

# There Used to Be Order

Life on the Copperbelt after the Privatisation of the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines

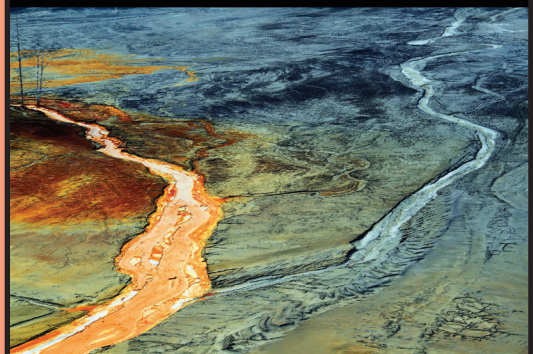
A volume in the African Perspectives series

In *There Used to Be Order*, Patience Mususa considers social change in the Copperbelt region of Zambia following the re-privatization of the large state mining conglomerate, the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM), in the mid-1990s. As the copper mines were Zambia's most important economic asset, the sale of ZCCM was considered a major loss to the country. More crucially, privatization marked the end of a way of life for mine employees and mining communities. Based on three years of ethnographic field research, this book examines life for those living in difficult economic circumstances, and considers the tension between the life they live and the nature of an "extractive area." This account, unusual in its examination of middle-income decline in Africa, directs us to think of the Copperbelt not only as an extractive locale for copper whose activities are affected by the market, but also as a place where the residents' engagement with the harsh reality of losing jobs and struggling to earn a living after the withdrawal of welfare is simultaneously changing both the material and social character of the place. Drawing on phenomenological approaches, the book develops a theoretical model of "trying," which accounts for both Copperbelt residents' aspirations and efforts.

**Patience Mususa** is a senior researcher at the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden.

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of the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines



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There Used to Be Order: Life on the Copperbelt after  
the privatisation of the Zambia Consolidated Copper  
Mines

Patience Mususa

## Chapter 2

# “You Can’t Plan”

### Dreams, Practice, and Order

Despite the continual decline of the mining industry through the 1980s, many Copperbelt residents, particularly those working for the mines, could not conceive of a time when the industry would come to a standstill. Many of my Copperbelt informants recounted their belief that even after receiving retrenchment benefits—in the first instance, a house, and much later, “lump sum cash”—there would be new, and possibly even better, jobs in the mines. This view, quite out of step with the social realities described in Chapter 1, nevertheless had taken hold, spurred in part by the notion that a more open economy, which people had agitated for against the United National Independence Party (UNIP) and Kenneth Kaunda, would deliver. Shopkeepers in Luanshya described how miners receiving cash benefits had, despite the uncertainty of their futures, embarked on short-lived extravagant spending and lifestyle choices.<sup>1</sup> Opinion was divided amongst them as to whether the spending sprees were a result of mineworkers’ recklessness and inability to plan beyond the next pay cheque or a consequence of an inability to conceive of a future without the mines.<sup>2</sup> Rather they remembered the past with nostalgia.

Hope is an idea for the future. Does a life looking in a rear-view mirror<sup>3</sup> (Nyamnjoh 2001) preclude hope? If not, where would it lie? I found that life on the Copperbelt is not just one of getting by, or just a nostalgic look into the past, but also a place of “unrealistic” expectations and flights of fancy, where impossible dreams are dreamt. Later, I give examples of these forays, such as one instance in which a family planned an ice-cream parlour in a depressed neighbourhood where people struggled to have a meal, or the couple who borrowed close to a billion kwacha<sup>4</sup> to set up an oil-processing refinery. These examples, I argue, are not unconnected to Edward Nkoloso’s<sup>5</sup> vision of a Zambia entering the space age at the cusp of the country’s independence in 1964, or Kenneth Kaunda’s last desperate vision of a “Heaven on

Earth”<sup>6</sup> in the waning moments of his power. While these journey’s into “space” could be derided as millennial cults, I argue that these forays into the “impossible” are another iteration in the attempts for livelihood and a harmonious life that, like many religions, offer potentials of existence that stretch beyond the immediate environment and hint at a life that can emerge, maybe not in that place, but in another. However, these journeys, which could be described as hopeful, are at the same time pragmatic. Many Zambians say of the future, “We’ll see when we get there.” This view recognises the constraints of action and hurdles that might emerge, but does not preclude movement towards an uncertain future. It is an approach that requires “doing,” even if, like Edward Nkoloso’s vision of astronauts training for a trip to the moon, the prospects look crazy in the immediate context.

## Theorizing through Doing: A Phenomenological Engagement with the Copperbelt

In this chapter, I introduce the theories and methodology that underpin the whole book. These draw mainly from a phenomenological engagement with the Copperbelt. My concern, much as human geographers started to do in the 1970s, is to study the Copperbelt from a “man-in-the-world” (Tuan 1971, 191) perspective and not only a man standing apart from the world. As such, my approach mixes methods and theoretical discussions with practical examples, starting from the perspective that in order to understand people’s experience of place, the researcher must engage in a process of “doing,” a direct participant observation. This is line with the ethnographic tradition that is grounded in concrete examples rather than just abstract theory. In this approach, I am inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who sought to reconcile the tensions between knowing the world as we see it and as we experience it (Bourdieu 1977). However, drawing from the work of Tim Ingold (2000), which posits a material, phenomenological experience of the environment, and from Edward Casey (2001) and Gaston Bachelard (1969), who explore the imaginary of place as we experience it, I describe the Copperbelt as a *textured place*. Raymond Williams, in an influential essay, “Structures of Feeling,” succinctly describes this approach as a concern “with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt” (1977, 132). Thus, following on from James Ferguson’s (1999) ethnography in the 1980s, which broke from the linear narratives of progress on the Copperbelt and drew on performance theories, I build on his work, not only by describing what happened later, but also by analysing it through

an ontological approach embedded in the material environment. This, as others like Dennis Cosgrove (1988), and Williams (1977, 1980) himself have noted, is not divorced from the ways in which we assign meaning to the markers within the landscape that indicate what a place is, was meant to be, or has become.

My aim is to describe the texture and experience of life on the Zambian Copperbelt and not just offer, as prior anthropologists have done, an explanatory framework about social relations there. I borrow from cultural and human geography an approach to describe aspects of place that defy easy categorisation. For example, Adams, Hoelscher, and Till (2001) use the notion of textures of place to describe not only the “surfaces, processes, and structures” that characterise how we view certain places, but also those multiple experiences and situations that are constituted by the everyday practices and routines of living. In this regard, I build on Ferguson’s theoretical departure from a mappable representation of the Copperbelt that characterised many of the earlier ethnographies of the region, to include “unintelligible” and “noisy” aspects of life (1999, 36). While Ferguson’s work offered a brilliant critique of the myth of modernity and the teleological assumptions that underpinned the anthropology of the Copperbelt, I offer a view on how Copperbelt residents reconcile the myth, represented in the fantasy of the ability to plan their life, to the realities of living and dreaming in contexts of uncertainty.

I found that Copperbelt residents had not lost their capacity to dream. Rather, their dreams had taken a nostalgic turn, recounting a past within which the future could have been planned, and alternatively taken a fanciful turn that, on cursory observation, seems out of place. This “future imaginary” and the ways of being it invoked became both clearer to me and a site of reflection when I embarked on looking for a house to buy following my employment with Copperbelt University and the process of renovating it that began my fieldwork in Luanshya in August 2007. With this introduction of my entry into the field, I hope to set the context for a discussion on the methods and theories I draw on to think through what I observed during the course of fieldwork. They also situate my observations about the villagisation of the town (presented in Chapter 1) and the stories of how Copperbelt residents went about trying to make a life and “get on” with life in a place that many said had “lost its order.”

## The Search for a House on the Copperbelt

I had started looking for a place to buy in the Zambia summer of 2006, a year and half after becoming a lecturer in the Department of Architecture at Copperbelt University, located in Kitwe.

## Where on the Copperbelt?

I embarked on my search for a house the conventional way by looking in the property sections of the country's three main newspapers, the independent *Post* and the state-sponsored *Times* and *Daily Mail*. I initially looked for places located in Kitwe, but many of the places I saw were outside my budget.<sup>7</sup> In addition, in Kitwe, the commercial hub and most populous Copperbelt town with a more diverse economy than the region's other towns, I found it more difficult to establish both the validity of property sale offers and trust with the sellers. In one incident, when I went to view a property advertised in the papers, the supposed sellers turned out to have set up a scam in which they had contrived to have a gemstone dealer holding a little pouch of stones to wander onto the property, supposedly lost, asking for directions to the industrial area where he could polish the gems. The Copperbelt, known for producing high quality emeralds, has plenty a get rich story based on emerald mining and dealing. As a result, fake gemstone dealers abound, targeting those perceived to have large sums of money to spend, and lured by the prospects of lucrative returns. What alerted me to the scam was that the property seller's newspaper I had perused, while he futilely searched for the key to the house on sale had a section torn out that matched exactly the piece of paper on which the gemstone dealer had scrawled the address he was looking for. While this incident was more obviously an attempt to scam, in the other cases, especially where property was being sold following the death of the title deed holder, ownership and inheritance were often contested, as it was a widespread practice for the deceased not to leave wills.<sup>8</sup>

As a result of these issues, I widened my search to the other Copperbelt towns. Chingola, where the Konkola Copper Mines, owned by Vedanta, are located, was a possible option. Long known as one of the neatest towns of the Copperbelt, Chingola had weathered better the infrastructural decline following re-privatisation. However, the heavy machinery and traffic of trucks carrying copper ore coming from the Kanshanshi mines in Solwezi, the emergent new Copperbelt, from the mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo and KCM itself to the Mopani Copper Mines smelter in Kitwe meant that commuting to Kitwe from Chingola would be risky,

as the road that connected the two towns was considered one of the most dangerous on the Copperbelt. Mufulira, the Copperbelt town whose mine had been part of the Rhodesian Selection Trust mines and where my father was born, was out of question, not only because the shortest route to Kitwe still connected one to the dangerous Chingola-Kitwe road, but also because it is known to have poor air quality.<sup>9</sup> Ndola, the administrative centre and former industrial hub of the Copperbelt, like Kitwe, had higher property prices. Kalulushi, the most recent of the mine company towns on the old Copperbelt and in closest proximity to Kitwe, was also outside my budget. That left Luanshya, whose economy was hardest hit following privatisation and whose property prices as a result were the most depressed.

In the end, I found the place in Luanshya through a property agent who had advertised it and several other properties in the newspapers. The agent, a former civil servant who had retired from Lusaka to Luanshya because the cost of living was cheaper, had been selling the house on behalf of a former ZCCM employee, Mr Mumba, who wished to use the revenue from the sale to finance the building of a house in Ndola, where he planned to relocate. The house was located in the former low-density mine suburb that used to be administered by the mines. It was Mr Mumba's second property. In 2006, he had been leasing it out for rental income of ZMK 300,000 (about US\$60) a month. Mr Mumba had another home in Luanshya, where he and his family lived, located in the high-cost council area, the part of town previously managed by the local authorities. In contrast to many of the other town's residents, Mr Mumba, an engineer, was doing quite well financially, as he had established several work contracts with the new mines on the Copperbelt. I bought the house from him for ZMK 55,000,000 (about US\$11,000), with the aid of a lawyer to draw up contracts.

The house was a bargain, as most properties were at that time in the town. Luanshya was then considered likely to turn in a ghost town,<sup>10</sup> with little hope of reviving the copper industry that had been the backbone of the town's economy. Pragmatic reasons justified why I bought a place there. It was one of the few places I could afford to buy a house. Also, Luanshya was a forty-five-minute commute to work in Kitwe. While its depressed economy did not make it the best place to invest in property, it offered the security of a home. My father, a casualty of the retrenchments in 1995 during the privatisation of ZCCM assets, unlike other Copperbelt-based former employees, had not gained a house as part of his retrenchment package.<sup>11</sup> The months of anxiety about where we would move following the loss of his job made me seek to ensure that I

never found myself in a similar situation.

## Not Clear-Cut Aspirations

Like other Copperbelt residents I had met, I was also prone to fanciful ideas. Several of my Zambian colleagues had asked me why I had done the foolish thing of buying property in Luanshya when I could have invested in a piece of land in Kitwe or Lusaka, where, over the course of my service at the university, I could have built my own house. It was not uncommon in the urban areas of Zambia for people to spend upward of half a decade building a house, financing the construction according to variable revenue streams. This often placed persons in confrontation with the local authorities, who were mandated to repossess land that lay idle, especially in the capital, Lusaka, where the demand for land was high.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the slow and highly centralised land administration meant many miners, including my seller, Mr Mumba, did not yet have title deeds, other than a letter of sale from the mines, and the house at the point of sale was in the name of the former mining company, ZCCM. This was baffling to my European friends, who asked why I would take such a legal risk. The only surety was a contract of sale drawn up by my lawyer and signed by myself, the seller, the agent, and two other witnesses. In 2010, Mr Mumba did eventually get title deeds and contacted me to begin the process of transferring the deeds to my name, but several things could have gone wrong in between.

Like many other Copperbelt residents, even those in stable jobs such as the one I had at the Copperbelt University, I explored other livelihood options. I was influenced in large part—like others—by the need to maintain multiple options and not to rely on only one stream of revenue. This need to maintain a range of options reflected people's increasing sense of precariousness of life, an aspect I explore in greater depth in Chapter 6. With a good friend and colleague, also an architect at the university, I set about a number of economic forays. In 2005, we tried to open a tearoom on the main university campus, but this idea failed because the union that managed the property we planned to rent stalled and did not reach a decision to lease it to us. A year later an ill-advised venture to Lubumbashi, the centre of the copper-mining region Katanga in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in the quest of establishing links to manufacturers and suppliers of woven raffia fabric for interior design commissions, was curtailed by our being quickly distracted by the city's buildings and architecture. Temporarily forgetting we were in a war-torn country, we took photographs that resulted in our apprehension



by the city's plainclothes secret police and resulted in us losing half the money we budgeted to buy the fabric. Our more successful work was in small architectural consultancy commissions, often by clients who approached the university.

One venture that my colleague and I engaged in made me aware of the shifting economy of the Copperbelt. After years of low prices, the price of copper began to pick up in 2004. This brought the entry of international venture capitalists and other opportunists looking to cash in on the copper boom. I met one such venture capitalist, who pointed out the Copperbelt forest<sup>13</sup> and its reforestation potential to create a green economy for the region. At the time, he envisioned that in view of the push towards a green economy, mining companies, especially copper mines, which are great polluters and cause significant destruction of trees and the ground, would want to offset these negative effects by replanting indigenous forests.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, he said, the country then did not have the regulations in place to create a carbon market. In a utopian view,<sup>15</sup> I imagined that the implementation of this mechanism would result in jobs in agro-forestry, especially for a town like Luanshya that is completely surrounded by forest, and hence the revival of the town. My colleague and I had drafted a position paper to be tabled at parliament outlining how Zambia could participate in a green economy. However, a member of parliament who had seemed keen on this initiative during the initial meeting had in a follow-up meeting been more eager to tell us that he had been offered a position on the board of a copper-trading company. He conveyed his reluctance to talk about the position paper by urging us to have a drink with his coterie of male party cadres at his parliamentary accommodations, a situation that my colleague and I read as open to ambiguous interpretation, and accordingly we abandoned our pursuit of this avenue.

During fieldwork, I realised that there were other people like myself who had set out on a particular course in the hope that at some point something might change to shift the game in our favour. While my colleague and I had set out on a course that had little chance of success, the fact that we went as far as we did on a chance encounter highlighted the flexibility and permeability of the social context. This made me realise, early on in my fieldwork, that I should look at how overly ambitious dreams, and a call to religious symbolisms, for example through prayer, play out in practice.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, my approach to fieldwork overall was grounded in bodily material practices that owe to a spatial framework that emphasises what people do and their perceptual engagement with place and situations. This approach has been used by

anthropologists and human geographers (Tuan 1977; Rodaway 1994; Ingold 2000; Escobar 2001) who elaborate on cultural and political economic variations not as inherent traits of peoples and their environments but as contingent and emergent from both social and material relations. Departing from the idea that skills, as embodied, and societal structures are not fixed, these scholars see the body as interactional and in continuous transformative movement, engaging people and environment in a process of becoming. As I show, this prior work was useful in thinking through how Copperbelt residents conceptualise the practice of living—as Ingold (2000) describes it, a “wayfaring” movement towards an uncertain future.

The renovation of the house that I summarise in what follows enmeshed me in a process that allowed me to engage quite intensively with the broader macroeconomic issues affecting Copperbelt residents. This account sets the context for the chapter on the informal copper economy. As a “making” activity that was both material and social, it provided me with insight into how people navigate practical life in an informalising economy where capital is scarce. Very much like the options and variation in business ideas, I found that people’s interactions were improvised within the possibilities of what they could manage within the given social and material constraints, which in themselves were also unstable. The here and now of the Copperbelt within which people acted was not divorced from the broader macroeconomic forces driving the copper economy, such as increased demand for the commodity from China. Nor was it detached from the actions of locally and globally dispersed policymakers who variously proposed, sometimes at odds with one another, measures to increase or reduce taxation in the extractive sector. These intangible aspects to everyday living nevertheless affected Copperbelt residents’ livelihood options in ways that could not always be neatly described or connected. For my part, the renovation of the house that was to be my fieldwork home was an opportunity for me to reflect on the nature of this practice.

## The Renovation of the House

The house, one bedroom with a generous-sized living room and dining room and a closed veranda, was structurally sound but in a bad state of repair and needed much work. It sat on a large plot, thirty by sixty metres, that characterised the low-density former mine suburb, and which, like most other yards in the area, was not maintained. After drawing up a schedule of works and costs, I set about looking for tradespeople who could help me execute the repair work.

I was uncertain about where to begin my inquiries.

As a start, for the more urgent plumbing work I opted to contract a plumber from Kitwe recommended by a colleague. While he did reasonable work in installing new pipes, as the old ones had rusted through, it was not entirely satisfactory, as there were leaks due to the pipes not being laid precisely to gradient. I knew, however, that this did not reflect on the work ethic of the plumber but rather showed that, in addition to not having a good set of tools and well-calibrated measuring equipment, he, like many of the region's young tradesmen, had been inadequately trained in some of the abridged courses that had been offered by well-meaning non-governmental organisations following the closure of mining company trades schools on the Copperbelt. Also, the contraction of the region's economy meant that many received little experience on the job due to the dearth of construction work.<sup>17</sup> This knowledge and my awareness of the changing political economy directed my attention towards older tradespersons who had gained a more solid technical education and experience in the heyday of the mines.

A few weeks after getting the plumbing done, I was in Lusaka visiting my parents when I happened to spy through the window of the minibus I was riding in a banner outside a hotel announcing a meeting on traditional authorities' views on the country's 1995 Land Act.<sup>18</sup> Exiting the taxi before my intended destination, I decided to attend the meeting, despite not having been invited, to learn more about how chiefs felt about an aspect of the law that allowed—for the first time in the Zambian state—a conversion of land on customary tenure to state leasehold. During the lunch break I struck up a conversation with Mr Banda, the maître d'hôtel where the meeting was taking place. Mr Banda, who was in his late forties, happened to be a former resident of Luanshya and had worked as a mineworker for the Luanshya mines under ZCCM and RAMCOZ before they were liquidated and he was laid off. Mr Banda, who had gained a house as part of his retrenchment package, had left his family in Luanshya to look for a job in Lusaka. He had found one running the restaurant of the three-star hotel. His family was unable to join him in Lusaka because, combined with household expenses for his family and school fees for his children, he could only afford to rent in a nearby informal settlement. He also said he did not wish to subject his children to the difficulties and "morals" of "compound" life in Lusaka. By this comment, Mr Banda was referring to the villagisation of life in the informal settlements of Lusaka, where the expectations of convivial social relations more akin to ideas of village life fostered by material constraints such as poor sanitation<sup>19</sup> and the need to share communal taps, intermingled with city

life where all-night bars blared music until the early hours of the morning. This was unlike the small town of Luanshya, where Mr Banda's family still lived in the low-density former mine suburb where I had purchased a house.

Such chance encounters, and the opportunities they presented, were not uncommon and highlighted the fluidity of urban Zambian social experience. There was a tendency for people to "step outside of themselves" and take chances. This "stepping out" could be seen as a willingness to trespass social and material boundaries and, as the encounters in my research suggested, seemed to characterise a strategy that my Copperbelt informants drew upon to cope with the end of the certainties of the ZCCM system. This "wayfaring" beyond the established paths allowed people to perceive new opportunities. It was these very actions that led me to meeting Mr Lackson Mwale.

## Creating Kinship: Mr Lackson Mwale

Mr Banda happened to have a close friend, Mr Lackson Mwale, who had worked in the mines' property maintenance department. Following retrenchment, Mr Mwale had set up a small construction and building works firm in Luanshya. Mr Banda gave me the contact details. When I called Mr Mwale to set up a meeting to conduct a preliminary assessment of the work that needed to be done on the house, he came over to my place within thirty minutes, with one of his assistants, Mr Zulu, a former mineworker who had been retired in the mid-1990s. After the social niceties of greetings, Mr Mwale asked me where I was from, saying I sounded Indian on the phone. I knew this was a query about my "home village" and a way of establishing ethnic relations that went some way to setting the context for the social, communicative strategies we were to engage in. Mr Mwale said he was from the Eastern Province of Zambia. This established me as "kin," as my paternal grandparents had hailed from the eastern part of the country. Establishing that I came from the same "home" region allowed for a play of kin relations that extended the relationship beyond a straightforward business transaction and also allowed for breaking the alienation of capital. I became Mr Mwale's "sister." However, Mr Mwale had found a system that worked to reduce some of the liabilities that came with creating such familiarity. After looking around the property himself and going over the schedule of works, Mr Mwale told me that he usually preferred his customers to buy their own materials, though he could advise on the quality, the cost, and where to get them. This, he said, was because he did not want to be

accused of cheating, for example, buying lower-quality materials and charging higher prices for them. Also, this way, he said, he would only charge and be responsible for the labour costs.

Mr Lackson Mwale also became a valuable point of entry to my fieldwork in Luanshya, introducing me to his family and colleagues. His wife Rosemary and I were able to establish a common link, as she was an “auntie” (again, a relationship anthropologists characterise as “fictive kin”) to a young woman she worked with in Kitwe who was at the time dating my cousin. Through similar entry, by establishing relationships with family members of my key informants, most of whom adopted me as fictive kin, I was allowed a reasonable degree of freedom to conduct my research and was easily able to explore how women, men, and young people experienced life on the Copperbelt.

I met many of the people who became my key informants in the early days of renovating the house, and the services they supplied and advice they offered indicated the informalisation of the Copperbelt economy. For example, when looking for aggregate to make a cement mixture for setting a new feeder sewer pipe to replace the one that had burst in my yard, I was referred to a woman who sold flux stone that was being dug from the copper dump sites by women and children who were trespassing onto mine property to collect the flux. The sewer pipe itself was purchased in the hardware section of Chisokone market in Kitwe, the largest outdoor market of the Copperbelt. There, pipes such as the one I bought were manufactured in someone’s backyard, and as they were not tested by recognised testing bodies, I employed my own methods of strength testing. When I had the misfortune of an attempted robbery, having been resistant to installing burglar bars for aesthetic reasons and cost, I relented, and the metal bars were purchased for a fraction of the prices found in the stores through an introduction by Mr Mwale to a wholesale supplier of steel bars. I found out later that the bars had been part of a large consignment destined for the mines and as such were tax-exempt, thus enabling the supplier to sell quietly on the wider market at a lower price, thereby undercutting local competition.

Informalisation and the inevitability of trespass characterised how most people lived on the Copperbelt. Limited access to capital meant that many people were looking for cheaper goods so they could afford to “get on.” For example, when Mr Mubita, whose activities I present in greater length in the next chapter, on the improvised nature of Copperbelt livelihoods, decided to build his front-yard store, he could not afford even locally sold flux stone to use as a cement aggregate. Rather than abandon the construction of the store, he made several long trips with his

wheelbarrow in the early mornings, sweeping the little stones off a major road whose potholes were being patched.

Lack of access to money and credit did not stop people from carrying on with their plans. Bank loans were available mainly to salaried employees and larger, more established businesses. This allowed banks, such as the one from which I had borrowed money, to make monthly deductions directly through employers. Interest rates were high, ranging between 20% and 25%, and loan repayment periods were short, averaging two years at the most. This meant that many people borrowed from family members and friends; from microlending institutions, whose interest rates were even higher (often above 35%) with even shorter repayment periods; and from loan sharks, who charged over 100% on loans for the shortest repayment periods. For some of my informants who tended to bigger plans and had a corresponding need for credit, such the pastor and his wife I present below, the high cost of credit had serious consequences. However, those many whose financial circumstances made it difficult even to borrow money from friends and family had to rely on other means, like Mr Mubita, to get things done without using money. How this section of the Luanshya population got on was hinted to me shortly after moving to the house.

On the day that I met Mr Mwale to assess what work needed to be done on the house, I met some of my immediate neighbours. They sat under a tree and I could see them through the scraggly lantana hedge that formed the boundary of the two properties. After Mr Mwale had left, the man who had been sitting on a stool near a mat where two women and a baby sat wandered through the hedge. He introduced himself as Lazarus Nsofu. Taking me to introduce me to the women, the one with the baby turning out to be his wife, he asked if his wife, Sandra, could work for me as a domestic worker in turn for accommodation in the “servants’ quarters,” a room at the bottom of my garden. I told them that I was not in need of a domestic worker and did not plan to lease the room at the bottom of the garden. However, when I moved into the house a few weeks later, I found that Mr Nsofu, his wife Sandra, their baby, as well as a Mr Nsofu’s young niece had moved in. The family sat within a circle of mango trees at the bottom of the garden. Unsure what to tell them, whether to ask them to leave, I did not immediately approach them, and neither did they approach me. Eventually, loathing the task of having to ask them to leave, I resolved to employ Sandra for a couple of days’ work a week and Mr Nsofu a day for a week of gardening, and in return they could stay.<sup>20</sup> This was unplanned expenditure for work I did not need, but the

greater costs lay later in the water bills I was to accrue. The Nsofus, being neighbourly, allowed nearby residents whose water supply had been cut off to draw water from an external tap, which, previously blocked by the former owners, I had unblocked to enable the watering of a vegetable garden. Mr Nsofu, I was also to learn, when I found a youth I did not know working in the garden, also occasionally subcontracted the gardening work for gifts in kind, the youth saying Mr Nsofu gave him things people did not want. During the period of Mr Nsofu and his wife's employment with me they did similar things that stretched the bounds of what I found acceptable and which inevitably resulted in me asking them to leave.

While what the Nsofus did was socially risky, I came to realise in my encounters with other Luanshya residents that it was these risks that allowed them to extend the possibilities of their existence beyond the formal conventions of what was feasible or deemed acceptable.

Copperbelt residents, including myself, learnt more about the vagaries of the place we inhabited not by rigidly following a plan of action but by casting ourselves out into the flows and rhythms of life on the Copperbelt. We increased our knowledge of life and the place by what was referred to in the Copperbelt's everyday speech as "trying." Through this process, and successes and failures, Copperbelt residents textured both themselves and their environments.<sup>21</sup> Drawing from Thorsten Geiser's (2008) work on apprenticeship learning, one might describe me as having become an apprentice to life in Luanshya, increasing my knowledge by continuous improvised attempts. This learning process was not detached from that of other Copperbelt residents, as I learnt from people like Mr Lackson Mwale and others, as they did in turn. A mutual learning of how to get on with life was fostered by what Geiser describes as an empathetic "reciprocity of view points" as well as the sharing of "similar kinaesthetic experiences" (2008, 300).

Although Geiser's approach is useful in thinking about phenomena experienced in the more immediate environment, it requires elaboration for those that seem to exceed or escape it.

## Copperbelt Dreams and Aspirations

Despite the difficult and uncertain realities, many Copperbelt residents still had dreams for their futures. Some were fantastical and some, as Ferguson (1999) noted in his research, seemed to have an air of desperation. However, what appeared to be the millennial nature of these aspirations was based not only on disaffected or delusional fantasies, but in belief that one could

not know what lay in the horizon.

Jean and John Comaroff's ideas about "millennial capitalism" (2000) offer a useful starting point for thinking about things that seem to escape the present. In their work on contemporary capitalism they narrate how production, as a tangible expression of the making of things in the temporality of here and now, has given way to consumption, lending a spectral quality to the emergence of things that have been produced through processes invisible and intangible to those consuming them. This unknown aspect of the production of desirable goods has been of interest in anthropology in the study of cargo cults (see Lawrence 1971; Linstrom 1993); however, these studies have often tended to focus on identitarian discourse and power relations, seeing people who have cast their time and resources on improbable dreams and aspirations as marginal and their activities as expressions of disaffection with capitalism and modernity. My intention here is not to depoliticise the disjuncture that arises out of the inequalities of access to resources, but to draw attention to the ways in which they are localised and how persons try to bridge them and maybe move beyond the constraints of their circumstances. It is a view the Comaroffs espouse in looking at how the abstract properties of capitalism happen in situ (1999, 295).

This view resonates with the recent work of Lisa Cligget et al. (2007) on the Gwembe Valley, which reviews longitudinally how its residents have coped and made their lives in times of uncertainty and crisis, and how they have taken advantage of momentary economic booms. It contributes to the questions that anthropologists are increasingly asking, that is, how to make sense of human experience and explain it in times of crisis, instability, and rapidly fluctuating social change. Many of these questions arose with the triumph of neoliberalism that saw the fall of state capitalism and welfare in countries that had adopted socialist or communist orientations with political affinities with the former Soviet Union. Neoliberalism and the attendant structural adjustment policies that reduced social welfare, as described earlier, have created a paradoxical mix of hope and despair: hope in the promise of prosperity seen in the few who have "made it," and despair as a result of the erosion of people's social safety support and the abject poverty into which many have fallen. This paradox, I argue, has been key in contemporary anthropological studies in rethinking the concept of agency. The problem has been that if one takes an analytical approach to agency that sees people as willing action towards a goal, then when they fail to achieve their goals, are we to assume they have no agency and are fatalistically circumscribed by



their circumstances and those “more” powerful with agency, or can we think about it another way? Anthropologists working in other African countries that have experienced similar socioeconomic stress are thinking through such issues through the lens of seeing people’s actions as continuous attempts to seize opportunities or chances (Johnson-Hanks 2005; Piot 2010). For example, Charles Piot’s (2010) study of post–Cold War biopolitics in Togo illuminates how “nostalgia for the future” shifts the hopes and aspirations of Togolese from the uncertainty of the present to the future. In his presentation of American Green Card aspirants, Piot shows, through the case of Kodjo (2010, 82), how a visa aspirant becomes an immigration consultant entrepreneur for those wishing entry to the United States. Piot demonstrates how Togolese are willing to draw on what they had in hand to increase their chances and options. He gives an example of a man who was willing to use his disability as a strategy to gain a visa after hearing of someone who had gained one on the grounds of his need for a hip replacement (2010, 4). For the Togolese presented in Piot’s study, one did not know when one’s luck might change (2010, 164). This is a view shared by my informants on the Copperbelt, a view that explains their engagement in less than feasible livelihood and economic ventures, as I describe below.

## Waiting for Formal Re-employment

There were a number of former ZCCM employees who had appointed themselves as caretakers of former ZCCM recreational infrastructure. This included several who looked after the former ZCCM golf club, the pony club, and the recreation centre. These appointments involved no remuneration. This employment was not just a voluntary activity but also a way to occupy time productively in a familiar setting. Former mineworkers at these places waited in the hope of being rehired should the establishments they were looking after were to reopen under a paying employer. In my discussions with them, they all had indicated that they had failed to become the entrepreneurs that the new market economy expected.

One such person was a Mr Kabemba, who had held a supervisory clerical role in the ZCCM mines and had enjoyed playing golf in his spare time. When Mr Kabemba was laid off the mines, he used to his generous retrenchment package from the mines (when he eventually received it) to send his two sons abroad to study golf, one to Scotland, and the other with a scholarship to the United States. With most of the retrenchment spent, Mr Kabemba tried to raise chickens, but was no good at it, and said he had come to the realisation that he was no good at

manual labour, nor trade, and that his wife, the more entrepreneurial of the two of them, was now supporting them by offering a tailoring service. Mr Kabemba was part of an unpaid board managing the golf club, a job he did full-time, and one he said he could do well. The job involved providing a presence to prevent the encroachment of subsistence farming and other activities onto the greens, and trying to host occasional tournaments—although there was hardly anyone playing golf at the time of my research. There was a sense from Mr Kabemba and others like him that they were expecting a return to “normal” (by which they meant the order that had characterised paid employment on the mines) and would keep vigil till that time came, if it ever did. Their circumstance brought to mind Miss Havesham from Charles Dickens’s (1890) *Great Expectations*, living their lives in the decaying cocoon of yesterday and waiting, living in a place that is a tangible reminder of a time when leisure fell into the smooth rhythms of a planned workday.

## An Ice-Cream Parlour

There were other dreams that seemed to hark back to a past when ice cream was an expected treat for children, such as Mr and Mrs Spaita’s idea for an ice-cream parlour. One afternoon in early 2008 I sat on a porch that was part of a storefront for a shop selling an assortment of household groceries in one of the most depressed neighbourhoods of Luanshya’s former mine suburbs. This space was where Mrs Spaita and her husband were selling ice cream in cones. It was also where they had previously run a second-hand clothes store that had eventually been burnt down by jealous neighbours.<sup>22</sup> That afternoon, other than an ice cream cone sold to me, they only sold one other. Despite what seemed to be a dismal business, the Spaita’s had a dream of setting up an ice-cream parlour. Mr Spaita, who was then working for Luanshya Copper Mines, had already undergone training in making ice cream, and the couple, who had two children under the age of ten, were saving to buy a few more ice-cream-making machines and find premises to rent. Mr Mwanja, a former workmate of Mr Spaita, was incredulous that they could even consider such a business. The question was, who could afford ice cream when it was a struggle to have a meal a day?

## A Business Processing Used Oil

While the Spaita's business ideas were located in and based on a lifestyle of the past, others, like the Mwenyas, were anticipating a future industry, but one that unfortunately was overly ambitious, as they did not have access to affordable capital, nor had they properly assessed the viability of the business in the prevailing economic climate.

Mr and Mrs Mwenya, who ran a charismatic Pentecostal church, one among many that had sprung up to fill the spaces vacated by former mining company recreational activities, had a grand plan to set up a large used-oil refinery to service the entire Copperbelt. With the re-emergence of the copper industry, they envisioned that mining machinery and trucks would have a lot of used oil to dispose of that could be recycled. With a business proposal and using the revenue from the church and its tax-exempt status, they had secured a loan with the banks to purchase an old disused factory, the detritus of the region's former significant manufacturing industry. They had approached me informally for an assessment of what it would take to make the factory habitable. It was a significant cost that entailed their seeking another loan from the bank. Later they approached me to ask whether I would have the money to loan them, telling me that the bank had denied them the extra finance until they covered their existing loan, which amounted to close to one billion kwacha (about \$200,000). One evening when I dropped by to visit them, I found out that they also owed money to a loan shark, who that very evening had threatened Mr Mwenya with a gun. Had it not been for his wife's intervention and passers-by's curiosity, the loan shark would have probably shot him. Outwardly successful, the Mwenyas, who owned two luxury cars and lived in a house furnished with glitzy heavy furniture in an aesthetic commonly seen in the Nigerian movies that had become popular in Zambia, had, towards the end of my fieldwork, lost most of these assets. Mrs Mwenya told me they had resorted to borrowing money from microcredit lenders for daily expenses.

The Mwenyas were characteristic of the highly ambitious business people who had emerged following the liberalisation of the country's economy. Their exhibition of wealth was, as I had been persuaded by several business people, an important aspect of the performance of building confidence amongst potential investment partners. To be a successful business person, you had to be seen as already wealthy, what Zambians refer to as *kulibonesha ta* (to show yourself). As I show in Chapter 3, this view also related to Copperbelt residents' views of class, which had shifted from status based on occupation and rank to perceptions of wealth and ability to get by.

The stories presented here provide a micro-understanding of the ways in which hope is crafted and experimented with in times of great uncertainty and the future is imagined. They highlight that where hope for the planning and expected outcomes may not be readily visible in the immediate environment, nevertheless it is thought of as lying “out there,” on the horizon. The troubled side of this “out there” is reflected on in Chapter 6, on young people’s conception of the future and their ability to steer their lives. It responds to Ferguson’s (1992) article “The Country and the City on the Copperbelt,” where he writes, speaking of his Zambian informants’ apparent lack of “any morally positive images at all of a Zambian-made future” (1992, 85–86), that people’s conception of the future may not lie in a mirror view back to the past (see Nyamnjoh 2001). While the bleak narratives of self and the future that Ferguson recounts are still encountered in contemporary Zambia, they need to be placed within the context of Copperbelt residents’ dreams and aspirations, as in the examples I have given in this chapter. My informant’s dreams indicate that in times of trouble, Copperbelt residents are willing to speculate, even wildly, in the hope that something might change. This indicated not a lack of hope, but a hope that is cast way beyond the difficulties and hardship of the immediate present or even immediate future, and a belief that an iteration of activities within the present and the environment they inhabit may open up possibilities leading towards realising those dreams.

Rene Devisch’s (2006) use of “borderlinking,” a concept borrowed from Bracha Ettinger, offers a useful concept for looking at how Copperbelt residents work towards efforts that look improbable from a cursory examination of their circumstances. Borderlinking, in Devisch’s work, is the bridge that transverses varying temporalities of becoming in the flow of persons and things, an intersubjective and intercorporeal experience that resonates from the past in the present and the future. I pursue his insights in the chapters that follow.

## Notes

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1. Critique from the 1980s against IMF economic restructuring policies argued that liberalisation would see production and investment oriented much more towards consumption for high earners, and for luxury goods (see Makgetla 1986). The proliferation of shops and malls across the country selling high-priced consumer goods has in some sense created Guy Debord’s (1967) society of the spectacle, with residents desiring goods they could ill afford given their low and sporadic earning.
2. There was an awareness amongst many of the residents of Luanshya following temporary closure of the mines

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in 2000 that there were still copper mineral deposits, such as the Muliashi deposits. As of 2010 these were being developed by the new mine owners, the Chinese mining company NFC Africa.

3. An aspect of Ferguson's book that Francis Nyamnjoh (2001) takes up in his review is how Copperbelt residents conceptualise their future amidst hardship. Ferguson notes that it was not only commentators on the Copperbelt industrialisation that bought into the myth of modernity but also its own residents, such that a description of a hard life in the present could only elicit a nostalgic look to the past, where a prosperous modern future had seemed a reality. Nyamnjoh draws on a vehicular metaphor in his reading of Ferguson, writing that "like a driver with little prospect of advancing, their [that is Copperbelt residents] only chance of pulling out appears to be looking in the rear-view mirror" (see Chapter 6 for a discussion on how Copperbelt residents perceive their lives).
4. This translated to about US\$200,000.
5. At the time of Northern Rhodesia's (Zambia's) independence from British colonial rule, Time-Warner circulated a story that today still does the rounds online. It reported that Edward Makuka Nkoloso, a science teacher, had set up a space program called the Zambia National Academy of Science, Space Research and Philosophy in the outskirts of the Zambia's capital. There, using swings and rolling drums to simulate the conditions of space, he trained a youthful team of astronauts who, with a cat, were to compete with the United States and former Soviet Union in the race to the moon (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward\\_Makuka\\_Nkoloso](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Makuka_Nkoloso), last accessed 10 December 2013).
6. During the 1991 campaign for his and his party's UNIP re-election, Kenneth Kaunda, who had then ruled the country for twenty-seven years (since 1972 as a one-party state), had proposed turning over one-quarter of the country's land mass to a yogic Maharishi group who were to have helped turn the country into an earth-friendly agrarian paradise in addition to encouraging meditation amongst the country's populace as a practice to promote calm and peace. Kaunda subsequently lost the elections, and the scheme (which was seen as odd by the majority of the populace) was never implemented.
7. My budget, including cost of renovations, which I knew were very likely, was ZMK 65 million (approximately US\$13,000), to be financed by some savings, an employment-attached loan from a commercial bank, and a long-term loan from a friend.
8. In the absence of a will the intestate succession act of 1994 proposes the division of property between children, spouse, and dependants, as well as parents of the deceased if still living. There are frequent disputations over the distribution of resources.
9. Glencore's Mopani Copper Mines located in Mufulira had been cautioned in 2012 by the Zambia environmental agency over air quality pollution, particularly acid mist. See the *Mail and Guardian* newspaper article, "Zambia Halts Copper Treatment Plant's Operations," 6 March 2012.
10. Joe Kaunda, "Luanshya Risks Turning into a Ghost Town," *The Post*, 4 November 1999
11. Unlike many other ZCCM employees who occupied ZCCM housing and had thus gained a house as part of their retrenchment package, the subsidiary company located in Lusaka had not owned its own property and had rented from the private market.

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12. Land for which building permission had been obtained had to be developed within a period of five years.
  13. Copperbelt towns like Luanshya had been established in the middle of *miombo* woodland. Some of this woodland had been cleared to establish pine and eucalyptus forests that, following the sale of the mines in the mid-1990s, were being settled by retired and retrenched urban Copperbelt residents seeking agricultural livelihoods. See Hansangule, Feeney, and Palmer 1998.
  14. There are growing markets where you can exchange carbon-offset activities for “credits” then sold on special markets.
  15. I learnt several years later, when doing research on the development of new mines in Zambia in areas adjacent to nature reserves, that mining companies were lobbying to remove environmental protections as a means to allow mineral exploration in protected conservation areas.
  16. Naomi Haynes (2012), writing on Pentecostalism on the Copperbelt, for example, looks beyond the “spectral” qualities of prosperity gospel to how it fosters social relationships and exchange by promoting visible displays of material wealth that in turn play into expectations of moral obligations and reciprocity based on the hierarchies signified for those who are living well and not so well.
  17. The award-winning architect Walter Dobkins, who had designed the building that now houses the COMESA headquarters in Lusaka, whom I had interviewed for my master’s thesis, had taken these factors into account in the design of the building, which used a more organic form that, in contrast to a linear design, allowed for the concealment of errors for builders not adept at setting out straight lines, and the use of familiar, low-tech building materials.
  18. The 1995 Land Act allowed the conversion of land on customary tenure to state leasehold land, but not vice versa, as well as vesting all land under the president of the country. As most of the country’s land mass was under customary tenure, this act was criticised by both traditional authorities and by activists as potentially dispossessing the rural poor by, in effect, privatising land.
  19. Tembo, Nyirenda, and Nyambe (2017) estimate that about 90%, of residents living in Lusaka’s informal settlements use pit latrines, which pose a serious health concern given that untreated faecal matter remains in the environments where people live.
  20. I found out later that a number of residents had been offering work for board in former “servants’ quarters.”
  21. Texture connotes the movement and the sensing of things, place, and persons as they transform, shift, change, allowing for both “smooth” movements (here drawing from the notion of smooth space as that which allows for movement that drifts or wanders) and the nitty-gritty of place (as the movements that place the body in the immediacy of experience) (Casey 1997).
  22. I was surprised that they would set up again in the same place after this experience, but this was characteristic of what I encountered—trying again (see Chapter 6).