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TOWN MARRIAGE: GENDER, IDEOLOGY AND THE STATE IN THE COPPERBELT TOWNS OF COLONIAL ZAMBIA,1926-64

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The state of African marriage in colonial Zambia has been a matter of discussion, research and policy debate since the colony developed in the late 19th century. The outline of these discussions is well known. Chanock (1985) has described the initial repugnance by missionaries and colonial rulers towards "barbaric" African marriage customs, and the provision of jural rights to African women to counter this tendency. The resulting flood of marital litigation alarmed colonial and African (male) authorities, and consequently, in the 1920s, the discourse on African marriage changed. Researchers, missionaries and colonial officials expressed alarm about the "crisis in African marriage", particularly in the new urban centers. Traditional marriage customs, especially those strengthening control over women, began to be seen as a solution rather than a problem, and efforts to shore up traditional African marriage intensified (Richards 1940; Wilson 1942). During World War II the debate began to change, and concern for development spawned a renewed interest in marital stability, but this time in conjunction with support for the new developmental elite, the urban working and middle classes. Thus the debate came full circle. Once again colonial officials advocated a more interventive approach to African institutions, particularly marriage and the family, which were seen as central to issues of social and economic development as well as public order.

While the outline of this debate is well known, there has been a tendency to present colonial discourse on marriage as a monolithic entity, lacking internal contradictions. The importance of these internal contradictions, and the contribution by African men and women to this debate, has been underestimated. The role of emerging class forces in the African community has also been largely ignored. This article is an attempt to achieve a deeper understanding of the debates around African marriage in the British colony of Northern Rhodesia, with particular attention to the towns that grew up around the copper mines in the 1920s. The article intends to investigate the various strands of the debate around African marriage, and the possibliity that contending interpretations of the crisis over colonial marriage in Africa, both in the European and African communities, may have provided openings for African women to influence the discourse on African marriage and the reality of their lives in town.

Precolonial Marriage

Although missionaries and colonial officials generally emphasized the barbarity of African institutions in the early colonial period, particularly such "uncivilized" activities as child marriage and the inheritance of widows, in fact precolonial African societies had consistent sensible rules regulating marriage. Despite considerable variation among the peoples of what was to become Northern Rhodesia, certain themes around marriage

recur. Marriage defined relationships between men and women, regulated their sexual activity, located their children in the kinship system and determined the inheritance of property. It also frequently defined labour rights and obligations both of adults and children.

Because marriage was a contract between kin-groups rather than individuals, individual choice in marriage was unheard of (although potential partners sometimes had rights of refusal). Marriages were arranged through go-betweens, and involved lengthy negotiations between kin groups. A marriage was cemented gradually over a period of time and involved a number of rituals. While these rituals varied in different societies, they were taken very seriously, as the well-being of the group as a whole was believed to rest on their successful completion. The rights and duties of marriage were transferred piece meal, and required certain actions and accomplishments to be completed, particularly the birth of a child. The lineages were also involved in the dissolution of marriages, whether by divorce or death (Mitchell 1961:1-6).

In matrilineal societies, which are numerous in Zambia, rights over children (genetrical rights) from a union rest with the mother's kin group (the matrilineage) and the uncle is often more important than the father. A husband has rights to his wife's domestic and sexual services (spousal or uxorial rights) once he has paid a fee (msalamu or the chisungu payment) and performed certain rituals. In turn, the wife has the right to expect economic support and protection from her husband. Husbands in matrilineal societies took a long time to establish their place in the society. They paid little brideprice, but rather offered service to the bride's family over an extended period of time. Indeed, Audrey Richards discovered that among the Bemba peoples of North-Eastern Zambia, "It was the labour of the son-in-law over a certain period of years that was the essential tie uniting the families bound in marriage" (Richards 1939:114). This lengthy period gave the wife's family an opportunity to test a man's virility and ability to work, the key characteristics preferred in a husband.

Among the Bemba, the husband only gradually acquired economic control over his household and the right to move his children to his village. This usually took five to six years, and only happened if the husband had paid the marriage fee, mpango, and won the support of his in-laws. Most men eventually hoped to set up a village with their daughters and sons-in-law, whose labour they could thus control. This pattern held for a man's first wife. Subsequent wives joined their husband's household. But in all cases, a wife's tie to her people remained strong and wives regularly returned to live with their mother for various lengths of time, no matter where the wife was domiciled (Richards 1940:43; 1939:114,124-126).

Matrilineal peoples seem to have had more separations and divorce than patrilineal peoples, although the frequency varied with the degree of tension between lineage and marital loyalties. The Ndembu had the highest rate of separation, which usually occured later in life when wives sometimes moved with grown sons to

their new village (Turner 1957:62). In contrast, Bemba marital breakups generally occured in the early years, before a man had earned the right to take his wife and children to his own village (Richards 1940:34). The Tonga, on the other hand, seem to have had the most stable marriages, with considerable equality between the sexes and an emphasis on the family as the primary economic unit (Colson 1958). Since men could remarry without divorce (ie have several wives), only women needed divorces. Many women chose to live apart from their husbands rather than go through the tedious process of getting a divorce, which required the cooperation of both kin-groups. Most divorces were handled by family councils or heads; chiefs only intervened in extreme cases (Richards 1940:47).

In patrilineal societies,fathers' rights over their children were secured by payment of ŧobola.-Both uxorial and genetrical rights were generallly transferred at the mariage ceremony. This transfer was reinforced by the bride's move to her husband's village soon after the ceremony. A high premium was place on virginity, faithfulness and obedience (Barnes 1951:1-4).

Marital problems were handled at the family and lineage level for the most part. Among the Ngoni, for example, adultery was frowned upon and adultery with a chief's wife could bring death. But disputes over adultery among commoners were usually settled by payment of compensation. Social pressure minimized such cases, but they were never treated as criminal (Mitchell 1957:3-4; Barnes 1951:2-6). Marital quarrels were resolved through discussion, deliberation and conciliation between the families of the offending parties. Women had no jural rights and divorce was almost impossible to obtain. A man could divorce his wife by returning her to her kin, but this seems to have been fairly rare in this period (Barnes 1951:4,10,119).

Among the Lozi and some Zambian Ngoni, descent is traced bilaterally through both parents' lineage. This system emphasized uxorial rights since children received 'property from both kin groups. Lozi women remained strongly tied to their kin groups, and their childen had legal rights in both groups. However, children were expected to live in their father's village, and in that sense the Lozi could be said to exhibit patrilineal leanings. However, elder children and adults could chose to live with either sets of relatives (Gluckman 1955:167-179).

Marital stability in these societies rested largely on the relationship between spouses, and marital instability seems to have been fairly high. Early travellers reported widespread seduction, adultery and abduction of wives. One man acknowledged that "should a man take a liking to someone's wife he will have an interview with her and bring her home." As in other Zambian societies, the families of the aggrieved parties usually settled marital disputes. Adulterers paid compensation, and adultery did not necessarily result in divorce, which was seen as a last resort. The Paramount Chief only intervened if blood had been spilled (Gluckman 1950:181-182; Mitchell 1961:6-7).

The reconstruction of precolonial marriage systems has to be pursued with caution, as one tends to paint a more rigid picture

than reality deserves. Marriage, like all social institutions, responds to economic, political and social changes. In some cases, change was relatively slow, but in others, such as the Toka of Southern Zambia, change was more dramatic. Originally these people were matrilineal, but the intrusion of the Lozi in the mid-19th century led to them to adopt a more patrilineal Lozi-style structure. This introduced fluidity and a certain amount of uncertainty into Toka marriage and divorce regulations (Geisler 1990:4-5). The Yao of Malawi shifted their inheritance patterns towards patrilineality in response to trade and warfare. This led to frequent sucession disputes between sons and nephews and dissension in some chiefly families (Vaughan 1990:6). These examples serve to remind us that marriage rules are not immutable, and that because they affect access to human and material resources, they remain a central arena of struggle between the sexes as well as between generations. They also change over time.

The Early Colonial Period

During the 19th century, European explorers and missionaries in Africa painted a picture of savage tribes, badly in need of redemption by the forces of "civilization", particularly Christianity and commerce. Lurid accounts of African savagery beguiled the readers of Europe and created the background for the subsequent campaign to colonize Africa and bring "light" into "Darkest Africa." The early missionaries had little good to say about the African peoples. Coillard spoke of "the treacherous and cruel character of the Matabele" and the cruel, degraded Lozi (Coillard 1897:44,272). The London Missionary Society (LMS) missionaries regarded the Mambwe as "cowardly, lazy theiving and depraved (Rotberg 1965:38). African treatment of women, particularly child marriage, concubinage, polygamy and inheritance of widows, were held up as proof of African barbarism. In the mid-19th century, missionaries in South Africa called for a civilizing colonialism that would "cultivate 'the African desert' and its inhabitants by planting the seeds of bourgeois individualism and the nuclear family, of private property and commerce, of rational minds and healthily clad bodies, of the practical arts of refined living and devotion to God (Comaroff 1989:673). Similar exhortations were made by missionaries in Central Africa (Rotberg 1965:131).

This discourse on the failures of African societies provided a backdrop for legitimizing colonial penetration into Africa in the late 19th century. Africa was portrayed as a degenerate, slave-ridden continent, in need of order, discipline and Christianity. Indeed, Francis Coillard characterized the Black Continent as "one of the principal fortresses of Satan" (Coillard 1897:267). This picture provided a context for colonial self-congratulation and self-assurance about the purity of the colonial mission. As a result, the partition of Africa was considered a matter of humanity and goodwill, rather than imperial conquest (Cooper 1989:747).

Both missionaries and colonial officials agreed that the evils of slavery in Africa should be replaced by a prosperous world of wage labourers and small peasants. While missionaries preferred a

more bucolic, rural peasantry (Comaroff 1989), colonial officials struggled to fulfill their own and other colonial demands for African labour. But both missionaries and colonial officials agreed that traditional African societies and their leaders impeded progressive transformation in Africa. This transformation, they both believed, would require remaking African society and hence intervention into the daily lives of African peoples. Only then would civilization and Christianity triumph.

Missionaries and colonial officials went right to the heart of the matter by intervening in that most crucial and intimate of institutions-- marriage. Missionaries did everything they could to convince Africans to stop their "sinful habits", particularly polygamy and widow inheritance. They deleted "sinners" names from the catechumen rolls, and some missions set up informal courts to punish transgressors. In an effort to Christianize and modernize African marriage, colonial officials provided African women with previously unknown jural rights. Colonial courts heard and judged all manner of disputes between men and women, thus bypassing the traditional kinship structures normally invoked to deal with such matters. Colonial officials believed they were providing a civilizing influence through the enactment of British law and believed it would counter some of tbe dastardly customs so abhorrent to themselves and the missionaries.

These courts provided a new avenue for women in their struggles with men over marriage and resources, an opportunity they took up with alactrity. Ngoni women gained the right to divorce their husbands and many Cewa and Nsenga women who had been married before 1898 deserted their Ngoni husbands and returned home after British rule was established. Ngoni women began to use the courts to express grievances with husbands and to obtain divorces. Bride-wealth payments fell between 1898 and 1930, no doubt reflecting the new uncertainty about marriage (Barnes 1951:121-122). The Bemba reported a rise in divorce rate as well (Richards 1939:114-116; 1956:49). In 1918, the District Commissioner (DC) in the Bemba area reported that "Many of them (women) seek divorce on the most trivial grounds, and are not slow in coming to the Boma about it. The marriage tie is a loose one, generally speaking-- though perhaps less ...now that so many natives are embracing Christ-ianity. A large number of marriages arrranged early in life are dissolved after a few years by mutual consent" (ZA1/9/2/4, DC,Kasama to Secretary of Native Affairs (SNA), 14 Feb.1918).

Colonial officials reported marked changes in women's behaviour. One DC claimed "They (African women)are now most independent. They do not hesitate to refuse to enter a marriage they do not care about and often take unto themselves husbands without their parents consent" (ZA1/9/2/4, DC, Chilange to SNA, 19 Feb.1918). Another DC reported that "Yes, women are becoming more independent. Possibly years ago there was a certain amount of fear for the white man and his administration which has gradually disappeared; women, if they think they have a grievance nowadays, are not slow in airing it, and in matrimonial disputes it seems to be much more common for the woman to be plaintiff than in former

days (ZA1/9/2/4, DC, Kawambwa to SNA, Feb.1918). Women from Kalomo "did not hesitate to come and complain even though it be against her husband or headman. Women are not backward in applying for divorce and widows are more often refusing to be inherited." Some women even asked colonial magistrates permission to transfer to another village, something unheard of in precolonial days (ZA1/9/2/4, Assistant Magistrate, Kalomo to SNA, 11 Jan.1918).

The rise of urban centers further reduced the control of African elders and husbands over wives and daughters because the urban economy opened up new options for survival. Women could live in town as prostitutes, petty traders or beer brewers, or they could marry outside their tribe thus escaping the authority of their male relatives. Temporary marriages developed as women discovered they could survive by moving from man to man without the constricting bonds of formal marriage. These changes were particularly dramatic in Livingstone, which was the first large urban center in Zambia. One Native Commissioner (NC) reported that "after marriage it is true that young women become more independent especially when residing in the neighborhood of towns and settlements and are throwing off their husbands and living with men who appeal to them more" (ZA1/9/2/4, NC, Livingstone to SNA, 15 Feb.1918). African public servants and migrant labourers often took up temporary urban marriages during their sojourn in town. Rural elders lost control of marriage payments, which were frequently made in town and pocketed by distant relatives posing as a woman's proper guardian. Women were also hired out or even "sold" for cash by husbands (Geisler 1990:5-6).

Rural patriarchs complained bitterly to the colonial authorities about these changes, particularly the loss of control over women and marriage payments. African men in the Fort Jameson district complained that "women are becoming more independent, and give as the reasons Mission influence, no intertribal warfare, enforced sparing of the rod, and a general feeling that has sprung up amongst native womankind that they are as good as their husbands" (ZA1/9/2/4, DC, Chilange to SNA, 19 Feb.1918). Nyakyusa elders blamed rising divorce rates and uncontrollable women on the same changes (Wilson 1977:190-192).

Initially these complaints fell on deaf ears. Colonial authorities assumed British law would create a more "civilized" Africa, and eventually women would be satisfied with their lives. The flood of matrimonial cases began to cast some doubt on this equanimity. Around Livingstone, the flood turned into a torrent as rural elders began to increase the size of the marriage payments. Young men came to court complaining that their fiancees and wives had left them for men offering larger payments, and that these desertions had been encouraged by elders eager to benefit from larger payments (Geisler 1990:8). In turn, women began to assert their right to divorce, and used the courts to free themselves from unwanted alliances.

Colonial officials became disenchanted with women's new freedom, and began to rethink their position. This disenchantment is reflected in colonial officers' responses to the Secretary of

State for the Colonies, who sent around a questionnaire in 1918 regarding African women's well being in the colonies. Some officials still supported women's jural rights, arguing that without them Africans would still prefer "as before the European occupation, to treat (women) as cattle" (ZA1/9/2/4, NC, Mpolokoso to SNA, 25 Feb.1918). However, most replies expressed impatience and even moral outrage with African women's behavior. The District Commissioner at Kasama, for example, reported that "Personally, I think the average native woman is perfectly capable of looking after herself. Many of them seek divorce on the most trivial grounds, and are not slow in coming to the Boma about it" (ibid., DC,Kasama to SNA, 14 Feb.1918). The DC at Chilanga insisted the government did not need to help African women. "I believe them to be quite capable of looking after themselves" (ibid., DC, Chilanga to SNA, 19 Feb.1918).

Some officials expressed a desire for a new approach. The Native Commissioner at Kasempa warned that "Many women who have visited the Congo, Broken Hill and Livingstone ... require the exercise of fairly rigid discipline to keep them in their proper place." He claimed that although women from outside villages usually regarded themselves as chattel, they get more assertive eventually. "It is not," he argued, " necessarily to their advantage that this tendency should become more general" (ibid., NC, Kasempa to SNA, 23 Jan.1918). Colonial officials increasingly began discussing ways to keep African women under control.

The missionaries expressed similar concerns. They believed stable Christian families were the fundamental unit required for Christian transformation. In the 19th century, some missionaries began to favour African customs that strengthened the marriage bond. Coillard, for example, argued that "marriage by cattle," ie. with a bridewealth payment in cattle, "was a blessing. It was a barrier against corruption and a civil contract." He lamented the absence of such institutions among the Lozi (Coillard 1897:284).

Gradually the tone of missionary discussions about African societies changed as missionaries became more invested in maintaining the social structures of their followers. No longer are Africans characterized as barbarians. Edwin Smith, for example, writes that "One feels, in writing about Africa, that it is not easy to convince readers as to the startling transformation that has occured in recent years." Smith speaks of "a fine, virile, Bantu population" of industrious agriculturalists who have always recognized a Supreme Being. "Marauding on a large scale has ceased; firm, humane government is everywhere established under the British flag" (Edwin Smith 1928:114-115,23).

Missionaries began to recognize the value of many African traditions. Mabel Shaw, the headmistress of the London Missionary Society's school for girls in Mbereshi (Bemba territory) speaks of trying "to conserve all that is true and good in the old life and build upon it" (Shaw 1932:13). Another missionary argued that in order to educate African girls, one must "not change their sphere; improve it. Do not take from them all their ways; better them" (Musser 1927). In the realm of marriage and sexuality, mission-

aries began to speak more cautiously about the value of traditional norms. One missionary reported that while traditional African marriage is often "accompanied by obscene rites in which no Christian can take part without a soiled conscience,.... In the present state of affairs we cannot afford to dispense with any of the restraints of Native life," especially separation of the sexes (Pirouet 1927). Mabel Shaw believed many of the traditional regulations about sex were necessary, arguing that the more evil ones would fall away naturally under the influence of Christianity. She even described polygamy as "a social system, ...perhaps necessary for them for a time .... Meanwhile we do not look upon polygamy as wrong" (Shaw 1932:59-61). African societies were no longer described as fundamentally evil. Missionaries confidently predicted the transformation of African into bucolic rural societies supported by ideal Christian families, which were "the base of all social conditio ns of the church" (Smith 1928:126).

This vision of harmonious Christian African societies was a rural one; missionaries believed migrant labour and urban life interfered with this transformation. The rural bias of many missionaries was reflected in an almost hysterical condemnation of urban life. Reverend J.R. Fell, at the 1927 General Missionary Conference for Northern Rhodesia (GMCNR), heaped invectives on a mining center, Broken Hill (now Kabwe),claiming that "The compound is rotten with disease, prostitution is quite common. Broken Hill bids fair to become the moral cesspool of the country" (Smith 1928: 126). Mabel Shaw spoke piteously of "the hundreds of our young men,and our girls, too, away in the mining areas, or Elizabethville in the Congo, far removed from their tribal lands, cut adrift from all the tradition and sanctions of the tribal spirits ....The tribal fire for these men and girls has gone out; there is no sense of direction; they are adrift on an alien stream" (Shaw 1928: 25, 40).

According to missionaries, urban centers undermined the morals of African men and especially African women. The Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) reported that men in the mining towns of Zambia took to illicit unions or "sought consolation in promiscous intercourse," either of which put them out of the church and "loosened the moral fibre and power of self-control of all alike" (Blood 1962 vol.III:53). Missionaries fretted that urban life would create a detribalized African population, free of both mission and traditional control. They were particularly concerned about women, believing they, even more than men, quickly came to prefer urban life. The wives, they argued, "have very much less to do: no gardens to hoe,no corn to grind, no anxiety about the crops, and no fear of famine. It is therefore not surprising that they are often reluctant to return to village life....This spells demoralization for the women" (Smith 1928:124-125). Missionaries called for renewed efforts to create viable rural economies and stricter rules to control labour migration, particularly the migration of women and children to towns.

These concerns were matched by a growing commitment to indirect rule by the British, which enabled British authorities to

rule at minimal expence with the assistance of traditional rulers. Supported by missionary and scholarly visions of progressive African societies, colonial policy sought to encourage and strengthen traditional African social structures, as long as they did not interfere with British interests. Africans were defined as rural people, who could never be more than temporary town dwellers. The colonial government, which replaced British South Africa Company rule in 1924, strengthened the authority of rural leaders by establishing Native Authorities with judicial functions. The rule of customary (traditional) law by rural African leaders was enshrined in the Native Authorities and Native Courts. Colonial officials set about trying to codify this law based on the assertions of rural elders about what was "traditional". These traditions, of course, were not always reflective of past practices, but rather expressed elders' desire to recapture their authority over men and women who had escaped to the towns. This recreated customary law was then considered the only legitimate authority over an African, and it was an authority that only existed in the rural areas. Urban problems had to be taken to the countryside. The call for an urban court fell on deaf ears as rural African authorities sought to strengthen their control over men and women. One of the ways they did this was to maintain control over marriage, divorce and matrimonial problems in the urban area.

Indirect Rule and Urban Marriage: 1926-1939

The adoption of indirect rule, with its preference for rural African life and its romanticization of African traditional cultures, led colonial officials to oppose settled African life in Zambian towns during the 1920s and 1930s. This policy conflicted with the labour needs of the copper companies, which had been set up in the mid-1920s in response to rising world copper prices. Four towns grew up around the largest copper mines: Kitwe (Nkana and Mindolo Mines; Luanshya, Roan Antelope Mine; Chingola, Nchanga Mine; and Mufulira, Mufulira Mine. A nearby commercial center, Ndola, grew as the mines expanded. Competition with neighboring mines for skilled labour forced mine management to permit some married labour at the mines. The mines and government compromised by agreeing that mine labour would rotate regularly between town and country, thus ensuring that labour stabilization would not turn into urbanization.

Colonial policy deliberately discouraged Africans from settling in town. African men were only allowed in the urban areas as long as they served colonial capital. African women were supposed to facilitate that labour. Colonial officials wanted women and children to stay in the rural areas where they could maintain production and ensure the return of migrant labour. In order to encourage this, colonial authorities gave rural chiefs the right to deny women permission to travel to the towns. They also kept urban social services to the minimum. Educational facilities were designed to discourage families from bringing children to town for schooling. Girls were offered only two years of school. Further

schooling was to be in the rural areas, where women "belonged." Welfare policies were strictly recreational, designed to amuse workers and their dependents in between bouts of labour. Any services that might foster a permanent urban African population were discouraged.

The few missionaries on the Copperbelt in the early years generally agreed with this policy. As we have seen, most missionaries believed town life was harmful to African men and women, and they supported policies that discouraged urban settlement by Africans. The missionaries continued to emphasize the need to protect Africans from the evils of urban life.

Mine management, preoccupied with its labour needs, adopted a much more instrumental approach. The mine authorities offered housing to "married" miners, particularly more skilled workers. Marriage certificates were not required. Management just wanted women in the mine compounds to keep labour satisfied and productive, with a minimum of trouble. The mine police complained of fights over women in the compound, and consistently troublesome women were ejected from the compounds, but most women encountered little objection from the mines. Moreover, mine management soon discovered that married labour was more reliable and productive, and so gradually increased the percentage of married labour in the mines. The compound managers (CM) adopted a rather easy going definition of married women to encourage this married labour force (Spearpoint 1937).

Despite opposition from rural chiefs, women migrated to towns in increasing numbers. An initial trickle gradually expanded. By 1931, about 30% (or 5292) of the 15,876 black mine employees lived with their wives on the Copperbelt, and more women lived in the nearby government townships. In 1932, for example, 50% of the 522 domestic servants at Nkana mine lived with women. Neighboring Roan Antelope mine in Luanshya reported 351 male domestics living with 236 women and 265 children (Merle Davis 1933:75-76). In 1935, one of the largest mines (Roan Antelope) increased its married labour complement to 52% of 4513 men (Spearpoint 1937:53), while Nkana reported 2000 married men on its workforce (ZP10/2/4,1935 strike, evidence of William Scrivener, Nkana CM, vol.1:56). By the 1940s, about 15,500 women lived on the mines, with many more in the neighboring townships. These figures are low as many women lived illegally in compounds and consequently avoided census takers (Parpart 1986a:142-143; Perrings 1979:252).

Colonial and Native Authorities reluctantly accepted the migration of married women to the mines, but strongly opposed the migration of single women. Officials regularly checked women's documentation on travel routes, setting up road blocks on well traveled routes. The colonial government adopted a policy of repatriating "undesirable" women and children back to the rural areas. This policy was particularly aimed at juvenile troublemakers and women not firmly under male control. None of these policies had much success. Women developed strategies for circumventing road blocks, including walking around them or forging certificates of permission from rural chiefs. And repatriated women soon

reappeared in town (Parpart 1988).

African women came to town for a number of reasons. Some women simply accompanied their husbands to the Copperbelt. But many women deliberately chose town life in order to earn money, escape from parental and social constraints and to try out new life-styles. In neighboring Lambaland, the local men complained that their wives wanted to leave them and that their wives "say we do not give them so many clothes and such good times as they can have at the Mines" (Lambaland 1928, no.47). Chief Nkana, the paramount of the Lamba, complained that "their women refused to marry in their own tribe but preferred temporary attachments to the Awemba on the Mines." He wanted the Lamba women "driven out of the Mine Compounds" (ZA/7/4/25, Tour of DO, Ndola District, Oct.-Nov.1931). Similar complaints echoed throughout Northern Rhodesian colonial reports. According to the Eastern Province DO, "every lorry is laden with women travelling to the labour centres .... The cost of the fare, (is) earned by the sale of food stuffs or sent by some male relation" (NAZ/SEC2/85, Eastern Province Annual Report, 1935).

The evidence about women's lives in the first decade of the Copperbelt is rather scanty, and we have to construct a picture from bits and pieces. It does seem that many young women coming to town soon adopted trendy European-style clothing and new strategies for survival. Mabel Shaw, who visited Nkana Mine Township in the late 1920s, reported seeing "a girl known to me, from a river village just like the one from which Shi-Chongo bought his fish. She wore loose wide-legged pyjamas, gay flaunting garments, she carried a sunshade,and walked with her head thrown back, a cigarette in her mouth. A group of young men followed her admiringly." A year ago, she had been one of the many small girls who ran alongside Ms.Shaw's bicycle at Mbereshi (Shaw 1932:39). Women living in contractors compounds and squatter compounds lived rather more grim lives,and no doubt had little access to such luxuries. But the well dressed modern woman was certainly the model for most women who came to the Copperbelt.

African women soon discovered they had only limited opportunities to earn a living in town. Beer brewing, the sale of prepared foods and prostitution were the most profitable activities Chauncey 1981; Parpart 1986). Most of these activities required a house. Since housing was generally tied to formal employment, and very few women had such jobs, most women had to find a male partner in order to acquire housing. Furthermore, only a few women could support themselves; most depended at least partially upon men.

Some women solved the need for male support by choosing to live conventional married lives, much as they had in the rural areas. These women worked hard to stretch their husbands' meager wages. Most produced food in nearby gardens, which supplemented their husbands' rations and provided bits of money. They struggled to clean their small, dank houses and to clothe and supervise their children. Many of these wives were married to the more skilled miners, who frequently came from Nyasaland, where they had been educated, in Presbyterian missions. These more educated Christian Africans put a high stock on Christian behaviour, and set a

standard for "proper" marriage in the compounds. While certainly not the behaviour of the majority, these families early on provided models that more ambitious and religious Africans could follow. They were usually strong supporters of the early churches on the Copperbelt, and many of the women became active in the women's groups of their church (Lambaland 1933). They regarded African women in less stable relationships with some contempt, particularly prostitutes (Fanny Musumbulwa, interview Luanshya, May 1989).

However, not all women wanted or could follow this pattern, and other possibilities existed. Prostitution provided an option for some women, as it was fairly easy to get temporary access to the single men's mining quarters. Unattached women were constantly introduced as sisters or sisters-in-law and permitted to remain as visitors for a time in spite of suspicions about their status. Mine managers complained that these women often spread venereal disease throughout a section of the compound before they could be discovered and expelled (J.M.Davis 1933:77). Colonial officials regularly reported prostitution in the compounds of the mines and even more so in the loosely regulated compounds of contractors and other employers. In 1928,for example, a Native Commissioner reported that "the number of young unmarried women and widows thus engaged, or reported to be so engaged, was abnormal" in the Nkana area. He blamed the grandmothers or aunts by marriage "who encourage women to go and no doubt share in the spoils" (ZA7/4/8, NC, V R Anley, Nkana tour, 8 May 1928). The amount of prostitution is difficult to assess, especially since both colonial and African officials were apt to exaggerate its importance for their own ends, but it certainly existed and provided an important survival strategy for women on the Copperbelt. Lala women are reported to have charged a tickey (a three penny piece) for sexual favours, although a man reportedly claimed that they sold themselves not "for a small pinch but for a good heaped handful" (International Missionary Council (IMC), M. Read and A.Richards, Notes on the Copperbelt, 20 Jan.1936). Nearby women in neighboring villages developed a variant on this theme. Many refused to marry, preferring to live off selling sexual favours and beer to urban workers who came there on the weekends (ZA7/4/34, Fox-Pitt, Ndola District Tour, 19 Jan.-7 Feb.1932).

However, most women preferred a more long-term solution to their needs. It was easier to be registered as a man's "wife" than to continue trying to evade officials and find new partners. The mines and other employers were happy to register any woman a male employee claimed as a wife. No certificate was required. As a result, the temporary "mine" marriage flourished on the Copperbelt in this period. These marriages could last from a few weeks to years. Couples lived together temporarily in the mine or government townships, usually without benefit of customary marriage rites. Sometimes small payments were made to local relatives,and custody of children agreed upon (ZA7/4/25, Fox-Pitt, Tour Ndola District, September 1931; Colonial Office (CO)795/83/45109, Sub-Committee of the Native Industrial Labour Advisory Board, Northern Rhodesia, 1936). More often, the partnership was purely the decision of the

partners involved. Many women had a string of these marriages, preferring this existence to returning home to the rural areas. Some women changed hands four or five times over a number of years (Davis 1933:77). Variants of the mine marriage had existed at other urban centers, but the number of people practicing it no doubt increased on the Copperbelt. It was born of convenience, providing foreign men with sexual and physical needs, while offering women an opportunity to benefit from male employment and urban life.

Women seem to have enjoyed considerable leverage in these marriages, no doubt strengthened by lopsided urban sex ratios. The district officer in Chingola reported a sex ratio of two males to one women, claiming that "The women are not slow to take full advantage of this" (SEC2/153, African Affairs, Western Province, Chingola Report, 1939). Tight-fisted men soon lost their partners to more generous mates. One missionary reported that women living on European stands with cooks and houseboys often got their partners "to hand over practically all their earnings, otherwise they found other men. So they had lots of dresses and slept on beds with mosquito nets. Others preferred clothes and trinkets to having babies" (Moore 1940).

The various options available to women caused considerable unrest between the sexes. Women who came to town with their husbands compared their lives with that of their more independent sisters. One young woman, for example, came to the mines with her husband, only to discover that he was seeing girls and coming home late, often drunk. She spoke longingly of the comparatively plush existence of friends in temporary marriages (Moore 1940). Marital problems flared up as young women realized they could easily find more generous partners. Fights broke out in the compounds, particularly at the beerhalls, where new partnerships were often formed. In Ndola, for example, a man killed his wife in a fit of jealousy. He objected to her drinking beer with other men while he was at work in town (ZA7/1/17/2, African Affairs, Ndola District, 1934). It is no surprise that marital disputes took up much of the time of local officials.

African marriage and marital problems thus became a major concern of mine management and colonial officials on the Copperbelt. Marital instability also concerned African men, both in the rural areas and in town. As we have seen, rural leaders opposed female migration to the Copperbelt. But African men in town soon began to complain about women's behaviour in town as well. For example,in 1931 the Ndola Native Welfare Association demanded that the beer halls be closed on Sundays. "The main source of troubles was about women" they argued. "Men spent their money for women, in most cases women who are not their wives but immoral friends, who keep any number of such lovers. Married women did not behave well and a majority of beer drinking women were of loose character." The association wanted two days of the week at the beer halls for women and four days just for men (ZA1/9/45/2, Minutes, Ndola Native Welfare Association,4 Sept.1931). Miners complained that crowded housing and inadequate sanitary arrangements undermined marriages as well, and urged the companies

to separate single and married miners (ZP10/2/4, 1935 strike evidence). Increasingly, African leaders in town blamed single women for marital unrest, and demanded their removal (Luanshya, Native Advisory Committee, 15 Nov.1938). Chiefs, who sometimes visited the Copperbelt to bring back unattached women and children, strongly supported these demands (SEC2/167, Chief Secretary (CS) to Provincial Commissioner (PC), Ndola, 2/12/1938). Urban leaders also began to call for urban native courts that could register marriages in town, increase penalties for adultery and a clamp down on divorce (SEC2/167, Native Advisory Committee, Nkana, 11 Nov.1938). Adulterous women who refused to return to their husbands were to be sent home, along with "loose" (usually unmarried) women (SEC2/406, vol.II, Native Advisory Committee, Nkana, 10/8/1939).

Colonial officials were caught in a bind by these demands. While they sympathized with the call for increased control over urban women, and in fact, believed African women were "becoming too independent" (PRO,Cmnd.5784, NR,Governor to Sec of State for the Colonies, 16 Sept.1936), they also worried about undermining traditional institutions, particularly rural native authorities (SOAS, LMS Box 29, Moore to Cocker Brown, 20 Oct.1936). Colonial officials were concerned that African wage earners would consider themselves emancipated from traditional authorities. They warned that "It would have to be remembered always that true progress meant the adding of new things to the old rather than a complete replacement of the old order" (SEC2/167, PC to Nkana Advisory Committee, 11 Nov.1938).

At the same time, some colonial authorities recognized that women in the mine compounds served certain purposes. As one official report stated, "while the outright harlot exists as a moderate rarety ... The courtesan, however, has the industrial stage set nicely in her favour. It is not forgotten, however, that she plays an important and even beneficial part in the compound economy; at least she brings to many a semblance of normal home life, and can be said to solve problems as well as make them....She at least keeps corruption from the village." Thoughtless promiscuity rather than temporary marriages were seen as the problem (SEC2/153, Chingola, African Affairs, Western Province, 1939).

The colonial authorities tried to steer a middle path through these complexities. They sought to reinforce the idea that good women remained at home in the rural areas. The neswpaper Mutende,- published for African readers, played this up. In 1937, an editorial argued that women and men have equally important jobs. Men go away to work "so that the wife may have clothes and a nice hut. The wife remains at home to look after the children" (Mutende - Dec.1937). This bucolic vision was compared unfavourably with the evils of town life.

The colonial government finally set up urban native courts in the late 1930s, but they were entirely staffed by native authority appointees, who, while determined to reduce women's freedom in town, were also loath to hand over authority to urban men. Divorce cases of couples married "properly" by customary law were sent to the rural native authority courts. Colonial officials supported

this. The Kitwe DC, for example, "never allowed a valid native marriage to be dissolved locally" (SEC2/406, vol.11, DC, Kitwe to PC, Ndola, 11 Sept.1939). Marriage registration remained the prerogative of native authorities, who vociferously opposed registration in town as that would undermine their authority (SEC2/167, PC, Western Province to CS, 26 November 1938).

By 1938, each Copperbelt town had an urban court. Marital disputes and assaults dominated the courts' deliberations. The court aessessors agreed that they must reduce the number of temporary liasons on the Copperbelt, and the urban courts refused damages for adultery or divorce to Africans in these partnerships (SEC2/406,vol.II,Cadet W. Boyle to DC, Kitwe, 11 Sept.1939). A couple had to prove that they were officially supported by their kin groups before their case would be considered. Following the lead of the rural courts, the urban court assessors sought to control women by punishing adultery with heavy fines (usually L3 against the offending male and eventually a small fine against the woman). The man was fined even more heavily (L7) if he had abducted the woman in question. The courts also tried to reduce the freedom of women to move from partner to partner by expelling single women from town and by encouraging adulterous women to return to their estranged husbands rather than joining their new lover. This reflected the African belief that adultery should be settled by compensation rather than divorce (SEC2/200, Western Province, Newsletter, 27 Sept.1939).

The courts had some lattitude, and were particularly harsh on "promiscuous" women. The Mufulira urban court, for example, decided that "If a woman is found to have married three different men, one after the other, she can be regarded as a prostitute and she can claim nothing, not even her clothers, if she leaves the third man" (SEC2/381, vol.I, Report of Urban Native Courts, Mufulira, 12 May 1939). "Loose" women were frequently ordered to return home.

Mine management was ambivalent about women's position in the compounds as well. Management recognized that women often caused trouble, but believed the benefits outweighted the costs. Initially management believed it could maintain married labour at little cost, and in the spirit of indirect rule, sought to discourage urban stabilization by severely limiting facilities for women and children in town. However, a massive strike in 1935 on the copper mines shook this equanimity. One compound manager (CM) publicly confessed that indirect rule in the urban areas was a failure (ZP10/2/1, vol.II, evidence, H.H.Field, CM, Mufulira, 1935). Management was particularly concerned about the disruptive influence of "unoccupied" women and children at the mines (SEC/LAB/1, W.J.Scrivener, CM, Nkana, "Native Labour as Affecting the Copper Industry of Northern Rhodesia," 17 Aug.1934; Spearpoint 1937). Unwilling to increase expenditure on dependents or to alter basic labour policies, the mining companies decided to enlist the assistance of a group of missions trying to establish themselves on the Copperbelt.

The United Missions on the Copperbelt (UMCB), which had been

struggling for acceptance and support, thus suddenly found itself in favour, particularly for work among women and children. Inspired by the Copperbelt study of the International Missionary Council in the early 1930s (Davis 1933), the UMCB efforts to coordinate a number of protestant missions on the Copperbelt had received little suppport from the mines before 1935. The strike led to a change of heart by the company. As one missionary pointed out, "The strike has had a good effect in that it has thoroughly frightened everyone, and if these reform measures are to be introduced, now is the time to do so" (LMS Box 28, R.J.B. Moore to Overseas President of YMCA, 5 Nov.1935).

The UMCB missionaries were caught in a dilemma, as they, like most colonialists and missionaries of the time, preferred traditional African rural life to the moral dangers of the city. Accordingly, the UMCB missionaries argued that migrant labour should be circulated regularly between town and country. They urged colonial officials to repatriate all unmarried women and older children in town, and to introduce compulsory registration of African marriages "in order to strengthen the home and family life of the people" (SEC2/406, vol.1, General Missionary Council of Northern Rhodesia (GMCNR), August 1939). The UMCB deplored the lack of effort "to prevent unmarried women and girls leaving their villages and making undesirable loose and immoral associations in the towns and locations" (Methodist Missionary Society (MMS), Box 1033, 1937-38 Report on Women's Work, Mufulira). They also opposed extensive social services in the urban areas, including more advanced schooling for girls, on the grounds that this would only attract more Africans to town and encourage stabilization (GMCNR, Jan.1936 and August 1939).

The UMCB was strongly influenced by anthropologists, such as Audrey Richards, who believed traditional African cultures should be protected at all costs. UMCB leaders in London and Africa consulted with Richards, who gave scathing reports of the spoiled African women on the Copperbelt "who feel they are living the lives of princesses." While admitting that a few women were "virtuous materfamilias", in her opinion, most were "out to have a good time....Their philosophy of life is pure and logical materialism. Clothes and material objects are their only desire in life." She argued that "Women are in general far more thoroughly materialistic than the men, who are looking forward to going home and settling down with a wife....Few women want to go back to the village, they have a much better time on the mines." Richards advised the missions that "it would take a woman who had worked successfully among truculent, shy and self-sufficient slum girls here (London) to understand how to win over these girls and women" (ICM Box 1214, Dr. Richard's talk at the Africa Circle, Nov. 1934 and a conference with Drs. Read and Richards, Jan. 1936; Council of British Missionary Societies (CBMS), Agnes Fraser to Ms. Wrong, London, 15 March 1935). Such characterizations fit well with missionary assumptions, which were all too ready to believe that African women "liked the strange, idle life, money and the gay clothes ...(life on the mines) would buy" (Mindolo Ecumenical Center (MEC) papers,

Kitwe, R.J.B. Moore, "Cooperative Work on the African Copperbelt," 14 Nov.1937).

However, as the UMCB women's missionaries began working on the Copperbelt, they soon realized that although African girls could be seen bicycling and smoking cigarettes, they were "only thus superficially different" (CBMS, A. Fraser to Wrong, 28 March 1935). They also began to realize they were dealing with an increasingly urbanized population. Agnes Fraser, in charge of women's work, concluded that "I suspect that unwittingly or willingly the Mines are badly misled on the subject of the temporariness of their employees by the way they move from one camp or company to another" (ICM, Box 1214, A.Fraser to B.D.Gibson, LMS, London, 5/12/1938).

Mrs. Fraser and Monty Graham-Harrison, who joined her in 1937, found many of the women receptive to mission teachings. While still "trying in a small way to keep alive in them the mental alertness and good ways learnt in the villages," they also hoped "to arouse ...a desire for new knowledge by means of Women's Schools held at the various centers." Despite language problems (women of 15 different tribes and many different religions attended), these informal schools offered women an opportunity to meet one another and to learn skills in housewifery and some basic education (Graham-Harrison 1939). The emphasis was on teaching women and girls to be good wives and mothers, and "to foster a sense of responsibility and fellowship for their compound and its conditions of life." They hoped to produce what the team leader, Reverend Arthur Cross, called "progressive wives", although Ms. Fraser worried that the expression "sounds too like a game of frequently changing partners -- a danger that is only too real here" (MMS Box 833, A.Fraser to Ms.Gibson, London, 5 Dec.1938).

Fraser and Graham-Harrison were particularly optimistic about the possibiity that the more advanced Christian women in their classes could provide models of proper Christian family life to other women in the Copperbelt communities. They wanted these women to become more active in church life, arguing that "It would make a tremendous difference to the work in urban areas if even a few of the Christian men have had a glimpse of the real co-operation that there can be between a Christian man and wife....It is only as they see real Christian homes, that the men will see what help women might give." They believed these properly trained Christian could "improve" married life on the Copperbelt (Graham-Harrison 1939).

By the end of 1938, Agnes Fraser and Monty Graham-Harrison had concluded that schooling for girls on the Copperbelt must be expanded as well. While agreeing that ideally African girls should be trained in the rural areas, they became convinced that a certain number of girls were going to stay in the urban areas. These girls needed more schooling. Agnes Fraser argued persuasively that "It is these very girls that we consider at the stage when we could save and influence them and lead them to see the worthwhileness of the good life." The good life of course, meant being a good Christian wife, devoted to one's spouse and well versed in domestic science, particularly housecraft and child-welfare (LMS Box 32B, A.Fraser to Ms.Gibson, London, 5 Dec.1938).

The UMCB team took up the challenge,and began to lobby the education department to improve schooling for girls. Increasingly, team members were convinced that family life must be fostered on the Copperbelt, and that required better education and social services for adults and children, including girls (LMS Box 32B, Some Notes on the Evangelistic Campaign at the Copperbelt, June 1938). To that end, the team suggested setting up a girls' boarding school and a training center for girls who would become home demonstrators, welfare assistants, and club leaders on the Copperbelt. Both should be supervised by the missions in order to provide a healthy moral and religious atmosphere, and to provide girls in the Copperbelt with the opportunity "to receive the training which will safeguard them from the moral dangers of the industrial environment and will fit them to become home-makers and enlightened wives and mothers in that environment" (LMS Box 32, Memorandum on Education Policy, UMCB Team, 21 Nov.1938).

The colonial government reluctantly began to admit the relevance of these arguments in the late 1930s. While still opposing urban stabilization, colonial officials began to realize that neither the mines nor African labour would cooperate with this policy. Unwilling to admit the need for new policy directions, the colonial government nevertheless began to accept the inevitability of some stabilization on the Copperbelt, and consequently the need for more urban schools. In 1938, all Copperbelt schools began offering standards III and IV. A sub-committee on female education, chaired by the missionary educator, Mabel Shaw, sought ways to improve female education in the colony. In 1938, the government proposed a girls' boarding school on the Copperbelt, which would "educate girls for wifehood and motherhood." Mere academic education, undesirable for boys, was declared "disastrous for girls." The syllabus was designed to stress housewifery, childcare, and sex hygiene (SEC1/444, Department of Native Education (DNE), Report of Sub-Committee on Female Education, 1937; SEC1/526, A Review of Native Education in the Copperbelt of Northern Rhodesia,1938). The department sought a headmistress of exceptional quality, on the assumption that "Her first boarders are likely to be girls already adversely influenced by their industrial environment whom she must wean to a life of useful service as home demonstrators, teachers and house wives" (MMS Box 833, DNE, NR to Gibson, 5 Nov.1938). Thus, the school was designed to improve family life on the Copperbelt, to reduce marital instability and to inculcate western notions of proper family life into the younger generation. This attempt at social engineering foreshadowed future colonial policies, which would adopt a more interventionist stance towards African institutions, including marriage (Cooper 1989).

Tightening the Noose: Urban Patriarchy 1940-1953

These efforts to bring urban women under control and to regulate African marriages in town had very limited effect in the war years. Women continued to come to the mines in increasing numbers (Parpart 1988). About 50% of the miners lived with partners in the mine townships, while government townships reported 60 to

70% married citizens. In 1940, the Kitwe DC reported that 96% of the traders had wives living with them (Saffery 1943:51-53). Leaders in the hinterland of the Copperbelt continued to complain about their women leaving the area to "contract illicit unions with the mine workers and soldiers" (SEC2/406, vol.III, DO, Ndola to PC, Ndola, 16 June 1942.

Crowded conditions and limited opportunities for cash as well as favourable sex ratios (for women) continued to provide the motive and opportunity for prostitution and temporary mine marriages. Many workers could barely support themselves and their dependents, increasing the temptation for women to seek out new, more generous partners. The beer halls and cramped urban housing facilitated negotiations between potential partners. As before, prostitution seems to have been less common than the informal mine marriage, though it certainly did exist. Wilson reported that prostitutes in neighboring Broken Hill charged one to two days wages for a night's casual intercourse (Wilson 1942:66). Chauncey reports similar figures on the Copperbelt (Chauncey 1981).

Economic pressures, particularly the need for housing, and social pressure against single women, pushed women to seek the best deal in the marriage market. The Copperbelt "pick-up" marriage was still common. For example, an African clerk remarked that it was easy for a married woman visiting Mufulira to simply move in with a bachelor, and to stay there until her husband made a fuss or brought a suit, whereupon the woman often simply returned to her husband as if nothing had happened (SEC2/406, vol.III, DC, Mufulira to Welfare Officer (WO), Mufulira, 30 Oct.1940). Neighboring women easily compared their material goodies, and quarrels over the relative generosity of different partners frequently led to marital breakups (Moore 1940a). Remarriage in the Copperbelt was relatively easy, thus providing an option for women who wanted to stay in town (Saffery 1943:47). While most temporary marriages were individual contracts, some were taken up purely as survival strategies. One young orphan was "forced on a man she hates. The aunt who is responsible is a thoroughly bad lot, only anxious to make money out of the girl" (ICM Box 1214, Mary Shannon, Mufulira, Report to Women's Foreign Mission Committee, 1947).

Compound laxity in the war years no doubt encouraged this state of affairs, as compound managers sought to maintain their supply of married labor at minimal cost. If a man claimed he had a wife, he was given a married housing and his wife received a bracelet (Chingolongolo)- to indicate her "married" status (SEC2/406, vol.III, DC to WO, Mufulira, 30 Oct.1940). Couples frequently produced forged certificates or hired bogus "relatives" to vouch for the legitimacy of their marriage. The going rate for this service was 2/6d in 1944 (SEC2/200, Newsletter, Western Province, 17 Oct.1942; SEC2/406, vol.IV, African Regional Council (ARC), Western Province, 17 July 1944). The legitimacy of these guardians or the marriage in question was of little concern to the mines. Despite their preference for married labour, the mines sought to minimize the expense and problems resulting from that decision. To that end, traditional elders were appointed to handle

domestic disputes in the mine compounds, thus reminding workers that they were only temporary urban dwellers. Social services were kept to a minimum and government was urged to repatriate adolescents (Copper Industry Services Bureau (CISB), Comments on Elwell Report on Copperbelt social services, 2 March 1945).

However, there is some evidence of minimal change, perhaps reflecting some of the late 1930s efforts to reduce marital instability. A report by Lynn Saffery, a labour officer hired to study African living conditions on the Coppperbelt in 1943, discovered that prostitution and concubinage seemed to be declining and that marriages in the Nkana mine townships and the Kitwe management board compound were more stable than he had expected, given the reports by anthropologists such as Richards and Godfrey Wilson. Wilson had reported a high divorce rate and 30% intertribal marriages in Broken Hill. This observation was supported by Arthur Cross of UMCB and the senior labour officer, William Stubbs. Saffery discovered that only 32% of husbands and 26.6% of wives in Kitwe had been married before and 65% of the wives had come straight to Kitwe from the village. Mr. Cave, a welfare officer for Kitwe Management Board, reported a higher figure (47%) for women in Kitwe township the year before (1942). At Nkana, Saffery found that only 32% of the husbands and 30% of the women had been married before. Half the wives had come straight to the mines from the village. 85% of the spouses at Kitwe and 88% of the spouses in Nkana were of the same tribe. Saffery linked these changes to increased stabilization, as 44% of the women in Kitwe township had been there for three years or more. Mr.Cave had reported similar figures for the year before (1942). At Nkana, 33% of the women had been in the compound for three or more years and 65% of the women had not been home since coming to town. Saffery discovered most women were working hard to maintain a family in rather difficult circumstances. Around 85% of the women he interviewed liked town life, and almost half (45%) of the Kitwe women and 35% of the Nkana women wanted to remain in town (Saffery 1943:40-41,76).

The more stabilized urban Africans were developing a more settled married life in town. Saffery discovered that the long term skilled miners were less often embroiled in marital disputes (Saffery 1943:47). Although determined to minimize social differentiation in the mine compounds, after two strikes (in 1935 and 1940) mine management worried about worker satisfaction among its more skilled employees, and decided to appease them by offering them marginally better housing, ie three rooms rather than one (SEC/LAB/45, Labour Officer (LO), Ndola, visit to Mufulira, 19-20 Nov.1940; Acc.72/1/5, Northern Rhodesian Chamber of Mines (NRCM), Meeting, 3 July 1941). These more skilled workers were "rapidly becoming the leaders of public opinion in the compounds" (Rhodesian Consolidated Mines (RCM)/CSD/WMA 147, CM, Mufulira to General Manager (GM), 30 July 1942). These same people dominated the churches and put considerable stock in the adoption of Christian family life. These leaders, usually teachers, interpreters and clerks, took advantage of weekly missionary at-homes, where "The

men conducted themselves with extreme propriety and are keen to improve their general background knowledge in this way" (MMS, Mass Education,Jan. 1945). Their wives were often church leaders, and flocked to training courses offered by the UMCB women missionaries (ICM Box 1214, Mary Shannon,Work in the Copperbelt, 1942). These couples resented "the present status and sometimes priority of accomodation being given to these irregular unions" (SEC2/406, vol.III, PC, Western Province to HCS, Lusaka, 29 Aug.1941).

The urban elite became increasingly vocal about urban conditions and one of their favorite complaints centered around the looseness of urban marriage. The Urban Advisory Councils (UAC), which were set up in 1938 to represent responsible urban opinion, complained to the District Officers that prostitutes should be sent home, that women were marrying too young and that temporary marriages were all too common in the urban areas (UAC, Luanshya, 28 March 1944). African Regional Councils (ARC), established in the 1943, provided a forum for urban and rural African leaders in Western Province. Both councils discussed urban marriage at length. Both urban and rural male leaders agreed that Copperbelt marriages were too loose. However, urban leaders were more concerned with their control in the towns, and called for a urban marriage registration (SEC2/406, vol.IV, ARC, Western Province, 17 July 1944), and a law requiring all Africans to register their marriages (SEC2/406, vol.IV, UAC, Kitwe,7 Dec.1945). Rural leaders opposed urban registration, arguing that "Copperbelt marriages are not proper marriages and people who wish to marry should come back home" (SEC2/18, ARC, Eastern Province, 18 Sept. 1943). But all members believed marriage registration could be used to limit housing for temporary marriages. To this end, the Ndola Regional Council asked compound managers "to refuse admittance to all women without marriage certificates and ...that compound managers should not allow any woman without a husband to sleep in a compound unless she has a marriage certificate or a pass from her Chief" (SEC 2/406, vol.IV, ARC, Southern Province, 30 May 1944).

The councils commented on many aspects of customary law that were supposed to be the purview of the Urban African Courts. They demanded that women as well as men be fined for adultery and that couples who made a business out of adultery be stopped by reducing the fines for repeat offenders (SEC2/419, ARC, Western Province, 17 July 1944). One member, for example, insisted that the husband should get custody of the children if the wife misbehaved, that young women should only marry at home in the rural areas, that divorced women should be sent back to their villages and that chiefs should not issue a pass to a divorced woman who wanted to return to the urban areas. Another member wanted bridewealth payments increased "in order to strengthen marriage." The council members even attempted to define a legitimate urban marriage (SEC2/406, vol.IV, ARC, Western Province, 1-2 May 1945 and 17 July 1944), and suggested that education facilities be set up to teach women domestic science. They also demanded wills which would enable African men to bypass customary law and control the inheritance of their property, thus increasing patriarchal control in matrilineal

societies (SEC2/226,vol.I, ARC, Western Province, 1945).

The missionaries supported many of these demands. Mission leaders on the Copperbelt were "realizing more and more that a Christian Africa can only be built on the basis of Christian homes. Accordingly the questions of Christian marriage and work among the women are receiving special attention." The UMCB missionaries agreed that they "must keep constantly before our people the high ideals of marriage and family life for which Christianity stands" (MMS Box 1034, Report on the Northern Rhodesian District, 1940-41). To attain these goals, the UMCB reiterated many of the African elite's complaints and demands, particularly the need to limit women's access to the beer halls, to repatriate unmarried women, to register all marriages and to limit married housing to properly registered couples. The missions urged government to assist their efforts to encourage Christian families by passing a marriage ordinance which gave legal recognition to monogamous Christian marriages (Council of World Missions (CWM), AF/15, Welfare Work, UMCB, 27 July 1942; AF/41, UMCB to Gibson, 10 May 1943).

The UMCB team continued to believe education for women and girls was a crucial weapon in the struggle to establish "proper" Christian families on the Copperbelt. A large, bloody strike on the mines in 1940 increased UMCB credibility as both government and the mining companies searched for ways to divert and occupy women in the mining areas. The UMCB team was given a freer hand with women's work and continued control over all female education except the government boarding school. Their women's centres sought "to counter the attraction of the dance and beer hall, and of 'men' in the lowest sense..." The women's centres emphasized training for marriage and motherhood, as defined by the norms of Christian family life (ICM Box 1214, Mary I.Shannon, Work in the Copperbelt, 1942). While ostensibly calling for women's equal partnership with men, the underlying theme remained loyalty, obedience and the importance of marital stability. African customs, such as Łobola,- which served that end, were encouraged (CBMS,A/G24, Merle Davis, Proposed Study of African Marriage, 1947).

The team believed formal education was a key to change as well. The UMCB primary schools inculcated missionary notions of "good womanhood" in their female pupils. But the missionaries continued to worry about the more wayward elements of the female adolescent population. Agnes Fraser urged government to make schooling compulsory for girls from 12-16, "if the average adolescent girl of the Copperbelt is not to be allowed to remain the outstanding menace to the moral atmosphere of the industrial areas" (CWM,AF/15, A. Fraser, Women's Work, 1943). The UMCB also pressed government to prohibit marriage before 16 years in order to encourage girls' schooling (ICM Box 1214, Mary Shannon, Report to Women's Foreign Mission Committee, 1947).

The colonial government was caught in a crossfire between these demands and its continuing desire to preserve the authority of traditional African leaders. Initially, the government tried to walk a fine line, maintaining native authority's control over marriage registration, urban court personnel, and women's migration

to the urban areas (SEC2/406, vol.III, DC, Mufulira to PC, Ndola, 18 Nov.1940). Some officials even advocated shorter work periods on the mines (NR3/11, R.S. Hudson, Labour Commissioner (LC), Copperbelt Tour, 30 Aug.1941), but the labour needs of the mines only increased labour stabilization, and consequently the demand for some form of urban marriage registration. The government decided on a compromise, permitting the urban courts to give prelimarary certification to couples who could find a supportive guardian to vouch for them in court. The couple were given a temporary certificate while the appropriate rural native authority processed the final paperwork. This certificate could be used to obtain married housing (SEC2/406, vol.IV, HCS to all PCs, 25 May 1944). The government also managed to convince the mines to tighten up their allocation system for married housing by requiring marriage certificates as much as possible (ibid., DC, Chingola to PC, Western Province, 11 Jan.1945).

The urban native courts continued to be staffed by appointees of the native authorities. They were instructed to send divorce cases of properly married couples back to the rural authorities and to grant divorces only in exceptional cases. Marriage registration was encouraged by insisting that adultery cases could only be heard for registered marriages. The urban courts were also urged to repatriate women living in town without a man, especially recent divorcees or adulteresses. These rules were designed to control women in town without damaging the authority of traditional African society. The government rejected demands by urban African leaders for more control over the courts (SEC2/406, vol.III, LC to HCS, Aug.1942 and DO, Chingola, Registration of Native Marriages, 1943).

However, both external and internal pressure gradually brought about a change in colonial policy and a different role for the urban courts. The complexities of urban life forced the urban courts to develop urban variants of "customary" law. Cases demanding untraditional solutions came up continually. Even the definition of a "proper" marriage created problems because the urban courts often dealt with unregistered urban marriages that nevertheless had children, some kin support and a lengthy history. The courts had to stretch the definition of marriage to place these on the docket, and they did just that. The courts created their own working definition of a legitimate marriage, which focussed on bridewealth payments and parental approval rather than village rituals (Epstein Papers (EP), Urban Court Members' Conference, 1941,1949,1953). In some cases, the urban courts even gave divorces to proper village marriages (SEC2/406, vol.IV, DC, Ndola to PC, Ndola, 20 Dec.1944). Frustrated by inefficient rural authorities, the urban courts increasingly offered temporary urban marriage certificates as if they were official. They gradually evolved their own variants on the rules for divorce and adultery, particularly the nature and size of the fines and the treatment of repeat offenders. Although always conscious of their role as protectors of traditional law, the urban court members increasingly recognized the need for some autonomy from native authorities,

particularly for registering marriages of urbanized and alien Africans. Some court members even recognized the inevitability of intertribal marriages, which most native authorities strongly opposed (EP, Urban Court Members' Conference, 18-20 July 1949, 13-16 April 1953; Epstein 1953).

Urban marriage patterns gradually began to react to these court decisions, and practices developed to accomodate court requirements. Clyde Mitchell, in a 1951 study of Luanshya, discovered that couples who had lived for years in town without registering their marriages now found it necessary to obtain registration. He also discovered that most marriages had some family approval and that bridewealth payments had become the norm, even among matrilineal peoples. Bridewealth was seen as a security against divorce, although Bhisungu payments increased as people realized these were exempt from repayment at divorce (Epstein 1953). Increasingly, women living on the Copperbelt had to be married; 95.2% of adult women lived with a partner. Although remarriages were common (only about one-third of marriages were the first time for both spouses) urban divorce rates were only slightly higher than rural divorce rates. At Nkana, divorce rates of 25.6% for urban marriages compared favourably with divorce rates of 41.8% for the Lamba and 36.9% for the Ngoni. Efforts to stabilize urban marriages thus appeared to be working. Even intertribal marriages usually occured between persons from geographically or culturally similar tribes (Mitchell 1957).

However, many urbanites continued to evade attempts to bring urban marriage under control. Marriages among the intelligentsia were apparently solidifying, but the urban poor continued to indulge in temporary relationships. Chiefs still complained that their women were running away to town (SEC5/450, African Provincial Council (APC), Central Province, 23 Feb.1950). Repatriation did not solve the problem as repatriated women often reappeared once officials turned their backs (SEC5/450, PC, Western Province to SNA, 14 Sept.1950). Forged marriage certificates and lax compound managers enabled unmarried couples to live in town. Colonial officials remarked on the large number of young women in the Copperbelt towns who "lead a life at best of temporary unions with unmarried men and at worst of prostitution" (SEC2/155, Western Province, Annual Reports, 1947, 1948). Regional Council (renamed Provincial Councils in 1944) members complained that "There are ... women who marry here (in town). Now, they will be married by one man here and tomorrow another place. What they do is go to the Boma and get a receipt.... This kind of woman has made this case on the Copperbelt numerous and that is the reason why the married women are so many on the Copperbelt, because they have not got proper marriages (SEC2/226, vol.II, APC, Western Province, 28-29 April 1948). From 10 to 25 percent of these unions had no children, thus facilitating marital instability (Colchester, 1947).

Frustrated by these problems, the urban elites demanded more control over the urban courts. They wanted urban solutions to urban problems, particularly those concerning women and marriage. Urban leaders regularly demanded that urban marriages be registered

in town (EP, UAC, Luanshya, 17 Nov. 1952 and African Representative Council (ARepC), 1949). Members of the local,provincial and national African councils (a national African Representative Council was established in 1946) openly criticized the urban courts and advised the public to take problems to the District Officers if they were unhappy with urban court judgments. They wanted urban-based court assessors, who understood the need for a uniquely urban point of view. For example, one Provincial Council member demanded that women "who look for other men" be repatriated, but wanted women with urban parents to remain in town (SEC2/168, Chingola UAC, 29 Nov. 1948; SEC2/226, vol.II, APC, WP, 28-29 April 1948). Some Urban Advisory Council members even wanted "respectable" single women in town to be given training for employment (EP, UAC, Luanshya, 27 Sept.1950). One council meeting suggested a uniquely urban solution to adultery cases, arguing that "Part of the money that is for the upkeep of the family and the house is spent on that woman (the adulteress), and therefore that woman should be fined so that the money should go to the wife." They also insisted that divorced women and prostitutes be exempt from compulsory education in town, as they were bringing disease and bad habits to the other children (SEC2/226, vol.II, APC, Western Province, 9-10 July 1947).

Increasingly urban based colonial officials sympathized with these complaints, and some of them began to argue for distinctive urban solutions, particularly in regard to marriage. The District Officer in Ndola, for example, urged government to allow the urban courts to issue marriage certificates to couples who had been married in town for five years, arguing that "inter-tribal marriages of urbanized Africans are bound to multiply and I can see no good and a lot of evil in refusing to legalise them, with due safeguards. ...The introduction of registration of marriages by repute and cohabitation would be a blow at the African idea of marriage as a social factor in a communal society and a step towards the African acceptance of marriage as a contract between two persons." This, he believed, was an inevitable consequence of civilization; one that should be encouraged rather than suppressed (SEC2/406, vol. IV, DO, Ndola to DC, Ndola, 7 Feb.1945). Another District Officer condemned the present system, arguing that it "should be scrapped" and replaced with marriage registration in town. "Native customary law is not sufficiently elastic. It has served its purpose and must give place to progressive elements" (ibid., DC, Chingola to PC, Western Province, 7 Feb.1945).

Gradually, colonial officials in Northern Rhodesia began to consider new policies for dealing with urban Africans. A growing concern with African development encouraged a new attitude towards African workers and elites. Increasingly, colonial reports called for the establishment of a stable urban population in Africa. The Eccles Report on finances of native locations in the urban areas argued that any "policy which would tend to keep wages low, and to prevent the development of good conditions and family life in the urban areas, would be shortsighted. The interests of all concerned will best be served by hastening the process of stabilization" (Eccles Report, 1944). While the initial reports taking this line

were often shelved (such as the Saffery Report in 1943 and Elwell's report advocating expanded Copperbelt welfare services in 1945), eventually this new approach to colonial policy began to infiltrate official thinking in Northern Rhodesia and elsewhere (Cooper 1989). As a result, colonial policies began to support African urbanization and to both recognize and foster emerging urban working and middle classes. This had important repercussions for African marriage in urban areas such as the Copperbelt.

Consolidation, Reform and Resistance:1953-64

The advent of the Central African Federation (1953-1964), with its public commitment to racial cooperation in the federated states of Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (now Malawi), hastened the adoption of new colonial policies for Africans. Support for stabilized African working and middle class families in the urban areas intensified, and with it, the need for policies encouraging this transition. Legislation encouraging the development of stable urban family life was introduced. In 1953 urban courts were permitted to register marriages of urbanized and alien Africans (SEC5/447, HCS to PCs, Admininstrative Circular, 15 April 1953). The urban courts were also urged to crack down on divorce by sending divorce cases to church or welfare officers for reconciliation before granting a divorce. Some litigants were sent home with a lecture on the importance of marital stability. The labour officers and district officials on the Copperbelt increasingly favoured policies that encouraged stable working and middle class life among urban Africans (SEC5/503, UAC, Kalulushi, 25 Oct.1957 and DC, Kalulushi to PC, Ndola, 4 Dec. 1957).

Government urged the missions to expand urban schooling, particularly for girls, but lack of funds hampered their ability to respond to the initiative. As a result, the government expanded girls' schooling, but always with the explicit goal of creating good wives and mothers. Academic training was deliberately focussed towards occupations in line with home life, such as nursing, teaching and social work (SEC1/383, NR Development Plan 1946-49). As the Director of African Education (DAE) stated, "the chief career for which Schools should be preparing girls is that of homemaking and bringing up children" (SEC1/443, DAE, comments on F.H. Gwilliam and M. Read, "Report on the Education of Women and Girls in Northern Rhodesia, 1947", 2 March 1948). This approach continued to inform educational policy in Northern Rhodesia. The expansion of women's education was part of the overall strategy to establish European-style family life. Colonial officials argued that development in Africa would only occur when African women could give their children the same headstart offered by their more educated European sisters (NR2/512, "African Progress Dependent on Women's Education", African Eagle, 19 Oct. 1954). This attitude continued to prevail. In 1961, a woman educator wrote that the African "wife and mother has a tremendous role in the development of a nation.... It is the woman -- whatever her career--and the home she creates which set the standards of living, which have the greatest influence in moral standards and towards a well-balanced

outlook, thereby creating the foundation of a community worthy of recognition" (Baker 1960-61).

Municipal governments set up welfare centers for women as well. At Chingola, model homes were established in municipal compounds. One served as a creche while the other offered local women practical classes in housewifery. In each Copperbelt town, "Considerable emphasis was placed on the education of African women in matters relating to good home management" (NR Labour Department Reports, 1959,1961).

After 1953, the mining companies adopted a similar stance as they shifted to deliberately encouraging a stabilized African workforce. Women's welfare was dramatically expanded, with the express goal of fitting miners' wives for settled urban life. Welfare classes emphasized hygiene, domestic science and the importance of marital stability. They aimed to "assist the women to run their homes more efficiently and to provide a happier and more stable background for their families." Special classes on marriage were introduced for adolescent girls and advanced training in homecraft was offered to the wives of the more skilled workers. Case workers were introduced to handle problems arising from marital instability, child neglect and threatened divorce (RCM/CSD 203.5,file 5, Welfare Officers (WO) Annual Report, 1954; CISB100:21, vol.2, Replies to Department of Welfare and Probationary Services Questionnaire on Mining Company Welfare, 1955; Harries-Jones 1964). In cooperation with the education department, a badge scheme was introduced in the women's welfare centers which aimed to improve homecraft education and to encourage the development of women's clubs. Badges could be earned in health, mothercraft, laundry work, thrift, shopping and budgeting and other domestic subjects (NR2/440, Ministry of African Education, 1960). Company newpapers highlighted successful wives, who advised their sisters to look after their houses and families properly as "A husband always loves a cheerful wife. Then he does not think of divorce" (Luntandanya,-25 April 1959).

The missions and churches reinforced these messages. The UMCB declined and in 1955 it was integrated into the Copperbelt Christian Service Council. But the Copperbelt churches continued to influence the lives of African converts and church mores and training for Christian family life continued to play a crucial role in the lives of many urban Africans, particularly members of the middle class. Church women's groups offered leaadership training to women who were active in the church, and this became an important source of satisfaction for many women. The spiritual successor to the UMCB was the Mindolo Ecumenical Center (MEC), founded in 1958, and based at the UMCB Mindolo center. MEC offered classes to African women: a six month's course on Christian family life and a six weeks course on marriage preparation. The longer course was aimed at more advanced women and the need to prepare them "for the new responsibilities which African advancement is pressing at their doors"(Luntandanya 5 Nov. 1960). It was very popular (with 500 applications for 40 spaces), particularly with husbands who wanted their wives to learn the niceties of European

living (Taylor and Lehmann 1961; MEC, Report on Women's Training, 1963).

Thus, both discourse and policy in the urban areas encouraged the adoption of European family life, and the stabilization of marriage. The emerging middle class and more respectable members of the working class on the Copperbelt supported this goal, and used their positions in urban institutions to reinforce marital stability and to advocate the adoption of European-style family life ("The Copperbelt's New African Middle Class" Horizon 3,2, Feb.1961). The result was considerable stabilization of marriage during the federal period 1953-64), particularly among the intelligentsia (Powdermaker 1962).

At the same time, women sought to protect their interests in this changing environment. A male partner remained a necessity for most women in the Copperbelt towns. Temporary "mine" marriages continued to exist, and many women preferred them as they offered maximum flexibility in the marriage market. However, urban regulations, especially the urban courts, increasingly pushed women to obtain marriage certificates. As a result, changing partners increasingly required women to obtain a divorce. The courts became a site of struggle between the sexes, with women developing a sophisticated list of complaints requiring divorce. While the urban courts sought to minimize divorce cases, persistent applicants often manaaged to get a divorce, even if it took several tries. Overall divorce rates in town, as we have seen, were lower than many parts of the rural areas, but divorce and remarriage remained an important survival strategy in the urban areas. Middle class women sought refuge in the social approval offered to their "proper" family life, but they too sometimes encountered marital problems. While the intelligentsia had fewer divorce cases, the courts offered them an arena to challenge their husbands when necessary. The lucky few obtained the education and employment necessary for independence, and women increasingly recognized the importance of this strategy for dealing with marital instability. But most women sought solutions within marriage, and since a woman could not remarry without a divorce (while a man could), it was women who often sought divorces in the urban courts. Overall, then, although marriages in town gradually stabilized after World War II, and the ideal of stable married life along the European middle class model had increasing appeal, urban women also developed strategies to protect themselves from the growing power of urban patriarchy, be it colonial or African. These strategies have been discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Parpart 1988), and deserve further investigation, particularly in relation to the nationalist critique of European culture. But this requires another paper.

Conclusion -

The debates around African marriage and the meaning of marriage for social order changed over time, and just as importantly, they varied among different interest groups. Sometimes discourse around marriage coincided in ways that

facilitated cooperation between unlikely bedfellows, such as the colonial and traditional rulers. While colonial leaders spent much of their time devising methods to control traditional African leaders, they also wanted to buttress traditional elders' authority over African women. To that end, colonial officials supported native authority's power over women's migration and African marriage. At the same time, the priorities of different fractions of the colonial community provided the rationale for competing approaches to African institutions, particularly marriage. Colonial efforts to buttress traditional institutions fell foul of mining capital's need for a stable skilled labour force. Capital's requirements thus fostered policies and assumptions in the compounds which provided the opportunity for women to survive in the urban areas. Thus, the mines and other colonial employers provided a space for African women to develop new patterns of behaviour and to escape from the strictures of male authority in the rural and even urban areas. Women took up this opportunity with alacrity, devising new forms of marriage that maximized their autonomy and access to resources. Although women's voices are silent for the most part in this early period, their actions speak louder than words, and their actions prove a determination to shape their own conditions of marriage, quite apart from the traditional or European mores being offered to them by African and European authorities.

The importance of investigating patriarchal cooperation in detail is striking in this instance as well. While African and European leaders agreed that African women must be brought under control, once again, conflicts over the nature of this control offered women some space for developing new survival strategies. This paper has described the coalition of forces trying to bring African women under control, and the central role marriage played in that effort. European and African men agreed women should be married, and saw marriage as the most effective means of controlling women. But debates over the type of marriage needed was another matter. Here the conflict between advocates of indirect rule and actual developments in the urban areas surfaced and muddied attempts at patriarchal collaboration. As we have seen, most colonial officials believed traditional institutions could best guarantee low-cost social order, but the mining companies' labour requirements created a population with problems and needs that conflicted with the ideology of indirect rule. African urban leaders emerged and began demanding special consideration, and their demands influenced the thinking of management and missionaries on the Copperbelt. They started calling for urban based solutions long before most colonial officials had given up their commitment to indirect rule. This conflict emerged in the debate around marriage as a conflict of ideas, but it was rooted in the political economy of urban life and global economic realities. The requirements of capital created a discourse and reality in the urban areas that encouraged management and the missionaries to offer African men and women in town opportunities officially proscribed by the colonial policy of indirect rule. And, as we

have seen, urban men and especially urban women, took up these opportunities and shaped their lives around them.

Shifts in the global political economy, particularly the devestation of World War II, altered the climate of opinion in London and consequently in the colonies. The need for colonial development to help with the sterling crisis led to new thinking about Africa. The family and marriage played a central role in these debates, as colonial policymakers began to see urban African working and middle classes as the key to African development. The role of family life in this process came to the forefront and with it women's role as the organizer of family life. Urban African leaders approved of this approach, and allied with colonial leaders, missionaries, and corporate officials to guarantee stable urban family life. To do this, African women had to be brought under control: no more flitting from man to man. The discourse and policies around marriage shifted; urban women must be controlled and incorporated within a more Europeanized version of family life. This congruence of interests, and the use of institutional power to buttress these interests, especially the courts, the schools and the church, led to changes in African marriage patterns. Temporary alliances became more difficult to sustain, as did prostitution. Marriages stabilized under the pressure of patriarchal authority. Many women chose to work within this framework, particularly members of the emerging elite. But even women who accepted the ideology of proper (often Christian) family life and the role of women in that world, still sought to define that life in ways that benefitted themselves. They used the very institutions designed to promulgate ideas about the virtue of family life to protect their interests. They went to welfare officers, church leaders, compound managers, and even trade union leaders to demand help with stingy or abusive hsubands. They also went to court and divorced men for not being good providers. Many women advocated education for their daughters as employment became another avénue to achieve autonomy from abusive husbands. These strategies and the debates surrounding them, indicates the importance of looking beyond the dominant debates in a society, to discover counter debates and actions, and the way these various strands affected the lived experiences of men and women. The dominant debate over colonial marriage emphasized the need to bring women into line with generally accepted notions of propriety, as these evolved over time. But differences over the notion of family and marriage, and changing economic, social and political realities, offered space to African women to shape their own history within the debates and to contribute their own point of view as well. Women thus emerge as actors in the debate over marriage in the colonial period, actors who could manipulate events and disagreements between what at first looks like the monolithic voice of African and colonial patriarchy.

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