

Style and ethnicity: reflections on methods for the study of arts in the Zambezi and Kasai headwaters

"Le renoncement à l'angélisme de l'intérêt pur pour la forme pure est le prix qu'il faut payer pour comprendre la logique de ces univers sociaux qui, à travers l'alchimie sociale de leurs lois historiques de fonctionnement, parviennent à extraire de l'affrontement souvent impitoyable des passions et des intérêts particuliers l'essence sublimée de l'universel; et offrir une vision plus vraie et, en définitive, plus rassurante, parce que moins surhumaine, des conquêtes les plus hautes de l'entreprise humaine" (Bourdieu 1992, 16)

This paper is a short discussion of style in the arts of some peoples of the upper Zambezi and upper Kasai, in particular, among the Chokwe, Lunda and Lwena, or Luwale peoples. Firstly, I shall discuss current uses of the concepts of art, style and ethnicity. The first question I asked myself was: what is the validity of the distinction and classification of ethnic styles, and is this approach useful to our knowledge of the works of art? Secondly are these apparent styles pervasive in all fields of art production? Thirdly would there be something like regional styles in the cultural area of Zambezi and Kasai headwaters? It is not my purpose here to practically analyse and discuss the variety of "ethnic styles" of the region in any way, or to propose definite answers. Rather the purpose is to discuss the difficulties of the concept and the necessity to broaden the scope of our research in time, space and theory in order to unravel variants and invariants in the formal aspects of works of art.

A number of concepts underlying my argument are derived from Alfred Gell's anthropological theory of art (1992; 1996; 1998) which, departing from institutional and aesthetic definitions, defines artworks mostly as *indexes of social agency* rather than meaningful *representations*, or depictions of events, forces or beings even though they can partially fulfil this role at times. Any object, including the human body and music can become "art" if they have an interpretation that reveals the fact that they embody "complex ideas and intentions" (Gell 1996, 15) in a web of *social relationships*, and if they require, for their making or for their further use, technological skills whose mastery remains out of reach of the common of the mortals (Gell 1998)¹. Art is also conceived of as a component of technology, the "technology of enchantment", that

Boris Wastiau, Royal Museum for Central Africa de Tervuren, Belgique.

¹ Alfred Gell's theory itself was influenced by the work of E. Gombrich (*Art and Illusion*, 1960), who had theorised on the relationship between formal aspects of works of art and the effect, or impact, of the illusion which they procure.

differentiate art from other artefacts by investing them with magical powers (Gell 1992): "As a technical system, art is oriented towards the production of the social consequences which ensue from the production of these objects. The power of art objects stems from the technical processes they objectively embody: the technology of enchantment is founded on the enchantment of technology" (Gell 1992, 44). Any object has a sign and agency value that primes over its pedestrian use value, and this is especially true in the case of works of art because they embody intentionality. It is here that a distinction between the artisan and the artist, according to the present working definition of "art", can be addressed: the artist could be distinguished as s/he who has a role to work on social relationships via the object s/he has crafted, which brings about the emergence of a belief in the mystical and the magical power of his/her object and his/her person. This, obviously, extends substantially the field of art. To this purpose, I must therefore remark that I use the term "art" accordingly (liberally, in the context of art-historical scholarship) to refer to artefacts "in the vicinity of which" social agency is concentrated, oriented or created (Gell 1998) and not to objects distinguished only by subjective aesthetic judgement. A certain effort of "methodical philistinism" (Gell 1992) is therefore required to avoid unduly narrowing the field of the anthropological enquiry into the artistic phenomenon due to the effects of one's own aesthetic judgement.

I refer to works of art as "indexes" of relationships, rather than "symbols" of other objects, as has prevailed in the discipline, because in Chokwe related arts, most artefacts are active elements, or "agents", in networks of inter-related social actors (human beings, spirits, deities, forces, etc.), and not mere tokens "symbolising" some other distinct reality alien to this world. For instance, a mask is a mask, a *likishi* (or *-kishi*) that men use to perform specific social purposes (Photo. 1-2). Whatever its style, it may relate by its specific features to other cultural notions such as social characters or mythical heroes, but it has immediate reality and power in the *hic et nunc* of its instantiation in performance. The mask is properly a fetish that has will and power: it has existence of its own. What people see and interact with on the village scene is the mask as agent, that scares, soothes, or amuses, not an image that stands for some alien and unseen reality that needs to be deciphered. The same goes for most other art forms such as carvings or magical paraphernalia.

I have no interest in discussing the word art itself, and those who already resist the objectivation, may wish to call something else the objects I refer to if bothered by such a broadening of the concept. I will remark, however, that such a working definition of art has two major advantages over the philosophical, aesthetic, or institutional definitions: it offers a methodological approach that attempts to free from any aesthetic, historical or social constraint in the appreciation of the adequacy of the inclusion of the artefact in the category "art". As a consequence, it probably includes anything that has ever been called art in all intellectual traditions, European, others, and a little more. Incidentally, a category constructed in such a way may also preserve from anachronism and ethnocentrism. This is not to denigrate the sociology of art circulation or aesthetics. The agenda is different. In contrast, any "essentialist" definition of art or the artist will be the produce of an institution, a judgement of taste, and can not therefore be of any help for an anthropology of art.

Photo 1-2 (left) *Kalelwa* mask photographed among Congolese Chokwe around 1919 © Africa Museum, Tervuren. (right) *Kalelwa* mask among the Luvale of Zambia. Photo B. Wastiau, 1995. Features of the face are among the few elements which may recall an ethnic-based style. The structure, making and decoration of the rest of the masks' heads and of the costumes are closer. The role and significance of this fearsome mask, always equipped with machete and stick, is similar today among the Luvale as it was 80 years and several hundred miles away among the Chokwe.



Style as a concept

The combination of formal qualities in a work of art, or an ensemble of works of art generally is referred to as style; it can be observed in shape, matter, colour, motif, topic or combination of these various elements. Style is distinct from meaning, function or nature. Style, as a visible recurrent phenomenon, does not here refer to especially or restrictively accomplished craftsmanship of some sort, but to formal aspects of artefacts, without any of the judgement of aesthetic value that should be left out of a fully reasoned approach (cf. Gell 1992; 1998; Bourdieu 1992). It has been frequently noted by ethnographers that most African art production was not meant to be “beautiful” in the first place, that is in Kantian or Hulmean aesthetic terms, but rather to be efficacious and forceful. As in any art, it needs enough agency to have an “impact” and serve its purpose. In our context, the queer notion of “*ututombo*” (the “beautiful”, in Chokwe) is, by the state of the art of our knowledge of *emic* notions of aesthetics, a useless concept. An aesthetics of perception, and one of production would require much more specific field research data than is available today.

A proof of the arbitrary character of this approach is that the object categories defining art in the eyes of Western scholars of African material culture (and artists and collectors too), have varied with time, not so much because it was

necessity to consider jointly the creation of works of art and social relationships. Bateson suggested that "... if art is somehow expressive of something like grace or psychic integration [of the individual into society], then the success of this expression might well be recognizable across cultural barriers" (1973, 235-236). It is the role of the anthropology of art to investigate the necessities of works of art that would make this possible.

Style is constituted by an array of relations between formal, stylistic, geometrical and decorative features in a set of artworks, each of which may, or may not, bear on the significance or efficacy of the artwork. A style can be described at the level of individual artist (ex.: Samanana Kachaku), at the level of an atelier (ex.: Dundo village) or school (ex.: Moxico school), a geographical area (ex.: West Kasai), a socio-cultural formation or "ethnic group" (ex.: Luchazi), and, I contend, a broader cultural region. In all these cases there are objective continuum of transformation of style in time between generations, in space between "ateliers", ethnic groups or regions. Accordingly, one can observe retention and protentions of stylistic features *between* works proceeding from within these diverse units, and also retentions and protentions of relations between such stylistic configurations.

Before going any further in the discussion of terms of reference, I would like to make a few remarks about the difficulty of enquiring about art styles in the field. Among the greatest obstacles to the understanding of art is the fact that it expresses things or does things that often can not be expressed or done otherwise, for instance in speech, or by any other medium on a everyday basis and following common sense. Art conveys the ineffable or "indicable" and operates by magic or technological enchantment (Gell 1992; 1998). Isadora Duncan is quoted to have said: "If I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing it" (Bateson 1973, 242). Many an artist could utter something similar about his or her art. Conformably, it is therefore a quasi-initiatic and partly paradoxical effort of intuition and sensibility, mixed with close systematic observation that is required while in the field to surround the subject matter of the anthropology of art, which then requires to be rationalised in a textual discourse. If one can try to deflect one's attention from what at first sight appears as "art", it is much harder to discern and focus on "technologies of enchantment" that do not fit in our aesthetic make up and which may even be based on other than visual terms.

There is a second hindrance which consists in the frequent lack of a certain awareness, and of a discursive knowledge, on the part of the artist or performer approached in the field (although "super-informants" are an exception). Habit implying forgetfulness (*habitus*), a good deal of "traditional art" is difficult to enquire about. As Bateson has it, but it could have been Bourdieu: "The economics of the system, in fact, pushes organisms towards sinking into the unconscious those generalities of relationship which remain permanently true and towards keeping within the conscious the pragmatics of particular instances. The premises may, economically, be sunk but particular conclusions must be conscious" (Bateson 1973, 246). This is the reason why during enquiry in the field it is often much easier to gather practical and detailed information on particular features of art forms than to talk about the overall performance about the ideologies or representational systems they underpin.

Ethnicity as a concept

In this text, I am inclined to use the term “socio-cultural formation” to refer to “the Chokwe”, “the Luvale”, “the Luchazi”, etc. because it prevents me at the same time from using a term in need of a more specific use (“ethnic group”), and instead of the frequent use of a number of others, such as “people”, “group”, “polity”, “empire”, “chiefship” and so on, which are all relatively inadequate to describe the socio-cultural formations under scrutiny.

Besides what was said above, style is also what we recognise, mostly by education and experience, and which helps us to infer ethnic or geographical provenance. Now, only very few scholars such as Marie-Louise Bastin have proceeded empirically, by a study of the origins of museum collections and classification of their styles. Conversely, we, as followers, mostly ascribe “ethnic origins” to pieces by comparison, therefore reinforcing arbitrarily the correlation between a given style and an “ethnicity”. Furthermore, needless to say, that “ethnicity” is a tricky concept in upper Kasai and Zambezi (von Oppen 1993; Wastiau 2000). Firstly, socio-cultural formations have no geographical boundedness and most people are culturally and linguistically of mixed ascendancy because of migrations and intermarriages. Consequently, one may draw no sharp borders as Olga Boone did for South-West Congo (1973). Actually, if this were done it might trigger a general uprising in the region. Socio-cultural formations have been fluid, interwoven, and so have their cultures for as far back as historical documents allow us to go (Papstein 1978; Vansina 1966; von Oppen 1993; White 1949). By this I mean that the quest for the determination of a “pure ethnic style” is the same bias and bears the same consequences as to seek “ethnic purity” (cf. Levine 1999)³. Unless one subscribes to the point of view that traditions and change are not exclusive (Vansina 1989), “tradition”, as a strong concept, may imply immutable “ethnic art”, although there are no such things as bounded and perpetual traditions in the field of art, neither in Africa nor anywhere else. When I use the term “tradition”, it is rather to the contrary with the conviction that “tradition” is a measure of integration of new cultural elements (technologies to work out and construct the social), therefore a measure of change.

Ethnicities as we know them, are to a great extent ideological constructs produced by the European observers and colonial agents during the XIXth and the XXth centuries, on a nominal basis and mainly after the observation of language and chiefship (Amselle and M'Bokolo 1999). It has always been different for the inhabitants of the region, who have had different agendas and have used several names to refer to themselves and to others (Wastiau 2000). For example, the “Mawiko” (people from the West) and to a certain extent the “Luvale”, both of whom migrated from Western Angola to actual Zambia, derived their ethnonym from blanket-names given by former inhabitants of the land (Lozi, Mbwela, Lunda) or by the European administrators. The term “Nganguela” has been used by several populations to name their eastern neighbours, the term meaning “from the rising sun”. Interestingly, a number of related “groups” that have been called Nganguela actually lived in a

³ Consider for example the historical complexities of an ethnicity such as that of the neighbouring Nkoya (Van Binsbergen 1993).

homogenous environment, and had developed similar modes of production and technologies (von Oppen 1993, 30), which suggests that ethnonyms could derive from something other than language or political organisation.

Certainly, these socio-cultural formations (Luvale, Chokwe...) had been open to other cultures for a very long time. Bear witness to this is the most "classic" Uchokwe "autochthonous country" sculpture, the flint-stone guns in the hands of supposed mythical ancestor Chibinda Ilunga, present from the eighteenth century on words (Photo. 3). European square and folding chairs, pipes or snuff-boxes which nature, form and style betray coastal and Portuguese influences corroborate this (Photo. 4) (Bastin 1982a, 1989, 1991; Wastiau 2000). It is also exemplified by the myths of migration, conquest and ethnogenesis, or by the *miyachi* clanship system that once cross-cut some "ethnic divisions", that there can only be partial, temporary and blurred ethnic distinctions. It must also be remembered that ethnic affiliation is not exclusive, and that it is negotiated throughout the life of an individual, in initiations, marriage and political engagements.

Let us consider too, the means by which the "Chokwe" conquered alien populations. According to Vansina (1966, 218-222), one tactic was to establish small settlements of hunters in the proximity of cultivated areas among peoples who did not hunt. After some time, the immigrants appointed their own chief, and gradually rejected the autochthonous landlord, often overthrowing him by force. The overall population then became "Chokwe". Chokwe expansion, according to Vansina, required numbers that Uchokwe country is unlikely to have provided. Assimilation of "foreigners", stolen wives and slaves increased their number and their descent belonged to the lineage of their Chokwe father, which insured that the next matrilineal generation would be "full-fledged Chokwe". It is in this context, in which women were highly commoditized, that we may want to reconsider the aesthetics of the feminine-looking *pwo* masks (Photo. 9). Larger populations were surrounded and settled: "Gradually the enclosed groups began to be considered as Chokwe by outsiders and they were assimilated culturally, so that they themselves began to see themselves as Chokwe. Among others, this was the case with Lunda Mukundu of Northeastern Angola" (*op. cit.*, 220).

It turns out that the history of art in the upper Zambezi and Kasai is a history of art circulation and borrowing, one of intense creativity and sweeping change. This, however, it will be shown, does not imply that there are no stylistic or conceptual recurrences, but to find them, we need to grasp the fluidity of such a notion as "tradition" and understand that it may relate to something other than the uncritical preservation of formal style in our own classic sense of the term. Art production, the specific material culture that concentrates notions of agency around itself, offers a material and objective basis to reconsider such notion as "ethnicity" and "ethnic" style. As such, is there any interest, after all, in defining an 'ethnic style'? Formal styles and thought styles develop around central ideas, concepts, or tropes in the socio-cultural formations, to be embodied in artworks. This type of critical embodiment is to be discussed in the following pages. Art history must be a history of ideas and of social relations, not a mere factual and pseudo-objective history of forms: "enquiry" into relations must prime over "record" of facts (Onians 1978).

The upper Zambezi and upper Kasai style area

Loosely defined, the geographical region of Kasai, Zambezi, Kwango and Lunge Vungu headwaters includes a number of socio-cultural formations, most of which trace their origin in migrations and ethnogenesis over the past two or three centuries. Historical and oral-historical sources all point to this fact (Cameron 1877; Carvalho 1890; Miller 1969; Papstein 1994; von Oppen 1993; Wastiau 2000). There has thus been no permanent association of a socio-cultural formation to one very specific geographical area over a long period of time, but rather a history of population flux and culture hybridisation. In fact "ethnic groups" today are very different from what they were some 100 or 200 years ago. So are aspects of their culture, of their arts. On the other hand, there has long been (at least over the past 150 years) a broad cultural community among these peoples, most of which have shared, beside a common clanic system (*miyachi*), *mutatis mutandis*, the same initiation rituals for young and older men and women, the ancestral cult, *ngombo* divination and *hamba* possession rituals. In these, comparable artefacts are used which, because of their similar form and style, can sometimes hardly be distinguished on an "ethnic" or even geographical basis: *ngombo* divination basket, *tuhembi* clay fertility figurines, *tambwe* hunting shrines, among others (Photo. 5, 6). In fact, there is more in common with these socio-cultural formations than there is to differentiate them. This is reflected in the fact that part of their arts differ in style and a larger part is almost undifferentiated (this is leaving crafts aside, which also show common conception). If one makes abstraction of wooden masks and figure sculpture, the cultural continuum appears more clearly. What interests me in consequence is what makes these cultures akin and mutually intelligible, rather than what separates them.

We are not talking about a highly fragmented cultural area comprising a great number of ethnic groups all clearly distinct and speaking mutually unintelligible languages as one can find for instance along the linguistic fragmentation belt between Nigeria and Cameroon. Chokwe, Lunda, Luchazi or Nganguela, Luvale and Mbunda for instance, are large, historically related socio-cultural formations counting in the hundreds of thousands, most of which have long coexisted in

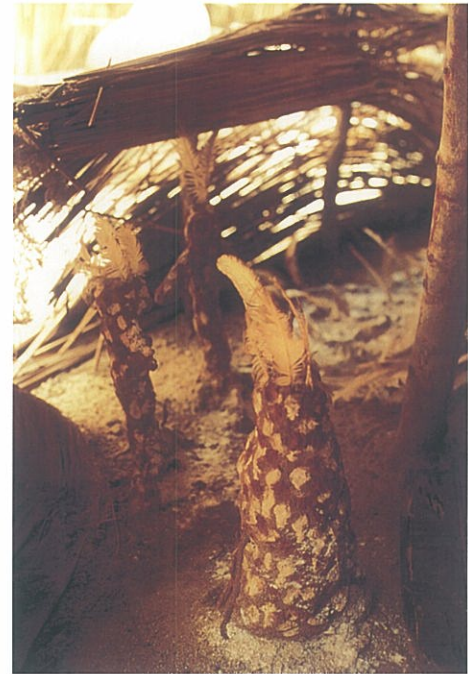
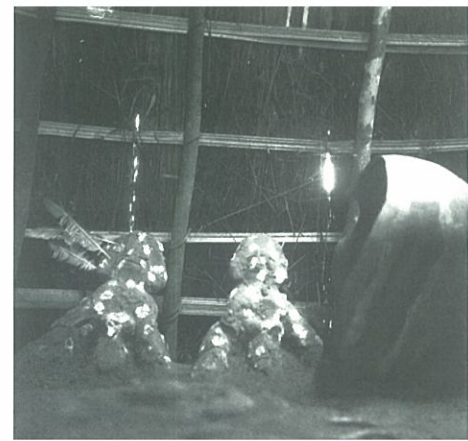


Photo 5-6 *Tuhembi* clay figurines photographed in 1935 by Roelandts, in a Chokwe shrine for the *hamba* spirit *jinga*, in Mwa Mushiku village, South Kwango (D. R. Congo). *Jinga* is said to be the Chokwe equivalent of *lihamba lya kamayuva* of the Luvale, a spirit of kin always involved in Chipango infertility treatment. © Africa Museum, Tervuren. (right) *Tuhembi* figurines inside a seclusion house for the treatment of infertility in Kapiololo village, Zambezi (Zambia). Photo B. Wastiau, 1995.

multicultural environments. However, taking late XIXth and early XXth century wood-carving as a subject matter, one could draw tables or charts of protentions and retentions of stylistic features in the shape of Alfred H. Barr's (1936) or Alfred Gell's (1998) and look for filiations, bifurcations, encounters, etc. Yet, one could also look for common base elements.

Another approach would be to determine how style may inform about technologies that are available to the artist, his/her tools and raw material: therefore of the availability of resources, their exploitation and distribution. Technology is fully related to the economy of the region (Vansina 1998, 203 ff.), and so is style: they must be approached together. How for instance does one interpret morphologically distinct bark masks that nevertheless have been stylistically and technically very similar (I do not say identical) among several ethnicities of the region? One key is that different populations were culturally akin, and that *mukanda* initiation and its technology has democratically cut across ethno-political boundaries. Conversely, wooden masks that are not strictly related to initiation, such as *pwo* or *chihongo*, have developed very distinct styles.

A thoroughly systematic analysis of ethnic carving styles in the upper Kasai, the upper Zambezi, and indeed Angola, on the basis of art collections is doubtless Marie-Louise Bastin's major contribution to the history of art in Africa: from *Art décoratif Tshokwe* (1961), to *Memorial de Culturas* (1994), and up to her latest publications such as *Figurine masculine d'un ancien couple* (1998), she laboriously contrasted and related the forms and decorative patterns of a very large corpus of carved artefacts. Marie-Louise Bastin realised immediately the intimate connection between the styles of several peoples of the Kasai, Zambezi, Kwango and Lungwe Vungu headwaters in this field (1973; 1982a).⁴ Yet there is more to art than carvings and masks: most peoples of the area have elaborate conceptual art in their magic and therapeutic paraphernalias for the ancestral cult, divination or spirit possession. They have complex performance arts in relation to masquerading, dancing, oral arts, and they have had refined body decoration art as well. The embodied aesthetics are especially developed throughout the cultural area in dance and spirit possession performances. The anthropology and art history of those remains largely to be done.

In her enquiry as to the common ancestry of these peoples, and in particular that of the Chokwe, Marie-Louise Bastin has frequently based her research on the reports of Capello and Ivens (1881, I, 173-174) of what they heard from the Chokwe chief Ndumba Tembo to explain the origin of three peoples of the region: "In the powerful capital of the Lunda (Ruund) a woman of noble birth, called Tembo or Lucoquessa, had three sons, Ndumba Tembo, Muzumbo Tembo and Kasanji Tembo. As they were excellent hunters, they too decided one day to strike out towards the west with their attendants and followers in search of lands -sparsely populated- where they might settle and form a state. The oldest, Ndumba tembo, conquered 'T'chiboco' (Ucokwe), that is, the native country of the Chokwe, whose capital lies west of the

⁴ Namely the Lunda, Minungu, Lwena or Luvale, Songo, Ovimbundu, Nganguela, Mbunda, Shinji, Holo, Imbangala, Lwimbi, Luchazi, Mbwela and Lunda-Ndembu. To these could be added a few others such as the Camatapa, Kakongo and Luyi.

source of the Kwango", the remaining people settling in other areas (quoted in Bastin 1998, 61). Marie-Louise Bastin analysed all known relations of this mythology as were reported by nineteenth century explorers from among the several polities of the area (Bastin 1978). In most other accounts, the union of a Lunda aristocrat, Lueji and an errant Luba hunter, Chibinda Ilunga, provides the starting point for ancestral charts (*passim*). Whether or not these have historical or "merely" mythical value they all point to a certain cultural commonality that has prevailed from at least the mid nineteenth century until the late colonial era. It has long been accepted that a number of peoples of the area under scrutiny could have had a common cultural ancestry going much further back, which would have been confirmed in the myths of hunter Chibinda Ilunga and princess Lweji (Birmigham 1966; de Heusch 1972 and 1988; Vansina 1998a). According to the theoretical standpoint, the latter either confirm the common underpinning origin of the socio-cultural formation, or they point to a common ideology. Of course, one can easily see that both aspects integrate each other, penetrating history, and *vice versa*. Jan Vansina has recently broken the tale of an historic Uruund diaspora, which he had himself contributed to founding (1983), by convincingly suggesting, that the adoption of such myths of origin, so ideally inter-linking a number of populations of the region might have been introduced as late as the nineteenth century. They would have served the purpose to putatively establish kin ties between distinct segments of the population, namely the military superior but new-coming Chokwe and the old established Uruwund dynasty (Vansina 1998a). Interestingly enough, this could correspond to the rise of Chokwe "expansion" or "colonial" style in court carving. Put simply, some of these migrations of chiefly siblings related in the corpus of myths might have never happened and would have served the purpose to legitimate the XIXth century ethno-political set up (Vansina, *op. cit.*). This recalls Prof. de Heusch's structuralist approach which Vansina himself had so vehemently opposed (1983). Without falling in relativism, one can say that there probably was a combination of historicity and myth, new myths being created and integrated in larger, older mythical systems in the same way as new cultural items or concepts are integrated in pre-existing cultures and constellations of meaning during periods of historical change.

This is not the place to discuss these sources any further. Suffice to stress that, just as for art which is often related to it, at the level of mythology, these socio-cultural formations share a common structured basis that can hardly be distinguished, and that each present specific "stylistic features" meaningfully stressing kinship and distinction with regard to other socio-cultural formations. Art and mythology in some cases might actually have developed in tandem.

Stimulated by European trade (see map.), made possible by privileged access to fire arms, Chokwe expansion from the sources of the Kwango to the East and the North would have started around mid-nineteenth century when the extensive slave trade gave precedence to ivory and wax trade, and ended in the 1910s, by paradoxical European repression and "pacification" (Miller 1969; Vellut 1973; von Oppen 1993) . "Les explorateurs de la seconde moitié du XIX^e siècle témoignent de leur déplacement vers le nord et le nord-est. La vie de ce peuple devient alors semi-nomade. En tout cas, peu favorable à l'élaboration d'un art de cour qui demanderait une organisation bien établie et l'appui de mécènes" (Bastin 1994, 42). It is reported that the Chokwe remained rebellious and uncontrolled by the Portuguese until the advent of mining

Photo 7 Expansion style spear with hunting whistle attached collected by J.-A. T. Fourche in the Kasai (R. D. Congo) between 1933 and 1942. RMCA, RG. 43548. H. 182 cm Wood (*Parinari curatellifolia* subsp. *Mobola*) Whistle: H. 95 mm Wood (*Crossopterix febrifuga*), steel, nails. © Africa Museum, Tervuren. Photo R. Asselberghs.

in the 1920s (Miller 1969, 74). By the end of their expansion they also went South, as far as reaching the Kwanyama.⁵ But most populations of the area were on the move and the Luvale, for instance, also achieved political pre-eminence by war and trade in the Eastern fringe of the region by mid to late XIXth century (von Oppen 1993; Wastiau 2000). The Lunda also were migrating, and the Luchazi, Nganguela, Lwimbi, Mbunda among other oriental neighbours of the Chokwe also moved in numbers towards the East and the South, reaching Lunda, Mbwela and Lozi countries in which they settled to this date (Wastiau 2000).

Ucokwe and chokwe expansion styles

“Seule en vérité l'histoire sociale peut fournir les moyens de redécouvrir la vérité historique des traces objectivées ou incorporées de l'histoire qui se présentent à la conscience sous les apparences de l'universel” (Bourdieu 1992, 508).

After *Art Décoratif Tshokwe*, Marie-Louise Bastin focused her study on nineteenth century and early twentieth century carving. She distinguished “Ucokwe” sculpture, a court art of the early XIXth century, from the “expansion style”, from 1850 onward. “Ucokwe”, would have been confined to the sources of the Kasai, Lungwe Vungu and the Kwango (Photo. 3, 4). A palatine art characterised by chiefly statuary, it would gradually have disappeared together with the original autochthonous chiefship at the time of the territorial expansion and European colonisation (Bastin 1982a, 253-254). Two major schools were distinguished: the school of the Serra de Muzamba and that of Moxico. The expansion style, more recent and de-centred is thought to have been mostly devoted to ancestral worship, *mahamba* spirit possession rituals and masks, although some court art subsisted in the form of thrones, spears and luxury objects (Photo. 7, 8, 9). Indeed, the older Ucokwe art style characterised by finely crafted large objects or figures probably designed to comemorate and enhance

Photo 8 Expansion style palatine chair from South Kasai (D. R. Congo), collected before 1911. RMCA, RG. 20594. H. 95 cm W. 37 cm Wood (*Vitex doniana* -verbenaceae), leather, nails, pearls. © Africa Museum, Tervuren. Photo R. Asselberghs.

⁵ cf. the Powell-Cotton collections in British Museum and those collected by António Carreira that are kept at the National Museum for Ethnology in Lisbon.

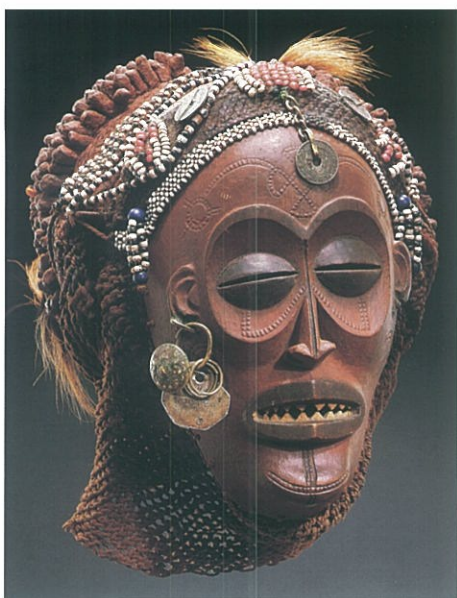


Photo 9-10 (left) *pwo* (woman) mask from the Tervuren Museum, collected South of Tshikapa in the Kasai before 1930. Note the tax tags and the European coins attached to the hairdo and the earlobes. RMCA, RG. 32510. H. 225 mm W. 135 mm Wood (*Alstonia*), fibre, clay, metal pieces, beads. © Africa Museum, Tervuren. Photo R. Asselberghs. (right) *pwevo* (woman) mask worn by Luvale dancer Kenneth Kapalu Lisambo for “multi-ethnic” public in Zambezi (Zambia). Note the trendy hairdo, the bright colours of the costume and the imported scarf on the breasts. Photo B. Wastiau, 1997.

the power of lineage-based chiefship had to vanish among the rather nomadic courts of warlords who earned their position and following by their achievements in the arts of trade and war rather than by matrilineal inheritance of title. What has been presented so far as Chokwe’s greatest art is indeed early XIXth century court art, Ucokwe art, and the carvings of the following “expansion style”.

Nevertheless, as Marie-Louise Bastin herself acknowledges, only few pieces of court art were collected until the beginning of this century and it cannot be ascertained that there were no stylistically different art forms such as bark masks and other perishable media for instance, which renders their contextual interpretation difficult. Our knowledge of nineteenth century art style can therefore only be of limited extent and hypothetical value. Besides, court art, albeit of a different tradition and style, perhaps also displaying less of a certain craftsmanship pleasant to our eye, has existed among other chiefships such as the Aruwund, the Luunda and the Luvale among others, where it is still to be found (Photo. 11-12). In terms of aspect, the “expansion style”, which is above all a later style, has been described as a “weakening of the older style” of the courts of the “autochthonous country” at the sources of the Kwango. Nevertheless, it displays retentions of the Moxico and Mussongo schools, in a similar fashion that in space and among different socio-cultural formations, one can observe similarities that either corresponds to a common background, or mutual borrowings. That expansion art was different from Ucokwe, should find its first explanation in the fact that that “expanding” fractions, which agglutinated different groups, lived a relatively semi-nomadic life, dedicated to trading over long distances, warring and raiding slaves; a life style hardly auspicious to the development of



Photo 11 Chief Ndungu of the Luvala with chiefly regalia and wearing his Uruwund crown, in Mize (Zambezi, Zambia). His wife, in the background, wears a headdress similar to his, but smaller and exempt of the grey parrot's red tail feathers on the top. Those are said to have been offered to the court by Aruwund paramount Mwata Yamvo himself (see Palmeirim 1998). Photo B. Wastiau, 1997.

luxurious furnitures and impractical objects such as large carvings. This occurred when they settled down at the end of their journey.

One can also observe a wide array of formal protentions and retentions at a synchronic level in the styles of "classic" carvings among cognate social formations of the area, such as the Songo, the Lwena or the Nganguela, Matapa or Mbunda. Marie-Louise Bastin recognised the similarities rallying the sculptures of a number of these peoples and conceived of a possible Chokwe influence, "un rayonnement artistique", on their neighbours or conquests rather than the contrary. But although such a process is likely to have taken place at the time of Chokwe expansion, it is of course very difficult to sustain any such "influence" hypothesis to explain all the common essential features at the level of artefacts with the scarce historical evidence at hand. I contend that there must have been a common cultural background even prior to the XIXth century Chokwe expansion, and that the kinship of styles must have derived partially from the violent encounter of the socio-cultural formations.

It is common to hear or read that Chokwe art production, beginning with the "expansion style", and production outside the core of later Chokwe country are "poorer" and decayed versions of Uchokwe.⁶ Such is the case of Zambian art of the Northwestern Province, which Manuel Jordán has researched and promoted over the past years (Jordán 1998; Felix and Jordán 1998). Yet this so-called decline is only relevant if we project a modernist European aesthetic and European pre-modernist conception of craftsmanship. For if we are to consider arts in a broader scope as proposed in the introduction, we realise that whereas we haven't the slightest evidence to what purpose items such as Chibinda Ilunga figures may have been made, it is possible to develop in-depth approaches of numerous other artistic traditions. It seems quite obvious though, in the light of what we now know of the material culture of the area, and art in general, that

⁶ "Art production became limited more and more to masks, snuff-mortars, pipes, hour-glass drums, and chairs. Artistic achievement was expressed above all in masks (perhaps because the religious and family traditions have been maintained), and in chairs. In the fields of figure-carving and decorative art, naturalism has declined (features and details become schematized, natural hair and beards have been discarded). The profile has become heavy; the lines and volumes are softened, the strength and vitality have been lost, and the stance is static. The majority of figures are stereotypes" (Bastin 1982a, 253).

the practical use value of such carvings (as other court objects) must have been subordinated to their function as markers of the social rank of their owner. The awe inspired by the mastery of a chiefly anthropomorphic carving could have been transposed on the ruler depicted by, or associated with it. Conversely we know for sure what purpose the masks, *hamba* figurines, sorcery figurines and other paraphernalia produced over the last century have been made for. Besides, it is still possible today to gather data about the latter and observe retentions of the former since art is far from disappearing from these regions (Jordán 1998).

To establish the Chokwe origin of some art forms and techniques (for instance masks, divination baskets, ironworking among others) one often relies on ethnographic reports of specific instances and/or relations of *emic* perspectives of representatives of peoples subaltern to the Chokwe. But if Chokwe artists were said to be so good as to be commissioned by foreigners for chiefly regalia and initiation paraphernalia at the turn of the century (as they can be today), it also happened the other way round, and some Minungu carvers have produced masterpieces for Chokwe patrons in the region of Muconda. The Luvale could have a fine carving style but still order their royal drums (*mikupelo*) from neighbouring Nkoya artisans. Also, carving styles could be so similar, that for instance the early century Songo produced pieces very similar to that of the Chokwe, and it is mostly the topics or the treatment of details that made a difference (e.g. long decorated pipes, the bull motif, the embracing caryatid motif) (Bastin 1982b). As with myth, these statements on the “ethnic authorship” of a cultural production should be considered critically within the context of social and political relations during the Chokwe expansion and colony. They are likely to be part of an ideological discourse, not outright historical evidence. Here the problem of ascribing ethnic origin to works of art is all the more acute. Marie-Louise Bastin had found the “ethnic distinction” could be difficult, if not impossible in some cases. For instance, in the Muconda region: “... tribal distinctions are often difficult to make. The various styles have become amalgamated into one hybrid, affected and stereotyped form” (Bastin 1982a, 254). But could this not be the result of Chokwe assimilation of the conquered populations? Not all Roman art was produced by Roman artists! That there has been a “Chokwe influence” is

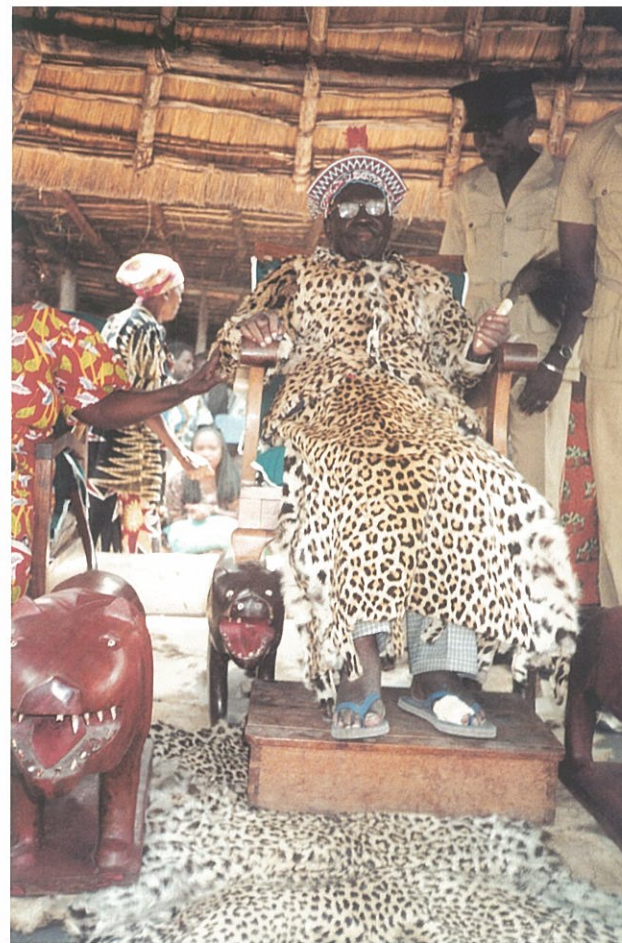


Photo 12 Chief Ndungu of the Luvale during *likumbi Iya Mize* annual festival, Mize (Zambia). Sitting on his throne in an outdoor shed, he is kept by his *tupasu* vigils in uniform. He is clad in leopard skins and holds a whisk made of the *pulu* (*Gorgon taurinus*) antelope tail. Photo Modesta Kapalu.

not in doubt, but we are still in need of explaining *why*. Expanding through trade and raiding, assimilating through appropriation and rape, they conquered, settled and occupied many lands and populations where life, modes of production and technologies were deeply affected, including at the level of artistic production.

Already in her thesis Marie-Louise Bastin discussed the mutual influences between close neighbours, and those that the Chokwe would have had on more remote groups such as the Pende, Luluwa, Nsapo, Mbangani, Kete, or Kongo of the Kasai and the Kanyok (Bastin 1973, 271-279; 1982a, 285). But the further afield one goes and the less historical evidence there is, the harder it is to talk about “influence” and “borrowing” rather than “common cultural background”. Just as one can easily differentiate a “Scandinavian style” from a “Germanic style” or a “Mediterranean style”, broad stylistic regions can indeed be distinguished, although any attempt to do so strictly proves problematic, for any choice of stylistic trait or field of art to operate a classification is arbitrary and will yield different results. Also, unless they can be proved to have occurred, such “influences” as mentioned above can only be presumed.

It is still assumed, for instance, that the Lunda have had no art of their own, which is a pretty damning statement which ought to be replaced by the statement “most Luunda, Uruwund and Aluund arts to our knowledge have not featured large anthropomorphic carvings of “classical” interest and wooden masks”. Of course, as any people, they have produced numerous original works to this day, as a number of studies bear witness, such as the data collected among the Lunda Ndembu (Turner 1967), Luunda (De Boeck and Devisch 1994), and Aruwund (Palmeirim, 1998), for instance. Would we dare say that Muslim peoples have no art because they have no figurative art? Among other examples, contrarily to what has become a received idea, at least some Lunda such as the Ndembu can craft a wide range of *makishi* masks; all the Lunda build and use shrines, magic, sorcery or healing paraphernalia and have performances that fall within the scope of our definition of art. As for masks, contemporary examples have featured men from different “ethnic groups”, among which Lunda elements, joining to craft the components of a single piece. *Mutatis mutandis* one finds the same core of material culture and art forms amongst these related populations. The presence or absence among one of them of free-standing figurative carving, of one type of mask, or of palatine paraphernalia is rather trivial in the face of the cultural patrimony that they share.

Craftsmen and carvers have been valued in the Chokwe Diaspora, mainly where they have lived among Luunda or Aruwund-speaking peoples that they regularly failed to dominate (Crawley 1972; 1973; cf. De Boeck 1993). A good chief had to be one himself: “If a chief lacks such skills, he will be all the more eager to encourage these craftsmen to settle in his capital, become his courtiers, and supply sculpture and fine metalwork to his court and chefferie” (Crawley 1972, 37). This interest for court art, probably issued from the XIXth century, extended to Lwena-Luvala courts and prevailed at least until the 1960’. During the colonial era it probably helped the “estranged conquerors” to manage their predicament in alien territory. Besides, systematic participation and patronage of the Chokwe chiefs in *mikanda* initiation rituals also supported the development of certain crafts (*ibidem*). In fact, some artefacts such as prestigious items found among Chokwe minority groups seem pretty “unrealistic” (cf. Baudrillard 1972, 19) in South-West Congo during the first quarter of this century, in

the face of the inaccessibility of the power that such artefacts were supposed to convey. Probably, if we want to discern the role of such ancient artefacts, we ought to seek clues as to how and for whom they were produced, and how and to what end they were displayed or used.

Broadly speaking, the style of the cultural region has to be observed in a combination of possession performances, fibre and wood masks, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic woodcarvings and chiefly and magical paraphernalia, most of which have not been historically documented as yet. Palatine arts developed within chiefship and chiefship together with long-distance trade, wars and ethnicities. If Ucokwe court art was produced for the glory of the established rulers, expansion art seems more like an attempt to distinguish the small and relatively disempowered, though ingenious and aggressive, minor migrant courts. Both cases contrast with the older art forms that have sprung out of the more egalitarian segments of the upper Zambezi and Kasai populations.

If one goes beyond style, form, artist or school, to investigate the historical field of production from which the arts under scrutiny all derive, one may begin to unravel unsuspected relations and causalities. Clear stylistic distinction have occurred mostly in carving, and probably only matched a certain “ethnic differentiation” at times of political struggle, conquest, colony and/or ethnogenesis. They are the produce of historical changes, shifts, events, in which people, creators and users alike, were engaged, both provoking and undertaking their effects.

The Ucokwe of the aboriginal country was a lavish and realistic style characterised by distinguished figures, effigies of supposed mythical ancestors or chiefs, elaborate thrones and accessories such as snuff-boxes. Objects in this style were collected late in the XIXth century, but unfortunately, virtually no historical data is available about their production and use. One can only presume that they indexed the dominion of a developed political oligarchy and some cultural icons related to masquerading, hunting and trading. From around 1850, expansion or colonial period art, mainly to the north (Kasai) lacks the “great anthropomorphic statuary” of the “classic style” and corresponds to the more common art forms existing today that are related common to chiefship, religious and therapeutic practices, but also comprises luxurious items (finely carved and decorated).

In both cases though, wood carving, as a salient (and incidentally perennial) feature of Chokwe art production, was developed in relation to the exercise of political power. This is probably where it most distinguishes itself from its kindred which did not reach such political and military pre-eminence during the same period. More than “... exterior signs of maintenance of the Chokwe chief’s prestige” (Bastin 1973, 199), there ought to have been a real political economy of the signs (Baudrillard 1972), with effects within and without the Chokwe realm, in the country of origin and during the expansion. In the colonial social formation, this was particularly striking in chiefs’ regalia. It is in this context of strong authoritarian relations that we must interpret style in relation to power; for this is when objects take their full meaning and become important agents within webs of social relationships. Beyond their ritual agency, objects are the media of “social prestations”, meaningful to the constitution of the social order of the time and place. It is similarly evidenced in ostentation

and conspicuous waste, a fact visible in some masquerades, thrones, drums, palace architecture, and so on. It is very clear in the manufacture of instruments of domination such as spears, guns and swords (Photo. 7). As a corollary, when individuals from a dominated segment of a social organisation have the opportunity to live by their art it is very likely that they do so by stressing the superior status of their masters. It must have been a sort of “impératif culturel” for the conquerors to assert superiority in as many fields as they could.

For example, how to interpret the gesture of the Mwata Yamvo, the Uruwund paramount chief in power in 1910, who gave a Norwegian officer a chair of his that was of Chokwe style (Bastin 1973 , 208)? More than information about the diffusion of styles in the region this might inform as to how chiefly regalia crafted in a certain style could be used in a politically and culturally tense context. Although this is a mere hypothesis for the time being, it could have been a strong statement of the Uruwund paramount to offer a representative of the upcoming European colonial power a piece of regalia in the style of courts that were not fully under his control! From my Zambian experience, I can say with assurance that should a palatine work of art in an “ethnically characterised style” be handled by representatives of another ethnicity, this would lead to outrage. Sometimes however, the relationship between ethnicities with regard to an artwork can be insignificant. Such is the case of the Luvale sacred *mukupelo* hourglass drums, real badges of kingship, that are bought from the Mbwela for purely technical reasons.

Regional arts

As stated in the introduction, it is not my intention to discuss specific styles in graphic detail but rather to develop preliminary questions, and I will refer the reader in need of learning the various recognisable features of the area’s carving styles to consult Marie-Louise Bastin’s extensive and detailed studies (cf. bibliography). The ritual institutions that are common to the peoples in question are at the basis of the social organisation, regulating all transitional stages in the life of individuals, whatever their ethnicity or rank (Jordán 1998). There is also a sense of linguistic community that prevails between certain groups: Marie-Louise Bastin empirically remarked the kinship between languages such as Luvale and Chokwe which is now confirmed by current research in linguistics. But let us look at male initiation. If Prof. de Heusch’s theory about the relatively recent (XIXth century) diffusion of the *mukanda* in the region is to be confirmed, that is, that circumcision was brought to the upper Kasai and Zambezi by the Sotho, via the intermediary of the Southern Lunda (de Heusch 1988, 40-43), then one has a further case in point for the study of the relationship between style and ethnicity. Conceptually, technically, and to a certain extent in form, initiation (*m*)*akishi* are very comparable within the “structural ensemble” in cause, and it is often difficult to ascribe ethnic origin to some of the bark masks such as *chizaluke*, *kalelwa*, *chikunza* or other mitre-shaped characters, especially if we take into account the full costume (inseparable from the “head”) and the associated performances (Photo. 1, 2). I therefore propose that either:

- local association of autochthonous masks to circumcision occurred (the Sotho did not use any masks) and thereafter was diffused by contact, or via XIXth century conquerors, such as the Chokwe.
- or, most ethnicities of the region North of the Lozi possessed such masks and individually operated the same association between the *mukanda* and their masks.

It is remarkable that while one can say that those bark masks are stylistically the same from a valley to the other, what differs most is the variety of forms that a number of them are given (corresponding to a number of distinct characters). Conversely, a wooden mask least related to initiation, such as *pwo* (or *pwevo*), has shown more stylistic variability (Photo. 9, 10).

In my research, I mostly dealt with spirit possession performances and their associated paraphernalia, which, similarly show common concept and style, a fact of which the ritualists (*vimbanda*, *vimbuke*, *vanganga*, etc.) are well aware. Only a glance at the published iconography of *tuhembi* fertility clay figurines and *tambwe* hunting shrines (clay lions) will reveal this (for instance: Baumann 1935, pl. 34-35; Martins 1993, ph. 12-13; Wastiau 1998; Wastiau 2000) (Photo. 5, 6).

Any research in the region's arts at large unravels corresponding forms, similar material, identical uses and related styles in most domains. Style being defined by relations between features of forms, the study of styles ought to be the study of relations between relations of features. Starting from a visual point of view, it is therefore logically the ensemble of the production of stylistically-related artworks that should constitute the body of material to be studied, whether ascribed identical or distinct "ethnic provenance". Starting from a conceptual point of view is another matter. But ethnographers have always felt the compulsion to distinguish and differentiate ethnic groups together with styles, which is natural and laudable to a certain extent, but which may also blur the ethnographic description. It has been the case that elements of a culture were left out of description and/or analysis on the grounds that they did not "belong" to the peoples in question, but were an "influence", or recent "borrowing". For example, in the midst of some "notas etnográficas" on the Nganguela, ethnographer António Carreira had to insist on what was "legitimate" (sic) Nganguela culture, and what "belonged" to the Chokwe: "Todos estes costumes ganguelas merecem estudo aprofundado com base em pesquisas de campo, por forma a destrinçar o que é legítima pertença da cultura do grupo do que, porventura, consitui influência estranha. Isso é, porém, tarefa de quem possua conhecimentos seguros dos povos e, em especial, das línguas" (1968, 61). For him and other ethnographers of the era, it was obvious and unquestioned that there was, or at least had been, a clear overlap of ethnicity, language and culture. Ironically, other scholars questioned the existence of such an "ethnic group" as the Ganguela, often identifying them as truly Mbwela, or a cluster of other ethnicities. Constant references in the literature for over one century leads me nevertheless to believe that there has been a socio-cultural formation either being called or calling itself Nganguela, and displaying a material culture proportionally similar to that of the peoples it has been related to, namely the Mbwela-, Chokwe-, and Luchazi-speaking peoples (cf. Wastiau 2000, introduction).

Marie-Louise Bastin was not far from the same conclusion when in respect to wood carving of kindred or close styles such as Lwena, Chokwe and Songo, she asserted that it was the analysis of the whole corpus that would indicate the *preferred features* of one or the other people (Bastin 1973, 222), but that in some cases there were no absolute correlations to be drawn between distinctive stylistic features and “ethnicity”. Indeed, there are many common motifs among the various socio-cultural formations, such as crosses, scarification lines and the sort, as well as associations of motifs and forms.

These questions, and that of style permanency, must be further articulated with historical change. Just as Ucockwe art style gave way to “colonial expansion style”, any field of art production undertakes historical change when the culture in which it has emerged engages in transformations, mostly by cultural contact in migrations, trade or wars. This means not that all is constantly invented anew. Rather to the contrary, any new production is derived in the line of previous productions, it has a recapitulative aspect, respecting structural patterns and retaining most (or at least some) of the former, or primitive features, even if change is swift. This, in fact, could hold true in all artistic traditions. As A. Gell had it: “An artefact or event is never either traditional or innovatory in any absolute sense, or, as time-philosophers are inclined to put it, *sub specie aeternitatis*” (Gell 1998, 256). On the one hand, all the older art works of the type known to the artist are as many protensions for him or her to create something formally and stylistically similar. On the other hand, the artist is able to project in the future his/her ideas, which s/he has embodied in the artwork (via concept, form and style).

Unlike court art, ritual arts developed in the more egalitarian segments of the population. They did not serve the purpose of glorifying the temporal power of chiefs or of powerful traders, and therefore failed to become an object of interest before the advent of ethnography in the region in the XXth century. As such it has remained a difficult exercise to talk about a history of art in the region, because documents for the period extending beyond the past century are scarce and do not allow for generalised and precise comparisons. But if one adopts a broader view of art in time, space and concept as is proposed, extended and numerous fields open for enquiry into XXth century art that can be documented by substantial data: archives, books, ethnographic and photographic collections and before all fieldwork. Therefore, I want to end this paper with a few examples that illustrate how an anthropology of art may interrelate and explain artworks, history and style, without presupposing or overemphasising any correlation between style and ethnicity.

Chairs and thrones

Insofar as it is wise to project ethnographic findings into the past, it can be suggested that chairs, both in the past and present have been indexes of seniority and (mostly male) power in the region under scrutiny. The chief’s seat, or more simply the chair of the elder of the matrilineage on which the village is based is often called *litanda*, say throne, instead of *chitwamo*, the common term for a chair or stool. It is inherited through the uterine line together with the positions and other badges of power. In the courts, be they Lunda, Luvala or Chokwe, finely carved and decorated thrones were among

several key artefacts that established and maintained the power of their owners (Photo. 8) along with other paraphernalia such as *mikwale* double-edged swords, fly-switches, royal drums and in some places bells. Although such chairs have become rare, imposing European colonial-style armchairs were introduced as a substitute. A fine and heavy chair not only informs on the status of the sitter; it is a means by which an institution (chiefship) and its representatives can act on some social relations. For instance, to build and use a chair larger than that of the chief would be an offence. At another level, not to give me the best chair in a bush village is an invitation for me to leave at once.⁷ In a specific spirit possession cult named Jila, members issued from rather marginalised segments of society perform healing rituals where the humblest is brought to sit on a chair for the time of the cure, thereby marking ritual inversion of the established norms. I have made the hypothesis that the gift of a Chokwe-styled chair by Mwata Yamvo to an European seemed to me to be more that the statement of friendly intentions. Today, the Luvale throne of chief Ndungu, near Zambezi, is a very large and heavy armchair flanked by two large polished and smooth sculpted lions (more on certain occasions) (Photo. 11, 12). Those, that probably were made in the 1940s, are not meant to reflect any “traditional belief” in a lion spirit, but rather to resemble the lions that flanked the throne of Solomon as described in the old testament. Styled in the 1940s in the fashion of some crafts that were introduced by missionaries such as F. Coillard in the region as far back as the late nineteenth century (MacIntosh 1907, 120), these felines have remained in the present as a powerful emblem of Luvale chiefship not to be dissociated from the throne. Many other examples could be given that confirm the use of seats to negotiate power, hierarchy and filiation. In all cases, I contend, the style in which the chair is carved or built, informs and qualifies its social role which can, or can not, be relevant to ethnicity, but certainly is of secondary importance in most cases.

Modernity and the alien

My second example has to do with the incorporation of modernity and the white alien in traditional art to inflate and emphasise agency. Marie-Louise Bastin pointed out the early integration of elements of foreign culture such as chairs and guns (*passim*), and later bicycles and other vehicles in Chokwe carving (Bastin 1973, 200; 1991), but this in fact is a feature common to all the people of the area, if not of most African cultures: think of the Lozi sorcery night guns (Reynolds 1958), the Holo “crucifix” figures, and European characters in Luvale or other spirit possession (Lips 1937; Stoller 1995; Wastiau 1998; 2000), among others. This process took place from the onset of intercourse with foreign traders, be they the famous “pombeiros”, Angolans, Europeans (Bastin 1991) or Arabs. After all, it is not different from the one that led most Chokwe-dominated socio-cultural formations to adopt and adapt part of their culture, be it forms of masquerading, types of spirit possession, or carving styles.

⁷ For a cross-cultural example on sitting arrangements and the making of hierarchy, see Toren (1990).

These assimilations by no means meant either a loss of a “tradition” or “identity” but rather a cultural reinforcement designed to collectively anticipate the successes of a positive engagement with the upcoming colonial power, and later the postcolonial culture. By integrating new forms and symbols in pre-existing ritual and symbolic structures, upper Zambezi and Kasai peoples insured both an interpretation of historical changes they were bringing about and a development of their symbolic-conceptual resources. This attitude has allowed officiants of the most modern possession cults, which incorporate numerous images of modernity such as radios or military attires, to describe their deeds as pertaining to “*tradition*” (*chisémbwa*), and not as alien or “*undele*” (i.e. “of the white man”). The same process of translation of culture allowed an informant of Marie-Louise Bastin to describe the famous carvings of standing hunters as a depictions of the mythical Chibinda Ilunga (Bastin 1978), although most featured rifles and not bows, as Chibinda is said to have carried according to mythology. Though data is virtually non-existent, one can guess that *prima facie* meaning (here a representation of Chibinda Ilunga) was largely subordinate to agency: possibly a visual glorification of ancestorship and filiation, that is, the role of the object as mediator in social relations, between individuals, groups and spirits. On the other hand, a change in style such as the inclusion of modern weaponry among the figurative elements might be an indication of the will to update an older concept with modern means. The stylistic addition only qualifies in a different way the perennial nature of the agency of the object. It also modernises it without destroying the otherwise characteristic formal features that were immediately recognisable to the beholder or user.

The same can be said about artefacts such as the *makishi* masks, which seems to have fulfilled rather constant functions in the context of *mukanda* initiation. Although there have been some “ethnic specificities”, a number of socio-cultural formations of the region share the same bulk of masquerades, which have the same basic style: *makishi* bark masks always sport red and white strips of cloth, paper or paint on a black resin, or now tar background, knitted fibre costume, fibre, blanket or hide skirt or apron (Photo. 1, 2). There is a certain typology of funny and of fearsome characters that have homologous shapes. At the local level however, sometimes, though rarely, on an ethnic basis, mostly on a regional basis or at times on an individual basis, specific styles and sub-styles are created that wax and wane in time and space.

Spirit possession arts

The third example I would like to give here deals with the arts (mostly sculpted staffs, costumes, amorphous magical paraphernalia and sometimes figurines) which were created within a regional possession cult, which, by definition, has spread over ethnic boundaries. The Jila cult, which use of chairs I have mentioned earlier, has specific staffs and costumes which have been known over a large area of Western and Northwestern Zambia and Eastern Angola. Their carved staffs, for instance, definitely have a style of their own which is distinct from staffs of other cults or from older ethnic styles of the region (Photo. 13). They present, however, a number of resemblances with the latter, be it in terms of agency, form or style. Some

figures, such as the Chikuza mask and Kalulu half being figure belong to the regional cultural background, but have been reshaped in a style specific to the cult to fulfil specific roles.

In these three examples, art forms have appeared as means to “fashion and refashion” aspects of cultural memory (*cf.* Stoller 1995), by working agency, form and style to integrate historical events into a pre-existing cultural heritage in a “traditional” manner. This seems to be the reason why processes of historical, cultural or ethnic integration may be reflected in changes of style. Style qualifies agency, religious, political or other, by making visible and by locating it in socio-temporal space. The first example, discussed from the introduction, was that of the upper Kasai colonial Chokwe style in the late XIXth and early XXth centuries. By outdoing their neighbours and partners in art, the Chokwe demonstrated their dominion of matters of politics, religion, medicine and technologies, and thereby reinforced their temporal superiority in the region.

Conclusion

It is probable that we cannot develop our knowledge of the arts of the region under scrutiny without relying to a certain extent on concepts of “ethnicity” and “tradition” (Levine 1999; Vansina 1989), but we must beware of there being no necessary or systematic correspondence between language, ethnicity, style, form and use. As a matter of fact, art style and ethnicity among the kindred peoples of the Lungwe Vungu, Kasai and Zambezi headwaters have seldom been fully correlated. Only some palatine art styles of the late XIXth and early XXth century, perhaps the continuation of some former style such as Ucockwe, appear as fully differentiated on an ethnic basis. Those can be defined through the study of a restricted corpus of wood carvings only. They may have flourished at the same time as ethnicity itself developed in the context of a political and military struggle. Less empowered socio-cultural formations, such as the subjugated Luunda, the South-Western Luvale or smaller populations such as the Holo, Luchazi or Camatapa did not produce any such arts in this period. On the other hand a complex, refined and multifaceted regional art cutting across



Photo 13 Staff and medicine shrine related to *mukanda*-derived *mahamba* spirits during the annual June ceremony of the Jila cult in Mbalakanyi village, Zambezi (Zambia). This regional cult (that is, clearly non ethnic-based), has incorporated a score of local and regional mask and bush spirits in its pantheon, such as this *chikuza* masker: Jila staffs come in recognisable sets, feature bulging shaft with conical top decorated with white pearls and a pointed end. Photo B. Wastiau, 1994.

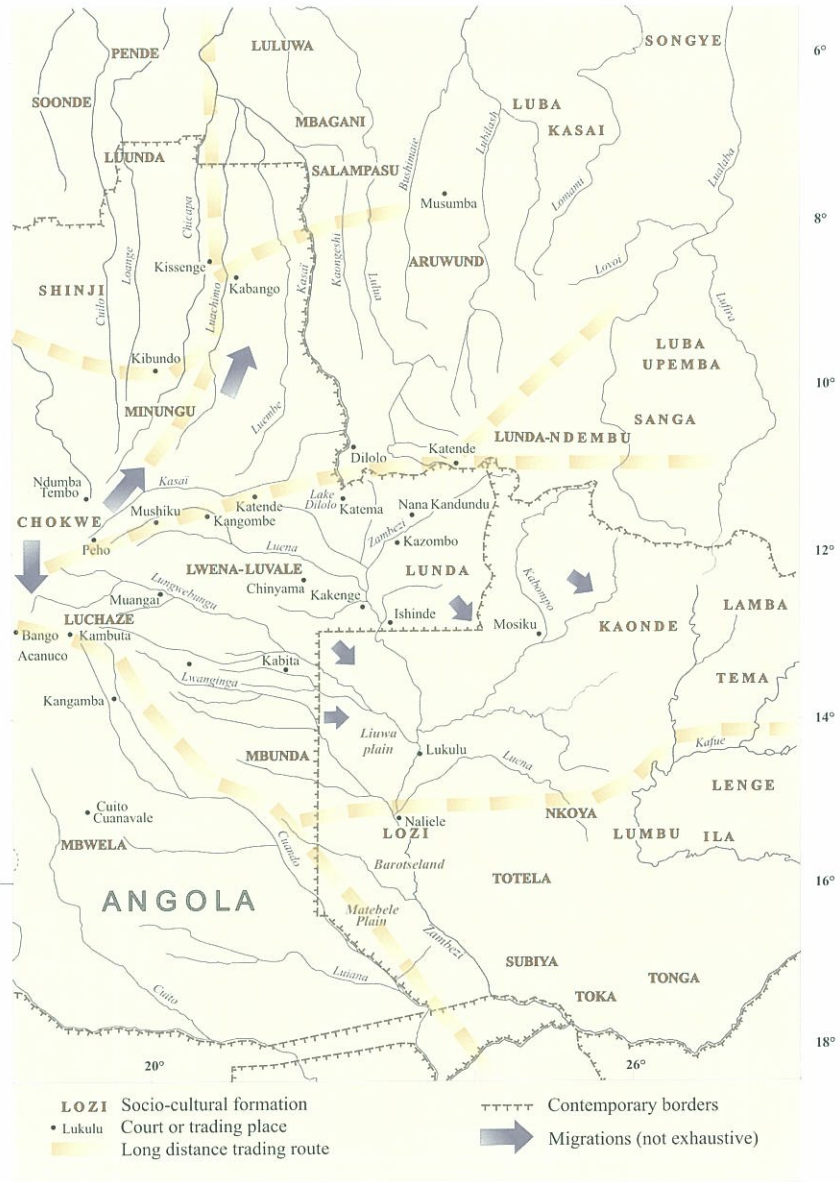


Photo 14 *Ngombo ya lipele* divination basket used by diviner Samundengu in Mushona, Zambezi (Zambia). Only few anthropomorphic items contained in the basket may at times show ethnic-based style. Such a divination technique can be practised by anyone having been possessed by a spirit called *lihamba lya kayongu*, and used to help any client, regardless of ethnicity. Photo B. Wastiau, 1995.

“ethnicities” constantly developed in the fields of religion and therapy (Jordán 1998; Wastiau 2000). Ethnic-based styles developed in the fields of solid wood carving principally, whereas regional styles characterised most other fields. One can also conclude that an ethnic-based differentiation of style may occur without being pervasive in the various fields of production, and that the arts of divination, witchcraft, spirit possession and masquerading are common to most of the peoples of the region and generally indistinguishable on an ethnic basis, unless they are circumstantially designed for this purpose.

Art, at large, must be approached in the double perspective of synchrony and diachrony to reveal its mediatory role in a socio-cultural formation. Much remains to be done to systematise more data, specify and deepen the ethnographic and theoretical questions. Certainly, Marie-Louise Bastin gave us a priceless oeuvre to start research with and blazed a number of trails in this field.

UPPER ZAMBEZI AND UPPER KASAI CULTURE AREA c.1870



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