1994). It cannot be denied that the population increase and the number of youths do pose development planning problems. According to the 1990 census, fifty-seven per cent of the population in George compound are less than twenty years old (CSO, 1994). Nor can it be denied that criminality, vandalism, and prostitution are serious problems among the youth. The papers in the volume edited by Osiei-Hwedi (1989) have clearly shown this to be the case. However, if all research focuses on special problem groups of youths, there is a risk that the concept of youth as a problem becomes a stereotype.

As research on youth developed in the West, the view of youth as a problem was initially dominant. Focus was on special groups, for example gangs of boys, and they have been studied in terms of sub-cultures. In this study, no such specific group is studied, but the intention is to look at the everyday life conditions of, so to say, ordinary young people in a poor housing area.

Lieberg (1992) has done a study on how youth in a Swedish peri-urban area make use of their neighbourhood. With reference to Ziehe (1989), he notes that in modern society old traditions erode and there are no self-evident ways for how to behave in everyday life. The youth are more free than before to make choices, a freedom which creates possibilities but also uncertainty and cultural homelessness. The dreams and fantasies of the youth are colonised by images produced in the mass media. The youth look for experiences and action, in order to avoid the dullness of everyday life and to fill the gap created by cultural homelessness. The youth are not simply victims of the
media and commercial forces, but create their own identity and their own understanding of the world and of gender relations.

 Obviously, there are great differences between the life of Western youth living in a society where modernisation has meant welfare and a consumptionist lifestyle, and the life of the youth in George compound where the promises of modernisation have failed. Culture is rapidly changing in the African urban setting, but cultural homelessness is a provoking concept which, in the African context, may lead to a way of thinking about culture as denoting “traditional”, something one leaves at home, in the village. This would hardly be a fruitful point of departure for studies. What inspired me in the thinking of Ziehe and in the Lieberg study was instead their approach. They regard youth not just as recipients of educational efforts or media messages, but as creators of their own identity and consciousness which they form in dialogue with their environment, a peri-urban neighbourhood. This study will scrutinise the everyday life, the ideas and dreams of the youth as part of an urban culture in the making, full of variety and contradictions, but still providing a cultural home.

Urban development and identities

This study may, especially if viewed as being one in a number of longitudinal studies, be characterised as an urban community study. However, I hesitate to call George compound a community; it is far too large and heterogeneous. The use of the concept of community may lead to a belief that the feeling of unity and the social ties between people living in the same neighbourhood are stronger than they really are. Therefore, I use the local expression, a compound, or the more official, a peri-urban area.

Place and time are crucial in the contextualisation of how gender relations are created and my previous longitudinal studies of George compound provide data for this. In the sixties, my studies in George compound took their starting point in the physical structure; I analysed the use of space as an aspect of everyday life, community organisation, and state intervention in the form of upgrading and legalisation. Theories about urban development in terms of squatter consolidation and slum improvement and commoditisation have been used and are again incorporated within this study.

There is a long tradition of urban studies in Zambia. Many studies with a focus on the physical environment have been conducted in the context of applied research and of planning for interventions. Life and physical conditions in urban areas are described without much theorising. In other urban theories, the spatial and physical realities are reduced to background factors, so for example, in the theories on social networks which originally developed in urban anthropological studies at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in
The concept of networks has since been revitalised and adopted into many disciplines and is now integrated in the dominating way of looking at everyday life.

An overview of recent urban studies in Africa shows few grand theories, but more pragmatic assumptions (Stren, 1994). Several ongoing studies focus on governance and informality, the role of the civil society and on non-governmental organisations.¹ There is a risk that a concentration of research on organisational life excludes all the unorganised women and men. While social change most often comes about through organised action, when it comes to change in gender relations, these often take place through negotiation in what is defined as the private sphere.

In the poor urban environment of George compound, young women and men create their identities and their relations between each other and the adult world. This is in line with Giddens’ (1990) understanding of self-identity as a reflexive project in which each individual creates her or his identity amid the options provided in the environment. In African studies on youth, ethnic and political identities have been problematised in relation to crisis and violence.² The inhabitants of George compound add their urban identity to their ethnic identity, but the new identity is partly also formulated in opposition to the meanings prescribed to ethnic identities. According to the findings of my previous studies, people made efforts to build an urban identity that fitted in with their conditions of living. This study will look into the multiple identities of the youth, at the intersection of gender, urban, ethnic, political and class identities.

In a Southern African context, the GRUPHEL studies (Sithole-Fundire et al., 1995; Larsson, Mapetla & Schlyter, 1998) have provided empirical evidence on the complexity of how gender relations are negotiated and re-negotiated in the urban situation. Hierarchies are challenged due to new situations in public life, as well as within the household and in personal relations.

One of the few studies on gender and urban culture, which integrates physical urban conditions, has been presented by Thorbek (1994), who compares the situation in Bangkok and Colombo. She examines how urbanisation influences women’s lives and outlines the cultural characteristics of slum life. She emphasises the significance of gender in shaping slum culture.

¹. Associational life in African cities was, for example, the theme of a research conference organised by the Nordic Africa Institute and the Christian Michelsen Institute in Bergen in August 1998.
². In January 1998 a seminar on the theme “Youth and Urban Popular Identities during the Era of Economic Crisis, Structural Adjustment and Political Transition” was organised in Gaborone by Adebayo Olukoshi of the Nordic Africa Institute. Several papers identified (male) urban youth as actors in political unrest and targets for political manipulation.
This study, like Thorbek’s, examines a variety of the impacts which urban and political development have on people’s living conditions, but the focus here is on youth instead of on women. Furthermore, like Thorbek, I look at impacts in both directions. Gender relations as they are formed by the youth affect the outcome of structural changes in society, such as urban and political development. Urban development is an outcome of a social practice in which gender relations are crucial.

Outline of the report

The main research questions posed in this study of youth in George compound focus on how youth reconstruct or challenge gender inequalities. The concerns about democracy and urban management, deteriorating living conditions and family belonging, sexual education and AIDS generate additional research issues which will be elaborated and specified in the following chapters.

The research design of the study is coherent with the theoretical framework of gender constructed and reconstructed at all levels of society. Information was collected with three levels of analysis in mind: the level of interpersonal relations, the level of institutions and that of cultural images and ideologies. The level of interpersonal relations corresponds to the theme of sexuality, friends and family relations.

The institutional level corresponds to the themes of politics and household arrangements. All is seen through the eyes of the youth and, therefore, the analysis deals with their cultural interpretation of the reality. The methodology is outlined in Chapter Two, which also presents the young women and men who provide the case histories which are central to the analysis and illustrate the findings.

The findings are presented in the six subsequent chapters. Discussion of the existing literature in each field and the theoretical issues is integrated in the presentation of the findings. Chapter Three uses housing histories and essays to outline urban living conditions. It describes how the environmental degradation of the urban neighbourhood is experienced by the youth and it finds gender differences in preferences for improvements. It discusses how the uneven maintenance of the houses and over-crowding affect the living conditions of young women and men, of tenants and owners. Changes in use of spatial arrangements for everyday life are analysed as part of an emerging culture of urban living.

The political organisation in George compound during the one-party system is outlined in Chapter Four. The process of change towards multi-party democracy is put in a national context. The teenagers were not actors in this process other than in a very limited sense, but they are all deeply affected by
the changes and they form their own views of the meaning of democracy. The analysis reveals various views among the youth. They also have diversified views on how the compound should be managed and what the proper roles of women and men in politics ought to be. The limitations of community-based development strategies are highlighted by weak community organisations and a lack of youth participation.

For the youth, the neighbourhood is the place where they make friends and learn about society outside their families. Chapter Five outlines the social life in the neighbourhood, how youths make friends across ethnic lines and how they experience class differences. Gender and class divided the youth in their everyday activities, while differences due to ethnicity were easily bridged. Witchcraft and theft were identified by the youth as sources of conflict. The youth acknowledge no other home than George compound, they have a strong urban identity. In their daily lives they are co-creators of an urban culture of everyday life.

In previous studies I have shown that households are not static entities, but are manipulated in size and composition as part of survival strategies. The crisis of the nineties has affected household composition and the position of the youth in the household. In Chapter Six, contradictory tendencies regarding the extended family and family obligations are identified. The youth foster an ideal of a nuclear family living away from parents and relatives. Some young men had painfully experienced that they could not draw benefits from what they saw as traditional family obligations. Family resources are too exhausted. Increasingly, networks of support are built on individual trust and friendship. The chapter further describes how domestic work is gendered and made invisible. Unemployed young women and men are all said to be “just sitting”, although the women spend most of the day doing domestic work.

Parental power and authority, specifically when it comes to the choice of marriage partner, are explored in Chapter Seven. How gender relations within the families will develop is dependent on how the youth view spousal relations. The hierarchy is defined by the meaning attached to the concept of head of household. Mutual respect between spouses is requested, but means different things to the husband and the wife. Views on faithfulness, women’s work outside the home and domestic violence are changing, although violence often is seen as being provoked by women who demand equality. Educated girls with ideas of a more equal relationship regarded the strategy of never marrying as a viable option.

The schools in George compound have been poor in giving sex education. For the girls traditional ceremonies are performed, albeit changed in timing, form and content. The assessment of these ceremonies differs; while many young girls are proud and defend this remaining women’s space, others condemn it as indoctrination for subordination. The official message of abstention
creates a gap between official moral and reality among the youth. Chapter Eight outlines young people’s views on sexual activity, contraceptives, pregnancies, barrenness and abortions, and it discusses how they handle conflicts between gender identities, desire and the threat posed by AIDS.

Chapter Nine returns to the central question of this research: How do young women and men in George compound recreate or challenge unequal gender relations? Often contradictory gender relations have been identified and so have ideas that pose a challenge to them. Gender issues cut across this study and information on gender has been given in all chapters. In the short concluding chapter an effort is made to summarise and interpret this information in terms of gender negotiations and the dynamics of gender relations.
2. Methodology and presentation of informants

The study has been designed with reference to the theory of a gender system which may be analysed at the level of cultural images, at the institutional level or the level of interpersonal relations. The qualitative analyses of interviews will inevitably deal with cultural images. The youth are asked to give their views about the institutions of state, community and family. The analysis will deal with community politics and democratisation, and with gender power relations within the households. Analyses of interpersonal relations will deal both with relations within families and with sexuality.

With the intention of describing the situation of the youth from their own perspective and to allow for, to me, unexpected views to be uncovered, a qualitative and interpretative method has been elaborated. The youth in George compound are the “knowers”, who provide answers to the research questions on how they experienced the process called democratisation, how they arrange their everyday life in the given living conditions, and how they challenged, accepted or defended gender inequalities. The main sources for analysis are the voices of the youth as they come forward in interviews and essays. The method of constructing case histories is central to the qualitative analysis.

The choice to study one urban neighbourhood in depth is an acknowledgement of the significance of place. The neighbourhood is seen as in itself having physically and socially manifested structures of power and patterns of everyday life to which the youth respond. In a series of earlier studies I have followed the development of George compound from a variety of aspects (Lundgren et al., 1969, Schlyter & Schlyter, 1980, Schlyter, 1991). The choice of this neighbourhood has therefore methodological advantages for me, not just in facilitating fieldwork, but in providing historical information at the levels of both neighbourhood and family.

Fieldwork and sources of information

Fieldwork for this study of youth was carried out in December 1994 and December 1995. I also use material from fieldwork carried out in December 1993, although at that time, the focus was on women (of all ages) and changes in the political system (Schlyter, 1995, 1998 c). The longitudinal study I started in 1968 included a detailed investigation of sixty houses. At the time of the present study, about forty houses remain, and about half of them are inhab-
ited by the same families for many years. In 1995 I made an investigation of twenty-seven of these houses, with help of maps and photographs extensions and improvements of the houses were documented. Information on the number of inhabitants and the relationship between them were collected, if possible from members of both owners’ and tenants’ households.

By sticking to the area of my original selection of houses, this study is concentrated to the old core of George compound, which has grown extensively since then. The 1980 and 1990 censuses have provided quantitative data on the old core of the compound. Special sheets on the level of enumeration areas were, at my request, produced by the Central Statistical Office (CSO, 1984, 1994).

In 1995, the Zambian Association for Research and Development, ZARD, invited the public to contribute essays on various themes and pupils and students were especially invited for some themes (ZARD, 1996). I was privileged to be allowed to read the essays written on the themes of youth unemployment, equal opportunities in education and violence in the family. These essays can be seen as reflecting views of an educated and articulate part of the Zambian population. Excerpts from thirty essays written by (mainly male) authors in the age group fifteen to twenty years were analysed in order to identify themes and questions for interviews in George compound and also to support the identification of patterns of thinking among youth. Quotations from the essays are also used to illustrate such patterns.

These essays gave me the idea of using essay-writing as a method of getting information directly from the youth in George compound. As there are no secondary schools in George compound, the schools in the neighbouring areas were approached. A Zambian colleague negotiated with teachers and was allowed into the classroom to invite pupils from George compound to write essays on the themes “Living conditions in George compound”, “Parents and teenagers”, and “Youth, love and sexuality”. The essays varied greatly in quality and richness of content. Only one boy wrote about love and sexuality, no one wrote about parents and teenagers. Eleven essays on the theme of living conditions were selected for analysis. Four of the writers were girls. In addition to these essays, two of the girls I interviewed also submitted written essays directly to me.

Individual and group interviews

In 1968 I met mostly young families in George compound, couples with on average two or three children. The women were usually close to my own age, i.e. born in the forties. In George compound today, my own generation is seen as very old and many of my informants have passed away. In this study I looked for informants among their children, grandchildren, nieces or other
young relatives living in the same houses. Thirteen houses of my original sample in the longitudinal study were included in this study, and the young members of the families I knew from previous visits were interviewed alone or in groups of two or three.

These informants knew me as the researcher who keeps coming back, who writes books and who never gives anything but photographs. In order to see whether my acquaintance with their parents affected the interviews, I conducted eight longer interviews with girls and boys who were completely unknown to me. I found no significant difference in interview answers and openness. The difference was in their initial response to my request for an interview. Where I was unknown, I had to explain at length the purpose of the study and it was not unusual that they asked for money for an interview. Although I never paid anything, almost all were kind or curious enough to participate in the interview.

I also tested the benefits of having young or elderly, male or female interpreters, and it seemed as if differences according to age were more important than those according to gender. Young interpreters were more often met by jokes and less sincere answers. A nurse aide of my own age at the local clinic became my main interpreter. The interviews were open but structured. I asked the young women and men to tell me about their life experiences. I used a checklist in order to cover issues related to the three themes: democracy and neighbourhood, house and household, and finally, interpersonal relations and sexuality. In all three themes I made sure that the gender aspect was present. A limited number of specific questions were put to all, but most of the interviews were in the form of dialogues. I made efforts to create space for the informants to follow their own line of thinking and thereby provide, for me, sometimes unexpected and new perspectives. I wrote down, as closely as possible, their histories as they were interpreted for me.

The interviews were conducted at a slow pace and I took notes during interpretation. After each day I typed out the interviews and did preliminary analyses which, after consultations with the research assistant, were allowed to inform the interviews of the next day. I prepared new questions in order to fill gaps and clarify contradictions in the history recorded from previous interviews. This way lack of clarity in previous statements could be eliminated, and complex issues discussed and viewed from several angles. Each interview occasion lasted between half an hour and two hours. Some persons were interviewed up to three times, with an interval of a year or a week.

It can be said that during the interviews the case histories were constructed in dialogue between the young persons and me. It is unavoidable that their understanding of who I am and their expectations of me affected what they chose to tell me; what they wanted me to understand. If not everything that they told me was true, their histories still reveal something
about their way of thinking. It is also unavoidable in the dialogue that my spontaneous interpretation of what they tell me leads on to the next question. The constructed narratives therefore reflect at least two minds, mine and the young person’s, possibly they are also coloured by the interpreter.

Three lengthy interviews were conducted in uni-sex groups of about five persons. Two of the groups were male and one was female. Group interviews and individual interviews provided different types of information. In the group interviews, ideals and myths were aired, while in the individual interviews, personal feelings were more often revealed.

I chatted with an uncountable number of young people while I was in the area. These easy talks often gave me ideas which I tested and recorded in the interviews. I had not decided on the number of interviews in advance. I stopped doing interviews when about forty young persons had been interviewed, individually or in groups. At that point I found that answers tended to be repeated, that new ideas were rare and that no new patterns of thinking emerged. In addition I interviewed some parents, some professionals in the area such as school teachers, clinic staff, NGO staff, shop-owners, and also a few politicians. Outside George compound, interviews were carried out with city council staff and one of the councillors of the area.

A qualitative analysis

The texts provided by essays and interviews have been analysed first to reveal unexpected themes or ways of conceptualisation, to identify issues which are subjected to gender negotiations of the kind that are assumed in the theoretical model of a gender contract, and in a second stage to identify individuals or groups with typical or extreme ways of thinking.

Using a qualitative method of analysis I have read all the essays and interviews many times. They were coded, which means that they were subjected to a dense reading during which various issues and patterns of thinking were identified and labelled. Concepts used by the young people themselves were identified (in translation). I have not striven to find an average view, but I have identified extreme and unusual views as well as the common ones. The intention is to give an account of the variety of views and experiences among the youth.

During this first stage of the analysis, views on gender relations were identified. I grouped the views and tried to distinguish between different patterns of thinking. This was repeated in separate concrete analyses of the other main themes: democracy, neighbourhood and housing, household and sexuality. Only at the second stage did I take account of the characteristics of the persons who held the various views. Already the first preliminary analysis revealed that youth in school and youth at work often held views that dif-
ferred from the views of the majority of the informants. Neither education nor work-experience had been themes for discussion. Nevertheless, these experiences proved to have a strong influence on views and ideas, and the ability to express the ideas. In terms of numbers, the youth at school or at work are in a minority in George compound.

Less than half of the boys and a third of the girls aged between fifteen and nineteen attended school, according to the 1990 census. One girl out of five and one boy out of eight had never been to school. Most of the young women and men interviewed had attended school for between four and seven years. Although education in Zambian schools is in English, most informants were not able to communicate in this language. The secondary school-goers were often but not always children of the more prosperous families, which according to the standards of George compound usually meant children of workers without much education, but still in formal employment.

Unemployment and poor chances of ever getting a job were part of the reality for youth in George compound. According to the 1990 census, only twenty-four per cent of the girls and thirty-eight per cent of the boys were noted as being “economically active”. Still these figures seem large compared to the situation in the households of those interviewed. There were not many breadwinners, in the sense of persons contributing a substantial part of the household economy, among the interviewed teenagers. None of them was in formal wage work.

As a third phase in the analysis, I looked specifically at some other groups of persons with shared experiences, for example girls who had gone through initiation rites or girls who married as teenagers. My assumptions, that their common experience had formed common views, were not confirmed. Other than the school-goers and bread-winners, I found no additional groups that distinguished themselves by holding distinctive sets of views in common. Among the remaining majority of the youth, there was a great variety of different views and conditions.

Case histories and modes of presentation

The qualitative analysis is conducted to identify variations and dynamics in phenomena. The method is not designed to give answers to the question of how many. Nevertheless, there are occasions when, in the presentation, I find it informative to use quantification such as a few, some, many, almost all, etc. If nothing else is stated, this reflects frequency in the analysed material, which consists of interviews with forty individuals and thirteen essays.

Twelve of the interviews were selected to represent the variety of views and experiences. The text material from these was rearranged as case histories with information in chronological or thematic order. From the remaining
interviews I selected a number of interesting quotations relating to various themes. The subsequent qualitative analysis was limited to this research material: twelve case histories, a number of quotations on various issues and three group interviews. The case histories became the main tool used in the analysis. I grew to know them more or less by heart. Thus, the experiences of these informants were always present in the analysis of essays or quantitative information.

For the readers of this book I wanted to present a couple of young men and women by name (not their real names) in order to make the presentation more personal. I found that it was impossible to limit the number of quoted individuals to a couple, as I wanted the variety of experiences and views to be presented. Any idea of constructing fictive cases representing various “types” was abandoned as undermining the trustworthiness of my analyses.

Although I am aware of burdening the reader with memorising names and distinguishing between cases, I had to select as many as six case histories involving eight people in order to include the most important differences in views. Even these six cases were not enough to cover all the views and experiences. Some views came forward more clearly in the group interviews or in the essays. Anonymous voices from group interviews or the other, not presented, case histories will complement the material and paint a nuanced picture of life in George compound.

The list of main informants on page seven is compiled to make it easier for the reader to remember the persons of the case histories when quoted in the analysis that follows. The selection of three secondary school pupils and two breadwinners who had been to but not completed secondary school, is obviously biased, given the statistics about education and employment in George compound. But it has to be remembered that they were selected because they gave voice to important views and ideas that were identified in the material, not because they represented specific groups of youth. Furthermore, the imbalance is partly compensated for by the presentation of a group interview with uneducated boys and of anonymous voices from unemployed young men.

**Presentation of main informants**

This presentation of the main informants is short and focuses on livelihood conditions and the family situation. It starts with three secondary school pupils, followed by the breadwinners, the unemployed and the married young women.
Fiona and Cecilia, sisters with ambitions

In 1995 Fiona was eighteen years old and Cecilia sixteen. They were both attending secondary school and were very ambitious. When starting secondary school Fiona was adopted into the household of a twelve year older sister, who was married and had two small children. They lived in the most prosperous house of all my informants, but they were raised in rented rooms. Cecilia lived with her divorced mother in a rented room. She was welcome to stay with her sisters, but her mother wanted her at home to help with smaller siblings.

At the time of the interview, Cecilia was visiting her sisters for a few days. She spent the night in Fiona’s room, which was furnished with two beds, two chairs and a table with a table lamp. In this house Fiona not only had a room of her own, electric lighting and nutritious food, but she also got active support in her studies and access to information and protection. In the living room there were a huge four piece group, a radio and a television, and a pile of newspapers on the table.

Fidelus, the hope of his parents

Fidelus went to secondary school and lived with his parents and four younger siblings in a proper house in Lilanda, the better-off part of George compound. However, his father had been unemployed for some time and his mother was the main breadwinner. The house itself looked a bit run down, but as yet had no serious defects. During the period of my visits the house was gradually emptied of belongings and filled with tenants. The television set was the first thing to go, having a high second-hand value. Pieces of furniture did not give much in return but were, nevertheless, sold off.

Fidelus was aware of the sacrifices his family went through in order to be able to keep him in school. He wanted to become a medical doctor to help people and to earn well, so that his own family would be prosperous again.

Monde, cook at the market

Monde was seventeen years old, was born in George and had lived in George during her entire life. Her late mother had been a second wife who lived with her two daughters in rented rooms. Her father had abandoned the family and Monde had not seen him for many years. She did not know if he was alive. Five years ago, Monde’s mother became pregnant with a man “who passed by” and a little boy came into the family.

Six months before the interview in 1995, Monde’s mother passed away. Monde stopped going to school in order to work in the restaurant she and her
sister inherited from their mother. They called it a restaurant, but it was more of a catering business. In a small room at the market she cooked simple meals for the customers, who were male artisans working at the market.

Although business was not what it used to be and the profits were low, thus far Monde and her sister had managed to keep the restaurant going and maintained themselves and their little brother. They were happy to be allowed to stay on in the room their mother had rented. The house was not far from the market and the landlord behaved correctly, he helped them and protected them.

Jonah, a “businessman”

Jonah was born in 1978, the same year as his parents and two sisters had moved to George compound from the Copperbelt. Jonah’s father, who originated from Zaire/Congo, was a carpenter and had established a home-based workshop. One of Jonah’s older sisters passed away before school age, but the family grew with the birth of another four boys. However, business was declining and his father could only work if orders were pre-paid as he could not afford to keep material in stock.

Two of Jonah’s brothers did not survive the cholera epidemic in 1992. The same year his sister married and left home, and the following year his mother passed away. She had been ill for almost a year and spent much money on consulting traditional doctors. During my 1994 visit I could see that no one took responsibility for cleaning the house. In George compound, the houses and the space outside the front door are usually swept every day, but this was not the case in Jonah’s home during this period.

At the age of sixteen, Jonah had just finished grade eight. He claimed that he was one of the best pupils in the school. Still, he was considering not returning to school. He had no interest in carpentry and had never learned the skills from his father. For a long time he had worked over the weekends as a michanga boy, that is, selling cigarettes and other goods in the streets. His earnings had covered his school fees and books, and he had bought himself new shoes and a bike.

In 1995 Jonah had left school and made good profit on the street, to which he was paying all his attention. He was proud to be a “businessman”. The earnings were not good enough, however, to keep his brothers in school. Instead, they also joined the street business. Their incomes were needed for food. It was a long time since their father had got an order for carpentry:

– We are all dependent on Jonah and on the rent paid by our tenants, was the answer to a question to Jonah’s family members on how they survived.

Jonah’s sister, twenty years old, had moved back home with her first-born, a girl of two years. When her second baby passed away and they had no food,
her husband who was originally from Malawi went back to his country in order to see if there was a possibility of making a living. A year later she had still not heard from him. In addition to the six members of the family, a young former neighbour and her baby were living-in guests since a month. The house was nice and clean, without doubt because there were now women living in it.

Mary, living with her grandmother

Mary was born in 1979. As was the tradition, her mother had gone to her parents’ house for the birth, but against tradition, she never returned to Mary’s father who had taken a second wife. At the age of six, Mary was taken to her father’s family in another compound where she went to school. She only attended school for three years, then she rejoined her grandparents’ family and her mother. Her father’s family settled on the Copperbelt.

Mary’s grandfather worked as a night watchman, a job he held until he passed away in 1989. His income had been the core funding of the large household. Others had contributed when they could. One aunt of Mary’s worked as a “live-in” maid, so she only came once a week to visit during the day and to pay for her seven children, who all grew up in the family. Most years they had difficulties in making ends meet, but Mary cannot remember ever having gone to bed hungry as a child.

During my visit in 1993, Mary’s mother had passed away and her aunts were not healthy. All the aunts and cousins were engaged in selling vegetables at the front door, but the profit was almost nil. The only regular income of the household was the wages of the aunt who was a domestic worker. None of the cousins had more than four years of schooling. They all contributed when they could, but they often went to bed hungry.

Two years later, in 1995, all the aunts had passed away and so had a baby cousin. The grandmother was still in a state of shock:

– I had five daughters. All are dead and so are the fathers of their children. Thank God, my sons are alive.

Mary had made a trip all alone to the Copperbelt hoping to be allowed to join her father’s household. After a long search she found out that her father was dead as well. So she returned to George compound to find shelter and to help her grandmother with the four younger cousins aged between nine and three. The rent paid by a tenant was their only income and it was not enough. Mary often went to bed hungry.

Mercy and Evelyne, married sisters
Mercy, fifteen, and Evelyne, eighteen years old, were two of six daughters who lived with their parents in 1994. Their father worked in the industrial area.

Mercy had only attended pre-school for one year. At the time of the interview in 1995, she had moved to her husband. A token of a bride price was paid, so she was regarded as married, although the marriage ceremony had been postponed, due to a death in the boyfriend’s family.

Evelyne had stayed some years with her blind grandmother in Chipata, where she went to school. She was only thirteen when she became pregnant. The man refused to take her on as a wife. He was sued for “damage”, but he never paid. She stayed with her baby in her parent’s house in George compound when another man “passed by” and she became pregnant again. A third man made her pregnant again and married her. Before that, she had lost two children, and she also lost her third child at the age of eight months.

Evelyne was pregnant again and was staying at her parent’s place because her husband was difficult. He drank and smoked dagga, the local name for marihuana. It was not the first time she took refuge in her parents’ house when conditions in her husband’s house became unbearable.
3. Living conditions — houses and environment

This chapter will start by presenting and discussing a number of housing histories, which serve as a continuation of the presentations of the informants. One essay, written by a boy called Elisha, is also presented. He, like the other informants, was born and lived in George compound. During the nineties, living conditions have deteriorated for all people in George compound. There may be a few families who have increased their individual wealth, but even they are nevertheless affected by the gradual degradation of their urban environment. What environmental problems do the youth in George compound identify? Do young women and men want different types of improvements?

In previous studies, I have shown that home ownership is central to house-owners’ strategies for urban living. In addition to income from rent, a house may provide space for other income-generating activities. Access and control over assets is an important aspect of gender equality (Schlyter, 1988). The few comments found in the literature on youth and housing conditions are related to home ownership and housing. Gwagwa (1998) quotes a house owning mother in a low-income area in Durban who painted the lounge with paint left over when her son had painted his room. Larsson (1990) noted in Botswana that a working son put modern furniture only in his own room within the home of his parents. He even locked the door for the periods he worked away, usually in South Africa. Few young sons or daughters in George compound had a room of their own. To what degree do young women and men participate in household strategies on shelter? In what way are young members of house-owners’ households involved in housing improvements?

My previous studies in George compound as well as in Harare have made me aware of significant differences between house-owners’ and tenants’ living conditions. If not so much in size and quality of space as in the way they were allowed to use it. Children of tenants were restricted from playing and making noise (Schlyter, 1989). Datta (1996) studied women headed households in Gaborone and found that the majority of tenants only occupied one room and that in general the relations between landlords and tenants were amicable, but particularly where owners were not richer than tenants, there was the strain of sharing limited space and resources.

Elderly people, teachers, nurses, and other professionals working in George compound often referred to overcrowding as a root of all kinds of
problems. Ogden (1996) finds the same in a Kampala neighbourhood. Did the youth share this explanation? How did the young women and men see their future neighbourhood and housing situation? What were their ideal living arrangements?

Housing histories

Some parents or grandparents of the respondents were among the original settlers in George compound. In the sixties they built their own houses of mud bricks, most often because no other option was open for them. In the planned housing areas, the houses were tied to employment, but many of the construction workers and unskilled labourers in the expanding industries were not offered a house by their employers. There were also those who preferred a mud house of their own in George compound to a rented room or even a council house, as no rent was charged. Further, they were free to extend the house with the growth of the family, or gain an income by letting rooms to tenants. The youth of the nineties did not have the same options as their parents or grandparents. Land was controlled and there was no free land on which to build a house in George compound or anywhere else in Lusaka.

With the legalisation of George compound in the seventies, house owners received an occupancy licence. With security of tenure, a period of intense building activities started. During the second half of the eighties most house owners were in the process of turning their houses into concrete houses. Some managed to make a few small improvements every year, but others saw their structures dilapidate before completion. In 1980, slightly more than half of all houses were in concrete. In 1990, eighty per cent of the mud brick houses had been rebuilt. The younger generation confirmed that they had been raised in homes which were building sites at the same time. With the slow progress, they had lived large parts of their life in unfinished structures.

The informants were asked to tell me about their housing and household history. By this I meant the household composition and the housing situation as far back as they could remember. Jonah, Mary and Mercy’s and Evelyne’s parents lived in houses which I had studied since 1968 and which were included in the investigation of twenty-seven houses.

The house of Jonah’s father

Jonah’s parents bought a mud house in 1977, the year he was born. Bit by bit it was replaced by a three-roomed concrete house. In 1991 another two rooms were added to the house. One room was for Jonah and one of his brothers. They moved in although it was not finished. The window hole was blocked up and the walls were not plastered. The other room was intended to be a store for the workshop. The work was usually carried on outside. However,
business was declining and Jonah’s father could only work on pre-paid orders and could not afford to keep material in stock, so the room was let to tenants.

Already in 1993 I found that Jonah and his brother had moved back into the original part of the house. One more room to let to tenants helped the household economy. In 1995, they were six persons living in three rooms. Temporarily, they were eight as their former neighbour had been staying for more than a month with her baby. In addition, there was a tenant family of five persons in the two-roomed extension.

The house was in decay, and so was the whole area where the house was situated. A neighbouring grocery had expanded into a huge walled “beergarden”. The inhabitants of Jonah’s father’s house were severely disturbed by the noise and the smell from the latrines. Worse, during the rainy periods the area was at risk of flooding. Furthermore, it was a long way to the new standpipes and the family continued to buy water at the beer-garden which had a bore-hole of its own.

The house of Mary’s grandmother

Mary’s grandparents had built a mud brick house in George in 1967. It was a well-built three roomed house with a veranda and a kitchen. Mary’s mother was one of ten living children, and for periods the household was expanded by relatives looking for jobs and by children of relatives living elsewhere. The house was extended to six rooms. Since the early eighties, two or three rooms were let to paying tenants.

During the upgrading of George, the family was ordered to demolish two of the rooms in order to make space for their neighbours to improve their house. In compensation, they were granted space on the other side of the house and, with support from the upgrading project, they built a concrete structure of two rooms. These rooms were let to tenants, as the rent was higher for rooms with concrete walls. The grandparent’s house was rebuilt in a way that was characteristic of the denser parts of George compound. The family’s savings were put into concrete blocks, that were gradually laid together to form a wall around the old houses. In 1988 this part of the building was completed and the old mud houses were taken down and carried out through the door. Since then nothing has been done to the house. During some periods as many as twenty-two persons belonged to the household.

During my visit in 1993, the house was inhabited by three tenant families, by Mary, her grandmother, three aunts, and eight cousins. The uncles had all moved out, but it was the eldest uncle who had inherited the house. He came every month and collected the rent from the tenants. Only occasionally did he
leave a little of the rent income for the household of his mother, but Mary was understanding because he had his own family to support.

The uncle did not maintain the house and when one of the doors to the tenants’ rooms was kicked to pieces by a drunk visitor, it was not replaced. He could not get much rent as the room could not be properly locked up. After that, the room was used as a sleeping room by sons of the tenants. They covered the door opening with iron sheets and plastic. They did not pay rent, but sometimes they helped Mary’s grandmother.

In 1995 the household was reduced to Mary, her grandmother and four cousins. They lived in two of the rooms, while all the others were let to tenants. Altogether they were fifteen persons in the house. The grandmother kept the rent from one of the tenants, the rest was collected by the uncle.

Although situated in an area of extremely high density, Mary’s grandmother had been successful in protecting an outdoor space of about fifteen square metres for private use.

The house of Mercy’s and Evelyne’s parents

The parents of Mercy and Evelyne first rented three small rooms in the house which they bought in the early eighties after the death of the former owner. They continued to occupy the same rooms and gained an income from the new tenants. Since four of the six daughters had married and moved out, overcrowding was not too bad. The living room, where six sisters used to sleep was now a permanent bedroom for the two youngest sisters only. It was nice and neat. A granddaughter was adopted so the family amounted to five members, Evelyne was not included as she was considered a guest, albeit frequent.

The first real improvement to the house to be made since its purchase was the instalment of electricity, which was just about to be completed at the time of the interview in 1995. A new standpipe just outside the house replaced the old one which had been broken down for years and also added to the use value of the house.

Living conditions of Fiona and Cecilia

Fiona, and Cecilia temporarily, lived in the best built and equipped house of all my informants. It was a seven-roomed house recently enclosed within a security wall. An older sister of Fiona had been renting the house for five years, after the owner’s family had moved out. Fiona did not know where the owners lived, but she knew that her sister paid rent of K50,000 (US $50) a month. Six persons were living in the house, including the young nanny who had a bed in the children’s room.
Cecilia stayed overnight in Fiona’s room which was furnished with two beds, two chairs and a table with a table lamp for them to sit and study. The living-room was nice and well-furnished. This was a house for indoor living. The space in front of the house inside the security wall was occupied by a car wreck. The backyard was small and the latrines were very close to the house.

Cecilia lived with her mother in a rented room in a ramshackle mud house in another part of George compound. Fiona and Cecilia did not have much to say about growing up in a rented room:

– It is a noisy place with a bar just across the street. Mother complains that she cannot sleep, I usually do, in spite of noise. The landlord is OK, but very strict with payment on the due date.

– The room was nicer seven years ago when we first came. But the landlord has not kept it up. It is raining in and the door is almost eaten by termites.

Elisha’s essay

This slightly edited version of an essay written in English by a boy in secondary school, Elisha, starts positively by describing his own life in George compound as happy and pleasant. However, it continues with an account of the environmental problems:

I was born in George compound and I have lived all my life in this compound. I began my education at a Welfare Hall near Chiando market. All I can remember about it is playing with my friends with no knowledge of where I was going educationally. In 1988 I found myself enrolled in primary school. At this tender age, I had no understanding of my environment.

At school my teacher introduced me to many subjects, of which English and mathematics were my best. Outside class, I learned how to play football. It became the game I enjoyed whenever I was free, especially during weekends.

During my time in primary school, George compound began taking a different shape. People built block houses. My father’s old house of mud and wattle was pulled down. In its place my father struggled to build a house of concrete blocks though the plot was small. It had more rooms for the family and father’s extended family.

The most difficult part I found in my life in George compound was when it came to bathing and using the toilet. There was one room, used both as a bath and toilet. To make it worse, the building was made of pieces of iron-sheets, with holes and wire here and there, and it was used by more than twenty people.
When it rained the whole of George compound, especially the area surrounding the house became waterlogged. The toilet filled up and released waste which made small streams which children played in. George was the first compound to be hit by cholera. Because of having no good pit latrines, diseases are created by the people living in George compound.

It was a life one could not enjoy living through, but it was my life in my father’s house, which leaked badly. My destiny at that time was linked to George compound and since I was in school I could never leave George compound.

In my later life I had a better understanding of my surroundings in George compound. I used to wake up early to look at people. They were always hurrying. The workers in the industrial areas, the marketeer’s dressed in bright cloths, school pupils in groups. The youngsters loitering around corners, hoping to be hired for piece-work.

The other thing about George compound was the toilet stench, the smell of cooking, the smell of fermenting kachasu and the smell of drunkards at the beer halls and their vomit. The foul air was all over George compound, everybody breathed in the foul air without complaints. Why?

The area is hard to live in, in the sense that water is scarce. One has to go to a distant place to fetch it. Life in this compound is not very simple to live, as compared to some sophisticated areas.

Houses are built almost everywhere, roads inclusive, some of which are incomplete to date. It is a high density area. People throw their rubbish anywhere, saying the Government has the duty to remove it.

People in George employ themselves in the four markets. However, this is not enough. Some young men and women are unemployed. With the persisting retrenchments and liquidation of companies, there are too few working places in our country.

Elisha concludes his essay with an appreciation of the new boreholes which provide clean water. He wishes to improve his life greatly in the near future. He has an optimistic view on the improvements done during 1995. Although he notes that life in “sophisticated areas” is easier, he is not, like many other essay writers, planning to move out from George compound.

A deteriorating neighbourhood

The youth had views on their environment although they were not always well-articulated. They had all experienced the deterioration within George compound, and they all wanted improvements. One essay writer expressed a
dream: “I would like to see a beautiful George compound with proper streets and street lights. I would like to see houses built in lines and also a beautiful George compound with green vegetation.”

The youth expressed aesthetic values with preferences for houses in straight lines. Both boys and girl raised the issue of density as a negative feature of George compound. Most essay writers and interviewed school-goers were so critical of their environment that they hoped to be able to move out of the area. In general, the youth who were not at school had a strong positive feeling about George compound as their home and they considered it to be a good place to live. They were not blind to its negative sides and complained about the deterioration of services, such as water, roads, drainage and lighting.

George compound was legalised and upgraded in the late seventies, the period when most of the interviewed youth were born. Community centres, schools and a clinic were provided. Many of the youth had attended preschool in one of the two community centres, which Elisha called the Welfare Hall in his essay. This community centre was also used by UNIP as a party office. It was the party that organised the pre-schools with the support of non-governmental institutions. After UNIP lost the 1991 elections, it was left empty, vandalised and stripped of its asbestos roof sheets. The schools which were built by the upgrading project were maintained, but they were too few and too small to be able to enrol more than a minor part of the children in the area.

According to the 1990 census, fewer children than ever were attending school. The reason was not, as suggested by Moser (1996) that the labour of the children was needed. The reason given by the youth in George compound was that they could not afford to go or that there was no place for them. Some claimed that the teachers asked for bribes in order to enrol them. They stressed that it was not only uniforms and books that had to be paid for, but also contributions to school material such as pieces of chalk. The demand for contributions from parents to a school is a heavy burden and this was confirmed in the group discussions organised by ZARD (1995).

The youth were most concerned about the schools and many of them pointed to the fact that there were no secondary schools in the area. The clinic was still in operation and most youths had been there several times for minor or more serious illnesses. They complained about fees and lack of medicine, and they claimed that as unmarried teenagers, they were not given advice in sexual matters.

The increasing density, through infilling of houses, extension of houses and more people in each room, put a strong pressure on open space in the area. The high density of the neighbourhood was in itself a source of conflicts as people were so close to each other. It was difficult to find space for digging
new pit latrines when the old ones were filled up. One essay writer notes that density also prevents food production: “To avoid quarrelling with the neighbours, many people have decided not to keep livestock because it brings fights or enmity. They can’t even make small gardens for vegetables for fear that their vegetables may be eaten by chickens. Only those with fenced houses can manage to keep these things.”

Previously, many families had an informal garden beyond the neighbourhood. However, the respondents claimed that their families had stopped cultivating because the land was too small, the harvest was uncertain if there was a lack of rain and because the crops had to be guarded day and night during the month before harvest to stop thieves. Some of the boys had worked as crop watchmen in previous years. They did not miss the work, as it had been tedious and dangerous.

Gendered claims for improvements

Gradually, due to lack of maintenance, the roads of the upgrading project in the seventies again turned into muddy tracks during the rainy season. In the mid-nineties, an international non-governmental organisation organised the digging of storm water ditches along the roads in a food-for-work scheme. None of the interviewed teenagers had participated, but many of their mothers had.

Bad roads were what young men mentioned first if asked about environmental problems. They argued about the need for vehicles to reach all parts of the compound. Girls complained about muddy roads, usually arguing that their shoes became filthy or that the mud produced a lot of laundry and for the washing they needed water. Shallow wells were used for non-drinking purposes. With the dense settlement and the use of pit latrines, the water was badly polluted. Since the repeated outbreaks of cholera in the first years of the nineties, most people also boiled the tap water, but charcoal was expensive and, therefore, many poor households did not continue to do so, once cholera was eradicated.

The standpipes provided in the seventies worked for about ten years. From the late eighties, however, the water supply was irregular, to say the least. Only a few hours a day, but not every day, there was water in the pipes. With no water in the pipes, the taps were stolen for their metal value. Water had to be collected from far away in Matero and usually it had to be paid for. A water supply was the top priority for girls, when asked about what environmental improvements they wanted. To collect water was the task of girls and women.

According to the 1990 census, every third house had a standpipe within a hundred metres. Only one house in a hundred had inside piped water, one of
which was the house of Fiona’s sister. Fiona explained to me that with the water shortage, the individual pipes were important. The tap was left open and some family member stayed at home to fill the buckets if water came. That was much better than having to hang around the empty standpipe. During the last year there had never been water in the pipes, so the individual connection was not of much help.

The great improvement that was going on in the area during my fieldwork was the provision of water. Fiona, like all other informants, was happy about the boreholes which were in being drilled by a Japanese aid organisation. Fiona found it in order that a monthly fee was to be paid, and she hoped that they would be connected:

– A huge water tower has been built. Surely they will connect existing pipes?

Lack of electricity caused people to spend a lot of money buying charcoal for cooking and kerosene for lamps and candles. Mercy’s and Evelyne’s mother had saved for years to pay for the wiring in order to get electricity and was, at my visit, just ready to ask for a connection. She explained that it was not only a question of a higher standard and more functional cooking, but she also expected running costs to be lower than for charcoal. Many girls raised the need for electricity for household use. The boys demanded electricity primarily for street lighting.

In a study in the seventies, I had asked about preferences for improvements and found strong gender differences. The men wanted roads and transport while women demanded water and clinics. With the liberalisation of transport there are now many minibuses driving to town and the clinic is there. Regarding roads and water, similar gender differences in demands for improvements are noted among the youth today as among their parents twenty years ago.

Tenure, residential density, and quality

The first generation of urban settlers in George compound built their own houses and were then reluctant to sell. According to the 1990 census, about sixty per cent of the house-owners were also the builders of their houses and thirty-two percent of the owners had inherited or got the house as a gift. These figures show a slow housing market. Only eight per cent had, like Mercy’s and Evelyne’s parents, bought their house.

According to my 1995 investigation of twenty-seven houses, only three had absentee owners. George compound still had the character of a home ownership area with owner-occupation. Nevertheless, according to the investigation, as well as the 1990 census, there were almost as many tenant
households as owner households in the area. There is thus a high rate of owner-occupied multi-family houses.

According to the 1990 census, one house in five in George compound was inhabited by more than one household. According to my previous work, multi-family houses were more common, about one in three (Schlyter, 1991). This higher figure was confirmed by the 1995 investigation of twenty-seven houses. Nine of these houses were inhabited by more than one family, some of them by several families. In one house as many as seven families resided.

In selecting informants for this study, I was careful to include children of tenants as well as of owners. However, the analysis of the interviews gave no reason to distinguish between tenants and owners as groups. The quality of the accommodation the youths were raised in was the same and so were their hopes and dreams for the future. Family income levels were more decisive than tenure for how well the families lived. Owners did not have higher quality in their housing or more space than tenants. A case in point is Fiona, who was the only one of my informants who had a room of her own and lived in a rented house.

Young well-paid people often rented a whole house for their own families. In the case of Fiona’s sister, the family was extended by Fiona and by a nanny who slept in the children’s room. The family ambition was to have a house of its own in a middle-class neighbourhood. In the meantime, inside security walls, they could create a nice home in George compound.

Most tenants were renting rooms, not houses. Monde talked about being raised in rented rooms:

– During a period we moved very often. There are landlords who do not respect a women without a husband and there are landlords who hate the noise of children. We were always told to be quiet! But then, just before my brother was born, we were lucky to find a room in the house of nice people.

– Is the room nice as well?

– It is just a room.

– Is it big, does it have windows?

– No windows, but a solid door which can be locked. Not big, not small, just a room.

Most interviewed young people who had grown up as tenants’ children had little to say about the rented rooms. If they complained, like Fiona, they made reference to landlords who did not like the noise of children. Quite often the teenagers made positive comments on the character of the landlord. By doing so they indirectly said that it was common to have difficulties with the landlord. The relation to the landlord was much more important than the physical quality of the rooms.

In my longitudinal studies in George, I have shown that residential density among owner families was fairly constant, at about two persons per room.
over the years. The houses were extended as the families grew. This is not true any longer. Overcrowding has increased. Almost two-thirds of all families in George which had six or more members, continue to live in two rooms only, according to the 1990 census.

Although owners did not have more indoor space per person than tenants, it can be assumed that children of owners benefited indirectly from the security that house-owning means to a poor family. Generally, the children of owners did not see themselves as privileged compared to tenants’ children. For Mary the asset was a loving grandmother, who would always be ready to make room for a granddaughter, whether she lived in a house of her own, a rented room or in the house of her son.

With the ageing of the area there were more large families, especially as the younger generation had difficulties in forming households of their own. Unmarried young mothers stayed with their parents, not because they always wanted to, but because they could not afford the rent for a room of their own. The fathers of their children could not offer marriage because they had no secure income to pay the rent for a room. There are more reasons but, certainly, the cost of shelter and the lack of opportunities for making any kind of personal income had an impact on household formation and meant an increase in the size of families, extended by the presence of grown up daughters and sons.

Overcrowding meant that children had to sleep in the rooms of their parents and that youth of both sexes had to share bedrooms. Some families tried to make special arrangements to avoid this situation. Thus, it was not unusual that young boys spent the night in the house of an uncle or aunt together with their male cousins, while the young girls stayed in their parents’ home. Talking about sleeping arrangements in a male group interview, I brought up the traditional way of separate huts for the young boys. After some discussion, the group concluded that parents in George compound would not approve of that. They wanted to be able to check that their teenagers were inside at night.

By themselves, the youth never mentioned the lack of indoor space as a major problem. They mentioned lack of money, alcoholism, or wicked step-mothers or uncles as problems. On my suggestion that overcrowding was a problem, they usually agreed, but it was not a primary source of their worries.

Homeowners’ uneven housing struggles

My first spontaneous impression during the field work in 1995 was that very few housing improvements were carried out in the nineties. Even acutely needed maintenance was lacking. However, closer investigation of twenty-seven houses showed that, during the period between 1989 and 1995, six
houses were extended by one room or more and five mud houses were partly or completely rebuilt into concrete houses. Two houses had been surrounded by concrete security walls and two had installed electricity. That is to say, more than half of the houses in my sample had been improved in some way.

Given the poverty in the area, these figures indicate an astonishing progress in building activities. My first impression of decay can nevertheless be correct, because there was an uneven development; among the twelve houses that were not improved, a couple were close to collapse. While some of the families were more destitute than ever and had let their houses deteriorate due to lack of basic maintenance, a few had been able to improve their position and had invested in security walls. Money or poverty were not the only explanatory factors of housing improvements or lack of improvements. There were houses with an uncertain ownership structure due to inheritance and there were absentee owners who did not maintain their houses. Among the poor there was a large group who put priority on housing improvements in spite of poverty. Evelyne’s mother who invested in electricity belonged to this category.

Another of my informants lived, like Mary, with her grandmother and a cousin. The old woman had rebuilt one of the rooms in her mud house into a concrete room on a proper foundation. She used to sell herbs and cure people, but to build her house she had worked in the work-for-food programme, sold the food and bought concrete blocks, a few at a time:

– At my age, you do not need much food.

I found it unbelievable that the old woman had been able to buy blocks for a whole room that way, but she denied getting any help from the granddaughters or from other family members. A neighbour had helped her with the construction work for nothing. My informant confirmed:

– My grandmother built this house. We will have food even when we have no work, because of the nice room to let. The mud brick room is small, but enough for us to live in.

The teenagers in the families did not play roles of any importance in relation to improvements or maintenance of the houses they lived in. Teenagers’ need of space was sometimes, as in Jonah’s case, part of the motivation for an extension although the rooms were used for tenants in the end. The parents of the teenagers had done quite a lot of the original building themselves: the women produced the mud bricks at the site and the men assisted the bricklayers and other artisans who were hired for special work. With the upgrading and transition to concrete blocks, almost all the work was done by professional builders. It became more difficult to substitute cash for working time and thereby it also became more difficult for unemployed daughters or sons to make an input in housing improvement.
There had been suggestions of turning youth unemployment into production of housing but these were never implemented by the government (Ndulo, 1989). There were no signs of informal initiatives in that direction. No young man in George regarded it as possible to enter this sector. Probably there was an over-establishment of experienced builders in the informal sector, since the building boom after legalisation in the seventies and early eighties. None of the informants had contributed to housing improvements either in cash or by work and none expressed an intention of helping to improve the houses of their parents.

A quest for modern living arrangements

If young people in George compound expressed any preferences for housing, they wanted “modern houses in straight lines with large gardens”. Asked if they wanted the large gardens to grow vegetables, they said no. Low density was an aesthetic value based on experiences of conflicts in the area and of the how the middle class lived. Born in town, the youth had little experience of cultivating crops. The Lusaka women in the ZARD discussion groups were older and had experience, but would nevertheless not cultivate in town. Rather than pay rent for land and buy seeds they would, if they had money, buy food. They saw gardening as risky because of drought or theft of crops (ZARD, 1995).

For outdoor arrangements, they dreamt of a display garden with flowers. They had “modern” visions for outside as well as inside arrangements. Modernisation existed not only in the dreams of the youth. The houses in George compound were gradually transformed into concrete houses. A properly built concrete house was dry and light, and one room was furnished to become a desirable modern living room with a sofa, armchairs, tables etc. Social life moved inside. Instead of bringing a stool to me and placing me outside, at the side of the front door at the swept area, I would be proudly invited into the living room. Women took on the role of home-makers in the sense of decorating the living room and making it cosy with the help of posters, paper flowers and crocheted table-cloths.

Epstein (1981) describes the use of the simple and dark housing at the mines on the Copperbelt in the fifties and he draws parallels to Richards’ rural studies in the thirties. Both note that the hut or house was not lived in. People sat outside and the men gathered in the men’s hut or in the bar. The same pattern has been carefully documented in my previous George studies (Schlyter, 1980). Epstein notes that the African white-collar elite had better housing and that these houses were lived in.

The windowless mud brick houses in George compound with the low mud floor were used for sleeping and storing, while most other activities were
carried out on the swept area outside each house. In the house there was usually no other furniture than an iron bed for the parents. The corners were filled with boxes and cloths and textiles were hanging from the roof to avoid the dampness of the walls. The process in George compound of rebuilding of houses into concrete is not only a shift in material, but it can also be analysed in terms of a shift of residential culture following an increase in welfare. A change of residential culture is a question of class, prosperity and opportunity.

School-going youth stressed the need for a proper table and lighting in order to be able to do homework properly. There were very few secondary school pupils in the plain, dark and damp houses in George compound. There is an obvious correlation with the parents’ economic situation and school attendance, but the actual physical conditions, like the lack of proper space for studying, may also play a role.

While the process of modernisation of living arrangements was in progress in the eighties, it ran out of steam in the nineties due to poverty, badly built concrete houses and lack of money to buy furniture. Houses of concrete blocks are often built on an inadequate foundation, windows and glass became very rare luxury goods and most window holes are blocked up by concrete blocks. Consequently, houses classified as concrete houses may be as damp and dark as the old mud brick houses. Still, concrete houses had a symbolic value as modern houses.

The very last space to be modernised was the kitchen. While in the mud houses, the kitchen could be a small room with an entrance door of its own, in most concrete houses it was reduced to utensils arranged on the floor in a corner of one of the rooms. Cooking inside continued at floor level and with the same simple charcoal stove. During the hot season, cooking was carried on outside as usual. Among my informants it was only Fiona who lived in a house with a modern kitchen and a paraffin stove at counter level.

With the increasing poverty, the quest for modern living had to be compromised. There had also been a modern kitchen in Fidelus’ home, but with the economic crisis of the family, this space was the first to be turned into a room to let to tenants. Kitchen utensils were stored in the living room and cooking took place on the veranda floor. The fact that the kitchen was the last space to be improved and the first to be sacrificed may reflect the value given to housework, usually woman’s work.

Prospects for the future

It can be concluded that most young people did not involve themselves in the houses of their parents. Such a house played no role in their plans for the future. The girls saw their future in another place with a husband and the
boys wanted to find a place of their own. Only an eldest son, or a breadwinner of the household, saw chances of inheriting the house of his parents. In reality, the parent’s house often became an asset for daughters and granddaughters, especially if they lived with and cared for their mother or grandmother, but they certainly did not count on it.

Ownership of houses was, in case of the owner’s death, usually transferred to a son, not to the widow. The case of Mary’s uncle was not unusual. Being the eldest son, he inherited the house and collected rent from tenants, while his mother, Mary’s grandmother, was allowed to live in two rooms with her grandchildren. Most young women did not know about women’s newly won inheritance rights and, like Mary, they did not contest male inheritance. In this they differed from the older women in previous studies, who often were furious by having been deprived of what they saw as their rights. Only the educated girls like Fiona and Cecilia contested the male appropriation of houses, they were informed about the new law and added moral arguments. The educated boys argued against the tradition among some of the ethnic groups that uncles should inherit and argued for the rights of the eldest son.

The strategy of the parent generation had been to build a house of their own. The second and third generations saw no such possibilities. Young men calculated the possibilities of starting a family of their own. To build a house was impossible. There was no land and building material was too expensive. Most of them had to conclude that they could hardly afford the cheapest rented room. They were not happy to bring their wife to the house of their father. The need for a place separate from parents, and to live in a “modern way” in a “modern house” was felt stronger than the need for ownership and security.

The only available rooms for rent were in home-ownership houses, with or without the owner living in the house. On basis of her studies in Mtendere, another peri-urban housing area of Lusaka, Hansen (1996) discusses gender and generational differences in access to housing. As home ownership systematically deprives women of control over their housing situation (if they are not owners themselves), Hansen argues for a policy of making rental housing available, which would also benefit the youth. However, few of the youth in George compound could afford a room built and let on commercial conditions.

The deterioration of the neighbourhood was an issue of which the youth were very aware. In their daily lives they were affected by problems in terms of poor houses, collapsing pit latrines, a density that brought houses too near the latrines, lack of privacy for bathing, scarcity of clean water and rubbish that was not removed. Priorities for improvements revealed gender differences, but common to both the young women and the men was an attitude of detachment. In their struggled to give an appearance of being modern urban
people they refused to link their identity as urban youth to the conditions in the neighbourhood. They might be ashamed or proud of their indoor living conditions, but the outdoor conditions were not their business. The deterioration was an annoyance, but they did not engage in improvement actions, although for most of them, their future was bound to be in George or a similar compound. In the following two chapters the political and social life in the neighbourhood will be scrutinised.
4. Politics in transition

With the transition from the one-party system of the second republic to the multi-party system of the third republic of Zambia, the local organisation of low-income peri-urban areas in Lusaka was deeply affected. This chapter provides an insight into what a political process of democratisation may imply at a local level, by describing how it has been experienced in George compound by the young people.

Factors like the importance of self-organisation, of a vivid civil society and of women’s participation have often been stressed as conditions for democratic development. Local organisation is also emphasised in strategies on how to deal with the shortcomings of local governments in handling social and environmental problems (UNCHS, 1997). An underlying assumption in policy debates, but also in many research efforts, has been that community organisations and community work are the agents for change towards a better environment. I do not think that this should be taken for granted in poor neighbourhoods and countries, or in any suburbs anywhere. The levels of social coherence and potentials for common action have to be researched in each particular case. To what degree are the youth in George compound engaged in so-called community work?

In an long-term study of political culture and democratisation, Bratton and Liatto-Katundu (1994 a) assessed the prospects of consolidation of multi-party democracy in Zambia. They conducted a comprehensive survey of people’s knowledge and attitudes towards democratic values such as political tolerance, trust and efficiency. Inspired by them, I made the issues of political knowledge and political tolerance important themes in my interviews with youths in George compound.

With the concept of political culture, Bratton and Liatto-Katundu widened a narrow focus on elections and multi-partyism in their study of democracy. A collective of African researchers, within the Women and Law in Southern Africa Research Trust, went further by adopting a broader definition of democracy. They used “the concept of democracy to refer to conditions at three levels; i.e. the family, the state and interstate levels; which either promote or frustrate the following three elements, namely; participation in decision-making, a fair sharing of responsibility and resources, and a recognition of individual autonomy” (WLSA, 1995: 27).

Such a definition differs from conventional definitions of democracy in that it goes beyond the division between public and private and includes the
family. A holistic approach is always important if democracy is meant to refer to women as well as to men, and it becomes necessary in a dual legal situation such as the one in Zambia. According to customary law women are not recognised as having personal liberty, but are under the custody of a husband or male relative. Is it possible to talk about democracy for women who are allowed to vote, but are still regarded as legal minors?

In this report, gender power relations are dealt with at community as well as at family and individual level. Although, in this chapter, the focus is on democracy and public institutions, the WLSA definition is useful as it establishes a link between democracy, local organisation and everyday life in the compound. A series of questions can be derived from it: Is it a democracy that has promoted participation in decision-making by young women and men? To what degree is there a public sphere in which young men and young women can engage? There have always been women in Zambian politics but in a limited number (Nalumango & Sifuniso, 1998). How is women’s political activity viewed in George compound?

The main research questions in this chapter are: What is the face of democracy that the youth in George compound have seen? Does democracy mean the same to women as to men?

**Once a UNIP stronghold**

George compound was, already in the sixties, during its first period of growth, a stronghold of the United National Independence Party, UNIP. George was a working class area and the trade union and the party had close connections. At an early stage local UNIP party leaders gained control over the settlement. People had no notion that their settlement might be regarded as an illegal squatter area. They had been allocated a plot by one of the party leaders, in a similar way as a village headman could allocate land.

The party was organised in wards, branches and sections with local elections of chairmen and chairladies and youth leaders at all levels in the party hierarchy. The size of a section was twenty-five houses, and one may argue that the party was over-organised, meaning that in relation to actual political responsibilities and power vested at the local level, the number of elected leaders was great. Within the party, members on ward and branch levels were pressing for recognition and improvement of their settlement. At the section level the work was more of a social nature. Especially many of the women leaders worked hard as unpaid social workers.

In the seventies and early eighties, the local leaders took a central role in an upgrading project thanks to its participatory approach. They explained the project to the inhabitants and could influence the actual physical planning through road planning committees. The people and the local party leaders
themselves saw this as the party delivering the goods it had promised (Rakodi & Schlyter, 1981).

In Mtendere, another peri-urban area of Lusaka, the party history is quite different according to Hansen (1996). She describes the party as being dominated by one strong man who was re-elected again and again. This difference may partly be explained by a different class composition and by the fact that in Mtendere people had individual plots distributed by the City Council. In George no surveying of plots was done, but with the upgrading, the owners of houses were given occupancy licences.

In the late eighties the party influence in George compound declined. The party leaders were ageing. Some were highly respected and maintained leadership more or less in a personal capacity while others became inactive. Young people were not attracted to party activities. The old leaders maintained authority over land use. In spite of legalisation no formal allocation of plots had occurred. With increasing overcrowding, conflicts over the informal plot borders arose, for example, when a new latrine had to be built. The women leaders continued to work as unpaid social workers and to organise the community in support of members in need, especially in connection with funerals.

The Youth League as community guards

The Youth League was organised with the election of youth leaders in each section. My impression in the seventies was that the youth leaders were not very young, that they were all male, and that their main task was to maintain order in the area. Before the introduction of the one-party system with the Second Republic in 1974 I heard about clashes between sympathisers of different parties in other compounds, but never in George. Surely the youth organisation played a role in the local implementation of the one-party state. I have no documented cases of abuse from the side of the Youth League in George compound, though, and only very vague indications in interviews that dissidents of the one-party system saw the youth organisation as a repressive force.

In a World Bank assessment of Zambian poverty a note says: “The youth league of UNIP used to use violence to discourage ‘illegal’ trading by beating up vendors and destroying their stalls and stocks” (World Bank, 1994:139). There is no source given and in the text references are made to the Copperbelt as well as to Lusaka. I never saw or heard about violent acts in George. But it is true that the party discouraged certain types of small-scale businesses outside the market-places, if they were not licensed.

The Youth League worked as a kind of informal police and, in fact, it was praised by many inhabitants, especially in retrospect after the 1991 elections,
when members of the community felt that they had no protection against theft and violence. The fact that there is no police station in George has always been a source of discontent. Over the years I have asked what improvements people in George would like to see. A police station has always been high on the priority list and it was still so in 1994. Bratton and Liatto-Katundu (1994b) found that the police in urban areas were at the bottom end of a trust scale for governmental institutions. Such a distrustful attitude to the police had not developed in George compound where the police were never present.

Attitudes can change rather rapidly with negative experience. In 1995 I was told by several informants that, as an alternative to party leaders for solving conflicts between neighbours, the police were no good. Still it was more a question of the police not being accessible than a general distrust.

In the interviews none of the young people admitted to ever having had contact with the local Youth League. It can be questioned whether it even existed in the late eighties and early nineties. If it did, it recruited members older than those I interviewed, who were in their early teens at that time.

Towards democracy

During the eighties, increasing poverty and the disability of the ruling party to deliver any goods weakened the authority of the local party leaders in George compound. This was a reflection of economic and political development at a national level. The economic progress of the seventies came to a stop due to the collapse of copper prices, to the increase of oil prices and to economic mismanagement.

The national context

Zambia steadily increased its borrowing matched by more and more stringent conditions. In the mid-eighties a more comprehensive structural adjustment package was agreed upon (Rakner, 1993). The reforms imposed by the World Bank and IMF focused on the abolition of food subsidies to the urban population. Urban dwellers answered with riots, the most serious ones were on the Copperbelt, where fifteen people died. In Lusaka, the riots were more limited, and none of my informants in George compound reported participation, although they were desperate over food prices and directed their anger towards the party.

In assessing the role of the students in the political transition from a one-party system, Nordlund (1996) found that students had initiated protests against the raising of mealie-meal prices in June 1990, but they did not organise the subsequent riots and their agitation in the peri-urban areas was limited. The UNIP regime closed the university in April 1991 and bussed the students back to their home villages. Nordlund notes that it thereby, as an
unintended consequence, provided the opposition, the Multi-Party Democracy Movement, MMD, with 4,000 campaign workers. Few students originated from the poor peri-urban areas like George. I have not heard about any students in the families I know, and as far as my interviews show, the opposition to UNIP did not need fuel from outside.

The trade union movement had gradually distanced itself from the one-party government, and it was within the unions that the national leadership of the opposition was formed. The landslide victory won in the 1991 election by the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy, MMD, was based on a coalition between the trade union movement, business and farming interests, and support from churches, students and UNIP dissidents (Rakner, 1993).

At the national level, MMD won a strong position, with 126 out of 150 seats in the parliament, and the Third Republic was established. Its support was not solid, though. In local elections few voters came to the ballot boxes. Although democratically elected, and with a name of multi-partyism, the MMD government has not shown a strong commitment to democratic values and to the consolidation of a multi-party system. On the contrary, student opposition has been brutally silenced and opposition leaders have been jailed. A state of emergency was declared in 1993 on allegations of an attempted coup.

A study of political knowledge and values conducted during short periods of fieldwork will inevitably be coloured by issues that are hot news and debated during these periods. In 1995, the public debate was dominated by the issue of the citizenship of the former president, Kenneth Kaunda, and other political leaders. Some of them were declared non-citizens of Zambia and deported to Malawi. In response to this, the nationality and the identity of the president were challenged. In the mass media, Zambian politics resembled a soap opera, and discussions of the issue were vivid in all social classes and low down in the ages. Is the president a Zambian? This question was not posed by me but raised by the teenagers themselves in my interviews in George in 1995. This was the single political issue that engaged most attention. Often it was the only political question on which the teenagers expressed their own views.

A vote for change

In the election in 1991 MMD got strong support in George. During my visit to the area a week after the election most of my informants were very clear in their argument about why they voted for Chiluba, the MMD leader. They wanted a change. Children were still practising the slogan: “UNIP cholera”. At that time no one in the area defended UNIP in public. Sympathisers maintained a very low profile and kept silent. Two years later, sympathies for
UNIP were again declared openly:– I was never directly threatened by violence, but during the election campaign I was afraid to admit my sympathies for UNIP, said one of my informants who once had been a UNIP chairlady.

During the first two years of the new government the price of the staple food, mealie-meal, increased by five hundred per cent. This was not the change people had voted for; for most of my informants the situation had become worse than it was during the riots before the election. Still there were no food riots after the election. The people of George had voted for MMD. Even if some riots are described as spontaneous, it can be assumed that riots are less likely to occur if there is no target for the anger and no alternatives. The opposition was disorganised and memories of the UNIP government too recent to be re-evaluated.

The people in George had voted for a change. In connection with the election the UNIP party structure including the Youth League in the area just vanished. The women’s organisation that had until the end of the UNIP era maintained responsibility for much unpaid social work in the area was also dissolved. Most people expected MMD to fill the empty posts of section and branch leaders. For them the local party organisation was, quite adequately in a one-party state, seen as the lowest level of local government.

Like Bratton and Liatto-Katundu (1994), I found that people regarded politics at local community level as more relevant than elite politics on the national arena. In 1994 many informants still expected party organisation to be initiated at former section level and there were many kinds of speculations to why this was not done. For example, the death of an elected councillor and meetings that did not take place were widely seen as being results of witchcraft. My interviews with MMD officials gave somewhat contradictory answers. Many of them claimed that they had a strong local party organisation. My understanding is that MMD did not intend to keep up the system of sections which can be seen as a must for a one-party organisation.

Instead of a party structure engaging hundreds of people in the management of their neighbourhood, there was one councillor representing the old part of George compound in the City Council. He lived in a middle-class area on the other side of Lusaka. He was the only formal connection to the new ruling party and the state. This was a change, but not the one anticipated by the inhabitants of George.

Observers of Zambian politics have concluded that in spite of a democratically elected government, there is really no change in the political order (Rakner, 1993). This observation might be correct if one looks at the national level only. From the viewpoint of the neighbourhood, there was a dramatic change in the political order, in that the old party organisation disappeared.
and there was no replacement of its function as an urban management organisation and as the link to the political system of the city and the nation.

**Youth and the meaning of democracy**

Four different views on the democratisation process, rooted in differences in knowledge and experiences, could be identified among the interviewed youth. There was the “informed view” held by Fiona, Fidelus and others who were attending or had attended secondary school and also came from more prosperous families than the others. There was the “business view” held by Jonah and other young “businessmen”. Their school background varied. One handicapped boy had never been to school, while one of them was still in secondary school doing business during holidays. There was the “dissident view”, for which Evelyne was the most outspoken among my informants. She was arguing against the new multi-party system, advocating UNIP and the one-party system. Finally, there was the “indifferent view” held by Mary and the majority of my informants.

The indifferent view: no change for the better

On my open questions to the young women and men about their view on democracy and what it had meant to them, the most common answers were:

- Not much had changed.
- Vote or no vote—it is just the same.

Among the holders of these most common views there were also some differences. For example, factual knowledge and the ability to express opinions about political issues varied with age and sex. Uneducated girls were less likely than boys to express themselves on these issues, and a nineteen year old was more likely to express an opinion than a fifteen year old. What they all had in common were disappointment and indifference to political reforms.

The youths in this group could not explain what democracy meant. A few informants guessed it had something to do with “freedom”. What kind of freedom they could not say. Two male informants returned to this question later in the interview in response to a question on local leaders. They defined democracy as freedom from local leaders.

In another group interview, after a lengthy discussion, four young women agreed among themselves that democracy had to do with elections, but that they did not care for elections. They said that they had no opinions on the political changes in the nineties. To a broader question about any changes they had experienced in their neighbourhood, they responded:

- Everything has become more expensive.
- There are more goods available, but we have no money.
– Drinking and smoking dagga are more common

In a group of young men, my questions were met by laughs and cynical comments, which might have hidden the fact that they did have knowledge about democracy on an abstract level, but found it more important to tell me what the transition had meant to them. According to these informants democracy means that:
– You have to pay water bills without getting water.
– You have to go hungry although there is food at the market.
– You are excluded from school because you cannot pay extra fees to corrupt school teachers.”

It was my strong impression that an openly cynical attitude towards politics was held by many more in 1995 than in 1994. Mary and many other young people said that they were not going to vote in the next election. The reason was either that elections make no difference, or that they had no registration cards. Asked if they had tried to get registration cards they said that they had not. They referred to friends who had failed and to the costs of going to town and having photographs taken. They either did not have the money or did not find the required efforts worthwhile.

The informed view: the system has changed

The educated youths had learned their school lessons. They explained the definitions of democracy as the freedom to choose leaders and they had opinions about how fair elections should be conducted.

Fidelus and other boys at secondary school knew quite a lot about the personages at the national political level and could name several of the ministers. They stressed that the Zambian political system had changed, now there was democracy. They were disappointed about the changes it had brought about for themselves, still, they defended democracy as a system:
– The fault is the economy not the political system, said Fidelus.
Another boy put the blame on the ruling party:
– MMD is not painting the picture they have promised.

Fiona and Cecilia expressed more ambivalent attitudes to democracy. Initially, they made cynical comments about all politicians and they claimed not to be interested in all the dull things about politics. At a later stage in the interview they claimed to read everything about certain political questions and expressed strong opinions about the need for women in politics. In their home, newspapers were bought about twice a week. They also enjoyed listening to the teachers who used to read a selection of news to the class. In their opinion the teachers managed to do so in a way which was neutral to party politics.
Fiona, who was eighteen years old, had worked very hard to get an identity card. She had been to the registration office, but the queues were too long. She planned to go to Chipata because she had heard that it was easier in small towns. Her sister did not allow her to go, though. Obviously voting was important to her, but when asked about her party sympathies she said that she had no praise for any party, and added proudly:

– I have the right to keep my vote secret.

The business view: now there is freedom

Most positive to the political changes were the male street vendors. They, like a few of the others interviewed, defined democracy as the freedom to do business. During one-party rule, unlicensed street vending was restricted, but the local leaders allowed women to sell vegetables, cooking oil, charcoal and other basic items in small quantities from their door step. The licence was a kind of income tax and the women were not seen to make a real income. Women selling food stuff were also tolerated at the bars and bus stops on pay day.

In the streets there were also always boys selling cigarettes, so called mishanga boys. In a study of mishanga boys in central Lusaka, they are described as highly organised and acting on the border of illegality (Chan, 1989). Today, the male street vendors like to call themselves businessmen and they claim that previously they were chased away by the UNIP Youth League or by other party officials. Nevertheless, the control was not effective enough to put them out of business. Their activity was seen as criminal not only because it was unlicensed but also because they often sold not only cigarettes but dagga (marihuana) as well.

In the political rhetoric of the MMD, businessmen were depicted as the heroes and the carriers of development. The mishanga boys proudly called themselves businessmen and enjoyed the change of status, at least in their own eyes. The MMD government praised entrepreneurship, but not exactly street vending. There were some so-called clean up actions against street vendors in central Lusaka, but never in George compound. Many young men had established semi-permanent stalls along the roads. They introduced new combinations of goods and had a more active way of selling. According to a number of other informants their main income was from selling dagga, but this I cannot confirm. They themselves denied it.

The business boys’ factual knowledge about concepts such as democracy and the formal institutions that governed their country was not comprehensive. Jonah with his background in school was an exception. The others did not have the formal knowledge of the system from school lessons, but were very well informed about the political debates of the day and the national
political personages. They knew which persons in the compound were influential. They also had a feeling of where real power was situated and thought that the real power structures were not identical with the formal ones.

On the question of the meaning of democracy, all of them said that it was freedom to do business. Only if asked specifically did they agree with a statement that democracy had to do with elections and multi-party systems. Any discussion of multi-partyism tended to be confused by the name of the ruling party. In their experience, multi-partyism was the same as the government of MMD and they saw no special asset in the existence of an opposition party.

Regardless of their huge gaps in knowledge, even the illiterate vendors, who did not read newspapers themselves, were well informed. They discussed politics with each other and their customers. They were all full of praise for the liberal economic policy that changed their status from criminals to heroes of development.

The dissident view: many parties only fight

Evelyne and Mercy, uneducated daughters of former UNIP leaders, could directly present a definition of democracy related to free elections and multi-party systems. Mercy did not express an opinion of her own regarding the political reforms, but Evelyne held strong views. She listed all the things that had become too expensive and was worried about the disorganisation of the compound. According to her it was all due to the political reform. Competing parties could not get together and work for the best of the community. She was basically critical of multi-partyism. She was not uncritical of UNIP.

She was going to vote in the next election. She laughed and said:

– Of course I will vote for UNIP. I am brought up with the party, it is part of my life. But I cannot say that I am impressed by our leaders.

Mary shared the critical view of multi-partyism. Nevertheless, her indifference to the political developments and her refusal to register and vote places her in the group of the indifferent.

Local leaders and community organisation

In 1995, the initial disappointment at the lack of local MMD leadership had faded and among the youth there was at least an embryo of an understanding that in a multi-party system, parties have to learn to live side by side also at the level of the compounds.

For the great majority of the youth the parties’ activities in the area were completely unknown, but they were vaguely aware that the parties had started to organise and elect leaders:

– But these chairmen are only for their own members
Need for local leaders?

Any discussion on local organisation tended to centre around previous experiences of local leaders. Still there were rather strong feelings around this issue, and the standpoints ranged between extremes.

The business boys appreciated the fact that there were no longer leaders in the area making their business difficult. To the question whether they saw some problems with a compound without leaders, they replied that they did not. Some informants reflected over their experiences of having been unfairly treated by UNIP party leaders. I asked them about details and found that they had been involved in conflicts that were not settled in their own favour. There might have been serious misuse of power, but I found no evidence of any. George compound was never surveyed and divided into individual plots. Neighbours have to agree on plot boundaries, which can be changed according to need. Jonah said:

We can solve the conflicts over plot boundaries or latrine locations ourselves without party leaders.

However, according to a clerk at a local court in Matero, a lot of people could not solve such problems themselves. Since the election, the courts had a long waiting list because of new cases of a type that had been solved by the local leaders before.

Evelyne said:

– Today quarrels between neighbours can go on forever. The police are no good, the court is no good. Some people go to the market chairman and pay him to help to solve their conflicts.

There was a marked gender difference in attitudes among the youth towards local leaders and the former party-based community organisation. The young women missed the social work carried out by the chairladies and their community way of solving conflicts. While men solved conflicts of land, the chairladies had intervened in social conflicts. The young women also expressed fear of the increasing insecurity in the area and regarded it as an effect of the lack of local organisation for social control.

In a group interview the young women argued that there was a desperate need for good chairmen and chairladies. One woman said:

– The leaders worked hard and did many good things; ever since they disappeared everything has become worse.

– There is no control and we are afraid.

Associations and committees

Social control that certainly could be oppressive also provided a feeling of security, which was lost in a period of increasing crime. The fear of theft was reflected by the fact that one of the first initiatives after the elections was to
organise Neighbourhood Watch Associations in order to fill the gap left by the Youth League. Some said it was an MMD initiative, others said it was an initiative of worried residents. Whatever the truth, already by 1994 there was no watch association active in the old parts of George compound. A former member, an owner of a rather large grocery, said that they had only been a dozen members, and they had to stop because there were too few who accepted missing a good night’s sleep, risking their lives to protect other people’s property without any remuneration.

The need for local leaders was not felt only by inhabitants in George compound. It was a problem for the City Council to have no one representing the whole community in negotiations, for example, in connection with a water supply project.

The confusion around the organisation of water supply can be taken as an illustration. With Japanese aid, a system of boreholes and standpipes was provided. As far as I could detect, there was not much participation in the planning process, but before the water was turned on, water committees were elected among people who volunteered to control each standpipe and see that it is used only by those who had paid the monthly fee of K1000 (about US$ 1). The committees of five to seven persons claimed that they had been promised, not a wage, but an allowance for their full-time job. After some months they had still not received anything and, according to my informants at the city council, they were not going to receive anything either.

The water committees’ members I met were all well above twenty years of age. More than half of them were women, most of them of mature age. It was also worth noting that the committees I met made a strong point of electing women for the work. From their arguments of the importance of women being active in development work it seems as if a gender balance had been issued as an instruction. If they are not paid, I suspect that the men will drop out as it would threaten their identity as urban men to continue. I have identified a strong gender division in regard to unpaid work: Women may work for free or for food. Men work for money!

Non-party leaders?

The political role of local government was defined as enabling, supporting and co-ordinating projects within communities. In the multi-party democracy of the Third Republic (1991– ) there is no party organisation built up to act as the lowest level of local government. Therefore the City Council initiated the creation of an alternative, Residential Development Committees. The RDCs should be elected in the community, but not according to party affiliation. The RDC model has been tried and found workable in the upgrading of Bauleni, a smaller squatter area.
There has been some confusion about the role of the RDC in George compound. The councillors wanted the committees to be more closely tied to their own activities and thus more integrated in party politics. Because of this, I was told at the City Council in 1995, that the election process had been delayed, but was on track. George compound was so big that it was to be divided into eight zones, each with an elected zone committee to be represented in the RDC.

I met only two people during my fieldwork who had heard about RDCs. One was Fidelus. He had heard about the committees, but not been present at any meetings and he commented:

– How do they think they will be able to have a non-political election in a highly politicised compound?

The other person was Evelyne who claimed that she had been to an RDC election meeting:

– They had put thirty names on a list and we had to tick the names we wanted. Few people knew about the meeting. There were only ten people present. Those who wanted it were elected. They gave each other the votes.

– Who drew up the list? Who are they? I asked.

– There was no party propaganda. The parties were not supposed to be involved. But it was the MMD people, she replied.

The meeting was held on an open space close to one of the new stand-pipes. Although she claimed that it was an RDC election, I am not sure that this was correct, because she believed that the elected persons should watch the standpipe as well.

In contrast to Fidelus, who doubted the possibility of non-party politics, Fiona and her sister who had not heard about the Residential Development Committees, welcomed the idea of non-party elections for local leaders:

– They are really needed, we would vote for a woman.

A strong leader is a man

Ferguson and Ludwig (1995) concluded in their study of women in politics that the multi-party state has not yet conclusively improved women’s access to political office. Further, they saw that the powerful gate-keeping role of women’s wings of political parties had declined, at least temporarily. Obviously they had expected an improvement, but not found it. A survey conducted by the Central Statistical Office (CSO, 1997 a: 254) shows that the perception that women and men are equally suited to hold political office increases with education and urbanisation. 39 per cent of urban inhabitants approved the idea.
In George compound, the role of women in politics seemed to be an issue few persons had thought about until I posed the questions. Women and men alike expressed comments similar to Mary’s:

– If we elect an elder to represent our interests in the national or local government, we want to have a strong leader and that has to be a man. A woman is not strong. She is not listened to.

The need for women’s interests to be represented was not pushed by the uneducated women in George compound. Only at my suggestion did they agree to the idea, but without enthusiasm. They expected nothing from the government anyway. On the other hand, they saw the need for women leaders in the neighbourhood. Many young women missed the chairladies and saw negative consequences of their work not being done. It was on the question of women politicians in government that the educated youth differed most from the uneducated. There was also a remarkable difference between the boys and the girls.

The boys in school or in business usually knew that there were some women ministers in national government. Jonah identified the reason why there were so few women leaders in top positions as women’s lack of leadership capacity, which he saw as inherited. Fidelus expressed the view that at least one should be a member of the government and other decision-making bodies:

– She should act as a watch-dog of women’s interests.
– Why only one or two women? Why not half of the decision-makers? I provoked him.
– No, if there were many women in government, the men would just fight to destroy them to take their posts.

The views of the educated girls were quite different. Fiona and Cecilia argued aggressively for women leaders and accused women who called for men to be their leaders of being stupid. They had seen that at local levels in co-operatives as well as on national level. They themselves would certainly vote for a woman and they believed that politics would be better if there were more women engaged. Fiona said:

– They have started to fight for equal rights.”
– Who are they, I asked.
– I am going to fight myself, she said without specifying the other.

Both girls and boys in school held the view that men were the main obstacle for women in politics, either because they wanted these posts themselves, or because they wanted their wives at home. Milimo and Njobvu (1993) found that women, but not men, gave the same reasons as to why women did not participate in development projects. Similarly, Bergqvist and Nyman (1996) found that men’s attitudes was the factor most often ranked as hindering Zambian women’s access to the political arena.
Furthermore, both men and women in the Milimo and Njobvu study explained men’s dominance as the belief that men were more knowledgeable. Most of the uneducated young people in George would also subscribe to that view, but in their own explanations, strength and toughness were more important.

The face of democracy

With regard to the democratic values of political tolerance, trust and efficiency, it can be concluded that the youth in George did not trust the politicians, neither did they think much of their efficiency. The politicians had not delivered the prosperity that they had promised.

Political tolerance, in the sense of respecting the party you do not sympathise with, can possibly be said to be growing. Directly after the election, many inhabitants in George believed that MMD was just to take over after UNIP, and an active opposition party was not expected to exist. Four years later, among the youth there was a growing understanding of a political system that included competing parties, and tolerance of UNIP seemed to be better among them than at central political level. Unfortunately, there was also an indifference to politics that might be confused with tolerance.

George compound is a multi-ethnic peri-urban area and the young inhabitants did not see any role for ethnicity in politics. An absolute resistance to the politicisation of ethnic differences can be interpreted as one aspect of the tolerance. Not one of my informants agreed when I asked if they would prefer a councillor or other political leader of their own tribe. No, they wanted to vote for a strong and honest man and these qualities did not follow tribal lines.

The study shows that variations in views were closely related to the variation of living conditions, making the minority groups of educated youths and business boys stand out as more informed. Both of these groups had knowledge about politics, and they were also more positive to the transition than the majority of poor young men and women. Regardless of education, there was a strong belief in witchcraft as an important force in politics. There was, for example, a widespread belief that the first councillor of George died due to witchcraft.

Participation in politics among the youth was low or rather non-existent. Political reform has not increased participation in decision-making for any part of the George population. In a formal way, the distance to decision-making has increased, as there are no local leaders to approach, and the election of a councillor is the only channel for influence. Participation in elections is the crucial point in a multi-party system. Most of my informants will be of voting age at the next election, but very few will be voting. Many of
them did not care about elections, others were hindered by the fact that they had no national identity cards and that such a card was almost impossible to get.

None of my informants participated in local party organisation and only those with political activists in their families knew much about it. Regarding the questions concerning the governance of the compound, there was a marked difference between the attitudes of men and women. Women more often than men missed the system of local leaders and wanted something similar in its place. The multi-party system has not meant democratisation in the sense of promoting participation in decision-making in community issues for any category of the inhabitants in George.

There was no framework for youth to engage in community work. There were a few international NGOs active with community work, but none of them attracted the youths. It is doubtful if the newly initiated Residential Development Committees will be able to provide such a framework in the future. These committees were not known among the youth.

Gender relations have not visibly changed with the political transition. But they have been affected. Women in George compound felt deprived of their organisation and influence at the most local neighbourhood level. The political reform did not strengthen women’s influence in the political parties or in the government at any level. At the national level, however, the political liberalisation opened the way for women’s organisations and NGOs to promote women’s issues. Although these organisations are not organising people in George, their activities are known. The dominant view that women’s place is not in the public sphere was strongly contested by young women with secondary school education.

The youth in George compound have lived through a period of simultaneous democratisation and impoverishment. The change of government was tied to expectations of better times. Instead there has been a continuing deterioration affecting all aspects of life:

– Democracy? That is expensive food in the shops and nothing in the pots.

If the face of the political reform that has been called democratisation is hunger, it is not surprising that the dominant attitudes among the youth are disappointment, disinterest in politics and cynicism.
5. Urban life and identities

George compound was the place which the urban born youth called home. The neighbourhood was the social and physical environment where they first interacted with society outside their own families. As noted in previous chapters, youth did not actively involve themselves in local politics nor in the management of the neighbourhood. The deterioration of the settlement and of urban services can be assumed to provide grounds for conflicts between groups and individuals. Are there such tendencies and, if that is the case, how do the youth relate to such conflicts?

In a previous study, I found that for women who were heading households, neighbourhood co-operation and networks were important parts of their strategies of survival (Schlyter, 1988). Studies of how young people construct their social life in a neighbourhood in a poor country tend to focus on “problem groups”, such as criminal gangs or street children. How do “ordinary” young women and men create their own networks?

People live close to each other in George compound and privacy between neighbours is limited. The interview situation may serve as an example. In order to gain more privacy in the interview situation, I often asked to be invited into the house. Regularly, curious children, not only from the family, but also from tenants and neighbours, followed us inside. Only on my specific request were they asked to leave the house. Children get an insight into family life not only from their own family, but also from neighbours, often of a different ethnic background. How do the youth look at this rather overcrowded urban situation? Are there positive experiences or mostly conflicts?

The parents or grandparents of the youth had come to Lusaka from rural areas all over the country. They had ideas about themselves and about gender relations which were rooted in the division of work and power in rural societies. In my previous studies, I have seen how they have striven to become urban and modern people. They formed an identity of an urban man that was not only adapted to urban life, but was firmly rooted in wage work. The identity of an urban woman was more problematic. A “decent” woman was one who stayed close to the ideal virtues of a rural woman and who would not interfere in the male spheres of life. As urban public life was defined as male spheres, adaptation to urban life was, in a sense, undermining womanhood as it had been defined. For men it was the opposite. If a male was successful in urban life, he was viewed as a real man.
The youth had never lived in conditions in which the rural values were rooted, nor did their reality conform to the ideal conditions of a working father earning wages. This was reflected in the new urban values. Many had mothers who were de facto heading households and, by being the breadwinners and active in the public sphere, were challenging the breadwinner–homemaker social contract. With unemployment, it is hard for young men to root their identity as urban men in wage work and the ability to do the providing. What basis for an urban identity did the young women and men in George compound find?

This place is our home

Some of the young women and men in George compound had never been outside Lusaka; very few had been away in the last four or five years. Even their parents might have lost touch with their area of origin. Many parents were of different origins, some had been too long in urban areas, others were from neighbouring countries.

Jonah’s parents had never been back to Zaire/Congo and his sister’s husband returned to Malawi only in desperation, to find a way of making a living. Children of unmarried mothers, or unrecognised second wives, like Monde’s mother, were usually not welcome at their fathers’ relatives. Monde and her sister had no one to turn to and no place outside George compound to visit. Mary had her grandmother in George compound as her only place. Her late father’s relatives and new family chased her away, when she found them on the Copperbelt.

Fidelus used to visit his grandparents during school breaks, but he, as many other interviewed teenagers, referred to the expensive bus-fares as an explanation of why they not visited the rural areas. Not once during the nineties, a member of Fidelus’ family had visited their grandparents. The withdrawn transport subsidies had a direct impact on making the young people completely unfamiliar with rural life. At the same time, there was the propaganda that if you cannot feed yourself in town you have to “go back home”.

Circular migration and flexible household formation within extended families had for many years bridged the dichotomy between rural and urban. Already in the seventies, I found in George compound a strong identification with urban life and a desire to remain also after retirement. Aware of the emphasis put on urban–rural interdependence in contemporary African research, in the interviews I approached the issue from various angles, for example, by discussing the concept of home and where the youth saw themselves in the future.
I found that the youth acknowledged no home other than George compound. A few of them had, influenced by the propaganda, been thinking of the possibility of moving from town. But there were no realistic plans. Mary did not know of any place where she would be welcomed and she had no experience of farming whatsoever. Nevertheless, she said:
– I wish I could grow maize. If I lived in the rural areas, I would grow fields big enough never to be hungry.

Leisure time and drugs

It is often said that poor people have to work hard and long hours and that this includes children and youth. This study in George compound does not really confirm this “common knowledge”. Although there were great gender differences, the dominant problems mentioned by the youth who were out of school and out of jobs, were surplus time and disengagement. They were not alone, though. There were many children in the limited space of George compound and from an early age the children learn to play in large groups. The interviewed young women and men usually had many friends who had been playmates and friends from an early age.

Few children and younger teenagers were asked to work in income generating activities. Girls were involved in housework activities, notably fetching water and looking after smaller siblings. Boys could also be asked to keep an eye on younger siblings, but they were never asked to care of babies. Generally, the boys were given a lot of freedom and they had a lot of free time. Some girls were heavily burdened as the sole home-maker, they had to take over all responsibilities while their mother worked, others were living with relatives and were treated as unpaid domestic workers. The general picture was, nevertheless, that also many girls were bored:
– We have a lot of time to kill.

For the youth at school the situation was different. School and homework took a lot of time and furthermore they were engaged in leisure time activities. Most activities were organised by the school or by themselves, but in the social framework of the school. For the young people who were not at school, the possibilities of participating in organised leisure time activities were limited. Gangs of boys played a lot with home-made footballs in the streets, but did not see this as an organised activity. They were just playing spontaneously, allowing anyone passing by to join in for a while.

There were many churches in the neighbourhood. The girls were more frequent church-goers than were the boys. The girls complained that few boys went to church, while the boys made jokes saying that they went to church to find a girlfriend. According to the youth, the churches organised no activities particularly for the youth. Neither did the mosques:
We just meet in the mosque, outside the mosque I do not socialise more with Muslims than with other friends, said one of my informants with parents originating from Malawi.

Smoking dagga (marihuana) and drinking beer were mentioned by many boys as their only leisure time activities. In one group interview, all the boys declared that they liked home-made gin and beer. They all agreed that one should not get drunk more than once a week, but two boys admitted to drinking heavily more often. Drinking has since colonial times been more or less the only organised leisure time activity in Lusaka (Glazer, 1997). It is common for young people to grow up with alcoholic fathers.

There were many bars and shebeens in George compound. Elisha (Chapter Three pp. 37–38) described the smell of fermenting kachasu and the smell of the drunkards at the beer hall and their vomit as part of the air everyone breathed. Another essay-writer is concerned as “kachasu has shortened the lives of people in George compound ... Long time ago kachasu was being drunk by old men, but now there are small boys from twelve years and above who drink it”. A third essay assumes that the brewers earn a lot of money. “Though the government has tried to deploy paramilitary police to arrest anyone brewing the illicit beer, it has still failed as the people (brewers) stone the police”.

There were several kinds of drugs on the market in George compound. Mandrax (amphetamine) was mentioned by several, but none admitted to using it. In contrast, almost all the boys in the group interviews admitted to smoking dagga, while a few said they had been smoking twice a day for a number of years. A discussion on the health hazards of this abuse continued with comments on the risks of using herbs. They all had tried herbs for body warming (I suppose that means for increased sexual power or desire), but most herbs, they claimed, were used by women in order to maintain their power over men. These herbs, they agreed, could be dangerous, even deadly.

Young people met in the streets. Sometimes they gathered outside bars on Saturdays and listened to drummers and watched the professional dancers who used to dance for as long as coins were thrown to them. But more often they gathered around the television set in the bar. Girls often complained that boys drank and smoked too much. Girls who wanted to be regarded as decent were careful to tell me that they did not go into bars and they did not drink. To go to church or to rehearsal with the church choir were safe and “decent” occupations for young women.

While some young women said that they felt it was safe to move around in the compound until dark, others were more restricted in their mobility. As in the case of Fiona and Cecilia, their parents or guardians may not allow them to leave the house. A young married woman complained that although she never left the front of her house, men came and offered her money. Young
women tended to stay at home more than young men. They often sat outside their houses and sometimes talked to people passing by. They socialised in smaller groups, plaited each other's hair and put much emphasis on dressing nicely with small resources.

Co-operation and conflicts

Seen from the outside, in the opinion of middle-class inhabitants of Lusaka, George compound was regarded as a rather homogenous and poor neighbourhood. However, there were different levels in poverty and education, and the views of people reflected their position.

The general view of the neighbourhood and neighbours among youth in George compound was rather positive. Young people had their friends in the area and in general they found neighbours to be nice and decent, although there were also many thieves and witches. Friendship ties in the neighbourhood were important. The views of working youth did not differ from the positive valuation of their neighbourhood. Possibly they were even more positive. They expressed strong ties to the compound where they also made their living. The mishanga boys are key persons in the street, they have things under control and are proud to be in control, knowing what is happening everywhere in their compound.

In contrast to the majority of interviewed young women and men, the essay-writers did not have much positive to say about neighbourhood co-operation: “The way we live with our neighbours can be described as that of neighbours who are unhelpful. Our neighbours will not assist you in a social problem, but may attend your funeral for their own advantage.” Several similar quotations from essays could be made: “Our way of life to each other in the compound is that of non-co-operation when it comes to matters of community developments, in matters of politics and avoiding health hazards. Most neighbours would always give excuses of being busy, a child is sick and mind your own business excuses.”

I have tried to find explanations for this difference and considered the possibility that youths who were interviewed in their homes watched their tongues so as not to say negative things about neighbours whom I might know. This may be the case in a few interviews, but generally I found the youth very convincing when praising co-operation in their neighbourhood. For example, the girls who from the age of five had looked after smaller siblings and babies, explained that neighbours were always there to help if needed.

The difference between the interviewed majority and the essay-writers is better explained by the tendency of school-going youth to distance themselves from life in the compound. It is likely that the essay-writers from George had
encountered prejudices from teachers and schoolmates from other housing areas. Writing the essay gave them an opportunity of showing that they could critically evaluate their own environment and its inhabitants.

Although the essays were written by youth living in George compound, the inhabitants were often described as traditional or ignorant people “who neither know how to limit their number of children, nor how to improve their life”. In many essays there is an underlying text that reveals the authors’ self-image of being enlightened and of their aspirations towards upward social mobility. Elisha’s essay has no tone of despising George compound and its inhabitants, but that is more of an exception than the rule.

One essay-writer believed that less strict class segregation would help to spread good manners: “These people (in George compound) isolate themselves and they end up having bad manners, e.g. prostitution, theft, early marriages and pregnancies. In time to come I would like to see people in this area to associate themselves with other people from other areas so that they can learn good manners.”

A positive interpretation of these negative views in the essays is that they express a disappointment in relation to a vision of a better society that is kept alive among the school-going youth. One writer regretted that solidarity is limited by class boundaries: “One neighbour will not consider respect for another dying poor. They will only consider each other of the same standard.” The essays outlined, directly or indirectly, dreams of a nice clean and spacious neighbourhood characterised by co-operation and solidarity between the residents.

Multi-ethnic groups of friends

"The compound is pregnant with so many kinds of people. To mention a few I can say the majority are Bemba, Nyanja, Nsenga, Tonga and Lozi respectively. The area of a compound is not big enough to accommodate a large number of people. But the alternatives to the problems are limited. The houses are mostly small, dull in structure and, to crown it all, they are not plastered. Nevertheless, there are some good activities that take place within the compound which include the following: Sports, teenagers have formed teams for football and play during their free time. Video shows, some people enjoy watching video and pay K50 when watching. On Saturdays, they usually watch drummers and share jokes with jokers.”

This quotation from an essay about George compound raises the issue of multi-ethnicity, but puts blame on the density rather than on ethnicity for the problems that arises. The essay continues giving a rather positive view of leisure time activities. A more commonly held view is that there is nothing for teenagers to do in the compound.
In the interviews I asked the respondents who their friends were and if they spent their leisure time in ethnic groups. Almost without exception, the young people assured me that they did not choose friends along ethnic lines and that they socialised with all their neighbours. Fiona saw friendship as a useful part of her own education. She wanted to learn as many languages of Zambia as possible:

– I do not understand Bemba very well, I try to make a Bemba friend, so that I can learn and exercise.

Ethnicity was not a source of tension in the neighbourhood, but the political manoeuvring around citizenship and the discussions about the former and present presidents’ citizenship had an impact on whether people born outside Zambia felt secure and that they belonged. This situation for non-citizens has also been noted by Amnesty International (1997). Many of the youth in George compound had parents who were born in Malawi, Zaire/Congo or in Zimbabwe. They knew that they had the right to obtain Zambian citizenship when they reached eighteen years of age, but none I interviewed had even tried. They did not have all their papers in order and thus could not prove their place of birth. They felt threatened and excluded. They were called aliens and they claimed that they were refused a card that subsidised the fee at the local clinic. Many girls and boys with parents from abroad did not find a place at school and they were convinced that they were excluded or were asked for bribes just because they were aliens.

Divisions within the group of youth could not be found along ethnic lines. Gender and class were of more importance for how leisure time was spent, and for the amount of leisure time. Girls occupied themselves or were made useful within the households and did not themselves define much of their own time as leisure time. Some boys, those who called themselves businessmen, spent most of their time in the streets doing business or talking, but all of it was defined by themselves as work not leisure. Other boys had plenty of leisure time, but nothing to do. The boys at secondary school claimed that they themselves organised leisure activities, usually football games, with the support of the school. Girls at school also participated in organising the renting of a video-film to be watched in the home of a schoolmate with better-off parents.

Witches and thieves—sources of conflicts

There were great differences in the evaluation of the neighbourhood between the poor among the interviewed and the essay-writers from George compound, who often came from families that were a little better off. However, all the inhabitants were united in their concern about the many witches and thieves in the compound. For the people of George compound, witches,
female or male, even children, may be present everywhere. However, I never met anyone admitting to being a witch.

Accusations of witchcraft were not uncommon and suspected witches were openly pointed out to me. In contrast, accusations of theft were never directed to a specific neighbour. To make accusations of witchcraft is a crime according to Zambian law, but that law seemed to be disregarded in George compound. In discussions on neighbourhood co-operation, the school-going youth who usually came from the better-off families, often claimed that neighbours were jealous of their wealth and therefore used witchcraft.

The interviews confirm Ngulube’s (1989) observation that there is fertile ground for witchcraft in poor urban areas. Milimo and Njobvu (1993) identified a revival of witchcraft and found it to have far-reaching consequences on the implementation of some development projects they studied. Witches can be male or female, neighbours or family members. A nineteen year old boy writes in an essay about the sudden death of a young boy. The parents consulted a witch doctor: “The discovery was that the father alone was behind the death. The wife wept together with the relatives. Her husband was beaten to the point of death. He was stripped naked, some of his body was burnt. Divorce followed and the two young brothers of the deceased boy, in fear of another possible death, went with their mother.” The belief in witches divides families and it divides communities.

Fisiy and Geschiere (1996) are concerned about a loosening connection between kinship and witchcraft. Though there were accusations of witchcraft within households, most often in George compound I heard accusations directed towards neighbours who were not relatives. The number of ngangas, healers of various old and new traditions, has been growing in George compound. They developed a variety of skills, some very specialised, others announced themselves as “specialists in all diseases”. With the increasing death rate and poverty, it seems as if the market for witch-hunting skills has expanded.

Everyone was concerned about witches but many, for example Mary and Mary’s grandmother, were more concerned with false witch-hunters. Mary herself refused to talk about it, but her grandmother told me a terrible story about a woman in the neighbourhood who had gone mad and slaughtered her own three year old daughter like a chicken. Mary, five years old at the time, had been playing with the child and witnessed the killing. This had been a severe shock to her, but worse was that a witch-hunter accused Mary, albeit a small child, to be the witch causing it all. There were ugly incidents of violence between the families until, at last, it became a court case and the neighbouring family was told to stop accusing Mary. It was a difficult period, even after the accusers had moved away from the neighbourhood. Many neighbours avoided Mary in order to be on the safe side.
At the time of the interviews, a decade after the event, Mary still felt that she was at risk of being suspected as soon as something bad happened in the neighbourhood. When Mary’s mother and all her aunts passed away within a short period of time, the rumours were revived. Mary had, therefore, been hesitant to return to her grandmother in George compound when she did not find her father alive. She did so only because she had nowhere else to turn and her grandmother wanted her to come. So far no one had accused her of anything.

Almost all the informants, whether school-going or not, were concerned about witches. Not least, the successful ones were scared. Success was dangerous, as it generated greed and envy. Englund (1996) argues that witchcraft represents individualism as an inversion of morality and, as such, is integral to the modern conditions in the Malawi village he studied. If one accepts the notion of multiple modernities, it should come as no surprise that in George compound no contradiction was seen between the quest for modernity and the belief in witches. Cecilia, who took pride in being a modern young lady with radical modern ideas and intentions of making an individual career, pointed out that witches were her greatest concern about life in George:

– What I like least about George compound is that there are so many witches here. A witch-finder told me that it is the neighbours who made me sick last year. I just avoid talking to them now. The aunt to whom I should turn in case of personal problems has also been identified as a witch, so now I have no one to turn to.

The only one of my informants who denied the existence of witchcraft was Fidelus, who declared that he, as a born-again Christian, did not believe in anything other than God. He, like many other informants, bear witness to how a belief in witchcraft divided the community and the families and acted as a destructive force.

Not even poor households were safe from burglary. It was part of everyday life to see to it that the house was never empty nor left with the entrance door unattended to. Still, there was a difference between the concern to protect their few belongings felt by teenagers in poor families and the obsession with the risk of burglary expressed in some of the essays and in interviews with youths from families that were wealthier than the average.

The wish for a police station is a priority for all inhabitants of George. One essay-writer paints a picture which was valid not only for the well-off and educated: “With theft, burglary, stealing and fighting, people must go long distances to Matero or Chunga police station to report incidence. No wonder crime is rampant in the area! People can’t sleep well, they have sleepless nights for fear that they will sleep over and find that their belongings are
taken away, or wake up and be hurt themselves ... Not all people can manage to fence their houses to stop their belongings from moving out.”

**Multiple urban identities**

The youth born in George compound had a strong urban identity. All the interviewed young women and men wanted to stay in town. The network of neighbours and friends meant a lot to them and many of them expressed strong positive feelings towards the neighbourhood. However, the density of the compound created many conflicts which might motivate a wish to move out and there was a general quest for a modern environment.

The school-going youth differed from the majority by being more critical of their home environment. They also wanted to remain in town, but would rather not live in George compound. They created their networks of friends at school and not among the neighbours. They expressed a strong awareness of class differences. A future move to another area was seen as a conditional step on a ladder of social advancement. The essay-writers’ superior attitude towards people of their own neighbourhood is interpreted by me as being part of an effort to build a middle class identity. In their aspirations for another life, they distance themselves from their origins.

From my previous studies in the area, I know that also the parents’ generation felt a pride in being urban. They built an identity that fitted their choice of a place to live. The urban identity was added to their ethnic identity. They had moved from the rural areas and, at least before the bad times in the eighties, they had no plans of returning. In the parents’ generation, the men had been workers in industry, some had been trade unionists and many held the values that used to be connected with working class identities. The unemployed youth certainly did not define themselves in terms of class membership, but at the same time were painfully aware of being excluded from the benefits of development and global wealth.

For some of the young people who were brought up in families of UNIP leaders, it might be adequate to say that they had a political identity. Not that they identified with the UNIP party, but they had a way of defining themselves as tools in the process of nation-building, for example, by actively bridging over ethnic differences. After the election in 1991, the young “business boys” expressed a clear political identity as MMD supporters, but this identification faded in a few years.

The youth had visions of how the area could become nicer and be improved, but they did not visualise themselves as being participants in a process directed towards improvements. They saw no fruitful ways of beginning. There were no neighbourhood organisations that attracted them. Primarily the individual networks of friends were positively valued. While
many complained of lack of neighbourly co-operation and support, criminality, conflicts and witches in the area, they still had their own friends.

For the young people, the merging of urban and ethnic identities seemed unproblematic on the surface. They were proud of their ethnic origin, or origins, as ethnically mixed marriages were common among their parents. They told stories in a joking manner about the character of their specific ethnic group. At the same time, they formulated their claim to being urban and modern, partly in contradiction to the meanings ascribed to ethnic identities.

To be an urban woman or man was equated with being modern and the quest for modernity was strong. It was demonstrated in many ways, for example, in how to dress. One of the essay-writers from George compound writes: “Most people have normally taken the Western culture in terms of dressing and life as a whole. Most of the local indigenous people in my community prefer casual dressing to traditional styles, although most women have resorted to dressing traditionally simply because the materials used are quite cheap, all in all. In my community people dress according to their choices.” For young unmarried girls there seemed not to be much choice. They all used modern dresses.

To combine urban identities with ethnic identities did not seem to create any problems as such. The problem come in accommodating certain values and beliefs which were said to be traditional. Not always, though. Belief in witches was not only accommodated within the local modernity, it found fertile ground to develop new forms. Most difficult to accommodate within the modern identity were values around definition of gender. The young women in George were divided in their strategies. Some of the educated ones wanted to fight for a place for themselves in the labour market and to attain rights in the public sphere. Others had, as we will see in the following chapters, more adaptive strategies in forming their gender identity.
6. Households in transition

This chapter explores changes in household structure and in the position of young women and men in the household. One of the first targets of criticism, which emerged from a growing gender awareness in research and development work, was the concept of the household as a unified entity. In an overview of research on gender and households, Chant (1996) refers to the huge number of household studies which have been conducted during the last decade. She reviews studies of various household structures, but does not specifically comment on youth in the household. Her overview reveals some of the difficulties met when trying to understand household dynamics, with the various and variable conflicts and contradictions between altruism and self-interest.

In Africa, the extended family has been crucial in household coping strategies. Kapwepwe (1992) states that “extended families are more important in crisis”, and Moser (1997: 57) notes in a study in Chawama, another compound in Lusaka, that households are extended with kin and draws the conclusion: “This restructuring may be a short-term response to economic exigencies for the particular absorbed members, but it reflects a wider trend toward permanent extension”. This might be true, but in George compound I have also seen a tendency in the opposite direction: the nuclear family (parents and children) closes its ranks as it cannot afford solidarity with relatives. The support network within the extended family has been overburdened. This chapter looks at how youth in George compound have experienced these tendencies. What was their ideal household form, and how did they view so-called traditional family obligations?

The chapter continues by analysing how the position of girls and boys in the household differed, and how their positions depended on their contributions to the household work and expenditures. In the scarce literature on youth in Africa, household and family are usually mentioned as being of basic importance, still studies seldom focus on the conditions within the families. Gwagwa (1998) finds that the young people in South Africa think that they should contribute to the household, but should not be forced to do so. They lay this responsibility on the head of the household. Gwagwa also finds that daughters contribute more than brothers, although they are earning less. Where sons are contributing, it is usually in specific areas of their own needs. An ongoing study in some Copperbelt towns is looking more closely at the
livelihoods of the youth and at implications of poverty alleviation (Mulenga, 1996).

Finally, this chapter will look into how work, power and authority are divided in the households. Women are carrying heavy burdens due to poor living environments. This has lately been confirmed by a World Bank study. One of its case studies was done in Chawama compound in Lusaka (Moser 1996 & 1997). Moser notes that poor people cannot substitute paid services for declining public infrastructure, but have to close the gap through increased labour, which is usually done by women and children. How do youth in George compound view the sharing of burdens between generations of women? And to what degree do boys and young men contribute?

In the Zambian public discourse blame is often put on parents for not exerting enough control over the youth, resulting in crime or pregnancies. The uneven number of girls and boys in school is also interpreted as family discrimination against girls. Osei-Hwedie (1985) saw family attitudes towards women’s work and social status as a handicap for young girls to cross over. How is parental authority upheld in the households and how is it gendered?

**Household composition and family obligations**

In the sixties, there were small young nuclear families which built their houses and settled in George compound. As time went by, the families grew. According to the census, the number of large households has increased, but so has the number of small households. Thus, the average size of five to six persons per dwelling has been more or less constant during the last thirty years.

The cases histories presented in Chapter Two describe families of a size close to the statistical average. The composition, on the other hand, differs. Jonah’s household consisted at the time of the last interview of six persons: his father, two brothers, a sister, her child and Jonah himself. In addition, they had a long-term guest and her baby. Fiona lived with her sister’s family and a nanny, altogether six persons. Temporary guests were present in both Jonah’s and Fiona’s home. In the mid-eighties, the family of Mary’s grandparents consisted of fifteen persons. Now they were six remaining family members; her grandmother, four cousins and herself. Mary’s grandfather was the only one of all those in the studied families who had reached the age of sixty before passing away.

The way both Jonah’s and Mary’s families were composed was explained as caused by a crisis. Jonah’s sister had returned to her family in a situation of emergency. Her husband did not return from Malawi and she could not feed her baby. The number of siblings was decimated by cholera. The increased death rate as a result of the HIV virus produced “rest families” in a variety of
compositions. A case in point was Monde’s family which consisted of two teenage sisters and a little brother. However, according to the census, this was still unusual. In the whole of George compound only a handful teenage heads of households were recorded. Small households were often headed by older women, but seldom by young women.

Most individual life histories about households conditions, which I recorded, included time spent in the households of relatives. In a report from WLSA (1995), this is a phenomenon called fluctuating custody of children. The informants spent time with grandparents during school-leave, with an uncle, or with other relatives due to schooling or residential density. Evelyne lived for three years with her blind grandmother in Chipata in order to help her, on the other hand, during some periods, young relatives had been living in the informants’ own parents’ households.

Nevertheless, a survey of the various household members in the households of the forty interviewed young women and men at the time of the interviews, revealed that the nuclear family was more dominant than the recorded household histories first led me to believe. In fact, in families which included both parents, it was unusual to find any cousins or other relatives. Cousins growing up together were common only if they had single mothers or no parents and lived with their grandparents. The grandparent–grandchildren family existed, not only because AIDS took parents away; but it was also common for a grandmother to adopt the earlier children of a daughter when she remarried. Evelyne’s mother had adopted a baby girl from her eldest daughter. With the baby in her lap she said:

– Zambian men are reluctant to accept other men’s children in their home. I have adopted this girl and she has become the joy of my life. She is my love child.

I had been told that the distinction between cousins and siblings is not made in all African languages. Therefore I put specific questions, expecting to be able to identify a local conceptualisation of the family in George compound. There were variations in conceptualisation. The conclusion drawn by WLSA (1997) that family does not mean the same thing to all Zambians was not exactly contradicted, but among the youth in George compound there was a view with a strong dominance and this view came very close to the “Western concept” of a nuclear family.

Large families in George compound were composed of three generations. Usually, single daughters and their children lived in the parents’ house. If a son with a wife and children stayed in the same house, they usually did so as a separate household in terms of space and cooking. To cook for her husband is an important symbol of love on the part of a young wife. There was no tendency towards other types of extended households. On the contrary, there was a tendency for a household to close its doors to relatives and protect the
nuclear family. Household resources were exhausted and young relatives who did not work could not expect the traditional hospitality.

My previous research in George has shown that household composition was highly flexible over time. Household composition not only changed over time and with births and deaths in the family, but was also consciously manipulated as part of household coping strategies. It may be concluded from the current study that household changes were usually unwanted and caused by early death. But there was also a tendency to reduce household size to its core members as part of a coping strategy.

Young couples desire independent households

While it was common with three generations in a household, it was rare that young married or not yet married couples lived in the same household as their parents. One of my informants lived with her “husband-to-be” and her mother, who owned the house. My interpreter gave her view of the situation:

– He is just exploiting the situation. He promises marriage and gets accommodation and food, but he does not contribute to the household expenditures.

It could be assumed that the girls would like to stay close to their mothers, especially as some of the ethnic groups have matrilocal traditions. In Asian slum areas, Thorbek found a tendency for daughters to settle adjacent to their mothers (Thorbek, 1994). However, in a group interview, the girls were united in the attitude that it was best for a young couple to live separately from any parents. Mercy eloped and moved to the house of her father-in-law to be, but that was a special case and not a happy experience for Mercy. Another girl who was about to marry felt that she had to explain why she did not insist on moving to a place of their own:

– His father has been ill for a long period and my husband is really the head of the household. We will have a room to ourselves.

Similarly, if Jonah marries in a few years he, as the main breadwinner and the de facto head of the household, will bring his wife to his father’s house. Most likely they will form a separate household. If a son who marries is not head of the household, it is more likely that he will rent a room elsewhere and any available room in his father’s house will be let to tenants.

The young women as well as the men wanted to live in households of their own. This attitude is in strong contrast to the views elderly women used to share with me about their right to be supported and served by daughters-in-law. In the initiation rites and the traditional teaching of young girls, obedience to parents-in-law is a strong message. This demand for obedience is, in fact, the main reason why young girls want to live separately from their parents-in-law.

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Young men who had employment often preferred to move out in order to avoid family obligations and subordination under the father as the head of the household. This is not surprising nor a new tendency. Manona, Bank and Higginbottom (1995) refer to a study already conducted in the thirties in a South African urban area showing that young working men had a strong desire for their own independence and Peil (1984) noted after reviewing the literature on the African family that the move away from the authority of the father was the step into adulthood for a man.

Individual solidarity instead of obligations

Family obligations can be seen as the glue of society, but with urbanisation and scarce resources it is difficult to fulfil obligations. People tend to redefine what is family and what are obligations so that the concepts coincide with one’s self-interest. Armstrong (1992) notes that a wage earner may define ‘family’ as the nuclear family and perceive his or her primary obligations as being towards a spouse and children, while the unemployed cousin of the same wage-earner may wish to define ‘family’ to include his uncle’s children and thus bring this wage-earner into the circle of family obligations.

Many young men in George compound suffered when they were no longer welcome in the homes of relatives and could no longer draw on support from their wider family network:

– I lived with an uncle and went to school in Chilenje, but they asked me to leave, they could not afford to have me any longer, one informant said.

– My cousin stayed for two years with us, but now food is short, so he was asked to leave, said another.

The youths who had been pushed out of relatives’ households complained about their own fate. At the same time, they themselves argued against their own fulfilment of traditional social obligations in the future.

Increasingly, networks of support were based on individual trust and friendship. A case in point was the former neighbour of Jonah. For more than a month she had stayed in Jonah’s household while unsuccessfully looking for a job as a nanny, which was the only job she could think about as she was a single mother who had to take care of her child on her own. I suspected that Jonah or a brother was the father of the child, but I was convincingly told that this was not the case. They were just helping a neighbour and a friend.

Another case of friendship and solidarity is that Monde was offered a new permanent home in the family of a classmate. Monde had a best friend while at school, before she had to quit. Although this friend had moved to Ndola with her family, when she heard about the death of Monde’s mother she came all the way to Lusaka to offer Monde a new home in her own family. They could continue to go to school together. This was a very special offer, given
that they were not related nor even belonged to the same ethnic group. They were both of mixed origin. Monde cried when she told me that she had to turn down the offer. It was impossible for her sister to manage the restaurant and their little brother alone, and they had no one else to turn to.

In both these cases, offers were made to an individual by a person of another ethnic group, which illustrates the importance of individual friendship. Within families, individual bonds of love and trust were more important for mutual support than traditionally prescribed obligations. Accusations of witchcraft within a family were often based on the feeling that traditional family obligations were not fulfilled. Several times I heard that the death of a child was caused by a grandparent who was angry at not being given priority to food in the family.

The position of youth in the household

Households are no egalitarian institutions, but units that embed power structures based on age and gender. The position of teenagers in the household varied between boys and girls and also with their income earning capacity now or in the future. The breadwinners and school-goers among the teenagers were found to hold different positions from their unemployed and uneducated age-mates. In individual cases, of course, there may be immeasurable factors influencing the power structures, such as strength of personality and the degree of love between the family members.

Suuya (1993) refers to an unpublished report on criminal youth by Hatchard (1979) that found that these most often were the eldest two children in a family. This may indicate the eldest children are not properly taken care of. A more positive interpretation could be that the youth have a strong family responsibility and have found no other way to contribute.

The main breadwinner of a household obviously gains a certain status regardless of age. Jonah’s father was the head of the household, but it was Jonah who provided for the family and decided whether something other than food was to be bought. A school-going boy was an investment in hope for the future of the whole family. Fidelus’ parents had severe difficulties in making ends meet, but made very effort to continue to support his education. His teenage sisters had dropped out, while his younger siblings were still kept at school:

– At least they should learn to read.

In the case of Fiona, it was a ten year older sister who had managed to get an education and a formal job and who really wanted her younger sisters to educate themselves. The importance of being an independent person and not being totally dependent on a future husband was a message strongly put forward by the older sister.
At the same time, the sister expected total obedience from Fiona as long as she gave her accommodation and schooling. This was accepted by Fiona as part of the agreement of being supported. In general, Fiona held very strong views regarding justice between sisters and brothers, men and women. She was not ready to marry if she did not meet a man who treated her as an equal. Among all the interviewed teenagers, only the educated girls expressed strong ideas that challenged what they themselves described as the traditional order of family relations.

The girls and boys at school were all well aware of their privileged position. It seemed to be a difference in expectations placed on boys and on girls. The young male school-goers were treated as the future providers and they felt strongly that they were supposed to pay something back in the future. Fidelus had an attitude of confidence in himself making a career, other boys felt stress and anguish knowing what the expectations on them were and how difficult the labour market was for school-leavers.

According to tradition, sons should provide for their parents in their old age but, in reality, in George compound usually the divorced or unmarried daughters took care of parents, at least in the case of a widowed or divorced elderly mother (Schlyter, 1988). The difference between girls and boys as future providers may therefore not be so great as it sounded when they themselves described their position in the household.

Contributing or “just sitting”

It is often said that in times of crisis all family members, even teenagers and children, have to contribute to income and subsistence. However, much more often than I had expected, the teenagers in George compound were entirely on the receiving side in the household, specially the boys.

Some of the interviewed business boys asserted that they supported their families when they made profits, but in response to more detailed and direct questions, it seemed as if most of the profit was used for their own consumption. Radios and batteries were mentioned as purchases from which the whole family could benefit. A radio is a luxury item in George. Only half of all households owned a radio, according to the census.

The young men who only occasionally made some income usually kept it for their own expenses. Only seldom did they contribute to general household expenditures. No one living with both parents said that they made a contribution to rent or to food for the family. In their view the rent was a problem for their father and food a problem for their mother. In Jonah’s history it can also be noted that he kept his income for himself, as long as his father and mother could support the family. The family was poor, but Jonah
bought himself a bicycle which is even more luxurious in George than a
radio. His first major contributions were to his brothers’ school-fees.

The girls “helped” their mothers or grandmothers, who worked around
the clock to make ends meet. They did not distinguish between help in petty
business or with domestic work. They never calculated their contribution to
the business profit, not even when the profit came from the production of
goods, as in the case of three cousins who all helped their grandmother in
producing and selling floor polish on a small scale.

Girls worked with household chores and made themselves useful, while a
boy was “just sitting”. Many of the unemployed boys felt the tension of not
being able to contribute as expected and thereby not gaining the respect they
desired. Unemployed young men had an insecure situation if they lived with
relatives and, sometimes, even if they lived in their own family. They became
pure burdens. One young man had been “evicted” from his father’s house.
There was no space and no food for him. Luckily he was welcomed by his
grandmother. The girls seemed to have full security in their parents’ home
and more seldom stayed in a relative’s house. If they did, they had to work
hard doing household chores. One girl who had lived in an uncle’s house for a
period said that she was treated like a slave.

In many second-hand stories and in the essays, girls contributed money
or food gifts earned through prostitution. This story was sometimes expanded
with details about parents pretending not to understand how the daughter
earned the contributions. Similarly, there were stories about criminal boys
providing their families with a variety of goods, but these were much less
frequent.

Division of domestic work

To keep the house tidy and clean was regarded as women’s and girls’ work.
With the modern living room culture, an art of “home-making” was devel-
oped. Furniture was covered with crocheted cloth, printed posters decorated
the walls and paper flowers were put on the table. The dark and damp mud
brick house was not decorated inside, only cleaned. Cleaning is important in
the ongoing struggle against cockroaches, bed bugs and rats. The floor is
swept every day and also the outdoor area. This is work primarily for young
girls. If there were no women living in the house, these tasks were not
performed properly, like in Jonah’s house during one period.

To collect water was also a task for girls and women. If there were no
daughters around, a mother could ask a son to fetch water. Young women
often did the laundry for all the members of their household, but it was not
unthinkable for a young man to wash his own clothes. A sister, sister-in-law
or a girl cousin would do it but, if there were no girls around, a man could do
it for himself if he was not married. In George compound, although cooking usually takes place outdoors, I never saw a man cook, and it was talked about as an entirely female task.

During the period when Jonah’s family was composed of men only, Jonah’s father told me that the sons most often did the cooking. However, Jonah and his brothers denied this absolutely. They said that an aunt living somewhere in George compound came everyday to do the cooking. They denied ever having prepared a meal. I asked them if they rather would die than to make the nshima for themselves. They told me that if it was necessary they could easily do it. They had seen it done and knew that it was easy and required no skills. A year later their elder sister had moved back home. The division of work was self-evident: she did the cooking.

Jonah’s denial of ever having cooked illustrated how afraid he was of being linked to any female sphere. The cooking and the fire have symbolic meanings, not only practical ones. “To cook for a man” is the local expression of a marriage or a stable cohabitation. Only if the work was paid for could a man do it. Cooks, like other domestic servants in Zambia, have usually been men. Values may change with education. In the home of a research colleague I found a sixteen year old son doing the cooking when he came home from school and saying that he enjoyed it.

Only among the girls at school did I hear demands for a change in the division of domestic labour between the boys and the girls. They felt that girls’ duties at home were an unjust burden because girls were left with little time to do homework. Nevertheless, Fiona did all the cooking in her sister’s household and she was also happy to do so:

– I love to cook when I can buy all the food I need.

Without doubt, the girls worked more in the home than the boys, but boys also took a share, a fact that has been noted also in the South African context (Møller, 1997). Young girls were more often tied to the home by caring responsibilities, but according to them it did not involve not much hard work. They only complained about the lack of water. For many girls as well as for most boys the problem was rather a surplus of time.

There was a gender division of work, but also a division according to age. The eldest daughter often had to take the role of the mother. I also found the mothers extremely hard-working, often trying not to burden their daughters too much. There is also an uneven division due to position in the household. In extended households, a young woman, cousin or whatever kind of relative, was often treated as a domestic servant who worked for food and shelter. Boys who faced being expelled from the household tried to make themselves useful at home. Domestic servants are often male in Zambia (Hansen, 1989), one boy who was asked to do household work in his uncle’s family confirmed the dominant view of urban male identity as tied to wage work:
– If I have to be a domestic servant, I rather take employment where I get paid.

**Generation, gender and power relations**

According to the teenagers in George compound, their parents expected respect and total obedience. The same values were, according to Ngulube, (1989), also important in the socialisation of youth in the traditional Zambian societies. He noted that, in the cross-roads of cultural values in the urban areas, the issue of adaptation and adjusting children’s behaviour is more difficult. Two young men in one of the group interviews had spent some time in the rural areas. They found the social control there to be too tight and they appreciated the freedom they had in the town. A interviewed girl did not share this experience. On the contrary, she found her movements less restricted in the village, which was regarded as less dangerous than the town.

Respect should be shown by younger siblings to older, and by girls to boys. This was a view held by older brothers that was not necessarily shared by their sisters. Violence between sisters and brothers or cousins or other young relatives is mentioned in many essays as very common. The male essay-writers have no gender perspective on these conflicts, but in interviews many girls complained of being battered by their brothers.

In female as well as male group discussions it was agreed that disobedience to parents should be met with corporal punishment. Although most girls said that they had never been beaten by their father, the boys were much worse off in this respect. It seemed as if girls most frequently met violence from brothers and other male relatives and this was not accepted and defended as was parental punishment. One of the few female essay-writers mentions that many children are beaten and that there is no law in Zambia to protect children.

Like my other informants Fiona and Cecilia argued for obedience to parents or to those who were set in their place. Now that they stayed with their older sister they had to obey her. The older sister was very strict and decided everything. Fiona and Cecilia were not even allowed to go out without permission. They were not allowed to spend time with their friends outside, but they might bring their friends into the house. Sometimes Fiona went to church, but even that annoyed her older sister. Asked if they thought their sister was too strict with them, they said no. They seemed quite content with their restrictions. Cecilia had more freedom while living with her mother, but she wanted to become a professional and that, she said, could not be combined with playing around.

Parental power was seen as legitimate by the youth in George compound, but the male power applied by uncles, cousins and brothers were challenged
by the girls. The extended family was not recognised as a legitimate unit for executing power. Also in this sense the youth argued for the nuclear family form. The parental power was never challenged in words by the youth in the interviews. According to their parents, though, “modern children could not be trusted, they do as they want”. Specifically the mothers, who were heads of the households, had experienced lack of respect from the side of their sons. The young men themselves did not admit lacking in respect towards their mothers, but they often described themselves as heads of their household in absence of a father. With the power the young men ascribed to the head of a household it is easy to apprehend conflicts between mothers and sons.

Many young women and men were brought up in families without a father or where the father could not live up to the urban male identity of being a breadwinner and provider. It is often assumed that youth are socialised to share their parents’ values. And the youth themselves sometimes referred to parents’ values or to values of their ethnic group regarding power in the family. But household composition was changing and also the parents were in processes of re-negotiating their gender values. Both values rooted in the rural society and values rooted in urban wage work communities had lost their relevance to reality. So, it was a contradictory situation in many ways.

If power relations in the household are seen as the outcome of negotiations one can conclude that the young girls and boys were poor negotiators as they accepted the authority of age. The situation was worse for the girls, though, as their gender identity partly was rooted in the old values of femininity as characterised by submissiveness. Girls hesitated to argue and raise their voice. Furthermore, they were deprived of arguments as their unpaid work in the household was unrecognised. Even contributions in cash tended to be unrecognised.

The following chapters will provide a bases for further assessment of how the youth negotiate gender relations and create their own identities as urban women and urban men.
7. Marriage and power

The discussion in the previous chapter about parental power is continued in this chapter, as it starts by raising the issue of the choice of marriage partner. To what degree are ideas of individual choice of partner and of a love marriage adopted by the youth? The chapter continues to reveal the views of the youth on power relations between spouses. The youth grew up in families in which their parents had to adapt to the conditions of urban life and wage work. My previous studies show that the ideals of a male breadwinner and a female homemaker were widely accepted.

With the high level of unemployment, it is obvious that many teenagers had grown up in families where breadwinning was a joint effort, or where the mother had been the main breadwinner. The fathers had not fulfilled their obligations as breadwinners according to the dominant gender contract. The youth had witnessed how the gender contract has to be re-negotiated at the household level. The fathers had struggled with their identity as urban men, which has been closely tied to their role as breadwinners. To what degree does this contract influence the young men’s views on gender power relations in the households?

Monachonga (1989) stressed the thesis that with modernisation women’s subordination is individualised from having been a collective subordination under family rules, to individual women’s subordination under one man. In Zambia, power and authority in households have for a long period been discussed in terms of modernisation versus custom. The discourse, which has both academic and popular arenas, can be seen as an ideological gender struggle in which customs and traditions are interpreted to fit arguments. An early contribution to this struggle is a book by Chonooka (1988) called “Traditional Marriages in Zambia”.

Chonooka describes the traditions of various ethnic groups, but puts a strong effort into finding the common customs in order to emphasise the unity of Zambia and to “promote our culture”. The main message coming through is that the culture prescribes the men’s unchallenged headship of the family. “Some working women have become too powerful and proud, and have lost respect for their working husbands. They say, they both earn money so why should the man be the head of the family? It is much more than money that decides headship of a family” (p. 165). In other words, he argues that headship is a question of sex not of breadwinning and he blames women for not sharing his own interpretation of custom.
Since these books were published, Zambian women’s organisations have been formed and the gender debate intensified and deepened. Many issues regarding women’s rights have been brought up, for example, inheritance rights, lobola¹ and violence against women. Have young women and men in George compound heard about this? How do they view their own future position as husband or wife? How do they define headship?

**Parental power and marriage**

While the young women and men in George compound accepted their parents’ power in principle and even corporal punishment for disobedience, they were more selective in their views when it came to concrete examples. The father, the head of the household, should be obeyed, but only as long as he was right and fair. The problem was that a father might often be drunk.

There were also certain limits to the acceptance of the father’s power. Daughters as well as sons made it clear that they themselves had the responsibility for their own lives and they themselves should choose a marriage partner and way of life. Regardless of the level of education, neither boys nor girls would consider marrying without love.

Mercy eloped with her lover

Mercy was not even fifteen when she eloped with the man she loved. One afternoon in 1994, I found her sitting outside her parents’ house preparing vegetables for the evening meal. She told me that she was still at school when she fell in love and eloped with a man, Duckson. They loved each other very much and they stayed with his parents who had a four-roomed house in Chawama. Duckson had previously shared the room with his brother. Now the brother moved to a neighbour where he was allowed to share a room with the neighbour’s sons. So Duckson and Mercy got a room of their own.

However, Duckson’s parents were not happy. They wanted their son to marry a certain girl from their own village. They claimed he was engaged to her. Mercy had not known about this girl when she followed the man. Duckson said to his parents, “The girl in the village is a nice girl, but it is this one I love.”

“A town girl from George compound could not be trusted, they are moving up and down,” his parents maintained and they called for an aunt. The aunt moved into the house and harassed Mercy physically and psycho-

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¹ The gifts given by the groom to the parents of the bride have different names in the different local languages. I have chosen to use lobola as the term adopted into the English language.
logically until she could not stand it any longer. She had to escape back to her parents if she was not going to lose her mind.

– Did you not tell Duckson?

– No, I thought he understood, but...

I asked if she was pregnant. Crying she told me she was not. She believed that a pregnancy could have been the door that opened the way for a marriage. She was also anxious because of not having become pregnant. What if she was barren? Her parents invited his parents for negotiations, but they refused to come:

– Before, my mother wanted me to stay in school, now she wants me to marry this man, but what can I do? Why is he not coming to take me back?

She is confident that she would become a good wife. She loved this man and she would be faithful and give him all respect. In her opinion, the man should be the head of the household, which meant that he should bring her “food and everything”.

Duckson’s parents tried hard to get him to marry the girl they wanted. This history has a happy ending for Mercy. When Mercy had lived at home for three months Duckson came, paid a first token of lobola and brought her back to his home. In the meantime, Duckson’s father had died and the aunt had gone back to the village.

Love marriages and lobola

The idea of marrying for love was firmly rooted and the informants only accepted an arranged marriage if it happened to coincide with love. Eloping was a way to force parents to agree to a marriage. Ideally, before marriage, the two families should meet and negotiate. A great range of traditions around marriage seemed to have converged into cash payments from the husband to the parents of the wife, a lobola that confirmed the serious intentions of the man and later the marriage. Eloping is not a new phenomenon, there has long been this possibility for loving couples to form a future of their own (Keller, 1979). After a couple has eloped, the families may meet to agree on the terms, or the parents of the girls may sue the man for damages and thus be compensated for the loss of lobola. This kind of case was common in the local courts.

The youth demand love marriages and Mercy’s mother showed that members of the older generation also stressed love as the glue of a marriage. I heard of no cases of forced marriages in George compound, but I met a couple of girls whose parents had tried to prevent their marriage. In the case of Mercy, Duckson’s family did not succeed in preventing their relationship, but another girl I interviewed was less lucky. The couple had been preparing for marriage and only in the week of the coming wedding did relatives find “that
the totem did not fit” and there were several, for me, incomprehensible reasons for preventing the marriage. The girl, who had met the man in a church and had had a year long sexual relationship with him, was very sad. So, while an individual love relationship is said to be the most important thing for a marriage, family opinions do still matter.

In an essay, a seventeen year old boy writes a story about a girl who was forced into marriage by her father who threatened to expel her from the family. “Not even her mother, whom she loved very much, gave her any support... Her father was only interested in the attractive bride price. The girl settled in her new home and carried out her duties, and she had four children... But her husband often came home drunk from the illicit beer called kachasu, and whenever he was drunk she was beaten for no reason at all. The girl had to go back and forth to her parents.” The writer draws the conclusion that drunkenness, forced marriages and age differences are causes of conflict. This and several other essays indicate that forced marriages still exist, due to parents’ need for money. The parents have no legal powers to force a girl, but according to the essay the girl had no choice if she did not wish to be excluded from the family.

One boy wrote: “Marriage is to buy a domestic tool. Lobola is the pay. I remember the time when my father would tell me to give my clothes to my brother’s wife so that she could wash them. Harshly he said to her: Our lobola must work.” Another essay notes that lobola has been converted into a price which varies depending on the quality of the commodity — the wife. Fiona said:

– Some men think that they buy a wife and therefore treat her as they like. But lobola is not a payment and a woman is not a commodity.

Fidelus argued against the size of the sums involved among educated people. Fiona and Cecilia explained that a huge sum was most often motivated by the cost of the girl’s education:

– But they will pay it to our father and he has not contributed a penny to our education. It is our sister who pays for everything.

The sisters were very critical, not only of the size of the sum, but also of the symbolic interpretation of buying a wife, which they did not think was easy to change. Young men in a group interview complained that without money for lobola they could not marry. Further on in the discussions it became obvious that it was more their lack of an ability to keep a family that prevented marriage. The lobola could be reduced to a token after negotiations with parents-in-law. It is a paradoxical situation: Lobola is reduced to a token among those who support and defend the custom, while it increases to huge sums among the educated who criticise it.

Many essays describe the evils that follow from what they see as a misinterpretation of the custom, others defend lobola as a proof of the seriousness
of the husband-to-be and a security for the woman. If fear of exclusion is one side of the coin, the joy of belonging may be the other. Their position was close to the WLSA (1997) team of researchers who argued, not for abolition but for a re-conceptualisation of lobola from bride price to marriage payment. Lobola could be retained as a custom which brings honour and dignity to the marriage, and thereby be beneficial to women.

A conclusion that parental blessing and lobola is beneficial for women poses questions about the situation of young couples who form domestic unions without being married or having paid any lobola. On basis of this study it is not possible to tell whether they had chosen to elope and stay unmarried because the man has no money for lobola or because they suspect that their union would not be approved. The huge number of young unmarried mothers living with their parents after short lived domestic unions certainly show that without lobola and marriage, men feel no strong obligations towards a child and its mother.

Ideal spouses and faithfulness

According to the 1990 census, two thirds of the women in George compound married before the age of twenty, eight per cent even before the age of fifteen. Marriage is on the agenda for young women and it was easy for them to characterise what they saw as a good wife and a good husband. The most common answers to the questions on what characterised a good wife and a good husband were, that a good wife works hard at home, shows respect to her husband and makes him feel good, and is nice to her husband’s relatives. The characteristics of a good husband were that he supports his wife, is nice to her and does not beat her, and that he consults his wife before taking decisions.

These answers were given by both young women and men. However, the frequency, emphasis and interpretation differed greatly between men and women. The young women had the ideal of a husband who not only supported them but could “keep them well”. They accepted that men took the decisions, but emphasised that as wives they should be consulted. Men emphasised the wife’s respect and that they themselves had to make plans and take all decisions.

The young women had a special and important claim on a good husband: He should be faithful to her and never take a second wife. Faithfulness on the side of the wife was taken for granted as a necessary characteristic for a good wife, but the young men did not agree that this was also the case for the husband.
Male group interview: A wife shall show respect

Six young men were interviewed as a group. They were friends and neighbours, all but one were eighteen years old. Four were born in George and the other two had come to town as children more than ten years earlier. None of them had been to secondary school.

What makes a man a man, they said, is that he works hard and that he has plans in mind. Although they were all unemployed they agreed that work defines a man. Without earning money a man cannot get married. To be married and become a head of a household was the ultimate step from being a dependant to becoming a man. The ideal age of marriage for a man was twenty-five to thirty years. The girl should be as young as possible:

– A young girl can be formed like clay, one of the boys said and was supported by laughter. But another boy protested and said that he wanted a wife who also was a friend to talk to and exchange opinions with.

Asked to characterise what they saw as a good wife whom they would like marry in the future, they agreed after some discussion:

– She shall respect me as a husband, respect my parents, be clean and beautiful, be tolerant and not talk to other men.

– What does it mean for a wife to respect her husband? I asked

Respect is a positive word but in the end it turned out to be the equivalent of obedience. A wife shall show respect to her husband by being obedient without the husband having to use harsh words or force. A husband shall show respect to his wife by being non-violent. A wife should be advised, but not beaten. They all believed that wife-beating had become more common during recent years and they blamed this on women for not being obedient. They understood that a man could become angry if his wife did not do what she was told. Asked what they meant by tolerant, one boy said:

– She should be able to take abuse from my parents without getting angry.

The others agreed and told some stories about mother and daughter-in-law relationships. Then they added that their wife should also be tolerant toward her husband, not nagging and complaining. Asked if tolerance was not a characteristic of a good husband as well as of a wife, they started a discussion which ended by them trying to define what was the power of a head of the household. Slightly simplified, my conclusion was that they wanted to define headship to include all the power, while the wife should agree with everything, so that there were no conflicts.

However, the boys believed a woman had a source of power and control over her boyfriend or husband through the use of herbs. There are a number of love medicines and also herbs for other purposes. They all believed that the
herbs were very powerful and they ascribed great skills to women in using herbs.

I asked if they wanted to lock their future wife into the house, as they did not want her to go out and talk to other men. After some discussion they modified this. They meant flirting, not just talking, and after further discussion they agreed that a wife could work. They regarded this position as proof of their having modern minds.

– If your wife earns. Is it her right to use the money as she wants? I asked
– Yes, they said without hesitation. From my previous study I knew that this position was not self-evident among the older generation. One of the boys added:
– If I have nothing for a beer, she should give me something!

Adultery and “second wives”

The clearest division in the views of women and men was the attitude to polygyny and faithfulness. Women’s ideal of a husband included absolute faithfulness and no second wife. It was an ideal of all women, but most of them seemed to hesitate to make demands which went against what they saw as an African tradition. The risk was that they would be deserted and they knew about the hardships that a woman without the support of a man could meet. They rather used love medicine to make the husband incapable of making love to someone else. But many young women held strong positions and were outspoken, among them were Fiona and Cecilia. They definitely rejected being a second wife or accepting a second wife; they also demanded absolute faithfulness:

– With the HIV virus, faithfulness has become a question of life and death.

Under the threat of AIDS, young men also saw a value in faithfulness. Still they maintained:

– A husband is a good husband even if he looks for a second wife.

Polygyny exists in Zambian tradition, but it never was the dominant form of marriage. The wives were kept separate and each was responsible for her independent household. In the early period of urbanisation, when wives were often left in the village to maintain agricultural production, it was not unusual that men took a town wife without performing the traditional marriage rituals. This form of polygyny is described in the studies done in the Copperbelt towns in the fifties by Epstein (1981) and Powdermaker (1962). With urban families’ dependence on the husband’s wage, it has become more difficult for a man to keep several wives. Nevertheless, the custom prevails, and in George compound many men take a second wife without fulfilling the obligations of marriage procedures. At least, that was a general opinion among the inhabitants, and there were several cases among my informants.
The issue of polygyny is related to the question of faithfulness. Adultery on behalf of a husband was not seen as adultery by the men, but as the natural search for a second wife. The tradition, the essay-writers say, is that women have to be tolerant of their husbands. A nineteen year old boy wrote: “One time my mother was beaten carelessly by my father for following him to a drinking place after she was told about the love affair of daddy and a certain woman. When mom visited the scene, father was really tight with this woman. My father was very annoyed by mom’s following him and beat her. My mother had to flee to her parents, but her parents advised her to go back after hearing the story about the affair between my father and the other woman. She was told that it is a taboo for a woman to pop her nose into her husband’s moves. She had shown lack of discipline, no matter that she was beaten.”

I was also told, especially by the young men, that adultery on the part of wives was not uncommon. If husbands were unemployed, the wives were suspected of accepting gifts from lovers. In the discussions with young men, their demand for a good wife to stay at home was not only motivated by their wish to be in full control over the household income, it was also motivated by their need for control of the wife’s sexuality. A husband’s control of wife’s sexuality is supported by law. The husband has the right to sue his wife’s lover.

The meaning of headship

The young generation was born into an authoritarian family tradition in which the father’s decisions could not be questioned. At the same time, many of them had grown up in families without fathers or in families, where the ideal of the male breadwinner was no longer valid. Their mothers’ contribution to the households had been substantial. In spite of this, many young men subscribed to the model of a male breadwinner with a wife as a homemaker as the ideal model. Some men could accept working wives, but whether they did so or not, they tended to detach the definition of household head from being the breadwinner. The uneducated girls wanted to be provided for and with that they accepted that men would head the household.

I provoked both women and men by saying that a couple has two heads as it is constituted by two persons. A clever family uses both heads. The girls laughed happily at this splendid but strange idea, while the boys rejected it with great emphasis:

- There cannot be a family with two heads. There are no such animals.
- The Bible tells us to be the head of the household.
- It is not our African culture. We pay lobola and we become the heads.
Breadwinning and women’s work

On the issue of wives’ work outside their home, views among men and women were divided. Uneducated young women agreed with the men that the husband should be the head of the household and the main provider. The dream for many young women was to find a man who could keep them well. Nevertheless, they saw the importance in being able to, and allowed to, earn money for themselves and their children. They did not approve of the idea of being confined to the home only; they wanted to earn something for themselves and be able to visit their own friends and relatives whenever they wanted to, without having to ask for permission and for money for bus fares.

When Mercy had been maltreated and was forced to leave the house of the man she had eloped with and wanted to marry, I asked her what she was going to do. She said that she could just wait and keep herself. I misunderstood her answer thinking that she wanted to keep herself in the meaning of being economically independent. But that was not what she meant. She explained that her responsibility was to keep her body clean and not “move up and down” with boys. She did not view economic independence as desirable. She wanted to marry and make her husband happy.

– Men just do not feel well if their wife can be independent. A wife must make her husband feel well.

My further interviews confirmed that Mercy’s view was widespread. Almost all the young men, educated or not, held the ideal of a non-working wife who “spends most of her time at home”. Often they openly related this view to the husband’s need for control and authority:

– She shall not earn, because a working woman creates problems. She might like to decide for herself.

One of the female essay-writers, Pamela, seventeen years old, wrote: “In the home of a husband and wife who are both working. Let’s say they all have degrees and maybe the wife holds a higher post at work than the husband. Such a marriage will not last long because they will all be boastful toward each other... In such homes violence is there. There will be a lot of competition and no love for each other... In such cases relatives of the husband will force him to divorce this wife because of her manners. Some of the relatives will end up killing her by means of magic.”

Fiona and Cecilia: Work first—marriage later

Both Fiona and Cecilia agreed that education was the only way for a girl to avoid total submission to a man in the future. In their opinion, a woman must have a profession and continue to work and have an income of her own when married, otherwise she was at risk.

– If you are only married it is no good. You can never trust a man.
– If I marry I want to have a job so that I can support myself. If my husband earns well, I might stop working for a period while the children are small. But if I have a job I like, I will continue to work like my sister does.

Turning the talk about their views on the future, they both revealed a dream of a husband who respected them.
– What do you mean by respect?
– He should consult me in all matters and listen to me.

Both Fiona and Cecilia were conscious of, and disturbed by, the fact that marriage put control of their lives into a man’s hand. They declared that men were not trustworthy and they mentioned their own father as an example. He had never contributed to the household. They had seen widows and divorcees being stripped of all their belongings, and they had seen conflicts and bitter struggles in families and between in-laws. In complete sincerity they suggested that the best option was never to marry. Then, giggling, they both added that they would marry anyhow if only Mr Right turned up.

Fiona and Cecilia were determined to get a job before marriage and to continue to work. I asked them what they would do if their husbands did not want them to work. They said that they would never marry a man who did not accept a professional wife.
– So there will be two heads in your household?
– No, my husband will be the head of the household! OK, as Zambian girls we are taught to be submissive. A good wife should obey her husband. I will obey my husband if he is right. I do not intend to agree with him if he is wrong!
– But if it is not an important matter, and you have another opinion, would you agree with him just in order to be a good wife?
– No! Never.

A job was the first aim in their lives. They wanted both a profession and to be married! They had realistic views on the difficulties that they were going to meet in their efforts to get working experience before marriage. They told me several stories that they had heard about the need for contacts in order to get a job and about sexual harassment during recruitment. Employers asked for “carpet interviews”. Still, Cecilia’s believe she was going to be successful in her studies and in getting a work:
– You have to have work experience before marriage, because you cannot rely on anybody, she explained.

Evelyne: I will go back
Evelyne’s marriage has been the same all the time. She goes and comes back, goes and comes back to her parents’ house. Her husband comes to fetch her
and says he wants her, then after a while he scolds her, beats her and throws her out of the house.

– What are your own feelings for him? Can you go on like this for ever? I asked.

– No, really I would like to divorce him. I am tired of him and of this moving up and down. I do not want to do it with my husband any longer. I do not like it. I would like to stay here and just be a mother.

– So what will you say when he comes?

– I will go with him.

– So he has also positive sides?

– He is my husband. The baby I am expecting is his. I have to follow him.

Evelyne is slim and weak and she has a skin disease. She has not been tested for HIV, nor were any of her three deceased children, but she suspects that she is developing AIDS. She says that then she will come back home to her parents anyhow, because she is not feeling well and her husband does not take care of her when she is ill. Nevertheless, he is her husband, he has paid the lobola. Although she is battered, she does not question his supreme rights as the head of the household.

Violence in the family

Like Evelyne, other battered women said that they try to please their husbands and avoid provoking them. In contrast, the conclusion drawn in the male group interviews, was that women’s increasing inability to subordinate themselves was the main reason for increased domestic violence. Many essay-writers also propose similar explanations for domestic violence. An eighteen year old boy writes: “The sudden uprising of the feminine gender to fight for equality with men is one of such developments which have led to family violence... Had this fight been restricted to employment only, I think things would not have become sour in families... But women have taken this struggle even into the families.”

Wife-beating is used as an argument against equality: wives should not demand equality because it provokes violence. An eighteen year old schoolboy writes: “Unfortunately, men having been heads of the families cannot accept this (equality) so easily, so what happens? Violence erupts between husbands and wives.”

A survey of gender attitudes reveals that thirty-one percent of all Zambians think that a husband is entitled to beat his wife in order to discipline her (CSO b, 1997). The gender differences are smaller than what might be expected, only four percent. This means that more than every forth woman approves wife-beating. The survey shows that this attitude decreases with education and urbanisation.
Both boys and girls in George compound believed that serious violence in the family had increased. There was a gender difference in the explanation and justification. The interviewed girls never justified wife-beating, but some of the interviewed boys actually did so. An eighteen year old schoolboy writes a moral story of a lazy and cheeky wife who was beaten up and became loving, respecting and hardworking because of the treatment by her husband. As a future father, he sees himself having the responsibility of “teaching my wife and my children which ways are good in this world and of the word of God”. Many of the boys use quotations from the Bible to strengthen their arguments. One of them concludes: “A thing that some women tend to forget, is that the Bible tells wives to be loyal to their husbands... The man is trying to have the loyalty that he is entitled to have. In order to have it, he is entitled to beat his wife”.

The young men in the group interview presented above did not justify violence, although they found excuses for it. In another group interview, the young men agreed among themselves that a husband and a father may have to use corporal punishment, not only on the children, but also on the wife if she did not show respect:

- Women are cheeky and do not behave. Wives are disobedient and provoke their husbands, because they earn their own money.

Reading all the essays submitted to ZARD on the theme of violence reveals a number of different explanations, but still the focus is on the behaviour of the wife. According to several essay-writers, a wife may provoke violence by being disobedient, cheeky, jealous or lazy. Explicit examples of disobedience are that the wife denies her husband sex, or that she does not accept his decision. Disobedience and cheeky behaviour of women were often explained by the fact that women were breadwinners. The women wanted to have a say over their own earnings. Several writers said explicitly that it was women’s fight for equality which led to family violence. Some male writers actually believe that women need beating.

Other reasons given for why women provoke violence were related to structural explanations. Due to poverty, a wife may not be able to serve good food, which may provoke violence. Or she may go with other men in order to get gifts, a behaviour that certainly provokes violence. Due to a forced marriage and lack of love, a wife may cause her husband’s impotence with witchcraft, or because of an inter-tribal marriage she may have difficulties in accepting the customs of her husband’s family. Usually the girls blamed abstractions such as poverty, alcoholism and jealousy, which make violence occur or erupt. No one put blame directly on the man who does the beating. In this, the educated woman does not differ from the uneducated.

Jeff, an eighteen year old boy, has written an outstanding essay. His views differ profoundly from most of the others for whom violence is gender-
neutral and just erupts due to various kinds of hardship. Furthermore, he sees the results and tries to understand its ideological basis: “Often husbands view the marriage licence as a licence to batter their wives.... In fact, wife-beating causes more injuries to women requiring hospitalisation than rapes, muggings and automobile accidents combined... A child witnessing his mother being battered is equivalent to the child being battered. Thus most of these young witnesses are conditioned to believe that men must control women and, in order to do so, man must scare, hurt and demean them... Abusive men have the wrong view of women, whatever culture they are from they have been brought up to believe that a man is number one. Men are trained to believe that they are superior to women and that it is their right to punish, discipline or intimidate them. In many lands the man is considered to have the right to treat his wife like a mere object, just another piece of his property. His control and domination of his wife is taken as a measure of his manliness and honour.”

Co-operation and love in the marriage

To marry for love has been widely accepted as the only possible basis for marriage. Many young women also saw the survival of love in the marriage as a condition for not breaking up. They were not ready to accept that their husband divided his love with a second wife. For the men, love was not necessarily indivisible and they often believed that if a man showed too much love and dedication to one woman he was bewitched or poisoned.

An essay-writer called Pamela believed that a wife shows love by obeying her husband and if she did not, the husband was bound to look for another wife. In Pamela’s thinking and that of many of the people of George compound, a woman shows love by subordinating her wishes to her husband’s. But the dream, the ideal expressed by many young women was to marry, to co-operate with her husband, to be respected by his relatives, to love each other and to have a sense of belonging. Obedience could be accepted, but never unconditionally. Many uneducated women and men clearly said that they wanted co-operation on more equal terms between spouses. One young man who was not at school and was out of work gave voice to a vision of a love marriage based on mutuality:

– I wish I could afford to marry my girlfriend, I want her to be my wife and my best friend. I want us to share all problems and all joys.

The varying and partly conflicting ideals of a good husband or a good wife reflect an uncertainty about authority in the family; there are those who defend and those who challenge inequalities in the family. It can be described as a gender struggle at family level, a struggle that is fought in the form of
negotiations which can occur in verbal arguments or in action. Most often it is a peaceful struggle, but it may also become violent.

Fiona and Cecilia rebelled against men’s power over women and discussed the positive features of never marrying. Still, they wanted to believe that they themselves ought to be lucky enough to find the unique man who would treat them, if not as equals, so at least with great respect. A Mr Right should love them, support them in their working career and not be scared by their economic independence.

Asked to compare their own situation as young women with those of their mother’s generation they said that they lived in another world.

– Our mother married when she was fourteen or younger. She had no options. We can get an education and can prepare for responsibilities, Cecilia said.

– They have started to fight for equal rights and we can only have rights if we are not totally dependant on a man, Fiona added.

– Who are “they” fighting for equal rights? I asked.

– They are many. All of us have to struggle.
8. Sexuality, knowledge, and gender identity

This chapter focuses on the young people’s views about boyfriends and girlfriends, on expectations and norms in the interaction between young men and women, and on sexuality. What type of negotiations surround sexual activities among the youth?

In Zambian campaigns to prevent the spread of HIV, young people’s sexual desire is often denied, and abstinence is put forward as the solution. Sexual activity becomes the problem. How are young people in George compound handling the conflicts between ideal and actual behaviour? Premarital sex is common in Zambia. Milimo (1993) found it to occur in eighty per cent of all cases. This was regarded as a high rate and a problem. Frequent explanations given were lack of parental guidance and women’s need of money, but her respondents also suggested explanations that touched on the issue of gender identity, such as men’s inability to control themselves and the need to be a real man or woman.

In Tanzania, a research programme on teenage girls’ reproductive health has included several case studies on teenage sexuality. The studies “lament the rapid disintegration of family values and the community’s relinquishment of its common responsibilities to nurture adolescents and groom them as accountable adults. The modern state has so far not managed to fill the vacuum left by abandoned rituals.” (Rwebangira, 1998: 7). Could this be said about George compound as well? What knowledge do the youth in George compound have about sexuality, and from where do they get it? Are rituals abandoned or are they adapted to urban life?

Power and pleasure, that is what sexuality is about, writes Harper (1996) for the editorial collective of the South African journal, Agenda. Discussions on sexuality, the editors found, often boil down to a discussion on reproductive rights, unwanted pregnancies, motherhood or diseases and power in relation to these issues. The pleasure of love is a motor of human behaviour, but is seldom included as an aspect of sexuality in research. This study has not gone into depth on this issue, but I assumed that positive or negative sexual experience or non-experience were central in the forming of gender identities. However, like Harper, I found that experience of sexuality as a way of sharing physical experience and pleasure was not easily turned into words, by either women or men, while anguish, conflicts and power around sexuality were more easily communicated.
Schooling and divergent views

School and formal education was raised as an issue in the interviews with the young women and men only in relation to their knowledge about the body, sexuality and reproductive health. The difference in knowledge between youth in or out of school was not significant, but their attitudes and way of talking about sexual activities did diverge.

The importance of school in forming attitudes came through in some findings of a study in Kafue, assessing young people’s sexual health (Clara et al., 1997), and it was also noticed by Kabwela, one of the essay-writers from George compound. Fiona and Cecilia had not learned much at school, about either their bodies or sexuality, but to them, education was the springboard to a better future and sexuality was seen as a threat to that future. Excerpts from a male group interview are presented to illustrate the arguments of young men who were not at school.

Kabwela’s essay

Kabwela discusses three groups, school-going youth, those who are not at school but have experience of school life, and those who have been to school for just a few years or not at all.

According to Kabwela, teenagers who are at school experience love and sexuality along with a lot of anxiety. They are barred by restrictions at home, by religious denominations as well as by restrictions of the school. He believes that many teenagers experienced sexuality as a result of peer pressure. In school there are groups of youths from different areas and backgrounds and in such an environment, group competition and a wish to experiment with what others do come into play. School-going youth in love write letters, and exchange gifts and photographs. A problem is that their curiosity about love and sexuality makes them concentrate less in class and may result in their leaving school prematurely.

Teenagers who are not at school, writes Kabwela, have experienced school-life and have received guidelines from parents, the community and religious organisations. Kabwela proposes a number of explanations as to why many of them concentrate on sexuality: “They have little or nothing else to do, ... they are financially sound, beautiful or handsome, or they have an inborn aspect of love and sexuality in them”.

The teenagers who have never entered school have received learning from their parents and the community, Kabwela writes. Nevertheless, he believes that they are driven into love and sexuality without knowing the fruits that may result. He points to cases of intimidation. He pities the uneducated who lack knowledge which may play a role in understanding and behaviour change. “The sexuality they practice most often leads them into marriage.”
In interviews and essays, it became clear that the level of education affected thinking about sexuality, but I would not explain that simply as a lack of understanding. Rather it is another understanding arising from other alternatives in life and other strategies for the future. Kabwela suggests that lack of time or opportunities lead school-going youth to try to refrain from sexual activity. Kabwela uses gender neutral language and has not reflected on possible differences in the situation of boys and girls. The following interview with Fiona and Cecilia points at the risks involved in sexual activity and its impact on a future career as the reason for abstention. This was most clearly revealed in interviews with girls, but school-going boys also argued in similar ways.

Fiona and Cecilia: No playing around

Fiona and Cecilia were outspoken representatives for the view that sexuality poses a threat to their ambitions of making a career as professionals. A professional career was partly motivated as a strategy to avoid being totally dependent on one man. Both sisters appreciated “strict rules in order to be protected from temptations” and they put all their efforts into their school work. The younger sister added:

– I have more freedom living with my mother. Yet too much freedom is not good for young girls. The important thing for us now is to get an education.

– When I live here I have to follow strict rules. My elder sister accepts no fooling around. I am not allowed to go outside the house. She does not even like me going to church on Sundays.

Both sisters said that they had many boyfriends but, they emphasised, the boyfriends were just friends. Cecilia added that she did not really have any special boyfriend now. She had a boyfriend she really liked, but he married someone else. They had never “come together”, though he had put pressure on her. She loved him and wanted to, but she was afraid. One of her friends had almost died after an abortion and she wanted to finish school before having children.

– He kept asking me to marry him, but I was at school and did not want to quit. It is impossible to serve two masters. He wanted me to stop in form eight. If I had done so, I would never ever have got a job. To get a job you must be educated and have a speciality.

She was almost in tears when she recalled that her boyfriend did not wait for her, but married another girl of fifteen. She did not regret her choice, though. She reflected over the situation of a friend who married for love and now struggled for food without prospects of escaping from poverty.
The sisters had not been told about sexuality, either by their mother, or by
the aunts who were supposed to inform them. In their family they had no
rites or traditional teachings for young girls.
– We will have kitchen parties before our weddings.
They denied knowledge of what they would be taught at the kitchen party
and they denied ever having heard about dry sex, a custom of inserting herbs
in the vagina in order to become dry, which is believed to enhance the
pleasure of the husband. It may be that they wanted to appear to be modern
girls to me. They had a fairly good knowledge of contraceptives. They had
learned nothing at school, so all they know they were told by friends.
In her dream about the future Fiona wanted two children, one boy and
one girl.
– And if you get two girls or two boys? I asked.
– I would still only have two children.
Cecilia saw complications. It was risky to use pills:
– If you later want more children you may have become barren.
She wanted four children to be safe. She knew that many children died. She
started to talk about the cholera coming back and about witchcraft. She
referred to a previous question about what was good and bad with living in
George compound.
Fiona and Cecilia intended to get exams and some years of working
experience before marriage. I wondered how they saw their lives during these
years of studies and work before a possible marriage. I asked if they intended
to stay virgins until marriage, even if they worked for some years and married
at, say, twenty-five. With a giggle, they agreed that it would be difficult for a
boyfriend to wait that long, but they were resolute in their intention to avoid
an unwanted pregnancy. The safest way was to keep men at a distance:
– You cannot flirt with men and expect it to stay with kisses.
They protested when I said that girls who got pregnant were unlucky.
– It is not a matter of luck, but of misbehaviour. They have to know that a
certain behaviour could have consequences.
– These girls use baking powder, washing powder, herbs, and God knows
what for abortion.
In the light of the fact that they had realised that they would be under
pressure and probably find it difficult to remain virgins themselves, they were
very condemnatory in their comments. Yet they did not think of themselves,
but about “all those girls who go with boys, teachers and other older men, for
presents”. I wondered whether they condemned teenage pregnancies only
and asked if they wanted to have children out of wedlock if Mr Right never
turns up.
– Yes.
– Yes, of course!
Male group interview: Many girlfriends

I asked the six unemployed young men about their girlfriends and they started to boast about how many girlfriends they had. Sexual activity was obviously central in their definition of masculinity. It made a man strong. The boy who had distinguished himself before through independent and different views said:

– My girlfriend and I, we are the best friends, we respect each other, and we are faithful.

His comment made the other more serious:

– I stick to one at the time.
– I cannot have many, I have no money for gifts.
– I stick to one, she does not ask for gifts every time.

The girlfriends all lived within George compound. Some of the couples saw each other every day; others spent time together once a week. None of the boys had ever used a contraceptive. They claimed to be careful. On the other hand, they also expressed the view that the girls get strength from the sperm. They all agreed that girls like gifts and that they prefer boys with money. Being unemployed, they had to find a way to a girl’s heart by other means:

– If you talk nicely and satisfy a girl, she wants you again.

Their boasting about many girlfriends and the joking manner of the group discussion came to an abrupt end when I asked about the AIDS risk. Some murmured that they did not go to prostitutes. There was an uneasiness in the group, and some of its members stood up as if they wanted to leave. I decided to leave the subject and asked if they would marry their girlfriend if she became pregnant.

– We cannot marry as we have no work.

They became very upset about my question if they would help the girl to get an abortion, and all of them dismissed the idea:

– Abortion. NO! You should not abort what is going to become a human being! It is against God’s will.
– Was it a commandment of God? Did they follow all the commandments?

I asked

– It is a sin in the eyes of all Gods and of the ancestors.
– But if the father has not admitted his fatherhood?
– The ancestors will know.

None of the boys went to church. They said church-going was for girls and elderly people and they made some jokes about all the pretty girls in church:

– I am not so desperate for a girl that I go to church.

The boy who dared to contest the dominant views of the group, did so again and said:
– I pray at home. You do not have to join a church to show respect for God.

Later in the interview I asked about homosexuality. With reference to “African culture” and to the Bible, the young men denied its existence in George compound. They made a direct connection between sexual harassment and homosexuality:

– In prison, boys are homosexually raped. If you are a thief and get caught, that is the worst thing that happens to you.

**Sex education**

The AIDS epidemic has made the question of sexual behaviour and education a problem that is widely discussed at all levels of society. It has often been said that traditional education has disappeared while the parents and the schools are not shoudering the responsibility. In George compound, it is not true that the traditional initiation ceremonies have disappeared. They were there for girls albeit somewhat changed in timing, form and content.

For boys, the ceremonies are not performed any longer, possibly with some exceptions. I was told second hand that an ethnic group originating from an area near the Tanzanian border still held ceremonies for boys in George compound. However, I never managed to locate a first hand informant. According to Dover (1995) the customary threshold rituals to male adulthood had disappeared also in the rural area of the Goba.

At school, most girls and boys had never had any lessons about the body and its biological functions, or about sexuality and morality, apart from general condemnation of any sexual activity. Like Fiona and Cecilia, most educated youths said that they had not learned anything about sexuality at school. Jonah was an exception, who said that he had learned about the human body and its reproductive organs in anatomy lessons, while a few other informants said that a non-governmental organisation had visited the school and talked about the AIDS disease and how you can catch it.

Parents’ responsibility is strongly emphasised in the official Zambian discourse on AIDS. Yet in the views of people in George compound, parents have only an indirect responsibility for the sexual education of their own children. It is taboo for a mother to raise these issues with her daughter, but she can make sure that an aunt or another relative is appointed as someone the daughter can turn to for advice. To give advice in personal matters is also an important responsibility of a grandmother. Dover (1995) found the same attitude among rural Goba and noted that the taboo may be less stringent in strongly Christian families.

In George compound, as far as my interviews indicate, parents continued to withdraw from the sexual education of their children, regardless of how
devout they were in their religious beliefs. The youth, regardless of level of education, maintained the opinion that their parents were not suitable talking partners when it came to problems of sexuality or related personal feelings. They said that in the case of serious problems they would probably turn to some person in the older generation, most likely a grandparent.

If not earlier, a person is assigned as an adviser just before the girl or the boy marry. “Advice on marriage” is referred to as a common element in the various Zambian customs. An experienced person is assigned to thoroughly prepare each partner for married life. I found most people take this issue very seriously. Young couples saw the custom as a resource; if trouble arose, they could turn to the person who sometimes was called the guardian of the marriage. In George compound the guardian of the marriage was not always a relative, but might be an elderly neighbour.

It seemed as if individual counselling of relatives does not start until there are problems or it is time for marriage. The youths learn by observation within the family and the neighbourhood. Life in overcrowded conditions does not allow for many secrets. Many boys said that they had seen their sisters when asked about what they know about girls’ bodies. Both boys and girls said that the first information they got about sexuality was from friends. Sexual experience was discussed with friends.

Mercy’s ceremony

When I met Mercy in 1994, nobody had ever talked seriously with her about her body and about sexuality. She knew from friends what to expect, before she began to menstruate. From friends, she had also heard stories about what a man can do to a woman. Her best friend was raped in George compound, so at first she thought sex was something terrible. Yet with the man she loved she learned that it was something fine.

Despite the history of elopement, when Duckson came to take Mercy back to his house, her parents did not allow her to follow him until she had been through an initiation ceremony. She was young and had been to school so, therefore, her parents had delayed the ceremony.

– Before in the villages, the ceremony was held twice a year for the girls who had started to menstruate, Mercy’s mother said and continued:
– Now we think it is better if they wait for marriage and do not learn how to move with men too early. The ceremonies are usually held during school leave, because the girls should be in seclusion for almost a month.

Mercy had already left school and they planned a month of seclusion for her. Mercy was secluded in the smaller of the two rooms. Every day elderly women, relatives and neighbours came. Mothers never participated in the ceremonies of their daughters, but married sisters may do so. Mercy’s sister
Evelyne came home to participate, bringing her baby with her. Unfortunately, the baby died, so they had to terminate the ceremony after only ten days.

– What did you teach her? I asked Evelyne
– Everything. How to behave and how to move with a man.
– Do you teach her about dry sex?
– Yes, that is our custom.

I asked the mother, who used to participate in other girls’ ceremonies, if the girls today were taught the same things as she herself was taught in the village when she was young. She explained:

– Some things are the same. There is no difference in how to please a man. How to move up and down. Yet many customs have changed. I was told that after I had a baby I should come back to my mother and father and stay with them for four to six months. Now we tell the young women to stay with their husbands. We also tell them how a wife is supposed to behave in relation to her in-laws. Usually, nowadays we have participants from different tribes so the girls learn about different customs.

How to please a man

In talks with parents, I was assured that almost all girls went through a ceremony, although not at the same tender age as a generation ago. Two reasons were given. First, they talked about the difficulties of keeping girls out of school. However, there are holidays and furthermore the majority of teenagers in George compound are not at school anyhow. Therefore, I think that the second reason was more important:

– We do not want to teach the girls about sexuality too early. What they know about they will start practising.

Given this attitude, the ceremony was often postponed until just before the marriage and merged into a prolonged so-called kitchen party. In Mercy’s case, no marriage was held, due to illness in her husband’s family, but with the ceremony performed for Mercy, and the first token of lobola paid, the marriage process was seen as having started.

Preferably, the ceremony should be three weeks to one month long, but for various reasons it was often shortened. A shorter period was planned for economic reasons. Often the ceremony involved guests from the village who had to be paid for. The period could also be shorter due to unexpected events, such as death in the family, as happened to Mercy.

As in Mercy’s ceremony, participation was usually multi-ethnic. It was generally regarded as important to be aware of variations in customs. The contents of the ceremony also varied somewhat according to ethnic affiliation. In Mercy’s case, the education in sexual behaviour was very practical, but I was told that it was not so among the Tongas and Lozis. The majority of girls
in George compound learned “how to dance in bed”, how to mix herbs and insert in vagina in order to get dry, and many small tricks of “how to please a man”.

A study by Nyirenda (1994) shows that dry sex is widely practised by women in Lusaka. One reason for the practice given by the women was to enhance mutual satisfaction, but other reasons were to keep their husband, to please their husband, or because their husband demands it. Nyirenda’s concern stems from the fact that dry sex causes irritation and wounds which facilitate HIV infection. Milimo (1993) is also concerned that the “more general and perhaps more important issue is the preoccupation on sex and the sexual satisfaction females feel that they must give to their male partners... These practices reduce women to mere providers of sexual satisfaction to their husbands” (p. 54).

Mercy was also taught about her own body and about how to keep it clean. I was curious about whether the girls learned to respect their own sexuality. Studies in Mozambique have indicated that women defended the initiation rites against FRELIMO’s condemnation, as it provided a women’s space where a girl learns about her own body and sexuality (Arnfred, 1988).

Most of my informants emphasised that they learned how to please a man. I tried to find questions which would provide answers reflecting a more positive view of the girl’s own sexuality and pleasure, but failed to get any information of that kind. On the other hand, the existence of the girls’ own sexual desires was taken for granted. It was also taken for granted that if a girl’s desire was not woken by a man before the ceremony, it would certainly be awoken by the ceremony itself. That was the primary reason for postponing the ceremony.

Girls were told never to reveal the contents of the teaching during the ceremonies. They seemed to value the secret as a proof of their womanhood. They were, therefore, not willing to tell me much about the ceremony and I did not want to push them. What they said was that they learned how to behave, how to respect their future in-laws and how to please a man.

The girls who recently had gone through the ceremony generally seemed happy with the experience. Their positive evaluation may to some degree be explained by the fact that they had for once been the centre of everyone’s attention. As a child, and especially as a girl, you were not supposed to be noticed much in the family. Yet for once everything centred around the girl. The girls were proud. Initiation rites were not central in their answers to the question about what makes a woman a woman. Nevertheless, I interpreted the pride shown by these young girls, as a pride at having left childhood and joined womanhood.

There were deviating views. One young woman who had just been through the ceremony was negative towards the experience as a whole. She
maintained that she was simply indoctrinated into subordination and that everything was just about how to please a man. She had learned nothing about her own needs and rights. She was told to always obey her husband and her husband’s relatives. A young married woman made a similar assessment of her kitchen-party.

In a dialogue quoted by Touwen (1996), there is a similar critique of the ceremonial teaching of women to be submissive. Should a woman really go to the kitchen and prepare food for her husband if he comes home and wakes her up at four in the morning? It was concluded that kitchen parties should help the girls to understand family life. The contents of the teaching should be changed. This was also the dominant view among my colleagues at the university.

**Sexual activity or abstention?**

The official message to young people, at school, in the media and in AIDS campaigns, was that they should not have a sex life before marriage. While this view was widely accepted on the surface, at the same time there was a strong belief that sexual activity was necessary for a man not to fall ill and that sperm has a strengthening effect on young women. Lindahl (1993) reviews a study by Likwa which suggests there is an average age of sixteen years for a girl’s first intercourse.

That sexual activities were differently judged for men and for women became obvious in the interviews. Almost all young men claimed to have had several girlfriends, while young women claimed to be virgins if not proved otherwise, that is by being mothers or being infected by HIV. Unmarried girls, who did not admit to their own sexual activity, nevertheless said that it was very common for young girls to be sexually active.

According to Epstein (1981) and Powdermaker (1962), who conducted fieldwork on the Copperbelt in the fifties, the view on sex was not puritan and certainly women’s sexual desires were also acknowledged. In George compound in the nineties, the views were more contradictory. The Pentecostal churches, with their strongly puritanical messages, were increasing in influence. To them AIDS was sent by God to punish immorality.

It is impossible to tell from my interviews if the risk of AIDS has in any way influenced the actual behaviour of young boys, but certainly it has an influence on their thinking. All were surrounded by dying relatives and friends and they were well informed about the reason for the disease. A few who boasted about having many girls denied that they put themselves at risk. They expressed a belief in faith or in witches:

– Sex or no sex—you live or you die.
The young men’s definition of becoming a man included having sexual experiences. In the group interviews, the young men easily became competitive when recounting their experiences. Yet, in individual interviews, they revealed their anxiety over the possibility of getting AIDS. Many of them said that they intended to remain faithful to one girl, but when they were drinking they forgot about it and when they woke up the next day they were scared. The ideal of proving their manhood and enjoying life as a man was in conflict with their knowledge about AIDS and their wish to survive.

Girls were put under pressure from boyfriends to accept a sexual relationship and were asked to “behave like a woman”. Keeping a boyfriend for long without a sexual relationship was regarded as improbable. The few girls I met who admitted being sexually active all claimed it was because of love. Like the youth in a Gambian study, they thought it was bad to “go with boys for gifts”, while love justified sexual activity (Faber & Viktorsson, 1994). There seems to be a difference between Gambia, where youths practised a sexuality without penetration which they called to “play love”, and George compound where youths of both sexes seemed to believe that a man could not stop himself. Fiona’s comment that “you can not expect a man to stop with kisses”, was echoed in many interviews.

Another difference is that in George compound, with the exception of some Christian believers, young people did not care much about virginity, which was very important in Gambia. Schoolgoing girls should keep themselves in order not to get pregnant and spoil their education. Girls out of school should not get pregnant with the “wrong man”. If it was the “right man”, a pregnancy was just happy news.

To elope with the man one loves has been accepted as a tradition within several ethnic groups, and it seemed to have been accepted as an urban custom. The problem was that the man often deceived the woman and left her after a while. In the villages, relatives put strong pressure on the man and damages had to be paid if the couple did not marry. In George compound, social control was weaker and damages were seldom paid, even if ordered by a court.

Possibly due to the strong recommendation of abstention, few educated boys openly admitted to being sexually active. Devout Christians and the recently “born again” denied the ideal of a man being sexual active. Their ideal was abstinence and if they had been weak and committed a sin, they expected punishment. Other boys who tried to live in abstinence were those ambitiously working for a career. No educated boy told me that he thought sexual activity was necessary for health and strength, but several girls claimed that boys had such ideas. That was the boyfriend’s most common persuasive argument. The girls, however, were not convinced.
– If you are in love, you feel happy and strong, it is not because of intercourse.

Youths were told about condoms but recommended abstention. Only to adult audiences was the principle of one man – one woman preached, a message that according to Ngulube (1989) “can not enter people’s heads”. Either Ngulube referred only to male heads, or there has been a drastic change of attitudes, because I found the idea of one partner very strong among the young women. They were extremely concerned by the prospect of their boyfriend’s or husband’s lack of fidelity. The men were more ambivalent to the idea.

All schoolgirls witnessed about having to be strong and learning to cope with pressures from men and with their own feelings.

– It is not difficult to say no to anyone, but if you are in love it is not easy.

Gifts and contraceptives = prostitution?

Although common according to my informants and other studies, any comment about young girls’ sexual activity was nearly always followed by condemnations of girls going with boys in order to get presents. This behaviour was condemned at school and in churches and the girls themselves echoed this lesson.

In studies in Tanzania, the girls were more open about having boyfriends, not because they thought he was a future husband, but in order to get gifts (Fuglesang, 1995, Tumbo-Masabo & Liljestrom 1994). The more condemnatory attitude in George compound may be the reason why few girls admitted to taking gifts from boyfriends. A study in Ghana shows that young women expect men in premarital relationships to act as providers, in exchange they offer him some wifely services not only of a sexual nature (Ankomah 1996).

Dover (1995) writes that accepting presents in return for sex may appear close to commercial sex-work, but that this is not the case. He claims that a sharp distinction is made between presents and purchasing of sex. This view was confirmed by young men in George compound in so far as it referred to themselves giving presents to their girl-friends. Love and length of relationship could make a difference in how gifts were viewed. Like in Ghana, young women in more stable relationships expected some kind of support. If their lover was married, they called themselves second wives.

Both women and men, however, condemned girls going with men just for the presents. They told many stories about “sugar-daddies” and they clearly viewed this as a form of prostitution. There was certainly no sharp distinction between accepting presents and being a prostitute. The Kafue study also notes that having “sex for gifts or money is locally referred to as prostitution” (Clara et al., 1997, p 18). Maybe in an urban setting, the distinction between gifts and
pure commercialisation of sex is more difficult to maintain. South African youth, like the youth in George compound, identify prostitution as a serious problem (van Rooyen, 1997).

Contraceptives was viewed with suspicion. Cecilia’s concern that pills may make you barren was shared by several other girls. With the AIDS campaigns they had been informed about condoms, but no one admitted ever having used one.

– I am not using condoms. I am not going with prostitutes, said the young man who had boasted of many girl-friends.

Although condoms were associated with prostitution, there were men who wanted to know where to get them. I had been told that the clinics distributed them free-of-charge, but the young men said that at the clinic condoms were only distributed to married men. At the clinic a non-governmental organisation offered counselling. They taught the system of safe days, but only to married mothers. There was no similar service for young girls. That would, according to the staff, be to support sexual activity among youth which would lead to prostitution and diseases.

Pregnancies, barreness and abortion

Men often boast about having many children. Despite the importance for the male identity of proving their virility by fathering children, in practice it was common that men denied fatherhood when teenage women became pregnant. Young unmarried mothers among my informants had all been welcomed in their parents’ home, they were proud of their babies and they were not at all ashamed.

According to an amendment to the 1991 Local Courts Act, local courts are empowered to handle maintenance cases (WLSA, 1992). However, among the uneducated majority in George compound, only marriage or damage were discussed when a girl became pregnant. The possibility of asking for maintenance for the child did not even occur to them. Many of the young mothers lived in deep poverty. There had been a sharp increase in child mortality in Zambia; one in five children died before reaching the age of five (NCDP, 1993). In George compound, according to the census, one in ten babies of teenage mothers died during the first year of life. This is a mortality rate double of that of infants of mothers over twenty years of age. These figures seems to contradict my own conclusion from the interviews: that pregnant young girls were generally welcome to stay in their parents’ house.

There seemed to be a certain ambiguity in moral codes. Virginity was not considered especially important, despite the terminology referring to an unmarried pregnant young girl as being “damaged”, as if she was worth nothing if not a virgin. None of the young men interviewed found it necessary
for their future wife to be a virgin when they met, only that she remained faithful to him. For both girls and boys, fertility was so much more important than virginity. The girls’ nightmare was to be barren. Since motherhood was part of the female identity, barren women were not seen as real women. Barren women were not only pitied, but also seen as lacking some of the qualities of a real women. For example, a teenager told me that his stepmother was barren and he expected me to assume that she was wicked and to understand that he was unhappy in his family situation.

Judging from my interviews with uneducated girls, barrenness seemed to be a much greater threat than unwanted pregnancies. The young unwed mothers claimed never to have considered abortion for themselves and the other girls claimed it was unthinkable for them. The young men were totally against any thought of abortion.

In contrast to the general tolerance in George compound towards girls getting pregnant, the educated informants and essay-writers were quick to condemn such girls. They all found it perfectly in order that a pregnant school girl should be expelled from school, while the father of the child, whether teacher or pupil, was not affected at all. Only when I commented that there had been two in making the child, so I found it unfair towards the girls, did Fiona and Cecilia agree and concluded that the father should also be expelled.

Unsafe abortions were common in Zambia according to several studies (Macwan’gi, 1993). The staff at the clinic in George compound told me that they often had to transport bleeding young women to the hospital. Illegal abortions were common among all groups of women. This contradicted the positive view towards pregnancies that was expressed by the uneducated girls in this study.

For the girls at school, a pregnancy was the end of their ambitions for a better life and only an abortion could provide them with a second chance. The school had never informed them about abortion and they were never told that is legal in Zambia. At the clinic, the nurses maintained that abortion was illegal. The schoolgirls were not primarily concerned with legality. Their first concern, if becoming pregnant, was to keep the pregnancy and the abortion secret, especially from their parents. Their second concern was the cost of going to a private clinic. They all knew girls who had had unsafe abortions.

Sexuality, fertility, and gender identity

I put two general questions to the young women and men:
- What makes a woman a woman?
- What makes a man a man?

Often the question first seemed to create confusion or even embarrassment. Being a woman had to do with sexual maturity and experience, but this
was not expressed directly, instead the most common answers from both women and men were:

– She is getting married
– She is mothering children

I asked the young women, still not married, if they did not regard themselves as women. I was told about menstruation and initiation ceremonies. However, in the end they concluded:

– You are a girl until you have been with a man and you should not go with men before marriage, although many do so.

Mercy’s uses this definition of womanhood, saying that she became a woman since she had been loved by a man. Further, that she had the qualities that would make her a good wife, that is to be faithful and respectful. She was worried about not being pregnant as she did not know whether she would be able to become a mother. For her, motherhood was the most important part of the definition of being a woman.

Everyone, man or woman, seemed to know what makes a boy become a man. It had to do with taking the step from being dependent to be the provider:

– A man works and plans for the future.
– A man gets married, supports his family and helps his parents.

Being a bread-winner seemed to be the most important part of the definition of masculinity. The bread-winning definition points at being able to generate goods for a family but also to be able to start a family and get children. To be fertile, to become a father.

In the male group interviews, it became obvious that sexual activity and fertility were in the core of the definition of masculinity. Men were supposed not only to be sexually more active than women, but also to have more children. The myth that “men have more children than women have” was frequently put forward and indicated that fertility is also part of the masculine identity. I asked how this was possible as every child has one mother and one father, another myth was used as explanation:

– Women are plenty, men are scarce. Therefore, women have less children each.

Among the youth in George compound, homosexuality seemed to be unknown or connected with harassment. McFadden (1994) uses the concept “compulsory heterosexuality” and this seems adequate given all the references to “our African culture” when homosexuality is discussed.

An active sexual life is part of the definition of masculinity, of being a real man. In Tanzania it is confirmed that having sex with a girl or girls is viewed as a measure of manhood (Mziray, 1998). There has been an expectation underlying anti-HIV work that education in combination with fear of AIDS would motivate men to distance themselves from this definition of
masculinity. Yet a gender identity is not easily changed. Devoted Christians and born-again men were most firm in advocating abstention. For them it was responsible behaviour that made them become real men. On this all schoolgoing boys agreed, but most of them seemed to simultaneously maintain the idea that a real man by necessity had to be sexually active. The contradiction was not resolved and the young men were filled with ambivalence and anguish.

The educated girls challenged what they saw as a traditional view of female identity: A woman shall always make her husband feel good and she should never complain, but endure. Those who were heading for a professional career rejected this role and some were seriously considering the possibility of never marrying. Marriage was certainly not a central part in their definition of themselves as women. Motherhood, on the other hand, was always regarded as closely tied to the female identity. And in their visions, it was possible to combine motherhood with anything:

– A woman today can take any role in society.
9. In conclusion: Changing gender relations

This study among youth in George compound was generated by concerns rose by my previous studies, which revealed deteriorating living conditions, contradictions in the democratisation process, and a continuous subordination of women. Many specific questions have been raised in the efforts to understand the political and social development of the neighbourhood and the lives and thinking of the youth. Questions about gender inequality are crosscutting and have been included in all the chapters. However, it remains for this chapter to summarise and interpret this information in terms of gender negotiations and changes of gender relations. The report concludes with a few comments about gender contracts and the dynamic of change.

Gender negotiations

The Zambian society is authoritarian in the sense that respect is central in all discussions about human relations. The degree of respect a person is entitled to is dependent on age, sex and position in household and society. Gender and generation are integrated in a power system. Power is not limited to the right to take decisions or to exploit. It is embedded in the social contract, in the norms and the actions of everyday life. Respect and obedience from the side of youth and women are defined as part of the culturally inherited social contract. But the gender contract that prescribes women’s subordination is contested and under change.

During the decades after independence in 1964, George compound was a working class area, and almost all men had work in the expanding industry. In the compound without urban services as water, sewerage and roads, the domestic work to maintain a decent life for the families was an everyday struggle for women. There was no wage work available for uneducated women, but many supplemented their husbands’ income with incomes from petty trading.

Men became breadwinners and women homemakers. The rules and norms of this world-wide dominating urban gender contract fitted well into the reality in George compound, and it was widely accepted as the natural and modern urban social organisation. The principles, of separation between male and female and of hierarchy with the male as the norm, were the same as in the gendered social organisation of the various rural settings, from where the inhabitants had migrated. Therefor it was easy for them to accept the new
contract at a general level, although there were many conflicts and contradictions in details.

In the nineties, men are often unemployed and women have become the main breadwinner in many households. But there is no new dominating gender contract that has replaced the breadwinner and homemaker contract. There were several contradictory norms and no incontestable rules to guide young people in what is right and what is wrong in gender relations. The proper behaviour of men and women was under constant negotiation.

At household level: Invisible housework and violence

Gender negotiation starts early. In George compound small girls, who did much of the housework, negotiated with their mothers in order to get time for play and, if in school, for homework. Many mothers did actually support their daughters. Most often by doing the work themselves, sometimes by putting demands on their sons. Many types of work were negotiable, only cooking seemed difficult to combine with a male identity. Rigid patterns of gendered division of work and authority were challenged most actively by the girls in secondary school.

Both girls and boys out of school and wage employment are said to be “just sitting”, although the girls may be working all day. Girls tended to share the notion of their own housework as no work, only the school girls who experienced difficulties in getting time to do homework complained and started negotiations with their brothers. They contested demands on serving their brothers. It was not unusual with a tension between young household members of different sex.

With poverty the extended families had been exhausted and youth could not take support from relatives for granted. Boys were at risk of being excluded if they could not contribute at least to their own subsistence. Girls had more security in the households, which might be explained by a culture to protect women, that dependency is part of women’s identity. But, it can also be interpreted as a recognition of the work women in the household actually do.

As urban modern people the youth had a desire to marry and form independent households, away from the parents’ houses. Young uneducated women rejected the prospects of becoming, as they put it, an unpaid maid to their mother-in-law. They wanted to be “nicely kept” as wives but also to have some income of their own. Women’s cash contributions to the household were often diminished, by the men and by themselves. Wives knew that their husbands’ identity as man was closely tied to his identity as breadwinner. Negotiations and arguments were not always straight, and both men and women tried to find new ways of defining their relationship.
Women’s claim to having the right to their own earnings, thereby exercising decision-making power in the household, was seen by the youth as a cause of conflict and domestic violence. Domestic violence was believed to be on increase. It can be seen as men’s ultimate argument in a gender conflict and their way of handling a threatening marginalisation. Violence towards young unmarried women in households was common and it was the brothers, cousins and uncles who battered, not the fathers. This violence was strongly contested, while violence against wives was not approved, but widely accepted as something that occurred due to poverty or drunkenness.

At a personal level: Sexuality and gender identities

In the shaping of a female identity, the so-called traditional ceremonies continued to play an important role. No ceremonies were performed for the boys. Girls learned about sexual practices (“how to please a man”), about how to subordinate themselves to their husbands and how to behave in relation to parents-in-law. The rituals can be seen as gender negotiations performed by women of different generations. Unanimously the witnesses said that the main message was to subordinate, but the older women could also give advice about how to negotiate a space for own initiative within a marriage.

Many educated youths saw lobola as a source of women’s subordination within marriage. Among the poor and uneducated youth in George compound, lobola was not contested, but women and men differed in their interpretation of its meaning. While the young women wanted to see it merely as a proof of a man’s sincere intentions, the men emphasised that it made them the head of the household.

The youth has a strong identity as urban and modern people. Although I tried to avoid the dichotomy of modern–traditional, it was often brought up by the youth themselves. They may be proud of their ethnic heritage and knowledge about customs, but only as something they managed to integrate with their urban and modern lives. They were truly holders of multiple identities. While the gender identity of the young men was shaken by their unemployment, the young women who contested subordination had to construct a new basis for their female identity.

While changing social conditions provided an insecure basis for the construction of gender identities, sexuality remained central both for women and men. It was an area full of conflicts and anguish. Sexual activity defined manhood and womanhood while abstinence was preached and the risks of HIV were well known. It was easier for a girl to accept postponement of the sexual debut. This meant that she was respected as a decent girl. For a young man, lack of sexual experience was degrading in the eyes of his peers. Many
boys took the AIDS threat seriously and tried to live in abstinence, although this was not admitted in public.

Girls' right to say no to a sexual invitation was not a self-evident right. Boyfriends could be very insistent in having access to a girl's body. AIDS provided an argument for girls to say no. And it seems as if many did so, or at least tried, even if many girls were afraid to lose their boyfriends if saying no. For an uneducated girl a no might be a lost chance of marriage, while for girls in school it was the only secure way of avoiding pregnancies and be able to finish school and get a job.

Many unmarried girls with children had been promised marriage but were abandoned. They lived in poverty and as dependent relatives or lovers. Many of them developed antagonistic and manipulative attitudes towards men, whom they despised. At the same time they were happy and safe in their identity as mothers. Young women, as well as men, saw motherhood and fatherhood as the ultimate proof of being a woman or a man. Sexual activity could be postponed or compromised, but never to the extent of childlessness.

Poor and uneducated young women had few ways of reaching a better life but to marry someone in employment. Among the girls it was common knowledge that men wanted submissive women. In an adaptive strategy for survival they did not contest the superiority of the man. While many young men argued for maintaining a gender hierarchy giving themselves privileges and power, there were a few but strong voices arguing for a vision of friendship and trust on equal levels between lovers and spouses.

At political level: A strong leader is a man

Party politics was not attracting young people. Young men and women who had participated in loosely organised support groups at the time of the election in 1991 found no way of continuing their engagement in George compound.

With the transfer from a one party to a multi party system the women's political organisation in the neighbourhood ceased to exist. For a decade or more, the women's brigade had not been an organisation attracting young women. It had not challenged, rather maintained, the existing gender relations, but it had provided an arena and a channel for political pressure regarding issues of women's concern. The reform of political structure would theoretically open for a less rigid division between women's and men's spheres of politics. But in reality, the separate spheres are maintained. Women have not been let into the politics of neighbourhood or local government. Men and women among the poor out of school argued for a strong leader to represent
them, and “a strong leader must be a man, women are not listened to in Zambia”.

Gender equality was not a priority of any of the parties. No actions were taken by the government to improve equality—at least none that was known by the youth in George compound. A limited number of strong women have managed to get political posts. There are even a few ministers. Not many, and not for the first time, but still they were important as model for girls who concluded that “women can do anything—even be ministers”.

Also boys acknowledged women’s ministers, often by using them as a proof that equality, or at least enough of women’s influence, was already in place. Educated young women argued for many women in politics, while the young men accepted a few women as “watchdogs of women’s issues”. Women were clearly not accepted into the male sphere of politics on equal terms, by accepting women as watchdogs, the principles of separation and hierarchy were maintained.

The middle-class based women’s movement grew stronger with the dismantling of the one party system and strict control of organisations. The movement supported women’s candidates in the election but with limited success. It was more successful in rising issues of great concern for all women, such as women’s rights to matrimonial property in case of divorce or widowhood. This was known and appreciated also among young women in George compound.

The multi-party political structure excluded the separate women’s hierarchical structure for political influence, but replaced it with informal structures of lobbying NGOs. Stronger or weaker as a political force may not be possible to say, but at least the issues of inequality that really concerns women are now raised. Gender is negotiated in public media and among people everywhere in the Zambian society.

**Gender dynamics**

For those who were born in the city, the gender norms and rules from pre-urban life existed as parents’ opinions, but also as alternatives to stick to when “modern” values became too contradictory and chaotic. The Bible became another source in the search for norms in gender relations. Selectively chosen, Biblical quotations were used as indisputable arguments for male dominance.

The interviews with youth in George compound revealed a deep difference in the thinking about gender among youth in school and those out of school. Education is important and the school-goers had learned about democracy and rights in a way that affected their views, but what they expressed as their deep beliefs on gender relation were not directly related to knowledge, not even to experience, but to their aspirations and strategies for the future.
Girls in school who wanted to finish education and compete on the labour market had to challenge the principles of gender separation and hierarchy. They fought themselves into previous male spheres, and they demanded access to work on basis of merits. They wanted to marry a man who respected them as an equal.

Boys in school were more ambivalent in their views. They often claimed women and men in Zambia were equals; if they noted unequal treatment, it was for the benefit of girls. At the same time they could argue against women entering the public sphere, as politicians or at the labour market. If women were allowed to enter it should be in subordinate positions such as watchdogs in politics or secretaries in business. For the boys the question of marriage partner included a choice of future lifestyle. Some wanted an uneducated wife because they foresaw less of conflicts and competition. But also those who wanted an educated and working wife wanted to upheld the relative hierarchy; she should be younger, less educated and less paid than himself.

The main strategy for the future of young women out of school was to find a man to marry, who would keep them nicely. They accepted the separate gender spheres and wanted to be the homemaker with a breadwinner for a husband. Thus they accepted the hierarchy in the family. To show submission was a way for them to win and keep a man. When this strategy failed they, as single mothers, tried to organise their lives for the best within that sphere of society which was accepted as the female sphere. Alternatively, they tried to extract resources from men by manipulation.

Young uneducated and unemployed men were deprived of their male identity based on wage work, marriage and providing for a family. What remained for them in proving themselves to be real men were sexual activity and having children. AIDS had deprived them of the social acceptance and joy of sexual promiscuity. To be a father was a proof of manhood, but was in contradiction to the male virtue of responsibility. To build a male identity, what remained was the idea of male superiority.

The youth were open-minded and ready to handle multiple identities. They used the dichotomy traditional–modern not in a static way, but in an effort to create their own modernity and to establish a distance to phenomenon of which they do not approve. Women and men tended to attach different meanings to concepts which regulate gender relations, such as lobola, head of household and respect. There were unclear issues in the gender contract, which they have to fight out in their everyday lives.

The contradictory tendencies of how views on gender relations develop among youth in George compound will inevitably impose a dynamic in the development of new gender relations. There seems to be a long way to go before a new gender contract replaces the outdated one. Perhaps will there
never be one as dominating as the old one has been, but rather several
adapted to the conditions within different classes and groups.

Seeds of change lie in the strength of the young women and men who
challenge gender hierarchies, and in their vision of friendship and equality.
Their struggle deserves more fertile soil. In the context of political reform and
the economic and physical deterioration of the nineties, unequal gender rela-
tions have not only changed, but have also been adapted and recycled in
George compound.
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