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**"'THEBA' IS POWER": RURAL LABOUR, MIGRANCY AND FISHING IN
MALAWI, 1890s - 1985.**

by

Wiseman Chijere Chirwa

A thesis submitted to the Department of History in
conformity with the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study of rural transformation in Malawi. It aims to contribute to the recent scholarly efforts to assess the impact of colonial domination and expanding capitalism on local communities and economies. It starts from the premise that if the incorporation of Malawian rural communities into the colonial economy and the system of oscillating labour migration created a crisis, it also provided avenues by which the crisis could be successfully contained. It then goes on to examine the survival strategies and enterprising spirit of rural workers, migrant labourers, fishermen and fish-traders. It demonstrates that the strategies of rural producers often went beyond survival in the provision of basic necessities. Some of them were more enterprising than others and thus able to proceed beyond subsistence to accumulation. Very often, the most successful ones were those who combined pseudo-traditionalist means of accumulation with new opportunities arising from labour migration, commercial fishing, cash-cropping and retail trade.

The study also evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the colonial state as an instrument of subjugation of African communities to the interests of the settler economy. It shows that neither the state nor the settlers themselves could entirely stop the independence and mobility of rural producers and workers.

If placed within the context of the southern African

historiography, this dissertation challenges the prevailing notion that colonial Malawi was simply a "labour reserve" for the mines and farms of South Africa and Southern and Northern Rhodesia. It shows that the Nyasaland plantations themselves were major importers of immigrant labour, predominantly from Portuguese East Africa, now Mozambique.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALBT	Alexander Low (Livingstone) Trust
ALC	African Lakes Corporation
ANLL	Agricultural Native Labour Limited
BCA	British Central Africa Company
BCGA	British Cotton Growers' Association
B&E.A	Blantyre and East Africa Company
BSA	British South Africa Company
CCDC	Capital City Development Corporation
CDC	Colonial Development Corporation
CLAB	Central Labour Advisory Board
ILO	International Labour Organization
ITG	Imperial Tobacco Group
ITLA	Inter-territorial Labour Agreement
JFRO	Joint Fisheries Research Organization
MALDECO	Malawi Development Corporation
MFD	Malawi Fisheries Department
NCAC	Nyasaland Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce
NER	North-Eastern Rhodesia
NTB	Native Tobacco Board
PEA	Portguese East Africa
RNLSC	Rhodesia Native Labour Supply Commission
SHRC	Shire Highlands Railway Company
TEBA	The Employment Bureau of Africa
UMCA	Universities Mission to Central Africa
WNLA	Witwatersrand Native Labour Association
ZIM	Zambezi Industrial Mission

LIST OF MAPS

Fig. 1 Physiological Regions

Fig. 2 Administrative Districts and Stations, 1891-1896

Fig. 3 Present Regions and Districts

Fig. 4 Fishing Grounds and Fish Markets

INTRODUCTION

If capitalism contributed to the crisis of the rural economy, it also provided the means by which the crisis could be successfully contained.¹

This study aims to contribute to the recent scholarly efforts to reconceptualize the process of rural transformation Malawi (then Nyasaland). It adopts the argument by John McCracken that if the incorporation of Malawian rural communities into the colonial economy and the southern Africa regional system of oscillating labour migration created a crisis, it also provided means by which that crisis could be successfully contained. Several local economies emerged during the colonial period.² Areas of labour migration in the north and the estate sector of the Shire Highlands in the south were balanced with areas of peasant production in the Central Province and the Shire Valley. McCracken reached these conclusions by focusing on the resilience of African tobacco production in the Central Province.³

¹ K. J. McCracken, "Central African History", A Review Article, in Journal of African History vol.26 (1985) p.243.

² K.J. McCracken, "Peasants, Planters and the Colonial State: The Case of Malawi, 1905-1940" in Journal of Eastern African Research and Development vol.12 (1982) p.21.

³ K.J. McCracken, "Planters, Peasants, and the Colonial State: The Impact of the Native Tobacco Board in the Central Province of Malawi" in Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS) vol.9 no.2 (1983) pp.172-192. See also, by the same author, "Share-cropping in Malawi: The Visiting Tenant System in the Central Province c.1920-1968" in African Studies Centre, University of Edinburgh (ed), Malawi: An Alternative

The present study goes beyond McCracken's focus by making comparisons between different sectors of the Malawian rural economy: rural labour, migrancy, cash-cropping, and fishing and fish-trading. It seeks to demonstrate that the different sectors of the rural economy cannot be studied in isolation from each other. Changes in one affected the others. Increased levels of labour migration from the northern districts affected the flow of wage labour to the settler estate sector in the south, while proceeds of migrancy stimulated fishing and fish-trading along the lake. The expansion in commercial fishing and fish-trading was, itself, dependent on the availability of markets for fish created by the plantation wage-labour force and African cash-cropping. The account below therefore emphasises the rural producers' capacity for innovation in their effort to avoid the immiseration associated with their incorporation into the colonial economy and the system of oscillating labour migration. It challenges the prevailing literature's over-emphasis on the universal evils of capitalist penetration by drawing attention to the way local producers' energy and enterprise, both individual and collective, sustained and eventually transformed rural life.

The evidence from fishing communities demonstrates that the strategies of fishermen and fish-traders often went beyond

mere survival in the provision of basic subsistence. Some of them were more enterprising and innovative than others and able to proceed beyond subsistence to accumulation. While entrepreneurial energy was often an important factor in this, it was not usually the only and sufficient factor. It is crucial to understand that some of the fishermen and fish-traders, for a variety of reasons, enjoyed a comparative advantage over others. This applied within households and social groups and between them. Social relations of 'seniority' frequently permitted elders to appropriate the productive capacities of 'junior members'. Some social groups, households, and individuals had access to more than one source of income and were involved in more than one set of productive and/or labour relations. They were consequently less vulnerable to economic changes beyond their control.

This also shows that while capitalism brought hardship to Malawian rural communities, it also brought new economic opportunities and choices. The household heads, migrant labourers and entrepreneurs who developed Malawi's commercial fishing and fish-trading were those who had not only the drive and imagination but also usually one or more of the comparative advantages described above. The social and political structures of the local communities and the nature of their economies thus played an important role in their incorporation into the capitalist economy. However, to argue that fishermen and fish-traders, migrant labourers, peasant

producers and rural workers were innovative and resourceful is not enough. It needs to be demonstrated that, as an instrument of subjugation of rural communities to settler interests, the power of the colonial state was limited. It could not entirely stop the mobility and independence of the rural producers, migrant workers, fishermen and fish-traders.

I

Earlier Perspectives

Prior to the 1970s, the debates on rural transformation in Malawi were dominated by social anthropologists and economists: between those who emphasized the evils of labour migration and those who viewed it as a "positive factor". The former perspective dates back to the 1940s when anthropologists based at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in Zambia, then Northern Rhodesia, emphatically denounced the cumulative social and economic effects of oscillating labour migration on the rural communities.⁴ Margaret Read, writing in 1942, was the first to argue that: "the current conception

⁴ See, for example, G. Wilson, An Essay on the Economics of Detribalization in Northern Rhodesia (Cape Town and Oxford, Oxford University Press/Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, 1941); G. Wilson and M. Wilson, The Analysis of Social Change (Cambridge, CUP/Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, 1945). For comprehensive theoretical reviews see S. Stichter, Migrant Laborers (Cambridge, London and New York, CUP, 1985) especially chapters 2 and 3; B. Freund, The African Worker (Cambridge, London and New York, CUP 1988) especially chapters 2 and 8.

that an African worker returns to his village with only a box of trashy trade goods, and after giving them away right and left sinks back easily into his old village ways is far from the truth".⁵ She noted that labour migration did not bring negative effects on every African village in Nyasaland. There were areas where the Africans had benefitted from it, and areas where it brought hardships. The African villages were "the real laboratories where new standards and ideas [were] being tested".⁶

In the 1950s, some anthropologists began to emphasize the positive effects of labour migration. For example, William Watson argued that the absence of 50 per cent of men did not cause the degeneration of the rural economy among the Mambwe of Zambia.⁷ The migrants did not break ties with the rural economy. Instead, they invested in it and maintained their social structures. This argument was applied to Nyasaland by Jaap van Velsen in his study of the lakeside Tonga. He found that in a society where the constitutional position of chiefs was so ill-defined, and their office so lacking in traditional sanctions, kinship relations did not provide the basis for the

⁵ M. Read, "Migrant Labour in Africa and its Effects on Tribal Life" in International Labour Review vol.XLV no.6 (June 1942) p.613.

⁶ Read, "Migrant Labour in Africa" p.613.

⁷ W. Watson, Tribal Cohesion in a Money Economy: A Study of the Mambwe People of Northern Rhodesia (Manchester, MUP/Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, 1958). See also W. Elkan, Migrants and Proletarians (London, OUP 1960). Elkan's study was on Uganda.

formation of local groups. Any free born m'tonga (Tonga person) could easily wield social and political influence by exploiting a variety of non-political chances and migrant labour happened to be one such chance.⁸ "Compared to other tribal areas", Van Velsen observed, "the Tonga are relatively prosperous, and that prosperity is largely due to their export of labour".⁹

As Sharon Stichter has rightly argued, these studies were "unduly synchronic, snapshots at a single point in time". They lacked historical detail and often "became justification for low wages and lack of stabilization of African workers at their places of work".¹⁰ However, it is important to emphasize that they were the first to argue that "life in the villages is not static" and that any analysis of rural transformations should pay "more attention [to] the village homes of the African labour force".¹¹ This call was ignored by most scholars writing in the 1960s and 1970s. The dominant theme in the 1960s was the movement of "surplus" labour from the "traditional", static, peasant sector to the "modern"

⁸ J. van Velsen, The Politics of Kinship: A Study in Social Manipulation Among the Lakeshore Tonga of Nyasaland (Manchester, MUP/Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, 1964).

⁹ J. van Velsen, "Labour Migration as a Positive Factor in the Continuity of Tonga Tribal Society" in Economic Development and Cultural Change vol.8 (1960) pp.265-278; also in I. Southall, (ed), Social Change in Africa (London and New York, CUP/International African Institute, 1961) pp.230-241.

¹⁰ Stichter, Migrant Labourers p.31.

¹¹ Read, "Migrant Labour in Africa" p.610 and p.613.

industrial sector. Writing in the context of the general theory of "modernization" most scholars viewed migrancy as "the result of the growth of industry".¹² Increased industrial production would thrive on drawing "surplus" labour from the traditional peasant sector. This would initially be accompanied by disastrous effects on the labourers and the areas they came from, but, as the urbanization and proletarianization of the workers advanced, it would lead to the development and strengthening of the "dual economy".¹³

The 'modernizationists' treated labour migration as a 'natural' outcome of the incorporation of rural communities into the capitalist system. "Driven by economic necessity and a desire to escape from the atmosphere of poverty and monotony in their traditional surroundings", the rural producers would "constantly flow" to the modern sector "to obtain new resources by employment in industry".¹⁴ This view was criticized by a generation of scholars writing on Southern Rhodesia in the early 1970s for its failure to address the

¹² For a pioneering study see P. de Briey, "Industrialisation and Social Problems in Central Africa" in International Labour Review vol.LXIII no.5 (May 1951) pp.475-505. Also, J. C. Mitchell, "Wage Labour and African Population Movements in Central Africa" in K.M. Barbour and R.M. Prothero (eds), Essays on African Population (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961) pp.193-248.

¹³ See W. J. Barber, The Economy of British Central Africa: A Case Study of Economic Development in a Dualistic Society (London, OUP 1961).

¹⁴ De Briey, "Industrialization and Social Problems" p.485.

role of coercion in labour mobilization. They argued that it is necessary to distinguish between "discretionary" and "necessary" emigration.¹⁵ "Discretionary" emigration occurred where rural producers were in control of their land and family labour and prices for their agricultural products were high enough to ensure comfortable living. It was the imposition of taxes, land alienation, and state control over the marketing of African crops which made labour migration "necessary". These were compounded by natural calamities: ecological changes, droughts and famine.

The account below shows that as far as colonial Malawi was concerned, areas of labour migration - notably the lakeshore and northern districts - were not areas of major land alienation. They were cut off from the centres of the colonial economy where the state was relatively strong and tax was collected with some degree of efficiency. As for marketing policies, these were felt mostly in the Central Province from the mid-1920s more than thirty years after the establishment of colonial rule, and twenty years after the beginning of labour recruiting. However, it would be right to argue that emigration was a result of lack of economic opportunities in these regions. Only from the 1920s did the Central Province become an area of African tobacco production while fishing and

¹⁵ G. Arrighi, "Labour Supplies in Historical Perspectives: A Study of the Proletarianization of the African Peasantry in Rhodesia" in Journal of Development Studies vol.6 (1972) pp.197-234.

fish-trading offered an alternative to migration along the southern sections of the lake.

The lack of economic opportunities as a cause of labour migration was a theme which interested most historians writing on rural transformations in Malawi in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁶ Up to this time much of the debate took place between anthropologists and economists. The 1970s saw a major shift in the analysis of labour migration in the southern Africa region as a whole. Scholars from various disciplines, writing predominantly from the "underdevelopment" perspective, began to address the relationship between migrancy and "rural poverty".¹⁷ They argued that the process of agrarian decline in the region was not a natural phenomenon. It was a result of the penetration of colonialism and the expansion of capitalism. Initially, capitalism stimulated peasant production by creating markets for foodstuffs but later

¹⁶ See, for example, F.E. Sanderson, "The Development of Labour Migration from Nyasaland, 1891-1914" in Journal of African History vol.2 no.2 (1961) pp.259-271; G. Coleman, "International Labour Migration from Malawi, 1875-1966" in Journal of Social Science (JSS), University of Malawi, vol.2 (1972) pp.31-46; R. Boeder, "Malawians Abroad: The History of Labour Emigration from Malawi to its Neighbours, 1890 to Present", PhD Thesis, Michigan State University (1974); L. Vail, "Peasants, Migrants, and Plantations: A Study of the Growth of Malawi's Economy" in JSS vol.11 (1984) pp.1-34.

¹⁷ See, for example, R.H. Palmer and N. Q. Parsons (eds), The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa (London and Los Angeles, Heinemann and University of California Press, 1977); C. Bundy, The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry (London, Heinemann, 1979) and, for a slightly different view, C. Murray, Families Divided: The Impact of Migrant Labour in Lesotho (London, New York, 1981).

undermined it (some said broke it completely) in order to obtain its labour.

A key factor in this was asset confiscation. The imposition of taxes, agricultural marketing policies, land and grazing laws were designed to force self-sufficient African producers into wage labour. The rural communities became the "labour reserves" for the expanding capitalist economy centred on the mines and farms of South Africa.¹⁸ This perspective was criticised for its over-emphasis on the self-sufficiency of the pre-colonial peasantries, the periodization of the process of rural transformation (initial peasant prosperity followed by decline), reliance on archival sources at the expense of oral data, and the failure to take into account the resilience of rural production.¹⁹

The concept of the "labour reserve" was applied to the

¹⁸ See, for example, M. Legassick "Gold, Agriculture, and Secondary Industry in South Africa, 1885-1970" in Palmer and Parsons (eds), Roots of Rural Poverty pp.175-200; and M. Legassick and F. de Clerq, "Capitalism and Migrant Labour in Southern Africa: The Origins and Nature of the System" in S. Marks and P. Richardson, International Labour Migration: Historical Perspectives (Houslow, Middlesex, Maurice Temple Smith/Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1984) pp.140-166. For the origins of the concept of the "labour reserve" see S. Amin, "Underdevelopment and Dependence in Black Africa - Origins and Contemporary Forms" in Journal of Modern African Studies vol.10 (1972) pp.503-524.

¹⁹ For details see T.O Ranger, "Growing from the Roots: Reflections on Peasant Research in Central and Southern Africa" in Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS) vol.5 (1978) pp.99-133; F. Cooper, "Peasants, Capitalists and Historians" in JSAS vol.7 (198) pp.284-314; J. Lewis, "The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry: A Critique and Reassessment" in JSAS vol.11 (1984) pp.1-24;

study of Malawian migrancy and rural decline by Leroy Vail and E.P. Makambe.²⁰ According to Vail, by the late 1930s or early 1940s, the colonial administration in Nyasaland "had long since abandoned plans to foster peasant production and had accepted the position of Nyasaland as a labour reserve for the rest of central and southern Africa".²¹ Makambe added that: "on the obverse side, the Nyasaland labour migrants contributed to the overall state of stagnation and underdevelopment of their homelands...."²²

A major weakness in these studies is that they did not pay adequate attention to the local economies. The economic motivations and strategies of the Malawian migrant labourers and peasant producers were not addressed. Rural "underdevelopment" was taken as a given and universal fact: for as long as there was increased labour migration there was going to be rural decay. This was not the case. The account

²⁰ L. Vail, "The Making of an Imperial Slum: Nyasaland and its Railways, 1895-1935" in JAH vol.16 no.1 (1975) pp.39-87; and by the same author, "Railway Development and Colonial Underdevelopment: The Nyasaland Case" in Palmer and Parsons (eds), Roots of Rural Poverty pp.365-395; "The Political Economy of East-Central Africa" in D. Birmingham and P.M. Martin (eds), History of Central Africa vol.2 (London and New York, Longman, 1983) pp.200-250 and "The State and the Creation of Colonial Malawi's Agricultural Economy" in R.I. Rotberg (ed), Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa (Lexington, Lexington Books, 1983) pp.39-87; and E.P. Makambe, "The Nyasaland African Labour 'Ulendos' to Southern Rhodesia and the Problem of the African 'Highwaymen', 1903-1923" in African Affairs vol.79 (1980) pp.548-66.

²¹ Vail, "The Political Economy of East-Central Africa" p.243.

²² Makambe, "The Nyasaland African Labour 'Ulendos'" p.566.

below shows that some areas of labour migration, notably the lakeshore, did not drift into poverty, moral and economic degeneration. Also, the colonial administration had not abandoned its efforts to support African agriculture by the early 1940s.²³ With the outbreak of the Great Nyasaland Famine of 1949, the administration embarked on a "grow more crops" campaign throughout the first half of the 1950s. The campaign resulted in increased maize production but prices were too low for the producers to benefit from it. In addition, the administration tried to promote African cotton production by introducing a "new regime": disease-resistant seed, pest control, early planting and early uprooting of stems. It was the fluctuations in prices and changing climatic factors which limited expansion in African cotton production in the 1950s. However, production did not cease. Between 1955 and 1964 Nyasaland produced more cotton than during any other years before.²⁴

II

More Recent Perspectives

From the early 1980s, some scholars challenged the idea that colonial Malawi was simply a "labour reserve" for the mines

²³ See also McCracken, "Central African History" p.243.

²⁴ See S. Agnew and M. Stubbs, Malawi in Maps (London, University of London Press) pp.86-89.

and farms of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. Three schools of thought emerged at this time: one emphasized local variations in the penetration of colonialism and capitalism, the second concentrated on the resilience of the African peasantry during the colonial period, and the latest dealt with agricultural development in the post-independence period. The last will be reviewed in a later chapter.

It is the other two which are of particular importance to the present study. The first employed a "spatial analysis" of the impact of colonialism on the people of Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia, and the Belgian Congo.²⁵ Three spatial variables were chosen: the location of administrative centres, schools, and railways. In relation to the distribution of African populations, these variables had "divergent effects" on the rural communities in the country. For example, the distribution of educational facilities neither coincided with economic opportunities nor corresponded to population distribution. "They followed a pattern determined by the missionaries",²⁶ while administrative centres followed a pattern determined by the distribution of European population and enterprises. They were concentrated in the Shire Highlands in the southern part of the country, the centre of the

²⁵ See B. Fetter, Colonial Rule and Regional Imbalance in Central Africa (Boulder, Westview Press, 1983); McCracken "Central African History" p.247.

²⁶ B. Fetter, "Malawi: Everybody's Hinterland" in African Studies Review (ASR) vol.25 nos.2/3 (June/September 1982) p.89.

colonial economy. This made tax collection in the region relatively easier than in the northern districts, the areas of labour migration. As a result of these variations, "individuals in different parts of the country experienced colonialism in different ways".²⁷

The school which emphasized the resilience of the peasantry also addressed the limitations of the colonial state: "so feeble and contradictory were its tactics that it could not prevent the emergence of a stunted but still viable peasantry"²⁸. This was a critique of the "underdevelopment" perspective which emphasized asset confiscation and the coercive powers of the state in forcing African producers into wage employment. Pioneered by Martin Chanock in the 1970s, the initiatives and resilience of the peasantry became important themes in the local studies by John McCracken, Megan Vaughan, and Elias Mandala in the 1980s.²⁹

²⁷ Fetter, "Malawi: Everybody's Hinterland" p.79.

²⁸ K.J. McCracken, "Peasants, Planters and the Colonial State: The Case of Malawi, 1905-1940" in Journal of Eastern African Research and Development vol.12 (1982) p.21, and by the same author, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State: the Impact of the Native Tobacco Board in the Central Province of Malawi" in JSAS vol.9 no.2 (April 1983) p.192. See also M.A. Vaughan, "The Politics of Food Supply: Colonial Malawi in the 1940" in African Studies Centre, Edinburgh University (ed), Malawi: An Alternative Pattern of Development (Edinburgh, African Studies Centre, 1985) pp.69-91.

²⁹ See Chanock, "Notes for an Agricultural History of Malawi" in Rural Africana no.20 (Spring 1973) pp.27-35; and by the same author, "Agricultural Change and Continuity in

The present study fits into the two perspectives outlined above, but puts more emphasis on the economic motivations and strategies of rural workers, migrants, fishermen and fish-traders. It goes beyond the focus on the distribution of colonial influence by addressing the relationship between the physical and human environments and how that influenced the incorporation of local communities and their economies into the colonial economy and the regional migrant labour system. It also analyses the responses of the settler planters to the challenges poised by the mobility, independence, and innovation of African workers and producers. This is done by showing that, during times of crisis, the Nyasaland planters survived on share-cropping arrangements with their tenants; and the employment of vulnerable categories of workers: immigrants from Portuguese East Africa (now Mozambique), children and, to a limited extent, women. That way, they avoided losing out entirely in the regional competition for

Malawi" in Palmer and Parsons (eds), Roots of Rural Poverty pp.396-409; McCracken, "Peasants, Planters and the Colonial State" pp.21-35, by the same author, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State" pp.172-192; and "Share-cropping in Malawi: the visiting tenant system in the Central Province C.1920-1968" in African Studies Centre, Edinburgh University (ed), Malawi: An Alternative Pattern of Development (Edinburgh, African Studies Centre, 1985) pp.35-65; M.A. Vaughan, "Food Production and Family Labour in Southern Malawi: the Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley in the early colonial period" in JAH vol.23, no.3 (1982) pp.351-364.; E.C. Mandala, "Peasant Agriculture, Gender and Inter-generational Relationship: the Lower Tchiri (Shire) Valley of Malawi, 1906-1940" in African Studies Review (ASR) vol.25 nos.2/3 (June/September 1982) pp.27-44.

labour.

If placed within the context of the debates in the historiography of rural transformation in the wider southern Africa region, this study attempts to identify some meeting points between the changes taking place at the local level and those at the regional level. It analyzes the responses of the Nyasaland migrants to the regional competition for their labour and the survival strategies of the local settler employers. Of late, scholars working on South Africa and its neighbouring countries have debated the uneven penetration of capitalism, the limitations of the power of the state, and the crafty responses of rural people to their incorporation into the capitalist system.³⁰ By employing the concept of the "power of the periphery" or "history from below" they have demonstrated that "the countryside was not simply a receptacle of change" and that the rural Africans were not "passive victims" of their incorporation. Instead, "they responded quickly and creatively to the forces confronting them, and

³⁰ See, for example, T. Keegan, "The Dynamics of Rural Accumulation in South Africa: Comparative and Historical Perspectives" in Comparative Studies in Society and History (CSSH) vol.28 (1986) pp.628-650; and by the same author, Rural Transformations in Industrialising South Africa: The Highveld to 1914 (Johannesburg, London, Ravan Press 1987); and Facing The Storm: Portraits of Black Lives in Rural South Africa (London, Zed Books 1988); W. Beinart, P. Delius, and S. Trapido (eds), Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1870-1930 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1986); W. Beinart and C. Bundy, Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape, 1890-1930 (Johannesburg and London, Ravan Press and James Currey, 1987).

their actions and struggles did have a material impact on the course of capitalist penetration".³¹ The literature on Malawi reviewed above shows that this was not unique to South Africa and the neighbouring countries. It applied to all the settler and colonial economies in the region.

The origins of the present study demonstrates this. It began in 1983 as a field research assignment for an undergraduate dissertation in sociology at Chancellor College, University of Malawi. Its aim was to analyze the effects of technological innovations on social and economic transformations in "artisanal" fishing in a small area near Nkhata Bay, northern Malawi.³² As the project's research methods developed, it became clear that what was seemingly a local, and more or less closed economic activity, had links with many other economic activities at the national and regional levels. Most important of these was the movement of labour within the country and to the various labour markets in the southern and eastern Africa regions during the colonial period and after.

Most of the fishermen and fish-traders who were regarded

³¹ J. Crush, The Struggle for Swazi Labour, 1890-1920 (Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987) p.4. See also Keegan, Facing the Storm. p.132.

³² W. C. Chirwa, "Technological Innovations, Social and Economic Relations in the Fishing Industry: The Case of Chizi Area, Nkhata Bay District", Bachelor of Social Science (Sociology) Dissertation, Chancellor College, University of Malawi (1984).

as "successful" had a migrant labour background. They were also not actively engaged in the production of cash crops. This was partly because the littoral areas do not have much cultivable land, and partly also because they regarded fishing and fish-trading as more profitable than cash crop production. Furthermore, the "successful" fishermen and fish-traders had more than one source of cash income, operating small businesses or receiving regular remittances and consumer goods from family members working somewhere within or outside the country. Some of the consumer goods were often sold to raise capital to invest in fishing and fish-trading.

These observations raised a number of questions relating to the relationship between the movement of labour and the nature of the rural society and economy in Malawi. In particular, the validity of the traditional argument that the incorporation of Malawian rural communities into the regional system of oscillating labour migration caused the crisis of the rural economy, was subjected to critical assessment.³³ Similarly, the prevailing view that rural Malawians were relentlessly subjected to the labour demands of the colonial economy, was questioned. This critical thinking led to a re-examination and expansion of the original thesis as the basis of the present study.

The first ^{chapter} examines the local communities and their

³³ For a similar view see K.J. McCracken, "Rethinking Rural Poverty" in JAH vol.19 no.4 (1978) pp. 611-15.

economies on the eve of colonial penetration in the early 1890s. Two themes are discussed: first, the relationship between the physical and human environments and how that influenced the nature of the local economies and their incorporation into the capitalist economy, and second, the regional variations in the distribution of colonial influence. The process of land alienation and the origins of labour tenancy are discussed in chapter two. The central argument is that land alienation did not generate a process whereby the Africans lost their ability to dispose of their labour or use it in independent production. Both the colonial administration and the European settlers could not stop the mobility of tenants and wage labourers. This theme is discussed in detail in chapter three which focuses on the shifting priorities of the colonial administration.

The relationships between wage labour, migrancy, and African cash-cropping are discussed in chapters four and five. Four themes are discussed: the competition for labour among the local employers and between them and external recruiters; the seasonal variability in the flow of wage labour to the European plantations; the failure of the state to control labour emigration; and the emergence of cash-cropping and fishing and fish-trading as alternatives to local wage employment and labour migration. Chapter six focuses on the transformations in the fishing industry in relation to increased labour migration and the development of fish markets

on the tea plantations of the Shire Highlands. Faced with increasing competition for the local labour supply and the independence of rural producers, the settlers turned to the employment of vulnerable categories of workers: migrants, children and women as chapters seven and eight demonstrate.

The last two chapters deal with the agrarian crisis of the 1950s and the resilience of fishing and fish-trading. In the 1950s, African cash-cropping went through a period of crisis. Prices for the major cash crops fluctuated widely resulting in increased labour migration as some producers abandoned production. The crisis was felt more severely by tobacco producers, both African and European. The tea industry, however, showed signs of resilience and vitality. It thus continued to provide the fishermen and fish-traders with viable markets for their fish. Some returning labour migrants along the lakeshore increased investments in retail trade fishing and fish-trading such that by the 1970s and early 1980s they had emerged as a distinguishable class of rural accumulators. The conclusion drawn from this account is that the Malawian economy has been more dynamic than the proponents of the "labour reserve" have presented it. The case of the migrant labourers who invested in fishing and fish-trading demonstrate not only the survival strategies, but also the economic motivations and enterprising spirit of the rural Malawians.

CHAPTER ONE

LOCAL ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES

The colonization of Malawi [former Nyasaland] produced a revolution in spatial relations among the inhabitants of the territory. Individuals in different parts of the country experienced colonization in different ways.¹

Rural communities in Nyasaland were incorporated into the capitalist economy in three distinct ways: as workers (both tenant and wage labourers) on the local settler plantations, as producers of food and cash-crops in the colonial economy, and as sources of migrant labour to the mines and farms of southern and eastern Africa. Communities in different regions of the country experienced the incorporation in different ways. Several local economies emerged during the colonial period.²

To appreciate the local variations it is important, first, to understand the nature of the local economies and societies at the eve of colonial penetration. This chapter therefore aims to outline the relationship between the physical and human environments and the way the local economies and societies were incorporated into the colonial economy and the regional migrant labour system. It also

¹ B. Fetter, "Malawi: Everybody's Hinterland" in African Studies Review vol.25 nos. 2/3 (June/September 1982) p.79.

² K.J. McCracken, "Peasants, Planters and the Colonial State: The Case of Malawi, 1905-1940" in Journal of Eastern African Research and Development vol.12 (1982) p.21.

describes the allocation of labour in the local economies so as to highlight the differences in the response to local wage employment and labour migration discussed in detail in the later chapters.

The strength of the colonial state also varied according to these local differences. During the first two decades of colonial penetration, the state was relatively stronger in the southern portions of the country than in what were regarded as "the labour districts" along Lake Malawi (then Nyasa) and the Central and Northern Provinces. During the first five years of the establishment of colonial rule, 1891-1895, the Shire Highlands had about 18 government stations, compared with 9 along the lakeshore and only one in the Central Province.³ This affected the collection of taxes and the policing of the northern districts. It also limited the coercive powers of the state in mobilizing labour for the Shire Highlands plantations.

With access to adequate amounts of land and family labour, the communities in the "labour districts" participated in the colonial economy predominantly as seasonal migrant labourers. From 1903/4, as Nyasaland became incorporated into the wider southern Africa system of oscillating labour migration, these communities became the leading exporters of

³ See, S. Agnew, and M. Stubbs, Malawi in Maps (London, University of London Press, 1972) p.45. See also B. Fetter, "Malawi: Everybody's Hinterland" in African Studies Review vol.25 nos.2/3 (June/September, 1982) pp.79-116.

labour. The effects of the emigration depended on the material and social conditions in the local economies⁴ which were, themselves, a product of the interaction between the physical and human environments.⁵

I

Physical and Human Environments

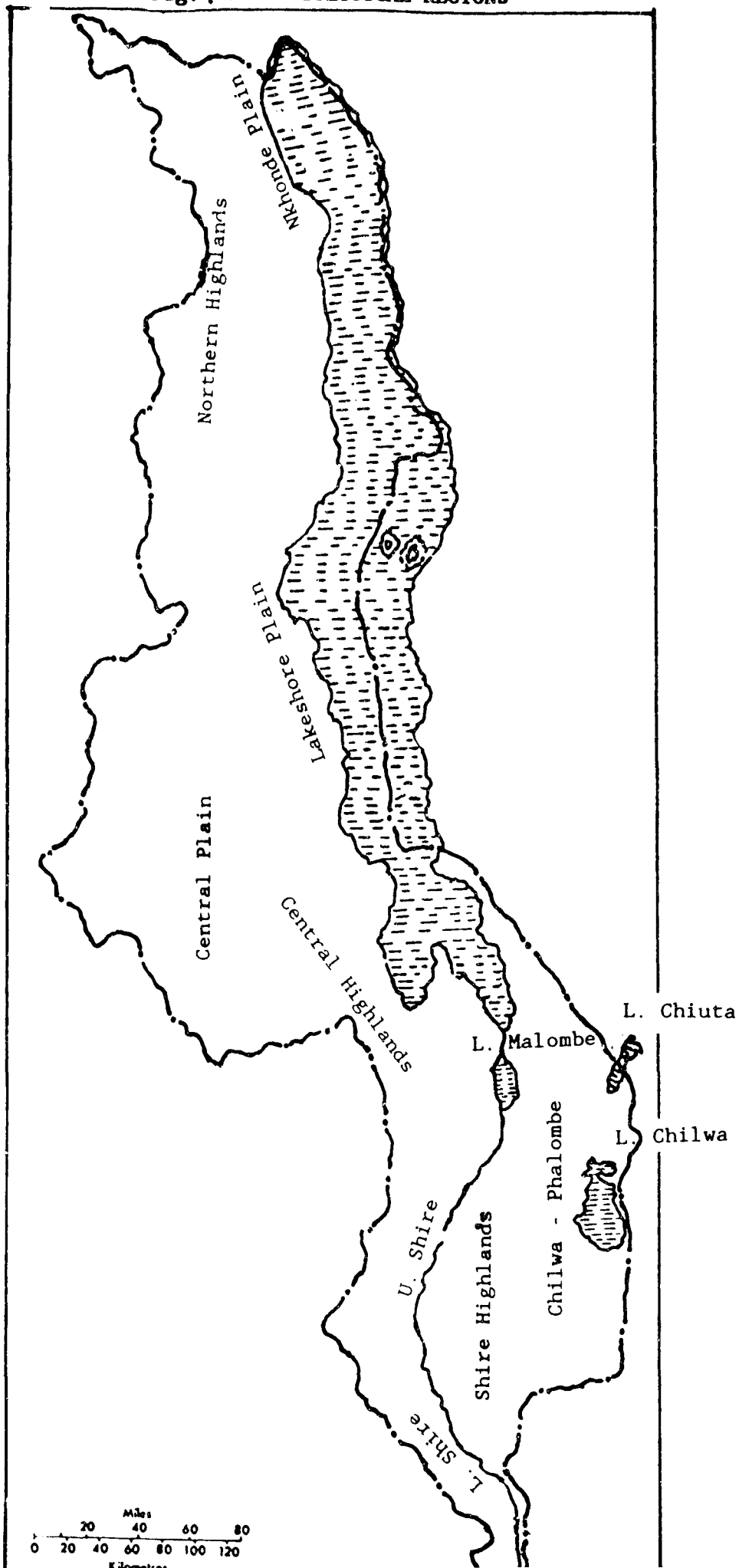
Malawi has six distinctive physiological regions which have throughout history influenced the relationship between local communities and their economies⁶ (see Fig.1: Map of Malawi). First, there is the deep, broad trough-like depression forming part of the Great Rift Valley which traverses the country from north to south. A greater part of this is occupied by lakes Malawi (then Nyasa) and Malombe, and the Shire Valley. Eight of the country's twenty-four districts have a lake front. The Shire River passes in five more districts, giving the country

⁴ For a detailed theoretical survey of the literature on this see S. Stichter, Migrant Laborers (Cambridge, London and New York, 1985) chap.2.

⁵ On the relationship between ecology and the process of capitalist penetration see E.C. Mandala, Work and Control in a Peasant Economy: A History of the Lower Tchiri Valley in Malawi, 1859-1960 (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press 1990) pp.3-14.

⁶ See F. Dixey, "The Distribution of Population in Nyasaland" in The Geographical Review vol.28 (April 1928) pp.274-290; Colonial Office, An Economic Survey of the Colonial Empire (London, HMSO 1932) pp.48-58; S. Agnew, "Environment and History: the Malawi Setting" in B. Pachai(ed), The Early History of Malawi (Evanston, Northwestern University,) pp.28-48.

Fig. 1 . PHYSIOLOGICAL REGIONS



two distinctive types of fishing communities, those of the lakeside and the riverside.⁷ Lakes Malombe, Chilwa, Chiuta (or Amalamba), Kazuni, the Chia lagoon and the two Rukuru Rivers add to the country's ecological diversity and the richness in its fisheries resources. These features also influenced settlement patterns and the nature of local economies during the pre-colonial period. For example, accounts of early travellers maintain that the lower part of the Shire Valley and the areas around Lake Malombe were densely populated. Encouraged by ecological diversity, local communities grew a variety of crops such as sorghum (Sorghum vulgare), maize, pumpkins and millet (Eleusine coracana) in the flood plains, in addition to fishing.⁸

The second region consists of escarpments, high plateaus and mountain ranges on both sides of the trough. Towards the north-end of Lake Malawi, the Viphya, Nyika, Mafinga and Misuku plateaus and hills are at an altitude of between 5,000 to 7,000 feet. Prior to colonial rule and right up to the beginning of this century, this region was very sparsely populated by the Alambia, Asukwa, and Andale in the Fort Hill

⁷ On riverside fishing communities see Mandala, Work and Control pp.37-39 and pp.250-254.

⁸ See, for example, J.E. Chambliss, The Lives and Travels of Livingstone and Stanley Covering their entire career in Southern and Central Africa (Boston, De Fiske and Company 1881), A. Waller, The Last Journals of Livingstone in Central Africa (New York Harper and Brothers 1875), J.P.R. Wallis, The Zambezi Journal of James Stewart 1862-1863 (London, Chatto and Windus 1952).

(now Chitipa) area. The only exceptions were the Henga Valley and the Phoka-Khondowe plateau in present Rumphi district where dense population settlements of the Aphoka, Ahenga and Atumbuka could be found. West of the lake, the plateaux stand at between 3,000 and 6,000 feet forming the Ntcheu, Kirk Range, Dedza, and Ngala mountains in what was known, during the colonial period, as the Central Highlands or Central Angoniland. Beyond these is the third distinctive feature: the Central Region Plain, extending from present Kasungu (then part of Marimba) to Mchinji (then Fort Manning). Prior to the invasion of the Angoni from southern Africa in the mid-nineteenth century, these two regions were inhabited by the Achewa or Achipeta, believed to be part of the Amaravi people.⁹

The Shire Highlands, situated between Lake Malombe to the north-east, the Lake Chilwa-Phalombe plain to the east, and the Shire Valley to the west, constitute the fourth physiological region. They are surmounted by the Mulanje mountains and the Zomba plateau rising to nearly 10,000 feet and 7,000 feet, respectively. With the exception of the southern parts, between Blantyre and Chiradzulu, and around present Zomba, this was another sparsely populated region

⁹ On the Maravi, see J.M. Scoffeleers (ed), Guardians of the Land: Essays on Central African Territorial Cults (Gwero, Mambo Press 1978), and by the same author, "The Meaning and use of the name 'Malawi' in Oral Traditions and Pre-colonial Documents" in Pachai (ed) The Early History. Also H.W. Langworthy, "Chewa or Malawi Political Organization in the pre-colonial era" in the same volume, pp.104-122.

prior to the coming of European settlement in the late nineteenth century. The Chilwa-Phalombe plain, the fifth distinctive region, was more populated than the Shire Highlands, but the economies of the two regions were complementary.

The sixth region is the lakeshore plain, a long and narrow strip of land along the western margin of Lake Malawi. In most areas it is not wider than between two to four miles, and even narrower in some northern districts where mountains come down close to the lake. The widest points are at the northern-end and the area between Salima and the south-western arm of the lake. Prior to, and throughout the early colonial period, this region was densely populated "essentially due to the ease with which water and food could be obtained".¹⁰ Not only was fish always available and the curing of fish an important local industry, but also two crops of maize could be raised in one year. At the northern-end in the Nkhonde plain, cattle were raised in large numbers in addition to rice, plantains, and cassava. Around Nkhota-kota, Arab-Swahili settlers introduced irrigated rice schemes which continued to exist up to the coming of colonial rule in the late nineteenth century. Another part of the lake which is of special interest to this study are the islands of Likoma and Chizumulu. Just under fifteen square miles each, they were, and still are, densely populated. According to the Nyasaland

¹⁰ Dixey, "The Distribution of Population" p.281.

Population Census of 1926, they had a population of not less than 8,818. Much of it was concentrated along the lakeshore "due to the almost complete absence of vegetation, soil, and water in the interior part of the islands". Prior to European influence, the islands "were well-wooded and well-watered". By the 1920s, "not only were most of the gardens of the islanders situated on the mainland, but even firewood and poles for huts had to be carried thence across to the islands".¹¹ The islanders' main economic activities were fishing and fish-trading.

Since the focus of this study is on these and their relationship with labour and agricultural production, the rest of this chapter will centre on four geographical regions: the Shire Highlands, the Chilwa-Phalombe plain, the Central Highlands and the lakeshore plain. The Shire Highlands was a region where European settlement and large scale land alienation took place from the late 1870s. It was in the same region that employment opportunities arose with the development of the plantations. East of the Shire Highlands, is the Chilwa-Phalombe plain. This area specialized in trading in non-agricultural commodities such as cotton-cloth, clay-pots, salt, fish and baskets. Being on the rain-shadow side of the Mulanje mountain, the region was agriculturally less

¹¹ Ibid p.281.

productive than the Upper Shire Valley.¹² The only exception were the areas around Lake Chilwa where maize and sorghum, Egyptian dura, (Holcus sorghum or Sorghum vulgare) were extensively grown in combination with fishing and salt-making.

The original inhabitants of these two regions were the Anyanja or Amang'anja. They were loosely organized in matrilineage or sororate units called mbumba, bound together by a common territorial religious cult.¹³

The guardian of the cult was the mfumu who, during the colonial period, became the territorial chief. At the village level, the guardian of the mbumba, known as the mwini mbumba or mwini dziko, "owner" or "controller" of the land, or ankhoswe, "marriage guardian", was usually a maternal uncle or the eldest brother in the family. He was responsible for the allocation of land, arbitration of disputes and protection of his sisters and their children. The mfumu, territorial "chief", could allocate some land to obwera, "strangers", at the territorial level but not at the village level. It was by this authority that they ceded land to the European settlers.

For grown-up men, access to land and family labour was through chikamwini, a system of "marriage and uxori-local residence" under the mwini mbumba. Before a young man took

¹² M.A. Vaughan, "Food Production and Family Labour in Southern Malawi: The Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley in the Early Colonial Period" in Journal of African History (JAH) vol.23 no.3 (1982) p.353.

¹³ Ibid p.353; Langworthy, "Chewa or Malawi Political Organisation" pp.111-112.

residence in his wife's mudzi, village, he had to prove his manhood by maintaining a piece of land allocated to him by the mwini mbumba or apongozi, "parents" in-law, for at least a full growing season. Failure to do so meant failure of the marriage. To maintain his marriage and residence in the wife's village, the mkamwini, "son" in-law, was required to work regularly in his "parents" in-law's garden, especially at peak periods. Thus, there was an intrinsic relationship between the control of land and the control and exploitation of the labour of young males.

Lack of anthropological studies on the Anyanja limits our understanding of the internal dynamics of the mbumba. For example, we do not know what mechanisms, apart from land allocation, the mwini mbumba used to control his "brothers", "sons" or "nephews" in-law. His allegiance to his own mbumba and to that of his wife is also likely to have caused some serious social tensions. How these were resolved, is not clear. It is also difficult to determine the extent to which the mbumba was a unit of production. Meghan Vaughan observed that the matrilineage and sororate group are almost invisible in Anyanja's oral records. Instead, "they emphasise the importance of the 'household' as a unit of production whilst the 'ideology of kinship' centres on the unit of the territorial clan".¹⁴ Clement Ng'ong'ola has argued that

¹⁴ Vaughan, "Food Production and Family Labour" p.353 fn 5, also Vaughan "Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi: A Study of Rural Communities in the Shire Highlands

although the mbumba was an important social unit for the exercise of some customary land rights, it was the banja, "simple family" or household, which was the main unit for the exercise of cultivation rights.¹⁵ Some male members of the mbumba could maintain access to land in both their maternal and marital villages.

Prior to the beginning of European settlement in the Shire Highlands, the Anyanja's social organization and their settlement patterns were affected by the immigration of the Ayao from Mozambique. The immigrants were specialized long-distance traders operating in the region between the Indian Ocean and the Luapula in present Zambia. Their immigration into the Malawi region was influenced by two related factors: they were experiencing internal political and economic conflicts which were exacerbated by competition for trade routes, and were pushed further inland by Arab-Swahili slave-raiders who were also their trading partners.¹⁶ Clyde Mitchell maintains that the first Ayao immigrants came in peaceful

from the mid-nineteenth century to 1915" PhD Thesis, University of London, England (1981).

¹⁵ C. Ng'ong'ola, "Rural Development and the Reorganization of Customary Land in Malawi: Some Lessons from the LLDP" in Journal of Social Science (JSS), University of Malawi, vol.13 (1986) p.47.

¹⁶ For details on the Ayao see D. MacDonald, Africana or the Heart of Heathen Africa. vols.1 and 2 (London, Simpkin Marshall and company 1882), J.C. Mitchell, The Yao Village: A Study in the Social Structure of a Nyasaland Tribe (Lusaka, Rhodes-Livingstone and Manchester, MUP 1956), E.A. Alpers, "The Yao in Malawi: the importance of local research" in Pachai (ed), The Early History of Malawi pp.168-178.

family or clan groups, lukosyo, which often found succour with the original Anyanja inhabitants. As the caravan trade increased in the nineteenth century, more militant 'tribal' groups began to come in. They extended their settlements from the south-end of Lake Malawi to as far south as Blantyre on the Shire Highlands.

This had two effects: it forced the indigenous Amang'anja communities into population concentrations around Lake Malombe, in the Upper Shire Valley, on the hill tops of the Shire Highlands and around Lake Chilwa; and changed the political order in the area. By the late nineteenth century, the whole area between the south-end of Lake Malawi and Blantyre on the Shire Highlands was politically dominated by Ayao clans. With the coming of European settlers, land often transferred hands between the Ayao clan heads and the settlers, bypassing its original custodians: the Anyanja eni mbumba (plural). This caused problems for the colonial administration when it came to settling land disputes between European settlers and the 'original owners'. Very often titles were arbitrarily given to the settlers because "the question had gone too far ahead for any kind of restitution to take place without causing much clamour of excitement".¹⁷

The Ayao invasion did not, however, drastically affect

¹⁷ Foreign Office (F.O.) 84/2197, Harry Johnston to Anderson, 21/1/1893, cited in B.S. Khrishnamurthy, "Economic Policy, Land and Labour in Nyasaland, 1890-1914" in Pachai, The Early History of Malawi p.385.

the nature of the Amang'anja economy. The immigrants were more interested in trading and land was still abundant for the Anyanja cultivators.¹⁸ In fact, the Ayao themselves were not just a "plundering and slave-raiding tribe" as accounts of early travellers suggest. They were also agriculturalists and cattle keepers.¹⁹ Ecological diversity played an important role in the economy of the Amang'anja and Ayao.²⁰ In the fertile Upper Shire Valley, mapira, Egyptian dura, millet (Eleusine coracana), groundnuts, yams, rice and sweet potatoes were extensively grown. Cotton was also "cultivated at almost every village". In the highlands, "each village [had] its smelting-house, charcoal-burners and blacksmiths" who made a wide variety of iron tools.²¹ These were exchanged with salt, fish and other items from the Shire Valley and the Chilwa-Phalombe plain. Regional trade caravans known as ulendo

¹⁸ Chambliss, The Lives and Travels of Livingstone and Stanley. p.316.

¹⁹ See Waller, The Last Journals of Livingstone. pp. Though Livingstone's accounts are full of the Ayao's slave-raiding activities, he mentions cattle keeping and food-crop production among Mataka's people.

²⁰ On the effect of ecology on local economies see Vaughan, "Food Production and Family Labour", E.C. Mandala, "Peasant Cotton Agriculture", and by the same author, "Capitalism, Ecology and Society: The Lower Tchiri (Shire) Valley of Malawi, 1860-1940" PhD Thesis, University of Minnesota, USA (1982).

²¹ Chambliss, The Lives and Travels of Livingstone and Stanley. p.318., David and Charles Livingstone, Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambezi and its Tributaries and the Discovery of the Lake Shirwa and Nyasa, 1858-1864. (New York, Harper and Brothers 1866) pp.124-125.

(singular), journey or trip, were organised by family heads and professional traders. The most popular of these was the "salt ulendo" from Lake Chilwa to Blantyre during the dry season. It was "always sure of a speedy sale for its wares".²² Though salt was the main item, dried fish, baskets, clay pots and cotton-cloth, were also traded.

The Amang'anja system of production and exchange was based on a sexual division of labour. Men were engaged more in those activities traditionally regarded as "men's jobs", associated with the "wild" and physical danger, such as the manufacturing of iron implements, basket-weaving, fishing, and cloth-making. The nature of the local economy also affected labour allocation. For example,

near a lake abounding with fishes, the cultivation of the soil, though not abandoned, [took] a secondary place. In districts abounding with game, the men as a rule hand[ed] over all agricultural work to their wives and slaves. Fishing and hunting [were] looked on as being more dignified occupations than hoeing.²³

Though most of the agricultural work was done by women, men were responsible for opening new gardens. Before the start of the rainy season the men cut the trees and grass, collected them in heaps, and burnt them. During the planting season, women and children planted the seed, weeded the fields and harvested the crops. Whenever additional labour was required,

²² A. Werner, The Natives of British Central Africa (London, Archibald Constable and Company 1906) p.207.

²³ MacDonalld, Africana or the Heart of Heathen Africa. vol.1 p.36.

men helped in some of these tasks.²⁴ During the dry season, they repaired huts and crop storage facilities.

Male labour was also allocated to defense-related tasks. A good defense was required to protect trade ulendo and gardens, including the women working in them. To build it required more than the mere presence of men, but the manufacturing of weapons as well: spears, clubs, and shields. In 1876, a pioneer missionary at Blantyre in the Shire Highlands observed that "a smithy in an old hut beside the station was daily patronised" by men forging iron implements.²⁵ Most of these were used in hunting and agriculture.

The foregoing description of production and exchange among the Amang'anja of the Shire Highlands and the upper Shire Valley also applied to the Anyanja and Asena of the Lower Shire and the Achewa or Achipeta of the Central Province. The coming of the Angoni in the Central Province in the mid-nineteenth century, while causing temporary changes to settlement patterns, did not fundamentally alter the nature of the local economy. Unlike the Ayao, the Angoni did not politically dominate the indigenous Achewa clans. In most cases they were effectively incorporated into the Chewa society. They lost their original language and some of their

²⁴ Werner, The Natives of British Central Africa. p.135-136.

²⁵ Werner, The Natives of British Central Africa. p.202.

traditions such as lobola payment, patrilineal descent and vililocal residence after marriage.²⁶ With the development of the plantation economy in the Shire highlands, the Angoni from the Central Highlands (Central Angoniland) increasingly turned to wage labour. The reasons for this were complex and will be dealt with in detail in chapter three. It will also be shown that from the 1920s, the expansion in tobacco production in this region reversed the process of internal labour migration as more and more people turned to cash-cropping.

II

The Fishing Communities

Another region from which the colonial economy drew its labour was the lakeshore plain. With the exception of the Namwera area in Fort Johnston district where tobacco production began in the 1920s, the lakeshore plain was geographically cut off from the centres of the colonial economy in the south. It was only from the 1930s, and especially after 1945, that the colonial government developed an interest in rice production in the region along the lake and tung in the northern highlands. Otherwise, the region was one of the "labour districts" for the Shire Highlands plantations and commercial companies and, from 1903/4, South African and Southern

²⁶ For details on Ngoni chieftaincies in the Central Province see Lord Hailey, Native Administration in British African Territories. Part II (London, HMSO 1950) chap.5.

Rhodesian recruiters.

The original inhabitants of this region were the Amang'anja (same as Anyanja) and Achewa in the areas between the south-end of the lake to present Nkhota-kota, the Atonga and Asiska between Nkhota-kota and Mlowe in present Rumphu, and the Atumbuka and Ankhonde to the north. They practised a mixed economy based on fishing and the production of cassava, rice, maize and plantains. Here as well, agriculture was predominantly in the hands of women while "men [made] twine or nets by day, and [were] at their fisheries in the evenings and nights".²⁷ Not much is known about the organization of the fishing industry among the Anyanja of the southern portions of the lake. The accounts of early travellers mention the existence of "fishing parties" but do not say how these were organized.²⁸ In a recent article, John McCracken has described the organization of traditional fishing among the Anyanja thus:

fishing was a gender-specific activity, monopolised almost entirely by men who made use of kinship ties in order to mobilise labour. Communal tasks such as setting nets, hauling them to shore and constructing canoes were normally performed by the male members of an mbumba or matrilineage group, though fish trapping could be undertaken individually. Most of the fish caught were consumed within the fishermen's mbumba.²⁹

The mbumba did not possess tenurial rights over portions of

²⁷ Waller, The Last Journals of Livingstone. p.88.

²⁸ Waller, The Last Journals of Livingstone. p.95.

²⁹ K.J. McCracken, "Fishing and the colonial economy: the case of Malawi" in JAH vol.28 (1987) p.419.

the lake and fishing activities were not controlled. Some Ayao chiefs, capitalizing on their political dominance over the Anyanja clans, made attempts to exert ritual control over fishing activities in the 1860s but their attempts failed because they were not a fishing community by tradition.

McCracken's account depicts the mbumba as an undifferentiated unit within which the fishermen worked for everybody's good. Social tensions associated with gear ownership, decision-making, and access to fish as means of subsistence are overlooked. In slight contrast to McCracken, Meghan Vaughan notes that the Lake Chilwa fishing industry was under "significant chiefly control" but does not give details on its organization.³⁰ In an earlier study of the Lake Chilwa fishing community, Swanzie Agnew and Chinyamata Chipeta found that although fishing was done by family labour, gear ownership and decision-making were on an individual basis.³¹ Their account, however, lacks historical details. A similar observation has been made by John Kandawire in his more recent study of the organization of fishing in relation to food production:

the owner of the gear is usually a 'senior' kinsman who is responsible for the welfare of 'junior' members, male and female, of his kin group.... It is from this pool of

³⁰ Vaughan, "Food Production and Family Labour" p.356.

³¹ S. Agnew and C. Chipeta, "Fishing and Fish Trading: Socio-economic Studies" in M. Kalk, A.J. McLachlan and H. Williams (eds), Lake Chilwa: Studies of Change in a Tropical Ecosystem (The Hague, Boston, London, Junk Publishers 1979) pp.345-368.

kinsmen that alovi are selected, and these are invariably male members. Where the group does not have as many male members as is required to constitute the desired number of alovi, an additional mulovi [singular] is invited from a neighbouring kin group which may also be related by blood.³²

The alovi were the actual fishermen.³³ As a fishing unit or organization, the alovi transcended household boundaries. Its members were drawn from the extended family of the owner of the fishing gear.

Three factors influenced this organization of the fishing industry among the Atonga: their kinship structure, possession of special skills, and age. The Atonga's social structure was based on the concept of ubali (real or fictitious kinship) and muzi (common residence or village).³⁴ Two sets of kinship ties were recognized: patrilateral and matrilateral. A person's abali included patrikins and matrikins of both mother and father. Residential allegiance was normally influenced by the presence, social status and material well-being of a 'senior' kinsman or village head - father, brother, maternal or

³² J.A.K. Kandawire, "Commercial Fishing and Food Production Among Lakeshore Dwellers in Malawi: A [Draft] Technical Report" for a project funded by the International Development Research Centre 1985-86. I am thankful to the author for allowing me to use his research notes.

³³ Alovi is a Tonga word for fishermen. It comes from the word kulowa which means to fish. The term alovi is currently widely used along the lakeshore to mean 'casual workers' or wage employees in fishing.

³⁴ On Tonga social structure see J. van Velsen, The Politics of Kinship: A Study in Social Manipulation Among the Lakeside Tonga of Nyasaland (Manchester, MUP/Rhodes-Livingstone Institute 1964).

paternal uncle, cousin etc - who was responsible for the general welfare of his 'junior' kins in the muzi.

The position of a 'senior' kinsman was not a hereditary office. It was achieved by his ability to construct a muzi by carefully manipulating his kinship ties in combination with his material position. There were two common ways of doing this: first, by assuming the responsibility of looking after his sisters and/or their children after the death of their husbands or fathers, respectively, and second, by paying bridewealth for his sons, nephews (or grandsons and grandnephews) and cousins so that they and their children resided in his muzi. Thus, "a man with a lot of money [would] have a big village because a lot of people [would] follow him, both sons and nephews".³⁵ This was also the type of a man who owned the fishing gear and those who "followed him" became his alovi. His abali materially and socially identified themselves with him through chiyambiko, a daily portion of the catch to which every household was entitled. The decision to give or deny access to chiyambiko was the prerogative of the owner of the fishing gear who was also the village head. For the rest of his abali and/or alovi, to be denied access to the chiyambiko was the same as to be denied residential allegiance and social affiliation. It can therefore be argued that control over access to chiyambiko and bridewealth payment were among the most important mechanisms by which the Atonga

³⁵ Van Velsen, The Politics of Kinship p.65.

village heads secured their own positions, village social structures, and production relations. Whereas the Anyanja and Achewa elders controlled and exploited the labour of young males through control over land and its intrinsic connection with chikamwini, "marriage and uxorial residence", the Atonga did it through chilowola, bridewealth, residential affiliation, and the chiyambiko entitlement.

As Jaap van Velsen has argued, the lakeside Atonga evaluated many of their material and social norms in reference to fish:

to care for a person is often expressed as keeping that person supplied with dendi [side dish or relish] i.e. fish. Similarly, a phrase: "so-and-so is doing well; he always has dendi" does not only refer to the fact that that person has a side dish to go with his main dish... but the implication is that he always has fish with his meals.³⁶

For the Mtonga man, owning a fishing unit was more than owning or controlling means of subsistence. It was a status symbol that every young man looked forward to. This social and political aspiration was among the major factors propelling young men into labour migration. Since there was an intrinsic connection between material accumulation and social and political power, enterprising young men enhanced their status in the muzi by investing the proceeds of labour migration in the local economy.³⁷ This, in turn, had two effects: first, on

³⁶ Van Velsen, The Politics of Kinship. p.14.

³⁷ On migrancy and maintenance of social structures see J. van Velsen, "Labour Migration as a Positive Factor in the Continuity of Tonga Tribal Society" in A. Southall (ed),

the one hand, it enabled young men to emancipate themselves from their elders' control but, on the other hand, it made them more tied to the traditional structures and the local economy. The latter factor was a pseudo-traditional avenue of accumulation which enabled the enterprising individuals and households to move beyond subsistence to accumulation.

Second, by utilizing proceeds of migrancy in their local economy, the fishing communities became more integrated into the regional system of oscillating labour migration than their cash-cropping counterparts. Another contrast was that unlike land, fisheries resources could not be owned or controlled by a household or an individual. They were common property whose utility as a commercial asset depended on individual or familial enterprise. This gave open-ended opportunities to those families or individuals who wanted to invest in commercial fishing, and migrant labour was the source of capital.

Special skills, such as canoe-making and net-weaving, also played an important role in the organisation of the fishing industry among the Atonga. Those who possessed them usually owned more fishing gear than those who did not. Alternatively, they hired out their services in return for a regular chiyambiko or some form of payment.³⁸ The possession

Social Change in Modern Africa (London, New York, OUP 1961) pp.230-241.

³⁸ Of late, wage payment has become more common as a result of the commercialization of the fishing industry.

of special skills therefore put some people in two advantageous positions: owner of gear and mulovi. By carefully manipulating these they were able to command the labour of the 'junior' members of their kin groups.

Related to this was the age factor. Young unmarried males between 14 and 20 years of age were often housed in temporary grass shelters, vihewero or mphara, at the beach during the warm and dry months of the year. Though this residential system had no social or ritual sanctions, it was an effective way of appropriating the labour of young men. Housed at the point of production, it was easy to mobilize them whenever necessary, especially for night fishing. Oral evidence suggests that the system was weakened by labour migration during the colonial period.³⁹ As they returned from abroad, the young men were able to pay chilowola by themselves, build their own huts, and establish their own nuclear families.

Fishing was compatible with labour migration because it did not require a lot of male labour. As noted above, the alovi fishing unit could be raised across household boundaries. One or two men in each household in the village would be enough to carry out the fishing required to maintain subsistence. For this reason, the Atonga migrants were usually

³⁹ See Chirwa, "Technological Innovations". Details on the effects of labour migration on the relationship between elders and young men are found in Malawi National Archives (MNA) Q267 B.S. Platt, Draft Report of a Nutrition Survey in Nyasaland, 1938.

"reluctant to leave their villages entirely without men".⁴⁰ They usually organized their trips in such a way that there was at least a man left in the village to provide the household(s) with fish. As Van Velsen noted, the households with women only "generally complain[ed] of their lot in terms of not having fish rather than in terms of being without a male spokesman". It was the women's task to collect and process, as well as trade, their men's chiyambiko. With the passage of time, this entitlement and the skills involved in fish processing played an important role in the emergence of women as "professional" fish processors.

III

Variations in Incorporation

With the beginning of the colonial economy in the 1880s, and especially after 1891, the local economies and communities outlined above were incorporated in different ways. Those along the lake and in the Central Angoniland became the sources of seasonal migrant labour (popularly known as "protectorate labour") for the European enterprises in the Shire Highlands. With the beginning of recruiting for the South African and Southern Rhodesian mines from 1903/4, they became the major exporters of labour. Intense competition for labour arose among the local settler employers and between

⁴⁰ Van Velsen, The Politics of Kinship p.71.

them and external recruiters. Due to the prevalence of poor working conditions and low wages in the Shire Highlands, "protectorate labour" tended to drift to the more lucrative markets abroad.

As the Shire Highlands plantations became more developed, and its labour force expanded, especially after the First World War, markets for fish were created. The lakeshore communities turned to commercial fishing and fish-trading in combination with labour migration. They exercised choice between local wage employment or external labour migration, and commercial fishing and fish-trading. As for those from the Central Province, the 1920s marked the beginning of tobacco production in their region, and thus new economic opportunities. They too exercised choice between migrancy and cash-cropping, often pursuing the option which offered better chances for individual or familial accumulation.

The Lower Shire Valley and the Chilwa-Phalombe Plain (especially the Mlanje district) emerged as areas of African cotton production between 1903 and 1905. Here as well, the African communities exercised choice between wage employment and cash-cropping. Elias Mandala has observed that due to the low wages and poor working conditions on the Shire Highlands plantations, the Lower Shire communities preferred cotton production to wage labour.⁴¹ In the Shire Highlands itself, the Africans were incorporated into the colonial economy in

⁴¹ Mandala, Work and Control pp.114-118.

three ways: as producers of food for the plantation labour force, as sources of seasonal wage labour (popularly known as "local labour") and, for those resident on the settler plantations, as tenant labourers.

These regional variations were reinforced by the uneven penetration of capitalism and its influence on the local economies during the first two to three decades of European settlement.⁴² The centre of the colonial economy was in the south where land alienation had occurred on a large scale between the late 1880s and mid-1890s. In the absence of statistical data, it is difficult to know how much land exchanged hands between the chiefs and the early European settlers during this period. It is estimated that, by 1895, about 3.7 million acres (almost 15 per cent) out of the country's holding potential of about 25 million acres had been alienated.⁴³ More than half of this was in the Shire Highlands. It is important to understand how this land was alienated because it affected the way its original occupants

⁴² For examples on the uneven penetration of capitalism in other parts of rural southern Africa see T. Keegan, Rural Transformations in Industrializing South African: The Southern Highveld to 1914 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1986); W. Beinart, P. Delius, and S. Trapido, Putting a Plough to the Ground Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa, 1850-1930 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1986) W. Beinart and C. Bundy, Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape, 1890-1930 (London, James Currey and Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987).

⁴³ Pachai, Land and Politics in Malawi (Kingston, the Limestone Press, 1975) p.37, and by the same author, "Land Policies" p.683; Khrishnamurthy, "Economic Policy" p.385.

were incorporated into the colonial economy and their labour exploited.

The process began with acquisitions of the pioneering Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), first at Molambala in present Chikwawa district, and then at Magomero in the modern Chiradzulu district in 1861. Two other Scottish missions followed in the mid-1870s: the Church of Scotland (Blantyre Mission) and the Free Church of Scotland (Livingstonia Mission). Other missionaries, traders, hunters and coffee planters came later. These early pioneers acquired large tracts of land from mafumu (plural), territorial "chiefs", in exchange with cheap trade goods such as calico, bottles of liquor, caps or very small sums of money. The transactions were usually conducted in a very dubious fashion:

A planter came to the village, he asked the chief to sell him a place where he could build a house, and that is the only plot the chief signed for....Then enquiries followed about the chief's boundaries. This information was later incorporated into the alleged deed of sale which in fact was no more than a small plot of ground for a house or a store.⁴⁴

Scholars have argued that the African chiefs thought they were transferring rights of beneficial occupation and use while the settlers thought they were getting freehold titles which was an unknown concept to the chiefs.⁴⁵ Bridglal Pachai

⁴⁴ MNA COM-F 4/1/1 Evidence given by Chief Kadewere to the Lyall-Grant Commission.; Pachai, Land and Politics. p.131.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Pachai, Land and Politics p.30-47; J.A.K. Kandawire, Thangaca: Forced Labour or Reciprocal Assistance? (Zomba, Centre for Social Research, 1978) chapters 1 and 2; C. Ng'ong'ola, "The Political Economy of Land in

has further argued that the settlers "took advantage of the friendliness and gullibility of the people, and the looseness of interpretation of the act of exchanging gifts and information"⁴⁶ True as this might be, the reasons were more complex than Pachai suggests. To begin with, it is important to note that the chiefs had the authority to allocate land to "strangers" at the territorial level, but not to sell it. The settlers could have got access to the land without "taking advantage of the friendliness and gullibility" of the chiefs.

Furthermore, the immigration of the Ayao and Angoni into the area had changed the political and social order of the indigenous populations. Some ambitious immigrant chiefs consolidated their political positions by collaborating with the European settlers to whom they 'sold' land formerly belonging to the Amang'anja. The majority of the chiefs who ceded land to the early settlers ~~were~~ of the Ayao and Angoni origin. Very often they did not have an idea of the amount of land they were giving away, let alone who the original occupiers were. The presence of European traders and planters in their areas made it easier for them to overcome their opponents and consolidate their political authority. For self-interested reasons, the European traders, planters and colonial administrators often directly involved themselves in

Nyasaland (Malawi)" in African Social Research, University of Zambia, (December 1983) p.493-514.

⁴⁶ Pachai, "Land Policies in Malawi" p.682.

the local politics, competition, and fighting.

A good example of this happened in Mulanje district in 1891. Chikumbu, a Yao chief, "was a menace" to early European settlers in his area. He was in the process of subjugating indigenous Amang'anja chiefs who, earlier on, had "asked" for British protection as a way of keeping their area from falling into the hands of Ayao chiefs. Harry Johnston, the first British Consul, dispatched a force of Sikhs to Mulanje: "to bring Chikumbu to reason, to remind him of the terms of his own treaty with the English, and to request him to cease annoying the planters...". Fighting ensued, Chikumbu was defeated and driven from his area into Portuguese East Africa. His brother was installed as chief in his stead. "This action may have definitely opened the Mlanje district to European settlement....Numerous planters came and settled on the land, much to the advantage of the natives, who at once began to prosper from the demand for labour".⁴⁷ The advantages to the Africans were probably less than Johnston thought. Acts of this nature were often used by the settlers to alienate land which the Africans needed more than wage labour.

Once land was alienated, it was demarcated by physical features: from one hill or stream to the other, with no clear boundaries. It was thus common for the chiefs to cede land beyond their territorial boundaries or that used for communal

⁴⁷ Johnston, "The British Central Africa Protectorate" pp.196-197.

purposes such as hunting and grazing. This happened at a time when indigenous communities were moving into the same lands due to the 'tribal' immigrations and the security offered by the presence of the European planters and traders. Some scholars have argued that much of the land the early settlers acquired was apparently unoccupied.⁴⁸ The danger in this argument is that it leads to the acceptance of the colonial fallacy of equating "unoccupied" to "unused" land. The Africans might not have effectively occupied the land, but they used it for a variety of purposes: hunting, grazing, collection of edible wild leaves and fruits, firewood, and grass and wood for buildings.

Since some settlers got "unoccupied" lands, they had to find the labour to work their estates. This was not readily available, especially during the rainy season when the Africans were busy in their gardens. The tendency was therefore to encourage the settlement of African villages on the ceded lands. For those who got lands on which Africans were already settled, the issue was not how they were going to remove the villages but the terms on which they were going to continue to occupy what had now become 'private estates'.⁴⁹ This gave rise to a system of labour tenancy called thangata, meaning "reciprocal assistance". The male head of the family would work for the European landowner for at least one month

⁴⁸ See, for example, White, Magomero p.81

⁴⁹ See White, "'Tribes'" p.516.

in a year (later extended to two months) during the growing season in exchange for the right to reside on the estate.

The operations of this system will be the focus of the next chapter, but it is worth noting here that the European settlers did not invent thangata. It was a traditional system of communal labour among the Amang'anja for tasks such as clearing new gardens, harvesting, and construction of huts. An individual would organize a food-and-beer work party whenever he/she was in need of extra labour. With the coming of the Ayao and the imposition of their political authority over the Amang'anja, thangata became a prerogative of chiefs and family heads. Its operation was brilliantly described in the evidence given to the Commission of Enquiry into the Chilembwe Rising of 1915: "the chief would kill fowls and goats, and make a lot of food, and prepare everything ready. Then he would take a small boy and tell him to beat the drum and tell people that the chief wants thangata tomorrow...

everyone would turn out to thangata. When they came the chief would offer them beer and say: "now come to the garden and give me your labour". They went to the garden and started hoeing...till midday. After that they marched to the chief's village in peace and with no sign of grief. They sat down around the chief's courtyard...[and] after feasting away, they began to dance. And the chief said: "now you have done very well and helped me, go in peace". That is what is known by the natives as thangata.⁵⁰

The European landowners transformed thangata into a system of labour tenancy. This did not, however, automatically

⁵⁰ Cited in White, Magomero. p.89.

result in the erosion of the Africans' rights and freedom to dispose of their labour or use the land they occupied. By themselves, the dubious land transfers outlined above were not enough to subjugate the African communities to the labour demands of a nascent colonial economy. The early settlers needed a legal machinery and an administrative power to accomplish this. Though the first British Consul in Nyasaland was appointed in 1883, it was not until 1891 that the territory became a British Protectorate.⁵¹ It was also from this date that land claims were officially settled and thangata institutionalized.

The foregoing account provides an outline of the local communities and the nature of their economies and highlights local variations in their incorporation into the colonial economy. Three key factors played an important role in this: the interaction between the physical and human environments, the uneven penetration of colonial influence, and the process of land alienation. However, to argue that the local communities did not experience colonialism and incorporation into the capitalist economy in the same way, is not enough. It also needs to be demonstrated that if the incorporation created a crisis, it also provided means by which the crisis could be successfully contained. The individual and collective

⁵¹ First called the Nyasaland Districts Protectorate, it became the British Central Africa Protectorate in 1893, and then the Nyasaland Protectorate from 1907 to 1964 when independence was achieved under the name Malawi.

survival strategies and enterprising spirit of the rural people need to be assessed. Similarly, the strengths and weaknesses of both the settler community and the colonial administration need to be historically evaluated. The next chapter will therefore focus on the relationship between land alienation and the origins of labour tenancy so as to evaluate, on the one hand, the strengths and weaknesses of the landowners, and on the other hand, the crafty responses of the Africans resident on the European plantations.

CHAPTER TWO

LAND ALIENATION AND LABOUR TENANCY

What the landlords wanted was not rent but work....¹ the tenant system was that the natives living on the land were compelled to work for the estates. No money rent was accepted.²

During the seventy years of colonial rule, 1891 to 1961,³ two major types of tenancy emerged in Nyasaland: thangata labour tenancy,⁴ and sharecropping. The latter took three forms: an agreement between the European landlord and tenants resident on his estate, between the former and immigrant tenants - the "visiting tenant" system - and between a European planter and African growers on Trust Land.

These tenancies were practised in two parts of the country at different times. Thangata was practised in the Shire Highlands, especially between the 1890s and early 1920s. Thereafter it became a hybrid cross of sharecropping, labour,

¹ Malawi National Archives (MNA) S1/385/23 Chief Secretary to Governor, 30/10/24; PRO C.O.525/66 Report of a Commission to Inquire into Various Matters concerned with the Rising in the Nyasaland Protectorate, 1916 (Hereinafter the Lyall-Grant Commission); C.O.525/97 Report of a Commission to Enquire into the Occupation of Land in the Nyasaland Protectorate, 1921 (Hereinafter The Jackson Commission).

² Public Record Office (PRO) C.O.525/66 The Lyall-Grant Commission, 1916.

³ Nyasaland became a British Protectorate in 1891. It got its self-government in 1961, independence in 1964, and became the Republic of Malawi in 1966.

⁴ The concept came from a Chinyanja or Chichewa word kuthangata meaning "to help".

and cash-and-kind tenancies, but still called thangata up to 1962 when it was officially abolished. The "visiting tenant" system and sharecropping between European planters and African growers on Trust Land emerged in the Central Province in the 1920s. Though officially abolished in 1962, they continued and were strengthened as a combination of wage-labour and sharecropping right up to the 1980s, and beyond.

This chapter discusses the relationship between land alienation and the origins and operations of thangata. It argues that land alienation and the introduction of labour tenancy did not generate a process whereby the erosion of Africans' political and land rights led to the loss of independence in their ability to dispose of their labour. For all its brutality, violence, and exploitation, thangata was not a relentless system which resulted in the immobilization of labour on the European plantations. On the contrary, the tenants were mobile and had created a variety of subtle but effective ways of evading some of its harsh effects. The colonial administration and the European settlers, though obstructive and threatening in their attitudes,⁵ and sometimes violent in their actions, could not stop the mobility of the

⁵ For details on this see K.J. McCracken, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State: The Impact of the Native Tobacco Board in the Central Province of Malawi" in Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS) vol.9 no.2 (April 1983) pp.172-192; and by the same author, "Share-cropping in Malawi: The Visiting Tenant System in the Central Province c.1920-1968" in African Studies Centre, University of Edinburgh (ed), Malawi: An Alternative Path to Development (Edinburgh, African Studies Centre, 1985) pp.35-65.

tenants and their ability to dispose of their labour independently. The operations of thangata reflected and impacted on the wider problem of labour mobilization.

By focusing on thangata we can understand the strengths and weaknesses of the Nyasaland settlers as well as the limitations of the colonial administration in labour mobilization. In the chapters below, it will be shown that the mobility of the thangata tenants applied to wage-labourers, share-croppers, independent peasant producers, migrant labourers, and fishermen and fish-traders. Acting individually or in concert, they all made their own terms on which to participate in the colonial economy.⁶ Through these they were able to contain the crisis created by their incorporation into the capitalist system. The period covered in this chapter is from the early 1890s to about 1920.

Most accounts of labour tenancy in colonial Malawi tend to assume that thangata was an inflexible, violent, brutal, and coercive system through and through.⁷ Very little

⁶ For evidence from other parts of southern Africa see, for example, J. Crush, The Struggle for Swazi Labour, 1890-1920 (Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987) pp.3-9. I have found Crush's analysis very useful for this study.

⁷ For details on thangata see, for example, G. Shepperson and T. Price, Independent African (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1958); J.A.K. Kandawire, Thangata: Forced Labour or Reciprocal Assistance? (Zomba, Centre for Social Research, 1978); B. Pachai, Land and Politics in Malawi, 1875-1975 (Kingstone, Limestone Press, 1978).

attention has been paid to its internal dynamics.⁸ The account below demonstrates that the system was adaptive to economic changes and some of its harsh effects could be evaded by the tenants. This accounted for its persistence. It also shows that the thangata labour force was unreliable, inadequate and inefficient. It involved periods of wage-labour partly as a way by which undercapitalized farmers could use the capital they had in abundance - land - to buy a labour force, and partly also to allow the tenants to raise a cash income.

As labour tenancy, thangata originated from the process of land alienation. The records of the Blantyre Mission of the Church of Scotland show that as early as 1892 European land owners were coercing labour from the Africans resident on their estates.⁹ Accounts of the officials of the African Lakes Corporation (ALC), the first commercial company to have acquired land in Nyasaland, suggest that other forms of semi-servile labour were also "recognized and ameliorated rather than abolished or ignored".¹⁰ The company gave shelter to

⁸ For a different perspective see K.J. McCracken, "Share-cropping in Malawi: The Visiting Tenant System in the Central Province c.1920-1968" in African Studies Centre, University of Edinburgh (ed), Malawi: An Alternative Pattern of Development (Edinburgh, African Studies Centre, 1985) pp.35-65.

⁹ See, for example, Life and Work in British Central Africa (February 1892) pp.1-4.; Life and Work (March 1892) pp.1-5.

¹⁰ F.L.M. Moir, After Livingstone: An African Trade Romance (London, Hodder and Stoughton 1924) pp.46-53. The African Lakes Corporation was formed on 21st June 1878 with a capital of £20,000. It was initially called the Livingstonia Central Africa Company Ltd as a way of acknowledging the

decamping slaves, refugees, and runaway wives who were required "to work for their freedom".¹¹ This practice was in response to the difficulties of mobilizing "free" labour from the villages surrounding the European estates, especially during the planting and harvesting seasons. The difficulty partly arose from the colonial land tenure system.

I

Crown Land and 'Private Estates'

With the coming of British rule in 1891, land was divided into two categories: Crown Land and the 'private estates'. The former was land occupied by the Africans according to their traditional customs, and the latter was that which had been ceded to the settlers by the chiefs. The process of creating Crown Land began between 1885 and 1891 when British Consuls (representatives of the Crown) signed treaties with African chiefs in various parts of the country. The treaties involved "rights of pre-emption" in the land the chiefs controlled. The chiefs supposedly "ceded their sovereignty" to the British Crown with the promise that: "they would at no time cede their territory to any other power or enter into any agreement with any foreign government except through and with the consent of

inspiration derived from David Livingstone and the principal promoters and supporters of the Livingstonia Mission of the Free Church of Scotland.

¹¹ Moir, After Livingstone. pp.50-51.

Her Majesty's government"¹² In a few cases the Consuls acquired, on behalf of the Crown, freehold rights over small pieces of land for the construction of government buildings and other public facilities.

The second series of the agreements were signed between 1891 and 1895. These contained more elaborate provisions on the cession of sovereignty, territorial and mineral rights. In some cases the government negotiated with the chiefs for proprietary rights over land. This was subject to three conditions: first, that the chiefs would be entitled to a certain percentage of the proceeds of the minerals (if found) and the taxes collected in their territories. Second, that their villages and gardens would not be disturbed; and third, that should their lands be sold or leased, they would receive a certain percentage of the money. "By means of these concessions from native chiefs", wrote Sir Harry Johnston, Nyasaland's first Commissioner and Consul-General in 1897, "I acquired the waste lands for the Crown throughout the Protectorate".¹³

With the passage of time, Johnston found that "there were

¹² PRO F.O.84/1942 and F.O.84/2197, cited in Ng'ong'ola, "The Political Economy of Land" p.497. The aim was to check the expansion of the Portuguese into the Shilo Highlands region. For details on this see the historical section of any issue of Colonial Office, Report on the Nyasaland Protectorate.

¹³ PRO C.O.525/100 Memorandum on Land Matters, Minutes and Correspondence (1921); Winston Churchill to George Smith, 30/9/21; Johnston, British Central Africa pp.112-113; Ng'ong'ola, "The Political Economy of Land" p.497.

many cases where tracts of the country were utterly uninhabited and possessing no apparent owner". He therefore acquired them "by first of all recognizing the nearest chief as ruler and then getting him to cede them to the Crown". The reason for this was that: "if only for the protection of native rulers and prevention of grabbing on the part of unscrupulous Europeans...it is necessary that the ownership of these lands should be primarily vested in the Crown so that their disposal may be effectually controlled by the government".¹⁴ By an Order-in-Council in 1902, all the lands acquired by concessions or through purchase from the chiefs became Crown Land. The land was "reserved for future native needs" taking into consideration population growth by natural factors and 'tribal' immigrations. However, where conditions permitted, portions of Crown Land would be leased to European settlers.¹⁵

In establishing Crown Land, Sir Harry Johnston had three objectives: first, he wanted "to secure" African villages from the results of uncontrolled land alienation. He feared that the Africans "were apt to become the serfs of the white man

¹⁴ Johnston, British Central Africa. pp.107-113.; PRO C.O.525/100 Memorandum on Land Matters. Johnston says "in some cases large sums of money were spent by the Government in buying up the waste lands from the natives where it was deemed advisable that a complete control over its disposal should be exercised". p.113.

¹⁵ PRO C.O.626/2 Memorandum on the Demarcation of Crown Lands (Reserved) Rather than Native Reserves, 1912.

when he began to appear as their over-landlord".¹⁶ In effect, what he feared is exactly what happened: the reduction of the Africans on the 'private estates' to labour tenants. Second, by concluding the concessions in the name of the Crown, the government would reserve the right to carry out development works such as roads, canals, railways and others, over anybody's property without compensation. And third, he hoped that the government would assume control of the water supply and mineral resources so as to be entitled to a royalty on the produce of mines if found. Consistent with these objectives, Alfred Sharp, Johnston's successor, stipulated that Crown Land "would be leased or rented in preference to being sold".¹⁷ This stipulation came into effect from 1904, after a lot of land had already been sold.

The irregularities in Johnston's treaties have been documented.¹⁸ To begin with, the legality of the Crown Land treaties was doubtful. Johnston and the Consuls before him did not have the Crown's authority to acquire land from the African chiefs on its behalf. The British Central Africa Order in-Council of 1902 "did not confer on the Crown any new rights in respect of land", but merely defined it as "Crown Land" on

¹⁶ Johnston, British Central Africa p.113.

¹⁷ PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe to Colonial Office: Return of Crown Land sold and leased, July to December 1904.

¹⁸ See B.S. Khrishnamurthy, "The Thomson Treaties and Johnston's Certificate of Claim" in African Social Research, University of Zambia, (December 1969) pp.588-601.

the basis of the treaties already signed.¹⁹ Thus, neither the Crown nor the local colonial administration had any meaningful control over these lands. The only exception was in 1902 when the Foreign Office asked Alfred Sharpe, Johnston's successor, to set aside about 360,000 acres for the British Central Africa Company as subsidy for railway construction.²⁰

Further difficulties arose from the lack of clarity in the provisions of the treaties. For example, though the Africans had the right to allocate and use Crown Land according to their customs, their "security" and freedom would be undermined by the Crown's supposed "right of pre-emption" contained in the chiefs' concessions. They would have no power to obstruct leasing or sale of their lands. In addition, both the concessions and the 1902 Order-in-Council did not specify how much Crown Land was to be left for African occupation and how much was to be sold or leased at any one particular time. For example, 7,388 acres of Crown Land were leased in the Shire Highlands and the Shire Valley between July and December 1904, a further 645 acres confiscated from Arab-Swahili traders in Marimba were sold by public auction, and 3,000 acres in the Central Angoniland were leased to the Dutch Reformed Church Mission.²¹ This shows that Crown lands were

¹⁹ PRO C.O.525/100 Memorandum on Land Matters in Nyasaland, 1920.

²⁰ Khrishnamurthy, "Economic Policy" p.387.

²¹ PRO C.O.525/7 Sharpe to Colonial Office: Returns of Crown Land Sold and leased, July to December 1904.

being occupied at a very fast rate. The administration soon realized that "the Crown had at its disposal a very small quantity of land...[it] was absolutely necessary to cease leasing any portion of the small acreage remaining in government hands".²² This did not happen. More Crown Land was leased in the Shire Valley for cotton production and railway construction in the later years.

The creation of Crown Land presented a major obstacle to the flow of labour to the European estates. During the first two decades of colonial penetration, the Africans living on Crown Land had access to adequate amounts of garden land. Their participation in the wage-labour force was thus limited to the dry season when they did not have much work to do in their gardens. It was those who lived on the 'private estates' who were exposed to the harsh labour demands of the colonial economy. Once a piece of Crown Land was leased or sold, the government had neither the resources nor the personnel to inspect the treatment of the Africans by their European occupiers. Often the landowners appointed their own chiefs and capitaos, "captains", who helped them coerce labour and maintain "work discipline".²³

The task of establishing Crown Land was easier than that of settling claims to the 'private estates'. By the time Harry

²² PRO C.O.525/3 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 6/12/04.

²³ See, for example, L. White, Magomero: Portrait of an African Village (Cambridge, London, New York, CUP) p.90; Johnston, British Central Africa p.169.

Johnston commenced his agreements with the chiefs, several commercial companies, individual settlers and missionary institutions had already acquired large tracts of land. Johnston's first task was to investigate the validity of their claims. He divided them into two categories: claims to mineral rights, and claims to land with or without mineral rights. As regards the former, "the investigation was relatively simple".²⁴ The chiefs alleged to be the grantors of such concessions were examined. If they admitted making the grant, and there was evidence that they had received fair value for the land, the mining concessions were confirmed.

A big challenge was in the case(s) of claims to land or land with mineral rights. These, according to Johnston, were sanctioned "only in cases of very lengthy occupation and much cultivation or building". But such cases were very few. Most claims were to lands which were not effectively occupied or developed: "in most cases the settlers had only arrived after the proclamation of the protectorate".²⁵ Those who had arrived prior to this "had no properly executed documents" to support their claims, making it difficult for Harry Johnston to settle them. Only after receiving "a series of abusive letters" from the claimants did he finally grant the titles.²⁶ In each

²⁴ Johnston, British Central Africa. pp.113-114.

²⁵ Ibid., pp.112-113.

²⁶ PRO FO84/2197 Johnston to Foreign Office, 10/3/1892 and FO2/54 Johnston to Foreign Office, 21/1/1893, cited in Khrishnamurthy, "Economic Policy, Land and Labour" pp.385. See

approved claim the grantee received a "certificate of claim" outlining the boundaries of the property and the terms of occupancy.

II

Africans on the 'Private Estates'

Of major concern to both the colonial administration and the settlers was how to accommodate African villages on the 'private estates'. Neither the settlers nor the administrators wanted to see the Africans removed. The settlers needed labour while the administrators, influenced by the missionaries, wanted "to protect" the Africans by refusing to grant the settlers exclusive rights. They also needed the revenue from the Africans and thus could not permit the settlers to use African labour without paying for it.

As a compromise, the administration included the "non-disturbance clause" in the "certificates of claim" which stipulated that:

no native village or plantation existing at the time of this certificate on the estate shall be disturbed or removed without the consent in writing of Her Majesty's Commissioner and Consul-General.... When such consent shall have been given, the site of such villages or plantations shall revert to the proprietor of the said estate. No natives can make other and new villages or plantations on the said estate without the prior consent of the proprietor.²⁷

also Johnston, British Central Africa. pp.112-114. Johnston says claims which did not have enough evidence were reduced in size.

²⁷ MNA S1/385/23 Pearce to the Marquis of Landsdowne, 7/7/30; PRO C.O.525/160 Secretary of State to Harold Kittermaster, 26/4/36.

In return for residence on the 'private estates' the male head of the household would work for the landlord for one month between March and November, and an additional one month for his tax. The landlord would pay the tax, calculated at the prevailing wage rate of three shillings a month, directly to the District Resident (later District Commissioner) on behalf of his tenant. A "tax certificate" would be given to every tenant who had fulfilled his labour obligation. These were the terms of thangata labour tenancy.

The seriousness of the labour part of this arrangement can be seen from the fact that right up to the 1920s, all ordinances dealing with the 'private estates' were not about land per se, but how to accommodate the Africans on them.²⁸ The central issue was whether to introduce cash tenancy or continue with thangata labour tenancy. Further evidence for this is seen from the absence of cases of massive eviction of Africans resident on private estates for the period covered in this chapter.

Landeg White has noted that during the formative years of the colonial economy thangata was not very harsh on some

²⁸ They included the Lands Ordinance (Native Locations) of 1904, the Native Tenants (Agreements) Ordinance of 1914, the Compulsory Written Contracts Ordinance of 1914, the Native Rents (Private Estates) Ordinance of 1917, and the Natives on Private Estates Ordinance of 1928.

estates. Every working day of the week men gathered at the estate office or warehouse early in the morning. After a roll call they were divided into gangs of twenty to thirty and given their daily fixed tasks, traditionally known as chichiri. For coffee picking the daily chichiri was to fill a basket of 40 lbs. For hoeing, weeding, or preparing new plantations, they were given fixed numbers of rows or distances to cover. The fixed tasks would be finished by midday and tenants "would walk home to help their wives in the village gardens".²⁹ The hut tax requirement was also flexible: "levied in millet, grown in the village gardens and handed over directly to the collectors from Zomba and Blantyre districts". In addition, immigrant labour from Mozambique was also abundant.

The point to emphasize here is that it depended on the individual landlord's labour supply. The undercapitalized planters and all those who could not afford wage labour, and were thus dependent on their tenants, tended to be more flexible for fear of losing their labour. What was particular about thangata was that it was open to abuse. Often, a month's hut-tax labour was stretched to two or three months by simply withholding the signature from the "tax certificate". In fact, there was no precise definition of what constituted "one-month's labour". It was the completion of the chichiri rather

²⁹ White, Magomero p.100.

than the number of days or the amount of time it took which constituted a "day's work". The labourers were marked absent for the day if they did not complete their chichiri, and every incomplete chichiri was carried over to the next day. The "tax certificates" were issued only to the men who had completed their zichiri (plural) in a 30-day period. It was common for the tenant workers to carry over their daily tasks, kugoneka chichiri, (literally meaning "sleeping over") to the next day, even for weeks while they attended to their own gardens. This made the flow of thangata labour very irregular.

However, it was also common for the landlords to exact thangata by force, especially if the workers were not forthcoming. In 1892, D.C. Scott of the Blantyre mission noted that to obtain thangata:

a number of natives had part of their maize crops cut down by a European owner of the land who is also native magistrate for the district, and on whose ground they have had their gardens for the past year or two. Others have been working since then on the owner's plantations in order to save their gardens from a similar fate.³⁰

The planters' response was that: "the said 'destruction of native crops' merely consisted of a few cobs of chimanga (Indian corn) not as much as would keep a native and his family from starvation for a week". They denied "the accusation" that the Africans were working on European estates to save their gardens from being destroyed. Instead, the planters argued, "every boy or girl, woman or man, received

³⁰ Life and Work (February 1892) p.3.; Kandawire, Thangata. p.11.

and do receive the usual wage current throughout the district and payable in beads, calico, or coloured cloth".

Trade goods were routinely used by the planters as a way of underpaying. Inferior goods were often over-valued and tenants were forced to accept them in lieu of cash wages. The use of violence was justified on the grounds that: "the natives living on a European's land do not readily respond to any call for help unless that call is either backed by the promise of a present or a threat of something else".³¹ This was a point of major contention between the settlers and the missionaries in Nyasaland. The latter disputed the former's assumptions:

does a 'European colonist' imagine that the native is unwilling to work and that he can be made to do so by presents and threats? Let him go and see the plantations of the Buchanan Brothers at Michiru, Lunzu, Chiradzulu, and Zomba or the buildings at Mandala, Blantyre and Zomba. These are the products of free labour. The African can work without compulsion of any kind.³²

As Khrishnamurthy has pointed out,³³ the missionaries were of the opinion that there was no shortage of voluntary labour in the country and thus no need for thangata. They were oblivious to the difficulties involved in procuring adequate supplies of "free labour". The seasonal labour demands of the peasant economy, the low wages and poor working conditions prevailing on the Shire Highlands plantations, and the

³¹ Life and Work (March 1892) p.3.

³² Ibid p.3.; Khrishnamurthy, "Economic Policy" p.391.

³³ Khrishnamurthy, "Economic Policy" p.391.

regional competition for labour, adversely affected the flow of "free labour" to the European plantations. The Shire Highlands planters thus had to depend on their tenants for the most part, and especially during the rainy seasons.

III

Evading Labour Tenancy

Granted the coercion involved in the system, some Africans managed to evade it through a variety of subtle but effective ways. The best of these was withdrawal. From as early as 1895, Africans were "withdrawing from centres of European influence to distant districts of the country" due to land problems and forced labour.³⁴ In September 1904, the Deputy Commissioner reported that:

every year Crown lands are being more closely occupied by natives because within recent years private owners have made natives resident on their estates pay rent.... The consequence has been that the natives who previously resided on the private estates have moved on to Crown lands where, of course, they live rent-free and moreover have a fixity of tenure which they do not possess on the private estates.³⁵

During the first two decades of colonial occupation, there was enough room on Crown Land to accommodate those withdrawing from the 'private estates'. It was the increase in the

³⁴ Life and Work (June 1895) p.2.; Kandawire, Thangata. p.13.

³⁵ PRO C.O.525/2 Deputy Commissioner to Colonial Office, 2/9/04, paraphrased.

immigration of the Anguru or Alomwe in the period between 1900 and 1910, and the continuing withdrawal from the 'private estates' which later resulted in the congestion on Crown Land.

Another way of evading thangata was by encroaching on unused parts of the 'private estates' and claiming them as parts of Crown Land. In 1896, Alfred Sharpe noted that: "although [the Africans] might have sold clearly defined blocks of unoccupied country to Europeans, they would from time to time encroach upon these, pick up the best bits, and come in and fell the bush preparatory to planting their own crops on it. This gave rise to disputes."³⁶ In the absence of comprehensive survey maps of the estates, it was very difficult for the Europeans to justify their claims to the lands occupied by the Africans in this manner.

The shifting of gardens and villages on the ceded land was also common. It was a way of reclaiming the lands the villagers had lost to the European settlers. The provisions of the "non-disturbance" clause which prohibited the creation of new gardens and villages were thus repudiated and ignored by the Africans "as their fancies guided them".³⁷ Bad treatment was often the cause of tenant migration from one estate to another: "there was no hindrance in the way of the migration

³⁶ A. Sharpe, "The Geography and Resources of British Central Africa" in The Geographical Journal vol.7 no.4 (June 1896) p.386.

³⁷ Details on this are found in PRO C.O.525/109 Memorandum on Land Matters.; C.O.525/100 Memorandum on Land Matters.

of the native from place to place".³⁸ In that way they could bargain for better terms of occupancy.

The tenants, as well as their wives and children, could also engage in wage labour with their landlords or other employer.³⁹ This was "a common practice" during the dry season when there was little work to be done in their own gardens. In the course of one year they could work for one or more employers in addition to their landlords.⁴⁰ This suggests that tenant labour was not immobile. It could be combined with wage labour. There is evidence suggesting that some migrant wage labourers from the central and northern districts continued to reside on the 'private estates' after they had ceased to work there. The land owners took "little or no action to prevent these incursions".⁴¹ The terms on which such "residents" were accommodated were unclear, but they formed a "floating population" from which labour was drawn at critical times. Their children, born and raised on the plantations, constituted a reserve from which future workers were drawn. From the 1920s, the majority of them became sharecroppers.

³⁸ PRO C.O.525/109 and C.O.525/100 Memorandum on Land matters, 1920.

³⁹ PRO C.O.525/48 F.B. Pearce to Colonial Office, 1/4/13.

⁴⁰ MNA S1/423/27 Draft Report of the Labour Census Taken in the Southern Province, 1925/26.

⁴¹ MNA Q/285 D.T. Jack/Ministry of Economic Affairs, Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Report on an Economic Survey of Nyasaland, 1958-1959 (Salisbury, Government Printer, 1959) pp.37-45.

Those in skilled or semi-skilled employment continued to combine wage labour with sharecropping but paid their rent in cash assessed at three times the prevailing official monthly minimum wage.⁴²

Outright refusal to work or to move out of the estate was another common way of evading thangata. In March 1892, one planter complained that: "for weeks the natives of a certain district have hampered the transport of goods of a large company, simply by refusing to carry loads although civilly asked to do so". It was only after they had been threatened "that they must work...or else pay rent, failing which eviction would follow [that] the men came flocking in. In the end, they received payment for the work done".⁴³ Similarly, in 1903, Joseph Nunan, the High Court Judge, noted that: "with equal cheerfulness and simplicity the natives refrained from specifying any condition on which they might themselves be allowed to remain on the transferred land".⁴⁴ They could easily refuse to offer their labour to the landlords.

Refusal to vacate the estates continued right up to the 1930s. For example, in 1930, an official of the British Central Africa Company (BCA) Company sued two "native encroachers" on the company's Mudi estate in the Blantyre

⁴² MNA 2/285 Jack, Report on an Economic Survey pp.39-42.

⁴³ Life and Work (March 1892) p.3.; Kandawire, Thangata. p.13. For a similar account see Moir, After Livingstone. pp.49-50.

⁴⁴ Quoted in White, Magomero. p.78.

district. At first he had ordered them to leave the estate and pulled down their huts. The Africans refused to move. The district magistrate convicted them on the account that they were not "resident natives" as defined by the 1928 Natives on Private Estates Ordinance (details below). They had commenced to reside and were residing on the estate without the owner's knowledge, and continued to do so after they had been ordered to leave. When the case went to the High Court the conviction was overruled on the grounds that the owner had some knowledge of the two Africans residing on his estate. The eviction itself was illegal because it was contrary to the provisions of the ordinance in question.⁴⁵ The High Court's decision demonstrated the limitations of the landlords' coercive powers.

It was from 1903 that the administration became directly involved in matters related to labour tenancy. The office of the Supervisor (sometimes called Superintendent) of Native Affairs was established, and an official was appointed to inspect labour conditions - including those of tenants. In the same year, J.C. Casson, the first Supervisor of Native Affairs, sued the Blantyre and East Africa Company (B.&EA) for

⁴⁵ MNA S1/727/26 Natives on Private Estates Ordinance: BCA Company versus Jeremiya and Solomon, 28/5/30 to 1/7/30. The ordinance defined a "resident native" as one who owned and resided in a hut on a 'private estate', in which case the two 'natives' were 'resident natives'. The court also held that the estate owner's knowledge of the existence of the two 'natives' on the estate signified his approval of their tenancy.

the indiscriminate exaction of thangata.⁴⁶ As part of his judgement, Joseph Nunan, the High Court Judge and Vice-Consul, suggested that: "this thorny issue could well be resolved by all the inhabitants of private estates agreeing to pay a moderate rent of something in the region of three shillings per annum in return for fixity of tenure".⁴⁷

The suggestion was incorporated into the terms of the Lands Commission appointed a few months prior to the conclusion of the court case, and headed by Nunan himself. Its purpose was "to investigate and report on the conditions of the Africans on the 'private estates'".⁴⁸ The Commission noted that the settlers "had assumed the role and privileges of the feudal seigneuries of the native occupier". Their "serfs" were "frequently subjected to the arbitrary demands of an often autocratic and sometimes uneducated master".⁴⁹ It called on the government to pass a law requiring landowners to set aside, on their estates, some land for African occupation.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Kandawire, Thangata p.15.; Pachai, Land and Politics pp.85-86.

⁴⁷ MNA S1/385/25 Extracts from the judgement by Judge Joseph Nunan, cited in Pachai, Land and Politics p.88.

⁴⁸ MNA S1/385/23 Lands Commission Report 1904; PRO C.O.525/303 Hynde to Bowring, 28/5/25; C.O.525/303 Bowring to Colonial Office, 28/11/25.

⁴⁹ PRO FO2/748 Land Commission to Pearce, 6/4/03; cited in Palmer, "White Farmers" p.217.

⁵⁰ PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe to Colonial Office: Memorandum on the Creation of Native Locations, 1904; MNA S1/385/25 Lands Commission Report, 1904; Pachai, Land and Politics. pp.89-100. The Commission recommended that "all estate owners should set

The Commission failed to realize that the settlers left large tracts of their estates undeveloped precisely in order to attract resident tenants, especially the immigrants from Portuguese East Africa. Part of the land was held for speculative purposes and for sale to new settlers.

IV

Proposed Legal Changes

Acting on the recommendations of the Lands Commission the government passed the Lands Ordinance (Native Locations) in 1904.⁵¹ The ordinance stated that:

every land owner, ...shall set aside a location or locations for natives of a total area not exceeding one-tenth of any undeveloped land in their possession. ...The locations shall be allotted by the Commissioner to village communities or separate native communities or groups of families, residing on the estate at the date of the Ordinance, on the basis of eight acres per family... connected by blood or marriage.⁵²

The settlers' response to the ordinance clearly showed that

aside one-tenth of all undeveloped land totalling 8,000 acres or upwards...in blocks of no less than 8 acres each" for 'native' settlements. Each settlement would consist of no less than ten huts belonging to "responsible" tax-paying heads of families. All isolated settlements of two or three huts would be scrapped. Those not willing to vacate such settlements would be given a three-year lease at no more than one shilling per acre.

⁵¹ The districts to which the ordinance applied were South Nyasa, Upper Shire, West Shire Zomba, Blantyre (including Chiradzulu and Thyolo or Cholo), Ruo, and Lower Shire. PRO C.O.525/1 The Lands Ordinance (Native Locations), 1904.

⁵² PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe to Colonial Office: The Creation of Native Locations, 1904.

their interest lay in the labour provided by the Africans resident on their estates. For example, the Board of Directors of the BCA Company would accept the ordinance on the condition that "the villages and gardens of native immigrants and those of old time settlers or their descendants shall be treated alike". There would be no protection as provided in the "non-disturbance clause". As for the Arguru immigrants, they would be treated as "tenants only, in respect of their villages and gardens".⁵³ They would be settled on the Company's estates solely on the basis of the provision of their labour to the company.

The rest of the settler community likened themselves to the African chiefs. They boasted of the "good relationship" they held with the Africans and asked the government to encourage it "as much as possible". This relationship, the settlers further argued, found its roots in the African idea of always living under a chief or headman:

When a native settled with a chief, he looked to that chief to provide him with garden room and when such land was exhausted, to allow him to take up new land belonging to or under the authority of the chief. If a chief moved, most of his people went with him.... His [the native's] freedom consisted in his right to ample garden room in the sphere occupied by the chief, and in return he gave the chief personal service.⁵⁴

The movement from the 'private estates' to Crown Land was interpreted as a "native custom" and method of making protest.

⁵³ PRO C.O. 525/7 BCA Ltd. Instructions to the General Manager, 1904.

⁵⁴ Cited in Pachai, Land and Politics. p.91.

In their opinion, there was "no widespread movement from 'private estates' to Crown Land". This was an indication of the "good treatment" the Africans resident on the 'private estates' received from their landlords. These arguments were meant to serve one purpose: to enable the landlords^{to} maintain access to the labour of the Africans resident on their estates. Not surprisingly, the ordinance received support from the large landholders who could afford allocating land to the tenants in exchange for labour.

The ordinance threatened the interests of the "small" landholders (those with 8,000 acres or less) who were so dependent on the resident Africans for their permanent labour supply but could not allocate the required 8-acre plots.⁵⁵ The ironic definition of farmers with as much as 8,000 acres as "small proprietors" was, itself, a reflection of their labour needs. The understanding being that locating 8-acre blocks to tenants would result in the reduction in the amount of land left to the planters' own use, and not as many tenants to settle on their estates. They would have more tenants by allocating smaller plots. The big companies had two advantages over the "small proprietors": they could afford larger numbers of wage labourers, and could attract more tenants because they

⁵⁵ Big land owners had no problems in settling large numbers of tenants on their estates. PRO C.O.525/36 W. Manning to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 8/4/11.

had abundant land.⁵⁶

The majority of the settlers, including those who owned large amounts of land and did set aside African locations, never abided by the provisions of the 1904 Ordinance. The plots they allocated were usually less than 8 acres per family, scattered in infertile parts of the estates, and the tenants were often not connected by blood or marriage. Two factors contributed to this: the mobility of the tenants themselves, and the immigration of the Mozambicans. It was difficult to distinguish the villages and gardens of the original inhabitants from those of new immigrants.

Even if the 8-acre blocks were demarcated, the identification of the "responsible heads of families" to whom the plots would be allotted would be a very difficult exercise. Some family heads had more than one wife, their families would thus get a much larger acreage than those who had only one family unit. Because of the system of multiple marriages it was common for one man's wives to live on estates belonging to different landlords thus further complicating the situation. In such cases the 'responsible heads of the families' would be the wives rather than the husbands. The ordinance gave the landlords powers to re-group scattered villages of less than ten huts per settlement, but it was an

⁵⁶ After a long debate small proprietors with less than 8,000 acres were exempted from this provision of the ordinance. PRO C.O.525/1 Creation of Native Locations (Locations on Private Land), 1904.

expensive and risky exercise. It would easily result in such villages vacating the estates and causing a serious labour shortage. Being fully aware of this, the landlords refrained from it. Even if they had implemented it, there would still be the problem of scattered family units due to multiple marriages. As a result of these problems the Land Ordinance was not fully implemented.

Between 1904 and 1920, four pieces of legislation were introduced and two commissions were appointed to inquire into land occupation and tenancy conditions. Citing population pressure on Crown Land resulting from the immigration of Mozambicans and the withdrawal of indigenous communities from the 'private estates', the government proposed the creation of Crown Land Native Reserves in 1912.⁵⁷ The aim was to control the numbers of Africans moving onto Crown Land from the 'private estates' and from Mozambique; and, as discussed in chapter 7 below, to create congestion on Crown Land which would in turn force the Mozambican immigrants to settle on the 'private estates'. The proposal was turned down by the Colonial Office on two grounds: that it would lead to the confinement of Africans to small infertile areas, allowing no room for population increase; and that it would encourage the immigration of Mozambicans to which the Colonial Office was opposed.

⁵⁷ PRO C.O.626/2 Demarcation of Crown Land Reserves, 1912; C.O.525/41 W. Manning to Colonial Office, 20/4/12; C.O.525/48 F.B. Pearce to Colonial Office, 19/4/13.

Upon realizing the failure of the 1904 Land Ordinance (Native Locations) and the proposed Crown Land Native Reserves Ordinance, a new land policy was proposed in 1913 by Major F.B. Pearce, the Acting Governor. Its objectives were: to prevent the residents on European estates from becoming serfs; to secure for the existing African population all their present holdings; and to provide land adequate in area and character for the normal increase of the African population, and for extension of African agriculture incidental thereto.⁵⁸ Every estate owner would be required to enter into a written agreement with the Africans resident on his estate. To avoid abuse of "tax certificates" all taxes would be paid directly to the District Resident from whom the Africans would receive their tax receipts.

The Colonial Office was initially reluctant to approve Pearce's proposal, partly for fear that it would not be accepted by the settlers and partly also because it would require finding or reclaiming land from the settlers for African occupation. When the approval finally came, two bills were introduced in 1914: the Native Tenants (Agreement) Ordinance and the Compulsory Written Contracts Ordinance.⁵⁹ The former's aim was to prevent landlords from evicting tenants refusing rent or labour demands. The latter applied

⁵⁸ PRO C.O.525/48 Major Pearce to Colonial Office, 9/4/13.

⁵⁹ For further details on these bills see Pachai, Land and Politics p.97-99; Palmer, "White Farmers" p.217-218.

mostly to wage workers. After a lengthy debate in the Legislative Council and a lot of lobbying through unofficial channels, the settler community defeated the Native Tenants (Agreement) Ordinance on the grounds that "it was vague".

The other ordinance was similarly abandoned because "it would upset the labour supply and hinder estate development".⁶⁰ The settlers threatened that: "economic cultivation depended upon tenants giving their labour; if the Africans concerned would not cooperate, eviction would be recommended".⁶¹ Both the Colonial Office and the local administration feared that if this threat was carried out, the government would be required to find land on which to settle the evicted tenants. This would be an expensive exercise and Crown Land in the Shire Highlands was already in short supply by this time. It was these fears the settlers used to their advantage. The ordinance was thus abandoned.

The Nyasaland settlers were very good at filibustering. Though a small group, undercapitalized, internally divided, and only indirectly represented in the Legislative Council established in 1907, they were strong enough to "ensnare officials in endless correspondence and interviews".⁶² Every

⁶⁰ Palmer, "White Farmers" p.217-218.

⁶¹ This was the view held by A.L. Bruce of the Bruce Estate at Magomero, Chiradzulu. Shepperson and Price, Independent African. p.198.; Pachai, Land and Politics. p.97.

⁶² Palmer, "White Farmers" p.217. From 1919, the settlers began to ask for their "right" to elect their own representatives. In a petition to the Colonial Office in 1921

time their interests were at stake they garnered support from overseas sympathizers and the local press. "They were frequently successful in amending legislation prior to its introduction, during Legislative Council debates, after bills had passed through the Council, and even after they had been placed on the statute book". The legislation mentioned above was not the only one they defeated in this manner. In 1912, they managed to have the Shire Highlands excluded from the terms of the District Administration Native Authority Ordinance which introduced paid chiefs acting as assistants to District Residents. They feared that it would undermine the landlords' authority over their tenants who would pay more allegiance to the chiefs. During the war, they forced the government to restrict the recruitment and volunteering of the Africans resident on the 'private estates' for carrier and other services.⁶³

V

Proposed Rent Tenancy

Thangata, the immigration of Mozambicans, land shortage and

they complained that: "there are three unofficial members on the Legislative Council who can represent our views...in effect these unofficial members do not represent the community". MNA S1/104/21 Petition by the Nyasaland Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, 7/2/21.

⁶³ PRO C.O.626/2 Nyasaland Protectorate Administration Report, 1918.

poor working conditions on the 'private estates' were among the major causes of the Chilembwe Rising of 1915. Following the rising the government set up yet another Commission "to inquire into various matters and questions behind the rising" and "to consider African grievances in general".⁶⁴ The Commission was told that:

what grieves the native is this: this compulsory work is not thangata at all. The native goes in the morning to a plantation, and he is set so many rows to do. He works from 6 o'clock to 4 o'clock, and if he fails to finish his work he is marked absent on his ticket. And that weak man has to do 2 months' work whereas thangata was one month's work...that is not thangata. It is slavery.⁶⁵

In its final report the Commission concluded that the whole system of estate management was "unsatisfactory". It recommended that an ordinance be passed to regulate the position of the Africans on the 'private estates'. All rents would be paid in cash. In the event of default, eviction would be carried out by an order of court after the concerned tenant(s) had received "reasonable notice to quit".

These recommendations became the basis of the Native Rents (Private Estates) Ordinance of 1917 which aimed at abolishing labour tenancy, except for where tenants themselves opted for it. Here again, the settler community resorted to

⁶⁴ PRO C.O.525/66 The Lyall-Grant Commission, 1916.

⁶⁵ PRO C.O. 525/66 Evidence by Joseph Bismarck to the Lyall-Grant Commission, cited in Pachai, Land and Politics. p.103.

its filibustering tactics. After debating the ordinance "clause by clause"⁶⁶ they delayed the implementation of its watered down version until a year later. They rejected all provisions aimed at illegalizing labour tenancy on the grounds that: "what first brought the native and the European together was a contract of labour in exchange for ground on which the native could make his garden and build his hut".⁶⁷ The importance of the 1917 Ordinance was that it provided legal provisions for the conversion of labour tenancy to cash tenancy, but it did not abolish the former. The landlords were not interested in cash. Their chief concern was labour because it was difficult to procure in unlimited supplies through means other than tenancy. The flow of wage labour was adversely affected by the seasonal demands of the peasant economy, the low wages and poor working conditions obtaining on the plantations of the Shire Highlands, and emigration to South Africa and the Rhodesias.

Three conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing account. First, the incorporation of the Shire Highlands African communities into the colonial economy did not generate a process by which the erosion of their political and land rights led to the total loss of their independence in their ability to dispose of their labour. Land alienation and labour

⁶⁶ MNA S1/172I/19 Secretary, Nyasaland Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce to Chief Secretary, 2/11/16 cited in Palmer, "White Farmers" p.217.

⁶⁷ PRO C.O.525/97 The Jackson Commission Report, 1920.

tenancy, by themselves, were not enough to accomplish the total subjugation of these communities to the demands of the colonial economy. Though vulnerable, these communities had developed subtle but effective ways of evading some of the harsh effects of land alienation and labour tenancy. It was the Mozambican immigrants, structurally much more vulnerable, who suffered most from labour tenancy.

Second, **for** all its violence and exploitation, thangata was not a relentless system. Settlers were always afraid of losing their tenants.⁶⁸ Up to 1920, the thangata tenants were still "very irregular in attendance". They took two or more months to complete their one-month thangata obligation and spent more time working in their own gardens. It was "always difficult to get this class of labour to work regularly".⁶⁹ It can therefore be argued that if the planters failed to immobilize the labour which was already resident on their estates, there was no way they could control the movement of wage labourers from Crown Land and the northern districts. This resulted in the emergence of a very competitive labour market, not only among the local planters but also between them and the external recruiters.

Finally, the above account also demonstrates that there

⁶⁸ See MNA S1/428/27 Draft Report of a Labour Survey, Southern Province, 1925/26; S1/1132/30 Report on Labour Conditions, Southern Province, 1930.

⁶⁹ MNA S1/1113/20 Secretary, Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, to Chief Secretary, 15/12/20; Rob Nash, Secretary, Mlanje Planters' Association, to Chief Secretary, 10/7/20.

was no direct transition from labour tenancy to wage labour. Different labour forms existed on the Nyasaland plantations at any one particular time. Labour tenancy was often combined with wage-labour, especially during the dry season. Starting from 1917, there were legal provisions for the conversion of labour tenancy into cash tenancy. This did not happen. The settlers were interested in labour not rent. Another possible explanation for the absence of cash tenancy could be the tenants' lack of opportunities for raising money on the estates during the period covered here. The wages offered to workers, between 3 and 5 shillings from the 1890s to the WWI, often paid in kind, were not enough to stimulate the transition from labour tenancy to rent. It was from the 1920s that sharecropping emerged as an important alternative to labour tenancy both in the Shire Highlands and on the tobacco estates of the Central Province. This, itself, reflected the growing independence of the tenants and the weakening power of the landlords. Before going into details on this, the next chapter will focus on the development and problems of wage labour.

CHAPTER THREE

WAGE LABOUR, PORTERAGE, AND ORIGINS OF MIGRANCY

Year by year the influence of the District Resident with regard to labour is getting less and less because money is becoming more abundant...the native worker has no desire to work as a labourer for the Blantyre planters [and the] Government has no power to influence a native to work unless the native is willing to do so.¹

The previous chapter examined the inability of the planters to maintain an immobilized tenant labour force on their plantations. Despite incorporation in the colonial economy, tenants retained independence and a wide variety of choices in the sale of their labour or using it for independent agricultural production. The present chapter discusses the responses to local wage employment and labour migration. It argues that these responses varied according to seasons, geography, the nature of local economies, and the degree of colonial influence. Where opportunities for making money were available, notably in the Southern Province, the 'natives' responded by seeking wage employment predominantly on a seasonal basis. Where the colonial state was weak and economic opportunities lacking, as was the case along the lakeshore and in the Central Province districts, at least prior to the

¹ Public Record Office (PRO) C.O.525/35 Notes of a Speech made by the Deputy Governor [F.B. Pearce] Before the Committee of the Chamber of Commerce on the Labour Question, on the 25th of March, 1910; Also in C.O.525/35 Pearce to Secretary of State for the Colonies, [undated] April, 1910; Sharpe to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9/5/10.

1920s, the 'natives' tended to migrate freely to areas of wage employment within and outside the Protectorate.

The chapter also analyses the competition that developed among local employers and between them and external employers. Since competition threatened labour shortage and wage increases, settler employers sought the support of the state to allocate labour in their interest. The evidence reveals that in Nyasaland, as in other colonies, the state was a clumsy, feeble institution whose regulatory efforts produced contradictory effects.² It was incapable of offering sustained support to settler interests,³ had no power to force the 'natives' to take up wage employment, failed to support local employers in their competition with external recruiters, and had no resources to police its borders to keep emigrant

² For examples from elsewhere, see, for example, See John Lonsdale's review of G. Kitching, Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite Bourgeoise, 1905-1970 (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1980) in African Affairs vol.80 no.319 (1981) pp.289-290; B.J. Berman and J.M. Lonsdale, "Crises of Accumulation, Coercion and the Colonial State: The Development of the Labour Control System in Kenya, 1919-1929" in Canadian Journal of African Studies (CJAS) vol.14 no.1 (1980) pp.55-81; and by the same authors, "Coping with the Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State in Kenya, 1895-1914" in Journal of African History (JAH) vol.20 no.4 (1979) pp.487-505.

³ K.J. McCracken, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State: The Impact of the Native Tobacco Board in the Central Province" in Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS) vol.9 no.2 (April 1983) pp.172-192; and by the same author, "Sharecropping in Malawi: The Visiting Tenant System in the Central Province c.1920-1968" in African Studies Center, University of Edinburgh (ed), Malawi: An Alternative Pattern of Development (Edinburgh, African Studies Center, 1985) pp.35-65.

workers within the Protectorate.

During the period from the early 1890s to about 1910, a class of seasonal wage-labourers emerged which laid the basis for labour migration and independent economic activity in the later decades. The two chapters which follow demonstrate that the flow of male labour was increasing just when economic opportunities at home were improving. From the late 1920s, the returns of migrant labour were used to finance commercial fishing and fish-trading along the lakeshore and tobacco production in some districts of the Central Province. This in turn affected the flow of labour to the Shire Highlands plantations.

I

Porterage and the "Labour Districts"

Geography played an important role in the way 'native' communities responded to wage employment. The first form of wage employment associated with colonial penetration was porterage, mtenga-tenga, for goods, and machila, for human beings. Its origins probably go back to the transformations in the slave and ivory trade. Written evidence suggests that Portuguese slave and ivory traders were employing porters and crews for canoes and boats along the Zambezi-Shire trade route from as early as the mid-1800s. They paid their workers in

trade goods and kachaso, a strong gin.⁴ Early European travellers and missionaries in the region travelled by machila, a hammock carried by 'native' porters in turns.⁵ It was through portage that the 'native' communities along the Shire River, the western shores of Lake Nyasa (now Lake Malawi) and the trade routes of the Central Province (Angoniland) became involved in wage labour. This involvement increased with the coming of Scottish missionaries and traders from the 1870s.⁶

The missionaries were also instrumental in the introduction of colonial rule along the lakeshore. For example, between the mid-1880s and 1895, the Livingstonia Mission of the Free Church of Scotland acted as an intermediary in the treaties between colonial officials and

⁴ See F.L.M. Moir, After Livingstone: An African Trade Romance (London, Hodder and Stoughton 1924) pp.41-43.

⁵ Moir, After Livingstone especially chap. vi; H.L. Duff, Nyasaland Under the Foreign Office (London, George Bell and Sons, 1906) pp.51-54; A. Colville, One Thousand Miles in a Machilla: Travel and Sport in Nyasaland, Angoniland, and Rhodesia with Some Account of the Resources of these Countries (London and Felling-on-Tyne, The Walter Scott Publishing Co. Ltd 1911); A. Isaacman and E.C. Mandala, "From Porters to Labor Extractors: The Chikunda and Kololo in Lake Malawi and Tchiri River Area" in C. Coquery-Vidrovitch and P.E. Lovejoy (eds), The Workers of African Trade (Beverly Hills, London, Sage Publications 1985) pp.209-242.

⁶ See Moir, After Livingstone chap.1; M. Gelfand, Lakeside Pioneers: Socio-medical Study of Nyasaland, 1875-1920 (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1964) chaps.1-5; K.J. McCracken, Politics and Christianity in Malawi, 1875-1940 (Cambridge, London, New York, CUP 1977) chaps.1-4; L. White, Magomero: A Portrait of an African Village (Cambridge and New York, CUP 1987) chap.1.

the lakeshore Atonga "chiefs" of the West Nyasa district.⁷ Between 1888 and 1890, Atonga men began to join the police force used against powerful Ayao chiefs in the south.⁸ Some 180 were recruited for the North End War against Arab traders.⁹ In late 1895, Mlozi, the leading slave trader at Karonga, was "captured and brought in by Sergeant-Major Bandawe of the Atonga"¹⁰ who "were from the very first the allies of the white man in his struggles against the Arab and Yao slave traders".¹¹ Subsequently, they became an important source of plantation and portage labour.

The Church of Scotland (Blantyre) Mission, the Free Church of Scotland (Livingstonia) Mission, and their trading counterparts, the African Lakes Company - later African Lakes Corporation (ALC), transported their goods by portage. The goods were brought by boats and canoes from the Indian Ocean up the Zambezi and Shire rivers onto Chiromo and Katunga (now

⁷ J. van Velsen, The Politics of Kinship: A Study in Social Manipulation Among the Lakeside Tonga of Nyasaland (Manchester, MUP for the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, 1964) pp.15-22; H.H. Johnston, British Central Africa (London, Methuen and Company, 1897) chap.iv.

⁸ See Johnston, British Central Africa pp.118-120. Sometime in the early 1890s, Mkanda, a Yao chief in the Mlanje district, "intercepted and slew several Atonga labourers on their way to a European plantation". The incident was followed by "hard fighting" until Mkanda was finally forced out of the Protectorate into Portuguese East Africa.

⁹ van Velsen, The Politics of Kinship p.19.

¹⁰ Johnston, British Central Africa pp.141-142.

¹¹ Quoted in van Velsen, The Politics of Kinship. p.19.

Chikwawa).¹² A series of rapids occur in the middle sections of the Shire River between Chikwawa and Matope. These made it impossible for goods destined for the Shire Highlands and beyond to pass through. Porters were needed to carry the goods from Chikwawa to Blantyre in the Shire Highlands; and to Matope or Liwonde to be transported by boats to the stations along the lakeshore; and from there to the inland stations in the central and northern districts, southern Tanganyika, and North-Eastern Rhodesia (NER).

The importance of portage and water transportation increased with the coming of more European settlers and the beginning of the plantation economy between 1885 and 1900. For example, in 1899, there were not less than fourteen steamers operating from Chiromo on the Lower Shire. By 1904, "about 125 steamers, barges, and boats" were recorded on the river. "The Mang'anja and Sena of the southern portion of the [Shire] valley found themselves servicing the new water transportation network in addition to portering European goods and their owners between Chiromo and Blantyre or Matope".¹³ The planters

¹² See PRO C.O.525/36 General Manager, BCA Company, to First Assistant Secretary, Zomba, 6/3/11; Henry Brown to Government Secretary's Office, 27/2/11; R.S. Hynde to First Assistant Secretary, 22/3/11; A.F. Kidney to First Assistant Secretary, 11/3/11, C. Metcalfe to First Assistant Secretary, 1/3/11; C.O.525/33 T.F. Firr, Director of Public Works, to Acting Deputy Governor, 13/10/10; R. MacDonald, Comptroller of Customs, to Acting Deputy Governor, 14/10/10; E.C. Mandala, Work and Control in a Peasant Economy: A History of the Lower Shire Valley (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press 1990) pp.108-9.

¹³ Mandala, Work and Control pp.108-9 and p.312.

used their field labourers to transport their agricultural products to the Shire River to be shipped abroad by trading and transportation companies such as the ALC, the Oceana Transport Company, the African Flotilla, and the Zambezi Traffic Company.

The beginning of coffee and cotton production in the Shire Highlands between the late 1880s and early 1890s created a new labour market. Africans could thus choose between portering and agricultural wage-labour. Evidence suggests that portering was more popular than agricultural wage-labour. It was casual and flexible, and thus suited the seasonal labour demands of the peasant economy. In the 1890s, for carrying a load of 60 lbs. between Katunga and Blantyre (about 32 miles) and back, wamtenga-tenga, a porter, received 9 pence plus one yard of calico or any other item(s) of equivalent value in lieu of posho, food money. By 1910, the cash wages had increased to 1 shilling 7 pence plus posho which was still in the form of calico and other imported items.¹⁴

By increasing maulendo, "return trips" a porter could receive more than the 3 to 5 shillings per month obtainable in agricultural work. A maximum of three trips per week could be made between Katunga and Blantyre. The posho trade goods could be sold at very high prices or used to mobilize labour for

¹⁴ In the 1890s and early 1900s, the rate was 9 pence in wages plus one yard of calico or any imported item(s) of equivalent value in lieu of food money.

agricultural purposes and for courtship and marriage payments. Because of their domestic value, hoes, blankets, salt and clothing were the most popular posho goods. The workers preferred porterage to agricultural wage-labour because it was more readily available during the dry season when the water level on the Shire River was at its lowest point. This was also the slack period, after harvest, when the 'natives' were not very busy in their gardens. In addition, porterage put less demands on the workers than did agricultural wage-labour. Once the ulendo (trip) was finished, the porters were free to go or to re-engage with the same or a different employer.

Much of the agricultural labour during the period covered here came from five geographical areas: within the plantations (tenants); the villages surrounding the plantations; Portuguese East Africa (PEA); the lakeshore districts (South Nyasa or Fort Johnston, Marimba or Nkhota-kota, and West Nyasa or Nkhata Bay); and the Central Angoniland (Ncheu, Dedza, and Lilongwe). The popular terms for these workers were: thangata or "residents" for the tenants; "local labour" for those coming from the villages surrounding the plantations; "aliens" or "foreigners" for the PEA immigrants; and "protectorate labour" for those from the lakeshore and the Central Province districts. The lakeshore area, Marimba, and Central Angoniland, were the "three large labour districts" which supplied "the greatest proportion of workers used on [the]

Protectorate plantations and industries"¹⁶ "Every now and then", wrote Johnston in 1897, "the chaps [sic: settlers and traders] go up the west coast of Nyasa (where they get very good sport) and come back with a gang of men for work. After supplying their own plantations they pass on the others to planters and traders who want men".¹⁷ The majority of these men were the Atonga from West Nyasa district, the Achewa or Achipeta from Marimba, and the Angoni from Central Angoniland districts. After the defeat of Makanjira and Zerafi, the Ayao from South Nyasa became a regular sight on the Shire Highlands plantations.¹⁸

The nature of the local economies played an important role in the way the inhabitants of the lakeshore areas and the Central Angoniland districts became involved in wage labour. Most lakeshore communities practised a mixed economy based on fishing and the production of cassava, rice, millet, sorghum and maize. The lake provided them with easy access to the regions of East Africa and the Indian Ocean. The Ayao of South

¹⁶ PRO C.O.525/2 Alfred Sharpe to Foreign Office, 19/7/04; PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe, Report on the Trade and General Conditions of the British Central Africa Protectorate For The Year 1903-1904; C.O.525/1 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 20/10/04; MNA S1/428/27 Draft Report of a Labour Survey Taken in Southern Province, 1927; H.H.Johnston, British Central Africa pp.168-69.

¹⁷ Johnston, British Central Africa p.168.

¹⁸ After 1896, Makanjira's area on the east coast of the lake became one of the most important labour supplying areas. See The Central African Gazette, 15th December, 1896. Also cited in M. Gelfand, Lakeside Pioneers p.204.

Nyasa (Fort Johnston, now Mangochi), the Anyanja of eastern Marimba (Nkhota-kota) and the Atonga of West Nyasa (Nkhata Bay) were active trading partners of the Arabs and Aswahili from the east. Trading caravans comprising of soldiers and traders were organized by clan leaders, who were more of military generals than "chiefs". The best time for the caravans was during the dry season when travelling by land was easier and the lake was less treacherous for dhows and canoes.

During the rainy season, men allocated most of their time to fishing which, like long-distance trading, was predominantly a male activity, while agriculture was left predominantly to women and children. Young men proved their manhood through the acquisition of fishing skills and ownership of fishing gear. One colonial official observed that: "the Tonga man is wedded to the lake almost from the day he is born. Thereafter, he quickly learns to tumble in it, to swim like a fish, to exult in his skill on it, and love it in all its moods. His main ambition in life then becomes to own his own net, and paddle his own canoe".¹⁹ Fishing was not labour intensive. For the fishing gear which required a few people to set and haul, labour was mobilized across households and extended families. Just a few fishermen in the villages could provide subsistence. The exodus of men to centres of wage employment

¹⁹ MNA NNC3/1/4 District Commissioner's Report, West Nyasa District, 1934.

did not, therefore, seriously affect production levels in the local economy. Agriculture could be sustained by the women and fishing by the few men remaining in the villages.

Labour migration and local wage employment were important ways of raising money to buy canoes and nets. The inhabitants of the lakeshore districts were thus among the pioneers of both internal and external labour migration. According to Bridgial Pachai, the first party of Atonga men to leave their homeland in Nkhata Bay district to work for the ALC as porters was in 1886, some five years before the establishment of colonial rule. By 1894, some 1,400 Atonga men were working for the company as porters and another 1,400 as field labourers in the Shire Highlands.²⁰ More workers came from Marimba and the Central Angoniland. In 1903 alone, the ALC recruited some 19,000 porters from Marimba district "for the transportation of loads".²¹ During the first two decades of its establishment, the ALC's major trading commodities were ivory, animal hides, cotton products (especially calico), hoes, and blankets. The transportation of these items required a lot of porters. The development of portage for pre-colonial caravans facilitated the development of transportation and

²⁰ B. Pachai, "In the wake of Livingstone and the British Administration: Some Consideration of Commerce and Christianity in Malawi" in Society of Malawi Journal vol.20 no.2 (1967) p.50; Coleman, "International Labour Migration" p.32; Johnston, British Central Africa pp.168-69.

²¹ PRO C.O.525/1 Report of the Trade and General Conditions, 1904.

trade in the colonial economy. A labour force had already emerged which colonial commerce could exploit without further transformation of the relations of production and exchange. Along the lakeshore, this process of "articulation" or "supra-imposition" had been accomplished by the military defeat of the Ayao and political collaboration of the Atonga and Anyanja.

In the Central Angoniland districts, both the Achewa and Angoni were agriculturalists.²² They grew maize, millet and a variety of pulses. They also kept some cattle and goats, but the size of their herds was limited by sleeping sickness due to the presence of tsetse fly in the area. During the dry season, both the Angoni and Achewa organized hunting parties, uzimba, which required a good amount of male labour. Prior to the mid-1880s, the Angoni supplemented their food production by raiding the lesser Chewa and Ayao communities. From around 1885, Angoni chiefs began to lose control over their subjects. They suffered a series of military setbacks against Ayao chiefs such as Mponda and Tambala, and their control over Chewa clan leaders and village headmen began to wane. The resultant breakdown in their political and social order

²² R. Codrington, "The Central Angoniland District of the British Central Africa Protectorate" in The Geographical Journal vol.11 no.5 (May 1898) pp.509-522; P.T. Terry "African Agriculture in Nyasaland, 1858-1894" in The Nyasaland Journal vol.14 (1961); M. Chanock, "Agricultural Change and Continuity in Malawi" in R.H. Palmer and N.Q. Parsons (eds), Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa (London, Heinemann 1977) pp.396-409.

released male labour from the traditional to the colonial economy. Young men previously employed in raiding, hunting, and herding began to migrate to the Shire Highlands on a regular basis.

From 1887, missionary influence began to penetrate Angoni society: "through employment of labour and payment with manufactured goods the mission stations provided the essential background to the later migratory movement" of Angoni men.²³ In 1896, Robert Codrington, the District Collector in Central Angoniland, sent the first batch of Angoni labourers to be employed in the Shire Highlands at 3 shillings a month plus food.²⁴ Some were enlisted in the police force used to subjugate and 'pacify' those who resisted colonial rule. "During all this crisis", wrote Johnston, "we were much helped by the Angoni....These men came down in hundreds to assist us in fighting Zerafi"²⁵ a Yao chief. By 1904, men from Central Angoniland were coming down to the Shire Highlands "in large numbers during the months March to October inclusive". They

²³ G. Coleman, "International Labour Migration From Malawi, 1875-1896" in Journal of Social Science, University of Malawi, vol.2 (1972) p.33; I. Linden, "The Maseko Ngoni at Domwe, 1870-1900" in Pachai (ed), The Early History of Malawi (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1972) pp.237-251.

²⁴ The British Central Africa Gazette, 1st May, 1896; Gelfand, Lakeside Pioneers p.204.

²⁵ Johnston, British Central Africa p.106. For details on the role of Angoni and Ayao in the Nyasaland police force see K.J. McCracken, "Coercion and Control in Nyasaland: Aspects of the History of a Colonial Police Force" in JAH vol.27 (1986) pp.127-147.

were employed in the transportation of goods from Chiromo and Katunga on the Lower Shire River to Blantyre and Liwonde; and as field labourers "opening up new grounds, hoeing, weeding, planting and reaping".²⁵

"Local labour" from the villages surrounding the estates was more readily available during the dry season when the 'natives' were not too busy in their gardens. With access to adequate amounts of land during the first two decades of colonial penetration, the 'natives' in the villages surrounding the estates tended to prefer growing food crops to wage-labour. The coming of labourers from the lakeshore areas and the Central Angoniland provided them with a market for their agricultural products. It was also common for the "protectorate labourers" to work for food in the local villagers' gardens during their spare time, especially on Sundays.²⁶

According to Alfred Sharpe, "the trouble with the African native so far as prolonged industrial work [was] concerned, [was] that he [was] extremely well off". Comparing Nyasaland to India, Sharpe noted that "in India work [was] necessary in order to obtain a livelihood, this [was] not the case in Central Africa [i.e. Nyasaland]. An African's wants [were] trifling and [could] be easily supplied almost without any

²⁵ PRO C.O.525/1 Report of the Trade and General Conditions, 1904.

²⁶ Gelfand, Lakeside Pioneers p.207; The Central African Times, 17th September, 1898.

work".²⁸ The point to emphasise here is not the triviality of the "wants" of the Nyasaland 'natives', but the ease with which they were supplied. By growing food crops during the rainy season and working for wages during the dry season, they were able to satisfy most of their needs. There was no need for "prolonged industrial work". As a result, the flow of labour to the colonial economy varied according to seasons:

In British Central Africa, labour is plentiful from March to November. During December, January, and February native labour is practically unprocurable. Labourers do not work in the wet season chiefly for two reasons:- (a) it is absolutely necessary for them to return to their homes and cultivate their own food crops; and (b) It is distasteful to them to work on plantations in the rains as the housing and food given to native labourers in this Protectorate by European employers has not hitherto been of such an excellent description as to encourage natives to face the rains during a period of outdoor work.²⁹

Citing poor feeding and working conditions (details below), Sharpe further observed that "practically no one wish[ed] to work in the Shire Highlands". Were it not for the fact that the 'natives' had a three shillings hut tax to pay to the government, and that it was necessary for them to work to obtain it, "75 per cent of the labour supply from Angoniland and the lake districts would never go to the Shire

²⁸ PRO C.O. 525/7 Extracts from the Report on the Nyasaland Protectorate, 1904/5.

²⁹ PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 20/10/04. C.O.525/2 Sharpe to Foreign Office, 16/8/04; See also C.O.525/2 Sharpe to Foreign Office, 19/7/04; C.O.525/5 Sharpe to Wemyss, 22/12/03; C.O.525/35 Report on the Blantyre Meeting, June 1910; MNA S1/428/27 Report on a Labour Survey, March 1927.

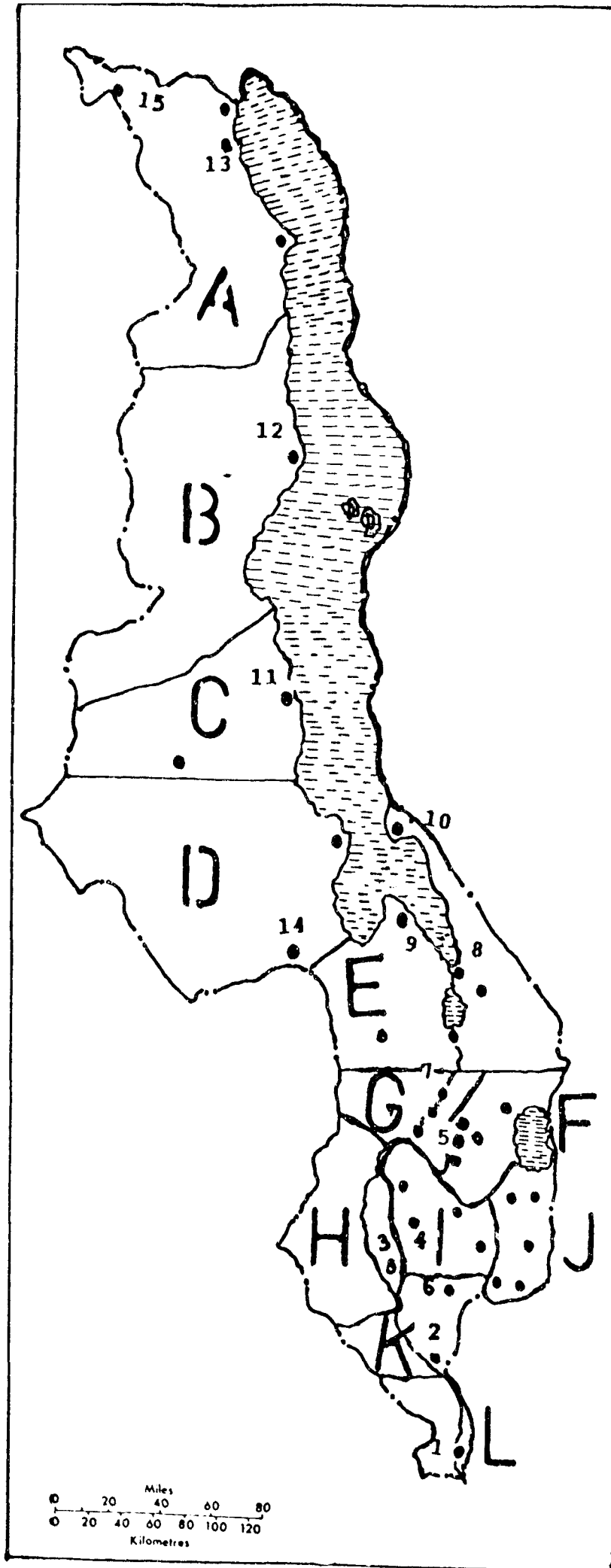


Fig. 2 : ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICTS AND STATIONS, 1891 - 1896

District

- A. North Nyasa
- B. West Nyasa
- C. Marimba
- D. Central Angoniland
- E. South Nyasa
- F. Zomba
- G. Upper Shire
- H. West Shire
- I. Blantyre
- J. Mlanje
- K. Ruo
- L. Lower Shire

Stations

- 1. Port Herald (Lower Shire)
- 2. Chiromo
- 3. Katunga (Chikwa a)
- 4. Blantyre (Kabula)
- 5. Zomba
- 6. Cholo (Thyolo)
- 7. Fort Anderson (Liwonde)
- 8. Fort Johnston (South Nyasa)
- 9. Monkey Bay
- 10. Fort Maguire (Makanjila)
- 11. Marimba (Nkhota-Kota)
- 12. West Nyasa (Nkhata Bay)
- 13. North Nyasa (Karonga)
- 14. Dedza
- 15. Fort Hill (Chitipa)

Fig. 3 : PRESENT REGIONS

AND DISTRICTS

A. Northern Region

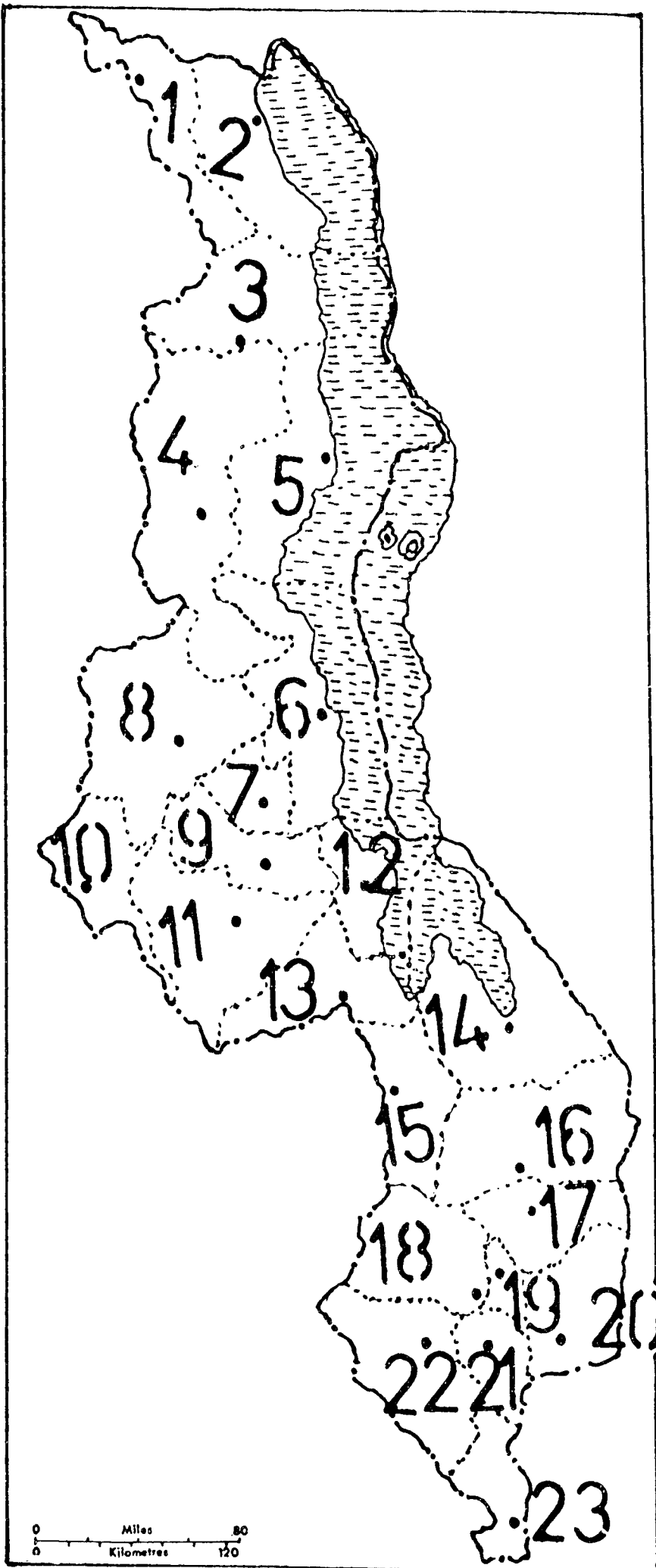
1. Chitipa
2. Karonga
3. Rumphi
4. Mzimba
5. Nkhata Bay

B. Central Region

6. Nkhota-Kota
7. Ntchisi
8. Kasungu
9. Dowa
10. Mchinji
11. Lilongwe
12. Salima
13. Dedza
15. Ntcheu

C. Southern Region

14. Mangoché
16. Machinga
17. Zomba
18. Blantyre and Mwanza (
19. Chiradzulu
20. Mulanje
21. Thyolo
22. Chikwana
23. Nsanje



Highlands".³⁰

However, hut tax was not a reliable mechanism of labour mobilization in Nyasaland. Introduced in 1891,³¹ it was collected mostly in areas south of the lake where the government was in firm control. Tax collection was an extremely difficult task along the lakeshore and in the central and northern districts. Administrative district centres (excluding stations) were few and scattered - just about thirteen of them in ^{the} whole country by 1908. The District Residents relied on very few untrained local policemen, just about 369 in the whole country by 1914.³² There were numerous exemptions in the northern districts due to lack of economic opportunities. It was only after 1904 that the government was

³⁰ PRO C.O.525/5 Sharpe to Wemyss, 22/12/03.

³¹ The Portuguese were already collecting taxes in the Lower Shire by this time. In 1891, H.H. Johnston, Nyasaland's first Commissioner and Consular-General, proposed a poll tax of 6 shillings but was reduced to a hut tax of 3 shillings. A few years later, a differential tax system was introduced: 3 shillings for those who had worked for a white employer for at least one month, and 6 shillings for the rest. Normally it was the 3 shillings hut tax which was collected. In 1909, a hut tax of 12 shillings was imposed on migrant labourers, partly to discourage the emigration, and partly also "as a reasonable provision to pay for the expenses of looking after the natives who insist[ed] on going to South Africa". The tax "was found to be unworkable" and was "therefore abandoned". PRO C.O.525/34 Proceedings of the House of Commons, 30/3/10; C.O.525/33 H.R. Wallis, Acting Governor, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 24/9/10.

³² McCracken, "Coercion and Control" p.128. See also PRO C.O.525/2 and C.O.525/3 Summaries of District Reports, 1904/5.

able to collect tax throughout the country.³² Even then, it was still "a hit or miss proposition which rewarded those individuals who could avoid the collectors".³³ In fact, once the tax was collected, the government had no control over the male 'native'. He was free to do as he pleased: he could choose to migrate to the south or grow cotton and food crops at home. Assessed at the rate of 3 shillings a year in the 1890s and early 1900s, which was also the prevailing monthly wage rate, it could produce only one-month's labour per man per year.³⁴ It could also be paid in a variety of ways: by doing 'public work' for the government, working for a white employer for one month (refer chapter two), in cotton, livestock, eggs, and in cash which could be raised by brewing beer or selling food crops.

³² PRO C.O.525/1 Ncheu Sub-district Report, 1904; Sharpe to Colonial Office, 24/4/05.

³³ B. Fetter, "Malawi: Everybody's Hinterland" in African Studies Review vol.xxv nos.2 and 3 (June/ September 1982) p.80. Fetter discusses the effects of colonial penetration by looking at three spatial variables: the location of administrative centres, schools, and the distribution of the African population. For details on tax collection see E. Smith, Report on the Direct Taxation of Natives in the Nyasaland Protectorate (Zomba, Government Printer, 1937); and C.A. Baker, "Tax Collection in Malawi: An Administrative History, 1891-1972" in The International Journal of African Historical Studies vol.vii no.1 (1975) pp.40-62.

³⁴ See White, Magomero p.83 and pp.100-103.

II

The State and the Employers

The planters wanted the state to be directly involved in procuring labour, but it was not in a position to offer them sustained support. It lacked the resources, personnel and political power over African chiefs in most of the districts north of the Shire Highlands. The first case of state intervention in matters of labour was in 1895 when Sir Harry Johnston, the first Commissioner and Consul-General issued the Native Labour Regulations, also known as the "Queen's Regulations", "to regularize better arrangements" for the employment of 'native' workers.³⁵ Employers were allowed to recruit labourers from the "labour districts" on contracts not to exceed twelve months. All contracts were to be signed before a government magistrate, with every recruit receiving a copy. The employer would pay the government a registration fee of one shilling per every recruit. The labourers were entitled to food and passage money to and from the place of work; medical, sanitary, and accommodation facilities at the place of work; and wages in cash.

There is no evidence suggesting that the "Queen's Regulations" were implemented. Often the employers used force to obtain labour from the Central Angoniland. They employed 'native' recruiting agents and gave "large presents to local

³⁵ British Central Africa Gazette, April, 1895; MNA COM-8/1 Draft Report of the Committee to Enquire into Emigrant Labour, 1935; Gelfand, Lakeside Pioneers pp.207-208.

chiefs" who sent their men to work.³⁷ By 1898, "free recruiting" had led to "widespread abuses" and the government decided to intervene to stop the practice. The "Queen's Regulations" were amended and replaced by a "new" set of Native Labour Regulations³⁸ which were partly also a response to labour "touting" by external recruiters. By this time "touts" from North-Eastern Rhodesia and Portuguese East Africa were enlisting workers in Central Angoniland. The matter came to a head when a 'native' agent by the name of Matola, a capitao of Eugene Sharrer, founder of the British Central Africa Company, was charged with attempting to send labourers to Beira. Prior to this incident, in 1897, Alfred Sharpe had sent 200 men from Port Herald district, present Nsanje, in the Lower Shire, for railway construction in Southern Rhodesia. However, it was not until 1903 that the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau (RNLB) was officially permitted to recruit in Nyasaland.³⁹

Under the "new" Regulations, the government took over the responsibility of forwarding labour from the Central Angoniland to the Shire Highlands. District Residents (later

³⁷ PRO C.O.525/1 Report on the Trade and General Conditions, 1904.

³⁸ The "new" regulations were not fundamentally different from those of 1895. The major difference was that for the first time the government was directly involved in securing labour for the planters, and that the use of 'native' agents and chiefs was prohibited.

³⁹ The Central African Times, 2nd April, 1898, cited in Gelfand, Lakeside Pioneers p.209

District Commissioners) and tax collectors were instructed to "encourage all natives who were unable to find money for their taxes to go down to the Shire Highlands to work for it".⁴⁰ To distribute the labour evenly, the planters and traders set up a Native Labour Bureau in 1900.⁴¹ The 'natives' who had no money to pay their taxes were sent to the Bureau with letters giving a list of their names, district of origin, and the amount of tax owing. They were required to work for the number of months required to earn the amount of tax they owed. By this arrangement, some 11,000 workers are said to have passed through the Bureau yearly.⁴²

Though initially quite successful, the arrangement between the Bureau and the government was short-lived. The government found it difficult to obtain adequate amounts of labour from the "labour districts" by using the tax mechanism. Those recruited by this method worked for only one month to obtain their tax receipts and returned home. Settler employers thus resorted to waylaying and periodic coercion of labour in the Central Angoniland by using 'native' capitaos. In 1901,

⁴⁰ PRO C.O.525/5 Sharpe to Wemyss, 22/12/03.

⁴¹ The Bureau was an association of planters and traders with no direct connections with the government. At the beginning of the planting season every member deposited 1 shilling per head for every labourer he wished to employ through the Bureau. In 1901, it appointed its own agent to recruit in Central Angoniland.

⁴² PRO C.O.525/3 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 26/11/04; C.O.525/1 Proceedings of a Meeting between the Governor and the Bureau Representatives, 19/11/04.

William Manning, the Acting Governor, sent Joseph Nunan, the High Court Judge, to the Central Angoniland to investigate complaints about the behaviour of the settlers and their capitaos.⁴³ In 1903, the Foreign Office instructed the Nyasaland government to stop forwarding labourers to the Shire Highlands. This was partly in response to representations by missionaries on the poor treatment of workers by their settler employers, and partly also as a matter of policy. Both the Foreign Office, and later the Colonial Office, were opposed to government involvement in the mobilization and allocation of labour for the settler employers. This became the local administrations policy from March 1904, leaving the settler employers "to [their] own resources in the matter".⁴⁴ The curtailment of the arrangement caused a "serious financial loss to the Bureau".

Later that year, the Bureau appointed a deputation: "to lay before the Commissioner the present unsatisfactory financial state of the Association, and to ascertain if anything could be done by the Protectorate administration to assist them".⁴⁵ The Commissioner's response was that he "was sorry that the Labour Bureau was in an unsound financial

⁴³ The Central African Times, 1st June, 1901; Gelfand, Lakeside Pioneers p.214. The recruiters were subsequently instructed to erect temporary shelters along the route the workers travelled.

⁴⁴ PRO C.O.525/5 Sharpe to Wemyss, 22/12/03.

⁴⁵ PRO C.O.525/1 Proceedings of a Meeting, 19/11/04.

condition". However, the government "had no interest in their Association beyond the fact that the Bureau had agreed to be responsible for the good behaviour of men accepted as recruiters of labour in the Lake Province". He added: "the Administration will never again act as 'labour agent'. All the Administration can do is to say to natives, 'you must pay taxes, if you have no money to pay your taxes, then you can always go and work to obtain it', the government cannot coerce men or compel them to apply to the Bureau".⁴⁶

In a separate dispatch to the Colonial Office the Commissioner stated that he did not see any special reason or advantage in the continued existence of the Bureau. In the Commissioner's view, the 'natives' of the Protectorate were free in the matter of labour. They could choose their employers and go where they liked to obtain work without applying to government officials or the Labour Bureau. The result was that the local employers found it "no easy matter to recruit labour directly in Angoniland" and the lakeshore districts.⁴⁷ Though the state refused to get involved in labour mobilization in the "labour districts", it was periodically called upon to turn out the thangata tenants who refused to work or wage-labourers who "deserted" before the expiry of their contracts.⁴⁸ It was usually less successful in

⁴⁶ PRO C.O.525/1 Proceedings of a Meeting, 19/11/04.

⁴⁷ PRO C.O.525/3 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 26/11/04.

⁴⁸ See McCracken, "Coercion and Control" pp.128-129.

dealing with the "deserters" than with the tenants who were easier to trace.

The year 1904 thus marked the beginning of an uneasy relationship between the settler employers and the colonial state. Four other developments took place in 1903/4 which complicated this relationship: the beginning of the 'native' cotton industry; the introduction of the Native Labour Ordinance; the beginning of railway construction; and the signing of an agreement with the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) for the recruitment of Nyasaland labour for the South African gold mines. These developments had three implications: they increased the competition among the employers; they offered the 'native' workers a greater freedom of choice; and forced the state to choose whom to support. It was especially in relation to the latter point that the state manifested its weaknesses and contradictions. It failed to offer sustained support to the local employers and to control the movement of migrant workers.

III

Local Competition For Labour

In 1903, Nyasaland became a centre for an experimental cotton scheme by the British Cotton Growers Association (BCGA).⁴⁹ The

⁴⁹ This account comes from L. Vail, "The State and the Creation of Colonial Malawi's Agricultural Economy" pp.46-47. The Association was a quasi-governmental body with direct

government began to distribute cotton seed to 'native' growers: first, in the Lower Shire and the Shire Highlands, and later in the Upper Shire Valley (Liwonde) and along the lakeshore.⁵⁰ One of the reasons the majority of the 'natives' in the Lower Shire, the Shire Highlands, and the Upper Shire Valley took up cotton growing was to obtain the three-shillings tax rebate. These were areas where the colonial state was in firm control and tax collection was easier than in the northern districts. Once that was done, they were free to carry on with their food production or to migrate to more lucrative labour markets outside the Protectorate.

In response to complaints from Scottish missionaries about poor working conditions on the plantations, the government issued yet another set of Labour Regulations in 1903.⁵¹ These became the basis of the 1904 Native Labour

connections with the Colonial Office. Nyasaland was chosen for the experiment because the Protectorate was about to be transferred from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office.

⁵⁰ PRO C.C.525/3 British Cotton Growing Association Land Purchases, 1904; and Memorandum on Cotton Growing, 1904; C.O.525/4 Sharpe, "Important Industries of the Protectorate, 1904"; C.O.525/1 Report of the Ncheu Sub-district, 1904; C.O.525/9 William Wheeler to Acting Commissioner, 14/8/05; C.O.525/33 J.S.J. McCall to Acting Governor, 28/7/10; C.O.525/33 Cotton Ordinance, 1910.

⁵¹ The Regulations prohibited the employment of women and children under sixteen years of age in "men's tasks" such as carrying loads. Employers were required to provide hospitals, medical, accommodation and sanitary facilities for their workers; cases of death to be reported in writing to the nearest government official within 24 hours of their occurrence. The Commissioner would appoint a Superintendent of Native Affairs who would act as a labour inspector.

Ordinance, the first coherent 'native' labour legislation in the Protectorate.⁵² The ordinance contained three key parts dealing with recruiting, general conditions of work, and emigration. Part one prohibited recruiting without written permission from the Commissioner. The use of chiefs and 'native' recruiting agents in procuring labour was similarly prohibited. Employers were required to enter into written contracts with their workers signed before a magistrate. Contracts of less than one month were not binding. The government would receive a registration fee of one shilling plus an advance of one year's hut tax per every recruit. All wages were to be paid in cash.

The settler employers felt that these provisions were inimical to their interests. They complained that:

the contract is treated by the local administration as unilateral. In some cases, after "signing on" before a magistrate, the "boys" do not go to work on the plantations at all; in a great number of cases they leave without notice and before the expiry of the contract period of service. In neither case do appeals to the local officials to take steps to compel the labourers to fulfil the terms of their contract meet with any practical response. The most common reply is that it is impossible to find the "boy" and make him return to work.⁵³

There was a great deal of force in the government's response. Keeping track of the "boys" would be a time-consuming and very expensive exercise. The government did not have adequate resources and personnel for such a task. Worse still, once the

⁵² PRO C.O.525/1 Draft Native Labour Ordinance, 1904.

⁵³ PRO C.O.525/16 Extracts from the Morning Post, Tuesday May 8, 1906.

labourer had worked for one month for the three shillings hut tax, he was free to leave. In the case of the workers who left before their contracts expired, the government refused to refund the registration fees and hut taxes advanced by the employers.

The second part of the ordinance which required employers to provide food, housing and sanitary facilities would have been controversial if it were implemented. The government, itself, did not provide such facilities for its workers. In fact, the majority of the employers could not afford them. As well, the government would have found it difficult and expensive to inspect feeding, housing and sanitary conditions in the scattered villages of the thangata tenants and the chitando compounds of the wage-labourers. In March 1901, the Bureau entered into an agreement with the Blantyre Mission for the daily inspection of its labour compounds by the mission's trained Medical Officer and for the treatment of sick labourers. The mission would receive 2 pence per every out-patient case and a yearly payment for in-patient cases.⁵⁴ Records on health conditions, mortality and morbidity rates on the estates are hard to come by. For sure, medical facilities and staff were non-existent over wide areas. Only larger plantations had dispensaries where workers were treated when

⁵⁴ The Central Africar Times, 9th March, 1901, cited in Gelfand, Lakeside Pioneers p.214.

sick.⁵⁵

The third section contained provisions on emigrant labour. The migrants could leave the Protectorate to seek work abroad on four conditions: that they were "unengaged labourers"; had paid their taxes; had made "satisfactory provisions" for the maintenance of their families during their absence; and had no debts or any other legal obligations. These conditions did not reflect the realities of Nyasaland's oscillating labour migration. With the exception of the provision relating to hut tax, the government had no mechanism to verify the claims of the prospective emigrants on all the other conditions. Those wishing to emigrate destroyed contracts signed with local employers to avoid being identified. Alternatively, they changed their names. The same hut tax certificate obtained from the advance made by the local employer could be used as evidence that one's hut tax was paid. The tax certificate could also be "borrowed" from a relative or obtained by growing cotton for just one season. It is probably for the latter reason that the 'natives' from some areas of Upper Shire and Central Angoniland tended to migrate after harvest, during the dry season.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ See MNA S1/1132/30 Acting Senior Provincial Commissioner, Report on Labour Conditions, Southern Province, 1930.

⁵⁶ PRO C.O.525/7 Report of the Central Angoniland District, 1905. It stated that "Johannesburg seems the only market where many of our natives can hope to obtain labour during the dry season".

The introduction of the Native Labour Ordinance in 1904 was not the cause of labour migration. Evidence suggests that as early as 1899, Nyasaland 'natives' were already migrating to Beira, Southern Rhodesia, and South Africa.⁵⁶ In 1900, a group of missionaries and planters signed a petition of protest against the migration: "what we want is that the labour which is in British Central Africa should stay in British Central Africa and not to be exploited for the benefit of other countries".⁵⁷ In 1903, Alfred Sharpe estimated the emigration from the "labour districts" at about 15,000 labourers. The figure "steadily increased" in 1904.⁵⁸

What was particular from that year was that the emigration increased simultaneously with the internal competition for labour. The beginning of railway construction in 1903⁵⁹ created competition for labour between four groups

⁵⁶ See Coleman, "International Labour Migration" p.36.

⁵⁷ The petition was first published in The Central African Times, 25th November, 1899. See R.B. Boeder, "An Historiographical Essay on the Effects of Labour Migration on Rural Life in Malawi", University of Malawi, Chancellor College, History Department Seminar Paper (1972) p.1; Coleman, "International Labour Migration" p.36; Gelfand, Lakeside Pioneers p.211.

⁵⁸ PRO C.O.525/2 Sharpe to Foreign Office, 19/7/04. Also in Sharpe to Robert Codrington, 9/5/04; Codrington to Sharpe, 25/6/04.

⁵⁹ Railway construction in Nyasaland was done by private companies which were more interested in making money than in providing better working conditions. For details see L. Vail, "The Making of an Imperial Slum: Nyasaland and its Railways,

of employers: the Shire Highlands Railway Company (SHRC); trading and transportation companies; the planters; and external recruiters. By July 1904, the SHRC had about 2,500 men working on its "private line" between Port Herald (present Nsanje) and Chiromo.⁶¹ It also employed a "considerable number" for the construction of the line between Chiromo and Blantyre and for agricultural work on its cotton, coffee, chilies, sisal, rubber and maize plantations.⁶² To outbid its competitors, the Company imported, duty free, "large stocks of calico", hoes, and other trade goods with which to pay its workers.⁶³ The action caused conflicts with trading companies which feared that the use of trade goods as wages would adversely affect their businesses. On the recommendation by the Comptroller of Customs the government gave the SHRC "a qualified permission to sell" the calico to its labourers "to

1895-1935" in JAH vol.16 no.1 (1975) pp.89-112; and by the same author, "Railway Development and Colonial Underdevelopment: The Nyasaland Case" in R.H. Palmer and N.Q. Parsons (eds), The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa (London, Los Angeles and Berkeley, 1977) pp.365-395; "The Political Economy of East-Central Africa" in D. Birmingham and P. Martin (eds), History of Central Africa vol.2 (London and New York, Longman 1983) pp.200-250; and "The State and the Creation of Colonial Malawi's Agricultural Economy" pp.53-56.

⁶¹ PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 16/8/04.

⁶² PRO C.O.525/10 Extracts from the Financial News, February December 16, 1904.

⁶³ PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe to Foreign Office, 7/3/04.

avoid damaging local trade".⁶⁴

Though the SHRC continued to pay its workers in trade goods almost up to the end of the construction of the Chiromo-Blantyre line in 1908, the competition for labour was not in its favour. Railway construction was characterized by very poor working conditions. Workers slept in temporary grass shelters or wattle-and-daub huts which provided no comfort during the rainy season. Wages, if paid in cash, were at the rate of three shillings per month. Usually it was the semi-skilled and skilled workers who received wages in cash. The majority of those employed in preparing the ground were paid in kind, especially during the first three years of construction. The food the company provided consisted of only raw maize grain, chimanga. No grinding and cooking facilities were provided prior to 1905. What the workers did was "to take the grain issued to them, roast it on a piece of tin over an ordinary fire and then chew [it] in the form of popcorn".⁶⁵ "Food of this description", wrote Alfred Sharpe to George Wemyss of the SHRC, "will keep a man alive and although he gradually gets weaker and weaker, he will live a month or more on it - that is to say, it prevents him from starving and that is what your labourers are doing". He went on to advise that:

⁶⁴ PRO C.O.525/5 Sharpe to Clement Hill, 26/1/04. The permission was valid up to 1st May, 1905.

⁶⁵ PRO C.O.525/5 Sharpe to Wemyss, 22/12/03.

"what you should do with the large number of natives employed is to make arrangements for the grinding of the corn and issue a daily ration of wholesome food such as cooked maize meal, or cooked rice, or beans, together with something to flavour it in the shape of salted fish or any kind of relish".⁶⁶

Low wages and poor working conditions made the SHRC "an object of aversion to the Angoni" and 'protectorate labourers' "who [would] not seek employment in connection with it".⁶⁷ An attempt to recruit 1,000 Atonga from West Nyasa in 1904 resulted in only 100 being obtained.⁶⁸ The Oceana Transport Company offered to bring down to the Lower Shire in its lake steamers all the labourers the SHRC could recruit in the lakeshore areas "at a low rate of 7 shillings 6 pence per head". The offer was turned down "on the grounds that it was too high a rate".⁶⁹ The Company's labour supply improved during the dry season of 1905 when some 9,000 men were employed.⁷⁰ This reflected the seasonal variability of the

⁶⁶ PRO C.O.525/5 Sharpe to Wemyss, 22/12/03.

⁶⁷ PRO. C.O.525/1 Ncheu Sub-district Report, June 1904. See also Mandala, Work and Control pp.109-110.

⁶⁸ PRO C.O.525/6 Bradford Leslie, Chairman, the Shire Highlands Railway Company, to Under Secretary of State, 29/3/04.

⁶⁹ PRO C.O.525/1 Beaton to Williams, 23/6/04. See also PRO C.O.525/2 Sharpe to Metcalfe, 21/12/03; Metcalfe to Sharpe, [undated] 1904; Sharpe to Foreign Office, 7/3/04; C.O.525/5 Sharpe to Wemyss, 22/12/03; Sharpe to Clement Hill, 26/1/04.

⁷⁰ PRO C.O.525/7 C. Metcalfe to the Secretary, BCA, 8/5/05; Sharpe to Colonial Office, 9/5/05.

wage-labour supply. By October, "the large majority" of the workers had returned home to prepare their gardens for the planting season.

In addition to the low wages and poor feeding, railway work was avoided because it was inordinately strenuous, done in malaria-ridden areas of the Lower Shire and the Lower Phalombe plain. Disease and death were very common especially among the unacclimatized recruits from the Central Angoniland and the Northern Province districts.⁷¹ The Company's medical staff and health facilities "were inadequate to deal with the large number of labourers employed".⁷² Up to December 1905, the medical staff consisted of only one Medical Officer and one European nurse, who herself died before the end of the year, and a few African "dressers". Only at Chiromo, the main station, was there a hospital and dispensary. At various camps up the line, only "small wattle-and-daub huts were erected to serve as hospitals, but as there was no professional advice or treatment possibly owing to the lack of properly qualified medical staff, these "hospitals" remained unoccupied".⁷³ The Medical Officer was preoccupied with European patients at Chiromo.

Between May and July 1905, mortality among African workers was so high that various missionary bodies made

⁷¹ PRO C.O.525/7 Whitehall to Gregory, 3/4/05.

⁷² PRO C.O.525/9 F.B. Pearce to Colonial Office, 2/12/05.

⁷³ PRO C.O.525/9 Pearce to Colonial Office, 2/12/05.

representations to the Governor on the subject. A scandal was averted only by the seasonal fluctuations in the labour flow as workers returned home at the beginning of the planting season. It was common practice in Nyasaland to refuse pay and rations to "local" wage-labourers and thangata tenants who fell ill. However, "protectorate" and "foreign" labourers who settled on the estates were paid and given rations for the days they were absent from work on account of sickness.⁷⁴

The internal competition for labour favoured two categories of employers: those who offered higher wages and better working conditions, especially the trading and transportation companies, and the agricultural companies which held large tracts of land on which tenants were settled. According to William Manning, the agricultural companies such as the ALC (also a trading and transportation company), the BCA, B.E.A. Coy, and A.L. Bruce Trust, "were never in need of labour".⁷⁵ The same applied to the transportation and trading companies as this account from the ALC manager shows:

the rules and regulations made in March last with regard to the recruiting of labour have not in the least affected our labour supply. On the contrary, since we have commenced to pay our natives in cash, instead of in kind as has hitherto been the practice, we have had more labour than we could give employment to, and we have not had to recruit a single man, they come to us of their

⁷⁴ MNA S1/1132/30 Report on Labour Conditions, 1930.

⁷⁵ PRO C.O.525/35 Manning to Colonial Office, 9/5/10; 11/3/11 and 8/4/11.

own free will and accord.⁷⁵

The Oceana Transport Company had a similar experience. In May 1904 alone, it recruited 797 labourers around Lilongwe, and "several hundreds in the Dedza sub-district" of the Central Angoniland for its cotton plantation at Chiromo. The Company Manager offered the recruits 5 shillings a month plus food.⁷⁶ By June that year, the Company had between 1,300 and 1,400 workers "clearing the ground for cotton, brick-making, building etc". The Supervisor of Native Affairs was convinced that: "the fact that Mr. White [Manager of the Oceana Company] has engaged, on the spot, as many men as the Railway Company have working altogether on both sections (some 1,300) although his rate of pay is lower, seems to me to show a disinclination on the part of natives to undertake work on the railway construction".⁷⁷ Casson was probably unaware that at 5 shillings a month plus food and transport, or passage money in lieu of transport, the Oceana Company's terms were better than those of the SHRC.

Some employers benefitted from good treatment of their workers. A good example of these was the Zambezi Industrial

⁷⁵ PRO C.O.525/1 Beaton to Williams, 23/6/04.

⁷⁶ PRO C.O.525/1 Report of the Central Angoniland District, May, 1904.

⁷⁷ PRO C.O.525/1 Charles Casson to the Commissioner, 21/6/04.

Mission (ZIM) near present Chiradzulu which, in 1904, reported that:

we find labour fairly plentiful at present and we are able to employ as many people as we require. We have however heard that some people are a little scarce and the Manager of the Blantyre and East Africa Co. has asked us to send any people we do not need to him as they are scarce. We do not think that the labour notice issued has in any way affected the labour market. At this time of the year the natives want work. If they get 4 shillings or 5 shillings each month, they are of course well pleased, but rather than return home, they would rather engage from 3 shillings or 2 shillings a month even though it was in calico.⁷⁸

The only reason the B.&E.A. Company could have been "a little scarce" of wage-labourers was poor working conditions. It had enough land on which thangata tenants were settled.

Two explanations could be given for the workers' willingness to work for wages as low as 2 or 3 shillings a month, even though it was in calico: first, it reflected the seasonal variability in the flow of wage-labour, and second, it suggests that the ZIM had better treatment for its workers than the B.&E.A. Company. The victims of the internal competition for labour were the "smaller" planters, especially since the big firms "had no intention of going to any expense in order to supply the smaller planter with native workers".⁷⁹

⁷⁸ PRO C.O.525/1 W.W. Miller to Williams, 23/6/04.

⁷⁹ PRO C.O.525/35 Manning to Colonial Office, 9/5/10; 11/3/11 and 8/4/11.

IV

External Recruiters and Local Reactions

Competition for the labour supply intensified with the beginning of external recruiting from 1903. The government had granted permission to the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau (RNLB) to recruit up to 3,000 Nyasaland 'natives' for work in Southern Rhodesia. In the same year, the Foreign Office signed an agreement with the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) to recruit up to 3,000 Nyasaland workers for the South African gold mines. The agreement was first proposed in 1902 but was opposed by the Nyasaland settlers and missionaries.⁸⁰ When it was finally approved by the Foreign Office in 1903, the terms included a capitation fee of 10 shillings per every recruit, and two-thirds of the wages to be paid as deferred payment. The Nyasaland government would "supervise" the recruiting and forwarding of the labourers to the WNLA agent based in the country. The agent was himself a government official who had been seconded to the WNLA. The Association would provide food, transportation, accommodation and medical facilities for the workers on their way to and from the mines.⁸¹

⁸⁰ PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe to Foreign Office, 16/8/04; The Central African Times, 3rd January, 1903.

⁸¹ For details see PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe, Report of the Nyasaland Protectorate, 1904; Sharpe to Foreign Office, 16/8/04; MNA S36/3/2/5 and PAM/704 G.N. Burden, Nyasaland Natives in the Union of South Africa (Zomba, Government

Though the white community in Nyasaland was collectively opposed to the agreement, there were some major sectional differences in their opposition. For example, the missionaries feared that emigration would be removing people from the areas under their influence:⁸³

our mission staff at Livingstonia...strongly feel that the deportation of the natives will prove ruinous to them, and to a great extent undo the work which for twenty-five years they have been seeking to accomplish in civilizing and elevating the people, they do not feel at liberty to issue instructions, which otherwise they should like to have done, warning natives against accepting engagement for the mines, as they feel that such action might be regarded as hostile to the local government.⁸⁴

They also maintained that the emigration would lead to the breakdown in the "moral values" and "tribal life" of the 'native' communities. The returning migrants would be coming with deadly infectious and sexually transmitted diseases; and the skills acquired in the mines would be useless in the migrants' agricultural economy at home.

The rate of mortality among the first recruits gave the missionaries and settler employers a good justification for their request to have the agreement terminated. Not less than

1936); G. Colby, Memorandum on Migrant Labour in South Africa and the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (Zomba, Government House, 1956).

⁸³ PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe to Foreign Office, 16/8/04.

⁸⁴ PRO C.O.525/2 Lord Overtoun to the Marquess of Lansdowne, 15/8/03; The Marquess of Lansdowne to Lord Overcoun, 28/8/03. Sometime in 1903, the Board of the Governors of the Livingstonia Mission had sent a deputation to the Foreign Office to protest the agreement with the WNLA.

120 of the 965 (some reports say 920) labourers recruited by the WNLA in 1903 had died, and more than 150 died in 1904/5. The major cause of death were pulmonary diseases: pneumonia and tuberculosis - which were aggravated by poor ventilation in the mines and compounds and cold weather to which the majority of the Nyasaland recruits were not accustomed. Accidents also claimed a few lives. Numerous assurances were given by the South African government and the WNLA that living conditions for the "tropical" workers would be improved. From 1904, the Nyasaland government began to forward the recruits so as to reach Johannesburg between August and December, after the cold season. Some mines provided exchange houses for "tropical" workers from 1904/5 but mortality rates remained high up to 1913 when recruiting was curtailed.

Officials of the SHRC were opposed to the agreement because they could not compete with the WNLA's conditions of service. They feared that not only were the WNLA's wages "out of proportion" to the rates they offered, but also that the period of twelve months for which the migrant labourers were recruited was one for which the SHRC could not engage them "even at double the wages"⁸⁵ given the seasonal fluctuations in the labour flow. What angered them even more was that the government had designated one of its officers to assist the WNLA in the forwarding of the recruits to the south while at the same time notifying local employers that it would not give

⁸⁵ PRO C.O.525/6 Leslie to Foreign Office, 29/3/04.

them further assistance in securing labour.⁸⁶ This contradictory and "unsympathetic attitude" on the part of the government caused a great deal of indignation from the local employers.

The views of the SHRC officials were shared by the Directors and local representatives of the BCGA and other cotton planters. Capitalizing on their connections with the Colonial Office, manufacturers and bankers at home, the Directors of the BCGA joined forces with their SHRC counterparts in lobbying for support from the members of the House of Commons to have the agreement abolished. Their local representatives teamed up with cotton planters in publicising the effects of labour emigration in the local press:

cotton planting is in full swing, but labour is extremely scarce in many places, and as the young cotton is more easily choked than full-grown coffee, it will be seen that the shortage of labour at this time is serious ...the scarcity of labour still continues and we regret to state that acreage which had been planted with cotton are having to be abandoned by several planters owing to shortage of labour.⁸⁷

These statements were supported by the Chairman of the British Central Africa Company in London, to which the SHRC was affiliated: "in collaboration of these statements, I beg to inform you that according to the latest advices received, about four hundred acres of land in the Upper Shire District

⁸⁶ The notice was issued in the Government Gazette, 31st January, 1904. See also PRO C.O.525/5 Sharpe to Wemyss, 22/12/03; C.O.525/6 Wemyss to Foreign Office, 24/2/04.

⁸⁷ PRO C.O.525/4 Extracts from The Central African Times of 12th December, 1903 and 9th January, 1904.

which had been cleared and prepared for cotton planting by my Company will have to be abandoned owing to want of labour".⁸⁸

This agitation was not totally supported by a small group of planters who had started to grow tobacco by this time. Though equally afraid of a reduction in their labour supply, the tobacco growers were also afraid that "if the recruitment of BCA natives for service in the Transvaal were stopped altogether, ...the Transvaal Government would retaliate by withdrawing the privilege of free import granted to the Protectorate-grown tobacco".⁸⁹ The duty free importation of Nyasaland tobacco by the South African government was "one of the inducements, a very considerable one", which led to the Nyasaland government to consent to the agreement between the Foreign Office and the WNLA. Though "duly carried out", it proved to be of very little value to the Nyasaland growers.⁹⁰

Another group which saw some advantages in labour emigration were traders. "They reap[ed] their profits in the shape of an increase of native trade on account of the funds brought back by returning workers".⁹¹ By 1905, "the trading

⁸⁸ PRO C.O.525/4 Wemyss to Foreign Office, 24/3/04.

⁸⁹ PRO C.O.525/16 H.R. Wallis, Memorandum on the Supply of Labour for the Transvaal Mines from the British Central Africa Protectorate, 24/5/06.

⁹⁰ PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe to Foreign Office, 14/12/03; Sharpe to Colonial Office, 16/8/04.

⁹¹ PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 16/8/04

community [had] already received several thousand pounds in purchases made by returned labourers, and [had] realised the advantages which accrued to them from the influx of so much money".⁹² However, the majority of the traders were also transport agents who needed porters. They feared that uncontrolled labour emigration would lead to the reduction in the much needed portering labour force. What they would have liked to see was a government-controlled system which would ensure them of a continued inflow of money and a reduction in the numbers of emigrants.

The government, itself, held a similar view. "In giving my approval to the Transvaal labour experiment", reported Alfred Sharpe, "the object I chiefly had in mind was the diversion of a portion at any rate of the stream of labour which at present finds its way to countries outside, into an authorised channel".⁹³ The policy of the government was therefore to "control" and "regulate" rather than to abolish the emigration. This policy was "desirable" for four reasons: first, to ensure that the labourers who left the country fulfilled their tax obligation. Second, to control the numbers of the able-bodied men leaving the villages at one particular time so as to ensure sustained agricultural production and maintenance of "tribal life". Third, the government would

⁹² PRO C.O.525/7 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 31/3/05. See also Nyasaland Protectorate, Report of the Population Census, 1926 (Zomba, Government Printer, 1926) pp.xxviii - xxix.

⁹³ PRO C.O.525/2 Sharpe to Foreign Office, 19/7/04.

raise some revenue from the capitation fees and the processing of the migrants' deferred payments. And finally, the flow of remittances and deferred payments would result in increased circulation of money among the 'natives', thus increasing their purchasing power and boosting the Protectorate's commercial sector.

Dependent on trifling grants from the Foreign Office (later Colonial Office); subsidies from the BSA Company for the policing of North-Eastern Rhodesia,⁹⁴ customs dues, and 'native' hut tax, the Nyasaland government was in dire need of an additional source of revenue. The failure of the coffee industry, which had been the Protectorate's economic mainstay, contributed to the government's decision to look to labour emigration as an additional source of revenue. Some of the government's aims were achieved. For example, in districts such as Nkhata Bay, where labour migration was common, "natives from Salisbury and the South [were] continually sending money to their relations for tax payment and other

⁹⁴ PRO C.O.525/54 Memorandum on the British South Africa Company in Nyasaland, 1913; Secretary, BSA Company to Under Secretary of State, 17/3/13 and 4/11/13; C.O.525/3 Sharpe, Report of the Nyasaland Protectorate, 1904/5 and 1905/6. Under an agreement signed in 1891, the BSA Company gave the Nyasaland government a subsidy of 10,000 pounds for the administration of the Company's North-Eastern Rhodesia territory, and 5,000 pounds for raising and equipping a police force. Thereafter, the Company paid an annual subsidy of 8,000 pounds. Evidence suggests that Robert Codrington, the first Administrator General of North-Eastern Rhodesia, was at one time the District Collector in the Central Angoniland District of Nyasaland. See Codrington, "The Central Angoniland of the British Central Africa Protectorate".

purposes".⁹⁴ There was "a large amount of native correspondence" which resulted in an increase in revenue from postal services. Not less than £2,955 were collected in 1904/5 and £3,000 in 1905/6. An additional £100 or more was collected each year between 1904 and 1906 as commission on postal and money orders from the migrant labourers, and between £115 and £250 in transit dues.⁹⁵

The Protectorate's hut tax increased from £16,756 in 1900/01 to about £27,000 in 1904/5. The government received £460 from the WNLA as the amount of capitation fees for the 920 labourers recruited in 1903. As a source of revenue, this compared quite favourably with the £400 collected as Crown Land rent in 1904/5.⁹⁶ European traders also benefitted from the flow of remittances and deferred payments which boosted their sales. The exact amounts of cash flowing into the local economy are difficult to estimate. Statistical data are non-

⁹⁴ PRO C.O.525/3 Extracts from the West Nyasa District Report, 1904.

⁹⁵ PRO C.O.525/3 Extracts from the West Nyasa and Chintsheche Reports, 1904.

⁹⁶ PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 28/11/04; C.O.525/1 Report on the Nyasaland Protectorate, 1904/5. See also M.A. Vaughan, "Social and Economic Change in Southern Malawi: A Study of Rural Communities in the Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley from the mid-19th century to 1915", PhD Thesis, University of London, (1981) p.112 and p.118. For Northern Province tax collection statistics see B. Fetter, "Colonial Microenvironments and the Mortality of Educated Young Men in Northern Malawi", in CJAS vol.23 (1989) p.408.

existent and the high levels of "clandestine" migration makes it difficult to know the exact numbers of the migrants.

Apart from the above achievements, the government failed to realize its other aims. Every year the WNLA failed to recruit the full number of labourers it applied for. Of the 3,000 applied for in 1903, less than 1,000 were recruited. The figure was raised to 5,000 in 1904, but only 1,193 were actually obtained. During the ten years of the agreement only 8,938 labourers were recruited,⁹⁸ giving an average of less than 900 a year. The figures on WNLA recruiting do not, in any way, reflect the numbers of Nyasaland workers in South Africa. The majority of the workers migrated independently.

The reasons for the low figures on recruiting were complex. To begin with, unlike in southern Mozambique where the WNLA had an official recruiting "monopoly" during this period,⁹⁹ in Nyasaland it was not allowed to use "runners" and independent agents. Instead, government officials were seconded to the Association to handle the forwarding of the labourers to the south. According to Sharpe, "the forwarding of labourers from the Protectorate to Johannesburg under government supervision caused so much irritation,...a large

⁹⁸ Burden, Nyasaland Natives in South Africa p.5; PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 28/10/04; C.O.525/7 Casson to the Governor, 16/3/05.

⁹⁹ See, for example, A.H. Jeeves, "Over-reach: The South African Goldmines and the Struggle for the Labour of Zambesia, 1890-1920" in CJAS vol.17 (1983) and by the same author, "Migrant Labour and South African Expansion, 1920-1950" in The South African Historical Journal vol.18 (1986) pp.289-309.

amount of work to the administration, and much inconvenience. After all, it [was] of doubtful benefit to the Protectorate and the labourers themselves".¹⁰⁰ On several occasions, Sir Alfred Sharpe, the Nyasaland Governor, disagreed with Lord Milner, the High Commissioner in South Africa, over issues like the "right method" in forwarding deferred payments, the banning of recruiting in the Shire Highlands, the numbers of labourers to be recruited each year and "some of the other conditions".¹⁰¹

Sharpe recommended to the Colonial Office to cancel the agreement by the end of 1904. The recommendation was refused on the grounds that it would impinge on the rights of the 'natives' to sell their labour on the best markets. In 1906, both the WNLA and the RNLB had their recruiting permits renewed. Two developments took place in 1908 which could have lessened the competition for labour. First, the Shire Highlands railway line was completed and the labour formerly employed by the SHRC was released. Second, the Imperial Tobacco Group (ITG) opened auction floors at Limbe in Blantyre, thus there was no need for South Africa to recruit Nyasaland labour in exchange for duty-free importation of Nyasaland tobacco. Both of these did not help to stop

¹⁰⁰ PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 16/8/04.

¹⁰¹ PRO C.O.525/3 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 28/11/04; Sharpe to Secretary, WNLA, 22/4/04; Secretary, WNLA, to Sharpe, 3/5/04 and 10/5/04; Sharpe to Lyttleton, 3/11/04; C.O.525/7 Milner to Sharpe, 30/9/04, 15/10/04, 29/10/04, and 31/10/04; Sharpe to Milner, 1/11/04.

independent emigration to the south. However, the opening of the auction floors gave the local employers renewed strength to oppose recruiting by external agents which resulted in the introduction of the Employment of Native Labour Ordinance of 1909.

The ordinance prohibited organized recruiting but did not ban labour migration. The 'natives' wishing to proceed to South Africa had to be engaged and forwarded by the government on the same conditions as outlined in 1904:

with regard to natives leaving the Protectorate, the policy of this Government remains the same as it has been in the past, namely that the large stream of native labourers who make their way out of Nyasaland to Southern Rhodesia and other territories south of the Zambezi should be regulated by Government, in order that the numbers may be controlled and that the arrangements may be made for those who desire to go whereby their journey can be carried out in comfort. They may go under defined conditions, they may return to their country at the end of their service, and may bring back with them a proportion of the money earned in the shape of deferred pay.¹⁰²

The question of recruiting or not recruiting within Nyasaland was irrelevant to the outward flow of labour.¹⁰³ South African and Southern Rhodesian recruiting agents were established "just over the Nyasaland border in Portuguese East Africa and Northern Rhodesia" from which they recruited

¹⁰² MNA COM-8/1 Extracts from the Proceedings of the Meeting of the Legislative Council, Zomba, 2nd-5th November, 1909 in Draft Report of the Committee to Enquire into Emigrant Labour, 1935; R.R. Kuczynski, Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire vol.2 (London, OUP 1949) p.551.

¹⁰³ Kuczynski, Demographic Survey pp.552-53.

Nyasaland 'natives'¹⁰⁴ The Nyasaland government had no control over their activities. The whole policy of "regulation" and "control" was thus a failure. In fact, as far as the flow of labour from Nyasaland was concerned, the agreements with the WNLA, the RNLB, and their respective governments were almost useless. South African and Southern Rhodesian employers were going to get Nyasaland labour even without the agreements. The only benefits, if any, were in the sharing of the costs of recruiting and the even distribution of the labour once it had arrived in South Africa or Rhodesia. As far as the actual resourcing of labour within Nyasaland was concerned, the agreements, and the recruiting itself, had very little impact.

v

The "Independent" Migrants

The majority of the Nyasaland labour migrants were not recruited. They migrated as "independents" or "selves".¹⁰⁵ They distinguished between chibaro or joini, "being

¹⁰⁴ Kuczynski, Demographic Survey p.553; MNA COM-8/1 Draft Report on Emigrant Labour, 1935; PRO C.O.525/35 Casson to Deputy Governor, [undated] July, 1910.

¹⁰⁵ PRO C.O.525/35 Charles Casson's, Reports on a Visit to Portuguese East Africa, Southern Rhodesia, and South Africa, especially the one on "Independents".

recruited", and selufu, "independent migration".¹⁰⁶ Very often, the Nyasaland migrants avoided chibaro preferring selufu instead.¹⁰⁷ Government officials were quite aware that they could not control or regulate selufu migration:

whether or not the present system of government-regulated emigration of labour is carried on, there will, undoubtedly, be a constant and increasing departure and return of voluntary unauthorised labour from the western Nyasa districts of the Protectorate to the south".¹⁰⁸ ...I find that it is at present practically impossible with the means at my disposal to exercise any great measure of control over voluntary emigration from the labour districts - the chief difficulty being that not only do I receive no assistance from the Governments of North Eastern Rhodesia or Southern Rhodesia, but the entry of labourers from the Protectorate into North Eastern Rhodesia and their passage through that territory to Southern Rhodesia is welcomed. Facilities are provided for their journeys, and no attempt is made to insist on such labourers complying with Protectorate regulations before allowing them to continue their journeys and to accept employment.¹⁰⁹

Attempts to "influence" officials in North-Eastern Rhodesia to comply with the Nyasaland migrant labour

¹⁰⁶ TIP.1, 29/9/89 Amadi Wadi, Chia Fishing Camp, Nkhota-kota; TIP.2, 29/9/89 Phillip Kandoole Banda, Nkhota-kota Trading Centre; TIP.16, 8/12/89 and Mrs Ngalawesa, Kyela Fishing Camp; TIP.22, 4/2/90 Maulanda Chimanda, Namiasi Fishing Camp; TIP.26, 12/3/04 B. Chijere Chirwa, Dindano-Mundola Village, Nkhata Bay.

¹⁰⁷ The term chibaro, chibalo, or chibalu was used in Malawi as a synonym of "coerced" or "indentured" labour. It was often associated with tax defaulters who were sent to work to obtain their tax certificates. In every day usage the term means "punishment". Joini was a derivative of "to join". It was used to refer to recruiting for military and other purposes. By extension, both the WNLA and the RNLB were known by the same terms. See also C. van Onselen, Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1923 (London, Pluto Press, 1976) p.99

¹⁰⁸ PRO C.O.525/7 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 21/3/05.

¹⁰⁹ PRO C.O.525/2 Sharpe to Foreign Office, 19/7/04.

regulations failed,¹¹⁰ partly due to the two territories being under different jurisdiction: North Eastern Rhodesia under the British South Africa Company and Nyasaland under the Colonial Office. The applicability of the Nyasaland labour regulations to North-Eastern Rhodesia was questionable. The same applied to Portuguese East Africa through which large numbers of the Nyasaland labour migrants passed. Neither the Colonial Office nor the Nyasaland government had the power to influence decisions relating to labour migration in these territories. It was also partly a factor of geography. The Central and Southern Provinces of Nyasaland shared long, unguarded borders with North-Eastern Rhodesia and Portuguese East Africa, respectively. The migrant labourers crossed them without any difficulties. The presence of labour "touts" in PEA and NER, just across the Nyasaland borders, made the task of controlling emigration even more difficult for the Nyasaland government.¹¹¹

The high death rate and the physical dangers involved in the journeys to the south did not deter selufu migration. By 1910, it had become quite clear to the officials in Nyasaland and at the Colonial Office that "it was impossible" to control

¹¹⁰ FRO C.O.525/2 Sharpe to Codrington, 9/5/04; Codrington to Sharpe, 27/6/04.

¹¹¹ Regarding complaints about "touts" see PRO C.O.525/2 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 19/7/04; Codrington to Sharpe, 27/6/04; C.O.525/35 Casson to Deputy Governor, [undated], July, 1910.

it.¹¹² The arrangements made "did not secure the desired results, i.e. control of the exodus",¹¹³ as the numbers of selufu migrants continued to increase. On his inspection trip to Southern Rhodesia and South Africa in 1910, Charles Casson, the Superintendent of Native Affairs, "met several parties of Nyasaland natives returning from work in Southern Rhodesia". He also overtook parties going to the south.¹¹⁴ A lot more were working on the sugar estates of Mopea (Sena), Changadeya, and Chimbue in Villa Fonte district of Portuguese East Africa. At Mopea, a total of 1 241 Nyasaland workers were recorded; another 1,653 at the Sena Sugar Factory in Villa Fonte district. Of the 2,900 to 4,400 seasonal workers employed in the company's factory each year, between 600 and 700 were from Nyasaland.¹¹⁵

This chapter has analysed the responses to wage

¹¹² PRO.C.O.525/34 Extracts from the Proceedings of the House of Commons, 30/3/10; C.O.525/33 Wallis to Colonial Office, 24/9/10. See also the correspondence between the Secretary of the B.E. & A Company and the Secretary of State for the Colonies, June 1910 in C.O.525/35.

¹¹³ PRO C.O.525/33 Casson to Colonial Office, 10/10/10.

¹¹⁴ PRO C.O.525/35 Casson to Chief Secretary, 19/9/10. According to a Southern Rhodesia census report for 1911, 12,881 Nyasaland workers were in country. This appears to be an underestimate.

¹¹⁵ PRO C.O.525/35 Casson to Acting Governor, 29/5/10; C.O.525/33 R.W. Vroom, General Manager, Sena Sugar Company, to Assistant Secretary, 11/10/10.

employment and the competition among the local employers and between them and external recruiters. It has also demonstrated that as far as the mobilization and allocation of wage-labour was concerned, the colonial state was incapable of offering sustained support to the settler employers. Mobility, choice, and independence in the sale of their labour were among the most important ways by which rural Malawians contained the crisis created by their incorporation into the colonial economy. The next two chapters will focus on peasant production, sharecropping, and fishing and fish-trading.

CHAPTER FOUR

LABOUR MOBILITY AND RURAL PRODUCTION

The average planter, if asked to give a reason for the existing labour shortage, would undoubtedly attribute it mainly to native tobacco growing...it is an undoubted fact that the supply of local and Protectorate labour has been seriously affected by this industry.¹

There are approximately 200 villages settled on or near the shore of lake Nyasa and Malombe, and the majority of people in these villages engage themselves in fishing for "Gain"²....Many natives have no gardens whatsoever but hope to purchase maize with proceeds of fish money.³

This chapter assesses the relationship between labour mobility, agricultural production, and fishing and fish-trading between 1910 and the mid-1930s. It focuses on the changing labour demands of the colonial economy, the levels of labour migration, the effects of African cash-cropping on the flow of labour to the European plantations, and variations in regional economies. Two periods are distinguished: the first, between 1910 and the end of the First World War (WWI), was characterized by competition for the local labour supply between the settler employers and external recruiters, transportation problems, recruitment of soldiers and carriers for the East Africa campaign, and expansion in the African

¹ Malawi National Archives (MNA) S1/428/27 R.H. Murray, Draft Report of the Labour Survey Taken in the Southern Province, March, 1927.

² MNA NSF4/1/7 South Nyasa District Annual Report, 1933.

³ MNA NS3/3/3 Nutrition in the Colonial Empire, Report on the South Nyasa District, 1940.

cotton industry. The last will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

The second period, between the end of WWI to the beginning of the Depression in the late 1920s and early 1930s, experienced a rapid expansion in African cash-cropping and fishing and fish-trading. These gave rural producers more choices, greater economic independence and a lack of motivation to work for the local employers - thus affecting the flow of wage-labour to the European plantations. They also resulted in the restructuring of regional economies. The Shire Valley emerged as an area of independent African cotton production while the former "labour districts" of the Central Province and lakeshore areas specialized in tobacco production, migrant labour and fishing and fish-trading, respectively. In the Shire Highlands, the centre of the colonial economy, African cash-cropping on Crown Land was balanced by sharecropping on 'private estates'. The latter will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

I

The State and Local Employers

By 1910, the independence of African producers and the effects of the "free" flow of labour discussed in the previous chapter began to be felt by the settler planters. Their immediate reaction was that the government was "neglecting the interests

of the planters and being actuated by improper natives".⁴ In March that year, they organized a public meeting to which the Governor was invited. The object of the meeting was: "to place before the Governor a memorandum prepared by the Nyasaland Associated Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce on general questions relating to the employment of Nyasaland natives both within and outside the Protectorate".⁵ The proposals made in the memorandum were:

first, that so far as regards the employment of natives within the Protectorate, [the] Government should relieve employers of any necessity for looking for and engaging their workers by establishing a Native Labour Department which would, through District Magistrate, collect labourers, forward them to Blantyre, and hand them over to the Chamber of Commerce for distribution. Second, with reference to labourers going beyond the limits of Nyasaland, [the] Government should continue as at present to regulate and provide for the exodus, but should discourage it as far as possible, and should do away with the employment by labour associations outside the Protectorate or agents charged with the collection and care of such natives as desire to go south for work.⁶

They made further representations to the Colonial Office "to refuse to sanction any further exodus of native labourers to the South until it is clearly shown that the labour needs of Nyasaland have been satisfied".⁷

⁴ PRO C.O.525/35 Secretary, B.E. & A. Company to Colonial Office, 21/6/10.

⁵ PRO C.O.525/35 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 9/5/10; Proceedings of the Blantyre Meeting, March 1910.

⁶ PRO C.O.525/35 Sharpe to Foreign Office, 9/5/10; also in the Proceedings of the Blantyre Meeting, March, 1910.

⁷ PRO C.O.525/33 The Nyasaland Associated Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture to the Earl of Crewe, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 28/7/10.

The government's reaction was, as usual, very negative: "to make government officials recruiters and suppliers of labour would be unwise course. Local employers are free to engage labourers when, how, and where they pleased".⁸ Unfortunately, the labourers had "no desire to work for the Blantyre planters" and the government had no power to influence them to work unless the 'natives' themselves were willing to do so. The government lacked power because:

ten or twelve years ago, it was a fact that the District Resident had a great influence as regards labour over the native under his administration because the hut tax at that period was little understood, money was scarce, and the native found great difficulty in raising the necessary sum to liquidate his obligations to government. His only asset then was his labour, and the native did his very best to evade the payment of tax.... This state of affairs no longer exists, money is plentiful. ...The native of the present day, instead of running away when there is a prospect of his hut tax being demanded of him, is the first now to come forward to pay it because ...he also realises that once his obligation to government is liquidated, he can do as he pleases: that is, he can rest in his village for the year, or proceed in search of more lucrative employment to the Zambezi or Southern Rhodesia.⁹

At home, cotton and rice production were good alternatives to wage employment. They "offered an easy method for the native agriculturalist to pay his tax" and there were "a score of ways by which a native [could] raise a great deal more than the three shillings required of him for his tax".¹⁰

⁸ PRO C.O.525/35 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 9/5/10.

⁹ PRO C.O.525/35 Notes of a Speech by the Deputy Governor, 25/3/10.

¹⁰ PRO C.O.525/35 Speech by the Deputy Governor, 25/3/10.

Government officials maintained that the claims of the members of the NCAC were "factitious agitations" and "misrepresentations" because they did not address the real issues.¹¹ These were: the desire to maintain low wages; avoidance of the cost of labour mobilization; and inability to mechanize their plantations. The local employers feared that the growing exodus of 'natives' to the south would eventually force a rise in the local wages which were still at 3 to 5 shillings a month on most plantations,¹² compared with between 10 to 25 shillings in Swaziland and 20 to 60 shillings in the eastern Transvaal at this time.¹³ Coupled with this was the fear of the rising cost of labour mobilization. Since the larger firms had tenants, it was usually the "smaller" planters whose labour supply was inadequate. For the most part they depended on seasonal labour from the villages surrounding the estates and from the "three labour districts" where labour migration was also rampant. To maintain a constant flow of labour from these areas, the "smaller" planters would need a recruiting organization, "runners" and agents, which were beyond their financial means. As for the NCAC, it had "no

¹¹ PRO C.O.525/35 Pearce to Colonial Office, [undated] April 1910; Sharpe to Colonial Office, 9/5/10; Casson to Colonial Office, 10/10/10.

¹² See Coleman, "International Labour Migration From Malawi, 1875-1966" in Journal of Social Science (JSS), University of Malawi, vol.2 (1972) p.39.

¹³ See J. Crush, The Struggle for Swazi Labour, 1890-1920 (Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queen's University, 1987) p.140.

intention of going to any expense in order to supply the "smaller" planters with native workers".¹⁴

The reduction of costs in labour mobilization was dictated by three factors: the land-locked position of Nyasaland which called for high transportation costs; the volatility of the agricultural economy as discussed in the previous chapter; and most important of all, the inefficiency, undercapitalization and labour-intensiveness of the Nyasaland plantations.¹⁵ Most of the Nyasaland planters owned more land than they could efficiently use. They also tended to prepare more land for planting than their labour supply would justify. The preparation was done during the dry season, May to September, when seasonal labour was abundant. By planting time, late October to December, the labourers had returned to their homes to work in their own gardens. The method of cultivation was also "primitive, done by the hoe"¹⁶...a wasteful use of human labour",¹⁷ which put inordinately heavy demands on field workers who therefore tended to avoid agricultural work. There was an "entire absence of

¹⁴ PRO C.O.525/35 Pearce to Colonial Office [undated], April 1910; Casson to Colonial Office, 10/10/10.

¹⁵ See L. Vail, "The Making of an Imperial Slum: Nyasaland and its Railways, 1895-1935" in Journal of African History (JAH) vol.15 no.1 (1975) pp.89-112; R.H. Palmer, "White Farmers in Malawi: Before and After the Depression" in African Affairs vol.84 (April 1986) pp.211-245.

¹⁶ PRO C.O.626/1 Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture, 1913.

¹⁷ PRO C.O.525/35 Casson to Colonial Office, 10/10/10.

agricultural machinery in the fields".¹⁸ They could not use ploughs because of the existence of tsetse fly, and high freight charges made the importation of machinery expensive.¹⁹ Reliance was thus placed on human labour hence the need to reduce costs associated with its procurement.

From 1910, the planters and trading-and-transportation companies experienced a sharp rise in production and overhead costs due to high railway rates and a sharp fall in the water level of the Shire River. The railway rates were so high that it was even cheaper to use porters.²⁰ In 1911, Allan Kinnedy, the ALC Manager, provided the following comparative figures of the cost of transporting goods by railway and portage between Chiromo on the Lower Shire and the Mandala (ALC) station at Blantyre:²¹

¹⁸ PRO C.O.525/35 Casson to Colonial Office, 10/10/10.

¹⁹ PRO C.O.626/1 Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture, 1913.

²⁰ PRO C.O.525/36 Allan F. Kinnedy, Manager, ALC, to First Secretary, Zomba, 11/3/11; General Manager, BCA and Company to First Secretary, 6/10/11; A. Livingstone Bruce, A.L. Bruce Trust to First Secretary, 6/10/11; Henry Brown, Thornwood Estate, Mlanje, to First Secretary, 27/2/11.

²¹ For comparison see E.C. Mandala Work and Control in a Peasant Economy: A History of the Lower Tchiri Valley in Malawi, 1859-1960 (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1990) pp.164-166.

Table 4.1: Comparative Transportation Costs.

<u>Type of Goods</u>	<u>By Railway</u>			<u>By Porterage</u>		
	£	s	d	£	s	d
8 trusses blue sheeting	1	1	7		12	8
80 " blue calico	10	2	6	6	6	8
20 " blankets	4	15	1	3	3	4
2 cases matches		14	11		6	4
4 " tea	1	3	2		12	8
100 " soap	8	15	0	7	18	4
1 box enamel ware		11	1		3	2
1 crate bicycles	4	10	0		6	4
60 bundles hoes	5	4	6	4	15	0
25 trusses native clothes	2	19	2	1	19	7
4 cases biscuits	1	2	4		12	8

Source: PRO C.O.525/36 A.F. Kinnedy to First Secretary, 11/3/11.

Porterage was cheaper for two major reasons: first, the SHRC charged by measurement of cargo whereas a carrier brought up any load of about 60 lbs. or more at an inclusive rate (wages plus food) of one shilling and seven pence between Chiromo and Blantyre. Second, the railway company conveyed the goods only from, or to, its stations at Blantyre, Limbe and Chiromo. The trader, transporter or planter would have to provide local transportation between the railway station and his warehouse and thus incur further costs. The further one was from the Limbe and Blantyre railway stations (about 5 to 7 miles apart) the higher the cost of local transportation to

be incurred. In contrast, porters carried the goods from the river stations of Chiromo and Katunga, up the Shire Highlands escarpments, straight into the warehouse, and vice versa. The planter, trader or transporter did not have to provide local transit facilities for his goods.

The importance of portage increased following a severe recession in the water level on the Shire River in 1910.²² According to H.R. Wallis, the Acting Governor, the transportation of goods, both exports and imports, on the Upper and Lower Shire (between the Lake and Matope and between Port Herald and Zambezi, respectively), had almost ceased by 1910. "Unless steps are taken to remedy at once this state of matters", reported Wallis, "all transportation communications along both sections of this river during the dry season of the year will be at a standstill...under the existing conditions both the trade and agriculture of the Protectorate are severely hampered".²³ Steps were taken to maintain a navigable channel on the Upper Shire between Fort Johnston and Liwonde by clearing the sudd, water vegetation, using imported sudd saws and a lot of 'native' labour.²⁴ The section between

²² Some sources suggest that the river began to recede between the late 1870s and early 1900s. See PRO C.O.525/33 Wallis to Colonial Office, 10/12/10; C.O.525/36 Henry Bennet to First Secretary, 27/2/11; C. Metcalfe to First Secretary, 1/3/11; Mandala, Work and Control p.108.

²³ PRO C.O.525/33 Wallis to Colonial Office, 10/12/10.

²⁴ PRO C.O.525/33 T.F. Firr, Director of Public Works Department (PWD), Memorandum on Upper Shire River Clearing, 13th October, 1910.

Liwonde and Matope was not cleared due to the high expenditure involved and because there was a fairly good road for wagon traffic between Liwonde and Blantyre via Zomba. The total cost of maintaining a navigable channel on the upper sections of the river between 1906/7 and 1910/11 was about £1,061. About half of the PWD's African labour force was employed in this task in 1910. By 1911, there were long delays in the shipment of goods at Chiromo causing heavy damages to cargo and "a lot of inconveniences".²⁵ Most planters, traders and transporters thus relied on porters to convey their goods. According to the reports of the Department of Agriculture for 1911, 1913 and 1915, "a large amount" of labour was "uneconomically employed in portage or 'tenga-tenga' work on account of all crops grown north of Zomba having to be transported to the railhead at Blantyre through distances varying from 10 to 120 miles".²⁶

II

Carriers, Soldiers, and Migrants

The coming of the First World War had a very adverse effect on the flow of plantation labour in Nyasaland. The government

²⁵ PRO C.O.525/36 R.S. Hynde, B.E.& A. Company to First Secretary, 22/3/11; Kidney to First Secretary, 11/3/11; General Manager, BCA Company, to First Secretary, 6/3/11; Bruce to First Secretary, 6/3/11.

²⁶ PRO C.O.626/1 and C.O.626/3 Reports of the Department of Agriculture, 1911, 1913 and 1915.

needed soldiers and carriers for the defence of the Protectorate's northern border with Tanganyika (then German East Africa). Nyasaland's proximity with Tanganyika made it an imperial recruiting ground for African soldiers and carriers. A total of about 200,000 Nyasaland 'natives' served in the East Africa campaign in the course of the war. This figure, which is believed to be an underestimate, represented more than two-thirds of the Protectorate's adult male population.²⁷ In the northern districts, labour emigration increased as a response to conscription for the war²⁸ while the outbreak of the Chilembwe Rising in the Shire Highlands in 1915 "discouraged the natives from leaving their villages in search of work". These events "caused considerable scarcity of labour for plantation work".²⁹

The 'shortage' was exacerbated by the recruitment of Mozambican immigrants, the major source of plantation labour in the Shire Highlands. About 6,000 Anguru/Alomwe carriers were supplied for the war from Chiradzulu district alone. Of these, 1,151 were dispatched at the peak of the growing

²⁷ M.E. Page, "The War of Thangata: Nyasaland and the East African Campaign, 1914-1918" in JAH vol.19 no.1 (1978) pp.91-95. For detailed coverage see, by the same author, "Malawians in the Great War and After, 1914-1925" PhD Thesis, Michigan State University (1977).

²⁸ W. Chijere Chirwa, "Masokwa Elliot Kamwana Chirwa: His Religious and Political Life" in Journal of Social Science, University of Malawi, vol.12 (1985) p.29. See also Page, "The War of Thangata" pp.87-100.

²⁹ PRO C.O.626/3 Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1915.

season (December) in 1917.³⁰ In the following year the government introduced regulations restricting the recruitment of workers for services on 'private estates' within the Protectorate due to the heavy demands for carrier and other services in connection with the East Africa campaign. Local employers had to obtain a special licence from the Superintendent of Native Affairs to recruit labour for agricultural purposes.³¹ The licence stated the number of workers to be recruited and the length of service. There is no evidence suggesting that the regulations were effectively implemented.

After the war, the government was faced with five challenges relating to labour: the demobilization of African soldiers and carriers; the influx of new settlers; the need for labour for the PWD projects; the control and regulation of labour migration; and the expansion in African commodity production. While the influx of new settlers created a new labour demand which could have absorbed the returning African soldiers and carriers, wages and working conditions on the plantations were too poor for the war veterans who were used to better conditions of service. The majority joined the stream of selufu migrants to the south. Those who remained

³⁰ L. White, "'Tribe' and the Aftermath of the Chilembwe Rising" in African Affairs vol.83 (October 1984) p.529.

³¹ PRO C.O.626/2 Recruitment of Labour for Plantation work, Amendment of Schedule of the Employment of Natives Ordinance, 1918.

home took up cotton and tobacco production with government encouragement.³²

The resistance of low wages and poor working conditions to the labour markets outlined above can be attributed to four factors. First, Nyasaland's freight costs on the single railway connecting it to the outside world through Portuguese East Africa remained high.³³ In 1921, the cost of shipping one pound of tobacco from Blantyre to London via Portuguese East Africa was five pence plus 2 pence export tax - a total of seven pence. The tax was "a heavy additional loss".³⁴ It was therefore imperative for the settler employers to keep wages and production costs low. Second, Nyasaland did not have significant internal markets for its cash crops and the potential regional markets were hard to reach due to transportation problems.³⁵ Higher wages could have increased production costs which could not be offset by increasing commodity prices on the local and regional markets.

³² MNA S1/428/27 Survey of Previous Occupations of Native Tobacco Growers, 1926-28.

³³ For a good discussion on this see L. Vail, "The Making of an Imperial Slum: Nyasaland and its Railways, 1895-1935" in JAH vol.16 no.1 (1975) pp.89-112, and by the same author, "Railway Development and Colonial Underdevelopment: The Nyasaland Case" in R.H. Palmer and N.Q. Parsons (eds) Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa (London and Los Angeles, Heinemann and the University of California Press, 1977) pp.365-395.

³⁴ MNA S1/104/21 R.S. Hynde, Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, to Chief Secretary, 11/1/21.

³⁵ R.H. Palmer, "White Farmers in Malawi: Before and After the Depression" in African Affairs vol.84 (April 1985) p.213.

Third, as mentioned in the previous chapters, the Nyasaland settlers worked in a very volatile situation. The coming of the new settlers in the post-war period coincided with a slump in commodity prices between 1920 and 1922. "Large stocks" of tobacco were unsold, cotton prices fell, and tea sold at "less than it cost to produce". The planters were in "a financial crisis".³⁶ They requested the government to stop providing facilities to external recruiters of Nyasaland labour which they feared would force wage increases.³⁷ Finally, the immigration of Mozambicans, both as seasonal migrant labourers and as 'settlers' on Crown Land and 'private estates', tended to depress wages. The settler employers substituted "protectorate labour" with the Alomwe/Anguru immigrants (details in chapter 8).

The outward flow of labour in the years following the war was partly due to a sharp rise in the prices of consumer goods. According to Leroy Vail, "there was a marked increase of men leaving the villages in search of work" because the consumer goods were "beyond their means".³⁸ Some of them were

³⁶ MNA S1/104/21 R. Rankie, Chief Secretary, to R.S. Hynde, 13/1/21.

³⁷ MNA S1/1132/20 Labour Scarcity for Agricultural Purposes: Representations by the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, 1920-1921; S1/104/21 Representations from the Nyasaland Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce on the Repeal of Export Taxes and the Question of Native Labour, 1921.

³⁸ L. Vail, "The State and the Creation of Colonial Malawi's Agricultural Economy" in R.I. Rotberg, Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa (Lexington, Massachusetts, Lexington Books, 1983) p.57.

employed locally but "large numbers" left for South Africa where they were attracted by more highly paid work than they were able to find at home. Ince their employment on the gold mines was banned, they were employed principally in rural mines, railways and harbours, agriculture, and domestic service. In 1920, their numbers were estimated at 20,000 in South Africa, and 14,000 in Southern Rhodesia and a lot more in the construction of the Trans-Zambezi Railway.³⁹ As was always the case, the Nyasaland government was unable to control this emigration:

Rhodesia and other parts of South Africa readily accessible are growing more and more attractive to the emigration of labour, especially so with native trade goods at their present prices and the general cost of living so greatly increased. This condition of things is likely to continue so long as the wages obtainable in Nyasaland compare unfavourably with those procurable elsewhere in its vicinity. Although this emigration... is prohibited, I am unable to prevent it.⁴⁰

The government's own contradictory and ambivalent policies encouraged this emigration. For example, sometime around 1919, permission was given to the Trans-Zambezi Railway Company to recruit Nyasaland labour and to buy food crops in Nyasaland to feed its workers. The justification was that the railway would be beneficial to the Nyasaland economy. The action drew "very strong" criticisms from the members of

³⁹ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Protectorate Annual Colonial Reports (London, HMSO, 1920) pp.7-9; 1921 p.6 and 1922 p.6; R.R. Kuczynski, Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire vol.II (London, OUP 1949) pp.553-554.

⁴⁰ MNA S1/920/21 Governor Smith to Colonial Office, 8/8/21, quoted in Vail, "The State and the Creation" p.57.

the NCAC and the Nyasaland planters in general "who [were] of the opinion that the Portuguese themselves should find the labour and the food to build the railway".⁴¹ The government's response was that there was always enough labour in the country for local purposes. The "trouble" was not emigration, but the low wages and poor working conditions prevailing on the local plantations. It went ahead with the agreement with the Trans-Zambezi Railway Company, but did nothing to help the local employers to improve working conditions. After completion of the line in 1922, more Nyasaland labour was recruited for the development of the Beira port, and later, for the Zambezi Bridge.

The government's unsympathetic attitude was partly a response to the poor performance of settler agriculture. By 1920, just as new settlers were coming in, officials in the Department of Agriculture began to doubt the future of individual settlers in the country's agriculture. "Nyasaland is not a white man's country, and never will be", argued McCall the Director of Agriculture, "the native is the producer of the future".⁴² Both the Nyasaland governors and the officials at the Colonial Office concurred with this view: "the prosperity of the Protectorate depends on the development

⁴¹ MNA S1/1113/20 B.W. Fairman, Secretary, Nyasaland Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, to Chief Secretary, 10/6/20; R. Nash, Secretary, Mlanje Planters' Association, to Chief Secretary, 10/7/20.

⁴² Cited in Palmer, "White Farmers" p.226.

of its tropical agricultural resources, partly by a limited number of European planters, but principally by the natives themselves with European instructors".⁴³ By the 1930s, it had become clear that Nyasaland was "not a country for the small European settler". This type of agriculture was "virtually an economic failure".⁴⁴ The Nyasaland government and the Colonial Office thus preferred well-capitalized plantation companies which had switched to tea production by this time.

As regards the flow of labour to the settler plantations, the implications of these debates were twofold: first, the government thought that it was better "to leave it to the planters to fight it out between themselves".⁴⁵ Second, it rejected proposals to limit African tobacco production on which the settlers blamed their labour "shortage".⁴⁶ Instead, it adopted the Kenyan policy of "dual development":

where the conditions are suitable to the growth of economic crops, provided the food supply has been amply provided for, every assistance should be given to the natives who desire to grow them....In areas where the first alternative is not within his reach, the native should be de-

⁴³ Colonial Office/Ormsby-Gore, Report of the East Africa Commission (London, HMSO, 1925) p.109. Also in Notes of Interviews with Governor Sir Charles Bowering, the Hilton Young Commission, 26/3/28 cited in Palmer, "White Farmers" p.227.

⁴⁴ PRO C.O.525/137 Minute by Downie, 27/6/30 and C.O.525/164 Maffey to Hopkins, 9/12/36. Cited in Palmer, "White Farmers" p.211 and p.226.

⁴⁵ MNA S1/1040/19 Minute by Costley-White, 8/8/19, cited in Palmer, "White Farmers" p.216.

⁴⁶ See MNA S1/428/27 Cholo Planters Association, Report of a Sub-Committee to Consider the Report on the Labour Survey, 30/10/26.

finitely encouraged to go out to labour. In others, where both alternatives are open to him, the Government is not concerned to impose either upon him, but simply to ensure so far as it can that he shall work in the cultivation of his own land, if he pleases, or else as a wage-earner on alienated land, if he prefers it. ...Indirect as well as direct production should be encouraged...⁴⁷

This policy was formulated by the East African Governors' Conference in early 1926 - Nyasaland was a member of the Conference. The understanding was that increased African production did not necessarily lead to a decreased labour supply: "those tribes which are most industrious and efficient at home also send out the largest labour supply". In addition, "in working for himself, the native will develop habits of industry which will lead him to seek work on a European farm".⁴⁸

As Raymond Buell noted, the immediate difficulty with this argument was that the planting season in the African areas came at exactly the same time that the settler planters needed large amounts of labour.⁴⁹ The increase in agricultural production brought greater independence and more choice for the would-be wage-labourers and thus a decline in the labour supply to the settler plantations. European settlers both in

⁴⁷ MNA S2/23/25 Dual Policy of Development: Agriculture and Labour, 1926. See also Acting Provincial Commissioner, Southern Province, to Chief Secretary, 9/11/25; Provincial Commissioner, Northern Province, to Chief Secretary, 17/11/25; Provincial Commissioner, Central Province, to Chief Secretary, 25/11/25; R.L. Buell, The Native Problem in Africa (New York, Macmillan Company, 1928) pp.381-398.

⁴⁸ Buell, The Native Problem p.394.

⁴⁹ Ibid p.394.

Kenya and Nyasaland were thus opposed to the "dual policy of development". However, as far as Nyasaland was concerned, the opposition did not amount to anything. The government did not limit African cash-cropping both on Crown Land and on 'private estate'. This was a good case of the ambivalence and contradictions in colonial policy. By encouraging direct production, the state unconsciously discouraged the flow of labour to the settler plantations. This happened at a time when production relations on the 'private estates' were changing. Starting from the early 1920s thangata labour tenancy in the Shire Highlands was gradually replaced by sharecropping. The Central Province, formerly one of the "labour districts" became the centre of the African tobacco industry.

The government's policies were contradictory and ambivalent not only because they did not support the interests of the local planters, but also the government's own interests as well. The PWD needed a lot of labour for road construction to link the Shire Highlands to the northern railway extension; and the railway extension to the newly opened tobacco-producing areas in the Central Province and the cotton-producing areas in the Upper Shire Valley and along the lakeshore. The Department also employed workers in portering and in building construction. The labour employed in building and portering "appear[ed] to be fairly plentiful" but that employed in road construction was "very unsatisfactory" and

"notoriously inefficient". The work was "very unpopular . . . due mainly to the long hours demanded without increased pay . . . work started at 6 o'clock in the morning to 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon. "Practically no piece-work was given".⁵⁰ No regular provision was made for the feeding of the labourers employed on the roads, and only temporary grass shelters were provided for those required to work during the rainy season.⁵¹ The PWD was thus an object of aversion to the labourers. Supervision of workers was irregular owing to lack of European staff, and "desertion" and "loafing" were common - hence the reference to "notorious inefficiency".

Acting under pressure from the settlers, and forced by its own labour demands, the government had attempted to secure labour by force between 1922 and 1924. Hut tax was raised from 3 and 6 shillings to 4 and 8 shillings,⁵² and was collected with impunity. Houses of tax defaulters were burned down and their wives seized for ransom.⁵³ New Labour Regulations were introduced in 1922 giving the government powers to conscript adult males (over the age of 18 years) "for essential

⁵⁰ MNA S1/428/27 Memorandum on Labour in Public Works, 1927.

⁵¹ MNA S1/428/27 Public Works Labour, 1927. For more details on working conditions in the Public Works Department see MNA S1/1132/30 H.H. Vassal, Acting Provincial Commissioner, Memorandum on Labour in Government Departments, 1930.

⁵² This was done according to the differential tax system as described in the previous chapter.

⁵³ Vail, "The State and the Creation" p.57.

services".⁵⁴ By 1924, "gangs of Chewa prisoners in chains and handcuffs, escorted by policemen, were a regular sight on the roads leading to the Shire Highlands estates from which they were said to have deserted".⁵⁵ The Colonial Office and local missionaries feared that the regulations amounted to forced labour. They advised the government to abolish them, and it complied.

III

Regional Labour Markets

An important aspect of the flow of labour from Nyasaland during the period covered in this chapter was the diversity of the labour markets. Though South African employers offered higher wages and better working conditions, they were not the only employers of Nyasaland labour. Higher wages were not the only attraction to Nyasaland migrants. The numbers of Nyasaland migrants entering South Africa after the 1913 ban

⁵⁴ PRO C.O.626/15 Nyasaland Government Gazette, 31st October, 1922; MNA S1/428/27 Public Works Labour, 1927. See also K.N. Mufuka, Missions and Politics in Malawi (Kingston, The Limestone Press, 1977) p.54.

⁵⁵ K.J. McCracken, "Share-cropping in Malawi: The Visiting Tenant System in the Central Province, c.1920-1968" in African Studies Centre, University of Edinburgh (ed), Malawi: An Alternative Pattern of Development (Edinburgh, African Studies Centre, 1985) p.37; and by the same author, "Coercion and Control" pp.128-129.

remained large,⁵⁶ but it was much easier to get to Southern Rhodesia because it was close. Also, the Rhodesian police watched the trains and the roads, migrants transmitting to South Africa had to move down the east side of the country, keeping to the bushveld wilderness along the Mozambique border.

The increase in mining and agricultural activity in both South Africa and Southern Rhodesia from the 1920s "caused an ever-increasing demand for native labour which could not be met entirely from local sources".⁵⁷ Between 1928 and 1932, the South African government developed a scheme of repatriating "tropicals" found in the towns but failed dismally. Thereafter, the Native Affairs Department permitted the employment of "tropicals" in agriculture due to a severe shortage in farm labour. This became official policy from 1938 with the implementation of the Urban Areas Amendment Act (Amended 1937). The Act banned Africans from the northern territories (excluding South West Africa, now Namibia, and the High Commission Territories, now Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland) from towns without the permission of the Minister.

⁵⁶ See MNA S1/1225/22 Rheinallt Jones to the Administrative Secretary, Office of the High Commissioner for Batsutoland, Bechuanaland, and Swaziland, 1/12/37; Herbert S. Stanley, Governor, Northern Rhodesia, to Harold Kittermaster, Governor, Nyasaland, 3/1/38 and Kittermaster to Stanley, 8/1/38.

⁵⁷ MNA S36/3/2/5 Nyasaland Protectorate/G.N. Burden, Nyasaland Natives in the Union of South Africa (Zomba, Government Printer, 1940) p.5.

The chief aim was to increase the supply of labour to the farmers.⁵⁸

The exact numbers of Nyasaland labourers going to Southern Rhodesia and South Africa during this period is impossible to state with any degree of precision. Statistical evidence is scanty, incomplete, and unreliable. For example, in 1920, a colonial report on Nyasaland estimated the number of Nyasaland workers in Southern Rhodesia at 14,000 while a population census done in Southern Rhodesia in May 1921 enumerated 44,702 male and 3,172 female Nyasaland 'natives' in the country.⁵⁹ Records of the Southern Rhodesia Chamber of mines show that an average of not less than 12,500 Nyasaland workers were employed in the Southern Rhodesian mines each year between 1920 and 1925.⁶⁰ By 1926, 43,169 (43,020 male and 149 female) Nyasaland workers were recorded in the country. The total figure rose to 49,487 in 1931.⁶¹ The numbers of

⁵⁸ MNA S1/1225/22 K.L. Hall, Chief Secretary, Circular on the Undesirability of East African Natives Immigrating into the Union of South Africa, 12/3/38; Eric Smith, Labour Commissioner, to Chief Secretary, 19/4/39; E. Warren, Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia Labour Officer, Johannesburg, to Labour Commissioner, Zomba, 4/12/39.

⁵⁹ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Protectorate Annual Report 1920 pp.7-9; see also 1921 pp.5-7 and 1922 pp.6-8; Southern Rhodesia, Final Report Regarding the Census, 3rd May, 1921 (Salisbury, Government Printer, 1921) pp.6-8 and pp.18-20. Also Report Regarding the Census, 4th May, 1926 Part II; Kuczynski, Demographic Survey pp.549-581; Coleman, "International Labour Migration" pp.36-45.

⁶⁰ See Kuczynski, Demographic Survey p.558.

⁶¹ Southern Rhodesia, Population Census Report, 1926, p.47; 1931, p.106; Kuczynski, Demographic Survey pp.556-557.

migrants going to South Africa between 1913 and 1936 are non-existent in the Nyasaland records, chiefly due to the "clandestine" nature of the migration during this period. In 1928, some 11,000 Nyasaland 'natives' were reported in South Africa where their presence "was causing unemployment among South African born natives".⁶² Given the degree of selufu migration from Nyasaland to South Africa during this period, this figure is undoubtedly an underestimate.

A labour census taken in Nyasaland between February and October 1937 came up with the following figures: 64,078 employed in Southern Rhodesia, 13,938 in South Africa, 5,782 in Tanganyika, 4,108 in Northern Rhodesia, 599 in Belgian Congo, and 1,582 in "other" countries.⁶³ These figures do not tell us much about colonial Malawi's labour migration. Two sets of figures would be important here: one on the numbers resident at any given time in the employing country; and another on the numbers of migrants entering those countries annually. The relationship between them would be determined by the average length of the contract period. If the contract period was six months the flow had to be double the number resident in the country so as to maintain the supply. If the contract period was two years, a flow of half the number resident would be required to maintain the supply. It is

⁶² MNA S36/3/2/5 Nyasaland Natives in the Union of South Africa p.6.

⁶³ MNA S1/943II/29 Adult Male Population and Labour Statistics, 1937.

impossible to make these calculations in the absence of reliable statistical data.

Apart from ease of entry and exit, proximity to home also played an important role. For example, the majority of the Nyasaland workers in PEA "were almost entirely" from the border districts of Mlanje and Chiradzulu.⁶⁴ They had no trouble in frequently crossing the borders. Similarly, the majority of those working on the North-Eastern Rhodesian farms were from the border districts of the Central Province (Angoniland and Marimba) and western districts of the Northern Province.⁶⁵ This migration increased with the beginning of deep level copper mining from about 1925. By 1930, some 3,944 Nyasaland workers were employed by the Copperbelt companies.⁶⁶ From this time, the farms found it extremely difficult to attract adequate amounts of Nyasaland labour. The expansion of tobacco production in the Central Province, from which much of the farm labour was formerly drawn, contributed to this difficulty.

Nyasaland workers were also employed at the Lupa Gold

⁶⁴ PRO C.O.525/35 Charles Casson's reports on a visit to Portuguese East Africa, Southern Rhodesia and South Africa, 1910.

⁶⁵ This account is based on an exchange of notes with Yizenge Chondoka of the History Department, University of Zambia, currently PhD candidate, History Department, University of Toronto. For accounts relating to earlier periods, see PRO C.O.525/2 Sharpe to Foreign Office, 19/7/04; PRO C.O.525/7 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 21/3/05.

⁶⁶ See Kuczynski, Demographic Survey p.434 and p.557.

Fields of Tanganyika. The migration began in the period shortly after WWI when the Tanganyika government hired skilled and semi-skilled workers from Nyasaland for its civil service. The majority of them were graduates of the Overtoun Institute of the Livingstonia Mission.⁶⁷ By the 1920s, the sisal plantations and groundnuts (peanuts) farms in the southern and western parts of Tanganyika were employing considerable numbers of Nyasaland workers from North Nyasa district (present Karonga and Chitipa). However, migrant farm labour was overshadowed by migration to the Lupa Gold Fields where "the great proportion of Nyasaland labour [was] employed by alluvial diggers".⁶⁸ By 1935, it was estimated that 15,000 Nyasaland workers were employed on the Lupa gold mines, and an additional 2,000 to 5,000 elsewhere in Tanganyika.

Due to the speculative nature of the Lupa mines, "no wage [was] promised". According to the Reverend W.P. Young of the Livingstonia Mission, the whole labour position was vitiated by the fact that over 80 per cent of the employers were alluvial diggers who were "barely making ends meet". They tended to employ more workers than they could pay in the hope that something would turn up. If nothing turned up, the labourers had to accept whatever they could get. If they took their complaints to the boma, the government, the response was

⁶⁷ MNA COM-8/1 Draft Report of the Committee to Enquire into Emigrant Labour, 1935.

⁶⁸ MNA COM-8/1 Rev. W.P. Young, Report on a Visit to the Lupa Goldfield Area, 1-6 November, 1935.

that "you can't take money from a digger who hasn't got it".⁶⁹ Depending on the digger's fortune, the workers received a minimum wage of 10 to 12 shillings per month plus food costing, on average, 5 shillings per month.

There were two other important aspects of the Lupa Gold Fields related to Nyasaland labour. First, the mines employed "large numbers of small boys" of 15 to 16 years of age. Most of them accompanied their adult male relatives. On arrival at the mines, they were often told to stay in the hope that the diggers would find something and they would be paid. Removed from family support, these children became extremely vulnerable. Given that no cooked rations were provided by the diggers,⁷⁰ the children were often underfed and undernourished. Due to lack of fresh foods cases of scurvy and leg ulcers were very common. The children were also exposed to numerous "social evils" including excessive beer-drinking and "forced" prostitution. Their value to the diggers was that they constituted a reserve from which supplementary labour could be drawn.

The employment of children was not unique to the Lupa Gold Fields. In the whole of southern Africa, including Nyasaland, the weakest employers - those who could pay the least - tended to rely on child labour, the disabled, women

⁶⁹ MNA COM-8/1, Young, Report on a Visit to Lupa, 1935.

⁷⁰ The diggers provided uncooked rations plus cooking utensils, the workers cooked for themselves. The rations were often sold to supplement the low wages.

and others without choice.⁷¹ In Nyasaland, this was one way by which the settler employers survived the competition for the local labour supply with external recruiters. Between the 1920s and the 1950s, children, youth, women, and the politically powerless immigrants from Mozambique constituted between one-quarter and half of the regular wage-labour force on the Nyasaland plantations (details in chapters 7 and 8).

The second aspect of the Lupa connection was the trade in foodstuffs from the North Nyasa district. In 1934, the District Commissioner in the area estimated that the trade brought in some £3,000.⁷² The Lupa diggers depended on this trade to supplement their poor rations. On the Nyasaland side, its importance can be appreciated if we compare the £3,000 to the £1,000 raised by sale of export crops in all the five districts of the Northern Province in the same year. The limitation of this trade lay in the uncertainty of the Lupa market given the temporary nature of the gold fields. Nobody was sure how long the Lupa market was going to be open to the people of the North Nyasa district.⁷³

⁷¹ See C. van Onselen, Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933 (London, Pluto Press, 1976) pp.124-125; W. Beinart, "Transkeian Migrant Workers and Youth Labour on the Natal Sugar Estates, 1918-1948" in JAH vol.32 (1991) pp.41-63.

⁷² MNA COM-8/1 Annual Report of the North Nyasa District 1934, cited in the Draft Report on Emigrant Labour, 1935. See also Young, Report on a Visit to the Lupa Goldfields in the same file. Maize sold at 2 shillings 6 pence per 60 lbs. bag and rice at 10 shillings per bag.

⁷³ MNA COM-8/1 North Nyasa District Annual Report, 1934.

The trade also defined the process of labour migration to the fields. The majority of the Nyasaland workers at Lupa were on short contracts of two to three months,⁷⁴ especially during the dry season. Short contracts were also characteristic of the Nyasaland labour migration to smaller mines, farms, and construction areas in eastern Transvaal, Southern and Northern Rhodesia, and the sugar estates of Portuguese East Africa.⁷⁵ Oral evidence suggests that these contracts were preferred by the migrants for three reasons:⁷⁶ first, they allowed the migrants to come home during the planting season and whenever there was a family emergency. Second, because the contracts were of a casual nature, it was easier to find and leave work whenever necessary, especially on smaller mines and farms which were frequently short of labour.

Third, workers returned to the same employers. They established personal relationships in this way which gave them assurance of re-engagement and allowed them to bargain for better terms of employment. If the employer was not in need of labour, he/she would act as a referee by recommending the

⁷⁴ MNA COM-8/1 Young, Report on a Visit to Lupa. Young cited evidence from his missionary colleagues in the area and from the Nyasaland workers themselves.

⁷⁵ See PRO C.O.525/35 Cassons's reports on a visit to Portuguese East Africa, Southern Rhodesia, and South Africa.

⁷⁶ "Theba Is Power" Interview (TIP) 3/WC/Ali Mgombe, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 23/9/89; TIP/5/WC/Phillip Kondoole, Nkhota-kota Trading Centre, 23/9/89; TIP/9/WC/Mwazeni Mutira and Kankhomba Kafere, Ching'amba Village, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 29/9/89; TIP/19/WC Kawatu Phiri, Namiasi, Mangochi, 17/12/89; TIP/26/WC/B.C. Chirwa, Dindano-Murdola, Nkhata Bay, 26/3/90.

individual workers to his/her friends. It was for the above reasons that some Nyasaland migrants preferred to work for smaller mines and farms to going to the Rand where working conditions and contracts were rigidly structured.

IV

African Cotton and Tobacco Production

Official records show that labour migration from Nyasaland increased simultaneously with cash-cropping at home, especially after WWI. On Crown Land in the Shire Valley, the Shire Highlands and the lakeshore districts of South Nyasa (Fort Johnston) and Karonga, the African cotton industry expanded remarkably in spite of marketing limitations and adverse agricultural conditions (see also Chapter 5 : Tables 1 and 2).⁷⁷ Unreliability of colonial statistics makes it difficult to precisely judge the amount of African cash crop production during this period. The following table, based on fragmented figures from the reports of the Department of Agriculture, provides comparative figures of the amounts of cotton produced in some districts shortly before and after

⁷⁷ PRO C.O.626/1 Department of Agriculture Annual Reports, 1912-14; C.O.626/4 Department of Agriculture Annual Reports, 1920-1925. For cotton Production in the Lower Shire Mandala, Work and Control, especially chapter 4.

WWI:⁷⁸**Table 2 : Cotton Production by Administrative Districts (in tons).**

<u>District</u>	<u>1912/13</u>	<u>1923/24</u>	<u>1924/25</u>
Shire Valley			
Lower Shire	24.36	732	1,692
Chikwawa/Katunga	n/a	128	454
West/Central Shire	7.45	99	153
Upper Shire/Liwonde	154.69	11	62
Shire Highlands			
Blantyre	7.45	n/a	n/a
Ruo/Cholo	4.97	n/a	n/a
Mlanje	280.64	83	85
Zomba	8.15	n/a	n/a
Central Province (Central Angoniland)			
Ncheu	n/a	100	99
Dedza	10.13	12	51
Dowa	n/a	6	12
Lakeshore Districts			
South Nyasa	118.18	101	142
Nkhota-kota (Marimba)	0.45	-	1
Karonga (N. Nyasa)	128.09	97	158
TOTALS	744.57	1,369	2,909

Source: PRO C.O.626/1 - C.O.626/7 Annual Reports of the Agriculture Department, 1910-1927. The figures for 1912/13 have been converted from pounds (lbs) to tons.

Notes: (i) This table makes more sense if read in relation to the Tables in Chapter 5.
(ii) n/a stands for figure not available.
(iii) In Dedza cotton was produced along the lakeshore as well.

Though incomplete and of questionable accuracy

these figures help us understand three important patterns in rural production in the period after WWI. First, cotton

⁷⁸ See PRO C.O.626/1 to C.O.626/7 Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture, 1910 to 1927. The figures for 1912/13 have been converted from pounds to tons.

production by European planters declined quite sharply from 1916. That could be the explanation for the low figures in cotton production in the Shire Highlands districts after WWI. Second, given that the official records state that 63 per cent of the cotton produced in 1925, 74 per cent in 1926, and 83 per cent in 1927 was by African growers, there is no doubt that this industry was expanding simultaneously with labour migration in the post-war period. Third, the main cotton producing district in the post-war period were in the Shire Valley, the Central Province, and the lakeshore areas. It was argued in the previous chapter that the Central Province and the lakeshore areas were the "labour districts" which provided the greatest numbers of "protectorate labourers" to the European plantations in the Shire Highlands. The expansion of African cotton production in these areas thus greatly affected the flow of this category of labour to the European plantations.

The effects of cash-cropping on African communities themselves varied according to regions. In the Lower Shire, cash-cropping stimulated nomi youth clubs which were hired by those who could afford to pay cash wages. "Boys and girls from one or several villages would form a nomi society whose primary function was to render agricultural services in return for payment in cash or in kind".⁷⁹ Nomi thus "provided a

⁷⁹ Mandala, Work and Control p.114. See also J.M. Schoffeleers, "From Socialization to Personal Enterprise: A History of the Nomi Labour Societies in the Nsanje District of

significant portion of labour needed for cotton production". Labour emigration among young men in the Valley "remained at insignificant levels throughout the 1920s and 1930s".⁸⁰ This was not the case along the lake and in the northern districts. Cash-cropping and wage employment were at insignificant levels in these areas. Labour migration thus offered better opportunities for accumulation to younger men. In the Central Province, tobacco production became an important alternative to labour emigration for middle-aged men and those with access to family labour and adequate land. The same applied to the Shire Highlands. By 1925, "there was a very marked increase in the growth by natives of cotton and tobacco for export".⁸¹ Official records show that 33 percent of the tobacco produced in the Protectorate that year was African-grown. The percentages gradually rose to 41 in 1926 and 43 in 1927. European producers feared that "this industry was so lucrative that it was impossible to compete with it".⁸² To understand the reasons behind this fear one needs to compare the earnings of tobacco producers on Crown Land and those on 'private estates'. The former could earn anywhere between £10 to £12 a year while the latter could earn up to £7 annually.

Malawi, c.1891 to 1972" in Rural Africana no.20 (Spring 1973) pp.11-25.

⁸⁰ Mandala, Work and Control p.157.

⁸¹ PRO C.O.626/4 Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture, 1925. See also C.O.626/7 Report of 1926/27.

⁸² MNA S1/428/27 Draft Report of a Labour Survey, 1927.

The annual earnings of the producers on 'private estates' were "about twice" the annual wages of the plantation labourers at that time.⁸³ African tobacco production thus presented a big threat to the settler employers' wage-labour supply.

The difficulty in the above figures is that they were "taken as fairly representative of the profits made by native tobacco growers in the Shire Highlands".⁸⁴ Not all growers on Crown Land could earn up to £10 or up to £7 on 'private estates'. A labour survey taken in late 1926/early 1927 concluded that most growers on 'private estates' made between £1. 6s. and £4 in profit. Though the latter figure was higher than the annual wage earnings for the majority of plantation labourers, very few growers made that much. About 51 per cent of them made a profit of less than £1. It was only those with access to adequate amounts of land on Crown Land who made enough money. In congested districts such as Chiradzulu and Zomba, the earnings of African growers both on Crown Land and on 'private estates' remained low.

What is needed here is adequate information on land holdings, district population, access to labour and markets,

⁸³ MNA S1/1132/30 Acting Provincial Commissioner, Southern Province, Memorandum on Labour, 1930.

⁸⁴ MNA S1/428/27 Draft Report a Labour Survey, 1927. The report went on to state that: "with a substantial increase in the monthly wage obtainable on a plantation, at least 50 per cent of those growing tobacco in the Shire Highlands would give it up. The industry would then be carried on only by those with a special aptitude for tobacco growing and with suitable soil available. This would be of mutual advantage to the native tobacco grower and the European planter".

capital investment, production costs and the living index. Such information is hard to find. With the influx of Mozambicans into the Shire Highlands in the post-war period, land shortage was a limiting factor to the expansion of African tobacco production. In some congested districts such as Chiradzulu, peasant land holdings were, in some cases, as small as half an acre. "Owing to the density of the population" there was very little prospect of expansion in African tobacco production.⁸⁵ However, land shortage could only limit the expansion of African cash-cropping but could not stop it entirely.

By 1928, tobacco was extensively grown by Africans on Crown Land in the Shire Highlands, on Trust Land in the Central Province, as well as on the 'private estates'. A survey of registered tobacco growers taken that year came up with the following figures:⁸⁶

⁸⁵ MNA S1/428/27 Draft Report of a Labour Survey, 1927.

⁸⁶ MNA S1/427/28 Previous Occupations of Registered Tobacco Growers, 1926-28.

Table 3 : Registered Tobacco Growers (1926-1928).

<u>District</u>	<u>1926/27</u>		<u>1927/28</u>	
	Crown Land	Estates	Crown Land	Estates
S. Province				
Blantyre	1,304	744	599	401
Chiradzulu	8,178	1,292	6,667	1,419
Cholo	458	1,258	-	n/v
Fort Johnston	410	68	13	38
Liwonde	-	-	193	22
Mlanje	7,026	45	1,861	0
Upper Shire	1,029	38	-	n/v
Zomba	5,535	2,798	1,747	297
C. Province				
Dedza	3,223	64	825	95
Dowa	10,303	0	6,110	0
Fort Manning	2,850	0	-	-
Kasungu	1,119	0	-	-
Lilongwe	13,125	166	9,280	-
Ncheu	2,381	483	-	-
Nkhota-kota	-	-	1,424	0

The above figures are far from being complete. They do not show the amount of land cultivated, investment outlay, profit margins, distinction between old and new growers, their gender - given that agriculture was predominantly a women's activity and wage-labour predominantly a men's activity. There was also the possibility of a grower having a plot both on Crown Land and on a 'private estate' at the same time. However, they had four implications in relation to the flow of labour to the European plantations. First, the majority of the growers were on Crown Land which was the source of "local labour". This shows that economic opportunities for the Crown Land 'natives' were increasing, and so too was their independence in their ability to dispose of their labour. Second, as regarded the tenants on 'private estates', cash-

cropping empowered them to bargain for better terms with their landlords. The low numbers of growers on 'private estates' in the Central Province is a reflection of the abundance of land on Trust Land in this region which meant that Africans could grow tobacco in their villages without moving into 'private estates' in large numbers.

Third, that the 'natives' were achieving greater independence in their ability to dispose of their labour is demonstrated by the fact that the majority of the registered tobacco growers were former labourers on 'private estates' or had at one time or another worked for an European employer. For example, of the 6,667 registered growers recorded on Crown Land in Chiradzulu in 1928, 6,137 had worked as labourers on 'private estates'; 348 of the 599 recorded in Blantyre; 1,752 of the 1,861 in Mlanje; 129 of the 193 in Liwonde, and 668 of the 1,747 in Zomba. A lot more worked for European employers in other capacities such as porters, capitaos, and domestic servants.⁸⁷ Finally, the rapid expansion of the African tobacco industry in the Central Province, which was one of the "labour districts" for the Shire Highlands plantations, severely affected the flow of labour from this region in subsequent years.

Another important aspect of the African tobacco industry in the Central Province was its connection with migrant

⁸⁷ In some cases the "previous occupations" of the growers were stated simply as "worked in the Shire highlands" or "worked in Blantyre" or Zomba etc.

labour. Of the 6,110 growers recorded in Dowa in 1928, 4,185 were migrant labourers; 1,698 of the 9,280 recorded in Lilongwe had worked in Southern Rhodesia and 10 had worked in Northern Rhodesia. In Nkhota-kota, 81 returned migrant labourers had taken up tobacco production as "new growers" in 1928. Given that no attempt was made to find out what the migrants were doing after returning home, it is impossible to state with any degree of precision how many of them had taken up tobacco production. Their numbers are likely to have been higher than suggested by the figures above. Some of them remitted money to their relatives to hire labourers or tenants to grow tobacco on their behalf. Not only does this show the vitality and resilience of the local economy in the face of increased labour migration, but also the enterprising spirit of the migrant labourers themselves.

VI

The Fishing Industry

African initiative was not confined to cotton and tobacco. At the southern end of Lake Malawi and around lakes Malombe and Chilwa, fishing and fish-trading emerged as alternatives to cash-cropping and wage labour. Just as with tobacco and cotton, African commercial fishing expanded in the post-WWI

period.⁸⁸ John McCracken has argued that this was a result of a combination of ecological and market factors.⁸⁹ Prior to WWI, much of the fish sold on the Shire Highlands markets came from the Shire River⁹⁰ and Lake Chilwa.⁹¹ The opening of the Shire Highlands railway provided the Lower Shire fishermen and fish traders with easy access to the markets on the Shire Highlands. The proximity of Lake Chilwa to the Shire Highlands was a big advantage to the fishermen and fish traders there.

Between 1913 to 1916, and 1918 to 1922, Nyasaland experienced severe fluctuations in rainfall resulting in a fall in the water levels on all the lakes and the Shire River. Lake Chilwa "almost completely dried up, bringing fishing to a temporary halt".⁹² Similarly, the Shire River continued to

⁸⁸ For information on pre-colonial fishing and fish-trading see Chapter One.

⁸⁹ K.J. McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy: The Case of Malawi" in JAH vol.28 (1987) pp.419-420.

⁹⁰ See Mandala, Work and Control pp.8, 36-39, 250-254.

⁹¹ McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy" p.420. For details on the Lake Chilwa fisheries see P.E. Phipps, "The 'Big' Fishermen of Lake Chilwa: A Preliminary Survey of Entrepreneurs in a Rural Economy" in Rural Africana no.21 (Summer 1973) pp.37-48; M. Kalk, A.J. McLachlan and C. Howard-Williams (eds), Lake Chilwa: Studies of Change in a Tropical Ecosystem (The Hague, Boston, London, Junk bv Publishers, 1979).

⁹² McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy" p.418; Life and Work (July-December 1915) p.6. See also H.L Duff, Nyasaland and the Colonial Office Second Edition, (London, George Bell and Sons 1906) p.111.

recede. By 1924, Lake Malombe almost entirely dried up.⁹³ The importance of these ecological changes is that they made fishing by traps and baskets easy. Weirs were constructed in the shallow waters across the Shire, along the swampy edges of the lakes, and in shallow lagoons to catch fish coming to spawn or take refuge. Family heads and local authorities who controlled the land along the water front tended to dominate this type of fishing. Some of them claimed proprietary rights over certain sections of the swamps and lagoons. Good examples of these were Nyachikhaza in the Lower Shire; Amang'anja family heads and clan leaders around lakes Malombe and Chilwa,⁹⁴ and on Chisi Island; Mponda near Fort Johnston; Mwamadi (Muhammad) Matewere at the Bar;⁹⁵ and Chembe near Cape Maclear.

Matewere's case was particularly interesting. He had taken advantage of his village at the Bar to construct weirs and fish-traps across the Shire some time around 1917.⁹⁶ He became the major supplier of fish to soldiers and carriers stationed in "labour camps" at Fort Johnston on their way to

⁹³ MNA NSF 4/1/3 South Nyasa District Annual Report, 1931; McCracken, "Fishing in the Colonial Economy" p.418.

⁹⁴ The Lake Chilwa and Chisi Island swamps and water fronts were also used for the production of salt and limestone, respectively.

⁹⁵ The Bar is at the southern end of the eastern arm of Lake Malawi from which the Shire River begins.

⁹⁶ MNA S1/437I/30 Minutes by the Attorney General, 11/1/30; S1/1437I/30 C.B. Nichols to Attorney General, 6/1/30; McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy" p.420.

East Africa.⁹⁷ More troops and carriers were stationed at Zomba and Blantyre who created a new market for fish from lakes Chilwa and Malombe. In 1920, a publication of the Historical Section of the Foreign Office reported that: "the natives using grass or reed traps or nets along the shore, or lines from canoes in deeper water, take large quantities of fish from the lake [Malawi]", and those along Lake Chilwa "catch fish and sell it in the Zomba and Blantyre markets".⁹⁸ By 1922, there was "a large fishing industry at the south end of the lake" catering for the markets in Zomba and Blantyre.⁹⁹

Lack of documentation on fishing makes it difficult to know the exact numbers of people involved in fishing and fish-trading at this time. In 1925, Cuthbert Christie of the British Natural History Museum conducted a brief marine biology survey at the southern end of the lake but died before publishing his findings. Brief notes from the survey obtained by government officials from members of his team suggest that

⁹⁷ An excessive fish diet was probably the cause of diarrhoea among the soldiers and carriers in the "labour camps" at Fort Johnston. See Nyasaland Protectorate, Report of the Population Census (Zomba, Government Printer 1926) p.xv.

⁹⁸ Foreign Office, Nyasaland: A Handbook Prepared Under the Direction of the Historical Section of the Foreign Office (London, HMSO, 1920) pp.61-62.

⁹⁹ S. L. Gray, A Handbook of Nyasaland (London, 1922) p.110 and N.H. Pollock, Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia: Corridor to the North (Pittsburgh, 1971) p.304, cited in McCrae, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy" p.420.

the lake's fisheries had a potential to sustain a big yield.¹⁰⁰ A report of the population census taken in 1926 noted that fish was consumed in great amounts and was "highly appreciated as a relish".¹⁰¹ A year later, a draft report of a labour survey taken in the Southern Province speculated that "a considerable proportion" of casual labour in the Shire Highlands "could be absorbed in the fish trade".¹⁰²

The extent of this trade was outlined in the 1931 population census report:

one of the growing industries is the fish trade. The fish are caught either in Lake Nyasa or Lake Shirwa [sic] and are sold either fresh or after being dried and smoked. The fresh fish is carried on bicycles, sometimes as far as Blantyre, 40 miles from Lake Shirwa [sic], and it always finds a ready market. Dried fish is hawked all over the country and is carried either on bicycles or on long poles slung over the shoulder. Sometimes, indeed, lorries are used and it is only a question of time before this means of conveyance becomes usual....Those engaged in the trade number not less than 10,000, the great majority being hawkers.¹⁰³

A similar account appeared in the 1932 annual report of the South Nyasa district: "there are approximately 200 villages settled on or near the shore of lake Nyasa and Malombe, and the majority of people in these villages engage themselves in

¹⁰⁰ MNA S1/822/25 Expedition by Dr. Cuthbert Christie, 1925.

¹⁰¹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Report on the Population Census, 1926. p.xv.

¹⁰² MNA S1/428/27 Draft Report of a Labour Survey, 1927.

¹⁰³ Nyasaland Protectorate, Report of the Population Census, 1931, p.28. See also MNA S1/1307/30 Population Census Report, 1931; and Colonial Office, An Economic Survey of the Colonial Empire p.48.

fishing for 'Gain'".¹⁰⁴ Their profits "varied greatly from season to season"¹⁰⁵ and depending on such factors as access to transportation and proximity to markets. Elsewhere in the Southern Province, fish-traders who were nearer to the Shire Highlands where plantation labour provided a good fish market, and those with bicycles or access to motorized transportation, could raise between 10 shillings (using a bicycle) and £2 (using motorized transportation) in a month.¹⁰⁶ Those around Chipoka, Salima, Domira and Senga Bay, benefitted from the northern extension of the railway which had reached a few miles from the lake by 1932. After its completion in 1935, the railway acted as an important stimulant to the trade in dried fish from these areas.

At Nkhota-kota, central part of the lake, fishermen with "big nets" made between £20 to £30 a year, but the average fishermen "probably [did] not exceed £10" while hawkers "possibly" made between £1. 10s and £2 a year.¹⁰⁷ At the prevailing wage rate of 5 to 7 shillings a month on the Shire Highlands plantations, it would take between 28 to 40 months

¹⁰⁴ MNA NSF 4/1/7 South Nyasa District Annual Report, 1930.

¹⁰⁵ Nyasaland Protectorate, Report on Population Census, 1931, p.28.

¹⁰⁶ TIP.13/WC/ D.P.M. Ngalawesa, Kela, Mpondas, Mangochi, 26/1/90; TIP.15/WC/F. Hapana Fatchi, Kela, Mangochi, 28/1/90; TIP.20/WC/Maulanda Chimanda, Namiasi, Mangochi, 4/2/90.

¹⁰⁷ Nyasaland Protectorate, Report of the Population Census, 1931, p.28.

for a labourer to earn £10. Growing his/her own food, dependent on family labour to process the fish, and with a supplementary income of between 1 pound 10 shillings to £2 a year, the Nkhota-kota fish-trader was far much better off than the Shire Highlands plantation labourer who had to buy his/her food and other necessities from his/her meagre wages. Oral evidence maintains that in the Shire Highlands it was very common for male plantation labourers to engage in fish-trading to supplement their low wages. They travelled to Lake Chilwa during week-ends to purchase fish and left it to their family members, usually wives or children, to sell while they (the male labourers) continued to work for wages.¹⁰⁸

The expansion of the African tobacco production in the Central Province acted as a major stimulant to the fishing and fish-trading around Nkhota-kota. The only constraint to expansion was the unavailability of transport facilities between the lake and the fish markets on the tobacco estates to the west. It was therefore those who had raised money from migrant labour or the "visiting tenant" system, and had invested it in nets or bicycles, who had an upper hand in business. This tended to lead to differentiation which, in a way, was an inherent characteristic of the fishing and fish-trading industry. Differentiation occurred between fishermen

¹⁰⁸ TIP.13/WC/D.P.M. Ngalawesa, Kela, Mpondas, Mangochi, 26/1/90; TIP.20/WC/Maulanda Chimanda, Namiasi, Mangochi, 4/2/90; TIP 15/WC/F. Hapana Fatchi, Kela, Mangochi, 28/1/90; TIP.4/WC/ W. Synod Mankhokwe, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 28/9/89. See also White, Magomero p.159 and pp.247-248.

and fish-traders, and among individuals in each of these groups. Fishermen and fish-traders were structurally distinguishable. Though by virtue of selling their fish to other traders fishermen were also fish-traders, they were different from the rest of the traders by virtue of being the primary producers. The traders bought the fish from the fishermen at the lake at chipiku, "wholesale" price, and took it to the markets where they sold it at retail price.

The significance of this was that there was no direct competition between the fishermen and the fish-traders. By selling their catch to the traders at the lake, the fishermen avoided the risks involved in handling a highly perishable commodity. The majority of the fish-traders were from inland areas or those who did not possess traditional fishing skills. However, it was possible to move from fish-trading to actual fishing for those who had the fishing skills. There is no evidence of wage-labour in fishing prior to the 1950s.

Fish-traders could be differentiated according to the way they entered the business and the degree of involvement in it. Entry into fish-trading was, and still is, very easy. It did not require a large capital outlay - one could become a fish-trader with very little money, as little as 2 shillings in 1930s. The initial capital could be borrowed and repaid relatively easily, or could be raised through wage labour or cash-cropping. The easiest way was to start by working as a m'lovi for a fisherman and then trade one's daily chiyambiko

share. In this way one would be part-time mulovi fisherman and part-time fish-trader. After raising enough money one would then take up fish-trading on a regular basis. This was a method usually followed by young men who did not own fishing gear. An alternative was to start by processing and trading a kin's catch and receive a share of the proceeds and thereafter build one's own business.

The way the fish-trade operated also contributed to the ease of entry. A fish-trader could act simply as a "middleman" operating between the lake and the market. This was usually the case with those who had adequate capital and access to motorized transportation or bicycles. Alternatively, the trader could simply wait for the "middlemen" at the market, buy their fish and resale it in the smaller village, plantation and peri-urban markets. This was the method usually adopted by women and "smaller" traders who did not have adequate capital and means of transportation. Competition therefore existed between the different categories of the fish-traders as well as among them. With the emergence of lorry transportation in the 1930s, it was the "middlemen" who had an upper hand in the trade. These competed with the "bicycle boys" for the urban and plantation markets. Both the "middlemen" and "bicycle boys" were predominantly returned migrant labourers or had earned their capital from sources other than agricultural production.

Just like fish-traders, fishermen could also be

differentiated. There was the group of the family heads and local authorities who had capitalized on kinship ties and traditional power relations to appropriate the surplus generated by their "juniors" for personal accumulation. Mwamadi Matewere, Chembe, Nyachikhaza, and other local leaders belonged to this group. The second group was that of entrepreneurs who had earned capital from external sources and had invested it in commercial fishing. Both groups were commercial in the sense that they were both in the market, but they were different on account of their economic backgrounds. The village and family heads had worked their way up within the fishing industry whereas the new entrepreneurs took the more business-like approach by investing in it capital earned from other sources. Their common characteristics were: possession of traditional fishing skills, use of family labour, and avoidance of risks involved in fish-trading by confining their activities to the lake.

Commercial fishing required a larger capital outlay than fish-trading. A fisherman needed at least one dug-out canoe, two paddles, a net, ropes, twine, and floats. All these needed money. In the 1930s, a canoe cost between £5 and £10 depending on the size; a chilimira, open-water seine net, or a khoka, beach seine net, cost in the range of £10 to £15 depending on the length.¹⁰⁹ Two important ways by which this money could be

¹⁰⁹ TIP.3/WC/Ali Mgombe, Chia Nkhota-kota, 28/9/89;
 TIP.12/WC/ C. Mwenda, Namiasi, Mangochi, 26/1/90;
 TIP.17/WC/T.H.K. Mzembe, Malembo, Mangochi, 3/2/90;

raised was by labour migration and cash-cropping. With the exception of South Nyasa (Fort Johnston or Mangochi) and parts of North Nyasa (Karonga), the lakeshore districts were not areas of cash crop production. It was thus through labour migration and employment in the civil service¹¹⁰ that investments in commercial fishing were made.

From the late 1930s and early 1940s, the increasing investment of the proceeds of labour migration in fishing and fish-trading began to transform the structural characteristics of the industry outlined above. The returning migrant labourers tended to dominate commercial fishing, especially in the northern sections of Lake Malawi. The evidence in chapter 7 shows that in the south they faced competition from well-capitalized European fishermen who had entered the industry from the late 1920s. The returning migrants therefore tended to dominate the "middleman" and "bicycle boys" position.

At the southern end of Lake Malawi and on Lake Chilwa, commercial fishing expanded rapidly from the 1930s as a result of the economic changes taking place in the Shire Highlands. African tobacco production, though weakened by land shortages, continued to provide a steady income to the local inhabitants. At the same time, well-capitalized European planters had

TIP/26/WC/B.C. Chirwa, Dindano-Mundola, Nkhata Bay, 12/3/90.

¹¹⁰ For the inhabitants of the lakeshore, and especially in the northern districts, employment in the civil service (as teachers and clerks etc) was facilitated by high literacy rates due to the presence of mission schools in the area.

shifted to tea production, resulting in an expansion in the plantation labour force, which in turn expanded the fish market in the Shire Highlands. At the same time, the government and local employers, influenced by the Colonial Office and the conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the feeding and nutritional requirements of workers, began to take an interest in the provision of fish to plantation labourers. Fish-traders were encouraged to bring their fish to the plantations for the labourers to buy and supplement their poor diets. These developments coincided with the "legalization" of labour migration from 1935 which, in the subsequent years, resulted in increased investments in commercial fishing and fish-trading.

Full understanding of these topics requires an examination of the colonial state's shifting priorities for agricultural production. The account in this and the previous chapters has discussed the initiatives of migrant labourers, independent rural producers, wage-labourers and fishermen and fish-traders. To argue that these people exercised a variety of choices, mobility, and independence, is not enough. The role of the colonial state, the changes in settler agriculture, and their impact on African independent economic activity, need to be historically outlined and explained. These will be the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE STATE, PLANTERS, AND PEASANTS

It is not too much to say that the whole Protectorate is being successfully turned by interested parties into a huge reserve for the production of rent-free cheap native tobacco, ...and we fear Government is more or less as hopeless in this matter as the European producer.¹

...the European tobacco industry in Nyasaland is in difficulties while the native one is comparatively prosperous.²

Much of the recent literature on African production in colonial Malawi, just like the account in the preceding chapters, emphasises peasant initiative and resilience. This approach was pioneered by Martin Chanock in the 1970s,³ but popularized in the regional studies by John McCracken, Megan Vaughan and Elias Mandala in the 1980s.⁴

¹ Malawi National Archives (MNA) S1/428/27 Report of a Sub-Committee of the Cholo Planters' Association, 30/10/26.

² Public Record Office (PRO) C.O.525/160 Memo by Gerard Clauson, 20/4/36 cited in R.H. Palmer, "White Farmers in Malawi: Before and After the Depression" in African Affairs vol.84 (April 1985) p.220.

³ See M.L. Chanock, "Notes for an Agricultural History of Malawi" in Rural Africana no.20 (Spring 1973) pp.27-35, and by the same author, "The New Men Revisited: An Essay on the Development of Political Consciousness in Colonial Malawi" in R. MacDonald (ed), From Nyasaland to Malawi (Nairobi, EAPH, 1975) pp.234-253, and "Agricultural Change and Continuity in Malawi" in R.H. Palmer and N.Q. Parsons (eds), Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa (London and Los Angeles, Heineman and University of California Press, 1977) pp.396-409.

⁴ See, for example, K.J. McCracken, "Peasants, Planters, and the Colonial State: The Case of Malawi, 1905-1940" in Journal of Eastern African Research and Development vol.12

One of the major themes in these studies is the shifting priorities of the colonial state in relation to settler agriculture and peasant production.⁵ They have challenged the old assumption that the colonial state in Nyasaland acted simply as an agent of metropolitan interests, local settlers, South African and Southern Rhodesian mines and farms, and private railway companies,⁶ by highlighting the ambivalence

(1982) pp.21-35, and by the same author, "Share-cropping in Malawi: The Visiting Tenant System in the Central Province, c.1920-1968" in African Studies Centre, University of Edinburgh (ed), Malawi: An Alternative Pattern of Development (Edinburgh, African Studies Centre, 1985) pp.35-65; M.A. Vaughan, "Food Production and Family Labour in Southern Malawi: The Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley in the Early Colonial Period" in Journal of African History (JAH) vol.23 no.3 (1982) pp.351-364; E.C. Mandala, "Peasant Cotton Agriculture, Gender and Inter-generational Relationships: The Lower Tchiri (Shire) Valley of Malawi, 1906-1940" in African Studies Review (ASR) vol.25 nos.2&3 (1982) pp.27-44.

⁵ See K.J. McCracken, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State: The Impact of the Native Tobacco Board in the Central Province of Malawi" in Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS) vol.9 no.2 (1983) pp.172-192; M.A. Vaughan, "The Politics of Food Supply: Colonial Malawi in the 1940s" in African Studies Centre (ed), Malawi: An Alternative pattern pp.69-91; E.C. Mandala, Work and Control in a Peasant Economy: The Lower Shire Valley of Malawi (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1990) pp.127-132.

⁶ For the earlier assumptions see, for example, L. Vail, "The State and the Creation of Colonial Malawi's Agricultural Economy" in R.I. Rotberg (ed), Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa (Lexington, Lexington Books, 1983) pp.39-87, and by the same author, "The Making of an Imperial Slump: Nyasaland and its Railways, 1895-1935" in JAH vol.16 no.1 (1975) pp.89-112; "Railway Development and Colonial Underdevelopment: The Nyasaland Case" in Palmer and Parsons (eds), Roots of Rural Poverty pp.365-395, and "The Political Economy of East-Central Africa" in D. Birmingham and P.M. Martin (eds), History of Central Africa vol.2 (London and New York, Longman, 1983) pp.200-250.

and contradictions in colonial policy in relation to peasant production. "The state in colonial Malawi", McCracken has argued, "operated as an arbiter between various types of interests, unable to support one too fully, in the knowledge that the triumph of a particular interest group would lead to the collapse of the whole".⁷

The present chapter contributes to this debate. It discusses the relationship between the shifting priorities of the colonial state, the independence of peasant producers, the problems of settler agriculture, and the flow of wage-labour. It also demonstrates that the shifting priorities of the state played an important role in the restructuring of the local economies. The period covered here is from about 1902 to 1945. The growth in African cash-cropping took place in three phases during this period. The first, from 1902 to 1920, saw the emergence of cotton production in the Shire Valley and the Shire Highlands, and to a limited extent, the lakeshore districts of South Nyasa and Karonga. Support for this came from the British Cotton Growers Association formed in 1902 and, from 1909, the Department of Agriculture.

The second phase, from 1920 to the early 1930s, was a period of expansion in African cash-cropping. Increases occurred both in cotton and tobacco production. The districts of the Central Province, formerly the "labour districts" for

⁷ McCracken, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State" p.192.

the Shire Highlands plantations, became the centre of African tobacco production while the Shire Highlands remained a cotton producing area. Thangata on the Shire highlands plantations was gradually replaced by a hybrid cross of sharecropping and rent tenancy. With the exception of Fort Johnston (South Nyasa) and Karonga, the lakeshore districts remained predominantly labour exporting areas, combined with fishing and fish-trading. The third phase, from the Great Depression to the end of the Second World War (WWII), was a crisis period but African cash-cropping did not collapse entirely. In contrast, European production almost came to a standstill. This, itself, contributed to the resilience of African production. Most European planters survived by buying and selling African-grown crops.

I

European and African Cotton Production

To understand the changes outlined above it is important, first, to have a picture of the nature of settler agriculture in the country during the first three decades of this century. To begin with, the white population in Nyasaland was never large: 314 in 1901, 766 in 1911, 1,486 in 1921, 1,656 in 1926, 1,975 in 1931, and 1,948 in 1945. Out of these, the planting community was as follows: 107 in 1911, 154 in 1916, 399 in

1921, 324 in 1926, 290 in 1931 and 171 in 1945.⁸ The increase between 1916 and 1926 came as a result of the imperial demobilization campaign while the Depression accounted for the decrease between 1931 and 1945.

This community could be divided into two groups: the individual settlers (who preferred to be called "planters") and the large land-owning companies. There were four major land-owning companies in the country: the African Lakes Company, later Corporation (ALC), belonging to the Moir Brothers; the British Central Africa Company (BCA) and its subsidiary, the Shire Highlands Railway Company (SHRC), belonging to a British subject of German origin, Eugene Sharrer; the Blantyre and East Africa Company (B&E.A), belonging to the Buchanan Brothers, and the A.L. Bruce Trust (ALBT), later Bruce Estates Ltd., belonging to Alexander Low Bruce, son in-law of Nyasaland's pioneer missionary, Dr. David Livingstone.

Among themselves, these companies owned not less than 771,900 acres of the best land in the Shire Highlands alone: 55,000 acres for the ALC, 372,530 acres for the BCA, 168,000 acres for the B&E.A, and 176,440 acres for the ALBT.⁹ The

⁸ See Palmer, "White Farmers" p.215 and p.221.

⁹ See L. White, Magomero: Portrait of an African Village (Cambridge and New York, CUP, 1987) pp.77-78, and B. Pachai, "Land Policies in Malawi: An Examination of the Colonial Legacy" in JAH vol.14 no.4 (1973) pp.683-684.

total acreage owned by the individual planters is impossible to know, even ignoring the fact that some lands transferred from one owner to the other. Three important factors influenced the relationship between the colonial state and the planting community: land laws, labour regulations, and the failure of cash crops. Since the first two have been discussed in the preceding chapters, it is the last factor we need to address here. Four cash crops were tried: coffee, cotton, tobacco, and tea, all of them failed one after the other. Coffee was introduced in the country in 1878 by Jonathan Duncan, a horticulturalist in the service of the Church of Scotland Mission at Blantyre. Produced predominantly by the Buchanan Brothers and the ALC from about 1883, the crop reached its peak in 1900 when two million pounds (lbs) were exported. Thereafter it gradually declined due to Brazilian competition, pests, diseases and exhaustion of soils.

By 1902, most individual planters had abandoned coffee production. Some switched to cotton. Unlike coffee, cotton could not be monopolized by the European planters. The crop was indigenous to the country, the settlers found the Africans already producing it. A stimulant to both African and European cotton production came from the activities of the BCGA, formed in 1902 with the chief purpose of stimulating cotton production in the colonies for the British manufacturers in order to reduce the dependence on American supplies. Through its agents, the ALC, the BCGA began to distribute seed to

African growers in 1905. From 1910, it became directly involved in purchasing, ginning and processing of African-grown cotton, but did not have a buying monopoly until 1922/23.¹⁰ Capitalizing on its connections with the Colonial Office, which took over the administration of Nyasaland from the Foreign Office in 1904, the BCGA advanced some £16,970 to settlers between 1910 and 1913 to take up cotton production.¹¹

The state supported the cotton industry by hiring a cotton expert and an entomologist in 1905 and 1910, respectively, to conduct scientific research on cotton. New cotton varieties were imported from Egypt and Peru.¹² From 1905 to 1909, the state promoted African rather than European cotton production. Seed was distributed to African growers in the Shire Valley and the Mlanje district of the Shire Highlands. The Lower Shire Valley was closed to European cotton production in an attempt to promote the African industry.¹³ By 1909, Nyasaland had earned the reputation of producing the best upland cotton ever imported into

¹⁰ PRO C.O.525/34 Secretary, BCGA, to Under-Secretary for the Colonies, 25/10/10.

¹¹ Mandala, Work and Control p.120. See also Vail, "The State and the Creation" pp.46-47.

¹² PRO C.O.525/6 Annual Administration Reports; C.O.525/9 Wheeler to Acting Commissioner, 14/8/05.; C.O.525/33 The Cotton Ordinance, 1910; C.O.525/33 J.S.J. McCall to Acting Governor, 28/7/10.

¹³ See Mandala, Work and Control p.127.

Manchester. The crop sustained a premium of 2 pence and two-and-half pence on the same type of cotton grown in America.¹⁴

The Department of Agriculture was established in the same year and for the first time European cotton production received official support. This marked the beginning of what Elias Mandala calls the "dual policy" of agricultural development: "with its right hand the colonial administration supported the plantation system while its left hand left open the possibility of peasant cotton production".¹⁵ Its support for the African industry was clearly stated: "the future of Nyasaland as an agricultural country depends on the development of her native agriculture and no crop is more suitable than cotton for this purpose".¹⁶ The priority of the Department of Agriculture was: "to encourage natives to take up cotton growing". The Director of Agriculture extended seed distribution to the Zomba, Liwonde (Upper Shire Valley) and South Nyasa districts. As an incentive, every grower who produced thirty-six pounds (lbs) of seed cotton was granted a three-shillings tax rebate.¹⁷ A Cotton Ordinance was enacted, giving the Governor powers "to control and regulate" the

¹⁴ PRO C.O.525/33 J.S.J. McCall, Director of Agriculture, to Acting Governor, 28/7/10.

¹⁵ Mandala, Work and Control p.127.

¹⁶ PRO C.O.626/1 Annual Administration Report, 1910. C.O.525/6 Memorandum on Cotton Growing in Nyasaland, 1910; C.O.525/33 The Cotton Ordinance, 1910.

¹⁷ PRO C.O.626/1 Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1911.

African cotton industry through the distribution of seed, determining the quality of seed cotton to be sold by African growers, marketing arrangements, and fixation of prices.¹⁸

By 1911, the African cotton industry had grown to the extent that local planters frequently asked: "is there room for both European and native cotton cultivators in the protectorate?".¹⁹ Afraid that African production would undercut the estates, the colonial administration removed the tax rebate that year. This was another good example of the ambivalence and contradiction in colonial policy. The response from the African growers was that: "if we have to pay the six shilling tax we wish more seed so that we can grow more cotton".²⁰

What the planters feared most was not competition from African producers, but that the African industry was "a reducer of local labour" and thus needed to be discouraged. The administration refused to bow to this demand because: "the native cotton industry [was] so dependent on the use of women and child labour such that it actually [allowed] a certain amount of occasional [male] labour elsewhere without interfering with results". It could only be considered as a minor cause in the decrease of local labour for European

¹⁸ PRO C.O.525/33 The Cotton Ordinance, 1910.

¹⁹ PRO C.O.626/1 Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1911.

²⁰ PRO C.O.626/1 Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture, 1911.

estates, and was "certainly preferable, from an agricultural point of view, to labour leaving for South Africa".²¹ The administration was also interested in the revenue from the Africans. Cotton production offered the best opportunity for raising tax money.²² The administration could not jeopardize this source of revenue. It continued to support the African industry. The staff of the Department of Agriculture was expanded to provide instructions and conduct research on cotton diseases so as to maintain high standards in the country's upland cotton.

An important factor in the growth of the African cotton industry was the absence of strict marketing policies. The colonial state pursued a laissez-faire policy, at least up to 1910. Under the 1910 Cotton Ordinance, the government levied a fee of 3d for every 100 lbs. of seed cotton purchased by a buyer. Every buyer had to obtain a licence costing 10 shillings, and government officials were represented at every market for the purposes of collecting taxes on the spot. The Department of Agriculture was also responsible for making sure that the African-grown cotton was graded before it was sold.²³

²¹ PRO C.O.626/1 Director of Agriculture, Annual Report of the Agriculture Department, 1911.

²² PRO C.O.525/35 Notes from a Speech by the Deputy Governor at a Meeting of the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, Blantyre, 23/3/10.

²³ See Mandala, Work and Control pp.140-145.

Beyond these measures the government did not intervene directly in the marketing of cotton. There were no marketing boards, no restrictions on the number of private buyers, and no monopoly over the buying and selling of African-grown cotton. Intense competition thus arose between private buyers. The Director of the Department of Agriculture feared that the prices would be forced to too high a level to be maintained in future and in case of market fluctuations. "The native does not understand market fluctuations", the Director maintained, "1d per 1lb. seed cotton means, with careful cultivation, a remittance of half his hut tax and from 18 shillings to 23 shillings per acre which is considerable wealth to a native in Nyasaland".²⁴ The BCGA expressed a similar concern and asked the government to regulate prices, but nothing was done.²⁵

II

Limitations of the African Cotton Industry

However, there were some limitations to the expansion of the 'native' cotton industry during these formative years. Not only was it spread over a distance of 700 miles, some districts suitable for cotton production such as Salima on the lakeshore and Karonga in the north were far from the centres

²⁴ PRO C.O.626/1 Extracts from the Report of the Director of Agriculture, 1910.

²⁵ PRO C.O.525/34 Secretary, BCGA, to Under Secretary for the Colonies, 25/10/10.

of the colonial economy in the south. There were no railway lines and no motor transport.²⁶ The distribution of cotton seed was also irregular and uneven with the 'natives' in the Shire Valley and Mulanje district usually getting the best deal. Once the seed was distributed, the production process was not adequately supervised because the staff of the Department of Agriculture, though expanded, was still too small to cover the cotton growing areas. Facilities for pest and disease control were also inadequate. The red ball worm, bacterial blight, and the cotton stainer were thus common problems. The officials encouraged African cotton production primarily for tax purposes. Once the tax obligation was met there was no other official incentive.

Though viable and showing signs of strength, the African cotton industry thus did not expand very rapidly during its first two decades, 1900 to 1920. After a period of initial expansion between 1909 and 1912, it temporarily declined in 1913 and 1914 due to drought, famine, and disease conditions. It recovered during the war but declined again in the immediate post-war period, 1918/19 to 1922/23. Agricultural inputs rose due to the post-war inflation, prices fell, and most important of all, there was a severe famine which forced large numbers of producers to abandon cash-cropping in favour of food production. It was from the mid-1920s to the time of

²⁶ PRO C.O.525/33 McCall, Director of Agriculture, to Acting Governor, 28/7/10.

the Great Depression, and after the Depression, that the African cotton industry experienced periods of rapid expansion. Statistical data from the Department of Agriculture, granted their inaccuracies, show the same pattern:

Table 5.1: African Tonnage of Seed Cotton.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Tons</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Tons</u>
1908/9	130	1920/21	375
1909/10	220	1921/22	387
1910/11	692	1922/23	747
1911/12	962	1923/24	1,369
1912/13	744	1924/25	2,909
1913/14	198	1925/26	2,197
1914/15	867	1926/27	1,387
1915/16	815	1927/28	2,486
1916/17	944	1928/29	3,505
1918/19	300	1929/30	5,448

Source: PRO C.O.626/1 - C.O.626/7 Department of Agriculture Annual Reports, 1910-1930.

The expansion in the period from 1922/23 was a result of a shift in government policy. The BCGA was given the monopoly to purchase all the cotton produced by African growers on Crown Land. The Association offered between 2 and 2.5d per 1lb. of grade 1 seed cotton, 1.5 and 1.75d per 1lb of grade 2, and 1d per 1lb. of grade 3. These prices were more than two times higher than those offered by private buyers.²⁷

As African cotton production began to expand in the early

²⁷ PRO C.O.626/4 Nyasaland Protectorate Annual Administration Reports and the Reports of the Department of Agriculture, 1920-25.

1920s, European production was on the decline. Cotton had become a "native industry" by this time.²⁸ Among the reasons cited for the failure of European production were ignorance of local environmental conditions, Egyptian competition, the outbreak of bacterial bright and the red bollworm. The data in the following table helps explain the pattern of decline in European cotton production:

Table 5.2 Percentages of African and European Cotton.

<u>Year</u>	<u>African</u> %	<u>European</u> %	<u>Year</u>	<u>African</u> %	<u>European</u> %
1920	16	84	1928	93	7
1921	14	86	1929	99	1
1922	12	88	1930	98	2
1923	31	69	1931	99	1
1924	35	65	1932	98	2
1925	63	37	1933	96	4
1926	74	26	1934	93	7
1927	83	17	1935	97	3

Sources: PRO C.O.626/4 and C.O.626/7 Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture, Reports of the Comptroller of Customs; B. Pachai, Land and Politics pp.204-205.

The figures in this table confirm the argument that it was from the 1920s that the African cotton industry expanded rapidly. This was especially so after the BCGA had been granted the purchasing monopoly in 1922/23. This acted as a major stimulant to African cotton production later. However, the European percentage for the years prior to the BCGA

²⁸ PRO C.O.626/7 Department of Agriculture Annual Reports, 1926 and 1927.

monopoly could be misleading. It does not distinguish between the amount of cotton produced by the Africans on the 'private estates' and that produced by direct wage-labour. If this were taken into account, the European percentage would be much lower than the above figures indicate.

Further evidence that the European cotton industry was in decline in the 1920s comes from the figures on the acreage under production:

Table 5.3 : European Agriculture (Acreage under cultivation).

<u>Year</u>	<u>Coffee</u>	<u>Cotton</u>	<u>Tobacco</u>	<u>Tea</u>
1913	2,600	25,697	10,499	2,812
1915	1,331	29,578	7,484	4,141
1917	1,237	28,372	9,516	4,523
1922	335	26,545	18,554	4,710
1923	475	20,948	17,308	4,236
1924	425	26,120	20,590	5,093
1925	875	17,541	22,415	5,435
1926	1,323	13,358	22,908	5,788
1927	1,239	2,545	25,002	7,070

Source : PRO C.O.626/4 and C.O.626/7 Department of Agriculture Annual Reports, 1913-1927. The statistics were compiled from the returns furnished by European planters.

The above figures, though deficient in a number of ways,²⁹ show fluctuations in coffee and a declining pattern in cotton acreage from 1922. In contrast, those of tea and tobacco depict a pattern of steady rise, though tea was grown on a

²⁹ They do not show how many planters furnished returns, in which district they were, output per acre, amount of labour used, amount of unused land, etc.

small scale.

III

Land and the European Tobacco Industry

Two factors accounted for the increase in the European tobacco acreage from the early 1920s: imperial preference starting from 1919, and the coming of new settlers as part of the post-war demobilization campaign. The imperial preference was, itself, a component of the post-war recovery process. Britain wanted to reduce dependence on American tobacco supplies and looked to its colonial empire for alternative sources. Most planters in Nyasaland thus switched to tobacco. By the early 1920s, tobacco was the protectorate's "premier European crop".³⁰ This coincided with the coming of new settlers. Initially the government was reluctant to take them in because of shortage of good cultivable land in the Shire Highlands. The earlier settlers were still holding large tracts of unworked land. The status of the Africans on the 'private estates' was still unresolved. The legislation passed in 1914 and 1917 had not solved the problems of thangata.

Faced with the expansion in tobacco production and the coming of the new settlers, the colonial administration was forced to re-address the question of land. A commission was

³⁰ PRO C.O.626/4 Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1923.

set up in 1920 to inquire into, and report on, the existing laws and policy with regard to the tenure of land held by non-Africans, the possibility of creating African reserves and locations, and the status of the Africans on the 'private estates'.³¹ The Commission noted that the 1917 Native Rents (Private Estates) Ordinance had failed to introduce tenancy by rent only. Labour was the only return for which estate owners allowed the Africans to settle on their land. It was only in this capacity that the majority of the Africans resided on the 'private estates'. What it failed to realize was that the intention of the 1917 Act was not to introduce rent tenancy per se but to provide the landlords with alternatives to labour tenancy.

The commission thus recommended that thangata be legalized. Tenants would be given fixity of tenure for a minimum period of four years, with the option to renew. That way, the problem of distinguishing 'original' inhabitants from 'new' immigrants would be avoided. At the end of the four-year period eviction would be limited to ten tenants per every 1,000 acres of land on each separate estate. Thangata would be limited to two-month's work after which tenants would be free to work for other employers for wages. That would make labour mobile so that new settlers and other employers could hire it freely. Semi-skilled workers such as carpenters, mechanics, drivers and bricklayers would reside on 'private

³¹ PRO C.O.525/97 The Jackson Commission, 1920.

estates' only as rent-paying tenants so that other employers could hire them freely. All tenants would be free to engage in cash crop production provided their landlords were given the first priority to purchase the crops. These recommendations were aimed at controlling and limiting the operations of thangata and introducing a hybrid cross of tenancies: labour, cash-and-kind, and sharecropping.

The recommendations became the basis of the Natives on Private Estates Ordinance (1928) which provided that:

the landlord must either offer [the tenant] work within a reasonable distance of his hut, in which case the mere fact of the native working for wages over specified periods of time entitles him to a rebate of the whole or part of the rent due, or give reasonable facilities to grow economic crops, in which case the landowner must purchase from the native such quantity of the produce... to be sufficient to entitle the native to a rebate of the whole or part of his rent. If the landowner neither offers work to the resident native nor gives him facilities for growing economic crops, his claim to rent disappears.³²

The ordinance was accepted by the Colonial Office, the local administration and the settler community as "a good compromise" because it gave the landlord the certainty of labour when it was most wanted and for a certain number of years while tenants got fixity of tenure and 'freedom' of movement.

To emphasize the importance of keeping the tenants on the 'private estates', the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce requested an extension of the tenure period from four to five

³² Cited in B. Pachai, Land and Politics in Malawi, 1875-1975 (Kingston, Limestone Press, 1978) p.119.

years. At the end of the five-year period only one-tenth of the total number of resident tenants would be evicted instead of ten per every 1,000 acres as recommended by the Jackson Commission. That way, the numbers of tenants being evicted at one particular time would be reduced and an adequate supply of labour would be ensured. It would also provide security of tenure to the tenants and prevent the landlords from evicting them arbitrarily. However, the winners were the landlords because the Ordinance gave them several options: they could use their tenants as sharecroppers, rent payers, casual wage labourers, labour tenants, or a combination of these.

The compromise in the 1928 legislation was influenced by the changes in both European and African production. In 1920, just at the time that it began to expand, the European tobacco industry showed how fragile it was. Tobacco prices at the London market fell. At home, in Nyasaland, the local administration introduced export taxes on the country's major agricultural products to offset the rising railway costs and as a post-war recovery measure. What was particular about these taxes was that they were levied flat on weight rather than on profit, valuations, or grades of the exported products.¹³ The taxes were: 2 pence per every 1lb. of cotton or tobacco exported, and 1 farthing per every 1lb. of tea. The implication was that the more the settlers exported, the more

¹³ MNA S1/104/21 Petition of the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, 7/2/21.

they were taxed. They described the taxes as a "direct and crushing levy,...an unjust burden" which had the effect of "crippling the industries concerned".

What made the tax burden even heavier was the slump in tobacco prices at the London markets. Fine bright (top grade) sold at 1 shilling and 4 pence per pound (lb), mottled leaf at 10 pence, and scrap at 3 pence. The Nyasaland settlers produced low-quality tobacco, often described as "muck". A flat tax of 2 pence was indeed heavy for any planter who shipped large quantities of "scrap" or "muck" tobacco. The effects were made doubly harmful by a rapid increase in the prices of agricultural inputs on the world market, compounded by an increase in local railway rates in 1920.³⁴

The settlers had only one area where they could reduce costs: 'native' labour. As argued in the preceding chapter, the local labour supply was affected by the recruitment of soldiers and carriers for the East Africa campaign, portering, and emigration. The government had also permitted recruiting of Nyasaland labour for the construction of the Beira-Zambezi railway line on the understanding that the railway would be beneficial to the Nyasaland economy. It is interesting to note that the person in charge of the recruiting was J.C. Casson, former Supervisor of Native Affairs, who, in 1903, had sued

³⁴ MNA S1/104/21 Petition of the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, 1920.

the B.E.A. Company on behalf of their tenants. His involvement in labour recruiting was seriously criticized by the settler community. They argued that, as a government official, he was well known to the 'natives' all over the protectorate. The labourers would "undoubtedly" get the idea that he was recruiting with government support. Casson's own accounts suggest he was indeed well-known to migrant labourers. He spoke some local languages and thus would communicate relatively easily with the labourers.³⁵ However, his recruiting activities did not have much impact on the flow of labour from Nyasaland since the majority of the migrants went as "independents".

As discussed in the previous chapter, the planters made several representations to the government on labour between 1922 and 1925, but the official response was disappointing. By 1925, the colonial administration made it clear that it would not turn the African producers into a wage-labour force or a captive tenant labour force immobilized on the European plantations. Wherever facilities were available, it was going to promote African cash-cropping. At the same time, it was not going to stop the Africans from seeking wage employment on the European plantations.³⁶ This reaffirmation of the "dual policy" was forced by the expansion in African tobacco

³⁵ See PRO C.O.525/35 Casson's Reports on a Visit to Portuguese East Africa, Southern Rhodesia, and South Africa, 1910.

³⁶ MNA S1/23/25 The Dual Policy of Development, 1925.

production.

IV

The African Tobacco Industry

The developments in the cotton industry were repeated in the tobacco industry. From as early as 1902 the Head of the Scientific Department noted that unlike coffee, tobacco was an industry that could not be so entirely monopolized by European planters.³⁷ In 1910, the Department of Agriculture reported that an important development during that year was the 'native' cultivation of tobacco. In the previous season, "some very good 'native' sun-dried tobacco was produced being principally encouraged and purchased by the Blantyre and East Africa Company for export".³⁸ However, statistical data from the Department of Agriculture suggest that the African tobacco industry was on a very small scale prior to the 1920s. Production figures were: 458 lbs. in 1909/10; 520 lbs. in 1910/11; 476 lbs. in 1911/12; 305 lbs. in 1912/13; and 358 lbs. in 1913/14. The estimated acreage under production was as

³⁷ Cited in W.E. Haviland, "The Rise of the African Tobacco Industry in Nyasaland and its Production Problems" in The South African Journal of Economics vol.23 (1955) p.144.

³⁸ PRO C.O.626/1 Nyasaland Protectorate Annual Administration Report, 1910.

follows:

Table 5.4 : Estimated African Tobacco Acreage.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Acres</u>
1918	8,330 ³⁹	1923	2,973
1919	1,483	1924	3,312
1920	1,748	1925	11,026
1921	1,400	1926	16,107
1922	1,276	1927	18,601

Source: PRO C.O.626/2 - C.O.626/7 Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture, 1918-1927.

The figures suggest that prior to the 1920s, tobacco was grown almost entirely in the Southern Province. Given growing land shortages in the Shire highlands, which was the main tobacco producing area, not much expansion could have occurred. The rapid expansion in the African tobacco industry in the post-war period should therefore be attributed to three factors: imperial preference, the performance of settler agriculture, and the opening up of the Central Province to tobacco production. As discussed in chapter 3, prior to 1908, most of Nyasaland's tobacco was sold duty-free in South Africa in exchange for emigrant labour. Access to British markets began that year with the opening of a factory at Limbe by the Imperial Tobacco Company. Export soared with the introduction

³⁹ This figure is obviously wrong, it is probably 1,330.

of imperial preference in 1919 which was partly responsible for the slump in prices in 1920 and 1921.

Up to this time, much of the tobacco on the Shire Highlands plantations was grown by direct wage-labour and thangata tenants. The decline in tobacco prices in the early 1920s, the rising cost of inputs due to the post-war inflation, the exorbitant railway rates, and the low returns to the planters due to the low quality of the leaf, forced several planters out of direct production. The number of planters dropped from 399 in 1921 to 324 in 1926 (refer the figures on the planting community above).⁴⁰ This suggests that they either left the country or ceased production. An appeal was made to the government by the Nyasaland Planters Association to bail out the struggling tobacco planters by providing them with loans "as a means of keeping them in the country".⁴¹ The amount of money allocated for this purpose was restricted by the Colonial Office to a meagre £8,000 a year. It could not go very far.

The majority of those who remained on the land survived either by turning their thangata tenants to sharecroppers or buying and selling tobacco grown by independent African growers on Crown Land. Evidence suggests a major division in the planting community at this time: between the larger landowners and the "smaller" individual planters struggling to

⁴⁰ See also McCracken, "Share-cropping in Malawi" p.36-37.

⁴¹ Ibid. p.36.

make a living. The latter encouraged Africans to grow more tobacco on Crown Land so that they could buy it cheaply and sell it at a profit. They employed African buyers and "spread incessant propaganda...to induce the natives to leave their work on European estates and take up village tobacco cultivation".⁴²

This affected the flow of wage-labour to the large planters and especially those who produced tobacco. They feared that: "the obvious end is that practically every native in the Protectorate will take up tobacco growing [on Crown Land]" from which most planters drew their outside labour". This source of supply was now "entirely made use of by native tobacco buyers".⁴³ The European tobacco planters also feared that with very low production costs involved, no railway charges incurred, and intense competition among the buyers, the African tobacco industry would be difficult to compete with.⁴⁴

The difference between the individual "smaller" planters and the larger landowners was also reflected in the changes in the landlord-tenant relationship. Since they did not have much land to give out, the individual "smaller" planters encouraged

⁴² MNA S1/428/27 Report of the Sub-Committee of the Cholo Planters' Association, 30/10/26.

⁴³ MNA S1/428/27 Memorandum by a Sub-Committee of the Cholo Planters' Association, 30/10/26.

⁴⁴ MNA S1/428/27 Previous Occupations of Native Registered Tobacco Growers, 1926-1928.

their tenants to grow maize with a guarantee that the crop would be purchased at 1d for 2 lbs. Given that the prevailing price of maize in the Shire Highlands at the time was 1d for 6 to 7 lbs., the price offered by the "smaller" planters was an attractive one. The tenants were "perfectly satisfied" with the arrangement: "if they could count on a reasonable price for their maize, they would grow it in preference to tobacco";⁴⁵ while the landlords obtained supplies of maize even during the years when the crop was in short supply. Another reason for the tenants' preference of maize to tobacco was because they could raise cash and food from the same crop at the same time.

The larger landowners increased the numbers of tenants and the amount of land allotted to them to grow tobacco on a sharecropping arrangement. A survey of registered tobacco growers recorded over 23,940 growers on Crown Land and over 6,243 on 'private estates' in the Shire Highlands districts of Blantyre, Chiradzulu, Cholo, Mlanje, South Nyasa, Upper Shire and Zomba in 1926/27.⁴⁶ Figures for previous years are non-existent partly because the registration of tobacco growers began in 1926, partly also because of the problems of colonial statistics. The influx of Mozambicans during the inter-war period made a major contribution to the numbers of tobacco

⁴⁵ MNA S1/428/27 Draft Report of a Labour Survey, 1927.

⁴⁶ MNA S1/428/27 Previous Occupations of Registered Tobacco Growers, 1926-1928.

growers on the 'private estates' (see Chapter 7 Tables 7.1 and 7.2).

The sharecropping agreement was verbal and could easily be terminated or violated by either party. Its substance was as follows:

for the first year a tenant receives rations or money in lieu thereof and the use of a plot of land for food production in future years. He is instructed and supervised in the planting of his tobacco crop by the planter and receives an advance of tools and money for his tax. In consideration of this he gives the planter the first refusal of his crop at the prevailing market price. He earns in this manner an average sum of £7 per annum, about twice as much as he would have earned if left to his own devices or in ordinary employment as a labourer.⁴⁷

Though verbal contracts often worked to the disadvantage of the weaker party, they did not result in the total loss of the tenants' independence. Whenever dissatisfied with the landlords' prices, the tenants took their tobacco to independent buyers who were predominantly Africans working as agents of European buyers. Given the competition, they were always eager to buy. The landlords' first refusal to purchase their tenants' crop was thus nullified.⁴⁸ They could not control "back alley" deals between the tenants and the independent buyers. Corruption in buying was thus very common while cases of tenant eviction or court proceedings against

⁴⁷ MNA S1/1132/30 Memorandum on Labour in Government Departments, 1930. See also S1/428/27 Draft Report of a Labour Survey, 1927 and Report on the Previous Occupations of Native Registered Tobacco Growers, 1926-1928 in the same file.

⁴⁸ See MNA S1/428/27 Memorandum by the Cholo Planters' Association, 30/10/26; Buell, The Native Problem p.253.

illegal buyers and sellers were very uncommon. The same applied to defaulting wage labourers on the estates: they were seldom prosecuted⁴⁹ "unless a case was of an aggravated nature".⁵⁰ The employees were "too valuable", that "it [did] not pay the planter to make himself unpopular with his labourers". After all, the prosecution of a few of them could "not act as a lasting deterrent to others".⁵¹ As for the tenants, the landlords feared that they would move out of the 'private estates' to grow tobacco on Crown Land.

To the tenants who came from Crown Land or other districts, sharecropping gave them access to garden plots in two different localities at the same time: at home and on the 'private estates'. That way they could raise tobacco on the 'private estates' and food crops on their home plots. Not only did this alleviate the effects of land pressure, it also enabled the tenants from Crown Land to move in and out of the 'private estates' depending on economic opportunities. It was this freedom of movement which mattered to the majority of the tenants in the Shire Highlands and the Central Province.

⁴⁹ MNA S1/1132/30 Acting Senior Provincial Commissioner, Report on Labour Conditions, Southern Province, 1930.

⁵⁰ MNA S1/1132/30 Memorandum on Labour in Government Departments, 1930.

⁵¹ MNA S1/1132/30 Memorandum on Labour in Government Departments; and Acting Senior Provincial Commissioner, Report on Labour Conditions, 1930, in the same file.

V

The "Visiting Tenant" System

Tobacco production in the Central Province began in 1920. In May that year, A.F. Barron and R.W. Wallace, planters from Zomba district, leased over 2,000 acres of land in Lilongwe district.⁵² Their initial attempts to grow flue-cured tobacco through wage-labour failed. In 1922, Barron turned to the production of fire-cured tobacco using tenants to whom he distributed seedlings in exchange for the right to purchase their crop. A year later, he extended his scheme to Africans on Trust Land in villages surrounding his estate and in neighbouring districts of Fort Manning, Dowa, and Ngara (later part of Kasungu). Two types of share-cropping thus emerged: on 'private estates', the "visiting tenant" system, and between Barron or Wallace and "independent" African producers on Trust Land. Several other European farmers followed Barron's example.

The number of private buyers in the region increased. By 1925, the monopoly enjoyed by Barron and Wallace had been broken. In some areas independent growers refused to sell to Barron and he subsequently withdrew his supply of seed and supervision.⁵³ That did not stop independent African

⁵² See McCracken, "Sharecropping in Malawi" pp. 37-38; and by the same author, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State" pp.174-179.

⁵³ Chanock, "The New Men Revisited" p.241.

production. The number of growers in the province increased from about 900 in 1923 to over 33,700 in 1927/28 and about 41,660 in 1932.⁵⁴ In 1935, the Central Province produced 7,507,000 lbs.; or 70 per cent of the country's total tobacco production. Much of this was grown by the "visiting tenants" on the 'private estates' and by the independent growers on African Trust Land.

The "visiting tenant" system was quite different from thangata practised in the Southern Province.⁵⁵ The "visiting tenants" had customary land rights elsewhere. They entered 'private estates' to secure a cash income, not to establish a permanent home. There were no formal leases or contracts between the landlord and his tenants, thus no transfer of rights in land. Tenant families were engaged on a seasonal basis, though they were free to stay for as long as they wanted. In addition to land the landlord supplied seed, fertilizers and materials for buildings. At the end of the season, he bought, graded and marketed his tenants' crop.

The practice had four advantages to the landlord: first, there was no pressure on his land due to tenant mobility. It

⁵⁴ McCracken, "Sharecropping in Malawi" p.38; MNA S1/428/27 Previous Occupations of Native Tobacco Growers, 1926-1928. See also Chanock, "The New Men Revisited" pp.241-242. Chanock says 32,000 growers were registered in the region in 1927.

⁵⁵ MNA Q/285 The Federal Government/D.T. Jack, A Report on an Economic Survey of Nyasaland, 1958-59 (Salisbury and Zomba, The Government Printer, 1959) pp.39-40. Hereinafter, The Jack Report.

was easy to regulate the numbers of tenants occupying his estate at one particular time. Second, since he supplied production facilities, the landlord closely supervised his tenants and thus ensured efficient production. Third, the financial risks involved were much less than would have been the case under a system of production by regular wage-labour. Once facilities were supplied, the whole production process was in the tenants' hands and, finally, the system gave the landlord access to a variety of extremely cheap forms of labour. The "visiting tenants" or/and members of their families were often employed as paid casual workers. As one planter put it in 1939: "I look upon my tenants as my reserve labour force. I insisted this year that they should come at any time I called upon them. I have got about 140 tenants and it means I can call up 20 in one day".⁵⁶

The commonest form of payment for this kind of work was food called msuma.⁵⁷ Traditionally, kusuma was to work for food during famine or seasons of food scarcity - especially between November and March. The planters modified msuma to meet their own interests just as they did with thangata and ganyo.⁵⁸ Sometimes no distinction was made between msuma and

⁵⁶ Cited in McCracken, "Sharecropping in Malawi" p.42.

⁵⁷ The person who worked for food or the proceeds of that work were also know by the same name. In a different usage msuma means "wealth" or "possessions".

⁵⁸ For details on ganyo see the chapter on the Anguru/Alomwe migration.

ganyo: "for relish, beans, meat etc there is a system of voluntary work, ganyo, managed on a task basis for spot cash".⁵⁹ Its advantage, according to T.W. Bradshaw, was that "the system work[ed] exceedingly well". The worker often did far more work in a day than he would attempt on a commensurate monthly wage and "even more than on the best paid tobacco estate of Rhodesia".⁶⁰

To the Africans, "visiting tenancy" had four major advantages as well: first, it gave them the opportunity to raise cash crops on the land which was not theirs while their village plots were left for food crops or a 'second' cash crop. Second, since the landlords supplied production facilities, the "visiting tenants" were saved from the problem of raising initial capital and meeting the cost of inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides. Third, they were not directly affected by price fluctuations *on* the international market. Attempts by the landlords to transfer production costs and market losses to their tenants often worked to the disadvantage of the landlords themselves. The "visiting tenants" simply quit the estates and reverted to subsistence or cash-cropping on Trust Land.⁶¹ Given the competition among

⁵⁹ McCracken, "Sharecropping in Malawi" p.42.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p.42.

⁶¹ This became evident in the 1950s. For example, in 1958, Barron told the Governor that: "the estates cannot make up their higher costs of production through higher yields and quantities if the Board is to pay the world prices of tobacco. The result will be that they will not be able to pay their

the buyers and their agents, African growers were never short of markets for their tobacco. Finally, by engaging in a variety of production activities and labour relations, tenant families could pool their incomes and thus be able to avoid some of the system's harsh effects. They could meet their subsistence and cash needs at the same time.

The number of "visiting tenants" increased from about 500 in 1927 to 7,531 by 1938. McCracken has noted that up to the early 1930s, the majority of these were Chewa-speaking people from villages surrounding the 'private estates' in Lilongwe and Dowa districts. By the mid-1930s, the majority of them had moved back to African Trust Land as independent growers. The majority of the "visiting tenants" on the 'private estates' in Lilongwe and Dowa thus came from the districts of Fort Manning, Ngara, Kasungu, and Nkhota-kota⁶² within the Central Province. They came for short periods with the sole purpose of raising cash incomes. Some were recruited from the congested Shire Highlands districts of Chiradzulu, Cholo, and Zomba. There were almost no tenants from the northern districts which continued to export labour to the markets abroad. This suggests an important restructuring in the regional economies. In the Shire Highlands, thangata was gradually replaced by a hybrid cross of sharecropping and rent tenancy; the Central

tenants as high a price as the Board and so the tenant will not come", Cited in McCracken, "Sharecropping in Malawi" p.53.

⁶² Ibid. p.40.

Province, formerly one of the "labour districts", became a tobacco-producing area; the Shire Valley remained a cotton-producing area, while the lakeshore and northern districts remained predominantly migrant labour and fishing and fish-trading areas.

VI

African Growers and the NTB

The triangular relationship between the colonial state, the European planters, and the independent tobacco growers in the Central Province was influenced by the activities of the Native Tobacco Board (NTB) formed in 1926. Competition in buying and selling of African-grown tobacco often resulted in large quantities of low-quality leaf being offered for sale, and very low returns to the growers. After discussions between government officials and European planters and buyers - both groups afraid of the competition - a Tobacco Ordinance was passed in 1926 to regulate the industry.⁶³ The ordinance required all tobacco growers and buyers to be registered, prices to be fixed by a central body so as "to protect" the growers, and the government to offer assistance to the Africans on Trust Land by employing tobacco instructors. It

⁶³ See Chanock, "The New Men Revisited" p.241; McCracken, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State" pp.177-180.

was for these purposes that the NTB was established.⁶⁴ The Board was funded by levying a cess of 2 shillings and 6d per every 100 lbs. of tobacco sold by the producer. This was more than a revenue measure. It was also a way of preventing African producers from undercutting European growers.

Another safeguard was the appointment of three very powerful settlers as members of the Board. One was William Tait Bowie, Manager of the B.&E.A Company (one of the largest employers of tenants in the Shire Highlands), Chairman of the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce and the Nyasaland Convention of Associations, and unofficial member of the Legislative Council. He was one of Nyasaland's pioneer settlers. The second member was A.F. Barron, owner of 12 estates in the Central Province with a total acreage of 17,196 acres, the largest employer of tenants in the region, and from the late 1930s, member of the Central Labour Advisory Board (CLAB). These two were joined in the early 1930s by I. Conforzi, an Italian planter in the Cholo district, the second largest buyer of African-grown tobacco in the country and, from the 1930s, one of the largest tea producers.

As John McCracken has argued, "these men constituted a powerful pressure group" whose interests sometimes run counter to the best interests of the independent African tobacco

⁶⁴ The Board was renamed the African Tobacco Board in 1952 and was incorporated into the Agricultural Production and Marketing Board in 1956.

producers.⁶⁵ As employers of large numbers of tenants, they opposed every attempt to convert resident tenants into wage labourers. They also persistently demanded reductions in the amounts of tobacco produced by independent growers. As a result, the NTB tended to restrict production by independent growers while ignoring increases in tenant production on the 'private estates'.⁶⁶

Two other methods were used to reduce competition between estates and independent growers: by restricting the numbers of registered growers, and by periodically closing markets. For example, a market at Ngara, used by 1,100 growers from Kasungu in 1928, was closed in 1930. The growers had to walk 43 miles to the "nearest" market at Mponela. As a result, the number of growers in the district fell from 563 in 1930 to 180 in 1933.⁶⁷ By 1934, the number of markets in the Lilongwe districts had been reduced from seven to three. The sizes of the gardens of independent growers were regulated - usually to less than two acres - and so too was the amount of tobacco to be produced. Restrictions on registration were often justified on the need to maintain high quality of the leaf and reduce "inefficiency" on the part of the growers.

⁶⁵ McCracken, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State" p.177; and by the same author, "Sharecropping in Malawi" pp.45-46.

⁶⁶ McCracken, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State" p.178; and *Ibid.*, p.43.

⁶⁷ McCracken, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State" p.178.

However, prior to the Depression, the NTB's malpractice did not seriously hamper the growth of the African tobacco industry. The average price offered to independent growers rose from 2d per 1lb. in 1924/25 to 4d per lb. in 1926/27. It fell to 3.5d per 1lb. in 1928 due to the slump in prices at the world market but was back to 4d per 1lb. in 1929 with the opening up of new markets. It was from 1932 that the average price dropped to below 3d per 1lb. The average earnings of the growers ranged from £1. 11s. 10d in 1925/26 to £3. 1s. 8d in 1928, a year when more than 30 per cent of their tobacco was not sold, to between £5 and £7 in 1930, and probably even higher.⁶⁸ That year, tobacco production was "the major source of cash income for 50,000 of the 127,000 tax payers" in the province, a total of £92,000 was earned by the growers.⁶⁹ Wages on the estates in the region ranged from 6 to 10 shillings a month.

It was during the Depression that the NTB came down hard on the African growers. In 1927, a report of the Department of Agriculture warned that:

a serious depression in the market for tobacco must be viewed with much concern by a country as dependent as Nyasaland is on its tobacco crop. ...Critical examination of the tobacco situation at present indicates that the production in Empire tobacco growing countries has out-

⁶⁸ Chanock, "The New Men Revisited" pp.241-242; MNA S1/428/27 Previous Occupations of Tobacco Growers, 1926/28. There are some discrepancies in the figures in these two sources.

⁶⁹ MNA S1/566/29 Central Province Annual Report, 1930, cited in Chanock, "The New Men Revisited" p.247.

stripped the existing demand of manufacturers for certain classes of tobacco.⁷⁰

In the following year, tobacco prices slumped. The average price fell from 3.5d per 11b. between 1929 and 1931 to 2.5d per 11bs. at the depth of the Depression between 1932 and 1934. In the Shire Highlands, sisal production was forced to cease, tea producers began "to study severe economies" to enable them to carry on, and many tobacco producers closed down. The outlet for Nyasaland's produce was "very black indeed".⁷¹

The numbers of planters fell sharply from 229 in 1928 to 82 in 1935 - most of them left for Southern Rhodesia. Those who remained in the country were "reduced to the position of middlemen", buying, grading, ginning, transporting, and ultimately shipping the Africans' produce.⁷² Production on the 'private estates' in the Shire Highlands almost came to a standstill:

at present the landlord cannot give [his tenant] work because in this period of depression he cannot afford to employ labour. The alternative is that the native may ask for land whereupon to grow cash crops...[but] neither the landlord nor anyone can afford to buy [them] at present prices. The outcome is that the landlord does not allocate land to his tenants thereby extinguishes his liability for rent....Consequently, the landlord gets no rent,

⁷⁰ PRO C.O.626/7 Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture, 1927.

⁷¹ Proceedings of a Meeting between the Cholo Planters' Association and Governor Thomas in Nyasaland Times, 26/5/31; also cited in Palmer, "White Farmers" p.241.

⁷² See Palmer, "White Farmers" p.237.

and the native tenant does nothing - final result:
nothing.⁷³

The prices improved slightly in 1935/36 but dropped to a record low of 1.67d per pound in 1937. Many growers in the Lilongwe district refused to sell their tobacco. They spread it along the road to the markets and burnt it.

In an attempt to recover from the after-effects of the Depression some planters and NTB officials continued to reduce competition with independent growers. Between 1935 and 1936, tobacco instructors were empowered to uproot "any tobacco plants they regarded as surplus to the growers' needs".⁷⁴ Up to 1937, the size of Crown Land gardens was still restricted to half an acre per grower in some areas. Those who planted more "were called up and told they must take out the rest".⁷⁵ The practice was criticized by the Colonial Office and was abandoned. It was from the same year that the NTB changed its marketing malpractice. An auction system was introduced, competitive buying was abandoned, so too was the cess. The Board took over the responsibility of buying all African-grown tobacco.

Not much was achieved. Average earnings for independent

⁷³ PRO C.O.525/156 Harold Kittermaster to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 15/12/34.

⁷⁴ MNA S1/720/26 Minutes of the Native Tobacco Board, 8/11/34, cited in McCracken, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State" p.179.

⁷⁵ MNA COM-7/2/3/1 R.M. Antill to Tobacco Commission, 1939, cited in McCracken "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State" p.179.

growers continued to decline. In 1939, "thousands of growers" abandoned production, riots broke out in some parts of Lilongwe, homes of NTB instructors were set on fire, and sticks and stones were used to drive them from the villages.⁷⁶ A commission of enquiry was appointed to investigate the Board's activities. It noted that the Board's bureaucracy had become too large and its salaries too high. The commission thus recommended serious cuts in the Board's staff and expenditure - especially in the areas of salaries and allowances. By 1942, the Department of Agriculture assumed the responsibility of supervising African tobacco production while the Board's activities were restricted to purchasing and marketing.

The NTB's control over the marketing of African-grown tobacco did not go unchallenged. Throughout the 1930s, District Commissioners in the Central Province and some officials in the Department of Agriculture opposed the restrictions imposed on African producers. They spoke in favour of expanding African production partly because it was good for tax collection, and partly also for fear that widespread peasant discontent would result in rural revolts which would in turn undermine colonial authority. They were joined by agents of the Imperial Tobacco Company who feared that without independent African tobacco production the

⁷⁶ McCracken, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State" p.182.

country's commercial agriculture would rapidly deteriorate.⁷⁷

The most important challenge to the NTB's practices came from the African growers themselves. As noted above, they refused to sell, burnt their tobacco, and sometimes rioted to show their dissatisfaction with the Board's malpractice. Another important reaction was avoidance of NTB markets. Though African-grown tobacco could not be sold privately after 1926, very often African producers sold their tobacco to European estate owners and their agents who competed among themselves and were thus always ready to buy from the Africans.⁷⁸ In 1941, attempts to prosecute "illegal" buyers in the Central Province failed and, by 1946, buying licences were issued to some planters in the region. These provided African growers with an alternative to the NTB markets. Thus, for all its political and economic strengths, the NTB could not monopolize the buying and marketing of African-grown tobacco. With the rising demand for empire tobacco during the WWII and after, the Board abandoned its policy of restricting African production and "large increases" occurred.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.178 and p.192.

⁷⁸ See McCracken, "Share-cropping in Malawi" p.47.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

VII

The Resilience of African Cash-cropping

The Depression and the malpractice of the NTB did not result in the total collapse of independent African cash-cropping. Official records show a steady increase in African-grown tobacco during the first four years of the Depression period: from 2,414 tons in 1928 to 3,519 tons in 1931 and 5,904 tons in 1932. The number of African registered growers was 53,044 in 1932 and the acreage under production was estimated at 34,000 acres.⁸⁰ Similarly, the African cotton industry, though severely affected by the Depression, did not collapse. Some 2,477 tons of seed cotton were sold in 1931 and 2,698 tons in 1932.⁸¹ The acreage under cultivation was estimated at 33,000 in 1932. This figure "was less than in the previous year" but owing to a more prolific seed used, yielded much higher than before.⁸² The completion of the northern extension of the railway to Salima on the lakeshore in 1935 acted as a major stimulant to cotton production in the southern sections of the lakeshore plain. It lessened the transportation problems faced

⁸⁰ Colonial Office, An Economic Survey of the Colonial Empire (London, HMSO, 1932) p.53; Department of Overseas Trade with J.W. Brigden, Report on Trade and Economic Conditions in Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (London, HMSO, 1933) p.68.

⁸¹ See Department of Overseas Trade, Report on the Trade and Economic Conditions, 1933, Part III; 1935, Part III; 1939, pp.1-20.

⁸² The seed was developed by the Department of Agriculture under the auspices of the BCGA and distributed to the African growers.

by the growers in the area.

The resilience and vitality of independent African cash-cropping is shown by the following comparative figures (European to African) at the depth of the Depression:

Table 5.5 : European and African Tobacco and Cotton Production

	Tobacco		Cotton	
<u>Acreage</u>	<u>1933</u>	<u>1934</u>	<u>1933</u>	<u>1934</u>
European	7,862	8,350	246	1,501
African	20,146	33,097	29,994	40,151
<u>Production</u>				
(in tons)				
European	174,400	194,750	34	121
African	456,100	566,050	3,080	5,377
<u>Export Value</u>				
(in Pounds)				
	389,794	470,405	50,014	102,876

Source: Department of Overseas Trade, Economic Conditions in Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (London, HMSO 1935) pp.60-61. The production figures have been converted from hundredweights to tons.

Taken uncritically, the above figures would suggest that African growers in Nyasaland escaped the Depression. That was not the case. Africans turned to cash-cropping because they needed money, no matter how little, so as to weather some of the Depression's worse effects. Elias Mandala has noted that "even when prices fell to the floor during the Depression, peasants in the [Shire] Valley continued to grow cotton when others gave up the enterprise entirely".⁸³ At the depth of the

⁸³ Mandala, Work and Control p.136.

Depression in 1932/33, the number of cotton gardens in the Valley had dropped by 9,429 from those planted in the previous year. The number of growers had also declined by 8,409 over the same period.

An important factor in all this was differentiation. The "larger" African growers, zunde holders, with land holdings ranging from two to three hundred acres or more and who employed wage-labourers, dropped out of cotton agriculture in large numbers because they could not pay their labourers.⁸⁴ About 61.3 per cent of them abandoned production between 1932 and 1933. It was the "smaller" peasants and women, for whom cotton production was the best way of surviving the Depression, who increased output in spite of the low prices offered. The number of independent female cotton growers in the Shire valley "rose by 600 per cent" between 1932 and 1933.⁸⁵ Cotton prices began to improve in 1934 leading to a further extension of cultivation in 1935.⁸⁶

It was the increase in production by the "smaller" peasants and women, in an attempt to survive the Depression, which accounted for the high figures in African production in the table above. As for European production, it had become cheaper to produce indirectly by using African growers who

⁸⁴ Mandala, Work and Control p.171.

⁸⁵ Ibid. Mandala does not provide absolute figures.

⁸⁶ Department of Overseas Trade, Report on Trade and Economic Conditions, 1935, p.60.

were offered low prices. The figures on European agriculture thus include production by Africans on the 'private estates'. The state of depression in European agriculture can be seen from the following figures:

Table 5.6 : Percentage of Cotton and Tobacco Grown by Europeans.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Cotton</u>	<u>Tobacco</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Cotton</u>	<u>Tobacco</u>
	%	%		%	%
1920	84	89	1931	1	41
1921	86	94	1932	2	32
1922	88	94	1933	4	28
1923	69	85	1934	7	26
1924	65	96	1935	3	19
1925	37	67	1936	4	16
1926	26	59	1937	2	16
1927	17	57	1938	2	n/a
1928	7	63	1939	1	n/a
1929	1	37	1940	n/a	20
1930	2	41			

Sources: PRO C.O.626/4 - C.O.626/7 Annual Reports of the Agriculture Department and Reports of the Comptroller of Customs, 1920-1930; Pachai, Land and Politics pp.204-205; Palmer, "White Farmers" p.236.

The above table suggests that European cotton and tobacco production began to decline in the mid-1920s and did not recover in the 1930s. This implies that Africans contributed higher percentages to the total production of cotton and tobacco in the country during this period.

Differences in the regional economies became more pronounced during the same period. In the Shire Highlands, settler planters continued to fight for "better terms" on which they could accommodate Africans on their estates. The commonest demand in the 1930s was a combination of sharecropping and cash-and-kind tenancy. In the case of tobacco the required amount was 250 lbs. of leaf measuring not less than one-and-half feet each.⁸⁷ Given land shortages on 'private estates' in the 1930s, resident tenants usually found it difficult to raise the required quality and quantity of the tobacco.

The differences between the two regions were also reflected in the split in settler politics from the mid-1930s. Prior to the formation of the Northern Province Association (later the Central Province Association) in 1936, the settlers in the country voiced their collective interests through the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce and the Convention of Associations, both of which were based in the Southern Province. With the formation of the Northern Province Association, the planters in the Central Province began to distance themselves from their Southern Province counterparts. They claimed that: "the two systems of growing as well as the actual tobacco [were] so entirely different that [they seemed] to have very little in common" with their counterparts in the

⁸⁷ Pachai, Land and Politics. pp.226-227.

Southern Province.⁸⁸ It was the growth of African nationalism in the period after the WWII which brought them together again.

The difference in the system of production lay in "the position" of Africans on the 'private estates' in the Shire Highlands as opposed to the "visiting tenants" in the Central Province. By the 1930s, the majority of the individual settlers in the Shire Highlands had lost effective control over their lands. In many cases "large proportions" of their estates were "so congested with African 'squatters' that it was of very little economic value to the owners". Freehold land "was virtually" owned in name only because the eviction of Africans resident on it "had become a practical and political impossibility".⁸⁹ Evidence for this comes from the absence of massive eviction of the residents of the 'private estates' in the 1930s and early 1940s. For example, in 1937, the BCA Company threatened to evict 1,200 tenants for failing to fulfil their rent obligation. Only 150 "ringleaders" were actually evicted "as an experimental measure".⁹⁰ Of the 1,250 eviction notices served in Cholo in 1944, only 120 were carried out.

Several factors were responsible for this. To begin with, due to the increase in the Anguru/Alomwe immigration into the

⁸⁸ Cited in McCracken, "Sharecropping in Malawi" p.52.

⁸⁹ MNA Q/285 The Jack Report, 1959, pp.39-42.

⁹⁰ Pachai, Land and Politics. pp.128-131.

region, there was very little Crown Land on which the evicted Africans could be settled. The government thus constantly intervened on the part of the Africans whenever large numbers were served with eviction notices. This worked to the advantage of the settlers as well, especially the large landowners. Whenever they wanted their tenants to produce more, they threatened to evict them so as to attract government support. The majority of the individual settlers were, themselves, rather reluctant to carry out massive eviction of their tenants given the failure of their agriculture during the Depression. They needed tenant production to survive and recover from the Depression's after-effects: "for as long as the tenants produced economic crops, there was no need for eviction".⁹¹

The growing politicization of rural areas by the educated African elites through the Native Welfare Associations made eviction of tenants a sensitive political issue.⁹² In the Central Province, the Central Province Native Association

⁹¹ This was clearly expressed by representatives of the planting community at a meeting with government officials on 3rd April, 1940. For details see Pachai, Land and Politics. p.131.

⁹² The first Native Welfare Associations were formed in the Northern Province: The North Nyasa Native Association in Karonga in 1912, the West Nyasa Native Association in present Nkhata Bay in 1914, and the Mombera Native Association in Mzimba in 1920. Thereafter they spread to the Southern and Central Provinces where the Southern Province Native Association was formed in Zomba in 1923 and the Central Province Native Association in Lilongwe in 1927. Tobacco growers formed the majority of the members of the Central Province Native Association.

formed in 1927 became "the sharp edge" of independent 'native' tobacco growers. Martin Chanock has attributed the development of anti-colonial sentiments in Malawi to the activities of this Association.⁹³ In 1940, Levi Mumba⁹⁴, Secretary of the Representative Committee of the Northern Province Native Association, told Lord Hailey that:

The "position of natives on private estates", where no difference is made between newcomers and those found on the land by the landlord when he took it, is a hardship on the latter because all of them may be equally evicted at the end of every five-year period. ...Ways should be sought to make the thangat system easier than at present. The tenant is an asset to the landlord and should receive better consideration in treatment as well as in the price of his tobacco or cotton.⁹⁵

Some rural chiefs joined in this agitation. In the same year, Chief Mpama of Chiradzulu in the Southern Province told the Governor that:

there is one complaint I wish Your Excellency to hear, and that is that there is so little land in this district owned by people. There is a large part of this district owned by Europeans but much of it is not being worked and the people feel that they should be granted a part of this land. With so little land, there is a scarcity of money...⁹⁶

The Governor's response was that: "when the war is finished

⁹³ Chanock, "The New Men Revisited" pp.242-253.

⁹⁴ Levi Mumba was a clerk in the Secretariat Office at Zomba, first Secretary of the Representative Committee for the Northern Province Native Association, and the first President of the Nyasaland African Congress formed in 1944.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Pachai, Land and Politics p.127.

⁹⁶ The Nyasaland Times 14/11/90 cited in Pachai, Land and Politics p.131, and by the same author, "Land Policies in Malawi" p.681.

and we return to the work of peace one of the first questions I shall consider is how I can find more land in Nyasaland for the people of Nyasaland".⁹⁷ With the formation of the Nyasaland African Congress in 1944, land and labour became sensitive political issues. The landlords could not easily evict their tenants without causing political clamour.

After the war, the Governor lived up to his promise. A commission was appointed in 1945 to consider the position of 'natives' on all land other than Trust Land, and generally to advise on land policy.⁹⁸ In its final report, it recommended that freehold lands heavily occupied by Africans, amounting to not less than 545,800 acres, be compulsorily acquired by the government and transferred to the Africans resident on it. In addition, the government should purchase "unworked" estates for African occupation. A Planning Committee set up to review the Commission's recommendations estimated the cost of land acquisition at not less than £10,000 during the first year and about £7,200 recurrent over a period of 3 to 5 years.⁹⁹ Throughout the 1950s, right up to the end of colonial rule in the early 1960s, the government continued to buy "unworked" estates to resettle former tenants.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Pachai, "Land Policies in Malawi" p.681.

⁹⁸ MNA PAM/811 Nyasaland Protectorate/J.C. Abrahams, Report of the Land Commission, 1945 (Zomba, Government Printer, 1945). Hereinafter, The Abrahams Commission.

⁹⁹ See Nyasaland Protectorate, Land Commission: Report of the Planning Committee (Zomba, Government Printer, 1948) pp.8-9.

It was argued in the previous chapters that neither the colonial state nor the settlers could control the mobility of tenants, wage-labourers, and migrants. The foregoing account has demonstrated that in the competition and conflicts between settler agriculture and African cash-cropping, the colonial administration could not fully support one group at the expense of the other. This in turn contributed to the resilience of African cash-cropping. By leaving the opportunities for cash-cropping, migrancy, and local wage employment fairly open, colonial policy thus contributed to the independence of the rural producers. Since this chapter has concentrated on cash-cropping, the next chapter will focus on the changes in the fishing industry.

CHAPTER SIX**TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE FISHING INDUSTRY**

The fishing industry is increasing, and a large number of natives from Dowa and other districts find the buying and selling of fish an easy way of obtaining money. It is purchased at the lake at 2 fish for 1d and sold in Dowa and Lilongwe townships at 3d a fish.¹

Of all African industries, the fish trade is the one that has made most progress in recent years....the fish carrier's bicycle is familiar to both sight and smell on every road...²

The present chapter discusses the prospects for wealth creation in the fishing industry and links this to the expansion in commercial markets. Three factors were responsible for expansion: the growth of African cash-cropping discussed in the previous chapter; the increasing labour demand created by the tea plantations of the Shire Highlands; and the competition between African and European commercial fishermen and fish traders, as well as among them. The chapter also analyses the transformations in the organization of commercial fishing and the limitations of state intervention. The latter was due to the administrative and regulatory weaknesses of the colonial state and the growing economic strength of the African commercial fishermen and fish-traders

¹ Malawi National Archives (MNA) S1/437I/30 Extract from the Dowa District Annual Report, 1937.

² MNA NS3/1/8 Provincial Commissioner, Southern Province Annual Report, 1939; K.J. McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy: The Case of Malawi" in Journal of African History (JAH) vol.28 (1987) p.422.

the majority of whom was returning labour migrants. It will be demonstrated in the last chapter that the colonial administration had no effective control over this emerging class of rural accumulators.

From the late 1930s, the colonial administration developed an interest in the fishing industry because of the generally poor nutrition of workers on the Shire Highlands plantations. This concern was influenced by the pressure put on the Colonial Office by the International Labour Office (ILO). During the inter-war period, the ILO passed several conventions on the protection of migrant labourers, and the housing, feeding, and general welfare of plantation workers. Britain was a signatory to these conventions and wanted to see them implemented in its colonies with modifications to meet the prevailing local conditions.

Thus, in 1939, Nyasaland became the object an ambitious nutrition survey which was linked to the fishing industry because of its importance to the nutritional requirements of rural communities and the feeding of plantation workers. This came at a time when local administrators were also increasingly concerned with the lake ecology and the long-term viability of the country's fisheries resources. These concerns were heightened by land alienation along the lake front for recreational purposes. The colonial administration thus half-heartedly introduced fish conservation measures and land legislation to control the alienation of the lake front. They

all failed.

I

Expansion in Commercial Markets

The growth of African cash-cropping and the expanded labour demand of the tea plantations increased the purchasing power of the Africans and thus expanded the commercial markets for fish. To understand this, we need first to look at the expansion in African cash-cropping and the growth of the tea plantations in the post-depression period. While the tobacco acreage under European production fell from about 25,000 in 1927 to about 7,000 in 1938, that under African production stood at about 30,000 in 1938.³ In each year between 1936 and 1938 the total tobacco production (European and African) was greater than in any year between 1932 and 1936, but the African growers' contribution was greater than that of European planters. Tenant production on the 'private estates' increased from 18 per cent of all African-grown tobacco in 1930 to nearly 40 per cent in 1939.⁴ There was an "enormous

³ Public Records Office (PRO) C.O.626/7 Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1927; Department of Overseas Trade, Report on Economic Conditions in Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (London, HMSO 1935) pp.59-61 and 1939, p.18.

⁴ K.J. McCracken, "Share-cropping in Malawi: The Visiting Tenant System in the Central Province c.1920-1968" in African Studies Centre, University of Edinburgh (ed), Malawi: An Alternative Pattern to Development (Edinburgh, African Studies Centre 1986) p.44.

increase" in the cotton crop which by this time was almost entirely in African hands. Annual production exceeded 3,000 tons in 1935, and again in 1938.⁵

John McCracken has argued that "the outbreak of the Second World War marked a new stage in the history of tobacco growing in Malawi".⁶ With American supplies on the decline, British manufacturers turned to empire-grown tobacco. In Nyasaland, the Native Tobacco Board (NTB) abandoned the policy of restriction in favour of expansion: "to produce as large a quantity of tobacco as possible on Native Trust Land".⁷ New markets were opened in the Central Province and the staff of the NTB was expanded. Auction room prices for African-grown fire-cured tobacco, though fluctuating from year to year, began to rise. NTB purchases of the Northern Division (Central Province) fire-cured tobacco rose from 3,437,698 pounds (lbs.) in 1939 to 9,623,559 pounds (lbs.) in 1945. By 1947, "the Central Province crop was by far the largest ever produced".⁸ In the following year, African growers produced more than half

⁵ Department of Overseas Trade, Report on the Economic Conditions, 1939, pp.17-18.

⁶ K.J. McCracken, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State: The Impact of the Native Tobacco Board in the Central Province of Malawi" in Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS) vol.9 no.2 (April 1983) p.186.

⁷ MNA 1A/291/AGR.33/iv-vi Minutes of the NTB, 8/10/40, cited in McCracken, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State" p.186.

⁸ McCracken, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State" pp.186-187; Nyasaland Protectorate, Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1947, p.5.

of the twenty-eight and a half million pounds (lbs.) of the country's total tobacco production.⁹ Similarly, cotton production "continued to expand". Production figures jumped from 5,740 tons in 1946 to 6,764 tons in 1947 and approximately 7,700 tons in 1948. The numbers of African tobacco and cotton growers rose from about 94,000 and 47,000 in 1948 to about 102,500 and 47,500 in 1949, respectively.¹⁰ To these should be added the labour of the family members - wives or husbands, children and relatives of the growers - and those not registered.

An important point arising from the official statistics is that if the numbers of the registered tobacco and cotton growers are added together in any year, they tend to be higher than the total numbers of African workers in all the major industries in the country in that particular year. For example, the total numbers of Africans in wage employment in the major industries in 1948 and 1949 were about 97,000 and 101,000, respectively. This no doubt reflects the growing independence and freedom of choice on the part of the African producers. It may also reflect the profitability of cash-cropping vis-a-vis local wage employment. These figures should not be taken uncritically. It was common for the Africans to move between sectors of the economy or to participate in

⁹ Colonial Office, Annual Report on the Nyasaland Protectorate (London, HMSO, 1948) p.27.

¹⁰ Colonial Office, Annual Report on the Nyasaland Protectorate, 1948, pp.12 and 27; and 1949, pp.15 and 32.

several of them at one particular time. This may have resulted in a lot of double counting.

What is significant is that the expansion in cash-cropping led to a rapid expansion in fish markets in cash-cropping areas of the Shire Valley, the Shire Highlands and the Central Province. At the southern end of Lake Malawi and around Lake Malombe the African fishing industry became "a big one" and "well-established". There was a "considerable industry in the smoking and drying of fish for sale....Thousands of fish were transported to Zomba, Blantyre and Limbe and sold fresh while many thousands more were cured by smoking and sold in village and native markets".¹¹ An annual report of the South Nyasa district for 1938 recorded: 1,001 "professional" fishermen; 898 fish-traders; and 396 "professional" makers of canoes, nets, rope, string and floats. Along with these were 516 shore-seine nets; 112 float gill-nets; 51 scoop nets; and 1,943 baskets and traps.¹²

Traders from the Shire Highlands and "all parts of the country to the west and south" came down to Fort Johnston by

¹¹ MNA NSF/4/1/4, South Nyasa District Annual Report, 1933; Nyasaland Protectorate, Report of the Population Census (Zomba, Government Printer, 1931) pp.27-28. See also NSF4/1/5 South Nyasa District Annual Report, 1939 and NSF4/1/7 South Nyasa District Annual Report, 1945.

¹² MNA NSF4/1/5 South Nyasa (Fort Johnston) District Annual Report, 1938. There are some discrepancies in these figures. For example, the 1933 Annual Report recorded 2,480 "professional" fishermen and 674 fish processors. NSF4/1/4 South Nyasa District Annual Report, 1933. See also McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy" p.423.

car and on bicycles to buy fish. Some of them settled permanently in the district to engage in fish processing and trading. At a small inland market in the Southern Province fish sales increased from 15 tons in 1934 to 32 tons in 1936.¹³ By 1945, dried fish were sold in village markets along the road from the lake to the Shire Highlands and throughout the Southern Province, and as far inland as the Kirk Range in the Central Province.¹⁴

The fish demand in these markets increased during the harvesting and marketing season, March to July, every year. In the Lilongwe district of the Central Province, fish sales were greatest during the tobacco buying season.¹⁵ During the rainy season, late October to March, people were busy in their gardens, the roads to the village markets were less passable by car or bicycle, and money circulation was limited. The risk of transporting fish to remote village markets in the rain was high and could only be offset by transferring the cost to the consumer in the form of increased prices.¹⁶ Enterprising traders switched to the markets on the plantations and in

¹³ MNA PAM/702 Native Welfare Committee, Nutrition Review of the Natives of Nyasaland (Zomba, Government Printer, 1936) p.7.

¹⁴ MNA NS3/3/3 Nutrition in the Colonial Empire, Reports for Chiradzulu, Cholo and Mlanje districts, 1942.

¹⁵ MNA PAM/823 Report of the Inquiry into the Fishing Industry (Zomba, Government Printer, 1956) p.5.

¹⁶ See MNA PAM/702 Native Welfare Committee, Nutritional Review p.15.

towns during the rainy season.

Plantation markets expanded rapidly between the early 1930s and the late 1950s. The decline in tobacco prices in the late 1920s had forced well-capitalized planters in Cholo and Mlanje to switch to tea. The acreage under tea production rose from seven to fifteen thousand between 1927 and 1933 (refer Chapter 2, Table 1).¹⁷ Tea production figures rose from 3,049,760 lbs. in 1933 to 4,624,111 lbs. in 1934, and export value rose from £56,656 in 1933, to £171,470 by 1934.¹⁸ "Several new and well equipped tea factories" came into operation and an experimental station was established at Mlanje.¹⁹ Between 1933 and 1952, the Nyasaland tea industry operated according to the terms of the International Tea Agreement which restricted overproduction by allocating quotas to member countries. This was a big advantage to the Nyasaland planters. There was no danger of overproduction and competition from big producers in India, Ceylon, the Dutch East Indies and Kenya; and their low-quality tea was guaranteed an international market.

The connection between the tea plantations and the

¹⁷ See also R.H. Palmer, "The Nyasaland Tea Industry in the Era of International Tea Restrictions, 1933-1950" in JAH vol.26 (1985) pp.215-239; and by the same author, "The Politics of Tea in Eastern Africa, 1933-1948" in Journal of Social Science (JSS), University of Malawi, vol.13 (1986) pp.69-90.

¹⁸ Department of Overseas Trade, Report on Economic Conditions, 1935, p.61.

¹⁹ Palmer, "The Nyasaland Tea Industry" p.219.

fishing industry had to do with labour. Unlike tobacco, tea was a perennial crop: "it took four years before tea bushes were ready for plucking and twelve years before they came to full maturity".²⁰ Whereas tobacco was produced predominantly by tenant labour, tea was produced predominantly by direct wage labour. Large numbers of unskilled labourers were required in hoeing, tending nurseries, pruning, plucking and packing - work was available almost throughout the year. In addition, tea leaves required processing and manufacturing on the spot. The industry therefore lent itself to the development of a small semi-skilled and semi-permanent labour force side by side with a large unskilled labour force. Figures from the second and third labour censuses taken in the country on 15th and 30th August 1930, respectively, show that the highest numbers of workers on labour rolls were in the tea-producing districts of Cholo and Mlanje. However, due to the labour demands of the local peasant economies, it was common for planters to have more workers on their labour rolls than the numbers reporting for work every morning.²¹ Absenteeism among the unskilled labourers ranged from 30 to 40

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ MNA PAM/690 Report on the Labour Census Taken on 15th, August, 1930 (Zomba, Government Printer, 1930) Table C. The numbers for Cholo were: 13,618 on the labour rolls and 10,287 "actually at work" on the census date, 15th January. On 15th August, they were: 13,075 on the labour rolls, and 8,696 "actually at work". In Mlanje, 16,995 were on the labour rolls on 15th January and 12,295 were "actually at work". On 15th August, the numbers were: 13,143 and 5,888, respectively.

per cent.²²

In general, the expansion in tea production resulted in the expansion in the wage-labour force which in turn was accompanied by a gradual rise in wages. Prior to the Depression, wages for unskilled labourers ranged from 5 to 7 shillings a month, plus 6 pence posho allowance per week, but fell to between 4 and 5 shillings during the depression. By 1938, basic wages for unskilled workers on the Cholo tea plantations had risen to between 8 and 9 shillings, and up to 12 shillings for skilled workers. On the majority of the Mlanje plantations they ranged from 6 to 8 shillings a month, and up to 12 shillings for skilled workers.²³ The Mlanje plantations were closer to the Portuguese East Africa (PEA) border and thus able to draw large numbers of immigrant workers. This contributed to the low wages offered on the tea plantations, especially in the Mlanje district. Between 1940 and 1948, minimum wages for unskilled labourers ranged from 12 to 15 shillings. They rose to between 17 shillings 6 pence and £1.10s by 1953. Those of skilled workers and capitaos, overseers, rose from £1.7s and £1.13s, respectively, in 1940, to £1.13s and £1.19s, respectively, by 1948. Between 1950 and

²² PRO C.O.626/22 Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1941; R.H. Palmer, "Working Conditions and Worker Responses on Nyasaland Tea Estates, 1930-1953" in JAH vol.27 (1986) p.109.

²³ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Labour Branch of the Provincial Administration for the Year Ending 31st December, 1938 (Zomba, Government Printer, 1938) pp.13-14; Palmer, "Working Conditions" pp.113-114.

1953, they had risen from £1.18s and £2, to £2 and £5, respectively.²⁴ These figures do not include bonuses and overtime payments which were common.

The combination of an expanded wage-labour force and gradually rising wages resulted in "a large demand" for fish on the tea plantations of Cholo and "lanje, especially during the tea-picking period from January to March when extra labour was employed.²⁵ Market places were opened up on almost every plantation where fish and other food items were sold. Both oral evidence and written accounts suggest that the best markets were on the plantations where the labour force was large or where wages were high, and that fish sales increased after the end of the month when there was money in hand.²⁶ Though the plantation markets were open throughout the week, special market days were held on different plantations, or villages neighbouring them, corresponding to pay days. Markets were thus known by their "market day" of the week. Rotating market days ensured a fairly even distribution of food commodities.

²⁴ Colonial Office, Report on the Nyasaland Protectorate, 1948, p.15; 1949, p.18; 1950, pp.9 and 23; 1951, p.27 and 1953, p.27.

²⁵ MNA PAM/823 and COM-9/4/1 Report of the Inquiry into the Fishing Industry p.5.

²⁶ MNA PAM/823 and COM-9/4/1 Report of the Inquiry into the Fishing Industry p.5. TIP.3/WC/Ali Mgombe, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 28/9/89; TIP.4/WC/Synod Mankhokwe, Chia, Nkhota-kota 28/9/89; TIP.13/WC/D.P.M. Ngalawesa, Kela, Mpondas, Mangochi, 26/1/90; TIP.20/WC/Maulanda Chimanda, Namiasi, Mpondas, Mangochi, 4/2/90.

II

Competition and Government Intervention

The expansion in fish markets impacted on the general organization of the fishing industry. Up to the late 1920s, fishing was almost entirely in the hands of Africans, and dominated by family heads, village headmen and chiefs such as Mwamadi Matewere at the Bar, Mponda near Fort Johnston, and Chembe near Cape Maclear. From about 1929, transformations in commercial fishing began to take place at the southern end of Lake Malawi.²⁷ "One or two Europeans" began to fish "for trade and commerce" in the South Nyasa (Fort Johnston) district. Competition arose, and the chiefs and headmen complained that the European fishermen were "interfering with their fishing rights and operations".²⁸ Two interesting cases were between a certain Mr Liegel and Village Headman Mwamadi Matewere at the Bar, and the Yiannakis Brothers and Chief Mponda just a few miles north of Fort Johnston.

In about 1929 or 1930, Liegel erected fish weirs and traps just 50 yards above Matewere's and in so doing came to direct confrontation with the headman.²⁹ A fight broke out

²⁷ McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy" p.421.

²⁸ MNA NS1/10/1 Report by the Committee to Consider the Fisheries Report, 1944.

²⁹ MNA S1/437I/30 I.B. Moir, District Commissioner, Fort Johnston, to Senior Provincial Commissioner, 1/4/30; Minutes by the Attorney General, 11/1/30.

between Liegel's and Matewere's men which was brought to the attention of the District Commissioner. In the process of investigating the incident, the government discovered that there were a number of European and Indian entrepreneurs directly involved in the industry, or financing African fishermen and fish-traders. Matewere himself was supplying fish to Indian traders who provided him with capital to construct more weirs in exchange for exclusive rights to purchase his catch.

Unlike in agriculture where the government usually intervened on the part of the European planters, at least up to the 1940s, in fishing the policy was reversed.³⁰ The government decided "to institute enlightened conditions for the future welfare of the [native] community" by controlling non-African commercial fishing.³¹ "I do not feel very easy about the increase in the number of European professional fishermen", minuted one official, "it is highly inadvisable that what is primarily a native trade should pass into European hands...with so many Indians and Europeans competing, the native trade...is seriously affected,"³² concluded another. Fishing Rules were introduced in 1931 prohibiting European and

³⁰ See Mccracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy" p.423.

³¹ MNA S1/437I/30 Game Warden to Chief Secretary, 26/4/30.

³² MNA S1/437I/30 Senior Provincial Commissioner to Chief Secretary, 3/12/32; District Commissioner, Fort Johnston, to Senior Provincial Commissioner, 14/11/32.

Indian commercial fishermen from operating within two miles of the African fishing grounds at the Bar without a written permit from the Provincial Commissioner.³³

Three reasons accounted for the government's support for African interests in commercial fishing. First, this was an industry which had developed in an area which was agriculturally marginal: "to allow Europeans to engage in commercial fishing would be to undermine the only money-making activity existing near the lake and hence increase the number of tax defaulters".³⁴ Second, the administration was worried about escalating violence between the non-African commercial fishermen and the African communities in the area.³⁵ Finally, the prominent non-African commercial fishermen were Greeks, "non-Anglo-Saxon, non-Protestant and not even English-speaking". Their political and economic value to the colonial state and the empire in general was minimal. Government officials had very little sympathy for them.³⁶

Despite government hostility some European fishermen were able to do well by making alliances with African middlemen. A

³³ MNA S1/437I/30 District Commissioner, Fort Johnston, to Provincial Commissioner, 16/3/31; McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy" p.421.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, MNA S1/437I/30 Minutes of a Baraza Meeting, Fort Johnston, 17/2/33; District Commissioner to Provincial Commissioner, Southern Province, 17/2/33.

³⁵ MNA NS1/10/1 Report by Committee to Consider the Fishing Report, 1944.

³⁶ McCracken, "Fishing in the Colonial Empire" p.423.

good example is the Greek family of the Yiannakis Brothers who built a large business by selling part of their catch at the lake to "bicycle boys", a major force in the commercial fishery, and transporting the remainder by lorry to the urban markets of Zomba, Limbe and Blantyre, and the tobacco-producing areas of the Central Province. The Yiannakis came from the island of Limnos. They had initially obtained land in the Namwera area, east of Fort Johnston, to grow tobacco. In 1933, Nicholas Yiannakis obtained a government permit to fish in the Shire River near Fort Johnston "in a very humble way...with the use of basket fish traps".³⁷ He then bought a locally made seine net (made by local Africans) and brought his two brothers, Christos Comminos and Stavros, into the business. They obtained two more permits to fish at Chipoka and Mtimbuka, a few miles north of Fort Johnston, where they had also leased residential plots. In 1938, they imported seine nets from England and became the first people to trawl on Lake Nyasa.

By the early 1940s, the Yiannakis were Nyasaland's major fish exporters to Southern Rhodesia. They installed a refrigeration plant at Chipoka, the present site of the Malawi Development Corporation (MALDECO) Fisheries Plant.³⁸ Records

³⁷ MNA NS1/10/1 Report by the Committee to Consider the Fisheries Report, 1944. See also McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy" pp.421-422.

³⁸ See MNA S29/1/2/1 Fisheries Officer, Fort Johnston, to Acting Chief Secretary, 15/4/47. The plant was installed in 1946.

of their fish accounts show a very healthy business:³⁹

Table 6.1: Yiannakis' Fish Business.

<u>Year</u>	(a) <u>Landings</u> (short tons)	(b) <u>Exports</u> (short tons)	(b) <u>as % of (a)</u>	<u>Value</u> (in £)
1938	203	100	49.3	2,424
1939	272	63	23.4	2,306
1940	n/a	117	n/a	2,495
1941	n/a	133	n/a	3,003
1942	105	96	91	2,229
1943	707	89	12.6	2,004
1944	339	50	14.7	1,496

Sources: MNA NS1/10/1 Fisheries, June 1943 - December, 1944: Yiannakis' Fishing Account; MNA COM-9/3/1 Commission of Enquiry into Fishing and Fish Trading, 1956: Yiannakis Fishing Account. Some records show that the 1939 landing was 509 tons from January to October, and up to 600 tons by December. The 105 tons landed in 1942 were only for the months of September to November, and a total of up to 719.5 tons were landed in 1943.

A greater part of the Yiannakis catch was sold to "bicycle boys" at their depot at Limbe, in the urban markets of Blantyre and Limbe, and on the tea plantations of Cholo and Mlanje.⁴⁰ Not less than 15,927 dozens of fish were sold at Limbe and in Blantyre between January and March, 1956 and

³⁹ These figures should not be taken uncritically. It was only from September 1942 that non-African commercial fishermen were required to keep statistics on landings and sales as part of a government investigation in possibilities of over-fishing. Figures on the amount of fish caught by Africans are non-existent.

⁴⁰ MNA COM-9/3/1 Evidence of Christos Comminos Yiannakis to the Commission of Enquiry into Fishing and Fish Trading, Blantyre, 17th-19th July, 1956.

another 13,267 dozens were supplied to the Cholo and Mlanje tea plantations during the same period. Total sales on internal markets for the three months exceeded £2,642, while total revenue from fishing for the first half of 1955 alone exceeded £22,143.⁴¹ By 1956, the Yiannakis were travelling to Amsterdam, Edinburgh and London to purchase nets and boats.

Their success attracted several other non-African commercial fishermen into the Fort Johnston district. By 1938, not less than five permits had been issued to non-African commercial fishermen, predominantly Greeks, and a few Indians.⁴² During the 1940s and 50s, the government received several applications for fishing and fish-trading permits from South Africa, Southern Rhodesia and Tanganyika. They were turned down due to ecological concerns and fear that the African fishermen would be eliminated by well-capitalized European and Indian commercial fishermen. Just like in cash-cropping, the colonial administration adopted a policy of balancing African interests with a small European sector. Only one major fishing firm belonging to Colonel Sanders was

⁴¹ See MNA COM-9/3/1 Chris Yiannakis' Fishing Account, 1956.

⁴² MNA NS1/10/1 Report by the Committee to Consider the Fisheries Report, 1944. The list included: Nicholas and Chris Yiannakis, H.M. Rodrigues, Abdullah Mussah, Nicholas Trataris, Ibrahim Osman, W.P. Taylor, Jussab Suleman, S. Drop, a certain Read, Henry Aschcroft, a certain Karim, De Niello, O. Wilt and A. Rajab.

granted a fishing permit in the 1940.⁴³ Sanders was an agent of General Motors (US) Ltd, Ford Motors, and later, Stansfield Motors Ltd.; and owner of an international transport company. He had raised £30,000 from his British dealers and proposed to set up a private fishing company to be incorporated in Nyasaland with a monopoly in deep water fishing. The company would also manufacture fish-meal and manure using facilities supplied by Standard Cannery of South Africa Ltd. Because of the ecological implications of deep water fishing Colonel Sanders' proposal was initially rejected. The permit was given after he had reduced his plan from deep water trawling to seine-net fishing limited to a smaller area around Domira Bay in Salima district.

The advantage the non-African commercial fishermen had over their African counterparts was the possession of abundant capital and reliable transportation. Almost all of them had other businesses: retail and grocery shops, tobacco plantations, bakeries, butcheries, and lorries for transportation. For example, The Yiannakis Brothers had a cattle ranch, several canteens, a bakery, grocery shops, and shares in the Limbe Tobacco Auction floors. In addition to carrying their fish to Zomba, Limbe, Blantyre, Cholo, and Mlanje in the Southern Province; and Lilongwe in the Central Province, they used their lorries to transport passengers,

⁴³ See MNA S1/437II/30 Extracts from Executive Council Meeting, 1/8/46.

fish-traders, and mail. Nicholas Trataris, another pioneer Greek settler, just like the Yiannakis, had a tobacco estate and transported passengers and African fish-traders between Fort Johnston and Blantyre.⁴⁴ The same applied to Abdulla Mussa, an Indian merchant. He had estates and businesses in Chiradzulu district and used his lorries to transport passengers in addition to fish.

Along with the Greeks were several Indian and "coloured" traders who transported passengers and traded in fish caught by African fishermen. Though they had enough capital and reliable transportation, they did not directly engage in fishing on account of lack of traditional fishing skills. They could have employed wage labourers to fish on their behalf, but found it better to avoid the risk by handling the African catch. Some of them provided capital to African fishermen in exchange for exclusive purchasing rights.

Though competition between the non-African fishermen and fish-traders and their African counterparts was intense, the former did not aim at wiping out the latter. The non-African fishermen, traders, and transporters benefited from their African rivals.⁴⁵ It was to the African fish-traders that the

⁴⁴ MNA NS1/10/1 Nicholas Trataris to Provincial Commissioner, 4/12/44.

⁴⁵ TIP.13/WC/D.P.M Ngalawesa, Kela, Mpondas, Mangochi, 26/1/90; TIP.15/WC/F. Hapana Fatch, Kela, Mpondas, Mangochi, 28/1/90; TIP.20/WC/Maulanda Chimanda, Namiasi, Mangochi, 4/2/90. See also McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy" p.422.

non-African commercial fishermen sold most of their fish at the lake and at various lorry stops on the road from Fort Johnston to Zomba, Limbe, and Blantyre. Anyamata a geni, "gain boys",⁴⁶ took the fish from these depots to remote village and plantation markets. The African fish-traders constituted the majority of the lorry passengers on the route from the lake to the towns and the plantations in the Shire Highlands and the Central Province.

This, however, does not mean that competition did not exist. There was "considerable friction" among the non-African commercial fishermen themselves, for example, between the Yiannakis Brothers and Van der Berg, one of the pioneer settlers in the district; between the former and chief Mponda and his people;⁴⁷ and between the chiefs and village headmen, and the African fish-traders. The chiefs and village headmen were themselves fishing "for gain", using the same methods as non-Africans, but having inferior quality nets and their operations being much less sustained than those of the non-Africans.⁴⁸ They were therefore interested in seeing a

⁴⁶ This term is made by combining mnyamata (singular), boy or youth, or anyamata (plural) with "gain" to mean "middleman" or retail trader. See also E.C. Mandala, Work and Control in a Peasant Economy: A History of the Lower Shire Valley in Malawi, 1859-1960 (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1990) pp.253-254 and p.379.

⁴⁷ MNA S1/437I/30 J. Abraham, Senior Provincial Commissioner, to Chief Secretary, 29/5/37.

⁴⁸ MNA NS1/10/1 Cecil Baker, "Notes for the Consideration and Guidance on the Issue of Fishing Permits", 16/10/42.

reduction in the influence of non-African commercial fishermen.

They garnered support from local politicians and Native Welfare Associations (in which they had a lot of influence) in their protest against non-African commercial fishermen and fish-traders. For example, in 1932, the Blantyre Native Welfare Association requested the government to "preserve the [fishing] industry for the natives only". The Association made its "strong request":

on the understanding that, in Nyasaland, the only trade a native has managed to raise money for his needs is the fish trade. This trade is the only one which even the low class of the natives manage to carry on and be able to raise money for hut taxes and their living necessities and it is a pity to see the non-natives competing unnecessarily and compel the natives to remain without any means of finding his living.⁴⁹

The Association further noted that the Africans were facing unfair competition because they did not have transport facilities of their own, "spending days and weeks" at the lake to obtain their supply while lorry owners could make two or three trips in a week.

Motorized transportation was a major concern to the majority of the African fish-traders. Though they benefited from its operation between the lake and the markets, they feared that the non-African traders, especially Indian merchants, would use it to undercut their operations. They

⁴⁹ MNA S1/437I/30 Resolution of the Blantyre Native Welfare Association, 3/12/32. See also minutes by the Governor, Harold B. Kittermaster, 22/3/37.

wanted the government to control the activities of non-African fish-traders, as this letter from Denson Chitenje shows:

[sic:] Dear Bwana, I am wondering my Master, when work is not founding in this country ...our work was of carrying fish and selling them. Then we were getting money and paying for our taxes, and some was used for our food and clothes...in that way we are getting life, we all nativesnowadays ...you have allowed the white men of your tribe carrying fish instead of we. We have tired with them now because we shall fight each other there, therefore you must keep chains for us which we will be chained with if you don't arrange this matter for us.⁵⁰

Chitenje placed part of the blame on African commercial fishermen and local authorities like Matewera for favouring Indian traders and well-capitalized African "middlemen" who were using motorized transportation. His opinion was shared by some government officials who feared that ill-feeling, bribery, and corruption in fish-buying and selling at the lake would result in increasing incidents of violence. The "monopoly" which Matewera enjoyed was "bound to give him a somewhat exalted idea of his own importance in his dealings with other natives as well as with Europeans and Asiatics",⁵¹ which would result in overt strife. However, the government could not "reasonably interfere in the actual trading of the fish". An attempt to patrol major fishing grounds around Fort Johnston ended in disappointment. The African police staff was

⁵⁰ MNA S1/437I/30 Denson Chitenje to Bwana [District Commissioner, Provincial Commissioner, or Chief Secretary?], 7/11/32.

⁵¹ MNA S1/437I/30 District Commissioner, Fort Johnston, to Chief Secretary, 14/2/30.

too inadequate for the purpose. Often the task was left to local chiefs, who, themselves, had vested interest in commercial fishing and were party to the conflicts taking place in the area.

III

The Conservation Debate

In addition to the maintenance of "law and order", the colonial administration was interested in the sustainability of the country's fisheries resources. The idea of fish conservation was first proposed in 1926 with the introduction of the Game Ordinance which restricted hunting and the possession of guns by Africans. As regards fishing, the decision then was that: "no interference, official or otherwise, could be of any benefit to the native who makes his own string, [and] nets...[and] puts [them] out when the lake allows him to do so".⁵² By 1930, this view had changed:

further enquiries have only served to strengthen the opinion that any scheme for increasing the catch would be attended by risks of fishing out the lake since the methods at present employed by natives although of a primitive character, are sufficiently successful to place a considerable strain on the supply of fish....As regards the desirability of exercising some control over the industry either by declaring closed seasons or preventing the extraction of immature fish, the Provincial Commissioners are unanimous in reporting that such measures would be certain to arouse much

⁵² MNA S1/1470/25 Provincial Commissioner, Northern Province, to Chief Secretary, 23/1/26.

resentment among natives.⁵³

Ecological concerns came to the peak between 1930 and 1935. The lake level had receded and the Shire River at the Bar and parts of Lake Malombe were "almost entirely blocked with sudd",⁵⁴ a thick impenetrable water vegetation. Fishermen constructed weirs and traps across the river and in shallow waters along the lake. As far as Monkey Bay, about 40 miles north of Fort Johnston, "fishing was good and large catches with spoons and seine nets could be made at almost any time of the day".⁵⁵ The administration thus abandoned its policy of non-interference in traditional fishing methods. It was "necessary" to protect the country's fisheries resources because, in the opinion of government officials, native nets were designed in such a way that small or immature fish could not escape. The weirs and traps were "a disastrous practice". Fishermen using these methods were "catching every fish attempting to enter the river(s)...and must literally be

⁵³ MNA S1/437I/30 R. Rankie to Lt. Col. L.M. Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10/2/26.

⁵⁴ MNA NS1/10/1 Interim Report on the Fish and Fisheries of Lake Nyasa: "Lake Levels, 1933-1943". The minimum and maximum heights were: 17 feet 9 inches and 20 feet and 6 inches in 1933; 19 feet 7 inches and 21 feet and 6 inches in 1934; 20 feet 9 inches and 23 feet and 3 inches in 1935. Thereafter they began to rise: 22 feet 11 inches and 25 feet and 4 inches in 1936, 23 feet 8 inches and 26 feet 7 inches in 1937, and 22 feet 10 inches and 26 feet in 1936. For comparison see McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy" p.417.

⁵⁵ MNA NS1/10/1 Interim Report on the Fish and Fisheries of Lake Nyasa.

destroying hundreds of thousands".⁵⁶

In the absence of scientific data, there was no actual evidence of the decline in fish stocks in the lake. The strongest reason for intervention was the distaste of colonial officials for the methods used by Africans to harvest fish. In their opinion, the Africans were "ignorant" of the effects of their "rapacious" fishing practices: "when chambo (Tilapia) are caught in native nets the young concealed in the pharynx of the Tilapia fish are not returned to the water...the fish is held by the tail and shaken, and a shower of the young issue from the mouth to be greedily collected and eventually eaten". This practice was "destructive and dangerous" because:

the mortality of fish-fry alone from natural enemies is incalculable and if the very breeding-fish themselves are remorselessly killed off year after year in ever increasing quantities, then all the natural history experience gained throughout the world would prove that ultimate disaster will be inevitable, and such a disaster generally arrives much sooner and more completely than expected (cf...certain fish industries such as cod and sardines, whales, seals, passenger-pigeons, etc).⁵⁷

Claims about the "natural history experience" and the quest for "scientific" knowledge often influenced colonial policy on soil, game, and forest conservation. By this time, the administration already had regulations related to game and forest control though it was after WWII that soil conservation

⁵⁶ MNA S1/437I/30 R.C. Wood, Game Warden, to Chief Secretary, 26/4/30. See also Governor to Chief Secretary, 6/5/30 in the same file.

⁵⁷ MNA S1/437I/30 Wood to Chief Secretary, 26/4/30.

measures were introduced.⁵⁸ Most of these regulations were justified by reference to dubious "scientific" interests which masked the officials' distaste of African methods of using natural resources. The first fishing regulations were introduced in 1930 by adding a section (Section 3: Fishing Rules MP.437 of 1930) to the Game Ordinance. They prohibited fishing by traps, weirs and poisoning, except for in areas to be demarcated by the District Commissioner, or any other Administrative Officer. A year later, there came a sweeping prohibition of fishing within two miles of river mouths to protect the fish entering the rivers to spawn.⁵⁹ The rules did not take into account some positive elements and some weaknesses in traditional fishing methods. For example, weirs and traps could only be used in shallow waters, and especially during the dry season. During the rainy season when the rivers, marshes and lagoons flooded, the traps were removed for fear that they might be washed away. They were also constructed in such a way that fish-fry could easily pass through. Fish poison could only be used in still or slow moving waters and its effectiveness was limited to a short period of time. The amount, depth, and flow of water could easily reduce its strength.

⁵⁸ See R. Kettlewell, and by the same author, "Nyasaland: Where and Whence?" in African Affairs vol 63 (1963) pp.258-265.

⁵⁹ MNA NS1/10/1 and S27/1/10/25: Fishing Rules Government Notice no.13/1931.

As for the traditional boats, they were designed to catch specific fish species in their habitats. Pelagic species were caught by different types of nets from deep-water species such as catfish. It was the adoption of new, and especially imported fishing technology such as mosquito-mesh nets, nylon gill-nets, trawling nets, and narrow-meshed beach seine nets, which put fish stocks at risk. The adoption of this technology was itself a response to the expansion in capitalist fish markets described above, and the leading figures were returning labour migrants. They were the emerging class of entrepreneurs in the fishing industry.

With the introduction of Indirect Rule and the establishment of Native Authority treasuries in 1933, chiefs in the lakeshore districts were empowered to collect fees on canoes made in their areas. The Forest Ordinance (Forest Rules GN.12/32) forbade the cutting of trees for canoes without payment of a royalty to the chief in whose area the tree was cut.⁶⁰ Quotas were imposed on trees to be cut for canoes.⁶¹ Resistance to these regulations was widespread and the government found it extremely difficult to implement them. Fishermen in Fort Johnston district complained that the restrictions "seriously handicapped those natives engaged in

⁶⁰ MNA NSF 4/1/7 South Nyasa District Annual Report, 1933. In November 1932, 1,814 canoes were recorded in the district, and 6,837 canoe trees were available. Canoes were being "replaced" or made at the rate of 827.83 a year

⁶¹ MNA NNC 3/1/4 West Nyasa District Annual Report, 1934; NSF 4/1/7 South Nyasa District Annual Report, 1933.

the fishing industry" and very little interest was taken in observing them.⁶² In Nkhota-kota, chiefs requested the government to abolish the quotas.⁶³ Further north, in Nkhata Bay, some fishermen evaded the restrictions by crossing political borders into southern Tanganyika to buy trees, or ready made canoes.⁶⁴

The controls on trees did not entirely stop the Africans from making canoes. For example, in Nkhata Bay district, there were "many instances" of trees being cut for canoes.⁶⁵ Difficulties in enforcing the forestry regulations were also numerous: poor communication, shortage of personnel, physical dangers in patrolling the forests, and unreliability of African forest rangers. The rangers were often bribed or threatened by canoe-makers.⁶⁶ The chiefs were equally powerless. They had no traditional authority over communal use of forest and aquatic resources. Their involvement in the restrictions on canoe-making was thus traditionally 'unconstitutional'.

⁶² MNA NSF 4/1/7 South Nyasa District Annual Report, 1933.

⁶³ MNA COM-9/3/1 Mwenyebabu, Tapa-tapa Village, Nkhota-kota, to Commission of Enquiry, Lilongwe, 21st-22nd August, 1956.

⁶⁴ MNA NNC 3/1/5 West Nyasa District Annual Report, 1935.

⁶⁵ MNA S11/3/1/89 West Nyasa District Annual Report, 1943.

⁶⁶ MNA S11/3/1/89 West Nyasa Annual Report, 1943.

III

Fish and Human Nutrition

During the period between the late 1930s and early 1950s, government involvement in the fishing industry was influenced by the activities of the fisheries and nutrition surveys and land alienation along the lake front. The way the surveys were financed and conducted reflected the colonial obsession with "scientific" knowledge in Nyasaland as in Africa in general.⁶⁷ Funds were pooled from different sources: the Medical Research Council of the Colonial Office, the Fresh Water Biological Association, the British Natural History Museum, and the local administration. The "experts" on fisheries and human nutrition were drawn from Cambridge University, the University of Hong Kong, the Fresh Water Biological Association, and the Fisheries Advisory Council of the Colonial Office. All of them had been involved in similar research in different parts of the colonial empire: the West Indies, the Middle East, Asia, and West and East Africa.

The nutritional survey was, itself, part of a wider

⁶⁷ See K.J. McCracken, "Experts and Expertise in Colonial Malawi" in African Affairs vol.81 (1982) pp.101-116, and by the same author, "Colonialism, Capitalism, and the Ecological Crisis in Malawi: A Reassessment" in Anderson and Grove (eds), Conservation in Africa pp.63-77 and 189-192; M.A. Vaughan, "Uncontrolled Animals and Aliens: Colonial Conservation Mania in Malawi", History Seminar Paper, Chancellor College, University of Malawi, (1977/78). For detailed discussions on "experts" and "scientific" research in Africa see J.C. Stone (ed), Experts in Africa: Proceedings of a Colloquium at the University of Aberdeen (Aberdeen, 1980).

imperial program. "The official concern with the nutritional requirements of the working classes surfaced in Britain in the aftermath of the First World War and was extended to the dependent colonial empire in the late 1930s".⁶⁸ Nyasaland became involved in it from 1936 when the Secretary of State for the Colonies dispatched a circular to all officers administering British colonies dealing with the subject of nutrition and its relation to agriculture, public health and the feeding of workers.⁶⁹ At the same time, the Colonial Office was paying increasing attention to the ILO conventions. In 1930, Lord Passfield, the Secretary of State for the Colonies dispatched a circular reminding African Governors that:

the general conditions under which native labour is employed are receiving increased attention from the ILO Office and I anticipate that there will be a further development in this direction. I am anxious that, so far as possible, the British Colonies, Protectorates, and Mandated Territories should show a high standard in such matters and be able to stand the light of criticism in comparison with conditions existing in other territories.... I shall, therefore be glad if you will take into consideration the conditions of labour in the territory under your administration, with special reference to such matters as hours of work, rates of pay, rates of overtime, etc....I consider also that the position as regards housing conditions and medical services should be taken under review and that any provisions which might contribute to the content and social welfare of native labour should

⁶⁸ McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy" p.424.

⁶⁹ MNA NCK 3/6/2 Nutrition Unit: Colonial Development Fund, Nutrition Survey; MNA Q/267 B.S. Platt, Draft Report of a Nutrition Survey in Nyasaland, especially Part I; MNA PAM/702 Native Welfare Committee, Nutritional Review (1936).

also receive attention.⁷⁰

Throughout the 1930s, the Nyasaland government tried to present a good image of labour conditions on the plantations. ILO conventions on minimum wages, provision of medical facilities, employment of women and juveniles, the feeding of workers, and the provision of housing and transportation to migrant workers were embodied in the country's labour legislation.⁷¹ None of them were effectively implemented. The government did not have the capacity to enforce its labour legislation; and the local employers, especially plantation owners, argued that they could not afford high wages and working conditions obtainable in Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. The tea plantations were notorious for their poor working conditions: "the living conditions prevailing on these estates are certainly not attractive", lamented the District Commissioner for Cholo in 1937.⁷² Some well-capitalized plantations began to stabilize their labour by investing in model brick compounds, providing health and sport facilities, water, fuel, and cooked rations.⁷³

It was the provision of rations and the nutritional

⁷⁰ MNA S1/1132/30 Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor, Nyasaland, 6/8/30.

⁷¹ See MNA LB3/3/3 ILO Conventions Embodied in Nyasaland Labour Legislation, 1930-1947.

⁷² MNA NSE 5/1/5 Cholo District Annual Report, 1937. Cited in Palmer, "Working Conditions" p.115.

⁷³ MNA S1/66C/37 Cholo District Annual Report, 1936. Cited in Palmer, "Working Conditions" p.115.

requirements of workers which drew the attention of both the colonial administration and settler employers to the importance of increasing fish supplies. The understanding was that: "the labour problem is not one of numbers, but of the efficiency of the unit, and that efficiency is a medico-social matter".⁷⁴ The problem could not be solved without addressing the inter-relation of diet and disease and their effect on the energy and efficiency of the African, both as a common villager and as a hired worker.⁷⁵ In this respect, the Nyasaland plantations "left out a lot to be desired". The wages were "not sufficient for the purchase even of the foodstuffs considered essential for the maintenance in robust health of an individual, much less his wife and family".⁷⁶ An

⁷⁴ This statement was first used in Nyasaland Protectorate, Report on the Population Census, 1926, p.xix. It became very popular in the late 1930s and early 1940s. See, for example, MNA NS3/3/3 Nutrition in the Colonial Empire: District Reports, 1939-1940.

⁷⁵ This was a popular topic at the time. See, for example, G.B. Worthington, "The Food and Nutrition of African Natives" in Africa vol.IX no.2 (April 1936); Colonial Office, Report on Nutrition in the Colonial Empire (London, HMSO, 1939), especially vol.1 Parts I and II; Colonial Office/G. St.J. Orde Browne, Labour Conditions in East Africa (London, HMSO, 1946); Colonial Office/C.H. Northcott, African Labour Efficiency Survey (London, HMSO, 1949); B. Gussman, "Industrial Efficiency and the Urban African" in Africa vol.XXXIII no.2 (April 1953); J.C. Carothers, The African Mind in Health and Disease (Geneva, WHO, 1953); P. de Briey, "Industrialisation and Social Problems in Central Africa" in International Labour Review (ILR), ILO, vol.LXIII, no.5 (May 1951) pp.475-506, and by the same autor, "The Productivity of African Labour" in ILR vol.LXXI nos.2-3 (August-September 1955) pp.119-137.

⁷⁶ MNA NS3/3/3 Nutrition in the Colonial Empire: Memorandum on the General Character of the Problem. See also the Cholo District Report in the same file.

investigation into the country's fisheries resources was important so as to find measures to conserve them "so that regular supplies may be available for consumption".⁷⁷

This realization is what led to the proposal for the fisheries survey in 1936.⁷⁸ At the same time, the Colonial Office was "considering the question of the fuller development of the fishing resources of the Colonial Empire".⁷⁹ In 1930, a Colonial Office conference had recommended the establishment of a Standing Advisory Committee on Fisheries as part of the organization of the Colonial Office.⁸⁰ The recommendation was not carried out because of the Depression in the early 1930s, but was reviewed in 1938 and a Fisheries Advisory Committee was appointed as part of the Economic Advisory Council. The Committee remained in abeyance due to the outbreak of the war until 1943.

The Nyasaland proposal received a lot of support partly because of its scientific value,⁸¹ and partly due to "the

⁷⁷ MNA PAM/702 Nutritional Review of the Natives: A Review of the Further Studies and Researches on the Subject which appears Desirable.

⁷⁸ MNA S1/437I/30 Harold B. Kittermaster, Governor, to Colonial Office, 12/11/38.

⁷⁹ MNA S1/430I/30 Malcolm McDonald, Secretary of State for the Colonies, to Kenneth Lambert Hall, Acting Governor, Nyasaland, 30/11/39.

⁸⁰ PRO C.O.910/1 Colonial Office, Memorandum on the Colonial Fisheries Advisory Committee, 1943.

⁸¹ See MNA S1/437I/30 Worthington to Herklots, 22/10/38; Eastwood to Hall, 31/12/38; PRO C.O.910/1 W.B. Worthington, Memorandum on Fisheries Development; see also memorandum by

urgency and importance of increasing the local supply of essential foodstuffs for local consumption" during the war.⁸² The local administration was urged "to take all possible steps to encourage and develop local fishing industries". However, they could not do this in the absence of "scientific" data on the country's fisheries resources. It was in relation to this that biologists from the Laboratory of the Freshwater Biological Association, British Natural History Museum, and the Medical Research Council were hired. Based on the findings of his earlier research on the East African lakes, W.B. Worthington, the Director of the Laboratory of the Freshwater Biological Association, proposed an ambitious investigation into the marine biology of the inland waters of Tanganyika, Northern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland. He hoped that the investigation would have "a direct bearing on the development of food supplies for native races".⁸³ The proposal became the guidelines for the Nyasaland Fisheries Survey from 1938.⁸⁴

C.K. Ricardo in the same file.

⁸² MNA S1/437I/30 Malcolm MacDonald, Secretary of State for the Colonies, to Kenneth Lambert Hall, Acting Governor, Nyasaland, 30/11/39.

⁸³ MNA S1/437I/30 W.B. Worthington to the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 13/10/36.

⁸⁴ The Survey was headed by H.J.E. Borley, son of J.O. Borley, former Fisheries Advisor to the Secretary of State. Three other experts were seconded to the survey: a certain Dr. Herklots from the University of Hong Kong, C.K. Ricardo (later Ricardo-Bertram) from the Freshwater Biological Association, and E. Trewavas from the Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge.

In the same year, Nyasaland became the centre of a Nutrition Survey headed by B.S. Platt, Director of the Human Nutritional Research Unit of the Medical Research Council.⁸⁵ On the recommendation of the Nyasaland government, the Fisheries Survey became a unit of the Nutrition Survey in 1939.⁸⁶ Its work was disturbed by the outbreak of the war in 1939 though collection of data continued until 1942 when a report was finally published. The report dismissed earlier fears that the lake was being over-fished. It recommended that the fisheries could be enlarged without damage to the fish stocks, and, because of its importance to the national economy, African commercial fishing needed to be developed and the fish-trade "organized".⁸⁷

The importance of "scientific" research on fisheries and human nutrition can be assessed in four ways. First, it gave the government a good justification for discontinuing direct intervention in African commercial fishing and fish-trading. With fears of over-fishing removed, the government had no better reason to interfere in African fishing methods. Second, it increased awareness of the need to promote commercial

⁸⁵ MNA NCK3/6/2 Nutrition Unit: Colonial Development Fund Approval, 1938/39. See also McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy" p.424.

⁸⁶ MNA S1/437II/30 Malcolm MacDonald to Harold Littermaster, 15/12/38; S1/437II/30 Memorandum on the Nyasaland Fishing Industry, 12/12/38; Ricardo-Bertram, Borley and Trewavas, Report on the Fish and Fisheries of Lake Nyasa.

⁸⁷ Bertram, et al, Report on the Fish and Fisheries of Lake Nyasa. Introduction and Summary of Recommendations.

fishing for the nutritional requirements of workers and the African population in general. The Nutrition Unit gathered data on the feeding and housing of workers on the tea plantations, in towns, hospitals and prisons; and recommended that fish could be used as a substitute ~~for~~ meat as a source of protein.⁸⁸

Third, and related to the above, the Unit was instrumental in promoting programs in health and nutrition in the Southern Province. In selected areas in the Shire Highlands, women were taught child care, food and nutrition, and the importance of preparing a balanced diet. Elementary hygiene and dietetics were included in the school curriculum targeted at children of both sexes who were regarded as "more receptive" than the "conservative" and "apathetic" adults.⁸⁹ Due to lack of sources, the effectiveness of these programs is difficult to judge. The lack of sources may itself suggest the ineffectiveness of the measures. Among the difficulties were: inadequate trained staff; high levels of illiteracy among rural women; and the conflict between regular class attendance and the labour demands of the traditional economy. Rural women's first priority was to allocate more time to their production activities.

⁸⁸ See MNA NS3/3/3 Nutrition Unit: Reports, 1939-1942, especially reports on Cholo and Mlanje.

⁸⁹ These programs began before the nutrition survey but received more attention during this time. See MNA PAM/702 Nutrition Review of the Nyasaland Natives pp.16-17.

In 1939, partly in response to the activities of the Nutrition Unit, and partly also due to the debates taking place in Southern Rhodesia and South Africa on the feeding and housing of workers, the Director of Medical Services began to circulate information on rations and proper housing of workers. The standards of rations and accommodation contained in his pamphlets were based on the minimum standards agreed on by the Directors of Medical Services of Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland at a conference in Southern Rhodesia that year.⁹⁰ The recommended scale of weekly rations was: 10 to 12 lbs. maize meal,⁹¹ 2 lbs. beans, 1 lb. shelled groundnuts, 4 ounces salt, and 2 lbs. meat or fresh fish, or 1 lb. biltong or dried fish. According to the findings of the Nutrition Survey, dried fish had more protein content than cooked meat.⁹²

Local employers, though generally agreeable to improving feeding standards, "did not consider it practicable...to make any stipulation as suggested by the Director of Medical Services".⁹³ However, by 1940, "most employers" were issuing fish to their workers on a weekly basis but not according to

⁹⁰ MNA PAM/1,969 H.S. De Boer, The Feeding and Housing of Native Employees (Zomba, Government Printer, 1939).

⁹¹ This was to be provided at the scale of 2 lbs. per working day. After protest from planters it was reduced to one and a half pounds per working day.

⁹² MNA NS3/3/3 Reports of the Nutrition Survey. See also LB3/3/2 Reports of the Director of Medical Services.

⁹³ MNA LB3/3/2 Chairman, CLAB, to All Members, 14/5/47.

the scale suggested by the Director of Medical Services.⁹⁴ The measure received official sanction in 1947 when the Central Labour Advisory Board (CLAB) adopted a resolution to add fish to the scale of rations given to workers "in order to introduce some protein of higher biological value".⁹⁵ Plantation owners encouraged, and sometimes invited, fish-traders to come and sell fish at their plantations.⁹⁶

Finally, between 1940 and 1943, the Nutrition Unit experimented with fishing gear, machines for spinning rope and twine, boat-building, and fish processing.⁹⁷ The results were, however, disappointing. The machines for making rope and twine were labour intensive and fish processing methods were inferior to the ones locally used. B.S. Platt himself admitted the failure: "I think we are making the mistake here, as in many other spheres of native development, in that we are trying to produce something for the native that we think we should like if we were natives. I think we should take an entirely different line".⁹⁸

⁹⁴ PRO C.O.626/22 Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1941. See also Palmer, "Working Conditions" p.115.

⁹⁵ MNA LB3/3/2 Chairman, CLAB, to All Members, 14/4/47.

⁹⁶ See MNA NS3/3/3 Reports of the Nutrition Unit; COM-9/3/1 Evidence by Gerald Hadlow, and by Christos Yiannakis, to the Commission of Enquiry into Fishing and Fish Trading, Blantyre, 17th-19th July, 1956.

⁹⁷ MNA NCK3/6/2 Nutrition Unit: Quarterly Reports, 1940-1943; McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy" p.424.

⁹⁸ MNA NCK3/6/2, Nutrition Unit, Quarterly Reports: Note by B.S. Platt on fish processing.

IV

Land, Recreation, and the Fishing Industry

In general, state intervention in African commercial fishing was a failure. Throughout the 1930s and 40s, forest and fishing regulations were never effectively implemented. During the Second World War, government attention had shifted from fishing regulations to land disputes. Some 51,229 acres had been leased along the lake front between Fort Johnston and Domira Bay in present Salima district for fishing and camping grounds, hotels, and residential buildings.⁹⁹ The leases often interfered with local people's gardens and fishing sites. Some local chiefs blocked applications for leases,¹⁰⁰ and government officials sided with them:

when Native Authority Mponda, on behalf of the people of his area whose rights are threatened by interference by non-natives, refuses to grant facilities, he is not necessarily being unreasonably and maliciously obstructive. The local natives have enjoyed their fishing rights all their lives, they are jealous of these rights and although ...they are very tolerant and long suffering, and not always vociferous when their rights are infringed, they do experience resentment. This resentment may not at first appear manifest, yet repetition of the cause for offence might have dangerous reactions on the part of the people.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ MNA S37/1/10/25 Senior Provincial Commissioner to Chief Secretary, 14/10/35; S37/1/10/26 Report of the Lakeshore Development Committee, 1945;

¹⁰⁰ MNA S37/1/10/25 Cecil Baker, District Commissioner, Fort Johnston, to Senior Provincial Commissioner, Southern Province, 13/2/42.

¹⁰¹ MNA NS1/10/1 Baker, "Notes for the Consideration and Guidance in the Issue of Fishing Permits", 16/10/42.

What ensued from this was a legal debate on the custodianship of the lake front and the water abutting on it. The government's position was that: "while the foreshore of the lake may be to some extent subject to private ownership, such cannot be said of the water abutting on it unless a claim in this respect is supported by a ruling in the courts".¹⁰² The lake front could be leased because it was part of Crown Land as defined by the 1891-93 land settlement scheme (refer chapter two), but only with consent from traditional owners. The water abutting on it was under direct government control and thus could not be subject to private ownership. However, chiefs and family heads had the power to turn down the applications which interfered with villages, gardens, and traditional fishing grounds.

In July 1943, the government appointed a committee "to examine and make recommendations for the development...of the whole lakeshore" and to proceed as a Town Planning Committee.¹⁰³ The Committee worked for almost one year and came up with four major recommendations.¹⁰⁴ First, leases varying in duration from 7 to 33 years were granted, having

¹⁰² MNA S37/1/10/25 K.L. Hall, Chief Secretary, to Senior Provincial Commissioner, 14/10/43.

¹⁰³ MNA S37/1/10/24, Interim Report of the Committee on the Development of the Lakeshore of Lake Nyasa, 1945.; Acting Chief Secretary, "Government General Notice", 25/1/45.

¹⁰⁴ MNA S1/37/1/10/24 Interim Report of the Lakeshore Development Committee, 1944; Acting Chief Secretary, "Government General Notice", 25/1/45.

regard to the capital invested in the land. In respect of the leases for hotels and residential plots with improvements estimated at £300 or more, a 33 year lease be granted; a 21 year lease for those with an estimated value of £200; and a 7 year lease for those with an estimated value of £100. Second, in the case of leases by non-African commercial fishermen for the purposes of securing fishing grounds, yearly leases were granted with the option to renew. Fishing permits were issued to the lease-holders.

Third, a Fisheries Department was established to deal with the fishing industry on three main lines: policing and inspection of fishing depots to ensure that the conditions of fishing permits and leases were carried out; to carry out scientific research; and to organize the fishing industry in general, and African commercial fishing in particular. The latter recommendation was passed on to the Lakeshore Development Committee by the Nyasaland Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce (NCAC)¹⁰⁵ because it was interested in the distribution of fish to labourers on the plantations. Finally, the Committee recommended for the setting up of a Standing Committee to function as a Town Planning Committee, in conjunction with the Fisheries Department, for the general development of the lakeshore including fishing and recreation.

The African response to these recommendations varied from

¹⁰⁵ MNA S37/1/10/24 W.G. Alcock, Annexure of a reply to the letter from the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, 30/4/45.

place to place. In Salima, Chief Maganga gave general approval to the leasing of plots along the lake, but with the sole reservation that his people's fishing rights would be safeguarded and all areas already occupied by villages and gardens would be left undisturbed.¹⁰⁶ As a result, almost the whole of the district's lake front was leased for hotels and camping sites, but fishing grounds were left undisturbed.¹⁰⁷

The reasons for Maganga's approval for the leases are unclear, but can be guessed at. To begin with, with the exception of the areas around Domira, Senga Bay, and Salima, much of the littoral plain in his district was not densely populated owing to poor soils. Rich soils existed a few miles off the lake. Since the leases were for a narrow strip of land along the lake front, there was no interference with villages and gardens. In addition, since the leases were for hotels, camping sites, and residential buildings, there was no immediate threat to the local fishing industry for as long as access to the lake was safeguarded.

Around Fort Johnston, where the conflict between local chiefs and non-African commercial fishermen was intense, the chiefs blocked applications for further leasing of the lake front. Only after long appeals to the government did some few Europeans and Indians obtain leases for hotels and residential

¹⁰⁶ MNA S37/1/10/26 Borley to Alcock, 2/2/45.

¹⁰⁷ See MNA PCC1/18/17 Lakeshore Development: Salima District Survey.

buildings.¹⁰⁸ Around Monkey Bay and Cape Maclear, some forty to forty-five miles north of Fort Johnston, chiefs agreed to the granting of rights of occupancy. Some 26 plots had been demarcated and surveyed by January 1945 and a public camping ground had been created.¹⁰⁹ Though local people's fishing rights were safeguarded, the conflict between fishing and the alienation of the lake front was not resolved. What mattered to the local communities was not the number of camping sites or hotels but access to the lake. Alienation of land along the lake blocked access to the fishing grounds. The fishermen needed the beaches and the land close to the lake to dry their nets and to build temporary shelters for their alovi, mending their nets, and storing their equipment. In Fort Johnston district, alienation of the lake front was particularly worse around Cape Maclear where agricultural land was limited and African villages depended almost entirely on fishing. The creation of a camping site in the area required controlling the expansion of villages and their concentration in a small "reserved land".¹¹⁰

By this time, land disputes were not confined to the lake front alone. Congestion on the 'private estates' in the Shire

¹⁰⁸ See MNA S37/1/10/25 Cecil Baker, District Commissioner, Fort Johnston, to Senior Provincial Commissioner, 13/2/42.

¹⁰⁹ MNA S37/1/10/24 Chief Secretary, Government General Notice, 25/1/45; Interim Report of the Committee on the Development of the Lakeshore of Lake Nyasa, 1945.

¹¹⁰ MNA S37/1/10/24 Interim Report, 1945.

Highlands and complaints from Africans that Europeans were holding large tracts of undeveloped land forced the government to appoint a Land Commission in 1946 "to advise on land policy".¹¹¹ The Commission recommended that undeveloped parts of the 'private estates' be purchased for African occupation. A total of 545,857 acres were recommended for purchase at a total cost of £328,149.¹¹² By 1953, "some 300,000 acres" had been purchased from private owners,¹¹³ especially from the BCA, B.&EA, A.L. Bruce Estate Ltd., and ALC. The first three were experiencing financial problems during this time and were quite willing to get rid of part of their vast plantations, especially where African populations were dense.

Attempts "to organize" the fishing industry began in 1946 with the establishment of the Fisheries Department. A Fisheries Officer was appointed "to review the local fishing industry and prepare it to take full advantage of the research

¹¹¹ MNA PAM/811 Nyasaland Government/Sir Sidney Abraham, Report of the Land Commission (Zomba, Government Printer, 1946), especially Parts I and III; Nyasaland Government/Planning Committee, Land Commission, 1946: Report of the Planning Committee (Zomba, Government Printer, 1948) pp.1-7; See also B. Pachai, Land and Politics in Malawi, 1875-1975 (Kingston, The Limestone Press 1978) pp.129-136.

¹¹² Nyasaland Protectorate, Report of the Planning Committee p.8.

¹¹³ For details see Colonial Office, Report on the Nyasaland Protectorate for the Year 1953 (London, HMSO 1954) p.55; and 1954, p.59.

and development work done by the [Fisheries Research Unit]".¹¹⁴ The Officer would also "make himself familiar with the fishing methods employed, and the social conditions and difficulties of the fishermen". In addition, he would continue researching on, and experimenting with appropriate fishing gear; looking into the possibilities of provision of loans to African fishermen; enforcing fisheries regulations; compiling statistics; and organizing the fish-trade.

Between 1947 and 1950, the Department continued the research started by the Fisheries Survey. Data were collected on the feeding, breeding, and migratory habits of tilapia and their relation to the lake's ecological changes. A proposal was made to buy the Yiannakis Plant at £30,000 and turn it into a Public Utility Company in which the government would hold 51 per cent of the shares and the remaining 49 per cent "allocated to interested parties".¹¹⁵ The government would run the company "until such a time that the Co-operative Office, working under the Fisheries Officer, could educate the "conservative native fisherman" to a stage when an African Fishermen's Co-operative Society could take it over". The Yiannakis Plant "would provide an excellent headquarters for

¹¹⁴ MNA PCC 1/18/16 Chief Secretary to Lands Officer: Duties of the Fisheries Officer, 12/1/46. See also A.J.P. Mzumara, "The Fisheries Department of Malawi: Organization, Policy and Management" in Journal of Social Science, University of Malawi, vol.7 (1978/79) pp.108-114.

¹¹⁵ MNA S29/1/2/1 Possible Government Acquisition of Interest: Extract from Executive Council Meeting, 14/4/47; Lowe to Chief Secretary, 3/5/47.

experiments, supplying gear, boat-building, research etc".¹¹⁶ It would become the basis on which all further fishing industry could be developed. The proposal was turned down on the grounds that the "fisheries business [was] too uncertain a venture for the government to finance".

Experiments with the use of ring and gill-nets made of cotton and flax were conducted around Fort Johnston¹¹⁷ and, starting from 1948, fishermen cooperatives were proposed. The gill-net fisheries received further stimulus from the Nyasaland Fisheries Company established in 1949 by South African interests. The government bought shares in the company using funds from the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund. The company sold gill nets to fishermen, and a new class of African "commercial fishermen"¹¹⁸ emerged. By this time, gill-nets had already been extensively adopted by returning migrant labourers in the central and northern sections of the lake. When the proposal to establish fishermen's cooperatives began to gather steam between 1948 and 1951, the returning migrants were among its major objectors. They were already established in the business and regarded the cooperatives as: "unnecessary

¹¹⁶ MNA S29/1/2/1 Fisheries Officer to Chief Secretary, 7/4/47.

¹¹⁷ Mzumara, "The Fisheries Department of Malawi" p.108.

¹¹⁸ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Protectorate Annual Report, 1954 p.6 and pp.75-76; and 1955, pp.78-79. The term "commercial fishermen" does not make much sense. African fishermen and fish-traders were already commercial by this time, but colonial officials referred to them as "subsistent" or "part-time".

risk...waste of effort, and altogether disturbing".¹¹⁹ The reason for this response was that the returning migrants had the capital to invest in commercial fishing. By the 1950s, they were an emerging class of rural accumulators who "did not need any government support".¹²⁰ Their increasing economic strength is explained partly in terms of the opening up of the regional labour markets beginning from the mid-1930s, and partly also in terms of the organizational changes in the fishing industry itself. By the 1950s, fishermen from the Northern Province, and fish-traders from different parts of the country, began to migrate to the rich fishing grounds of Fort Johnston and Salima in the southern sections of the lake. This impacted on the organization of African commercial fishing. The chiefs, village headmen, and family heads who had dominated the industry for decades were gradually replaced by a new class of entrepreneurs.

Before going into details on this, one question needs to be answered: given the economic changes in the "labour districts" discussed in this and the previous two chapters, how did the Nyasaland planters meet their labour demands? The next chapter argues that right from the beginning of the colonial economy in the 1890s, the Nyasaland settlers supplemented their local labour supply by employing immigrants from Portuguese East Africa (PEA), now Mozambique. This

¹¹⁹ TIP.3/WC/Ali Mgombe, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 29/9/89.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

reverse labour immigration reinforced the process of oscillating migration from Nyasaland. In addition to PEA immigrants, the planters employed considerable numbers of children, youth and women. The involvement of children and youth in wage employment increased with the expansion in tobacco production in the 1920s, and was entrenched during the era of the tea industry between the 1930s and 1960s. By employing these vulnerable categories of workers, the Nyasaland planters were able to avoid losing out in the regional competition for the local labour supply.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ALOMWE/ANGURU IMMIGRATION

In more ways than one, the Nguru immigration has proved one of the most important economic factors since the foundation of the Protectorate.¹ ...The Nguru have not only replaced local labour, but they have created a serious land shortage: this in turn has led to the cultivation of hills and slopes and consequent deforestation and soil erosion.²

Any account of colonial Malawi's rural labour would be incomplete without the discussion of Alomwe or Anguru immigrants from Portuguese East Africa (PEA), now Mozambique. Not only were they "the hewers of wood and drawers of water",³ they also made a lasting impact on the structure of the country's labour force, the system of oscillating labour migration, land colonization, and the ethnic composition of the Southern Province.

The aim of the present chapter is to demonstrate that

¹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Report on the Population Census, 1926 (Zomba, Government Printer, 1926) p.xxxiv. "Nguru" is the colonial mispronunciation of akumanquru, meaning "originating from" or "belonging to" Manguru. Alomwe were one of the ethno-linguistic groups which came from Manguru. Throughout this work I have used the term "Anguru" as a category of workers or migrants rather than as an ethno-linguistic group.

² Malawi National Archives (MNA) COM-8/1 Draft Report of the Committee to Enquire into Emigrant Labour (1935); see also R.R. Kuczynski, Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire vol.II (London, OUP 1949) p.546.

³ MNA COM-8/1 Draft Report on Emigrant Labour.; Kuczynski, Demographic Survey. p.546.

faced with increasing independence and mobility of local workers and producers, the Shire Highlands planters turned to, and depended on, immigrant labour from Portuguese East Africa. These immigrants largely saved the Shire Highlands plantation economy from losing out in the wider regional competition for labour. On the obverse side, they contributed to the growing independence and ability of the local workers to exercise choice between participating in the local and regional labour markets, and engaging independently in commodity production and exchange.

For all their importance to the colonial economy, the Anguru/Alomwe have received very little attention from scholars working on aspects of Malawian labour.⁴ Social anthropologists and missionaries writing during the colonial period preoccupied themselves with the "origins and meaning of the term Anguru", their traditions, and social structures.⁵

⁴ For earlier works on the Anguru immigration see, for example, C. A. Baker, "A Note on Nguru Immigration to Nyasaland" in The Nyasaland Journal vol.xiv no.1 (1962); and by the same author, Blantyre District: A Geographical Appreciation of the Growth, Distribution and Composition of its Population" in The Nyasaland Journal vol.xiii (January 1959); T. Galligan, "The Nguru Penetration into Nyasaland, 1892-1914" in R. MacDonald (ed), From Nyasaland to Malawi (Nairobi, EAPH 1975); A. Chilivumbo, "On Labour and Alomwe Immigration" in Rural Africana no.24 (Spring 1974); L. White, "'Tribes' and the Aftermath of the Chilembwe Rising" in African Affairs vol.83 (October 1984); and by the same author, Magomero: Portrait of a Village (Cambridge, New York, CUP 1987).

⁵ See, for example, A. Hetherwick, The Romance of Blantyre (London, James Clarke and Co. Ltd 1931); Mary Tew, Peoples of the Lake Nyasa Region (London, OUP 1950); E. Colson and M. Gluckman (eds), Seven Tribes of Central Africa (London,

Thomas Price, writing in 1952, found no concrete geographical origin of the name "Anguru", while Mary Douglas noted that "Nguru" is a hill in the region of Portuguese East Africa where they (the Anguru) came from.⁶ Their ethnic composition was analyzed by Elizabeth Colson and Max Gluckman who argued that the Anguru did not constitute a unified 'tribe'. They spoke a variety of mutually intelligible dialects of which Chihavani and Chilomwe were the most dominant.⁷ Generically, they identified themselves as "Alomwe", which was the largest group. The name "Anguru" was given to them by the indigenous Amang'anja and Ayao communities, colonial officials, missionaries and settlers. With the passage of time, the term "Anguru" had no direct relationship with ethnicity. It was coterminous with "native colonists" and "alien labourers". It is especially in the latter category that the term is used here.

Outside the above anthropological accounts, very little attention was paid to the Anguru's contribution to Nyasaland's

OUP/Rhodes-Livingstone Institute 1951); T. Price, "The Name 'Nguru'" in The Nyasaland Journal vol.5 no.1 (1952); C. Mitchell, "The Political Organization of the Yao of Southern Nyasaland" in African Studies no.3 (September 1949).

⁶ T. Price, "The Name 'Nguru'" p.23.; M. Tew, Peoples of the Lake. p.22-23.; Galligan, "The Nguru Penetration" pp.109-112.

⁷ Colson and Gluckman, Seven Tribes. p.297. The major groups and clans which constituted "Anguru" or "Alomwe" were: Lomwe, Khokhola, Muhavani, Thakwani, Marenje, Ratha, Nyamwero, Makua, Gwirima, Malata, Manyawa, Metho, Nahara, and Nikhukhu. For more details on some of these see Nyasaland Protectorate, Report on the Population Census, 1926 and 1931.

agricultural labour force. The account below adopts Thomas Galligan's argument that "this phenomenon of a reverse labour migration was intimately bound up with the larger issue of labour in the Protectorate, and it impacted on and exacerbated problems stemming from the overall labour situation".⁸ It demonstrates that the immigration took place in four major phases. The first was prior to the 1890s when ecological factors played an important role. Communities in agriculturally marginal areas east of the Lake Chilwa and Phalombe plain migrated into more fertile lands on the edges of the Shire Highlands and the Chilwa-Phalombe plain.⁹ This phase is beyond the scope of this chapter.

The second phase was from 1892 to 1899 during which officials of the Church of Scotland (Blantyre) Mission began to establish contacts with the African communities in PEA east of the Shire Highlands. The contacts paved the way for the Shire Highlands labour recruiters. Two other developments occurred inside PEA which forced the emigration: the "pacification" wars of the late 1890s, and the outbreak of famine in 1900/1. These events forced refugees into Nyasaland. The pattern of the migration thus changed from individual seasonal migrant labourers to family units coming to settle permanently. Within Nyasaland, the beginning of external recruiting in 1903/4 in the "labour districts" of the Central

⁸ Galligan, "The Nguru Penetration" pp.108-109.

⁹ For some details see L. White, Magomero chap. 2.

Province and along the lake forced the local settler employers to look to PEA as an important alternative source of labour. Immigrant families were settled on the 'private estates' as thangata labour tenants. This practice was firmly established with the expansion in cotton and tobacco production from 1910 and in the post-WWI period, respectively.

The third phase, from the 1930s to the 1950s, saw increasing numbers of the Mozambican seasonal migrant labourers coming to work on the expanding tea plantations of the Cholo and Mlanje districts. Two factors played an important role here: the proximity of the two tea producing districts to the Nyasaland-PEA border and the opening up of Nyasaland to external recruiters from 1935. Both Cholo and Mlanje districts were, and still are, border districts. This made it easy for the immigrants to come and work on the tea plantations there. Since the borders were not guarded, it was difficult for the colonial administration to control the immigration. The settler employers welcomed it because they could not effectively compete for the local labour supply with the external recruiters who offered higher wages and relatively better working conditions. It is important, however, to emphasize that the Anguru/Alomwe immigration did not force the Nyasaland Africans to migrate. These were two processes which reinforced each other.

I

Causes of Immigration

The Anguru/Alomwe came from the areas around Namuli Hills in Portuguese East Africa, east of the Shire Highlands. This proximity was one of the major influencing factors in their immigration. Its causes were, however, varied and complex. Different groups immigrated at different times and for different reasons. The exact date of the origins of this immigration is not very clear. According to Colin Baker, the earliest specific reference to the existence of Anguru in Nyasaland is an account of David Livingstone in 1859.¹⁰ Livingstone found a "Manguru village" of Matora at the confluence of the Lirangwe with the Shire River. After the establishment of the UMCA station at Magomero in Chiradzulu district in 1861, Henry Rowley, a mission official, reported that there were Anguru living amongst the Anyanja in the surrounding villages. Baker concludes that "these two cases, one a remarkably deep penetration into the country and the other near the eastern border, appear to be isolated instances of Nguru [sic] settlement in Nyasaland" during this period.¹¹

The situation changed from the early 1890s. Publications of the Blantyre Mission suggest that the missionaries played

¹⁰ Baker, "A Note on Anguru Immigration" p.41.

¹¹ Ibid.

an important role in attracting the Anguru into Nyasaland.¹² For example, in 1892, R.S. Hynde of the Blantyre Mission made several preaching expeditions into the Anguru areas after which dozens of immigrants are said to have found their way into the Shire Highlands. Two years later, W.A. Scott and J. Reid of the same mission established contacts with several Anguru chiefs in Portuguese East Africa during a ten-day evangelical campaign. In August 1895, the chiefs were reported to have sent "several large parties of their people to work in the Shire Highlands".¹³ This was followed by the establishment of a permanent mission station in their area. By encouraging, and sometimes forwarding workers from the villages around the mission station to take up wage employment in the Shire Highlands, the missionaries acted more or less as labour recruiting agents.¹⁴

It was through these contacts that the immigrants began to come down to the Blantyre, Chiradzulu and Zomba districts looking for work. "Large numbers" were engaged on plantations in Cholo (now Thyolo), and in porterage between Blantyre and Katunga (now Chikwawa). Transport companies regarded the Anguru as "good carriers" and the general opinion in Nyasaland

¹² See Life and Work (September 1890 and August 1892); Galligan, "The Nguru Penetration" pp.113-114.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Life and Work (August 1897) p.1. Officials of the Companhia da Zambezia forced the station to close down in 1900. See Life and Work (August 1900) p.3.; Galligan, "The Nguru Penetration" p.114.

was that "a new country had thus begun to be opened to free labour, and the prospects for Anguruland as well as for the Shire Highlands which was to benefit by a new labour supply seemed of the brightest".¹⁵ By May 1897, some 1,000 Anguru were working in the Shire Highlands as compared to 9,000 Angoni and 2,000 Atonga.¹⁶ Two years later, they were "familiar figures on Blantyre roads".¹⁷

Between 1898 and 1900, the contacts established by the missionaries were utilized by Sinderam and Walker who recruited labour for the Shire Highlands planters and transport companies.¹⁸ The origins of their recruiting activities are unclear, but J. Sinderam had an estate in the Dinde Marsh in the Lower Shire Valley close to the Nyasaland-PEA border.¹⁹ He drew much of his labour from the villages in PEA and the "labour district" of the Central Angoniland. According to Landeg White, in 1899, Sinderam and Walker were hired by the Governor of Quelimane to recruit 1,500 carriers from the areas around Namuli Hills in Portuguese East Africa,

¹⁵ Cited in Galligan, "The Nguru Penetration" pp.114-115.

¹⁶ White, "'Tribes'" p.514.

¹⁷ Life and Work (June 1899) p.5.; Galligan, "The Nguru Penetration" p.116.

¹⁸ See White, "'Tribes'" p.514,; J.A.K. Kandawire, Thangata: Forced Labour or Reciprocal Assistance? (Zomba, Centre for Social Research, 1978) p.14.

¹⁹ E.C. Mandala, Work and Control in a Peasant Economy: A History of the Lower Tchiri Valley in Malawi, 1859-1960 (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1990) p.123.

east of the Shire Highlands.²⁰ The carriers were to be used in an expedition against Mataka, an Ayao chief. Sinderam and Walker accepted the offer "on condition that 'for one week the Governor gave them the necessary powers to deal with the tribes there'". Their method was to approach each village headman in turn with the words: "'do you want peace or war? On one hand we offer you a free tax paper and work for which you will be paid in cloth; on the other hand, war!'".²¹ "After the burning of an occasional hut" the village headmen opted for work.

The evidence for the role of Sinderam and Walker in the Mataka expedition is unavailable from the Nyasaland sources. However, the Nyasaland administration itself collaborated with Portuguese officials by providing soldiers.²² Given the political autonomy and military capability of the Portuguese prazeiros, settlers, and their former Amakololo and Achikunda slaves and carriers, it is rather implausible that Sinderam and Walker would get way with coercing labour in the areas under their control. They would require a lot of force to back up their threats. The most plausible explanation could be that they used the well-armed, relatively autonomous, and strategically placed Amakololo and Achikunda chiefs in the

²⁰ White, "'Tribes' p.514.

²¹ Cited in Ibid.

²² See Public Record Office (PRO) C.O.525/1 Alfred Sharpe to Colonial Office, 29/3/04.

Shire-Zambezi Valley. These were already coercing labour in the area by this time.²³

Sinderam and Walker got some help from the mission officials who introduced them to the Anguru chiefs. More assistance came from the Companhia da Zambezia which had been granted a concession by the Portuguese government over some of the areas inhabited by the Angoni and Alomwe.²⁴ The company granted Sinderam and Walker an eighteen-month labour recruiting monopoly. During the first nine months of their contract they 'recruited' some 2,000 Anguru carriers for the ALC alone.²⁵ They also "brought large numbers of Anguru into the Blantyre area for the purpose of hiring them out to planters and transport companies at the rate of 10 shillings per month".²⁶

²³ On the political autonomy, military strength, and labour coercion of the Achikunda and Amakololo see A. Isaacman and E.C. Mandala, "From Porters to Labor Extractors: The Chikunda and Kololo in the Lake Malawi and Tchiri River Area" in C. Coquery-Vidrovitch and P.E. Lovejoy (eds), The Workers of African Trade (Beverly Hills and London, Sage Publication, 1985) pp.209-242.

²⁴ For details on this company see L. Vail and L. White, Capitalism and Colonialism in Mozambique: A Study of Quelimane District (London, Heinemann 1980); L. Vail "Mozambique's Chartered Companies: The Rule of the Feeble" in JAH vol.xvii no.3 (1976) pp.; and by the same author, "'Tawani, Machambero!': Forced Cotton and Rice Growing on the Zambezi" in JAH vol.xix no.2 (1978) pp.239-263.

²⁵ White, "'Tribes'" p.514.

²⁶ Galligan, "The Nguru Penetration" p.114.

Unfortunately, the agency provided no housing and sanitary facilities for their recruits. By August 1899, "dozens of Anguru" were reported dead, and 1,948 of the 2,000 recruited for the ALC ran away. Sinderam pursued and caught several of the deserters on the road to their homes. He brought them to the ALC compound at Blantyre (popularly known as Mandala) where they were severely flogged. Sinderam was well-known for his bad treatment of workers. Cases of workers leaving his estate in Dinde Marsh have been documented.²⁷

The events at Mandala were graphically reported in the Central African Times, Nyasaland's major newspaper, on 21st July, 1900, in an article titled: "The Anguru Road: Gruesome Sights". Anguru graves were reported seen along the roadside between Blantyre and Namadzi in Chiradzulu district. There were half-eaten corpses in the bush and on river banks; bands of fleeing men, half-starved and suffering from dysentery; they were returning to their homes in Portuguese East Africa.²⁸ Thirty-five "new graves" were seen at the ALC station at Mandala, and decomposing bodies in the Blantyre Mission compound.

These horrific incidents could not pass without legal action. The British Central Africa Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce instituted a court case against Sinderam and Walker.

²⁷ See Mandala, Work and Control p.123.

²⁸ Paraphrased from White, "'Tribes'" p.514-515.; Galligan, "The Nguru Penetration" p.110.

The agency was charged with the importation of labourers without making provisions for housing, food, sanitary and medical arrangements as required by the 1895 Employment of Native Labour Regulations; and for failure to report deaths. The flogging incident at Mandala was included in the charges.²⁹ Sinderam and Walker were found guilty and fined £250 including £50 for the assault at Mandala. The conclusion of this case marked an end to organized recruiting of Anguru labour, but did not mark an end to their immigration into Nyasaland. By 1905, seasonal migrant labourers were still a common sight in Blantyre looking for mtenga-tenga (porterage) work: "strutting about with but a few cobs of chimanga (maize) strung over their backs, they [would] search to their hearts' content for days".³⁰

II

Immigration of Family Units

Up to 1895, the majority of the Anguru immigrated into Nyasaland as single migrant workers on seasonal contracts. Very few remained in Nyasaland as permanent residents. Between 1895 and 1900, several developments took place in Portuguese

²⁹ See Galligan, "The Nguru Penetration" p.114.; White, "'Tribes'" pp.514-515.

³⁰ The Central African Times cited in T. Galligan "The Nguru Penetration" p.116. For a similar account see PRO C.O.525/8 Wallis to Colonial Office, 16/8/05. Wallis reported that the Anguru preferred porterage to working in the fields.

East Africa which forced the Anguru to settle permanently in Nyasaland. Most important of these were the 'pacification' wars between Portuguese officials and independent African chiefs. For example, in 1895, Portuguese officials mounted a 'pacification' campaign against Ayao chiefs Kawinga, Matipwiri and Zerafi. Following this, "a large influx of natives found its way into the Zomba district [in the Shire Highlands] where they [were] peaceably settled in full assurance of freedom and immunity from slave-raiding".³¹ Three years later, chiefs Mataka, Mkwamba and Nsikula were similarly defeated resulting in another massive immigration of Anguru into Nyasaland.³²

Colonial officials in Nyasaland provided two explanations for this immigration: first, that the immigrants were former slaves looking for refuge and thus prepared to work for their freedom; second, that they were running away from the "lawlessness" of Portuguese authority. Evidence suggests that the Nyasaland officials were themselves just as "lawless" as their Portuguese counterparts. In fact, it was their military actions across the border which forced the Anguru to migrate. In 1899, Nyasaland officials collaborated with their Portuguese counterparts against Mkwamba because:

transport work through in Shire Highlands was much inconvenienced by thefts committed upon [the] high roads by

³¹ Cited in White, Magomero. p.87.

³² PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 29/3/04; C.O.703/19-23 Registry of Correspondence, Sharpe to Colonial Office, 30/4/04.; Life and Work (June 1899) p.3; Galligan, "The Nguru Penetration" p.114.

natives coming from Portuguese territory north-east of Lake Shirwa [sic]. These people were Anguru, their head chief being a man called "Nkwamba". The course followed was for the men to enter the compounds of the transport companies and to offer themselves as carriers: they were employed and given loads: subsequently they decamped with these to Nkwamba's country.³³

"This punishment", Sir Alfred Sharpe wrote, "put a stop to all highway thefts for the time, and since then the Anguru have given no trouble, up to the present year; in fact, some thousands of them have settled in the Protectorate itself".³⁴ It has been shown in the previous chapters that this was a period of the beginning of plantation agriculture in the Shire Highlands. The settlement of the Anguru in the Protectorate was welcomed partly because it gave the white planters access to a labour force on which they did not have to spend money and time to recruit. The relative ease with which the Anguru got employed as carriers clearly shows the pressing need for

³³ PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 29/3/04. Nkwamba was said to be a friend of Mataka, a Yao chief who gave the Nyasaland Administration "so much trouble in the past years". The Portuguese East Africa authorities undertook an expedition to deal with both Mataka and Nkwamba: "in the first part of this expedition, that is to say so far as Nkwamba was concerned, the armed forces of this Protectorate co-operated with the Portuguese troops. Nkwamba's village was burnt, and the Portuguese expedition then proceeded against Mataka".

³⁴ PRO C.C.525/1 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 29/3/04. Sharpe went on to say that: "I am sorry to say, however, that these troubles have now recommenced, and several transport companies have had heavy losses owing to Anguru carriers from Nkwamba's taking loads and decamping with them...I have thought it possible that if these facts were communicated by Your Lordship to the Lisbon Government some arrangement might be come to under which some punishment may be meted out to Nkwamba and his people, or that I may be authorised to pursue thieves to his towns, and arrest them". The Colonial Office did not grant him the permission.

labour for the infantile colonial economy.

Apart from the 'pacification' wars, Portuguese officials had introduced a labour code which required all male Africans between fourteen and sixty years of age to work.³⁵ A head tax of 1,200 reis (about 3 shillings 6 pence) was imposed on every adult African. The effectiveness of these measures are rather unclear, but the individual prazeiros had the capability to coerce labour on their prazos and the areas around them.³⁶ In addition, the Portuguese government granted a royal charter to the Companhia de Niassa to administer the northern sections of Anguruland. The company's forced labour schemes forced people across the border into Nyasaland. The exodus increased with the outbreak of famine in the area in 1900.³⁷ By 1903, between 15,000 and 30,000 Anguru are said to have entered into the Blantyre district alone, and the Shire Highlands "tend[ed] to become Anguruland". Their main settlement centre was "that wide tract of unoccupied land lying to the south of Mount

³⁵ White, "'Tribes'" p.515.

³⁶ See M.D.D. Newitt, Portuguese Settlement on the Zambezi: Exploration, Land Tenure, and Colonial Rule in East Africa (New York, Africana Publishing Company, 1973) pp.87-203; A. Isaacman, The Tradition of Resistance in Mozambique: Anti-colonial Activity in the Zambezi Valley, 1850-1921 (London, Heinemann, 1976) pp.75-125; A.F. and B. Isaacman, Mozambique: From Colonialism to Revolution, 1900-1982 (Boulder, Westview Press, 1983) Pp.27-51.

³⁷ Not much is known about this famine. See Galligan, "The Nguru Penetration" p.116.

Chiradzulu between that mountain and Mlanje".³⁸

Correspondence between Nyasaland and the Colonial Office suggests that between 1895 and 1904 the majority of the Anguru settled on Crown Land.³⁹ Those found on the 'private estates' were predominantly chitando wage workers. Landeg White has advanced four explanations for the Anguru's ease of integration into the local communities.⁴⁰ The first is that their languages were mutually intelligible with the Chiyao and Chimang'anja spoken in Nyasaland. Communication was thus easy. Second, the Anguru clan structures and matrilineal descent and residence systems were also similar to those of the Ayao and Amang'anja. Third, though ethnically diverse, the Anguru were united by their common origin in the sense that they all came from Portuguese East Africa. They were always conscious of their 'foreigner' status, and thus did not constitute a political threat to the local chiefs. Finally, they came into

³⁸ Cited in Baker, "A Note on Nguru Immigration" p.41. This was an area dominated by such estates as the British Central Africa Company (BCA), the Blantyre and East Africa Company (B.&E.A), and the A.L. Bruce Trust (ALBT).

³⁹ PRO C.O.525/8 Wallis to Colonial Office, 16/8/05; C.O.525/13 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 22/8/06. In his study of the Magomero estate, Landeg White says the number of Anguru huts on the estate increased in the period between 1900 and 1914: "in the early 1890s, there had been no more than 40-odd huts on the whole 169,000 acres. The first Yao village had been settled in 1898 and from then on W.J. Livingstone [Estate Manager] had followed the policy of appointing Yao veterans from the King's African Rifles as headmen of new villages and paying them to attract 'Anguru' immigrants, Between 1900 and 1914, 4,926 new huts had been built". White, Magomero p.90.

⁴⁰ See White, Magomero. p.98.

Nyasaland at a time when Ayao and Amang'anja chiefs were competing for political power. By incorporating the immigrants into their local communities these chiefs boosted their political strength.

The local chiefs were thus among the first beneficiaries of the Anguru immigration. They used their political power and control over land to appropriate the immigrants' labour for individual purposes. Having no chiefs or clan leaders of their own, the Anguru "preferred to attach themselves to local the local Ayao and Anyanja chiefs".⁴¹ In exchange for access to land and food, they produced cotton for the indigenous chiefs and village headmen. The practice was called ganyo, from a Portuguese word ganho, meaning bonus.⁴² They were sometimes used as akapolo, domestic slaves, of local chiefs.⁴³ Government officials initially encouraged the system by "inducing the Anguru to make permanent homes" under the local chiefs.⁴⁴ The officials were aware, however, that the immigrants "were kept in a certain degree of mild subjection and occasionally perform[ed] a little menial labour for the protection of the chiefs under whom they settled", but "there

⁴¹ PRO C.O.525/13 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 22/8/06.

⁴² For details see White, Magomero. p.88. It seems the real meaning of the Portuguese word ganhar is to work for some kind of remuneration. With the passage of time ganyo became a form of casual wage-labour done on a task force or piece-work basis.

⁴³ PRO C.O.525/8 Wallis to Colonial Office, 14/8/05.

⁴⁴ PRO C.O.525/13 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 22/8/06.

[was] no serious interference with their rights and duties", the officials maintained. Labour certificates were suspended for chiefs and village headmen who produced adequate amounts of cotton using ganyo labour. By 1909, there was growing concern about Anguru's ukapolo, domestic slavery. One chief, Kada, was imprisoned for use of Anguru slave labour. Up to 1905, the colonial administration had no clear policy on the settlement of Anguru in the Protectorate. If anything, the immigration was detested because the immigrants were occupying Crown Land which was becoming smaller every year; also because of the accusations of thefts described above and the colonial administrators' own stereotypes of the Anguru. In their opinion, the Anguru were "dirty lawless" 'natives' with a primitive unintelligible speech which sounded nothing more than nguruungruu; staunch believers in witchcraft and magic; and quick to strike with a spear or knife.⁴⁵ Some of these stereotypes began to change from 1905. The Acting Commissioner, H.R. Wallis, reported that the Anguru were adapting themselves to their new surroundings and settled down into "law-abiding members of society". They were taking their troubles to the District Magistrate Court just like the local

⁴⁵ See, for example, H.H. Johnston, British Central Africa (London, Methuen and Company, 1897) chap.10 and p.485; H.L. Duff, Nyasaland Under the Foreign Office (London, George Bell and Sons 1906) chaps. 10-14; Nyasaland Protectorate, Population Census Report, 1926, especially the preface.

Africans.⁴⁶

This change in official opinion was not a result of a sudden change in the Anguru's behaviour. It came as a result of the changes in the internal labour sources. External recruiting in the "labour districts" of the Central Angoniland and along the lake began in 1903/4. The settler employers could not compete with the external recruiters, and the administration had no power to control the "free" flow of labour to South Africa and the Rhodesias. The Anguru had thus emerged as an important substitute for "protectorate labour". Their value as porters grew with the fall in the water level of the Shire River between 1906 and 1910. The transportation of goods on the river had almost ceased by 1910.⁴⁷ About half of the Protectorate's labour force was reported engaged in removing blocks of sudd to make the river navigable.⁴⁸ With the "seepage" of labour from the "labour districts" to South Africa and the Rhodesias, the migrant Anguru labourers became the major source of mtenga-tenga labour.

Some of them joined the Nyasaland Africans in migrating to the south. The practice was to come to Nyasaland, work for a short period, obtain residence status, and then migrate with the hope of coming back to Nyasaland. By October 1910, the

⁴⁶ PRO C.O.525/8 Wallis to Colonial Office, 16/8/05.; C.O.525/13 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 22/8/06.

⁴⁷ PRO C.O.525/33 Wallis to Colonial Office, 10/12/10.

⁴⁸ PRO C.O.525/33 E.L. Rhoades, Marine Transport Officer, to Acting Commissioner, 21/11/10.

Anguru "from Mlanje district" were reported working for the Sena Sugar Company at Mopea in Portuguese East Africa, and some were migrating to Southern Rhodesia.⁴⁹ These belonged to two groups: the young males who had no access to land and to whom labour tenancy did not offer chances for accumulation, and those who had most successfully integrated themselves into Nyasaland societies. They had access to the knowledge and networks established by the more experienced local migrants. Those who depended on labour tenancy for access to land found it difficult to migrate for fear of losing it.

Once settled down, the immigrants "made a useful addition to the population" as tax payers.⁵⁰ Governor William Manning acknowledged in 1912 that: "the Anguru immigration had come most opportunely. It populated vacant spaces, enhanced the Protectorate's revenue, and most important of all, it provided a ready and permanent labour supply for the extension of European enterprise".⁵¹ It has been noted in the previous chapters that the period between 1900 and 1912 experienced a number of changes in the internal sources of agricultural labour. It was during this period that the settler employers, the Shire Highlands Railway Company (1903-1907), and the

⁴⁹ PRO C.O.525/33 R.W. Vroom, General Manager, Sena Sugar Company, Mopea, to First Assistant Secretary, Zomba. See also PRO C.O.525/35 Reports by Charles Casson, Supervisor of Native Affairs, 1910.

⁵⁰ PRO C.O.525/13 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 22/8/06.

⁵¹ PRO C.O.525/44 Manning to Colonial Office, 2/11/12; see also White, "'Tribes'" p.518.

commercial companies heavily competed for the local labour supply - the individual settlers usually lost the competition. Attempts to organize internal recruiting through the Labour Bureau had failed dismally, partly due to lack of government support, and partly also due to the competition among the settler employers themselves. As well, it was during this period that both independent migration and organized recruiting for the Southern Rhodesia and South African labour markets began. To all these should be added the beginning of African cotton and tobacco production in most of the Shire Highlands and Lower Shire districts and the resultant mobility of tenants in and out of the 'private estates' as has been discussed above. The planters were undoubtedly experiencing labour problems during this period. The Anguru immigration could not have come at a better time.

On arrival in Nyasaland, the Anguru were given tax certificates by District Residents in exchange for two-month's labour. As Landeg White has argued, what the government had lost in land rents it gained in hut taxes with the influx of the Anguru.⁵² Revenue from rent of Crown Land amounted to a bare £400 in 1904, and another £500 came from land sales, compared with £27,500 from taxes.⁵³ In Mlanje district, where the majority of the Anguru settled, the number of taxes

⁵² White, "'Tribes'" p.518.

⁵³ PRO C.O.525/3 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 20/10/04.

increased from 6,137 in 1901/02 to 20,010 in 1911/12.⁵⁴

III

Settling on the 'Private Estates'

Changes in the internal labour sources and the beginning of African cotton production between 1903/5 impacted on the settlement of the Anguru immigrants on the 'private estates'. As the "original" inhabitants of the 'private estates' began to move to Crown Land (refer chapter 2), the major debates on the Lands Ordinance (Native Locations, 1904) centred on the "position of the new immigrants" on the 'private estates'. Land owners questioned the applicability of the "non-disturbance clause"^{to} the immigrants who settled on their lands after issuance of the "certificates of claim". For example, the British Central Africa Company (BCA) welcomed the Anguru immigrants "as tenants only" to whom the "non-disturbance clause" would not apply. The amount of land allocated to them would be decided by the company from time to time and would not conform to the legal 8-acre per family requirement.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ White, "'Tribes'" p.518; PRO C.O.525/33 Blue Book and Annual Administration Report, November, 1910. There was a remarkable increase in the Protectorate's hut tax figures in the period 1904/5 to 1909/10 due to external labour recruiting, the Anguru immigration and African cotton production: £35,619. 6s. in 1906/07; £36,605. 17s. in 1907/08; £38,388. 15s. in 1908/09; £41,530. 1s. in 1909/10.

⁵⁵ PRO C.O.525/3 Land Ordinance (Native Locations, 1904); C.O.525/7 British Central Africa: Instructions for the General Manager, 1904.

The intention in wanting to exclude the "new" immigrants from the protection of the "non-disturbance clause", was to reduce their bargaining power and ensure an adequate supply of labour and a subservient labour force. It is not surprising therefore that by 1910, the firms which employed a great amount of labour were those with extensive estates and a dense population on them.⁵⁶ This dense population was predominantly of PEA origin. The African Lakes Corporation, the British Central Africa Company, and the A.L. Bruce Trust Ltd. were singled out in this respect. What attracted the Anguru to the estates was the access to abundant land which they did not have under the local chiefs. With the increase in the immigration after 1900, Crown Land reached the limits of its carrying capacity.⁵⁷ The Anguru immigrants were thus better off settling on the 'private estates' in exchange for their labour, than settling on Crown Land. After all, ganyo under the local chiefs was no better than thangata under the European land owners. It is important, however, to emphasize that the "new" immigrants' tenancies were not different from those of the "original" inhabitants of the 'private estates'. There were no legal provisions for the distinction between the two groups.

⁵⁶ PRO C.O.525/35 J.B. Pearce to Colonial Office, 28/4/10.

⁵⁷ The flight of indigenous communities from 'private estates' to Crown Land starting from around 1895 exacerbated the problem. The government began to discourage the leasing of Crown Land from 1904. PRO C.O.525/3 Sharpe to Colonial Office, 20/10/04 and Sharpe to Colonial Office, 6/12/04.

From 1912, the administration's action helped land owners settle "thousands of Anguru immigrants" on the 'private estates'. Citing population pressure in the Shire Highlands, it began a campaign of discouraging the Anguru from settling on Crown Land.⁵⁸ The creation of African reserves on Crown Land was proposed because:

owing to the proximity of Portuguese territory there has been for some years a stream of immigration of Portuguese natives who desire to settle under British rule, and the allocation of land to these people has absorbed considerable area....In the Shire Highlands, it is becoming evident that on Crown Lands the limit almost of native settlement has been reached, but landowners when their labour requirements are satisfied probably either forbid or discourage further settlement. It is evident therefore that it is to Crown Lands that the Anguru immigrants, or natives that have worked out their present holdings naturally turn, and in the Shire Highlands the extent of these lands is not too great.⁵⁹

Government officials argued that the creation of the reserves would have four possible results. First, that the Anguru, facing a land shortage, would go back to Portuguese East Africa. Second, that they would prefer settling on the 'private estates' to having access to a limited amount of land in the reserves. Third, the indigenous natives living on Crown Land would "become anxious as to their future" and therefore

⁵⁸ PRO C.O.525/41 Manning to Colonial Office, 20/4/12; Nyasaland Protectorate, Report on the Population Census (1926).

⁵⁹ PRO C.O.626/2 Demarcation of Crown Land Reserve, 1912; C.O.525/41 Manning to Colonial Office, 20/4/12; C.O.525/48 Pearce to Colonial Office, 19/4/13. In 1913, it was suggested that the reserves be created in the Northern Province, away from the Shire Highlands, which conflicted with the planters' labour requirements.

"disinclined to allow the Anguru immigrants to eat up [their] garden lands".⁶⁰ The settlement of Anguru on government lands would "not be desired" and thus their immigration would be checked. The final possible result would be "to drive the Anguru immigrant to accept any terms from private holders which [would] enable him to be free of the possibility of return to the barbaric ferocity of Portuguese administration". This final result, the administration officials thought, "would be satisfactory in as much as only those Anguru who were prepared to work for their tax and possibly also pay rent would remain in the Shire Highlands. This would be economically satisfactory as giving the planter the labour he might want and retaining only a valuable labour asset in the Protectorate as against a possible excess population disinclined to work".⁶¹

The proposal to reserve land for Anguru immigrants was turned down by the Secretary of State for the Colonies:

In stating...that I was in favour of the most ample provision of Native Reserves, and in approving of the policy suggested by you with a view to securing such reserves, I had in mind the needs of the natives of Nyasaland only, and by no means contemplated the provision of land for immigrant natives from foreign territories.⁶²

⁶⁰ PRO C.O.626/2 Demarcation of Crown Land Reserve, 1912.

⁶¹ PRO C.O.626/2 Demarcation of Crown Land Reserve, 1912.

⁶² PRO C.O.525/41 Secretary of State to Governor William Manning, 20/4/12. For details on differences in opinion between the Secretary of State and the Governor see Galligan, "The Nguru Penetration" pp.121-122. When J.B. Pearce repeated the proposal in 1913, he was similarly rebuffed. PRO C.O.525/48 Pearce to Colonial Office, 19/4/13.

The officials in Nyasaland took advantage of this rejection and began "to encourage" the Anguru to settle on the 'private estates'. Chiefs in border districts were instructed not to allocate parts of Crown Land under their control to new immigrants, and to co-operate with District Commissioners in repatriating "undesired aliens".

As with labour emigration, the colonial administration did not have the capability to police its borders and control the immigration. This remained the case throughout the colonial period. Once the immigrants had entered the country, there was no system of identification to distinguish them from the local inhabitants. Though some village headmen were punished for shielding immigrants, the infiltration was "very hard to check".⁶³ The administration itself was afraid of "interfering with the fluid supply of labour which was so essential to the planting community".⁶⁴ The Anguru were welcomed by the planting community because "they were industrious as temporary resident workers on the estates and were preferred in this capacity to the indigenous native who [was] liable to allow himself to be too much

⁶³ Nyasaland Protectorate, Report of Provincial Commissioners (1936) cited in Kuczynski, Demographic Survey. p.541. Most of the village headmen in question were themselves from Portuguese East Africa. See Nyasaland Government, Report on the Population Census, 1921, 1926 and 1931.

⁶⁴ Nyasaland Government, Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 15/5/33; Kuczynski, Demographic Survey. p.541.

distracted by his home and family ties".⁶⁵

The Anguru had also developed their own ways of avoiding repatriation. Single men often married or moved in with local women, acquired land through marriage, and became "indigenous natives". If that strategy did not work, they bribed the local headmen to register them as indigenous tax payers, or "borrowed" tax certificates from friends and relatives.⁶⁶ They were also good at evading officials. If caught and escorted to the border, they just walked along it till they were out of sight of the police and entered the district again. The whole exercise "was a farce".⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Nyasaland Government, Report on Native Affairs (1932) cited in Kuczynski, Demographic Survey, p.540. See also MNA COM-8/1 Draft Report on Emigrant Labour (1935).; MNA LB3/5/1 Emigrant Labour Committee: Records of Meetings, March-May 1939.

⁶⁶ The immigrants were required to produce tax certificates as evidence of residence in the Protectorate. In 1937, The Provincial Commissioner for the Southern Province reported that: "three persons were convicted and fined in Mlanje district for selling their tax receipts to natives of Portuguese East Africa anxious to acquire a Nyasaland domicile". Nyasaland Government, Reports of Provincial Commissioners (1937) cited in Kuczynski, Demographic Survey. p.542.

⁶⁷ Nyasaland Government, Report of Provincial Commissioners (1936). The Provincial Commissioners admitted that there was not much they could do about it: "the position is thus a farcical one and must remain so until the scheme of native identification is implemented and in running order".; Kuczynski, Demographic Survey. p.541.

IV

"The Chief Source of Labour"

Most important of all, it was the fact that the Anguru supplemented the local labour force which made their immigration difficult to control. The importance of Anguru field labourers increased during World War One and the post-war period. Some 1,151 Anguru carriers were dispatched to East Africa in December 1917 alone.⁶⁸ The influx of new settlers in the post-war period created new labour demands which had to be met.⁶⁹ At the same time, the expansion in African tobacco and cotton production affected the flow of labour from the Central Province and the Lower Shire, respectively. From the northern districts, and along the lake, labourers continued to migrate to South Africa and the Rhodesias while the thangata system in the Shire Highlands was gradually being replaced by sharecropping. It was within this context that the Anguru labour began to assume even greater importance in the post-WWI period. Numbers of Anguru immigrants also increased dramatically after the war.⁷⁰ By 1924, there were "numerous

⁶⁸ White, "'Tribes'" p.519.

⁶⁹ MNA S1/1113/20 Labour Scarcity for Agricultural Purposes 1920-21.

⁷⁰ The 1921 Census Report recorded 108,204 Anguru, "and those classed as Yao [numbering 185,363] and Nyanja [numbering 202,674] were actually Anguru".

immigrants from Portuguese East Africa, mostly Anguru".⁷¹

In the same year, the "Anguru problem" was discussed in detail in an official report. "As regards immigrants", the report noted, "there is a stream of permanent settlers from Portuguese East Africa which appears to be slightly on the increase, the number so settling being returned at over 10,000 in 1924. These immigrants serve a useful purpose as labourers". The advantages and disadvantages of this immigration were that:

In many parts of the Southern Province the chief source of labour is Portuguese East Africa, whence thousands of natives immigrate yearly to work on the various plantations in Nyasaland, and many of these natives remain permanently either as settlers on private land or, with permission of the authorities, on Crown Land. This process of permanent and semi-permanent infiltration of alien natives has a beneficial effect on the labour supply. Indeed, without this source of supply in some districts, the labour problem would become extremely acute. But on the other hand, the settlement of thousands of natives in the very areas where Crown land is least plentiful is creating a serious state of congestion in many places.⁷²

The significance of the Anguru labour to the Protectorate's economy was echoed by an unpublished report on a labour census issued in March 1927: "it is no exaggeration to say that at the present time were the supply of Anguru labour cut off or even seriously diminished, half the plantations in the Mlanje, Cholo and Lower Shire districts would have to be closed and that the whole planting industry

⁷¹ Report of the East Africa Commission (1924), cited in Palmer, "Working Conditions" p.111.

⁷² Colonial Office, Nyasaland Colonial Report, 1924, p.9.; Kuczynski, Demographic Survey. p.539.

in the Shire Highlands would be disorganized", the report noted.⁷³ Some 10,553 "temporary aliens" (migrants) were employed in the country.⁷⁴ A report of the population census taken at the same time expressed concern with land pressure in the Shire Highlands districts. "No steps have been taken in recent years to check the immigration of Nguru", the report stated, "and the Shire Highlands [is] threatened with a great congestion of natives on the comparatively small area of Crown Land that remains".⁷⁵ Between 1926 and 1931, the Anguru immigration became so great that it "depleted the area available for the needs of the indigenous population", resulting in deforestation, the cultivation of hills and slopes and soil erosion.⁷⁶

⁷³ MNA S1/428/27 Draft Report on a Labour Census Taken in the Shire Highlands of the Southern Province (1926).

⁷⁴ MNA S1/428/27 Labour Questions: Previous Occupations of Registered Tobacco Growers, 1926-1928.

⁷⁵ Nyasaland Protectorate, Report on the Population Census, 1926.

⁷⁶ Nyasaland Government, Report on Population Census (1931); MNA COM-8/1 Draft Report on Emigrant Labour (1935). See also R.W. Kettlewell, Agricultural Change in Nyasaland, 1945-1960 (Stanford, Food Research Institute, Stanford University, 1965), pp.239-246; and by the same author, "Nyasaland - Whence and Whither?" in African Affairs vol.63 (October 1963) pp.258-265; K.J. McCracken, "Expert and Expertise in Colonial Malawi" in AA vol.81 (1982) pp101-116.

V

Population and Land

As Robert Kuczynski has argued, from the government's point of view the Anguru were welcome as labourers but not as settlers.⁷⁷ Unfortunately, most Anguru immigrants were not interested in entering the Protectorate as temporary wage workers. They were immigrating to settle. Only from the 1930s did the immigration of seasonal workers increase due to the emergence of the tea plantations. Even then, Anguru family units continued to immigrate and settle in Nyasaland. Opportunities for share-cropping on the tobacco estates both in the Shire Highlands and in the Central Province may have contributed to this. Population census figures, despite their inaccuracies, show a steady increase in the Anguru population in most Shire Highlands and Shire Valley districts between 1921 and 1945:

⁷⁷ Kuczynski, Demographic Survey. p.540.

Table 7.1: Alomwe/Anguru Population (Shire Highlands and Lower Shire Districts).⁷⁸

		<u>1921</u>	<u>1926</u>	<u>1931</u>	<u>1945</u>
African Pop.:		1,199,934	1,290,885	1,599,888	2,044,707
Blantyre	(i)	94,685	58,776	73,650	105,208
	(ii)	33,236	11,754	12,542	19,166
Chikwawa	(i)	-	27,954	35,892	59,664
	(ii)	-	193	600	4,270
Chiradzulu	(i)	60,601	64,571	80,129	83,639
	(ii)	26,675	27,687	38,341	44,033
Cholo/Ruo	(i)	39,502	44,311	59,154	119,746
	(ii)	5,211	33,972	37,116	79,108
Lower Shire	(i)	40,646	63,294	81,410	66,746
	(ii)	-	-	423	1,951
Mlanje	(i)	64,143	91,721	134,431	209,522
	(ii)	26,473	60,403	92,736	150,644
Upper Shire	(i)	65,028	55,492	60,934	-
	(ii)	-	11,318	12,446	-
West/Central Shire	(i)	20,717	11,907	15,492	-
	(ii)	43	-	2	-
Zomba	(i)	102,258	91,386	104,965	137,603
	(ii)	27,745	28,306	37,973	48,430
TOTALS	(i)	487,586	509,412	646,057	782,128
	(ii)	119,383	173,633	232,179	347,602

Note: (i) District Native Population (ii) Anguru Population.
Source: Nyasaland Protectorate, Report of Population Census, 1921, 1926, 1931, and 1945.

What these figures do not show is the exact location of the

⁷⁸ District boundaries changed from time to time. For example, Chiradzulu was at one time part of Blantyre, so too were Mwanza and Neno. Zomba included Domasi and Kasupe (parts of present Machinga). Liwonde and Upper Shire were, at one time, one district, but later Liwonde became part of Kasupe (now Machinga) while Domasi became part of Zomba. Ruo and Cholo (now Thyolo) became one district. The sub-districts of Mwanza-Neno (which became part of Blantyre) and Liwonde have not been included in this table. In 1921, 902 Anguru were reported residing in Liwonde sub-district. The number had risen to 20,513 in 1945. In the same year, Neno had a 'native' population of 25,179 of whom 166 were recorded as Anguru. These figures have not been included in this table.

Anguru in the districts, but there is a direct relationship between the increase in the Anguru immigration and the steady increase in the numbers of Africans resident on the 'private estates' in some of the districts:

Table 7.2 Africans on Private Estates (Shire Highlands and Shire Valley Districts).

<u>District</u>	<u>1921</u>	<u>1926</u>	<u>1931</u>	<u>1945</u>
Blantyre	66,222	24,558	23,328	30,209
Chikwawa	-	1,697	2,240	5,036
Chiradzulu	11,064	12,628	15,148	12,669
Cholo/Ruo	9,628	28,546	38,270	74,465
Lower Shire	310	532	1,397	449
Mlanje	5,893	5,704	7,938	16,207
West/Central Shire	473	99	151	-
Zomba	28,959	30,986	34,868	39,478
TOTALS	122,549	104,750	123,340	178,513

Source: Nyasaland Protectorate, Report of Population Census, 1921, 1926, 1931, 1931, 1945.

With the exception of Blantyre, Lower Shire, and West/Central Shire districts, increasing numbers of Africans resident on the 'private estates' correspond to the increase in the Anguru population. Major increases in the numbers of residents on the 'private estates' occurred in the tea producing districts of Cholo and Mlanje and the tobacco producing district of Zomba. All the three districts shared borders with PEA. Proximity thus played an important role. The decrease in the numbers for Chiradzulu between 1931 and 1945 was due to land pressure. By

1945, Chiradzulu had a population density of 310 per square mile, the highest in the Protectorate. With the expansion of tobacco production in the Central Province, some planters in the Zomba district, A.F. Barron and R.W. Wallace as good examples, recruited tenants from Zomba and Chiradzulu districts for their tobacco estates in the Central Province.

The fluctuations in the figures for Blantyre district might have been due to recording problems,⁷⁹ whereas evidence from the Lower Shire suggests that there was an active campaign to discourage Anguru settlement there from the 1930s. For example, in 1934 the Provincial Commissioner for the Southern Province reported that "large numbers" of Africans from Portuguese East Africa had immigrated into the Lower Shire district. They were working for local natives during the cotton season and on European sisal estates. They did not want to return home because of good prospects of re-employment in 1935. They were welcomed as field workers, but were "not allowed to hoe gardens on their own account and attempts to do so were speedily reported" and discouraged. Two years later, a number of headmen were "punished for shielding immigrants, mostly their own relatives from Portuguese territory".

As regards all the other Shire Highlands districts, the

⁷⁹ Recording problems for the Blantyre district were noted by the District Resident and cited in the 1931 Census Report thus: "each year there is a large influx into the Blantyre district. During the past months I have found several hundreds of natives on private estates of which there was no record in our tax census and many of these had settled unknown even to the owners of the estates."

1945 Population Census recorded that there was "no doubt [that] many of the new residents on private estates [were] immigrants from Portuguese East Africa".⁸⁰ It also suggested that, attracted by sharecropping opportunities, some indigenous Africans might have moved into the 'private estates' in districts such as Mlanje and Cholo from congested areas in Chiradzulu and Zomba. The increase in the figures of the African population in general, those resident on the 'private estates', and that of the Anguru in the districts of Mlanje and Cholo was undoubtedly "due to movement of families in search of employment on European estates". A big proportion of this increase was "attributed to immigration from the neighbouring territory of Portuguese East Africa". Also noticeable in the 1931 and 1945 population data is the increase in the numbers of Anguru settling in the tobacco producing districts of the Central Province: 250 in 1931 and 6,250 by 1945.⁸¹

By the 1930s, three categories of the Anguru immigrants could be distinguished.⁸² The first was that of family units migrating to settle permanently in Nyasaland. This category was viewed with a great deal of concern because of its effects

⁸⁰ Nyasaland Protectorate, Report on the Census of 1945. p.16.

⁸¹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Report on Population Census, 1931: Tables Q and U and 1945: Tables 4 and 5.

⁸² See Nyasaland Protectorate, Report on Native Affairs, 1932; Report on Population Census, 1931 and 1945; and Kuczynski, Demographic Survey p.540.

on land. It was the category blamed for rapidly occupying all the available land on the 'private estates' and Crown Land, the destruction of timber and the cultivation of hill-slopes. However, population data seems to suggest that there was a natural increase in the African population which was equally responsible for all these problems. The growth of African cash crop production in most districts in the Shire Highlands and the Shire Valley might also have resulted in the consolidation of land by the indigenous holders and consequently pushing the immigrants into remote, infertile hilly areas.

The second category was that of single men who came in search of work but married or moved in with local women and got access to land. This category, according to the Native Affairs Department, was the "least desirable". Officials of the Native Administration Department maintained that local elders detested this category of immigrants because they had little respect for headmen and other indigenous authorities. This category "took as much out of the land as they could". If conditions were not to their liking, they moved on, deserting their women and children. Having no concrete social base in the country, they had nothing else to restrain their movement. Government officials disliked them because of their evasion of taxes. Mobility made it difficult to trace them. The planting community disliked them because once they were comfortably established with a family and a place in the village community, their value as field labourers diminished. They

were no better than the local African "who [was] liable to allow himself to be too much distracted by his home and family ties to exhibit that concentration of effort which is a desirable attribute even in the unskilled labourer"⁸³ The third category was that of migrant workers who came for three to four months during the planting season and returned to their homes at the end of their 'contracts'. Most of them had family ties and access to land where they came from. They were in Nyasaland "to earn money for their annual requirements in cloth or for tax".⁸⁴

From 1932, the government decided to take new steps to discourage further settlement in congested areas. District Commissioners in border districts were instructed to control the settlement of Anguru and take disciplinary action against chiefs and headmen who permitted unauthorized settlement and failed to report new immigrants. In 1934, the Native Hut and Poll Tax Ordinance ⁸⁵ was amended and Subsidiary Rules on

⁸³ Kuczynski, Demographic Survey. p.540. For a similar account see MNA COM-8/1 Draft Report on Emigrant Labour, 1935.

⁸⁴ On 14th October 1905, the The Central African Times reported that migrant Anguru workers had began their homeward exodus at the end of the dry season. They were going home to prepare their gardens for the planting season: "every week gangs which are paid off have been returning to their homes". Cited in Galligan "The Anguru Penetration" p.118.

⁸⁵ For details on tax collection see, for example, E. Smith, Report on the Direct Taxation of Natives in the Nyasaland Protectorate (Zomba, Government Printer 1937); Baker "Tax Collection in Malawi: An Administrative History, 1891-1972" in The International Journal of African Historical Studies vol.8 no.1 (1975) pp.40-62; B. Fetter, "Malawi: Everybody's Hinterland" in African Studies Review vol.25 nos

Immigrant Natives were promulgated to regulate the movement of immigrant labourers. All immigrants were required to register with local chiefs and District Commissioners, and to pay a 6 pence tax per month for every month worked in the Protectorate.

These measures failed. In 1935, the Provincial Commissioner for the Southern Province reported that:

the results of the tax on immigrant labour instituted in 1934 proved to be disappointing and it is estimated that only about one-quarter of the total amount which should have been derived from this source was received. The failure is attributed to the difficulty of discriminating between immigrant and Nyasaland natives owing to absence of any reliable system of identification and to the lack of co-operation on the part of certain employers⁸⁶.... The imposition of this tax was unpopular with both employers and employees, and exceptional difficulties have been associated with the collection...many employers contend that the imposition of the tax caused a marked falling off in the number of Nguru labourers applying for work.⁸⁷

The major reason for the failure was the development of the tea industry. In 1937, Eric Smith, the Senior Administrative (Provincial) Commissioner advised that "of the important industries in this country, tea is the sole surviving European one, and the flow of this Nguru labour is vital to its interest...I submit that Government foster the interest of the tea industry, and put nothing in its way in the form of a tax

2/3 (June/September, 1982) pp.79-116.

⁸⁶ Nyasaland Government, Report of Provincial Commissioners (1935) cited in Kuczynski, Demographic Survey. p.548.

⁸⁷ E. Smith, Report on Direct Taxation, cited in Kuczynski, Demographic Survey. p.548.

upon casual labour the outcome of which may deter a number from coming over in search of work".⁸⁸ Acting on this recommendation, in the following year the government asked the Native Welfare Committee to prepare a memorandum on 'native' policy, especially with regard to immigration.⁸⁹

The Committee came up with a memorandum on 'native' policy in 1939 in which it recommended that the position of immigrant Africans be reviewed "with a view to the possibility of repatriating many who have already settled".⁹⁰ The Committee's major concern was land pressure in the Shire Highlands. It feared that if the immigration was allowed to continue without being checked, there would be no more Crown Land left for the growing indigenous African population. Its recommendation came at a wrong time because: "were it not for the labour coming in from Portuguese Territory, [the] planters

⁸⁸ The Senior Provincial Commissioner was also the Provincial Commissioner for the Southern Province at this time. Given that most employers of 'native' labour were in the Shire Highlands in the Southern Province, his views on the subject were usually taken very seriously.

⁸⁹ Nyasaland Government, Proceedings of the Meeting of the Legislative Council, Zomba, Government Printer, 13/14/38. The Native Welfare Committee was an advisory body appointed by the Governor. Its membership changed from time to time, but comprised mainly of government officials, employers of labour and a missionary official.

⁹⁰ Nyasaland Government, Native Welfare Committee Memorandum on Native Policy (Zomba, Government Printer 1939); Kuczynski, Demographic Survey. p.542.

could not carry on".⁹¹ Many of them had not yet recovered from the effects of the depression. The tea industry, which was just on the rise, was so dependent on Anguru labour that any interference with that supply would "mean the closing down of all the tea estates".⁹² In 1941, the Labour Branch of the Native Administration Department reported that 47 per cent of those employed on the tea estates, estimated at 20,000, were local villagers (including 3 per cent tenants), 27 per cent were from other districts of the Protectorate, and 25 per cent were from Portuguese East Africa.⁹³ Of the estimated 3,000 workers employed on the tobacco estates in the Shire Highlands, 50 per cent were resident tenants, 14 per cent from villages around the estates, 26 per cent from other districts,

⁹¹ Evidence of Mlanje Planters' Association to the East Africa Commission on Closer Union, 25/3/28, cited in Palmer, "Working Conditions" p.111.

⁹² PRO C.O.525/154 Minutes of the Select Committee on Agriculture Development, 31/5/34.; Palmer, "Working Conditions" p.111. See also Nyasaland Protectorate, Report of Provincial Commissioners, 1935. The report says there was no shortage of labour in Mlanje district. It estimated that 6,000 immigrants were employed on the tea estates in the district, and a lot more were working for other 'natives'. A similar account appears in the memorandum on 'native' policy prepared by the Native Welfare Committee in 1939.

⁹³ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Labour Department (Zomba, Government Printer 1941). The number of adult males employed in the Protectorate was estimated at 55,000. Of this, approximately 20,000 were employed in the tea industry and 3,000 on tobacco estates in the Shire Highlands. There was also a considerable number of youths under tax paying age employed in both industries. Reports for the subsequent years show a sturdy increase in the numbers and percentages of the Anguru working on the tea estates.

and 10 per cent Anguru seasonal migrant workers from Portuguese East Africa.

Given that the Anguru had settled on the 'private estates' and in the villages in the Shire Highlands districts (refer tables above), there is no doubt that the majority of the 47 per cent and 14 per cent "from the local villages" employed in the tea and tobacco industries, respectively, and the 3 per cent and 50 per cent of the tenants mentioned above, were themselves the Anguru. If this is taken into consideration, it would not be off the mark to argue that the bulk of the plantation labour force in Nyasaland at this time were the Anguru. According to the 1942 report of the Labour Department, "employers continued to find difficulty in maintaining a settled and regular labour force" out of the Africans from the local villages and districts of the Protectorate. That left them with two alternatives: the Anguru migrant labourers and resident tenants from Portuguese East Africa. From this, it can be further argued that even if we accept that the Anguru constituted 25 per cent of the total labour force on the tea estates and 10 per cent on the tobacco estates (which are grossly underestimated figures), they were still the most dependable categories of agricultural labour given the problems the planters had with internal labour mobilization.

The influx of Anguru affected the Nyasaland labour force in a variety of ways. From the mid-1930s, the majority of the

planters preferred to employ the Anguru to the local workers. The Anguru were regarded as better workers with only one goal in mind: "to complete their contracts as quickly as possible".⁹⁴ Unlike the indigenous Africans, migrant Anguru labourers had no family obligations to distract their work. They were also liked because of their availability during the rainy season, a time of the year when planters most needed labour but the local villagers were busy in their own gardens.

The political and economic vulnerability of the Anguru, the sheer cheapness of their labour, and the relative ease with which it was obtained, were the driving motor of the Nyasaland tea industry in the 1930s. The Anguru accepted all kinds of menial jobs:

doing...the very rough work - work which no Nyasaland labourer will do. There is plenty of Nyasaland labour for soft jobs or skilled work. but there are no Nyasaland natives, to speak about, who will do the rough work, and 75%, or probably 80% of the work on tea estates is represented by rough work.⁹⁵

The immigrants thus tended to be at the bottom of the plantation wage structure: as "hoeing boys", pluckers, and pruners. On the Mlanje plantations, the wages were 7 shillings per ticket plus 6 pence posho for hoers and pluckers. A bonus of between 2 to 8 shillings was given to those who plucked

⁹⁴ MNA COM-8/1 Draft Report on Emigrant Labour, 1935; Nyasaland Protectorate, Report on Native Affairs, 1933; Kuczynski, Demographic Survey. p.545.

⁹⁵ PRO C.O.525/154 Minutes of the Select Committee on Agricultural Development, 31/5/34, cited in Palmer, "Working Conditions" p.111.

more than their daily requirement of tea. This would bring the wages to a maximum of about 15 shillings a month. Hoers worked a "task day" averaging six hours while pluckers worked up to ten hours. The working week was six days, Monday to Saturday. As Robin Palmer has noted, plucking was however only carried out for less than half the year, during the rainy season.⁹⁶ For the rest of the year the immigrants were thus engaged as "hoeing boys", paid a bare 7 shillings plus 6 pence posho. In contrast, skilled workers, predominantly the Nyasaland Africans, received "up to" 30 shillings and clerks "up to" 80 shillings. The shifts of factory workers varied between nine and twelve hours depending on the seasons.

The Committee on Emigrant Labour appointed in 1935⁹⁷ reported that the appearance of foreigners prepared to work harder, to be the "hewers of wood and drawers of water" had induced a superiority complex among the local Africans. Wherever Anguru labour was available, the local Africans appeared to frown on manual labour for wages.⁹⁸ They would

⁹⁶ Palmer, "Working Conditions" p.112.

⁹⁷ The Committee was appointed as a Commission on 30th June, 1935 with two terms of reference: (i) "to report on the conditions now prevailing with regard to the exodus of native labour from the Protectorate for work outside, the effect on village life and the probable future effect on the Protectorate"; (ii) "to recommend whether it should be the policy of government, in the interest of the native, (a) to prohibit the exodus of natives altogether, and (b) to permit it: (i) without restriction (ii) under control.

⁹⁸ MNA COM-8/1 Draft Report on Emigrant Labour (1935); Kuczynski, Demographic Survey. p.546.

rather grow cash crops or engage in commodity trade than work on the plantations. This shows that the only "superiority complex" the local workers had was their independence and freedom of choice while the "inferiority" of the immigrants lay in their vulnerability as foreigners, especially the newly arrived ones who had no access to land.

The Anguru immigrants were not the only cheap categories of workers the Nyasaland planters depended on. As the next chapter shows, children, youth and women were also employed to a considerable extent. It also provides further evidence for the vulnerability of the Nyasaland plantations in the regional competition for labour. The employment of children, youth and women was one of the major ways the low-paying Shire Highlands plantations survived the competition. On the obverse side, it enabled the local adult Africans to engage freely in independent production and exchange, alternating it with seasonal wage employment on which they were not so heavily dependent.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CHILD, YOUTH, AND FEMALE WAGE LABOUR

We are so short of labour that we must employ child labour. I can not compete with my business unless I employed child labour .¹

Statistics of the Labour Branch of the Native Administration Department suggest that between one-fifth and one-quarter of the regular labour force on the tea and tobacco plantations between 1926 and 1953 were "young persons".² They were often supplemented by considerable numbers of women working mostly as "casual labourers". This "floating" labour force has received very scanty attention from scholars working on topics related to Malawi's agrarian change, rural and migrant labour.³

¹ Malawi National Archives (MNA) LB3/3/2 F.D. Warren, in Minutes of the Meeting of the Central Labour Advisory Board (CLAB), 19/7/48.

² "Young Persons" were defined as boys and girls below 18 years of age. Throughout this chapter "children" will refer to those below the age of 14; "youth" to those between 14 and 18 years; and "adolescent" to those in the marrying age - usually between 18 and 20 years. However, the term "child labour" is applied to all of them.

³ See R.H. Palmer, "Working Conditions and Worker Responses on the Nyasaland Tea Estates, 1930-1953" in Journal of African History (JAH) vol.27 no.1 (1986) pp.105-26; E.C. Mandala, Work and Control in a Peasant Economy: A History of the Lower Tchire Valley in Malawi, 1859-1960 (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1990) pp.25-32 and 154-58, 260-268; J.M. Schoffeleers, "From Socialization to Personal Enterprise: A History of the Nomi Labour Societies in the Nsanje District of Malawi, c.1891 to 1972" in Rural Africana no.20 (Spring 1973) pp.11-25.

The aim of this chapter is to provide further evidence that faced with irreversible reductions in the flow of "protectorate labour" due to the growth of African cash-cropping and external recruiting, the settler employers turned to cheap and vulnerable categories of workers. It also demonstrates that the production relations established on the Shire Highlands plantations, the incorporation of family units into wage labour and labour tenancy, and the influx of Mozambicans, further compounded the 'problem' of child, youth and female wage labour.

By engaging in wage employment the children and youths could gain some form of emancipation from the control of parents and elders, but exposed themselves more directly to capitalist exploitation and control. As Elias Mandala has argued, "their search for emancipation was fraught with ambiguity".⁴ The ambiguity applied to the family units as well. Often children and youths were encouraged to take up wage employment as a way of supplementing family incomes from the subsistence economy. Their "emancipation" was thus reduced.

The evolution of child wage labour in Nyasaland corresponded to the changes in the labour demands of the colonial economy. For the period prior to the 1920s, the employment of children and women occurred in the combination of wage labour and thangata labour tenancy as practised on the

⁴ Mandala, Work and Control pp.154-8.

Shire Highlands 'private estates'. This could be the reason for the lack of archival sources on child and female wage labour relating to this period. From the mid-1920s, as sharecropping began to emerge, and with the growth of African cash-cropping in the Central Province, children began to be singled out as a distinct category of workers, separated from their family units. Both colonial administrators and settler employers began to recognize and document it, but it was the expanding tea plantations of the Shire Highlands, starting from the early 1930s, which employed large numbers of children and youths. This was also a period when the Colonial Office put pressure on the local administrators to implement some conventions of the International Labour Organization. As a result, the administration introduced bills aimed at regulating the employment of women, children, and youths. Even then, the subject did not receive adequate attention from the administrators.

I

Children as "invisible workers"⁵

Archival sources on child, youth and female wage labour in

⁵ This concept comes from C. Robertson, "Invisible Workers: African Women and the Problem of the Self-employed in Labour History" in P.C.W. Gutkind (ed), Third World Workers: Comparative International Labour Studies (Leiden, New York, E.J. Brill 1988). See also C. Dennis, "Women in African Labour History" in the same volume.

colonial Malawi are undoubtedly inadequate. The same applies to published sources. The sources on child labour relating to other parts of sub-saharan Africa tend to be episodic, fragmented and sometimes too ideological to be used for comparative analysis.⁶ Rural time-use surveys of the 1950s and 60s provide nothing more than numbers of hours children spent in regular agricultural work.⁷ Though it is generally accepted that "most children work in one sense or another", the literature on African workers and peasants conceals children's labour behind that of working and farming adults.⁸

Feminist scholars of African labour have not addressed this weakness, yet much of what is said about African women as economic actors also applies to children.⁹ Just like women,

⁶ See G. Rodgers and G. Standing (eds), Child Work, Poverty and Underdevelopment (Geneva, ILO Publications 1981); UNO, Exploitation of Child Labour, A Report by A. Bouhdiba (New York, UNO 1982); A. Bequale and J. Boyden (eds), Combating Child Labour (Geneva, ILO Publications 1988); and a special issue of the Journal of Development and Change vol.13 no.4 (October 1982). For a good discussion on child and youth wage labour in South Africa see W. Beinart, "Transkeian Migrant Workers and Youth Labour on the Natal Sugar Estates, 1918-1948" in JAH vol.32 (1991) pp.41-63. This article came out after I had already drafted this chapter, but I have found it quite useful.

⁷ Cited in Rodgers and Standing (eds), Child Work. Preface and Chap.1.

⁸ For a comprehensive review of this literature see B. Freund, "Labour and Labour History in Africa: A Review of the Literature" in African Studies Review vol.27 no.2 (1984) pp.1-58; and by the same author, The African Worker (Cambridge, New York, CUP 1988) especially chaps. 1 and 8.

⁹ See, for example, Robertson, "Invisible Workers"; C. Dennis, "Women in African Labour History"; S.B. Stichter and J.L. Parpart (eds), Patriarchy and Class: African Women in the

children perform a lot of unpaid domestic labour; are overused in agricultural production; engage in "informal" income generating activities; have no control over family property; do not appear in official statistics as workers; and where officially employed, they do not receive employment benefits such as retirement schemes. Their involvement in domestic chores releases adult labour for other domestic tasks and wage employment.

It is also important to note that to define a 'child' and what constitutes 'child labour' is problematic.¹⁰ In most of the studies on child labour, a "child" is defined in terms of the following criteria: chronological age as outlined by law; institutional affiliation and collective behavioral pattern, as in the case of "school children"; socially and culturally defined life-phases such as order of parents' birth, inheritance rights, and rites of passage; physical and mental development; and dependency on parental care - though there are situations when children become major bread-winners and parents depend on them. In most African societies socially and culturally defined life-phases are a reflection of production relations wherein 'senior' members of the community control the labour of their 'juniors'. The control of social knowledge relating to sexuality, reproduction, religion, life and death,

Home and Workforce (Boulder, London, Westview Press 1987).

¹⁰ For details on this see Rodgers and Standing (eds), Child Work pp.viii-ix; Bequele and Boyden (eds), Combating Child Labour pp.v-vii.

are often used to control the biological and social reproduction of the domestic labour force. It is therefore difficult to pin-point when "child labour" begins and ends. For example, at 14 years old one child could be physically and mentally more developed than another and capable of doing "adult" work. The level of dependence on parental care would also depend on such factors as the health, mental, and physical abilities of the child. The availability of economic opportunities would also affect the relationship between parents and their children. Wherever economic opportunities are available for the children, their dependence on parents would be minimized with the possibility of the parents themselves being dependent on their children. In such a case, the "moral" aspects of "child labour" would not arise.

As for the employment of women, youths, and children in other parts of the southern Africa region, Charles van Onselen's work on mine labour in Southern Rhodesia provides some useful insights.¹¹ Adult women settled in the mine compounds as prostitutes, domestic workers, and to engage in a variety of other activities such as beer-brewing. Young boys from rural areas were recruited by the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau right from the early days of its establishment. Some parents allowed their children to work on the mines as "a desperate attempt to raise incomes that were themselves

¹¹ C. van Onselen, Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933 (London, Pluto Press 1976) 123-127.

exceptionally low", and also because food was provided on the mines thus relieving the parents of the responsibility.¹² Once on the mines, boys came to occupy a type of surrogate female role: "their tasks were those that were essentially associated with women in traditional society" such as cleaning, sweeping and cooking; and often included the sexual abuse of the children. Manual child labour was prevalent on the asbestos and mica mines. On the former, the children were employed in separating the asbestos fibre from the rock matrix in which the metal occurred while on the mica mines "at least half of the labour force was composed of children".

A key factor in this was the regional competition for labour between the Southern Rhodesian mines and those of the Rand. The poor working conditions and low wages offering on the smaller mines of Southern Rhodesia made them unattractive to the adult migrant labourers from the northern territories who flocked to the better labour markets in the south. One important way by which the smaller Southern Rhodesian mines could avoid entirely losing out in the competition was thus to employ vulnerable categories of workers which included children and youths.

In a recent article, William Beinart has provided a stimulating account of the use of youth and child labour on

¹² Van Onselen, Chibaro. p.125.

the Natal sugar estates.¹³ According to Beinart, "African youth labour was available not simply because there was a large demand, but also because there was a supply".¹⁴ Any analyses of youth and child labour on the Natal sugar estates must therefore address the issues of why the children and youths left the rural villages for the wage labour centres. Rural poverty was one side of the equation, the other was "the importance of child labour in African societies and the social stress within the homesteads".¹⁵ Beinart further argues that evidence suggests that "labour demands on boys and youths in Pondoland were increasing at the time when child labour became prevalent on the sugar estates". A key factor in the diversion of Pondo youths to the sugar estates was the prohibition of employment of persons under 18 years of age in the gold mines which were the major destination for the labourers from Pondoland. The Native Labour Regulation Act of 1911 which prohibited the recruitment of children below 18 years old did not apply to the sugar estates.

The account below will show that in a variety of ways, the Nyasaland case was quite similar to the two cases outlined above. Women, children and youths were brought into wage employment from quite an early stage in the development of the

¹³ Beinart, "Transkeian Migrant Workers" pp.41-63.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.63.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.56.

colonial economy. Their labour was exploited not just because there was a demand for it, but also because it was readily accessible. Tenancy and sharecropping arrangements and the location of the villages around the plantations made it easy for the planters to get access to this form of labour. One can also speculate that "running away" was probably the reason children and youths from PEA came to work in the Shire Highlands. The imposition of the "labour code", head taxes and forced cotton schemes in PEA as discussed in the previous chapter were probably behind the "running away".¹⁶ Within Nyasaland, the weakening of family forms of control over youth and adolescent labour brought by the demands of the colonial economy played an important role in the "proletarianization" of "young persons". As far as the Shire Highlands were concerned, the turning point was the beginning of land alienation. As the elders on the 'private estates' lost control over land, they also lost control over the labour of the youth, children and adolescent males. To understand how this happened, it is important first to note how the elders in the Shire Highlands used access to land to control the labour of adolescent males.

¹⁶ These statements can only be verified by information from the Mozambique side of the equation. That type of information is unavailable in Malawi.

II

Land and Control of Male Labour

Among the matrilineal Mang'anja and Yao of the Shire Highlands, the labour of adolescent males was effectively exploited through chikamwini bride-service.¹⁷ According to Mandala, "coming towards the end of his life as a junior, chikamwini tested a boy's socialization as an agricultural worker. Under the control of his prospective mother-in-law, apongozi, [sic: or mother-in-law's brother], the boy had to open and maintain a new field for at least one growing season before he was allowed to start his own household in the girl's village".¹⁸ Should he displease his prospective mother-in-law (or uncle-in-law) or show signs of laziness, he would be returned to his natal homestead without a wife.

If he succeeded, the boy would continue to reside in his wife's homestead and to work in his parents in-law's garden on a regular basis, in addition to maintaining his wife's garden. Amang'anja and Ayao boys thus "could not avoid chikamwini if they wanted wives". What was particular about this practice is that it entailed the control of adolescent males and the expropriation of their labour by their marital elders at a

¹⁷ For details on this see, for example, Mandala, Work and Control. pp.22, 30-31, 261-62 154-55; C. Ng'ong'ola, "Rural Development and the Reorganisation of Customary Land in Malawi: Some Lessons from the LLDP" in Journal of Social Science, University of Malawi vol.13 (1986) pp.44-46.

¹⁸ Mandala, Work and Control p.30.

time when they should have been breaking away from parental control and establishing their own production units. As for the girls' mothers and uncles, chikamwini guaranteed them control over the labour of prospective suitors and sons- or nephews- in-law for as long as the marital relationship lasted. The chikamwini factor among the ~~Amang~~'anja and Ayao shows that child labour in the traditional economy could occur in a variety of forms: as a form of socialization and acculturation, apprenticeship, rites of passage, and as a traditional way of labour mobilization.

Apart from chikamwini, the labour of children and youths was exploited through household food production. The accounts of early travellers and missionaries show that children made a useful contribution to pre-colonial agricultural production, hunting-and-gathering, fishing, and herding.¹⁹ In his study of the Lower Shire peasantries, Mandala observed that children and youth played an important role in the weeding of gardens and in dindiro, a series of activities which included the guarding of crops against birds and other predatory animals. For boys, "dindiro was a more pleasurable activity than

¹⁹ An interesting account of this is in J.E. Chambliss, The Lives and Travels of Livingstone and Stanley Covering Their Entire Career in Southern and Central Africa (Boston, De Wolfe Fiske and Company 1881) pp.316 and 397. It says: "All the people of the village turn out to labour in the fields. It is no uncommon thing to see men, women and children hard at work, with the baby lying closeby beneath a shady bush...men, women and children engage in field labour." Similar accounts are found in A. Werner, The Natives of British Central Africa (London, Archibald Constable and Company Ltd 1906), passim.

weeding, especially during a year following a good harvest when they would be well provided for" but not during years of food scarcity.²⁰ Mandala's account is quite similar to one found in a report of the Nyasaland Nutrition Survey of 1938 which collected data from the lakeshore district of Nkhota-kota:

as boys grow older, they learn to work wood for bows and arrows and for hoe-handles and to set traps for birds and small game. In the mice season during September and October they go out in parties and dig mice from their holes. At the lakeshore, they fish. The bulk of the women's work is under taken by girls of ten years and upwards. They are capable of, and frequently do, all the pounding, carry wood and water, and collect materials for side-dishes.²¹

The survey recorded differences in parental attention to the children depending on gender, age and degree of contribution to food production. Boys from about six to fourteen years of age were "left very much to their own devices to fend for themselves where food [was] concerned". Their mothers "did not bother about them" as they were not yet working and not old enough to make effective demands for food. Girls and their young brothers who stayed in the village had a constant supply of food which was not available to the older boys. The latter "wander[ed] about in the bush eating wild fruits and insects as they could find, stealing bananas and roasting them. During the green maize season these boys

²⁰ Mandala, Work and Control pp.53-54.

²¹ MNA Q/267 B.S. Platt, Draft Report of a Nutrition Survey in Nyasaland, 1938.

[stole] cobs from the gardens and roasted them, drinking any milk they could get from the cows or visiting other villages in the hope of being given some food".²²

The explanation for the boys' apparently "foraging" activities is that they were not at home during the day when the meals were given to the girls and young boys. They were either at the lake, fishing, or helping their elders mend the nets, or herding in the bush. Both of these activities were an ordeal for the boys. They involved long hours of work away from home and a lot of control by the male heads of the families. The boys could be severely punished if they took the animals into the gardens or failed to cast and haul a net properly. One of the best forms of punishment was to deny the boys access to food. As for the "stealing", it was a practice condoned by society because it was the way the herding and fishing boys got much of their food. The main difference between the boys and girls came in the way of the sexual division of labour in the traditional economy. It was the girls' role to prepare food while the boys' role was to forge and maintain the implements for its collection. While girls collected food items from domestic sources such as gardens, it was the boys' role to collect those food items associated with the "wild" such as game and fish.

The nutrition survey further noted that after eighteen

²² MNA Q/267 B.S. Platt, Draft Report of a Nutrition Survey.

years of age, boys tended to migrate to areas of wage employment within and outside the country. They accumulated money and household assets with which they were able to establish their own family units.²³ That way, they effectively evaded the control of elders over their productive and reproductive capacities. The experience of adolescent males in the Shire Highlands was somehow different. Amang'anja and Ayao youth did not need money or livestock to marry: "there was no intrinsic relationship between money and the Mang'anja [or Yao] chikamwini system".²⁴

Unlike in the northern lakeshore districts where bridewealth was a traditional marital practice, the Amang'anja and Ayao elders in the Shire Highlands districts could not control youth productive and reproductive capacities by withholding what Marxist anthropologists call "matrimonial" and "prestige" goods.²⁵ This inherent weakness in their control over adolescent boys worked to the advantage of the

²³ The returns of migrant labour were often used in bridewealth payment and to purchase goats and cattle for courtship and other marriage payments.

²⁴ Mandala, Work and Control p.154.

²⁵ See G. Dupre and P. Rey, "Reflections on the Relevance of a Theory of the History of Exchange" in D. Seddon (ed), Relations of Production: Marxist Approaches to Economic Anthropology (London, Cass 1978) pp.171-208; C. Meillassoux, "'The Economy' in Agricultural Self-sustaining Societies: A Preliminary Analysis" pp.127-157 in the same volume; and by the same author, Maidens, Meal and Money: Capitalism and the Domestic Community (Cambridge, CUP 1981); E. Terray, Marxism and 'Primitive' Societies (New York, Monthly Review Press 1972).

white planters. With the emergence of wage labour, the control of the elders over the labour of the adolescent males weakened. This was especially so in the villages on the 'private estates' where land was controlled by the landlord and thus no longer the basis for chikamwini.²⁶

The adolescent males were now provided with the alternative of becoming tenants and living with their wives on the 'private estates' away from the control of their apongcozi, 'parents' in-law. Even if they lived in the same village with their 'parents' in-law on the 'private estates', the landlord, rather than the 'parents' in-law, had the first call on their labour. The residence of unmarried women on the 'private estates' was an added advantage to the landlord. He got more male tenants as the women on his estate got married and established new households. The children born in these ^{households} were usefully socialized in plantation life and work, and formed a reserve from which future workers were drawn. The transfer of the labour of the women and children resident on the 'private estates' was also part of the dominant social relationship between the landlords and the male heads of the tenant

²⁶ For further details on chikamwini see, for example, M.A. Vaughan, "Food Production and Family Labour in Southern Malawi: The Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley in the Early Colonial Period" in JAH vol.23 no.3 (1982) pp.351-364, and by the same author, "Which Family?: Problems in the Reconstruction of the History of the Family as an Economic and Cultural Unit" in JAH vol.24 (1983) pp.275-283; D. Hirschmann and M.A. Vaughan, Women Farmers of Malawi: Food Production in the Zomba District (Berkeley, Institute of International Studies, University of California 1985) especially chaps.1 and 2.

families. It was therefore out of labour tenancy that child and female agricultural wage labour emerged.

III

Children and Women in Wage Labour

Labour tenancy was like hiring a whole family unit. The tenants' wives and children were often employed by the landlords in a variety of tasks: "his [the tenant's] wife and children have the chance of earning wages from their landlord by light work on the plantations", reported F.B. Pearce, "naturally, [they] look forward to this and similar forms of employment as a remunerative and easy occupation".²⁷ It has been argued in the previous chapters that the combination of wage labour and labour tenancy was one important way by which the undercapitalized Shire Highlands plantations effectively used the resource they had in abundance: land.

This was not a "remunerative" occupation for the tenants and their families. Though they were free to engage in wage employment, the wages were low and the operations of thangata sometimes limited the amount of time they could devote to wage employment. Very often, the landlords demanded their tenants' labour during the rainy season which was also the time when employment opportunities were more readily available because wage labour from the outside districts and the surrounding

²⁷ PRO C.O.525/48 Pearce to Colonial Office, 10/4/13.

villages was in short supply. The gap left by adult workers was often filled by the children: "it is customary on most Nyasaland plantations to engage small boys" to pick insect pests which attacked crops, and "thousands of children are employed to do this".²⁸ "Thousands" more were employed in hoeing, weeding and harvesting.

The publications of the Blantyre Mission suggests that by the early 1890s, children were "wholesomely" employed in agricultural wage labour and mtenga-tenga, portering, much to the resentment of the mission officials.²⁹ The mission's policy was "rather to discourage the employment of children [because] there were many cases where children were brought under the most wholesome influence simply through work".³⁰ This policy caused a lengthy debate between the mission officials and the settler employers. "Several letters" were sent to the editors of Life and Work, the mission's newsletter, by the settler employers who denied that they used child labour on their estates. The editors' response was that their reports were "fair and open".³¹ The mission had some difficulties in implementing its policy because most settlers

²⁸ PRO C.O.525/48 Pearce to Colonial Office, 19/4/13.

²⁹ Life and Work in British Central Africa (April 1890) pp.1-2; (August 1900) pp.1-4; see also A. Ross "The Blantyre Mission and the Problems of Land and Labour, 1891-1915" in F. MacDonald, From Nyasaland to Malawi (Nairobi, EAPH 1975) pp. 86-107.

³⁰ Life and Work (April 1890) p.1-4.

³¹ Ibid.

had direct connections with it. Some missionaries, themselves, employed child labour. Their inducement lay in the schools which their workers, including children, attended freely out of working hours. A few planters emulated this strategy with great success. In 1904, the Resident in Blantyre district reported that about 15 miles from his station was a mission station, and 2 or 3 miles from it, a plantation whose owner planted "a large piece of land" in cotton. Both the mission and the planter required "a good deal of labour" and competition arose between them. The planter came to the conclusion that his rivals' superior inducement lay in their school which the labourers attended freely out of working hours. He therefore built his own school and hired an African teacher to teach reading, writing, and English to all comers. The results "well repaid him".³² He got all the labour he needed and other planters followed his example. By the 1940s, the larger tea plantations provided school facilities for children who worked during the morning and attended the estate school in the afternoon.³³

Though the children were often employed in jobs they traditionally performed in the peasant economy, the context in which they worked had changed. It was no longer a part of the

³² PRO C.O.525/1 Extract from the Blantyre District Annual Report in the Nyasaland Protectorate Annual Report, 1904.

³³ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Labour Branch (Zomba, Government Printer 1948) p.9.

"domestic environment supervised by family members".³⁴ Instead, it was an impersonal relationship between the children and the employer, structured along capitalist lines, and forming part of the employer's labour mobilization strategy. Its detrimental effects varied widely. It had much greater hardships on the migrant children and youth than on those who came from the families on the 'private estates' or the villages surrounding them.

As regarded female wage labour, this was in greatest demand during the dry season when the women were not too busy in their family gardens. Since this was also the time when male labour was in abundance, the planters tended to opt for female labour because it was cheaper. This account, recorded by Harry Johnston in 1897, serves as a good example:

I am advised to get native women of the district to do [the hoeing] for me with native hoes. The women here work exceedingly hard - much better than the men - and ask less pay. A little while later they will be beginning to prepare their own plantations before the big rains so it is as well to get them now if I can. For chance labour like this, for any term less than a month, and within their own district, I shan't have to register them.³⁵

However, beyond accounts of this nature not much is known about women's wage labour on the Shire Highlands plantations during the formative years of the colonial economy. Our best source of information are photographs taken during this period. Harry Johnston's book, British Central Africa,

³⁴ Beinart, "Transkeian Migrant Workers" p.56.

³⁵ Cited in H.H. Johnston, British Central Africa (London, Methuen and Company 1897) p.169.

published in 1897, has a photograph of women making bricks for the construction of a settler's house.³⁶ Two factors determined the employment of women in brick-making: first, the moulding of bricks required the carrying of water and mud, a task which was traditionally associated with women. Men moulded, dried, and burned the bricks. During construction the women carried the bricks from the kiln to the building site. Second, bricks had to be made during the dry season, before the first rains.³⁷ Women's labour was more readily available to the settler employers during the same season. Photographs also suggest that some women were employed in the construction of the Shire Highlands railway line (1903-1908), "carrying heavy loads of earth on their heads".³⁸ Key factors in this were the low wages and poor working conditions in railway construction which made it "an object of aversion" by migrant workers from the "labour districts".³⁹ The railway company thus turned to the employment of women who were often paid in calico and other trade goods rather than in cash.

The first official reference to female and child wage labour was in 1903 with the introduction of the Native Labour Regulations. The use of women and children in portage was

³⁶ Ibid., p.174.

³⁷ Johnston, British Central Africa p.173.

³⁸ Mandala, Work and Control. p.313 footnote 38, and pp.109 and 113.

³⁹ PRO C.O.525/1 Ncheu Sub-district Report, June 1904.

prohibited, but not in agriculture. It is important to note that 1903 marked the beginnings of the construction of the Shire Highlands railway line and external labour recruiting in Nyasaland. Official concerns with child and female wage labour was therefore a reflection of the changes taking place in the country's labour sources and the competition between different groups of employers. However, there is no evidence that the prohibition on the employment of women and children in portering was implemented.

IV

Competing for Child Labour

Evidence from the Lower Shire Valley suggests that with the beginning of African cotton production between 1905 and 1910, competition for the children's labour arose between the peasant families, on one hand, and the settler planters and missionaries, on the other.⁴⁰ The peasant families wanted their children to contribute to their cash-cropping efforts while planters needed the children's labour on their estates. The missionaries were interested in having the children in their schools or to work for them after school hours. School education and "christian" or "moral" training often masked the missionaries' economic motives in maintaining access to the children. Mandala argues that both the secular and religious

⁴⁰ See Mandala, Work and Control pp.154-157.

European employers targeted the labour of male rather than female youths. This "narrowed their competition (and alliances) with the elders in the struggle for Mang'anja and Sena boys".⁴¹

The elders responded to this challenge in various ways.⁴² The Amang'anja and Amakololo elders lengthened the initial period of chikamwini from one to several growing seasons before the marriage could be consummated. They also revived some traditional farming practices such as chigunda or chilere, small plots allocated to young men and women before marriage, which were now turned to cash-cropping using youth labour. The cash crop, usually cotton, was sold in the name of parents who were registered growers. In the process, the parents appropriated both the labour and surplus generated by the youth.⁴³ Unlike their Amang'anja and Amakololo counterparts, the Asena elders encouraged wage labour and cash-cropping. The reason for this was that there was an intrinsic relationship between the Asena marital practice of chuma, bridewealth payment, and money.

Because of poor working conditions on the Shire Highlands

⁴¹ Ibid., p.154.

⁴² Ibid., pp.154-158 and 261-262.

⁴³ Mandala says "the money resulting from the sale of cotton served many purposes, the most significant of which was the financing of female chinamwali and male nyau initiation rituals". Thus, cotton money was transferred from the lower to the higher grades of elders, including headmen and chiefs who controlled the initiation schools. Mandala, Work and Control p.155.

and Lower Shire plantations, Asena young men tended to migrate to the mines and farms of Southern Rhodesia and South Africa to earn the chuma. At home, their elders made efforts to keep them in peasant production by increasing the amount of bridewealth from 6 shillings to 6 pounds during the first decades of the 1900s. It was easier to raise this amount of money by growing cash crops than to work for it on the plantations. At the prevailing wage rate of 1 shilling and 6 pence on the Lower Shire plantations or 3 shillings in the Shire Highlands, it would take a young man between two to five years to raise the bridewealth money. In contrast, if he remained at home in cash-cropping, it would take just one or two crop seasons.⁴⁴

The conditions on the 'private estates' of the Shire Highlands were different from those prevailing on Crown Land in the Lower Shire. Sharecropping had not emerged on the 'private estates' by this time. In 1913, the Acting Governor F.B. Pearce reported that children and women on the 'private estates' continued to work as part of the thangata unit.⁴⁵ Changes began to occur with the expansion in tobacco production in the post-WWI period. Opportunities for wage employment for both women and children increased. A postcard made by the Nyasaland Pharmacies (Blantyre and Limbe) in the

⁴⁴ Mandala goes on to argue that as they began to lose control over chikamwini, some Mang'anja families adopted the Sena practice of chuma bridewealth.

⁴⁵ PRO C.O.525/48 Pearce to Colonial Office, 19/4/13.

1920s shows a group of over forty women and children "preparing a new [tobacco] plantation" in the Shire Highlands.⁴⁶ The difficulty in this, as in all photographs, is that it does not say whether the women and children were wage-labourers or part of the tenant family units. The absence of men in the picture would suggest that this was a group of ganyo, casual labourers, who were often women and children.

In Blantyre district, boys "from 10 years" of age and above were often employed in this capacity by the settler planters.⁴⁷ Some of them came from as far as Ncheu in the Central Province accompanying their adult relatives to the Shire Highlands. "Nearly every young unmarried man" in the Central Province went to work in the Shire Highlands.⁴⁸ Separated from family support and dependent on low-paying casual labour, the migrant boys often drifted into crime and violence. "Numbers" of young Angoni boys were convicted of theft in Blantyre in the early 1920s.⁴⁹ The beginning of African tobacco production in the Central Province from the

⁴⁶ Courtesy of Bob Stock, Department of Geography, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada. The mailing date on the postcard is June, 1927. It was mailed from a Mozambican border town. I have made a copy of the photograph.

⁴⁷ MNA S2/23/25 Acting Senior Provincial Commissioner to Chief Secretary, 9/11/25.

⁴⁸ MNA S2/23/25 Provincial Commissioner, Central Province, to Chief Secretary, 25/11/25. See also Acting Provincial Commissioner, Southern Province to Chief Secretary, 9/11/25 in the same file.

⁴⁹ MNA S2/23/25 Acting Provincial Commissioner, Southern Province to Chief Secretary, 9/11/25.

mid-1920s reduced the numbers of children and young boys going to work in the Shire Highlands. Elsewhere, in the northern districts, "large numbers" of 'young men' and 'juveniles' "proceeded annually to Rhodesia, the Congo Belge [sic] and Tanganyika Territory".⁵⁰ Those who did not migrate, especially from the West Nyasa (Nkhata Bay) district, found employment within the country by enlisting with the Kings African Rifles (KAR) and the police, as carriers, and on the plantations of the Shire Highlands. Age and literacy were the determining factors here. Unmarried adolescents and youths tended to migrate while a few literate individuals tended to join the KAR and the police. It is rather implausible that "juveniles" would enlist for the KAR and the police. Age and literacy must have been key factors here. The adolescents, especially the literate ones, were more likely to enlist for the KAR and the police.

While African tobacco production and migrant labour affected the flow of both child and adult wage labour from the Central and northern districts, respectively, the beginning of sharecropping in the Shire Highlands from the 1920s generated a new debate on the "position" of unmarried women resident on the 'private estates'. Correspondence relating to the amendment of the 1928 Natives on Private Estates Ordinance suggests that the landlords scored a major victory over

⁵⁰ MNA S2/23/25 Provincial Commissioner, Northern Province, to Chief Secretary, 17/11/25.

traditional elders in relation to the "position" of unmarried women on the estates. "Will you please advise me", wrote A.G.O. Hodgson, the Zomba District Commissioner in 1932, "whether an unmarried woman has the right to bring a husband on to a private estate without permission; and also whether a male tenant, if the woman elects to live with him on the private estate, has the right to demand that she should come and live with him on that estate".⁵¹ The answer was that: "native custom in regard to marriage must give way to the rights of landlords to control the number of tenants on their land". Implicit in this reply was the argument that chikamwini could not be extended to the Africans resident on the 'private estates'. Traditional elders thus could not control the labour of adolescent boys on the estates through chikamwini bride-service.

Up to the mid-1920s, the tobacco estates of the Shire Highlands were the major employers of child and female wage labour. This changed with the beginning of the tea plantations from the late 1920s. The children and youths were "especially useful in plucking tea" for which they received from 2 to 6

⁵¹ MNA S1/727/26 District Commissioner, A.G.O. Hodgson to Chief Secretary, 26/7/32; see also Provincial Commissioner to Chief Secretary, 28/7/32; Chief Secretary to Governor, 25/4/32; and B. Pachai, Land and Politics in Malawi, 1875-1975 (Kingston, Limestone Press 1978) p.122.

shillings a month "according to their age and ability".⁵² Unlike tobacco, which was grown predominantly by sharecropping and labour tenancy, tea depended to a large degree on direct wage labour, much of it unskilled and lowly paid.

The key factors in the employment of youths and children in the tea industry were: first, the increasing Anguru immigration which had taken place between the early 1920s and mid-1930s, and second, the development of the African tobacco industry. The Anguru immigration had created a 'surplus' of prospective youth and child workers in the Shire Highlands. For example, of the estimated 26,150 settled in the three Shire Highlands districts of Blantyre, Mulanje and Zomba by 1904, 9,350 were reported to be "children".⁵³ These figures increased with the increased immigration between the early 1920s to the mid-1930s. A good number of the Anguru who came as seasonal migrant labourers, were "the young male Lomwe" employed as "'hoeing boys' at the lowest wages on offer".⁵⁴ These were probably the most vulnerable group of the Nyasaland labour force given the separation from their families and the hostile working conditions in which they found themselves.

⁵² See MNA S1/1132/30 Report on Labour Conditions, Southern Province, 1930; S1/428/27 R.H. Murray, Draft Report on Native Labour, March 1927.

⁵³ PRO C.O.525/1 Sharpe, Report on the Trade and General Conditions, 1903/4. Sharpe reported that: "the Anguru who are a sturdy native race, have migrated into British territory to the extent of a total of about 30,000 men, women and children".

⁵⁴ Cited in Palmer, "Working Conditions" p.111.

The youth and children also filled in the gap left by the withdrawal of adult labour from wage employment as a result of the development of the African tobacco industry. This affected the individual tobacco planters more than it did the tea companies. In 1926, the Cholo Planters Association reported that: "the existing labour shortage is apparently felt mostly by tobacco growers and is, in our opinion, chiefly due to the rapid spread of the Native Tobacco Industry". The report further observed that: "the fact that such shortage is felt firstly by European tobacco growers is in our opinion not due to dissatisfaction with present conditions of employment, but to the obvious fact that such natives understand to some extent the working of a tobacco crop and it is only natural that they should be the first to engage in production for themselves". Indeed, the majority of the registered tobacco growers both on Crown Land and on the 'private estates' were former wage labourers or tenants on European plantations.⁵⁵

V

Prevalence of Child Labour

It is against this backdrop that we need to understand the prevalence of child and youth wage labour on the Nyasaland plantations from the late 1920s. With the changes in the flow

⁵⁵ MNA S1/428/27 Draft Report on Previous Occupations of Native Tobacco Growers, 1929.

of adult male wage labour, the tea and tobacco plantations supplemented their regular labour force by employing youths, children and women. Both tea and tobacco required a lot of what the planters called "light work suitable for women and children": hoeing, weeding, tending nurseries, watering, pruning, stripping, stemming, picking and tying of leaves. In the factories, youth labour was employed in a variety of menial jobs: sweeping the floors, running errands, packing and unpacking of the tea and tobacco leaves. The demand for their labour tended to be greater during the harvesting seasons, February to April for tea and March to May for tobacco, because the leaves had to be gathered and processed in time for quality to be maintained. The task of processing: spreading, fermenting and curing of the leaves was undertaken by women and children because the skills required were the same as those used in food processing in the traditional economy.

The absence of reliable statistical data makes it difficult to know the exact numbers, ages and gender of children and youth employed on the Nyasaland plantations and family estates at any particular time. An unofficial labour survey conducted in the Southern Province in early 1927 came up with the following figures:⁵⁶

⁵⁶ MNA S1/428/27 Draft Report on the Labour Survey, March 1927. The survey was conducted by R.H. Murray, Superintendent of Census, "to assist the Provincial Commissioners, Zomba and Blantyre Provinces, in computing the number of labourers available for Public Works, there being at the time an

Table 8.1: Child and Youth Workers by Place of Origin.

	LOCAL		PROTECTORATE		FOREIGNERS	
	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Children</u>
Tobacco	8,320	5,846	4,068	782	3,352	662
Cotton	772	540	947	186	1,893	374
Tea	2,818	1,370	1,084	214	2,105	414
Coffee	202	140	98	20	81	16
Fibre	72	50	132	24	657	128
TOTALS	12,184	7,946	6,329	1,226	8,083	1,594

Source: MNA S1/428/27 Draft Report of a Labour Survey, March 1927.

What these figures show is that the majority of the children employed on the plantations came from the local villages and from within the plantations (under "local"). The second largest group was that of "foreigners", presumably from Mozambique. What the figures do not tell are the exact ages of the children, gender, and criteria used in employing them. The gender of the adult workers is also not known.

The first official labour census was taken in March 1929. It recorded a total of 4,687 women in wage employment. Of these, 4,238 were in "unskilled" jobs - which included

embarrassing shortage of such labour". It was decided not to publish the results as an official report on the labour question because of "its incompleteness, the short time available for its composition, and the absence of statutory power to take evidence rendered it undesirable to give it recognition as an official investigation of a matter which, at that particular time, contained somewhat contentious element". W.B. Davidson-Houston, Acting Governor, to Lord Passfield, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 7/8/29.

carriers and cultivators; 155 in "skilled" jobs - which included clerks, bricklayers, mechanics etc; and 294 in domestic service. The figures for men were: 65,963; 11,927; and 5,441, respectively.⁵⁷ According to a commentary in the Nyasaland Times, the census recorded 23,812 "juveniles" in wage employment, mostly in agriculture and related industries. Of these, 19,411 were boys and 4,401 girls.⁵⁸ In 1930, the Acting Senior Provincial Commissioner (Southern Province) noted that: "the work of children and women is very light and in order to make the work attractive they are given cooked relish in the fields".⁵⁹

In the same year, the Acting Governor Davidson-Houston reported that he and the Governor had seen the children at work and they appeared to like it. "Were they not so employed", Davidson-Houston noted, "they would doubtlessly be less wholesomely occupied in their insanitary villages, and the money they receive from the estates is a help to their

⁵⁷ MNA S1/428/27 Report on the Native Labour Census taken on 15th March, 1929.

⁵⁸ MNA S1/428/27 Extracts from the Nyasaland Times of June 14, 1929.

⁵⁹ MNA S1/1132/30 Report on Labour Conditions. In a memorandum prepared by the Acting Provincial Commissioner (different from the Acting Senior Provincial Commissioner), it was reported that "the employers only arrange for actual preparation of the food during planting season...a break is then called at midday and the employer provides a meal which is in addition to ordinary rations".

parents".⁶⁰ This opinion was not shared by the officials at the Colonial Office and those of the Blantyre Mission. However, it was from 1937 with a circular dispatch from Malcolm MacDonald, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, that colonial officials in Nyasaland began to address the employment of women and children, though still very half-heartedly.

The circular urged officers administering British dependencies to implement certain conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) relating to health and housing conditions - especially on plantations, transportation of workers who came from a distance, and the provision of school facilities for their dependants. It reminded the colonial administrators that:

as you are aware there are a number of international conventions dealing with the employment of women and children, minimum age for employment in industry etc...which have been ratified by His Majesty's Government...All colonial governments should consider whether any of these conventions which have not already been applied to their territories can be so applied and...all necessary steps should be taken to induce legislation to give effect to the conventions in question.⁶¹

A bill on the Employment of Women, Children and Young Persons was introduced in the Legislative Council towards the end of 1937. However, most of the sections dealing with the employment of women were irrelevant to the Nyasaland situation

⁶⁰ PRO C.O.525/137 Davidson-Houston to Passifield 15/3/30, cited in Palmer, "Working Conditions" p.111.

⁶¹ MNA S36/1/10/5 Extracts from a Circular Despatch from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 24/8/37.

concentrating, as they did, on issues of maternity leave and the employment of women at night, in mines, dockyards, railways, and heavy industries. The provisions dealing with the employment of children, among other things, set the employment age at 16 years, forbade the employment of children in mining, railways, heavy "industrial undertakings" and places where engine-operated machines were in motion.

The bill met with very unfavourable reactions from the employers of child and women labour. They requested for "enough time" to have a "close look" at it before it passed. They organised several informal meetings with top members of the Legislative Council including the Attorney General and the Chief Secretary to lobby for support to have a number of key sections of the bill changed. After having been debated "clause by clause" for two full years, the bill finally passed into law on 20th November 1939 with a lot of amendments. For example, the definition of "childrer" was limited to persons under 12 years of age but did not forbid employing them. Those between 12 and 16 years were defined as "young persons" and those between 16 and 18 years as "young adults". The definition of "night" was modified to meet the seasonal labour requirements. In the first quarter of the year "night" was from 6.15 pm to 5.15 am; in the second, from 6 pm to 5.30 am; in the third, from 5.30 pm to 6 am; and in the fourth, from 5.45 pm to 5.15 pm. The bottom line was to make it possible to use child labour between sunrise to sunset.

Most important of all was the inclusion of the clause "other than tea and tobacco" in the definition of "industrial undertaking". It had the effect of legalising the employment of children in any task related to the production and processing of the two crops. Malcolm MacDonald reacted immediately after the bill was passed:

one of the amendments made, namely the insertion of the words "other than tea and tobacco" appears to neutralize, in Nyasaland, the objects of the International Labour Conventions to which the ordinance purports to give effect, and I should have preferred to be consulted in regard to so important an alteration before the revised bill was introduced into the Legislative Council. I find it difficult to agree to the two industries of the Protectorate being excluded from the definition of "industrial undertaking".⁶²

The difficulty confronting the administration in Nyasaland was that the tea and tobacco companies, in addition to being "industrial undertakings" in the sense of having factories or warehouses, were also agricultural undertakings on account of their plantations and farms. While there was no objection to the employment of youth and children in the open air on the plantations and farms, that could not be extended to factories, sheds and warehouses. The law had to be reviewed and amended accordingly, which was done in 1940.

Information from the reports of the Labour Branch of the Native Administration established that year suggests that the law was very ineffective. There were almost no cases of the violation of the law while the numbers of women and children

⁶² MNA S36/1/10/5 Malcolm MacDonald to the Governor, Nyasaland, 22/2/40.

in wage labour continued to rise. In 1941, the Labour Branch (later Department) reported that: "a considerable number of youths under taxpaying age [are] employed in the Protectorate. The number of these is not at present known". In the following year, "seasonal employment" from April to August was obtained by some 2,000 youth between the ages of 14 and 18 in the tobacco packing factories operating in the Protectorate. The average inclusive wage was 9 shillings "per mensem". The youths employed in stemming, which required some skill, were given piece work and some earned as much as 16 shillings "per mensem".⁶¹ No reference was made to the monitoring of the conditions under which the children were employed, working hours, wage rates, and the implementation of the 1940 ordinance.

The report went on to say that an important feature of the employment of women and children was the "generous" midday meal which was provided by the large factories and that the work itself was "extremely popular". The meals may not have been as generous as the report suggested, but they were surely a big attraction for both children and women during times of food scarcity, especially during the rainy season.⁶² The

⁶¹ Yasulab, Interim Report of the Labour Branch, 1942.

⁶² Seasonal shortages were, and still are, a common characteristic of the highland districts. See, for example, MNA, 1932, Secretary, Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, Chief Secretary 15/12/20; M. A. Vaughan, The Story of African Famine: Gender and Famine in Twentieth Century (Cambridge, New York: UP, 1987); L. White, Magomero:

women, who were traditionally responsible for family subsistence, the new Anguru immigrants, and poor tenant families depended on this food in exchange for their labour.

VII

The Post-war Economy

The coming of the Second World War (WWII) contributed to the government's failure to implement the 1940 amended ordinance. The planters would not cooperate with the government in implementing any policy which limited the flow of cheap labour. After all, the government itself contributed to the labour "shortage" by recruiting carriers and soldiers for the war. Thus, in 1941, the planting community decided to request (if not order) the government to suspend the ordinance:

the Committee is of the considered opinion that the provisions under the ordinance of 1939 and 1940, to regulate the Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children, be suspended for the duration of the war and no further Rules, Regulations or restrictions be imposed until hostilities have ceased. The reason for this is that to bring the war to a speedy and successful conclusion, every man, woman and child must put forward a maximum effort in all branches to produce supplies and materials necessary for successful prosecution of the war.⁶⁵

The planters justified their demand by asserting that: "this point, we believe, is appreciated in Britain where school

Portrait of an African Village (Cambridge, New York, CUP 1987) pp.56-7, 66-7, 151-2, and 205-9.

⁶⁵ MNA S36/1/10/5 The Nyasaland Tobacco Exporters' Association Report.

children during school holiday periods are employed for long hours in agriculture and also in other branches of industry where their services can be used".

The "war effort" was a very contentious topic. On several occasions between 1940 and 1943 the Colonial Office had requested Nyasaland to provide soldiers and carriers for the war and to provide training and transit facilities for soldiers from Southern Rhodesia. The Colonial Office had also endorsed the recruitment of farm workers in Nyasaland by Southern Rhodesian farmers for the production of food crops as part of the "war effort". The Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) also applied to the Nyasaland Government for permission to recruit 8,500 workers as "an imperial war effort". After a long exchange of memos, resolutions by the CLAB, and letters to the Secretariat in Zomba, the WNLA quota was reduced to 5,000 but, to the dissatisfaction of the Nyasaland planters, the agreements with the Southern Rhodesian government were left intact.⁶⁶ It did not take long for the Nyasaland planting community to feel the effects of this as "often natives residing on private estates proceeded abroad without their landlords being in any way consulted".⁶⁷ This

⁶⁶ MNA LB3/3/1 Minutes of CLAB Meeting, 22/1/42; G. Thorneycroft to Labour Commissioner, 7/2/42; Minutes of CLAB Meeting, 14/9/43; Minutes of CLAB Meeting, 22/10/43; LB3/3/2 Minutes of CLAB Meeting, 25/7/44; Acting Labour Commissioner to Chief Secretary and to Sir William Tait-Bowie, 4/1/45; Minutes of CLAB Meeting, 20/4/45 and 12/10/45.

⁶⁷ MNA LB3/3/1 Minutes of CLAB meeting, 22/10/43.

gave the settler employers a good justification to request for the suspension of the Employment of Women and Children Ordinance.

The administration capitulated to their demand. The prohibition of the employment of children under the legal age was suspended, much to the resentment of the local missionaries. In 1943, the Archdeacon Winspear, member of the Legislative Council, expressed his dissatisfaction with the government's decision in a memorandum sent through the Nyasaland Christian Council. The administration "made no direct reply".⁶⁸ It was not until three years after the war that the Archdeacon raised the issue again, this time in the Legislative Council, but still without any success.

Meanwhile the numbers of both women and children in wage employment continued to rise, but those of women being lower than those of children. The numbers of women in regular employment at peak period (March) were: 3,420 in 1949; 5,428 in 1950; 6,182 in 1951; 3,205 in 1952; and 1,007 in 1953. The drop in 1952 and 1953 was due to the decline in tea production as a result of poor prices at the London market. The numbers of "young persons" in regular wage employment is represented by the following table:

⁶⁸ MNA LB3/3/2 Extracts from the Record of Proceedings of the meeting of the Legislative Council, 19/7/48.

Table 8.2 : Young Persons (YP) in Regular Employment.

	On 15th March (Peak Period)		On 15th November (Slack Period)	
	YP	Total Labour Force	YP	Total Labour Force
1949	: 16,444	83,054	12,801	68,770
1950	: 14,853	102,760	12,308	91,037
1952	: 19,373	92,053	15,219	75,480
1953	: 15,047	86,693	12,797	73,704

Source: Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Labour Department (Zomba, Government Printer, 1949, 1950, 1952, 1952).

The increase in the 1952 figure was no doubt the result of the crisis in the tea industry (details below). As tea prices fell at the London market the planters reduced their overhead costs by increasing the employment of casual labour, predominantly children, women, and immigrants. One weakness in the above figures is that they show numbers of children and youth in the private sector only. They do not include the children and youth employed in government departments of Agriculture and Forestry which were among the major employers of child and youth labour in the Protectorate. The majority of the youth and children worked in the Southern Province, the centre of the colonial economy, as the following table shows:

**Table 8.3 : Young Persons in the Major Industries by Region.
(Peak Periods Only)**

	<u>1950</u>	<u>1951</u>	<u>1952</u>	<u>1953</u>
	YP / Total	YP / Total	YP / Total	YP / Total
SOUTHERN PROVINCE				
Tea	6,783/35,045	9,566/43,555	8,781/38,469	6,435/31,803
Tobacco	3,000/10,966	4,669/15,362	3,849/11,702	2,989/10,619
Tung	1,529/ 3,736	995/ 2,649	679/ 1,558	1,133/ 2,885
Mixed				
Farming	965/ 3,018	1,676/ 5,222	2,537/ 8,369	1,829/ 5,620
Brick/ Const.	495/ 712	312/ 2,044	80/ 1,179	71/ 874
CENTRAL PROVINCE				
Tobacco	654/ 4,739	1,040/5,310	1,148/5,354	866/ 3,464
NORTHERN PROVINCE				
Tung	201 / 904	200/ 910	200/1,053	- -
Rice	53 / 400	50/ 380	- -	- -
Rubber	23 / 524	50/ 453	- -	- -

Source: Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Reports of the Labour Department, 1950, 1951, 1952 and 1953.

Total stands for the total labour force in that particular industry that year. **YP/Total** stands for young Persons out of the total labour force.

Since the tobacco estates in the Central Province depended on tenant labour for the most part, it can only be concluded that the majority of children and youth were part of the tenant labour force in that province. Figures for the Northern Province are rough estimates which do not reflect the reality - evidenced by the repetition of the figure 200 in three consecutive years and the figure 50 in rice and tobacco. The tung and rubber estates in Mzuzu and Nkhata Bay (West Nyasa district), respectively, employed more people than

recorded in the table. However, employment opportunities in the Northern Province were generally very limited. Apart from the industries mentioned in the table, a considerable number of children and youth were also employed by missionaries; in brick-making, soap-manufacturing, storekeeping, cotton production, maize-milling, domestic service, and a variety of casual tasks.

VI

Working Conditions, Reactions, and Legislation

Working conditions for the children and youth in the major industries, especially tea and tobacco, were very bad. The children worked long hours, often from daybreak to very late in the afternoon or evening. A 30 minute midday break was provided during which they were given food consisting of maize meal, gaiwa, and beans or salt. No meat, fish, or vegetables were provided. Since they were still part of their parents' family units, they were not entitled to weekly rations or posho, food allowance, to which all other workers were entitled. They were allowed to take home only the remains of their lunch. First aid attention, if available, was given when and where necessary. Very few estates had first aid facilities in case of accidents, and cases were often left until too late for effective treatment. There was no protection against adverse weather conditions. After the Second World War, wages

ranged from 2 to 6 shillings a week, depending on the children's age and ability, plus half rations or 3 pence posho. Casual work, ganyo, which was the children's major occupation, was paid for on a daily basis and according to the amount of work done.⁶⁹

In the factories and warehouses, this account from the Director of Medical Services serves as a good summary of the working conditions:

children were sitting down on boxes opposite long tables. They looked, and were weary. Conditions in the place they worked were not good; the sheds were hot and there was a lot of dust in the air some of which must have been tobacco dust. The sheds being large were badly lit and ventilated, they had iron roofs and no ceiling. The children had been at work since morning. This class of work, for the long hours and the conditions seen, is unsuitable for children.⁷⁰

He also noted that there was a "considerable amount of coughing" in the factory. Some factories provided respirators, but only a few were worn and "they were very dirty".

The employers saw their role as agents of socialization. They saw nothing wrong in employing children. They maintained that the work was "light and suitable for children and young persons". Above all, the children were "well fed, disciplined to some extent, taught useful work, and altogether trained to

⁶⁹ For categories of workers and wage structures see MNA S1/1132/30 Report on Labour Conditions, Southern Province, 1930; S1/428/27 Draft Report on the Labour Survey, Southern Province, 1927; Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1948; Palmer, "Working Conditions" pp.108-116.

⁷⁰ MNA S36/1/10/5 Director of Medical Services to Chief Secretary, 26/9/41.

become desirable citizens as opposed to the thousands of drones who infested the villages and were thus a liability both to the country and their fellow natives".⁷¹ They also argued that both the children and their parents consented to child wage labour: "those who are anxious to attend school depend upon this seasonal work to earn the necessary school fees and purchase a few personal requirements in the way of clothing etc".⁷²

Though "certain planters [had] erected schools for the education of the children of their tenants",⁷³ children attending school during this time were probably fewer than those working for the planters in general. There were very few schools in the Protectorate to take in large numbers of children. In fact, the majority of those attending school were adults. It is true that both children and their parents needed the money from child wage labour. The reason for this had to do with the economic conditions of the families on the plantations and in the villages neighbouring them. With limited economic opportunities, parents looked to child and

⁷¹ MNA S36/1/10/5 Nyasaland Tobacco Exporters' Association, Report by the Committee Appointed to report on the Employment in the Tobacco Industry of Women, Young Persons and Children under the Ordinance of 1939 and 1940, Limbe, 21/8/41. Also in MNA LB3/3/1 Minutes of CLAB meeting, 9/10/41.

⁷² MNA S36/1/10/5 The Nyasaland Tobacco Exporters' Association Report; MNA LB3/3/1 Minutes of CLAB meeting, 9/10/41.

⁷³ MNA S1/1132/30 Acting Provincial Commissioner, Memorandum on Labour Conditions in the Southern Province, 1930.

youth wage labour as an important source of cash income.

Evidence of parental resistance to child labour is almost non-existent in official records. This could be a reflection of the encouragement the children received from the parents. It could also be due to the simple fact that it was not recorded by the officials. The children themselves were reported to have been, at times, quite uncontrollable. They were "in and out of the factory all the time, knocking off work whenever they felt like, and especially if they found something more interesting with which to occupy their time".⁷⁴ Chief Bvumbwe of Thyolo, in whose area children were employed in large numbers on tobacco and tea estates, officially protested against the employment of children because it militated against their regular school attendance which he regarded as a retarding factor in the development of the native communities.

In contrast, Chief Mwase of Kasungu, the only African member of the Central Labour Advisory Board at the time, visited Conforzi tea factory in the same Cholo district in September 1941. Mwase "found children of about 14, 15, 16, years working there, they were not very young, they were happy, their work was easy, and there was not so much dust. These boys got 3 shillings and 10 pence per week". However, he

⁷⁴ MNA S36/1/10/5 The Nyasaland Tobacco Exporters' Association Report; MNA LB3/3/1 Memorandum on the Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Ordinance, 30/9/41. This sounds like a normal children's behaviour.

"agreed that the native was backward and that children should be encouraged to go to school and if they worked long hours they could not go".⁷⁵ Conforzi was a well-capitalized tea company and thus probably not a good place to look for poor working conditions.⁷⁶

The Chief did not look into ethical and health factors involved in the employment of children. These were addressed by the Director of Medical Services, whose argument was that "from a medical point of view, working under such conditions was detrimental to the physical and mental development of the children". He was "quite satisfied that in England work of this nature would be very strongly controlled".⁷⁷ Authorities at the Blantyre mission held a similar view. They also regarded the employment of children as "uneconomic [and] retarding the development of the country [which] was very much in the same position as England in the 1840s when there was a great deal of child labour, much of it very lowly paid, and in very bad conditions of work". They cautioned: "we shall not get this country to prosper if there is any tendency to use

⁷⁵ MNA LB3/3/1 Minutes of CLAB meeting, 9/10/41.

⁷⁶ For details on I. Conforzi see K.J. McCracken, "Economics and Ethnicity: The Italian Community in Malawi" in JAH vol.32 (1991) pp.313-332, and by the same author, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State: The Impact of the Native Tobacco Board in the Central Province of Malawi" in Journal of Southern African Studies vol.9 no.2 (April 1983) p.177.

⁷⁷ MNA LB3/3/1 Minutes of CLAB meeting, 9/10/41. Also in the debate on Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Ordinance in S36/1/10/5.

child labour or the labour of young persons where adults might be employed and kept in the country".⁷⁸

The importance of child and female wage labour in the tea industry increased in the 1950s. This was largely due to the agrarian crisis which began with the outbreak of a severe famine in 1949.⁷⁹ The famine forced large numbers of adult males to leave wage employment and turn to food production between 1950 and 1953. As a result, the labour "shortage" was more pronounced than in previous years. "Large quantities" of tea were lost in the Mlanje and Cholo districts owing to the lack of labour offering for plucking operations at the critical time. The gap was partially filled by women and children working to survive the after effects of the famine.⁸⁰ The sudden decline in tea prices in 1952 forced planters to temporarily reduce the numbers of regular wage workers (refer Table 8.3), while increasing the numbers of casual labourers who were predominantly women and children. By 1953, "both women and children [were] employed to a considerable extent in

⁷⁸ MNA LB3/3/2 Extracts from the Record of Proceedings of the meeting of the Legislative Council, 9/7/48.

⁷⁹ See M.A. Vaughan, The Story of an African Famine: Gender and Famine in Twentieth-Century Malawi (Cambridge, London and New York, 1987); and by the same author, "Famine Analysis and Family Relations: 1949 in Nyasaland" in Past and Present no.108 (1985) pp.177-205; R.W. Kettlewell, Agricultural Change in Nyasaland, 1945-1960 (Stanford, Food Research Institute, Stanford University, 1965) pp.239-243.

⁸⁰ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Labour Department 1950 and 1951.

agriculture, but women usually as casual labour",⁸¹ while children and Mozambican immigrants formed the bulk of the regular labour force.

The number of casual labourers in the tea industry was recorded at 3,810 in March 1954. Of these, 2,775, (or 75 per cent) were women, 700 (or 18 per cent) were "young persons" and 335 (or 9 per cent) were men,⁸² mostly immigrants from Mozambique. The tea industry began to recover from 1955 but the numbers of casual workers continued to rise due to the effects of the agrarian crisis. Prices for African-grown tobacco heavily fluctuated throughout the 1950s, resulting in an increase in labour migration. Some migrants destined for Southern Rhodesia were joined by their wives and children. About 1,106 women and 1,350 "juveniles" left the country for Southern Rhodesia in 1952 alone, some accompanied by adult male migrants, and others on their own.⁸³ Within the country, part of the labour of women and children formerly employed in cash-cropping became "casual labour" on the tea plantations. By 1958, the number of casual workers in the tea industry, predominantly women, children, and immigrants, had steadily risen to 12,038.

The combination of increased labour migration, on the one

⁸¹ Ibid., 1953 p.9.

⁸² Nyasaland Protectorate, Report of the Labour Branch, 1954; Palmer, "Working Conditions" p.112.

⁸³ Ibid., p.16; see also MNA S36/1/2/6 Native Female Immigration into South Africa.

hand, and the resilience of the tea industry, on the other hand, played an important role in the transformations in African commercial fishing between the 1950s and 1960s. The tea plantations continued to provide the fishermen and fish-traders with a ready market for their fish. The 1950s also experienced an expansion in the urban African population as a result of the beginning of manufacturing industries in Limbe and Blantyre. Thus, despite the agrarian crisis, the fishing industry continued to expand. The next chapter will, therefore, focus on the relationship between the agrarian crisis, labour migration, and the fishing industry.

CHAPTER NINE

MIGRANCY AND THE AGRARIAN CRISIS

The number of identity certificates issued annually for travel abroad remained fairly constant for several years prior to 1950, but since that date migration has increased sharply and in particular to Southern Rhodesia.¹ This is thought to have been largely due to the fall in the price of fire-cured tobacco...²

The literature on colonial, as well as present^{day} Malawi, often cites increased levels of labour migration as an indicator of "rural poverty" or agrarian crisis.³ Conclusions are often drawn from one or two sets of statistical data usually taken uncritically or with very little analysis.⁴ There is no detailed historical study which analyses changes in the levels

¹ Colonial Office, Report on the Nyasaland Protectorate for the Year 1954 (London, HMSO, 1955) p.25. Hereinafter Nyasaland Annual Report.

² Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1951, p.11.

³ See, for example, L. Vail, "The Making of an Imperial Slum: Nyasaland and its Railways, 1895-1935" in Journal of African History (JAH, vol.16 no.1 (1975) pp.111-112; and by the same author, "The State and the Creation of Colonial Malawi's Agricultural Economy" in R.I. Rotberg (ed), Colonialism, Imperialism, and Hunger: East and Central Africa (Lexington, Lexington Books, 1984) pp.39-87; "Peasants, Migrants, and Plantations: A Study of the Growth of Malawi's Economy" in Journal of Social Science (JSS), University of Malawi, vol.11 (1984) pp.1-36; C. Lienau, A Preliminary Report on Labour Migration and Agricultural Development in Malawi, Africa (Munster, Institut fur Geographie, Westfalische Wilhelms Universitat, June 1980).

⁴ For a good discussion on statistics on migrant labour from Malawi see G. Coleman, "International Labour Migration from Malawi, 1875-1966" in JSS vol.2 (1973) pp.31-46, and by the same author, "Regional and District Origins of Migrant Labour from Malawi" in JSS vol.6 (1977) pp.44-59.

of labour migration in relation to transformations in the country's agriculture. Of late, some economists have attempted to relate the return of labour migrants in the 1970s to changes in the country's post-independence economy and its labour demands.⁵ Although these authors refer to the pattern of labour migration during the colonial period, their focus is on the more recent developments.

Historical evidence suggests a complex relationship between local economies, their labour demands, and increased levels of labour migration during the colonial period. The preceding chapters have demonstrated that there were times when labour migration increased simultaneously with improved economic performance at home. The present chapter presents two arguments: first, that increased labour migration in the post-depression period was a reflection of changes in the regional labour markets. Intense competition for labour at the regional level gave the Malawian migrants greater freedom of movement and choice of labour markets; second, that it was only from the 1950s that there was a direct relationship between agrarian crisis and increased labour migration in some parts

⁵ See J. Kydd and R. Christiansen, "Structural Changes in Malawi since Independence: Consequences of a Development Strategy based on Large-scale Agriculture" in World Development vol.10. no.5 (1982) pp.355-375; and by the same authors, "The Return of Malawian Labour from South Africa and Zimbabwe" in The Journal of Modern African Studies (JMS) vol.21 no.2 (1983) pp.311-326.; R. Christiansen, "The Pattern of Internal Migration in Response to Structural Change in the Economy of Malawi, 1966-77" in Development and Change (SAGE) vol.15 (1984) pp.125-151.

of the country, notably the Southern and Central Provinces. The crisis was caused by climatic conditions and falling prices of the main cash crops. Increased labour migration was caused by falling returns from cash-cropping. Contributory factors included: land shortages in the Shire Highlands and the effects of the 1949 famine.

For evidence on the changing levels of migration, the chapter analyses two sets of statistical information: figures on organized recruiting, and the issue of Identification Certificates (IDs). These are discussed in combination with official accounts in archival sources. The account of the agrarian crisis is drawn primarily from colonial office reports on the Nyasaland Protectorate. Department of Agriculture files are still closed under the Malawi National Archives forty year rule. Given that the colonial reports were summaries of all the departmental reports, there is no doubt that the information they contain would match that in the reports of the Department of Agriculture, possibly with some minor discrepancies. By comparing the information on levels of migration to that on agricultural production in the 1950s, one conclusion comes out clearly: it was only in the 1950s that there was a direct link between rural crisis and high levels of labour migration. It will be demonstrated in the next chapter that as far as the lakeshore areas were concerned, the crisis was successfully contained by investing proceeds of migrancy in commercial fishing and fish-trading. By the 1960s

and 1970s, the majority of the fishermen and fish-traders had moved well beyond survival and subsistence to accumulation.

I

Regional Competition for Nyasaland Labour

It is important to understand the regional competition for Nyasaland labour from the mid-1930s because it impacted on the restructuring of the local economies, especially commercial fishing and fish-trading. The pattern of migration also changed. The majority of the recruits came from the Central and Southern Province because of the competition between the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) and the Rhodesia Native Labour Supply Commission (RNLSC). Both of these had their main recruiting stations in the southern and central regions. These made it easier for men to migrate.

After 1920, the South African Chamber of Mines "worked vigorously to enlarge its labour supplies and expand its influence".⁶ Its objective was to penetrate the labour sources

⁶ J. Crush, A. Jeeves and D. Yudelman, South Africa's Labor Empire: A History of Black Migrancy to the Gold Mines (Boulder, Westview Press, 1991) p.33 and chapter 2; MNA S36/1/2/2 and S36/1/2/3 Clandestine Immigration into the Union of South Africa, 1940-41 and 1941-44, respectively; S36/2/4 Reports of the Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia Labour Representative, Johannesburg Labour Office, 1941-48; S36/3/2/5 Labour Conditions in Southern Africa, 1939-41; S36/3/2/5 Nyasaland Protectorate/G.N. Burden, Nyasaland Natives in the Union of South Africa (Zomba, Government Printer, 1940) pp.7-8.

of Bechuanaland, Northern and Southern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland. In early 1934, the Union government permitted the recruitment of a limited number of workers from Bechuanaland as an experiment.⁷ The embargo on the employment of "tropicals" in the mines was lifted in 1935, and permission was granted to the WNLA to apply to the Nyasaland government for the recruitment of between 2,000 and 3,000 workers.⁸

The WNLA was not the only organization interested in Nyasaland workers during this time. Southern Rhodesia followed Britain off the gold standard and began an active campaign for labour in its neighbouring territories. As far as Nyasaland was concerned, the competition intensified from the mid-1930s for three reasons: first, Northern Rhodesia and Tanganyika had joined the competition. The Copperbelt, the Lupa Goldfields and the sisal and groundnuts plantations of southern Tanganyika were all interested in Nyasaland labour. Second, within South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, the mining companies, farmers and manufacturers competed for this labour among themselves. The growing political power of farmers in both countries in the 1930s and throughout the 1940s played an important role in shaping labour markets in the region in the subsequent decades, though the South African farmers never got

⁷ MNA S36/2/3/6 and S36/3/2/5 Burden; Nyasaland Natives in the Union of South Africa p.6.

⁸ MNA S1/1225/22 Secretary of External Affairs, Johannesburg, South Africa, to Chief Secretary, Zomba, Nyasaland, 5/9/35; S36/2/3/6 and S36/3/2/5 Burden, Nyasaland Natives in the Union of South Africa p.7.

the permission to recruit independently in the northern countries. Third, this was a period of the expansion of the tea industry in Nyasaland itself. Tea, being a perennial crop, gave rise to a typical colonial plantation economy. Its labour demands were quite different from those of the annual crops - cotton and tobacco - which had preceded it.

Intense competition for labour among these interests was accompanied by much political manoeuvring. Starting from late 1934 the Union Government began to negotiate with the Nyasaland Government for the experimental engagement of labour for the Rand Mines. An agreement was reached in 1935 whereby a Nyasaland company, the London and Blantyre Supply Company Ltd of Lilongwe, would act as agents for the WNLA. The Nyasaland government hoped that by using an internal agent, recruiting activities would be controlled and planter protest minimized. This device did not help. The planters and missionaries made representations to the government against recruiting. Their argument was that large-scale labour migration of the country's males disrupted family life and caused social and moral degradation in the villages.

In the same year, the government appointed a Committee (the Travers Lacey Commission) to inquire into emigrant labour.⁹ One of its recommendations was that: "no control can be exercised over the movement of the individual and no

⁹ MNA COM-8/1 Committee to Enquire into Emigrant Labour, 1935.

adequate protection can be secured unless statutory agreements are entered into with neighbouring territories".¹⁰ The agreement which the Committee wanted would provide that movement of all contracted or uncontracted labourers be governed by a quota system; that all conditions under which labourers may be recruited and employed be enforced; that all the governments co-operate in the taxation of the labourers, the forwarding of deferred pay, family remittances, and in repatriation of the workers after the contracted period; and that the Nyasaland government be allowed to station a Labour Commissioner in the neighbouring territories. The Labour Commissioner would act as Consul for the Nyasaland workers, to promote their welfare and inspect places of work. For its part, the Southern Rhodesian government wanted an agreement which would give it a leg up over South Africa. The two northern territories rejected the idea.

In 1936, Nyasaland entered into the Tripartite Labour Agreement (TLA), or Inter-territorial Labour Agreement (ITLA), with the two Rhodesias "with a view to keeping trace of migrant native labour"¹¹ and "to ensure attention to the

¹⁰ MNA COM-8/1 Report on Emigrant Labour, chapter xii, sections 167-185.

¹¹ MNA S36/1/1/1 Agreement on Migrant Labour Concluded at Salisbury on 21st August, 1936. S36/1/2/9 Migrant Native Labour: Agreement between the Governments of Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Some terms of the agreement were changed in 1940 and 1942 when the agreement was renewed.

varying needs of the three countries".¹² First priority would be given to each country's internal labour needs and only "free" labour would be allowed to migrate, no "active recruiting" would be permitted in Nyasaland. The two Rhodesias conceded to several demands made by the Nyasaland government: on deferred pay; family remittances; repatriation after two years; no recruiting without a government permit; and the stationing of a Labour Commissioner in Salisbury. For its part, the Nyasaland government would allow selufu, "free", emigration of labourers who had obtained a valid identity certificate, chitupa or situpa, "passport", and would provide facilities for forwarding the labourers to Southern Rhodesia. From 1938, the Southern Rhodesia government sponsored a "free" transport system, the Southern Rhodesia Free Migrant Labour Transport Service, popularly known as Ulere, a Chinyanja or Chichewa word for "free". The service was meant to benefit the Southern Rhodesian tobacco farmers who were constantly short of labour. The Southern Rhodesian tobacco industry began to recover from the Depression in the mid-1930s and thus its labour demand increased.

In the early 1940s, Southern Rhodesian tobacco and maize farmers were allowed to apply individually for a Governor's Permit to engage Nyasaland workers within Nyasaland. The permits were usually granted after approval by the Central

¹² MNA S36/1/1/1 Colonial Office/G. St. John Orde-Brown, Report on Labour Conditions in Northern Rhodesia (London, HMSO, 1938) pp.50-53.

Labour Advisory Board (CLAB) established in 1939 "to advise the government from time to time on matters regarding the welfare, supply and employment of native manpower for all activities both internal and external".¹³ Its appointment was partly a result of a recommendation by the Nyasaland Convention of Associations, the representative body of all the planter, social and commercial associations, upon recognition that labour emigration could not be prevented by force,¹⁴ and partly also because of the introduction of the ITLA.¹⁵

The functioning of the CLAB reflected the growing political power of the Nyasaland settlers who dominated its proceedings. No permits were granted for the engagement of more than 100 workers at a time, and to individuals with a poor record in their treatment of workers. Some of the big Rhodesian companies, such as the Imperial Tobacco Group (ITG), Siemens, and the Rhodesia Mortgage and Debenture Trust, with subsidiaries in Nyasaland, and the individual farmers who had left Nyasaland during the Depression, or had friends and

¹³ MNA LB3/1/1 Minutes of the First Meeting of the Central Labour Advisory Board, Zomba, 7th August, 1940.

¹⁴ MNA S36/1/1/1 Secretary of the Convention of Association to Chief Secretary: Motion by the Convention, 24/7/39.

¹⁵ Northern Rhodesia had a similar board, the Native Industrial Labour Board, NILAB, established along the lines of the Trades Board in the United Kingdom. The Nyasaland CLAB was first established as a sub-committee of the Economic Council. It became an independent Advisory Board in December, 1939, after receiving approval from the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

family members within Nyasaland, were able to evade the restrictions and secure permits for more than 100 workers.¹⁶ Other applicants, however, had to accept strict conditions concerning remittance of deferred pay family support, repatriation of workers after one year's service, provision of transport facilities; and all wages to be paid in cash at a rate of not less than 10 shillings for the first four months, gradually rising to between 15 shillings and £1 for the subsequent six months. They were subjected to unannounced inspection visits by the Nyasaland Labour Commissioner stationed in Salisbury. No permit was given to the individuals who did not meet these demands,¹⁷ though once the labour was recruited very few employers abided by the conditions.

There were several ways of getting round the restrictions. For those who had estates in both Nyasaland and Southern Rhodesia, they simply transferred their tenants on a seasonal basis. CLAB members feared that this would lead to abuse as Southern Rhodesian farmers were bound to acquire undeveloped freehold land in Nyasaland for the purposes of recruiting labour for their Southern Rhodesian estates.¹⁸ Another way was by using the ulere service itself. Very often

¹⁶ See MNA LB3/1/1 Minutes of CLAB Meetings, 28/5/37; 20/7/37; 27/8/37; 19/11/37; 14/1/38; 3/6/38.

¹⁷ See MNA LB3/3/1 Central Labour Advisory Board: Appointments and Constitution, 1940-1941; LB3/3/2 Proceedings of Meetings of the Central Labour Advisory Board; 1944-1947; LB4/1/2 Native Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1940-1942.

¹⁸ MNA LB3/1/1 Minutes of CLAB Meeting, 27/8/37.

the service by-passed both government officials and recruiters.¹⁹ Well-capitalized Southern Rhodesia tobacco and citrus fruit farmers operated their own ulere services using Nyasaland capitaos to recruit workers within Nyasaland. The capitaos were given money to purchase railway tickets and forward the labourers to Southern Rhodesia. Lorries belonging to individual Southern Rhodesian farmers often crossed the Nyasaland-PEA border to pick up labourers, especially in the border districts of Nyasaland.²⁰ The Nyasaland government was incapable of preventing them.

A similar situation existed between Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. Northern and eastern Transvaal farmers "pounced upon" labourers from the northern territories as they attempted to cross the Limpopo.²¹ Between 1936 and 1940, the Southern Rhodesia government stepped up the campaign among its northern neighbours against "the seepage" of northern workers into South Africa. In 1938, a call was made for a conference to find ways of stopping the "seepage".²² It needs to be

¹⁹ MNA S36/1/1/1 Burden, Report on Labour Conditions p.18.

²⁰ See MNA NSF4/1/3 South Nyasa District Annual Report, 1930.

²¹ MNA LB1/2/1 Influx of Northern Natives into the Union of South Africa, 1938-1939. S36/1/2/3 Report of the Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia Labour Commissioner, Johannesburg, 1940. See also the 1941 Report.

²² MNA S1/1225/22 Herbert S. Stanley to Harold Kittermaster, 3/1/38; Kittermaster to Stanley, 8/1/38. MNA LB1/4/1 Minutes of the Standing Committee on Migrant Labour, Salisbury, 22/8/39.

emphasised however that the Southern Rhodesian government was not able to regulate the movement of workers even within its own borders. To do so would have adversely affected the inter-regional flow of labour and possibly jeopardized the interests of employers, particular in the south-west. The Rhodesian authorities prepared draft legislation in effect to close the Limpopo border, but was never passed. The legislation would have conflicted with the International Labour Organization (ILO) campaign to regulate labour migration in Africa and ensure that workers could sell their labour in the best markets. Also, it could possibly have been vetoed by the Colonial Office which had sanctioned the recruiting and "free" flow of Nyasaland labour to South Africa.

This did not stop the Southern Rhodesian campaign. Several representations were made to the Union Government to respect the ITLA terms, but: "no Union Government [would] ever feel able to help in this respect".²³ Several factors were responsible for this. To begin with, the South African government had permitted recruiting "right up to the border of Southern Rhodesia and even extending into Southern Rhodesia" itself.²⁴ The South African government was itself under

²³ See MNA S36/1/2/3 J.M. Stanley to D.M. Mackenzie-Kennedy, 10/10/40; J.C. Smuts to G.M. Huggins 4/10/40; Mackenzie-Kennedy to H. Stanley, 18/10/40; Huggins to Smuts, 9/10/40 and 26/10/40.

²⁴ MNA LB1/4/1 Memorandum on Proceedings of a Meeting of the Standing Committee on Migrant Labour, Salisbury, 3rd-4th December, 1937.

pressure from various Farmers' Unions to allow the employment of northern workers on their farms.²⁵ Very often northern workers were compelled to contract with northern and eastern Transvaal farmers.²⁶ With the implementation of the Urban Areas Act in 1938 (passed in 1937), there was an active campaign to discourage the employment of northern workers in towns, channelling them to farming districts of Bethal, Nelspruit, Rustenburg and others. For this reason, the Act was dubbed as the "Farm Labour Act".

This did not, at all, solve the South African farmers' labour problems. The Act did not work and was abandoned after a short trial. Throughout the 1940s, the Transvaal farmers continued to experience labour "shortages".²⁷ In 1946, the government introduced a system of waylaying and rounding up northern workers attempting to enter the Union, giving them the option of contracting for farm labour or being deported.²⁸

²⁵ MNA S1/1225/22 E. Warren, Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia Labour Officer, Johannesburg, to Labour Commissioner, Zomba, 4/12/39.

²⁶ MNA S1/1225/22 Warren to Labour Commissioner, 4/12/39; S1/270/36 J.C. Abraham, Senior Provincial Commissioner, Southern Province, Investigations of the General Conditions under which Nyasaland Natives are Employed in the Union of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, 1938; and S1/270A/36 Report on Nyasaland Natives in the Union of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia.

²⁷ MNA S36/1/2/3 Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia Labour Officer's Reports, 1940-1941, S36/1/2/4 May 1944 Report, and 1946 Annual Report.

²⁸ MNA S36/1/2/4 Report of the Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia Labour Commissioner, 1946.

The system was not all that air-tight. A lot of the immigrants managed to avoid immigration officials, crossing the Limpopo on foot several miles away from the immigration stations, or crossing Beit Bridge at night.²⁹ The Southern Rhodesian government was itself incapable of stopping the "seepage". Though a proposal was made for a "labour free zone" on both sides of the Limpopo, Southern Rhodesia had neither the personnel nor the resources to police its borders.

During, and after the Second World War (WWII), Southern Rhodesia experienced critical food shortages. Negotiations were undertaken with the Nyasaland government for the recruitment of workers for food production. In 1946, the Agricultural Native Labour Ltd (ANLL) of Southern Rhodesia was given a Governor's Permit to recruit upto 5,000 Nyasaland workers for food production. The results were disappointing. By December 1947, only 1,426 had been recruited.³⁰ Partly because of this failure, and partly also because of the need to distribute Nyasaland workers evenly among the various sectors of the economy, the Southern Rhodesian government established the Rhodesian Native Labour Supply Commission (RNLSC),³¹ popularly known in Nyasaland as Mthandizi, "the

²⁹ See MNA S36/1/2/3 Report of the Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia Labour Officer, 1940.

³⁰ MNA LB3/3/2 Minutes of CLAB Meeting, 17/12/47. See also S36/1/1/5 Recruitment of Agricultural Labour for Southern Rhodesia.

³¹ MNA LB3/3/2 Minutes of CLAB Meeting, 24/2/47.

helper".³²

Representatives of the Commission visited Nyasaland in February, 1947 to apply for up to 10,000 workers. The permission was granted, partly as a way of reducing the influence of the WNLA in Nyasaland, and partly also because of the ITLA terms - that the three northern territories would have the first call on "their" labour resources. The Southern Rhodesian government hoped that using a centralized recruiting organization instead of individuals with Governor's Permits would be the best way to compete with the WNLA in the tropical areas. All individual permits were subsequently abolished.

The RNLSC appointed G.H. Spicer, former Nyasaland Labour Officer in Southern Rhodesia, as its representative in Nyasaland. It was hoped that Spicer's experience with Nyasaland migrants and his close association with the Nyasaland planters and Southern Rhodesian employers, would be a big advantage to the Commission. Within just a few months of the granting of the permit, the Commission established a network of depots and sub-stations in Fort Johnston, Salima, Ncheu, Dedza, Lilongwe, Dowa and Mzimba. It also took over part of the quota granted to ANLL, which ceased its operations in 1948. The Commission's lorries brought workers from all the district stations to the railhead at Salima, and later Balaka

³² It was called Mthandizi, "the helper", because it "helped" migrants secure "good jobs" and "better terms". See MNA S36/1/1/5 Recruitment of Agricultural Labour for Southern Rhodesia.

as well, and thus ulere became synonymous with Mthandizi.

Meanwhile, in South Africa the competition between the mining companies and farmers continued, with the latter gaining more government support after the coming to power of the National Party in 1948. William Gemmill, the WNLA liaison officer in Southern Rhodesia, continued negotiations with the northern territories.³³ He carried his "propaganda battle for the mines into the diplomatic arena, including the ILO in Geneva".³⁴ A delegation of the ILO visited South Africa and the northern territories in 1938/39 to inspect labour conditions.³⁵ To Gemmill, the visit was important in his justification for increasing the WNLA recruiting quotas in the northern territories which were, by this time, influenced by Britain to adhere to the terms of the ILO Conventions on migrant labour and social justice for workers and their families.³⁶ South Africa was not a signatory to these conventions; and despite all his efforts Gemmill was unable to secure the full quotas allocated to the WNLA in Nyasaland. It

³³ For details see files MNA S36/2/1/1 - S36/2/3/6 and S36/3/2/1 - S36/3/2/3; Gemmill to Chief Secretary, Zomba, 9/4/42; Gemmill to Kennedy, 25/4/42; Gemmill, Memorandum on WNLA Activities in the Northern Territories, 26/9/42.

³⁴ See Crush, Jeeves, and Yudelman, South Africa's Labor Empire p.50 and chapter 2.

³⁵ MNA S36/3/2/2 International Labour Office, Report of A Delegation to the Union of South Africa, 1938-1939.

³⁶ See, for example, MNA S36/2/3/4 Migration for Employment Convention, 1939; Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor, Nyasaland, 18/11/47.

was only from the 1950s and particularly from the 1960s that tropical recruiting began to justify the investment efforts the South African Chamber of Mines had devoted to it over the previous twenty years.

The same applied to the RNLSC, the ANLL, and all the other organizations and individuals who had obtained permits to recruit Nyasaland labour. Whenever the workers were approached, the first response was: "no bwana!".³⁷ The numbers of workers recruited thus fell "far short of expectations".³⁸ For example, in 1948, ANLL recruited only 516 workers. Of the 10,000 the RNLSC applied for, only 1,120 were recruited.³⁹ Of the 8,000 applied for in 1949, only 2,248 were recruited. The quota for 1950 was the same as in 1949, but only 1,935 were recruited.⁴⁰ The WNLA had the same experience. Out of the 8,500 quota for 1946/47, only 7,827 were recruited. In 1948, the quota was increased to 12,500 in the hope that more would be recruited, only 10,188 were obtained. The quota was reduced

³⁷ MNA S18/2/3/2 Extracts from The Rhodesian Herald, 13/12/46.

³⁸ MNA LB3/3/2 CLAB, Precis for the Executive Council, August, 1947.

³⁹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Labour Department for the Year Ending 31st December, 1948 (Zomba, Government Printer, 1949) p.9.

⁴⁰ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1949, p.11; 1950, p.10. See also MNA LB3/3/2 Chairman, to All CLAB Members, 7/5/47.

to 10,000 in 1950, and 8,619 were obtained.⁴¹

The figures for the rest of the 1950s were as follows:

Table 9.1: Quotas for South Africa and Southern Rhodesia.

<u>Year</u>	<u>South Africa</u>		<u>Southern Rhodesia</u>	
	<u>Quota</u>	<u>Recruited</u>	<u>Quota</u>	<u>Recruited</u>
1951	8,000	7,828	8,000	3,742
1952	8,000	6,501	8,000	4,654
1953	10,000	6,974	8,000	6,978
1954	10,000	9,844	8,000	6,504
1955	12,600	taken up	10,000	7,479
1956	14,000	taken up	10,000	8,196
1957	16,000	taken up	14,000	6,945
1958	18,000	taken up	14,000	8,647
1959	20,000	taken up	- -	- -

Source: Nyasaland Protectorate Annual Reports (London, HMSO, 1951-1959).

The above figures do not specify the districts from which the workers were recruited. Evidence indicates that it was common for Nyasaland migrants to be recruited outside the country on their way to the south, as well as inside South Africa and Southern Rhodesia.⁴² The figures might also have included considerable numbers of Tanganyikan workers recruited in

⁴¹ MNA LB 3/3/2 Chairman, to All CLAB Members, 5/10/47 and Minutes of CLAB Meeting, 17/12/47; Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1950, p.10. The 1950 report put the figure of recruits at 7,889.

⁴² MNA LB3/3/2 Minutes of CLAB Meeting, 14/12/51, also in LB4/1/1 Minutes of CLAB Meetings; Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1952 p.16.

Nyasaland.⁴³ More important of all, the figures show just a partial picture of Nyasaland labour migration given the levels of selufu migration.

The unreliability of statistical information on recruitment in Nyasaland can be judged from the discrepancies in the figures above and those from Southern Rhodesian sources as in the table below:⁴⁴

Table 9.3 : Nyasaland Workers Recruited by the RNLSC, 1950-56.

<u>1950</u>	<u>1951</u>	<u>1952</u>	<u>1953</u>	<u>1954</u>	<u>1955</u>	<u>1956</u>
1,872	4,098	5,608	7,090	6,411	6,185	10,337

Source: Southern Rhodesia, Report of the Urban African Affairs Commission, 1958 (Salisbury, Government Printer, 1958) p.14.

In some years, the figures recorded in Southern Rhodesia were higher than those recorded in Nyasaland. This would suggest that some of the workers were recruited outside Nyasaland.

It is difficult to explain the high figures in the Nyasaland data during the years for which the Southern Rhodesian figures were low. Three possible explanations can be given. First, the workers were of non-Nyasaland origin but recruited in Nyasaland. On arrival in Southern Rhodesia, they were listed under their country of origin. The same can also

⁴³ See MNA LB3/3/2 Minutes of CLAB Meeting, 7/9/51.

⁴⁴ I am grateful to Elias Mandala for providing this information.

be said of the years during which the Southern Rhodesian figures were higher than those recorded in Nyasaland: the workers were from Nyasaland but recruited in other countries, on arrival in Southern Rhodesia, they were listed under their country of origin. Second, the workers were recruited in Nyasaland, but did not reach Southern Rhodesia. They "deserted" on the way. The third reason could be that the statistics are incorrect.

However, the above tables suggest two common patterns: first, that the RNLSC or Mthandizi never recruited its full quota in Nyasaland. Second, there was a pattern of increase in the numbers of recruited workers in the 1950s, though with some annual variations. This shows up more clearly in the data from the South African sources (refer Table 9.2 above). The reasons for these two factors will be discussed below. Evidence that there was an increase in the levels of labour migration from Nyasaland in the 1950s comes from the data on issues of Identification Certificates (IDs):

Table 9.4 : Issues of Identity Certificates in Nyasaland.

<u>Year</u>	<u>S.Africa</u>	<u>S.Rhodesia</u>	<u>N.Rhodesia</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>Total</u>
1946	7,637	25,650	1,263	600	35,150
1947	10,066	23,991	1,204	391	35,652
1948	9,936	22,362	1,294	266	33,858
1949	8,848	21,984	1,198	365	32,395
1950	9,988	20,279	1,584	230	32,081
1951	9,307	32,235	2,882	277	44,701
1952	8,819	41,289	2,971	392	53,471
1953	7,526	39,975	3,555	1,741	52,797
1954	10,772	45,797	5,595	217	62,381
1955	14,023	46,072	5,624	467	66,186
1956	15,516	50,760	5,638	390	72,304
1957	18,045	49,248	6,671	382	74,346
1958	19,615	44,863	3,961	506	68,945
1959	22,022	40,252	5,155	865	68,294
1960	28,656	36,424	7,448	1,022	73,550
1961	34,405	28,947	8,537	663	72,552

Sources: Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Reports of the Labour Department (Zomba, Government Printer, 1946-1953); Colonial Office, Nyasaland Protectorate Annual Reports (London, HMSO, 1946-1962).

Three patterns can be discerned from the above table: first, the total numbers of IDs issued prior to the 1950s remained "fairly constant" as observed in the report cited at the top of this chapter. There was a sharp increase in IDs endorsed for both Southern and Northern Rhodesia from 1951; and from 1954 for those endorsed for South Africa. Second, there was a general rising pattern in the numbers of IDs issued for all the major importers of Nyasaland labour in the 1950s, though with some annual variations. And third, as the numbers of IDs endorsed for South Africa and Northern Rhodesia continued to rise from the mid-1950s, those endorsed for

Southern Rhodesia were on the decline.

The reason for the decline was the increase in the labour demand for the expanding post-WWII South African economy - which experienced a crisis in its internal labour demand - and the copper boom in Northern Rhodesia after 1953.⁴⁵ By 1959, would-be recruits were turned away because quotas for the South African mines were fully taken up. As for the decline in the figures for Southern Rhodesia, two factors accounted for that: the ITLA was terminated on 30th June 1960; and because Southern Rhodesia was going through a period of recession and unemployment.⁴⁶ With the termination of the ITLA, migration to Southern Rhodesia was by selufu. Nyasaland, itself, experienced rising unemployment between 1959 and 1961. To relieve it, the WNLA quota of 20,000 workers was removed. Free migration was permitted; and about 25,960 were thus recruited by the WNLA in 1960.⁴⁷

The above figures do not, however, include the workers who migrated without IDs who were always in very large numbers. As well, not everybody who obtained an ID migrated. It was only an indication of the intention to migrate through the official channels. The conclusion that the levels of migration increased in the 1950s is thus arrived at by

⁴⁵ On South Africa see Crush, Jeeves, and Yudelman, South Africa's Labor Empire, chapter 3.

⁴⁶ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1960, p.14 and p.32.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 1959, p.26; 1960, p.32.

comparing the patterns in the figures on recruitment, both from Nyasaland and Southern Rhodesian sources, and those on the issue of IDs. All the three sets of statistics depict patterns of rise.

The reason for the failure of the recruiting organizations to obtain their full quotas was that: "the majority of Nyasa migrants workers still prefer[red] to go abroad under their own arrangements, and to choose their own employers".⁴⁸ They "did not want nchitu ya chibalo ["chibaro work"]...and "did not require Identification Certificates or any other government assistance".⁴⁹ With the intensification of regional competition for "tropical" workers, it had become relatively easy to migrate and find employment, especially in areas constantly short of labour such as the northern and eastern Transvaal. The employers needed labour, and the labourers knew how to get to the labour markets. The more the employers competed among themselves, the greater was the migrant labourers' freedom of movement and choice.

However, there were some advantages in being recruited: the migrant could avoid the financial expenses on the trip to and from the south. There was some physical security against

⁴⁸ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1950, p.10.

⁴⁹ MNA S1/943II/29 Eric Smith, Memorandum on Population and Migrant Labour, 7/11/37. Smith was trying to convince the Atonga of Nkhata Bay to obtain Identification Certificates before migrating. They told him: "there is a catch in it...we do not want government assurances..."

"highwaymen", labour "touts", and wild animals along the bush paths the migrants took, and it was easy to ship personal effects using the official channels offered by the recruiters. In the case of the ulere service, the migrants were charged 2 shillings 6 pence for excess cargo which was usually in the form of capital goods: bicycles, nets, sewing machines, carpentry tools, and household items. It was also easier and more secure to remit money to relatives at home using the official services provided by the recruiters and the government.

One of the most important effects of ulere and the intensification of WNLA activities in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s was the opening up of the Southern Province to recruiters. All along, the government prohibited recruiting in the Southern Province during the planting season, except by those individuals, mostly Southern Rhodesian farmers, who held the governor's permits. Ulere nullified the prohibition as would-be recruits living close to the roads and railway line simply jumped on the lorries and trains whenever they wanted to migrate. Evidence suggests that it was from the late 1940s that labour migration from the Southern and Central Provinces increased sharply.⁵⁰ By the 1950s, the whole balance of migration in Nyasaland had changed. The Southern and Central Provinces were the major exporters of labour. Blantyre

⁵⁰ See Coleman, "Regional and District Origins" pp.50-58; Vail, "The State and the Creation" pp.71-72.

and Dowa in the Southern and Central Provinces, respectively, became the main WNLA centres in the country while the Central Province districts of Ncheu, Dedza and Lilongwe became the main Mthandidzi centres.

II

Proceeds of Migrancy in Local Economies

The relationship between regional economies and increasing levels of migration between the 1930s and 1950s was a very complex one. It has been argued in the previous chapters that as far as the Central Province and the Lower Shire Valley were concerned, labour migration did not relentlessly result in agrarian stagnation. However, from the 1950s, right up to the time of independence in 1964, or after, there was a relationship between agrarian crisis and increasing levels of labour migration in some districts of the Southern and Central Provinces. As for the lakeshore areas, evidence suggests that migration acted as a major stimulus to commercial fishing and fish-trading, retail business, and the construction of good houses for the families of migrants.

A limiting factor to the account below is that data on remittances and deferred payments flowing into Nyasaland prior to the late 1940s are hard to come by. Even if they were available, they would give just a partial picture of the amounts of money injected into the local economies. The names

and district or regional origins of the recipients would be difficult to detail given the large numbers of the migrants leaving the countryside at any one time. The table below shows the amounts of postal and money orders cashed at some post offices in the country between January and June 1934 and January and June 1935:

Table 9.5 : Postal and Money Orders at Post Offices.

<u>Office</u>	<u>1934</u>	<u>1935</u>	<u>Office</u>	<u>1934</u>	<u>1935</u>
	(£)	(£)		(£)	(£)
Blantyre	3,266	2,848	Luchenza	23	69
Chikwawa	69	72	Lujeri	4	10
Chintheche	2,238	4,699	Mikolongwe	10	18
Chiradzulu	64	135	Mlangeni	73	346
Chiromo	48	47	Mlanje	214	203
Cholo	82	130	Mzimba	270	1,707
Dedza	1,096	3,058	Namadzi	30	22
Domira Bay	58	43	Namwera	74	157
Dowa	303	912	Ncheu	1,073	2,230
Ekwendeni	139	416	Njuli	8	30
Ft. Lister	2	2	Nkhata Bay	51	313
Ft. Johnston	1,126	1,832	Nkhoma	181	569
Ft. Manning	243	257	Nkhota-kota	410	728
Karonga	218	320	Pt. Herald	264	374
Kasungu	437	834	Salima	-	90
Lilongwe	380	664	Sandama	2	7
Limbe	1,725	2,030	Thondwe	9	14
Livingstonia	427	658	Zomba	1,018	1,490
Liwonde	213	312			

TOTALS Jan.-June, 1934 : £16,571 Jan.-June, 1935 : £27,646

Source: MNA COM-8/1 Draft Report on Emigrant Labour, 1935, Appendix 5, Table 4.

Note : The 1935 figure for Ft. Johnston included Likoma; that of Ncheu included Balaka; and Mzimba included Rumphi.

The above table shows two patterns: first, more postal and money orders were cashed at post offices in the districts with high levels of labour migration. Notable in this respect

were the lakeshore and northern stations of: Chintheche (sub-station of Nkhata Bay), Fort Johnston, Livingstonia, and Nkhota-kota; and the Central Province districts of Dedza, Dowa, Fort Manning, Kasungu, Lilongwe, and Ncheu (including Mlangeni). The same pattern was repeated in the Southern Province: Liwonde, Mlanje (including Luchenza and Lujeri), and Port Herald (Lower Shire) - all had high levels of labour migration. With the exception of Mlanje, a tea-producing district, these post offices were in remote areas, away from the centres of the colonial economy and where the white population was very small. Second, more postal and money orders were cashed at urban post offices of Blantyre, Limbe and Zomba. These were the centres of the colonial economy where the white population was large. From the mid-1930s, both Blantyre and Zomba had high levels of labour migration.

District reports provide further evidence that labour migration had an impact on the circulation of cash in rural areas. The 1940 report for Nkhata Bay (including Chintheche) district recorded £16,000 cashed in postal and money orders. The figure rose to £21,512 in 1942, but £20,644 were recorded in 1943. The low figure for 1943 was a result of the absence of monthly figures for the first half of the year. The total annual figure would probably be higher if these were available. Some remittances "continued to be sent through the

District Commissioner instead of the post office",⁵¹ and he concluded that:

judging by the figures of payments by the post offices, to which must be added cash imported by returning emigrants, payments on account of family allotments etc, there is probably more ready cash in the district than at any previous period....So long as the Atonga continue to consider it beneath their dignity to labour on the land as a result of the money they earn in the mines, there seems little likelihood of any agricultural progress.⁵²

The money was usually invested in retail business, commercial fishing, and labour migration itself. For, example, in 1942 alone, not less than 40 trading licences were obtained in the district, presumably by labour migrants or their relatives. Oral evidence maintains that canoes and nets were among the migrants' major investments.⁵³ Another popular enterprise for the migrants or/and their relatives was kulambiska ndrama, money-lending. The purposes of kulamba ndrama, borrowing money, varied from bride-wealth payment,

⁵¹ MNA S11/3/1/86, S11/3/1/87, S11/3/1/88, West Nyasa District Annual Reports, 1940, 1941 and 1943.

⁵² MNA S11/3/1/86 and S11/3/1/88 West Nyasa Annual Reports, 1940 and 1942.

⁵³ TIP.3/WC/Ali Mgombe, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 28/9/89; TIP.7/WC/B. Nyasulu, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 29/9/89; TIP.11/WC/Cheketa Kaunda, Liwaladzi, Nkhota-kota, 30/9/89; TIP.12/WC/C. Mwenda, Namiasi, Mangochi, 26/1/90; TIP.26/WC/B.C.Chirwa, Dindano-M'ndola, Nkhata Bay, 11/3/90; TIP.54/WC/Muchona Kondowe, Chizi-Nyere, Nkhata Bay, 21/12/89; TIP.57/WC/PKM/Ephraim Zimba, Chawi, Kanyoli, Nkhata Bay, 20/12/89; TIP.18/WC/PKM/Kakholo Banda, Ndomo-Kanyoli, Nkhata Bay, 19/12/89; TIP.17/WC/AB/A.Salaka, Ngani, Likoma, Nkhata Bay, 15/12/89.

investment in commercial fishing or retail business, and for labour migration itself. The latter was the most common. The borrowed money was usually repaid with an interest of between 100 and 150 per cent over a two year period though the loan could be extended to five or more years. Money-lending was thus both a lucrative business and a way by which the migrant labour system was reproduced and perpetuated.

The relationship between patterns of emigration and investment in commercial fishing was more conspicuous in South Nyasa (Fort Johnston, now Mangochi) district. Numbers of IDs issued or endorsed rose from 458 in 1936 to 1,622 in 1938, slightly over 2,000 in 1940, to 2,268 in 1946.⁵⁴ In migrating or working locally, the aim of the Ayao, the inhabitants of the district, was "to obtain money for some particular purpose...such as a bicycle which [could] be used for the hawking of fish or other form of trading which they [liked] better than working in the fields".⁵⁵ There was "a large increase" in the licensing of bicycles in the district: 1,700 in 1937 and 2,650 in 1938.⁵⁶ Revenue from bicycle licensing rose from £171.8s.0d in 1937 to £326.5s.0d in 1939, and a record £770 in 1940. Thereafter, it declined to £660 in 1941,

⁵⁴ MNA NSF4/1/5 and NSF4/1/6 Fort Johnston Annual Reports, 1938-1946.

⁵⁵ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1952, p.5.

⁵⁶ MNA NSF4/1/5 Fort Johnston District Annual Report, 1938.

£283 in 1943 and £191 in 1945. The decline was "attributed to the increasing difficulty in obtaining spare parts for the bicycles owing to war conditions".⁵⁷ Enterprising individuals travelled to Fort Jameson (now Chipata) in Northern Rhodesia to obtain bicycle parts and used tyres from which twine was extracted for making and maintaining nets. The difficulty in obtaining spares for nets during the war is illustrated by the "very positive response" to an experiment in the sale of used tyres conducted by the government between 1943 and 1945. Some 425 tyres were sold in 1943 and not less than 300 in 1945. The prices ranged from 5 shillings to 10 shillings depending on the tyre size.⁵⁸

The importation of bicycles for the hawking of fish and other forms of trade was not confined to the lakeshore districts alone. Between 1935 and 1939, the number of bicycles annually imported through Chikwawa (former Katunga) alone increased from 93 to 3,970.⁵⁹ About 40,000 bicycles were licensed in the country in 1941, and about a quarter of these were used in fish-trading.⁶⁰ Bicycle repair shops were opened up at market and urban centres, and along the roads to the

⁵⁷ MNA NSF4/1/6 Fort Johnston Annual Reports, 1941-1946.

⁵⁸ MNA NSF4/1/6 South Nyasa District Annual Report, 1943; NSF4/1/7 South Nyasa District Annual Report, 1945.

⁵⁹ MNA NS3/1/8 Southern Province Annual Report, 1939. Cited in McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy" p.422.

⁶⁰ PRO C.O.626/22 Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1941.

lake in various parts of the Southern and Central Provinces.⁶¹ At Zomba, there was an entrepreneur who rented bicycles to fish-traders charging 6 pence per round trip to Fort Johnston, plus one fish per every 200 carried.⁶² In a survey conducted in the Southern Province in 1949 on the reasons for migration, 35.33 per cent (778 out of 2,202) of the respondents said "to obtain money necessary to buy bicycles" for retail and fish-trading. Another 25.25 per cent (556 out of 2,202) said "to buy clothes".⁶³ These two were the major reasons. The others ranged from "unfit to find employment locally": 12 respondents or 1 per cent, to "no definite reason given": 190 respondents or 9 per cent.

III

The Rural Crisis

To understand some of the changes discussed above, we need to look at what was happening in agriculture. The 1950s were a decade of rural crisis and contradictions. Both European and African agricultural production fluctuated widely, but prices

⁶¹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Report of the Population Census, 1931, p.27; McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy" p.422.

⁶² McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial economy" p.422.

⁶³ MNA LB3/3/3 Report of a Labour Survey undertaken in the Southern Province of Nyasaland Concerning Emigration of Nyasaland Natives in Search of Work, 1949. See also Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1949, p.5 and Appendix B p.24.

were low for most crops. In contrast, commercial fishing and fish-trading were on the increase, enabling communities along the lakeshore to contain the rural crisis. A major impetus to this was migrant labour and the expansion in capitalist markets for fish discussed in the preceding chapters.

It is difficult to make a comprehensive assessment of the effects of this crisis on agricultural communities. Important files in the Malawi National Archives are still under the 40-year rule and time and financial resources allocated for this study were too limited for comprehensive field work. The account below is based mostly on information from colonial reports which have some serious shortcomings. The reports suggest that the crisis hit the Shire Highlands producers more than anybody else. In the Central Province, some tobacco growers - especially those who grew burley tobacco on the 'private estates', managed to wade through it.

Leroy Vail dates the beginnings of the crisis to 1938.⁶⁴ This study has demonstrated that from the 1920s, right up to the end of the Second World War, African agriculture, though subjected to various shocks, did not decline continuously.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Vail, "The State and the Creation" pp.65-72; and by the same author, "Peasants, Migrants, and Plantations" pp.19-24.

⁶⁵ See also K.J. McCracken, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State: The Impact of the Native Tobacco Board in the Central Province of Malawi" in Journal of Southern African Studies vol.9 no.2 (April 1983) pp.172-192; and by same author, "Share-cropping in Malawi: The Visiting Tenant System in the Central Province c.1920-1968" in Centre for African Studies, University of Edinburgh (ed) Malawi: An Alternative Path to Development (Edinburgh, Centre for African Studies,

The turning point was surely in 1949 with the outbreak of the famine which came as a result of two successive droughts. The "grow more food" campaign pursued by the government in the wake of the famine increased the African production of maize and other food crops in the 1950s. For example, 9,800 tons of maize was bought by the Maize Control Board in 1950; and "not less than 28,550 tons" in 1951.⁶⁶

Of the latter figure, 10,813 tons (about 38 per cent) was purchased from producers in the Southern Province and 17,737 (about 62 per cent) from the Central Province; and "considerable unrecorded sales" were made across the border in Portuguese East Africa. Surplus maize production was reported every year between 1952 and 1955, but steadily declined thereafter.⁶⁷

Maize was not a profitable crop. The price offered to the producers by the Maize Control Board throughout the 1950s was very low: just one penny per pound.⁶⁸ In 1957, the Board reduced the price to 0.75 of a penny and only 5,784 tons were

1985) pp.35-65.

⁶⁶ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1951, p.43.

⁶⁷ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Reports, 1953, p.6; 1954, p.2; 1956, p.56; 1957, p.4 and p.64. The figures were: 47,148 tons in 1953; 41,223 tons in 1954; 54,345 tons in 1954 - the highest on record; 44,807 tons in 1955; 33,577 tons in 1956; 5,784 tons in 1957.

⁶⁸ The Maize Control Board was formed in 1946. For details on its operations see M.A. Vaughan, The Story of an African Famine: Gender and Famine in Twentieth-Century Malawi (Cambridge, London and New York, CUP 1987) pp.95-98.

bought as a result. By 1958, "there was reluctance on the part of growers to sell maize at the controlled price of three-quarters of a penny per pound". The government adopted "emergency measures" (coercion) and 12,822 tons were purchased by the Board. The price was brought back to one penny per pound in 1959 but only 5,553 tons of maize were sold by the growers. In contrast, private buyers, who operated without government recognition and offered higher prices than the Board, purchased 6,462 tons in 1959. By 1960, they were permitted to operate in competition with the Board, offering between 12 shillings and 16 shillings and 8 pence per bag depending on the distance from their main depots.⁶⁹

Much of the maize came from the Central Province. In the Shire Highlands production was limited by land hunger which, in August and September 1953, had resulted in widespread disturbances and riots in the Southern Province and parts of the Central Province. Opposition to the Federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland which came into effect that year amidst growing African nationalism, added to the disturbances. "Gangs of Africans" moved through affected areas, encouraging labour to cease work; forming road blocks; cutting telephone wires; destroying Native Authority buildings; and, in some cases, "deposing" chiefs suspected of collaborating with the

⁶⁹ The weight of the bag was not stated. Usually, maize and rice were packed in 60-pound bags, which would mean 2.4 pence and 3.33 pence per pound, respectively.

government.⁷⁰ Police reinforcements were flown in from the Rhodesias; eleven people were killed, and "large numbers" injured by the end of September.

In the aftermath of the riots, the government stepped up its efforts to resettle Africans living on congested estates. The number of families on the 'private estates' had been reduced from about 49,000 (173,000 people) in 1946 to 23,570 in 1956, and 18,085 in 1957.⁷¹ The majority of those still living on the 'private estates' were share-croppers or wage labourers who paid their rent in cash at three times the prevailing official monthly minimum wage. A common strategy was to combine share-cropping with wage employment outside the estates they lived on. By 1958, about 526,000 acres had been acquired by the government for the settlement of Africans formerly resident on the 'private estates'. By this arrangement, about 7,000 families held freehold land on the estates where they were formerly tenants. With the growth of African nationalism between 1959 and 1962, some Africans refused to move out of the 'private estates' voluntarily.⁷² Thangata labour tenancy was formally abolished in 1962. The

⁷⁰ See Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1953, p.5.

⁷¹ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1957, p.12 and p.58. Other sources say "about 20,000" African families were still affected by the terms of the Natives' on Private Estates Ordinance. See MNA PAM/858 Report on an Economic Survey of Nyasaland, 1958-59.

⁷² Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1960, p.17.

number of African families on the 'private estates' was estimated at 9,000 at the time.

Land hunger was not the immediate cause of the agrarian crisis. Erratic weather conditions played a major role. Throughout the decade, there were periods of drought followed by periods of heavy rains coming at the wrong time of the growing seasons. As a result, some crops did well in one year and badly in another. Prices at the markets fluctuated accordingly, and the worst victims were independent African tobacco growers. Here as well, the turning point was the famine of 1949. To alleviate its effects, independent growers in the Central Province increased their tobacco production. New areas were opened up in Kasungu and larger gardens were planted in Dowa. Owing to the greater need for cash, the crop was harvested early and handling was poor, resulting in low quality and low prices in 1950. Erratic weather conditions accounted for the low quality in African fire and sun-and-air cured tobacco throughout the 1950s resulting in fluctuations in the amounts of tobacco sold at the auction floors and the prices offered. The two tables below show the amounts of tobacco sold at the Limbe Auction Floors and the average prices offered:

Table 9.6 : Tobacco Sold at the Limbe Auction Floors (million lbs).

<u>Year</u>	<u>Fire- cured</u>	<u>Sun/Air cured</u>	<u>Flue- cure</u>	<u>Burley</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Fire- cured</u>	<u>Sun/Air cured</u>	<u>Flue- cured</u>	<u>Burley</u>
1950	24.02	4.42	2.60	0.81	1957	25.54	3.03	3.01	2.17
1951	25.39	5.35	4.04	1.35	1958	30.90	2.51	2.20	3.21
1952	12.56	3.00	3.52	1.00	1959	26.40	5.42	2.25	2.75
1953	24.36	6.29	3.73	1.69	1960	21.49	6.97	2.93	2.92
1954	23.60	3.30	4.31	1.95	1961	15.63	5.26	2.32	5.55
1955	14.78	2.32	3.69	2.02	1962	25.27	4.33	2.60	3.93
1956	25.43	2.68	4.12	2.28					

Source: Colonial Office, Nyasaland Protectorate Annual Reports (London, HMSO, 1950-1962).⁷³

The table shows fluctuations in the figures of fired-cured and sun/air-cured tobacco which were the types grown predominantly by African producers. African Trust Land fire-cured tobacco was "the main source of native earning power except possibly remittances".⁷⁴ Throughout the early 1950s, "large amounts" of African-grown tobacco were destroyed before reaching the auction floors on account of poor quality.

The average prices offered at the auction floors were as follows:

⁷³ For comparison see K.J. McCracken, "Share-cropping in Malawi" p.50.

⁷⁴ MNA S1/275/39 Report of a Sub-Committee of the Native Tobacco Board Appointed to Examine the Board's Expenditure in the Southern Province, 8/8/39. Quoted in McCracken, "Share-cropping in Malawi" p.62.

Table 9.7 : Tobacco Prices at the Limbe Auction Floors (d/lb)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Fire- cured</u> (d)	<u>Sun/Air- cured</u> (d)	<u>Flue- cured</u> (d)	<u>Burley</u> (d)	<u>Year</u>	<u>Fire- cured</u> (d)	<u>Sun/Air- cured</u> (d)	<u>Flue- cured</u> (d)	<u>Burley</u> (d)
1950	15.90	19.36	29.27	24.63	1957	19.03	24.72	27.02	34.97
1951	11.62	16.07	30.32	22.83	1958	15.59	24.93	22.40	22.78
1952	16.44	16.52	21.47	23.28	1959	11.61	23.24	28.19	22.22
1953	13.85	16.49	25.46	22.71	1960	15.58	19.14	32.98	32.72
1954	13.51	16.45	25.45	27.13	1961	19.09	14.73	28.44	24.40
1955	19.21	20.81	27.16	26.95	1962	20.03	21.69	32.87	32.55
1956	16.83	19.36	22.88	22.82					

Source: Colonial Office, Nyasaland Protectorate Annual Reports (London, HMSO, 1950-1962).

If read in relation to Table 3, the above table shows fluctuations in the prices offered for the two types of African-grown tobacco. Poor quality was often cited as the reason behind the low prices.

The information in the above tables should not be taken uncritically. The amount of tobacco grown by Africans on the 'private estates' is not disaggregated from that grown by independent producers on Trust Land. The prices offered to them are also not disaggregated. The table below gives an idea, though incomplete, of the amounts of tobacco bought from independent producers on African Trust Land in the late 1950s and the prices offered:

Table 9.8 : Tobacco Purchased from African Trust Land.

<u>Type</u>	<u>Amount (million lbs.)</u>				<u>Price (d/lb.)</u>			
	<u>1957</u>	<u>1958</u>	<u>1959</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1958</u>	<u>1959</u>	<u>1960</u>
Fired-Cured								
Northern Division	19.4	24.5	25.5	11.64	11.02	11.64	7.39	6.58
Southern Division	1.0	0.6	0.9	2.60	9.97	9.18	8.07	7.49
Sun/Air-cured								
Central Division	13.0	1.1	1.5	3.40	11.96	13.05	14.04	13.68
Northern Division	nil	nil	0.5	0.60	- -	- -	9.95	8.29

Source: Colonial Office, Nyasaland Protectorate Annual Reports (London, HMSO, 1957-1960).

Three important conclusions can be drawn from the above table: first, there were noticeable differences in the prices offered directly to the independent producers on Trust Land and those offered to the sellers at the auction floors. The differences reflect what the landlords and Marketing Boards, who were the sellers at the auction floors, were able to retain. Second, the low prices offered to the Trust Land producers imply a low return to their labour, hence the increase in labour migration in the 1950s. Third, there were some regional differences in the state of African tobacco production. More tobacco, at comparatively higher prices, was sold by African producers in the Central Province (central and northern divisions) than in the Southern Province.

Starting from 1953, some planters in the Central Province withdrew from fire-cured tobacco production by their tenants. They increased the production of burley which offered higher returns. By 1960, "virtually all the 5,900 tenants in [the Lilongwe] district were growing burley which accounted for

over 12 per cent of Malawi's total tobacco production".⁷⁵ This would suggest that some struggling independent fire-cured tobacco producers on Trust Land moved into the 'private estates' in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The figures on burley production and sales continued to rise in the post-independence period and, by the early 1980s, burley had become the most profitable tobacco grown both on the estates and by independent producers.

Further evidence for the crisis in African tobacco production in the 1950s comes from the numbers of the registered growers. These had dropped from about 92,000 in 1951 to 63,719 in 1954, and 23,603 in 1957.⁷⁶ In the latter year, 13,089 grew tobacco on the 'private estates'. The numbers of unregistered growers are unknown, so too are the figures on total production by African growers. The reports, however, recorded "large amounts" of African-grown tobacco destroyed before it reached the auction floors due to "poor quality". The amount of tobacco purchased from Africans (refer Tables 9.6 and 9.8 above) was therefore just a portion of their total production. When looking at the above figures, one has to take into account the possibility of some producers

⁷⁵ McCracken, "Share-cropping in Malawi" p.51.

⁷⁶ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Reports, 1951, p.22; 1954, p.22; and 1957, p.24. See also Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1952, p.6. The latter report recorded a drop in the numbers of registered tobacco growers from 63,624 in 1951 to 43,250 in 1952 "mainly due to the poor prices received in 1951".

moving, without ceasing production, from 'registered' to 'unregistered' growers during periods of crisis.

A similar story was repeated in the cotton industry. Only 907 tons of seed cotton were bought by the Marketing Board in 1949. In the following year, "pre-occupation with food crops at planting time in the Lower Shire [the main cotton-producing area], and the late start of rains had an adverse effect on cotton".⁷⁷ Only 5,700 tons were produced, about 1,000 tons less than in 1948. An improvement in weather conditions during the 1952/53 growing season, and a system of early planting to control the ravages of the red bollworm resulted in a "satisfactory crop" of 10,787 tons or 15,854 standard bales of lint cotton in 1953. This was about 450 tons short of the 1934/35 record figure. In 1954, the Lower Shire was hit by a "severe drought". The production of seed cotton fell to 7,801 tons amounting to about 11,500 bales of lint. A "new regime" of cotton production was introduced. It involved early uprooting of stems to control the spread of pests; dressing seed with perecot; and spraying young plants with sevin and DDT to control the breeding of the red bollworm.

These measures, coupled with good rains in early 1955, resulted in ~~the~~ the second highest crop since the 1930s: 9,579 tons of seed cotton equivalent to 15,407 standard bales of lint were produced. However, 1956 turned out to be "a disastrous" year for cotton. Planting rains were "extremely unfavourable"

⁷⁷ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1950, p.4.

and prolonged wet weather made conditions ideal for the build-up of pests and disease.⁷⁸ In the Lower Shire, the crop was devastated by the cotton stainer, Dysdercus, and bacterial blight, Xanthomonas malvaceanum. There was an outbreak of red bollworm along the lakeshore and a plague of rats in Karonga. The total acreage under cotton fell from 39,124 acres in 1955 to 26,422 in 1956; and production from 9,579 tons to 3,435 tons, of which 61 per cent was grade one. Much of the latter came from Karonga and was sold at a high price of 6 pence per pound. Grade two cotton, much of it from the lakeshore areas and Lower Shire, was sold at 2 pence per pound. By 1957, there was a "substantial loss of interest in cotton growing". The total production figure had fallen to 4,288 tons.⁷⁹

The numbers of registered growers fluctuated from 33,000 in 1951 to 43,853 in 1954, and 13,089 in 1957. A further 2,500 grew the crop on 'private estates' in 1957. However, unlike tobacco, cotton production recovered in the late 1950s, thanks to the intensification of the "new regime". Extensive insecticidal trials were carried out by the Cotton Pest Research Scheme, and detailed studies were made on the bionomics of the two major cotton pests: the stainer and the red bollworm. By 1962, cotton prices had risen slightly from 6 pence per pound to 6.5 pence per pound of grade one; and from 2 pence to 3 pence per pound of grade two. Both the

⁷⁸ Ibid., 1956, p.58.

⁷⁹ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1957, p.66.

acreage and total production steadily increased between 1957 and 1961 as this table shows:

Table 9.9 : Cotton Acreage and Production, 1957-1962.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Acreage</u>			<u>Production (short tons)</u>			
	<u>ATL</u>	<u>Estates</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>ATL</u>	<u>Estates</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Bales</u> ⁸⁰
1957	24,650	2,439	27,089	4,288	346	4,634	6,950
1958	32,112	2,620	34,732	5,513	608	6,121	9,317
1959	33,869	2,296	36,165	10,029	731	10,760	15,649
1960	51,236	2,857	54,093	12,515	1,051	13,566	20,354
1961	77,940	3,770	81,710	11,924	1,039	12,963	19,564

Source: Colonial Office, Nyasaland Protectorate Annual Reports (London, HMSO, 1957-1961).

The numbers of registered growers also increased sharply from 13,089 in 1957 to 34,575 in 1959/60 and 49,593 in 1960/61. In the 1961/62 growing season, 43,763 growers were registered in the Southern Province alone, and 4,022 in the Central Province.⁸¹ This suggests that the agrarian crisis of the 1950s did not affect all categories of rural producers in the same way. Fire-cured tobacco growers were the worse hit and their recovery was a long and painful process. Cotton growers had a relatively short period of crisis. Production was back to normal by the late 1950s.

⁸⁰ ATL is African Trust Land. One bale of cotton lint was equivalent to 400 pounds in weight.

⁸¹ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, p.71. The numbers of growers in the Northern Province were not recorded; about 1,000 were registered in 1959/60 and 1,756 in 1960/61.

IV

European Agriculture During the Crisis

The greatest survivors were the tea planters of the Shire Highlands. The year 1951 was "a record year for tea". Exports totalled 15,724,987 pounds (lbs), valued at £2,028,866; an increase of about 500,000 pounds (lbs) over the 1950 figure.⁸² The worst year for tea was 1952 when the price for Nyasaland tea at the London market fell to a record low of 11.5 pence. Evidence suggests that the tea plantations survived by making economies in labour, fertilizers, and other inputs. Reports of the Labour Department show a considerable decline in the numbers of labourers "actually at work" at peak period (March) in the tea industry: from 43,555 in 1951 to 38,469 in 1952, and 31,803 in 1953.⁸³

The figures do not, however, state the origins and categories of the labourers: how many were migrants, from local villages, and other districts in the country; or how many were hoers, pluckers, processors, etc. The categorization of workers by their district or regional origins would have

⁸² Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1951, p.45. The tea acreage was 22,660 acres in 1949 and 23,500 acres in 1950.

⁸³ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1951, p.11; 1952, p.18; and 1953, p.11. See also Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1953, p.22. The report put the figure at "about 40,000" of which about 30,000 were men, 1,000 women, and 9,000 "young persons".

helped in assessing the impact of the agrarian crisis, while the categorization by task would have helped in assessing the employers' efforts in reducing the wage bill. Evidence for the employment of cheap categories of workers comes from the sudden increase in the numbers of children employed in the tea industry in 1952 and 1953 (refer chapter 8 Table 8.2).

Contrary to the argument by Robin Palmer, the tea industry did not collapse in 1952 only to re-emerge in the 1960s.⁸⁴ Instead, it showed signs of resilience and recovery throughout the 1950s. In 1953, the price for Nyasaland tea at the London market rose to 47 pence per pound, and "high quality" tea was produced. The acreage under production was 23,362 acres, very close to the 1950 figure. Of this, 20,153 acres were in bearing. By 1954, 17,016,221 pounds were exported. The price at the London markets reached 79 pence per pound. Acreage under production had increased to 27,726 of which, 22,088 were in bearing.⁸⁵ Heavy rains in 1955 favoured the tea crop and a new export record of 17,190,378 pounds was recorded. Prices at the London market also reached a record high: 86.25 pence per pound. For three seasons: 1954, 1955, and 1956, rains were good for tea. Both export figures and acreage under production showed a rising pattern.

⁸⁴ Palmer argues that the industry was not able to recover until after independence. See R.H. Palmer "The Nyasaland Tea Industry During the Era of International Tea Restrictions" in JAH vol.26 (1985) pp.215-239.

⁸⁵ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1953, pp.61-62; 1954, p.62.

The industry experienced some difficulties in 1957 due to severe drought conditions. Up to 25 per cent of young tea plants between two and ten years old dried up. The export figure dropped to 16,740,000 pounds in 1958, compared with 21,360,000 pounds in 1956/57. The planters responded by increasing the acreage under production to 27,381, replacing the old plants with new ones. Early rains in 1959 "produced good flushes of leaf" and the export figure rose again to 24,350,545 pounds. In the same year, the Nyasaland Tea Association took over the entire financial responsibility of research and extension work. The Tea Research Centre at Mimosa, Mlanje district, and its entire staff were transferred to the Association.⁸⁶

This was more than an economic and scientific victory for the Association. It was a political move. At the height of the Federation, between 1953 and 1959, research and extension work on European agriculture was in the hands of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture. The growing political uncertainty in Nyasaland in the late 1950s contributed to what John McCracken has called "the crisis of confidence".⁸⁷ What the Tea Association had done was to take full control of the industry so as to become less dependent on government support which was threatened by political events.

The "take over" paid dividends in the early 1960s as the

⁸⁶ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1959, p.66.

⁸⁷ McCracken "Share-cropping in Malawi" p.51.

young tea plants came into bearing. Between 1961 and 1962, 31,518,498 pounds of tea were exported at the price of 38.86 pence per pound. Another severe drought in 1962 resulted in the drying up of young tea plants and loss of crop. The export figure dropped to 29,309,688 pounds sold at an average price of 34.63 pence per pound at the London market. This was not a loss price. It was within the normal range of the prices for Nyasaland tea at the markets during the late 1950s and early 1960s. The prices ranged from between 30 and 40 pence per pound at the beginning of each year, to between 45 and 72 pence per pound towards the end of the year.

Unlike tea, European tobacco did not recover from the crisis, except for burley production which expanded in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Three factors accounted for the resilience of the tea industry in contrast to the European tobacco industry. First, the tea industry was well-capitalized and thus could survive periods of crisis. Second, and probably most important of all, it relied on cheap wage labour. Unlike the tea planters the tobacco planters depended on tenant production for the most part. It has been argued in the preceding chapters that this class of rural producers were becoming increasingly independent and mobile starting from the 1920s. By the 1960s, tenants on private estates had become increasingly "independent-minded". It was estimated that between three or four per cent of them were dismissed each year on account of their independent-mindedness or

inefficiency.⁸⁸

Third, Nyasaland tea, unlike tobacco, was guaranteed international markets under the terms of the International Tea Agreements. Tea prices at the London market did not fluctuate as severely as those of tobacco. If anything, they were usually within the normal range, with the exception of the 1952 prices, and often tending towards a pattern of rise. Those of tobacco, with the exception of burley, were generally on the low side. As tobacco prices continued to fluctuate, the majority of the white planters survived by sharecropping arrangements with their tenants. The political events of the late 1950s and early 1960s made the recovery process even more difficult for them. In an attempt to contain the rising African nationalism the government carried out a number of reforms designed to lessen the economic grievances of peasant farmers.⁸⁹ In 1958, the price paid to Trust Land tobacco growers was raised "to a level close to that of world market prices".⁹⁰ This affected the prices on the 'private estates'. White farmers feared that if they did not offer higher prices, the tenants "would not come". The cost of producing tobacco on the white estates thus increased sharply. Bruce Barron, son of A.F. Barron, complained that the cost of producing tobacco by

⁸⁸ See McCracken, "Share-cropping in Malawi" pp.40-41.

⁸⁹ This account comes from McCracken, "Share-cropping in Malawi" p.53.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.53. See also the tables above.

tenants on his estate was as high as 11 pence per pound while that incurred by the Agricultural Production and Marketing Board was only 5.25 pence per pound.⁹¹ Afraid of the rising political tension, the government was unable to come to the white farmers' help.

Their hopes were completely shattered in 1962 with the introduction of a "new" Africans on Private Estates Bill which replaced the "old" Natives on Private Estates Ordinance of 1928 (amended in 1952 and 1959). Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda, President of the Malawi Congress Party, which had won the country its self-government in 1961, declared his intention to abolish the labour and sharecropping tenant system:

whether you call it thangata in the Southern Province, or visiting tenants in the Central Province, it is the same thing and I was not going to be deceived and confine this Bill to the Southern Province. I mean to extent it to Lilongwe, Fort Manning, Kasungu, Dowa, Kota-kota, right up to Karonga... and if that means I am driving anyone away from this country, then I say he can pack up and go.⁹²

The "new" Bill introduced a £1 annual rent on every hut on the 'private estates'.⁹³ Unmarried women were exempted from the rent, but the burden fell heavily on men with more than one wife. In practice, they continued to meet their tenancy obligations by sharecropping. In 1962, some 72,000 acres of

⁹¹ Ibid., p.53.

⁹² Speech by Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda, Proceedings of the 4th Meeting of the 76th Session of the Legislative Council, 1st June, 1962. Cited in McCracken, "Share-cropping in Malawi" pp.61-62.

⁹³ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1962, p.61.

freehold land were conveyed to the government by estate owners "to assist in solving the problems presented by the tenant system". Negotiations were in progress for the purchase of "several thousands" more acres of both occupied and unoccupied land for the "emancipation of tenants".⁹⁴ Of late, some analysts have argued that this did not solve the tenant problem. Between 1964 and the early 1980s, the independent Malawi government passed land laws and pursued agricultural policies which were quite similar to those of the colonial government. The analysts have further argued that these laws and policies had deleterious effects on rural producers. Land was in short supply and the tenant system was strengthened, resulting in what Leroy Vail calls "the colonial system confirmed".⁹⁵

As rural producers moved out of self-employment in peasant agriculture, labour migration, petty-trade, the "informal sector", and fish-trading increased. It will be argued in the next chapter that as far as the lakeshore areas were concerned, the crisis of the 1950s was successfully

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.62.

⁹⁵ Vail, "The State and the Creation" p.72. See also A. Chilivumbo, "On Rural Development: A Note on Malawi's Programme of Development for Exploitation" in Africa Development vol.2 (1978) pp.41-54; T. Mkandawire, "Economic Crisis in Malawi" in J. Carlsson (ed), Recession in Africa (Uppsala, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1983) pp.28-47; G.C.Z. Mhone, "Agricultural and Food Policy in Malawi" in N. Bourenane and T. Mkandawire (eds), The State and Agriculture in Africa (London, CODESRIA Book Series, 1987) pp.59-86.

contained by investing ^{the} proceeds of migrant labour in retail trade, fishing, and fish-trading. As regarded the expansion in commercial fishing, the key factors were the resilience of the tea plantations and the increase in labour migration. Though African agriculture was depressed, and consequently affecting rural fish markets, the tea plantations continued to provide profitable markets for fish. More labour was required for the increased tea acreage in the 1950s, thus maintaining the demand for fish on the plantations. There was also a growing demand for fish in the towns of Blantyre and Limbe due to the increase in the urban work force employed in manufacturing industries. These markets justified the investments in fishing and fish-trading by the returned labour migrants.

By the 1960s and 1970s, the majority of the migrant labourers who invested in commercial fishing did so for the purposes of accumulating, giving true meaning to the popular saying: "theba is power". The signs of rural accumulation were obvious: good houses; acquisition of expensive domestic items (imported beds, tables, bicycles, sewing machines, kitchenware, radios, cassette players, shoes, watches etc); investment in children's education, conspicuous spending on social functions such as wedding ceremonies; and, as one informant put it, "bread and tea every morning and meat and rice for dinner".⁹⁶ Imported items also acted as some kind of 'insurance premium'. Losses in commercial fishing were

⁹⁶ TIP.3/WC/Ali Mgombe, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 28/9/89.

compensated for by sale of the imported items and fresh investments were made.⁹⁷ It was the ease of conversion of proceeds of labour migration to investments in the local economy which enabled the fishing communities to contain the rural crisis.

⁹⁷ TIP.6/WC/George Kapote Phiri, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 29/9/89; TIP.8/WC/Rashid Banda, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 29/9/89; TIP.9/Mwazeni Mtira, 29/9/89; TIP.20/WC/PKM/Nchuka Kondowe, Chizi-Nyere, Nkhata Bay, 11/12/89; TIP.22/WC/PKM/J.M. Mzungu, Mapopa-Sanga, Nkhata Bay, 12/12/89; TIP.23/WC/AB/M.C. Songwe, Makungulu, Likoma, 15/12/89; TIP./WC/AB/A. Salaka, Ngani, Likoma, 15/12/89; TIP.17/WC/AB/F.G. Chamba, Makungwa, Likoma, 15/12/89.

CHAPTER TEN

"'THEBA' IS POWER": MIGRANCY, FISHING, AND ACCUMULATION"

Theba is power. It is the foundation on which we build. It is our source of capital.¹ ...We have theba houses, theba nets, theba radios and watches, and almost all grocery shops around here, came from proceeds of theba.²

The role of labour migration in the transformation of Malawian rural communities has received very little attention from scholars preoccupied with the developments in the country's agricultural sector. The debates generated by anthropologists in the 1940s and 1950s on the social and economic effects of labour migration have not been revisited in the light of new evidence.³ In the 1970s, scholars writing from the underdevelopment perspective were quick to blame "rural

¹ TIP.6/WC/George Kapote Phiri, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 29/9/89.

² TIP.9/WC/Mwazeni Mtira and Kankhomba Kafere, Mtanga I, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 29/9/89.

³ For the earlier debates see, for example, M. Read, "Migrant Labour in Africa and its Effects on Tribal Life" in The International Labour Review (ILR) vol.XLV no.5 (June 1942) pp.605-631; J. van Velsen, "Labour Migration as a Positive Factor in the Continuity of Tonga Tribal Society" in Economic Development and Cultural Change vol.8 (1960) pp.265-278; for a shorter version see A. Southall (ed), Social Change in Modern Africa (London and New York, OUP/International African Institute, 1961) pp.230-241; and by the same author, The Politics of Kinship: A Study in Social Manipulation Among the Lakeside Tonga of Nyasaland (Manchester, MUP/Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, 1964); J.Clyde Mitchell, "Wage Labour and African Population Movements in Central Africa" in K.M. Barbour and R.M. Prothero (eds), Essays on African Population (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961) pp.193-248; L. Mair, "Anthropology and Colonial Policy" in African Affairs vol.74 no.295 (1975) pp.191-195.

poverty" on the incorporation of these communities in the southern Africa "regional economic system".⁴ The process of accumulation in the rural communities themselves was not thoroughly investigated, let alone its connection with migrant labour.

The recent "social history" of Malawi has tended to focus on four major topics: the resilience of the peasantry;⁵ the relationship between ecology, gender, labour and social relations in the production process;⁶ famine analysis, food

⁴ Almost any chapter in R.H. Palmer and N.Q. Parsons (eds), Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa (London, Heinemann, and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1977).

⁵ See, for example, K.J. McCracken, "Peasants, Planters and the Colonial State: The Case of Malawi, 1905-1940" in Journal of Eastern African Research and Development vol.2 (1982) pp.21-35; and by the same author, "Planters, Peasants and the Colonial State: The Impact of the Native Tobacco Board in the Central Province of Malawi" in JSAS vol.9 no.2 (1983) pp.172-192; "Share-cropping in Malawi: The Visiting Tenant System in Central Province c.1920-1968" in African Studies Centre, University of Edinburgh (ed), Malawi: An Alternative Path to Development (Edinburgh, African Studies Centre, 1985) pp.35-65.

⁶ See, for example, M.A. Vaughan, "Food Production and Family Labour in Southern Malawi: The Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley in the Early Colonial Period" in Journal of African History (JAH) vol.23 no.3 (1982) pp.351-364; E.C. Mandala, "Peasant Cotton Agriculture, Gender and Inter-generational Relationships: The Lower Tchiri (Shire) Valley of Malawi, 1906-1940" in African Studies Review (ASR) vol.25 nos.2 and 3 (June and September, 1982) pp.27-44; and by the same author, Work and Control in a Peasant Economy: A History of the Lower Tchiri Valley in Malawi, 1859-1960 (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

production, and survival strategies;⁷ and the re-organization of customary land and the importance of legislation in the marketing of peasant crops.⁸ Though these studies have managed to challenge the assumptions in the dependency perspective of the 1970s which depicted Malawi simply as a "labour reserve", they, themselves, have not gone beyond the simple treatment of the rural economy as an "agrarian" or "peasant" sector. The other sectors: fishing, retail trade, recreation, and small-scale agro-industries have not received adequate attention.

In his work on the peasant communities of the Tchiri (Shire) Valley, Elias Mandala has argued that only "a very tiny minority" of the labour migrants were able to send money home or to invest in cattle and fishing.⁹ The present study argues that granted not everybody who migrated sent money home or was able to invest in the local economy, but as far as the lakeshore districts were concerned, labour migration formed a highroad to rural accumulation. The difference between the two areas probably had to do with the fact that the Shire Valley was an area of cash-cropping while the lakeshore districts

⁷ M.A. Vaughan, "Famine Analysis and Family Relations: 1949 in Nyasaland" in Past and Present vol. (1985) pp.177-205; and by the same author, The Story of an African Famine: Gender and Famine in Twentieth-century Malawi (Cambridge, London, New York, CUP, 1987).

⁸ See, for example, C. Ng'ong'ola, "Malawi's Agricultural Economy and the Evolution of Legislation on the Production and Marketing of Peasant Economic Crops" in JSAS vol.12,no.2 (April 1986) pp.240-262; and the special issue of Journal of Social Science (JSS), University of Malawi, vol.13 (1986).

⁹ Mandala, Work and Control p.266 and pp.252-254.

thrived on migrancy and fishing. Though both areas had high levels of labour migration (especially from the 1930s), the lakeshore districts tended to send more migrants than the cash-cropping areas of the Lower Shire. The relatively higher levels of literacy in the lakeshore and northern districts probably contributed to the difference in that the migrants from these districts were able to get better jobs and better pay,¹⁰ and thus able to save or remit more money. Such workers might also be more likely than the less literate migrants, from anywhere else, to put down roots in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia and cut ties with home.

Evidence suggests a direct connection between labour migration, commercial fishing, retail trade, and housing along the lakeshore areas. Oral accounts maintain that kumanga sitolo, "building a shop" and kumanga nyumba, building a house, were among the major priorities of the migrants. In reference to twelve theba houses in his village, an informant from Mtanga Village, Chia, Nkhota-kota, boasted that: "the body which has toiled in the mines cannot sleep on a reed mat in a shack. There should be a difference, and you know that".¹¹ He was not the only one to feel that way: "I would not be sitting here in my grocery shop to day, with a fishing unit at the lake, a radio and cassette player in the house,

¹⁰ MNA S36/2/3/6 and S36/2/5 Nyasaland Natives in the Union of South Africa, 1940, Appendix "C".

¹¹ TTP.9/WC/Mwazeni Mtira, Mtanga I, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 29/9/89.

two bicycles on the road, and children in school, if it were not for theba", confirmed George Kapote Phiri from a neighbouring village.¹²

Accounts of this nature provide further evidence for the argument that if the incorporation of Malawian rural communities into the regional capitalist economy created a crisis, it also provided means by which the crisis could be contained. Commercial fishing, retail business, and rural housing received their impetus from migrant labour. As well, they demonstrate that certain individuals in the rural economy did not just stop at mere survival, they were interested in accumulating. In the words of one informant, "if you are looking for millionaires, you will not find them here, but if you are looking for anthu wodya bwino, 'those who do well', [literally 'people who eat well'], you will find them, they are here".¹³

The indicators of kudya bwino, "doing well", were: a good house with imported domestic items in it; a reliable non-agricultural source of income; paying school fees for one's own children, nephews, nieces, and even cousins and affinal relatives; and having a bank or postal account. This chapter

¹² TIP.6/WC/George Kapote Phiri, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 29/9/89. For similar accounts: TIP.8/WC/Rashid Banda, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 29/9/89; TIP.11/WC/Cheketa Kaunda, Liwaladzi, Nkhota-kota; TIP.28/WC/PKM/M. Nkhata, Ndomo-Kakhongwe, Sanga, Nkhata Bay, 14/12/89; TIP.14/WC/PKM/Judas Saiima, Msumba, Ngombo, Nkhata Bay, 15/12/89; TIP.29/WC/R.R. Mzembe, Ndomo, Chizi-Kanyoli, Nkhata Bay, 19/12/89.

¹³ TIP.14/WC/B.L.N. Mwakimbala, Namiasi, Mangochi, 3/2/90.

therefore adopts the common people's own understanding of "doing well" in analyzing the process of rural accumulation. It is not about "millionaires" who could not be found in the countryside, but those who did "not sleep on a reed mat in a shack" and were aware that they were "different from most of the people" around them.¹⁴ The chapter argues that labour migration was a major impetus to this process of accumulation and social differentiation. It also addresses the colonial administration's interest in the fishing industry as a source of revenue for the Native Authority (chiefs') treasuries. Fishermen's co-operative societies were introduced but failed. The period covered here is between the late 1940s to 1985.

The contribution of labour migration to the transformation of African commercial fishing can be analyzed from three variables: the flow of cash into Nyasaland; the utilization of the proceeds of migrancy, especially bicycles; and the pattern of movement of the fishermen and fish-traders themselves. As regards the flow of cash into Nyasaland, there is no doubt that labour migration made a major contribution in this, though the exact figures on the amounts of remittances and deferred payments prior to the late 1940s are difficult to

¹⁴ TIP.6/WC/George Kapote, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 29/9/89; TIP.11/WC/Cheketa Kaunda, Liwaladzi, Nkhota-kota; TIP.14/WC/B.L.N. Mwakimbala, Namiasi, Mangochi. TIP.35/WC/PKM/Gwaza Chirwa, Ndomo, Chizi-Kanyoli, Nkhata Bay, 19/12/89; TIP.42/WC/PKM/Kekani Nyasulu, Nkhata Bay Boma, 22/12/89; TIP.51/WC/K.T.K. Themba Kamanga, Chizi-Nyere, Nkhata Bay, 20/12/89; TIP.68/WC/Chinthenga Nyirenda, Dindano-Mundola, Nkhata Bay, 20/12/89.

find. Even if they were available they would not give a complete picture given the levels of selufu migration and the various ways used by the migrants to remit money. These included: sending by hand with other returning migrants; by post; through Nyasaland Labour Officers in Salisbury and Johannesburg to the District Commissioners at home; or simply saving it until one returned home.

I

Remittances and Deferred Payments

Official records suggest that the flow of remittances and deferred payments increased from the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. The table below, though incomplete in a number of ways, gives a picture of the amounts of money flowing into Nyasaland from labour migrants:

Table 10.1 : Remittances and Deferred Payments

<u>Year</u>	<u>First</u> <u>Remittances</u> (£)	<u>Second</u> <u>Remittances</u> (£)	<u>Deferred</u> <u>Payments</u> (£)	<u>Total</u> (£)
1948	(including deceased estates deposits)			17,657
1949	(remittances only, no breakdown)			7,375
1950	6,991	1,248	2,140	10,379
1951	9,219	5,220	15,022	29,461
1952	15,436	8,062	21,070	44,568
1953	19,086	11,722	28,658	59,466
1954	(no breakdown given)	"more than"	£0.75 million	
1955	-do-	"just over"	£1.00 million	
1956	-do-	"just over"	£1.50 million	
1957	-do-	"just over"	£1.50 million	
1958	-do-	"just over"	£1.75 million	
1959	-do-	"just over"	£1.50 million	

Sources: Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Reports of the Labour Department, 1948-1953; Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Reports, 1948-1960.

The enormous jump in the figures for 1954 compared to

1953 (more than a ten fold increase) correspond to the sudden increase in the numbers of Identification Certificates (IDs) issued to the migrants (refer Chapter 9, Table 9.4) and the numbers of workers recruited in Nyasaland in those two years (Table 9.1). The numbers of IDs issued for South Africa jumped from 7,526 in 1953 to 10,772 in 1954. Those issued for Southern Rhodesia rose from 39,975 in 1953 to 45,797 in 1954, and from 3,555 to 5,595 for Northern Rhodesia. The numbers recruited for work in South Africa increased from 6,974 in 1953 to 9,844 in 1954 but the Southern Rhodesian figure slightly declined from 6,978 in 1953 to 6,504 in 1954. The high numbers of IDs issued reflect the high levels of selufu migration. It is also important to note that prices for African-grown tobacco declined during the early 1950s resulting in increased emigration.

The figures in the above table do not give a complete picture of remittances flowing into Nyasaland. There are three major deficiencies in them. First, they represent only a very small number of migrants who remitted money through official channels. The majority of them was in Southern Rhodesia, sending obligatory remittances and deferred payments according to the terms of the ITLA. The percentage of the employers making deductions from their workers' pay and forwarding them to Nyasaland was also not very large: between 23 and 46 per cent between 1950 and 1955, but gradually increased

thereafter.¹⁵

Second, the figures do not include the money sent by post; through the offices of the Nyasaland Labour Representatives in Johannesburg and Salisbury, by recruiting organizations themselves, and amounts of taxes remitted by governments. For example, in 1952, a total of £465,615 in postal and money orders was received from South Africa (£300,504) and Southern Rhodesia (£165,111). Much of this came from labour migrants. A further £119,367 was cashed in Nyasaland by returning migrants as deferred payment from the WNLA (£98,276) and the RNLSC or Mthandizi (£21,091); and another £36,198 was remitted by the Labour Representatives in Johannesburg (£7,401) and Salisbury (£28,797). In 1953, the total amount received from recruiting organizations was £135,181; and £33,529 from Labour Representatives; while postal and money orders amounted to £551,875. With the increase in recruiting quotas from the mid-1950s, the amount received from the recruiting organizations alone rose to £866,288 by 1957. The increased figures after 1953 in the table above include amounts of money sent through these other methods which were not taken into account in the earlier figures.

Statistical data from Southern Rhodesian sources on money remitted to Nyasaland are equally unreliable and incomplete.

¹⁵ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1950, p.20; 1951, p.12 and p.25; 1954, p.8; 1956. p.8 and pp.26-27; 1958, p.28.

The table below shows the amounts of taxes, remittances, and deferred payments sent to Nyasaland from Southern Rhodesia between 1952 and 1957 under the terms of the ITLA:

Table 10.2 : Taxes, Remittances, and Deferred Payments From Rhodesia

	<u>1952/53</u>	<u>1953/54</u>	<u>1954/55</u>	<u>1955/56</u>	<u>1956/57</u>
	(£)	(£)	(£)	(£)	(£)
Nyasaland	30,867	24,290	61,782	71,731	89,123
N. Rhodesia	18,055	15,290	30,293	42,633	33,015
PEA	27,147	30,696	41,786	47,617	49,976

Source: Southern Rhodesia, Report of the Urban African Affairs Commission, 1958 (Salisbury, Government Printer, 1958) p.15.

Just like those from Nyasaland, these figures do not include the amounts of money sent through unofficial channels. There is also no breakdown to show how much was in the form of deferred payments, taxes, and remittances. The numbers of the migrants on whose behalf the money was remitted is not stated; and so are the numbers of the employers who were making the deductions.

Finally, statistical data do not show exactly where in Nyasaland the money was going. It is difficult to tell which districts received more, and which ones received less. The names of the recipients are also unknown. What is evident in the Nyasaland sources is that the recipients were usually wives, children, mothers, and brothers of the migrants.¹⁶

¹⁶ See MNA LB5/5/1 Migrant Labour: Family Remittances, 1949-1951; LB5/5/2 Family Remittances, 1955. The files contain some incomplete information on the numbers of remittances received in some districts of the Southern Province - not for all the years.

However, three conclusions can be drawn from these statistics: first, the increase in the amounts of money flowing into Nyasaland corresponds to the increase in the figures on recruiting and those on the issue of IDs as discussed in the preceding chapter. Second, the increase is more noticeable from the mid-1950s, which confirms the argument that the country was going through a period of agrarian crisis which, in turn, resulted in increased labour migration. Third, evidence suggests a direct relationship between the flow of remittances and deferred payments and investments in the local economy in some parts of the country. In the lakeshore districts, two sectors of the local economy benefitted from this: retail trade and commercial fishing.

II

Migrancy and Retail Trade

A survey of retail trade done between 1952 and 1953 showed high percentage ratios of African to non-African shops in districts with high levels of migration and in those where prospects for cash-cropping were good. The exact numbers of the shops and their proprietors were, however, not stated:

Table 10.3 : Ratios of African to non-African shops, 1952/53.

<u>District</u>	<u>African</u>	<u>Non-African</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>African</u>	<u>Non-African</u>
North					
Karonga	96	4	Mzimba	83	17
Rumphi	95	5	Nkhata Bay	90	10
Centre					
Kasungu	58	42	Lilongwe	79	21
Dowa	57	43	Dedza	68	34
Nkhota-kota	82	18	Ncheu	88	12
South					
Ft. Johnston	64	36	Cholo	63	37
Domasi	42	58	Mlanje	77	23
Zomba	62	38	Chikwawa	74	26
Blantyre	45	55	P. Herald	53	47

Source: MNA PC01/15/8 Fergus Chalmers Wright, A Report of an Enquiry into the Distribution and Consumption of Commodities Among Africans in Nyasaland and Tanganyika, 1952-1953.

The above table suggests that retail trade in the Northern Province was predominantly in African hands. Given that there were "very little opportunities for making money" in the province,¹⁷ and that levels of labour migration were very high, the only possible source of capital invested in retail trade was therefore labour migration. This is confirmed by both oral and archival evidence. The latter shows that in 1955 there were 1,836 licensed traders in the four main districts of the Northern Province: Karonga (591), Rumphi (304), Mzimba (642), and Nkhata Bay (299).¹⁸ There were also "numerous and varied" unlicensed traders - ranging from those

¹⁷ See MNA PCN1/44/6 Facilities for Making Money in the Northern Province, 1954-1955.

¹⁸ MNA PCN1/44/5 Trading: Enquiries Regarding Trading Possibilities and Credit Facilities, 1955.

selling groceries in their houses, to those who moved their merchandise on bicycles or on their heads and shoulders, selling them from door to door in the villages, at public markets, and at social functions.

Oral evidence maintains that the majority of these hawkers were returned labour migrants.¹⁹ In the case of Karonga, lakeshore Rumphi, and Nkhata Bay, commercial fishing and fish-trading is likely to have contributed to the expansion in retail business. Concrete historical evidence for this is lacking,²⁰ but of late there has been a direct link between commercial fishing and the expansion in restaurant businesses in areas such as Chilumba in Karonga and central Nkhata Bay. Fish from Nkhata Bay are served in restaurants as far inland as Mbalachanda in Mzimba district. The majority of the restaurant proprietors themselves being returned migrants while commercial fishing has also thrived on proceeds of

¹⁹ TIP.3/WC/Ali Mgombe, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 28/9/89; TIP.5/WC/Philip, Kondoole Banda, Nkhota-kota Trading Centre, Nkhota-kota; TIP.44/WC/AB/S.S. Banda, Khuyu, Likoma, Nkhata Bay, 15/12/89; TIP.37/WC/AB/S. Banda, Mbungo, Likoma, 16/12/89; TIP.33/WC/AB/W. Chapema, Chileka, Chizumulu, 17/12/89; TIP.66/WC/AB/J. Kanyenda, Chilombola, Chizumulu, Nkhata Bay, 17/12/89; TIP.45/WC/PKM/K.Z.K. Kamanga, Chizi-Nyere, Nkhata Bay, 18/12/89; TIP.31/PKM/Yotam Thundu, Mlombwa, Kamisa, Nkhata Bay, 19/12/89; TIP.79/WC/K.T.K. Themba Kamanga, Chizi-Nyere, Nkhata Bay, 20/12/89; TIP.36/WC/PKM/Kakhola Banda, Ndomo, Nkhata, Bay, 19/12/89; TIP.66/WC/B.C Chirwa, Dindano-Mundola, Nkhata Bay, 12/3/90.

²⁰ For commercial fishing in Karonga see MNA PCN1/17/7 Provincial Commissioner, Northern Province, to Chief Secretary, 17/10/50; and PCN1/17/4 District Commissioner, Nkhata Bay, to Provincial Commissioner, Northern Province, 16/2/57.

migrancy.

It was argued in the previous chapters that in the 1920s and 1930s, some returning migrants in the Central Province invested their earnings in tobacco production. The table above shows a fairly high percentage ratio of African to non-African shops in this region as well, though not as high as in the northern districts. The survey recorded intense competition between African and Indian traders in the Central Province. The African traders asked the government to stop their Indian counterparts from opening up shops, making bricks and sewing planks on African Trust Land.

The Southern Province was the centre of the colonial economy, hence the fairly high percentage ratios of non-African shops. However, even here, districts with relatively high levels of labour migration: Fort Johnston, Mlanje, Chikwawa, and Port Herald, had high percentage ratios of African businesses. In addition to labour migration, Fort Johnston was a cotton-producing and commercial fishing district, the same applied to Chikwawa and Port Herald, while Mlanje and Cholo were wage-labour districts on account of their tea plantations. Zomba (including Domasi) and Blantyre had large urban populations hence the high percentage ratios of non-African shops. The Southern Province, and especially the Shire Highlands, was also a region of sharecropping which might have increased opportunities for hawking.

Apart from not stating the exact numbers of the retail

shops, the table above does not state the regional or district origins of the traders. Given the imbalances in economic development, some traders are likely to have moved from the less developed areas to the more developed ones. Two patterns are likely to have occurred: from the north and centre to the more developed south; and from the north and south to the cash-cropping areas of the centre. The movement from the south and centre to the less developed north was unlikely, or might have occurred on a very small scale. Unregistered hawkers were more likely to have moved from one district or region to the other.

An important factor behind the resilience of African retail business was the use of "unpaid" family labour. Traders usually employed members of their extended family whom they paid very little, often in kind. Using family labour was also a way of maintaining social relationships and family structures from which future workers could be drawn. The use of family labour was common in African cash-cropping and commercial fishing. In fishing, the alovi were often drawn from related households. The use of family labour and networks was one of the pseudo-traditional avenues of rural accumulation, especially if combined with proceeds of migrancy. This enabled some individuals and families to go beyond subsistence. Nowhere was this more pronounced than in fishing and fish-trading.

III

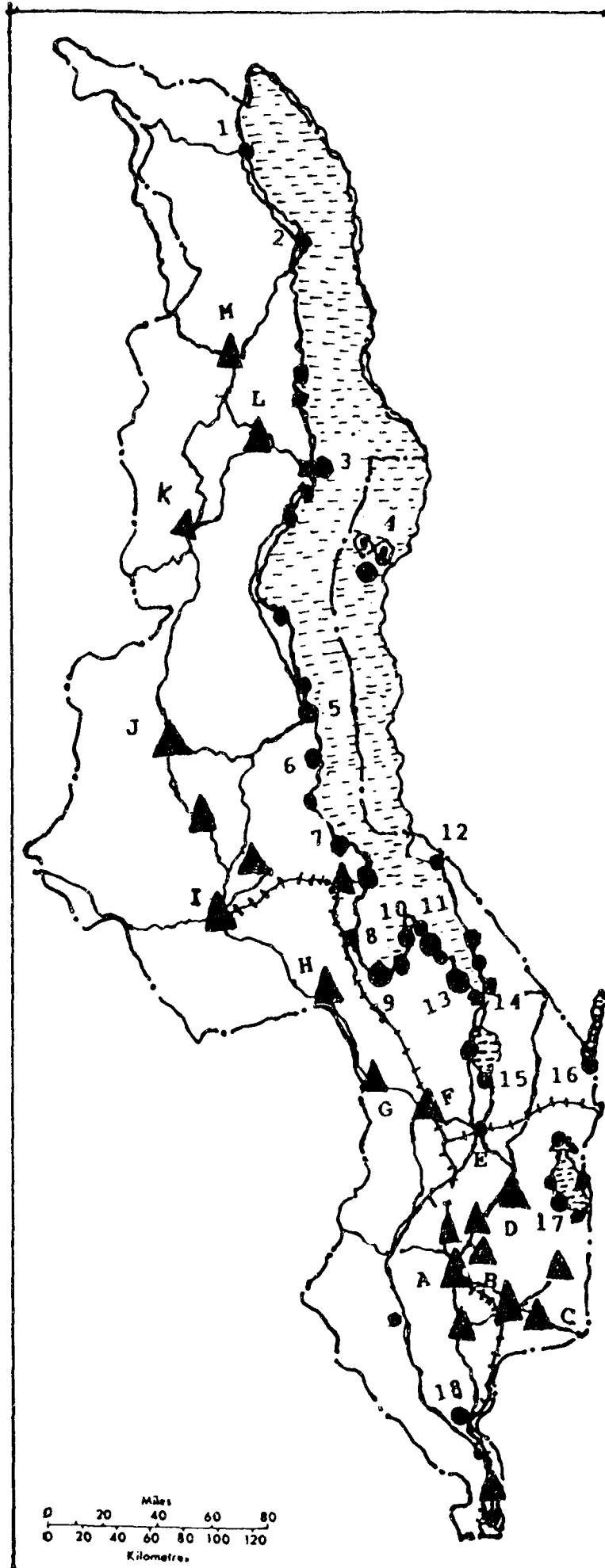
The fishing Industry in the 1950s

The 1950s witnessed renewed government interest in African fishing. This was partly in response to the agrarian crisis, and partly also because of the changes within the fishing industry itself which the government wanted to use to provide revenue for Native Authority treasuries. By this time, well-capitalized African commercial fishermen and traders had developed a network of fish-trading. They had established agents along the road from Fort Johnston to Zomba, Limbe and Blantyre with whom they left part of their lorry-loads while they, themselves, proceeded with the remainder to the urban markets.²¹ They competed with the Greeks who by this time were not allowed to export fish to Southern Rhodesia due to food shortages at home as a result of the 1949 famine. The ban was relaxed in 1954, allowing limited amounts to be exported, and completely lifted in 1957. The government proposed four policy strategies in "developing" African commercial fishing and "organizing" the fish-trade:²² promoting fisheries research; establishing fishing co-operatives; introducing fisheries

²¹ MNA COM-9/3/1 Evidence by Henry Masauko Chipembere to the Commission of Enquiry into Fish Marketing and Supplies, Fort Johnston, 8th-9th June, 1956.

²² MNA PCN1/17/8 Co-operatives Societies Officer, Northern Province, to Provincial Commissioner, Northern Province, 4/10/54; PCN1/15/8 Acting Chief Secretary to The Chairman of Co-operatives, Zomba, 18/7/58.

Fig. 4 FISHING GROUNDS AND FISH MARKETS



Fishing Grounds

1. Karonga
2. Chilumba
3. Nkhata-Kota
6. Chia Lagoon
7. Domira Bay
8. Chipoka
9. Malembo
10. Cape Maclear (Chembe)
11. Monkey Bay
12. Makanjila
13. Namiasi
14. Mangochi
15. Lake Malombe
16. Lake Chiuta (Amalamba)
17. Lake Chilwa
18. Chiromo (Shire River)

Major Markets

- A. Blantyre
 - B. Limbe
 - C. Mulanje and Thyolo
 - D. Zomba
 - E. Liwonde
 - F. Balaka
 - G. Ncheu
 - H. Dedza
 - I. Lilongwe
 - J. Kasungu
 - L. Mzuzu
 - M. Rumphi
- Fishing ground
▲ Fish Market

courses; and effecting price controls. Contrary to official thinking, African commercial fishing and fish-trading activities were already "organized" and "developed" by this time. The administration's main interest was the revenue from these activities.

Fisheries research was concentrated on the breeding and migratory patterns of the tilapia, the most commercial species.²³ In 1951, Nyasaland became the centre of another important survey - the Joint Fisheries Research Organization (JFRO) - "to undertake research into all aspects of fisheries on the lakes, rivers, and other waters, jointly of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland". The survey's research emphasis was on the development of African commercial fishing so as "to improve the protein food yield for undernourished Africa".²⁴ It established its headquarters at Nkhata Bay in the Northern Province because the southern part of the lake had already been surveyed in the late 1930s and early 1940s. The survey's headquarters became the first fisheries training school in the country. Trainees were initially drawn from local fishermen, by the late 1950s, there were trainees from Nkhota-kota and as far south as Fort Johnston. Upon completion of the course, a

²³ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1951, p.53; 1953, p.76.

²⁴ Joint Fisheries Research Organization, Report on the Survey of Northern Lake Nyasa, 1954-55 (Zomba, Government Printer 1956, reprinted 1961?) pp.4 and 19. See also Colonial Office, Northern Rhodesia Annual Report 1951, p.24; 1953, p.30.

six-month program, the majority of the first, second, and third entrants joined the Fisheries Department itself, forming the first group of trained African fisheries "experts".

Those who went home became the first group of the African "commercial fishermen" to qualify for loans from the Native Welfare Fund of the Colonial Development Corporation (CDC). Some of the trainees of the Nkhata Bay Fisheries School were still in the fishing business at the time of fieldwork on which this study is partially based.²⁵ Others had moved from being employees of the Fisheries Department to independent commercial fishing and fish-trading.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Fisheries Department experimented with different types of fishing gear and boat-building. The Department's plank-boats were "in big demand", orders "far exceeded possible production".²⁶ Gill-nets and a variety of twines and yarn were distributed (as part of the experiment) or sold to fishermen. The fishing industry thus "continued to show signs of expansion" and "becoming more truly commercial". A "small but growing" number of Africans "looked to fishing as their main livelihood".²⁷ Some of them

²⁵ TIP.3/WC/Ali Mgombe, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 28/9/89; TIP.12/WC/C. Mwenda, Namiasi, Mangochi, 26/1/90. A.J.P. Mzumara, a well-known former Fisheries Officer, trained at Nkhata Bay, was not interviewed for this study but had moved into commercial fishing, fish-processing and trading.

²⁶ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1953, p.76.

²⁷ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1954, p.6 and p.83.

were using powered boats with outboard engines.

The contribution of the Fisheries Department was, however, confined to gill-net fishing which expanded noticeably in the 1950s. Not less than two commercial firms were involved in the importation, manufacturing, and distribution of gill-nets in the country by the mid-1950s. Indian merchants in Blantyre, Limbe, Fort Johnston, Nkhota-kota and Nkhata Bay also imported and sold gill-nets. Some migrant labourers from the lakeshore districts had taken to cross-border trafficking of nets, especially from Tanganyika and Northern Rhodesia.²⁸

Another contribution of the Fisheries Department to gill-net fishing came through the decisive reduction in the crocodile population of the principal fishing areas of the southern parts of the lake.²⁹ Crocodiles had a depressant effect on gill-net fishing, destroying the nets and eating "large quantities" of fish already caught. In 1950, the Fisheries Department received about £1,400 from the Native Development and Welfare Fund for the destruction of crocodiles. A hunter was hired, and by the end of the year, he accounted for not less than 400 crocodiles shot. Hundreds more were poisoned to death. For weeks, the lakeshore was littered

²⁸ Informants asked for anonymity on this issue.

²⁹ MNA PCC1/18/16 Correspondence between W.H. Jollyman, the Fisheries Officer, and the Chief Secretary.

with rotting crocodile carcasses giving an awful smell.³⁰

Local villagers were mobilized to hunt for crocodile nests and collect their eggs. In less than one month in 1950, 4,485 eggs were collected. By 1951, crocodile hunting had become a profitable business. Some 253 skins were shipped to New York from Blantyre, and hundreds more to South Africa and Britain. Two licences were issued for commercial hunting of crocodiles in 1952. The business expanded in the 1960s and 1970s with some well-known African and non-African commercial fishermen in the Fort Johnston area being actively involved in it.³¹

Gill-nets were widely adopted because they were light and easy to operate, they did not require a lot of labour. Once set, the nets were left overnight and the catch collected the following day. Even one or two teenage boys would operate them. They were thus an ideal fishing gear for communities with high levels of labour migration. The imported nylon and flax nets were more durable than those made locally and thus were preferred by the fishermen. However, technological adoptions do not occur in a vacuum. They reflect changes in

³⁰ For detailed accounts see the correspondence between W.H.Jollyman and the Fisheries Officer, and the latter with the Provincial Commissioner and the Chief Secretary in MNA PCC1/18/16. The hunter, Jollyman, was a tobacco farmer and analytical chemist. The ecological implications of the poison he used were not assessed.

³¹ Due to the legal implications of the trade, informants asked for anonymity on this issue. The private hunters licensed in 1952 were J. Stutchbury and L.A. Gurney.

the economy, especially the expansion in the markets.

The fish markets continued to expand in the 1950s despite the rural crisis. The resilience of the tea industry meant that the fish market created by the wage labour force continued to flourish. The urban population also expanded during the 1950s. Blantyre and Limbe became centres of a small but growing industrial labour force. The list of international manufacturing firms establishing plants in Blantyre and Limbe grew steadily in the 1950s. They included: the Nyasaland Tobacco Company (subsidiary of ITG); Lever Brothers (Rhodesia) Ltd, a soap-making company; two clothing companies - the London and Blantyre Supply Company and the Nyasaland Clothing Company (forerunners of David Whitehead and Sons); the Rhodesia Cement Company; the Nyasaland Oil Industries, an oil-seed processing company; Hitchings and Kay (Pty), who operated a granadilla juice extraction factory; and the Mineral Water (Coca-cola) Factory. Light industry, construction, commerce and transportation, together employed between 15,000 and 16,000 workers each year between 1954 and 1959. The urban fish markets were thus sustained.

The intensification of gill-net fishing provided the government with an opportunity to raise revenue from fishermen and fish traders for the Native Authority Administration. New fishing regulations were proposed: Fishing Rules and Licensing (Commercial Fishing Rules, 1950) which introduced fishing

licences for African commercial fishermen.³² Restrictions on mesh sizes were imposed in 1951.³³ The objects of the new policy were threefold: to provide revenue for the Native Administration treasuries; to furnish statistics on the rate of African fishing; and to give the Native Authorities some control over the rate of fishing in their areas. The Native Authorities were empowered to refuse permits to non-resident Africans so as to conserve the fish stock in times of scarcity - as if the fish were stationary in the Native Authorities' respective areas. The actual fees to be charged were a matter for the Native Authorities to decide as this was in part a revenue measure.³⁴

Government officials were very divided on the desirability of the new rules. For example, the District Commissioner in Karonga at the northern end of the lake felt that it "would be extremely short-sighted to abandon any attempt at control", but, "in any case, there [was] plenty of unenforced and unenforceable legislation on the Statute Book already". Unless the fishing regulations were enforced, which he doubted very much, it would be insufficient merely to warn the African commercial fishermen of the results of over-

³² MNA PCN 1/17/7 Fishing: General Policy, Rules etc, 1947-1951.

³³ MNA PCN 1/17/4 Game, Fish and Tsetse Control: Fisheries Control Policy.

³⁴ MNA PCN 1/17/7 Fishing Rules and Licensing (Fisheries Commercial Fishing Rules, 1950).

fishing.³⁵ His opinion was shared by the Provincial Commissioner in the area who argued that: "if applied to the Northern Province [the rules] would present numerous practical difficulties". He therefore recommended that "they should not be applied to the Northern Province until such time as it is possible to ensure their enforcement".³⁶

The major obstacle to the effective implementation of these rules arose from the mobility of fishermen and their seasonal fishing practices. As the Provincial Commissioner for the Central Province noted: "Africans naturally [made] up their minds to fish or not to fish - at the start of the season [or] half way through the season". That would logically lead to problems in determining the licensing period.³⁷ Since the licensing would be done by the Native Authorities in their respective areas, there would be no uniformity in the fees and licensing system. When the metal licensing discs finally arrived from South Africa in 1953,³⁸ they were unevenly distributed in the southern and central portions of the lake.

³⁵ MNA PCN 1/17/4 District Commissioner, Karonga (North Nyasa District) to Acting Provincial Commissioner, 14/12/51.

³⁶ MNA PCN 1/17/4 Acting Provincial Commissioner (Northern Province) to Chief Secretary, 25/8/51.

³⁷ MNA PCC 1/15/8 Acting Provincial Commissioner to District Commissioners: Dowa, Nkhota-kota, and Dedza, 29/1/52.

³⁸ MNA PCN 1/17/3 Acting Director, Game, Fish, and Tsetse Control, 23/11/53.

IV

Price Controls and Co-operatives

With the introduction of the new Native Authority Ordinance in 1955, Native Authorities were given powers to effect price controls on fish sold in their areas. The regulations became very unpopular with local fishermen and fish-traders to the extent that the chiefs themselves became reluctant to enforce them vigorously. In fact, in most areas the chiefs neither had the power nor the resources to effect the price controls. Fishermen and fish-traders were mobile and would easily avoid areas where the controls were in effect.

It was only in Nkhata Bay district that controls were put into effect by a District Council bye-law which was enforced with support from the District Commissioner's office. This was partly a move to strengthen the position of Native Authorities in a district where, traditionally, the office of "chief" did not have any constitutional powers.³⁹ As fishermen and fish-traders challenged the legality of the controls, cases of violations became very common. Some 46 cases were tried in the chiefs' courts in 1956 alone,⁴⁰ ending in minor fines. The

³⁹ See J. van Velsen, The Politics of Kinship: A Study of Social Manipulation Among the Lakeside Tonga of Nyasaland (Manchester, MUP/Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, 1964) pp.v-xiv, and chapter 6.

⁴⁰ MNA PCN 1/17/4 District Commissioner, Nkhata Bay, to Provincial Commissioner (North), 16/2/57; Director, Game, Fish and Tsetse Control, to Provincial Commissioners, 29/7/56.

incidents attracted a great deal of official attention which resulted in the recommendation that the controls were "illegal" and had to be abandoned. There was growing fear that the fishermen and fish-traders would simply stop fishing and African commerce would suffer as a result.

Along with price controls came the proposal on fishing co-operatives. Funds would be drawn from the Native Development and Welfare Fund of the CDC and advanced by government to the co-operatives "for the purposes of purchasing good quality imported nets". District Commissioners would provide "personal assistance and guidance in developing a co-operative scheme for communal fishing and marketing".⁴¹ Two pilot co-operative societies were proposed: one on Likoma Island in Nkhata Bay district, and another in Chief Mponda's area in Fort Johnston.⁴² On Likoma Island, the attempts "were met with a response which was individually lukewarm" and collectively "extremely hostile".⁴³ At Mponda's, after a very little consideration, the scheme was rejected by Mponda and his headmen on the grounds that: "we have tried 'companies'

⁴¹ MNA NS1/10/1 Interim Report on the Fish and Fisheries of Lake Nyasa; COM-9/3/1 Commissioner for Co-operative Development to Attorney General, 4/10/56.

⁴² MNA PCN 1/17/8 Fishing Investigations and Proposal for Fishing Co-operatives - Likoma Island; NS1/10/1 Interim Report on the Fish and Fisheries of Lake Nyasa; Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Game, Fish and Tsetse Control, 1958 (Zomba, Government Printer 1959) pp.5-6.

⁴³ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Game, 1958, p.5.

and we don't like them".⁴⁴ The District Commissioner in the area concluded that:

the real explanation, which would be apparent to anyone familiar with native mentality, and with the Yao in particular, is that they mistrust each other and that they had no confidence that any co-operative effort requiring substantial manual labour would be maintained. In effect they are aware that for a combination of reasons cooperative effort among themselves is impracticable.⁴⁵

The reason was not mistrust. Co-operatives could not work because, as the Provincial Commissioner for the Northern Province rightly observed, "the records of small-scale marketing and production co-operatives showed that they did not work". That was "equally true of societies of fishermen".⁴⁶ The hazards of the trade, the simplicity of most fishermen; the perishable nature of the produce which gave the producer little bargaining power; and the alternating gluts and shortages which tended to disrupt connections with the markets; were the major obstacles to the co-operative organization of fishermen. The government would have to come up with substantial amounts of money, at least at the start, to help the fishermen modernize their equipment. The Nyasaland

⁴⁴ MNA NS1/10/1 Interim Report on the Fish and Fisheries of Lake Nyasa: Memorandum on Co-operatives by the District Commissioner, Fort Johnston.

⁴⁵ MNA NS1/10/1 Memorandum on Co-operatives, 1954.

⁴⁶ MNA PCN 1/17/8 Provincial Commissioner (North) to District Commissioner, Nkhata Bay, 6/9/54. He cited evidence from a document prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization on "Co-operative Thrift, Credit, and Marketing in Economically Under-developed Countries" (knead).

government did not have the funds.

The Commissioner also feared that loans would lead to indebtedness which in turn would result in apathy and lack of enterprise and unwillingness to work beyond subsistence. Managerial training for fishermen and fish-traders would be required, but the government had neither the funds nor the personnel. From the point of view of the fishermen themselves, co-operatives amounted to government intervention which they did not like. They were unwilling to let go of their individual enterprises in favour of co-operatives; and were afraid of accumulating debts. This was the main reason for their "hostile" or "lukewarm" reaction to the co-operatives. However, the proposal received some support from members of an emerging class of the Malawian 'petit-bourgeois', predominantly retail traders and nationalist politicians, who saw the fishing industry as "one of their hopes for an economic future".⁴⁷ Representative of these were the African members of the Legislative Council from the lakeshore districts. They became very vocal on matters of commercial fishing, and protested against the involvement of non-Africans in it. "That the fishing industry must be encouraged and widened is beyond dispute", wrote Wellington Kanyama Chiume to the Commission on Fishing, "but this must only be done with the view to increase and intensify African participation

⁴⁷ MNA PCN 1/17/8 Acting Chief Secretary to the Chairman of Co-operatives, 18/7/58.

rather than to offer easy facilities to the people who could establish business elsewhere".⁴⁸ The exportation of fish to Southern Rhodesia was opposed on the grounds that "it would be a European industry" since the Africans did not have sufficient capital to participate in such an enterprise.⁴⁹

In 1956, the government appointed a Commission of Enquiry into the Fishing Industry. Its terms were:

to assess as far as possible the total internal demand for locally caught fish at various price levels, and to relate this to the actual quantities caught by the existing fishing concerns, both non-African and African, in recent years. To consider the adequacy of the arrangements of the fishing concerns, both non-African and African for the storage, preservation, curing, transport, distribution and sale of locally caught fish, and advise how they might be improved. To assess whether fish caught locally can economically compete with imported fish. To advise whether the general or limited export of locally caught fish to the Rhodesias would be in the interest of the Protectorate; and to advise whether price control in respect of fish would be practicable or desirable.⁵⁰

Three important conclusions can be drawn from the voluminous oral and written evidence submitted to the Commission. First, African commercial fishermen and fish-traders continued to resent government intervention in the

⁴⁸ MNA COM-9/1/1 Wellington Kanyama Chiume, Member of Legislative Council, Nkhata Bay, to Secretary, Commission of Enquiry into the Fishing Industry. See also the evidence by Henry Masauko Chipembere, Member of Legislative Council, Fort Johnston, in the same file.

⁴⁹ MNA COM-9/1/1 Resolution passed at a Constituency Meeting at Malindi, Fort Johnston, 17/7/56.

⁵⁰ Nyasaland Protectorate, Report on the Inquiry into the Fishing Industry (Zomba, Government Printer, 1956) p.3. See also MNA COM-9/4/1 and COM-9/4/2 Draft and Final Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Nyasaland Fishing Industry, 1956.

fishing industry. A Nyasaland migrant labourer in Transvaal, South Africa, even protested against the idea of a commission of enquiry into the fishing industry: "I have heard this kind of thing before", wrote Koloneliyo Zekeyo Kamnkhwala, "at first, that it was required that all gardens in the villages should be registered, that was bad!...and now, it is fish. What is wrong with the fish?...Do you want Europeans to divide up the lake among themselves?...You better listen to us now, do you understand?"⁵¹ Kamnkhwala had read about the Commission in Msimbi, a Nyasaland vernacular newspaper which some migrants in South Africa received through their Labour Representative in Johannesburg.

Second, the numbers of Africans involved in commercial fishing and fish-trading had increased during the 1950s. Labour migrants in Southern Rhodesia and South Africa were writing to the home government for commercial fishing licences, partly in fear that they might lose out to the non-Africans, and partly also to find a niche to return to after working abroad. Applications for commercial fishing and fish-trading were also received from Europeans in Tanganyika and Northern Rhodesia. On the lake itself, some enterprising individuals operated dhows between Makanjila on the east coast and Fort Johnston, Monkey Bay, Chipoka, and Salima on the west coast; between Nkhota-kota, Mkumbaledza, and Chia, in the

⁵¹ MNA COM-9/1/1 Koloneliyo Zekeyo Kamnkhwala, Transvaal, South Africa, to Commission of Enquiry into Fish, Marketing and Supplies, 25/5/56, translated.

north, to various lake stations in the south; and between the islands of Likoma and Chizumulu to mainland stations in Nkhata Bay, Nkhota-kota, and Salima.⁵² Formerly a status symbol for chiefs and wealthy individuals, dhows had become an important fish-trading vessel for traders from Makanjila, parts of Nkhota-kota and the islands of Likoma and Chizumulu in the late 1950s, and right up to the late 1960s in the case of the islands.⁵³

Third, the internal demand for fish was a large one, and it often exceeded the supply - especially on the tea plantations and the urban markets of Blantyre, Limbe, Zomba and Lilongwe. The tea plantations were "most anxious" to see their workers receive adequate supplies of animal protein; the only source available in large supply was fish.⁵⁴ They had tried arranging with the Yiannakis for a regular fish distribution but the arrangement did not work. The reason for the failure was that Yiannakis wanted to avoid the risk of carrying a perishable commodity to the plantation markets his lorries could not easily reach, especially during the rainy season. On "five to seven" occasions Yiannakis' lorries, full of fresh fish, returned on their way to the plantations of

⁵² See MNA PCN1/17/5 Chief Secretary to Chairman of Co-operative Societies, 18/7/58.

⁵³ The use of dhows in fishing trading is also mentioned in Malawi Government/H.L.F. Renson, Fish Marketing in Malawi (Zomba, Ministry of Agriculture, 1969) pp.12-13.

⁵⁴ MNA COM-9/2/1 Evidence by Gerald S.J. Hadlow, Chairman, Nyasaland Tea Association, Blantyre, 17th-19th July, 1956.

Cholo and Mlanje due to bad roads.⁵⁵ Other fishing firms shared his fears: "we would very much prefer the estates themselves to purchase in bulk", wrote the Nielsen Brothers to the Fish Commission, "this certainly limits our liability of the handling of a perishable commodity".⁵⁶

For their part, the plantation owners wanted to avoid costs: "Yiannakis made the suggestion that I should buy the fish to sell", responded Robert Stewart Abbey of Thondwe Tobacco Company, "but I said no! He was a fish seller, I work tobacco...if he wished to sell fish, it was up to him to put a seller in my yard".⁵⁷ Some employers from Limbe and Cholo formed an association, the Lake Nyasa Fisheries Association, for the equitable distribution and marketing of fish. They brought the fish from the lake to central distributing points from which it was collected by plantation lorries. The arrangement "was a complete flop".⁵⁸ Often the fish reached the plantations in a very bad state due to poor handling, without freezing facilities, and spending long hours on the road. It was only from 1958 that cold storage facilities for

⁵⁵ MNA COM-9 3/1 Evidence by Christos Yiannakis to the Fish Commission, 8/7/56. See also evidence by Charles Edward Snell of the Nyasa and Chamber of Commerce in the same file.

⁵⁶ MNA COM-9 3/1 Nielsen Brothers (Private) Ltd, Central African Lake Fisheries, Secretary Fish Commission, 6/3/56.

⁵⁷ MNA COM-9 3/1 Evidence by Robert Stewart Abbey, Plantation Director, Thondwe, 1956. See also evidence by Christos Yiannakis in the same file.

⁵⁸ MNA COM-9 3/1 Evidence by Charles Edward Snell, Secretary, Chamber of Commerce, 1956.

fish became available in Blantyre, Limbe, and Zomba.

V

The Resilience of African Fish-traders

The failure of organized fish distribution benefitted African fish-traders. The plantations in Mlanje and Cholo which could not be reached by lorries on account of bad roads, became "stations of dried fish carried by Africans on bicycles".⁵⁹ It was to these traders that Yiannakis and other non-African fishing firms sold much of their fish. Yiannakis had established a depot with cold storage facilities at Limbe by this time. Fish-traders from various parts of the Shire Highlands, and especially those who operated on a small-scale, came to his depot to buy fish and retail it in remote village and plantation markets. The well-capitalized ones continued to make regular trips to Fort Johnston and Lake Chilwa for their supplies.

Two important developments occurred between 1958 and 1964 from which African fishermen and fish-traders benefitted: first, two non-African firms began to purchase fish caught by Africans for export to Southern Rhodesia. This was partly a response to the growing competition among the non-African fishing firms themselves, and partly also because of the

⁵⁹ MNA COM-9/3/1 Evidence by Charles Edward Snell, Blantyre, 17th-19th July, 1956. Also in evidence by Christos Yiannakis.

expansion in African commercial fishing. Four non-African commercial firms were in operation in 1959. Their overall fishing rate had risen from 9,325 ring-net hauls in 1958 to 12,412 hauls in 1959, but their individual production was not enough for the expanding export trade. Thus they adopted "a policy of large scale purchasing of fish caught by Africans", giving the African fishermen an option of selling their catch to local fish-traders or to the non-African exporters. Not less than 450 tons of fish were bought by the exporters from African fishermen in 1960 alone.⁶⁰ Second, the government provided some modest loans for fishing "and related purposes" between 1958 and 1962. The total amounts had risen from £2,400 in 1959 to £3,500 in 1960.⁶¹ The numbers of the recipient, their location, and size of operation were not stated.

The above developments resulted in differentiation among fish-traders. Three categories were identified by a study done between 1965 and 1969.⁶² The first group was that of "small-scale" traders dealing in amounts of fish valued between £2 and £5. They bought their supplies from commercial fishermen, "middlemen" or "middlewomen" traders, or went to the lake regularly. They processed their supplies on the spot and

⁶⁰ Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1960, p.85.

⁶¹ MNA PCN1/17/4 Director, Game, Fisheries, and Tsetse Control, to Provincial Commissioners, 30/2/59; Colonial Office, Nyasaland Annual Report, 1959, p.81; 1960, p.85.

⁶² Malawi Government/Renson, Fish Marketing, p.5.

carried them to the markets by lorry or bus. Their cash return varied between £5 and £10 per load. This group had "a small turn-over", though some were more active than others. The more active ones made more than two trips to the lake in a month. The second group comprised "large-scale" traders handling tons of fish using lorries. They employed labourers for processing the fish at the lake and had agents along the road and in the urban markets. If fresh, the fish was carried in insulated boxes mixed with ice bought from non-African firms. This group often acted as "middlemen" and "middlewomen", leaving the retail markets to the "bicycle-boys" and other "smaller" traders. The third category was that of seasonal traders engaged in fish-trading during the dry season when they had little agricultural work to do. They were irregular and few in numbers.

Other ways of categorizing the traders were possible as well, based on regional and economic background, capital outlay and profit returns, gender and age. Oral evidence suggests that increasing numbers of women and youth operated as independent fish-traders by the 1960s.⁶³ The improvement in transportation between the lake and the markets was one of the most important factors behind the independence of women and youth in fish-trading. The road between Fort Johnston and Liwonde was reconstructed, though not paved, between 1964 and

⁶³ TIP.21/WC/G. Mkwinda, Malembo, Mangochi 23/2/90; TIP.22/WC/Y.Y. Kamuonyele, Malembo, Mangochi, 23/2/90.

1965. With the coming of independence in 1964, bus routes in the Southern Province improved considerably, enabling fish-traders to reach the markets with relative ease.⁶⁴

In the same year, a group of African businessmen with an interest in fish-trading formed the Nyasaland Fish Transporters Association to carry the traders and their fish to their customers.⁶⁵ The Association worked in conjunction with the Malawi African Road Transporters Association, supported by the Ministry of Transportation. By 1969, the Fish Transporters Association had 2 lorries of 3 tons, 10 of 5 tons, and 3 of 7 tons. Each had a driver and a conductor who collected fares and kept a way-bill. According to Renson, these lorries, with a sign-board "FISH" in the front, constantly travelled along the roads, day and night, all over the country and at their full carrying capacity.⁶⁶ On their journey to the lake, they carried 20 to 40 traders with their empty baskets. From the lake to the markets they carried between 20 and 30 traders with their fish. A five-ton lorry was allowed to load 5 tons of fish and up to 25 fish-traders.

The independent Malawi Government adopted a non-interventionist policy towards African commercial fishing and

⁶⁴ See T.D. William, "Commodity Distribution in Malawi: A Case Study" in I.G. Stewart (ed), Economic Development and Structural Change (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1969) pp.83-103.

⁶⁵ See Malawi Government/Renson, Fish Marketing pp.11-13.

⁶⁶ Malawi Government/ Renson, Fish Marketing pp.13-15.

fish-trading. The reasons for this are unclear, but can be ~~Speculated upon~~. To begin with, the government had inherited colonial fishing regulations which were "of a general nature" and "no longer appropriate in relation to [the] prevailing conditions", and thus very difficult to enforce.⁶⁷ The task of policing the lake would also require a lot of personnel and financial resources which the government did not have. Second, to lakeshore communities, fishing was a means of subsistence just as much as it was a commercial activity. The fishing households ate some of the fish they caught and sold the rest. Increased government intervention would therefore interfere with their basic subsistence.

Between 1964 and 1972 the Malawi Fisheries Department (MFD) thus confined its activities to research, staff development and technical training. Fisheries stations were established in almost all lakeshore districts, and the fisheries training school was moved from Nkhata Bay to Mpwepwe in Mangochi (former Fort Johnston), where the richest fishing grounds are located. With the opening of the Natural Resources College in Lilongwe in the early 1980s, the training of Fisheries Assistants was moved to Lilongwe, while Mpwepwe remained as a centre for practical training and boat-building. Several surveys were conducted in fish processing and

⁶⁷ MNA Q/419 FAC/UN, Report to the Government of Malawi on a Programme for Fisheries Department Based on the Work of A. Aref, W. Steen and G.R. Valran (Rome, FAO/UN/EPTA, Report no.1761), see the section on "Legislation".

preservation, and in "connection with all aspects of fisheries development planning".⁶⁸ Lake Chilwa, which had dried up between 1968 and 1969, was restocked in the early 1970s.

The Department also provided services to a small group of Malawian trawler operators starting from the early 1970s. The majority of these were former employees of the MFD itself and other government departments. They had access to government and bank loans. Twelve of them were interviewed for this study (not included in the table below); only two started without loans. The initial loans, varying between K12,000 and K135,000 were administered by commercial banks in conjunction with the MFD. They were used to purchase imported gear and other inputs through the MFD. Dependent on these, the trawler operators became highly prone to cost inflation. They had no import licences and thus could not privately order parts from abroad, not even from South Africa, Malawi's major supplier of capital goods.⁶⁹

During the first few years of their operations, these fishermen reported monthly net incomes of between K2,000 and

⁶⁸ See, for example, MNA Q/419 FAO/UN, Report to the Government of Malawi (1965); Q/421 FAO/UNPD Fish Handling, and Marketing (1972); Q/470 R.C. Cole and I.J. Clucas, Report on a Visit to Malawi: Fish Handling and Preservation (London, Tropical Products Institute, 1972); and Q/561 Malawi Government/Renson, Fish Marketing (1969).

⁶⁹ For details on this see, for example, J. Hanlon, Beggar Your Neighbours: Apartheid Power in Southern Africa (London, CIIR and James Currey, and Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1986) pp.235-242; R.T. Libby, The Politics of Economic Power in Southern Africa (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987) pp.181-204.

K5,000 - more than twice or three times what an ordinary University of Malawi lecturer received at the time. Initial loans were quickly repaid, but being dependent on imported gear and inputs, they began to accumulate debts with the banks and the MFD's boat-building and maintenance section. With the rising cost of imports in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, some of them went out of operation.⁷⁰ The survivors were usually those who had long experience in fishing, other businesses, or highly paid jobs outside which enabled them to maintain their units.

A good case of success was that of Maulinda Chimanda at Namiasi. Chimanda (about 60-70 years old) started as a fish-trader in the late 1940s, operating between lakes Chiuta and Chilwa, and the tea plantations in Thyolo (former Cholo) and Mulanje (former Mlanje). He had raised his starting capital (just about 2 shillings) from his wages at I. Conforzi Estate where he received between 14 and 17 shillings a month. He bought his first net in the mid-1960s and started fishing at Lake Chilwa. He then moved to Lake Malombe in the late 1960s after Lake Chilwa had dried up, and then to Mangochi on Lake Malawi in the early 1970s. He modernized his equipment by purchasing two boats with outboard engines at about K6,500, one trawler net, one ring-net, and some gill-nets.

Throughout the 1970s, Chimanda had an average monthly net

⁷⁰ Fresh loans became available in 1990. Some of those who obtained them had to cover the old loans from the fresh ones.

income of about K2,500. He invested in real estate in Blantyre, cattle, and commercial farming. By 1985, his real estate properties were valued at over K175,000 (not less than US\$10,000 at the time). At the time of the interview two of his houses in Blantyre were leased, each, for K800 (about US\$333.00 at the time) a month; and had a monthly income of about K2,500 (about US\$1,042.00 at the time) from other businesses, other than fishing. Though not many fishermen and fish-traders were in his position, Maulinda Chimanda's case provides a good example of accumulation in the fishing industry.

In contrast to Chimanda who started as a fish-trader to a licensed trawler operator, George Kapote Phiri (32 years old), of Chia, Nkhota-kota, started as a migrant labourer. He left school in Grade 8 in 1977 and contracted with the The Employment Bureau of Africa (TEBA). Upon his return from South Africa in 1978, he bought two nets and two canoes and left them in charge of his brother while he returned to theba in 1979. He came back in 1981, bought two more nets, one canoe, and took over from his brother while the latter went to theba himself. By 1985, George had two grocery shops, two fishing units, two "good" houses which had cost him not less than K8,000 each to build, a sewing machine rented out to a tailor, and two bicycles used by his relatives for fish-trading. Two of his three children were in school, together with a younger brother (in secondary school) and five nephews and nieces -

all paid for by him. His elder brother and uncle had their own fishing units, all from proceeds of theba.

The case of George Kapote, his brother Rashid Banda, and their uncle, was not unique. There were several others like them around Chia Lagoon and in Nkhota-kota in general. Not less than five of the major shops at Nkhota-kota trading centre were owned by returned labour migrants; almost all the popular bars; and one motel. The owner of the motel, Philip Kondoole Banda, was dubbed "Mr Cape Town" because he worked in Cape Town where he got his capital from. He was also one of the local bulk purchasers of fish for his restaurant business. The investment in bars by returned labour migrants also reflects the wider connection between Malawian migrancy and the South African entertainment industry. By working in South Africa, Malawians get access to electronics, video games - including gambling machines, and musical equipment which they bring home and install in their bars. Recently, South African popular music has become "Malawian" popular music. Thus, its not only commercial fishing and fish-trading which have received their impetus from labour migration, but the development of commercial entertainment and popular culture as well. Another important aspect of this was the development of motels and inns along the lakeshore, patronized mostly by South African tourists.

VI

Growth Without Development

Three factors accounted for the resilience of African commercial fishing and fish-trading between the early 1970s and the mid-1980s: rapid economic growth; changing patterns in labour migration; and the regional migrations of fishermen and fish-traders. The analysts of Malawi's post-independence economy are agreed that, in general, the country experienced a rapid economic growth in the late 1960s right up to 1978/79.⁷¹ The GDP, estimated to have risen by 4.6 per cent annually between 1954 and 1963, grew by over 6.8 per cent annually - at constant prices - from 1964 to 1972; and by 6.4 per cent between 1973 and 1978.⁷² The analysts argue that much of this growth was concentrated in the plantation sector at the expense of peasant production.

Between 1964/65 and 1975/76, the estates accounted for over 70 per cent of the increase in agricultural exports, thus acting as "the engine of growth of the economy",⁷³ but without

⁷¹ See, for example, D.H. Humphrey, "Malawi's Economic Economic Progress and Prospects" in Eastern Africa Economic Review vol.5 no.2 (1973) pp.71-104; S. Thomas, "Economic Development in Malawi since Independence" in JSAS vol.2 no.1 (1975) pp.30-51. S.N. Acharya, "Perspectives and Problems of Development in sub-Saharan Africa" in World Development vol.9 no.2 (1981) pp.109-147; by the same author, "Development Perspectives and Priorities in sub-Saharan Africa" in Finance and Development vol.18 no.1 (1981) pp.16-24.

⁷² Ghai and Radwan, "Growth and Inequality" pp.73-75.

⁷³ Ibid., p.75.

development. Peasant production, with the exception of a small class of 'progressive farmers', "was generally in a depressed state".⁷⁴ As a result, there was a movement out of self-employment in peasant agriculture to wage employment on the estates. The numbers of both full-time and part-time workers in large-scale agricultural enterprises increased by an average of more than 50 per cent between 1968 and 1980. This was, however, accompanied by falling real wages coupled with shrinking per capita land resources which further reduced the potential for cash-crop income and subsistence production.⁷⁵ The average monthly wage on the estates in 1979 was a bare K11.84 (less than US\$10.00 at the time), and just "about enough to buy one 90Kg bag of unmilled maize - just enough maize for an average-size family, and no more".⁷⁶

Figures on income distribution provide further evidence for the distress in peasant life: 58 per cent of the population in 1977 had an annual per capita income of less than K30; 69.5 per cent, less than K40; and 90 per cent less than K75. David Hirschmann thus concludes: "this meant that the bottom 58 per cent of the income earners earned 23.8 per

⁷⁴ Kydd, "Malawi in the 1970s" p.345.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.348. For an opposing view see F.L. Fryor and C. Chipeta "Economic Development through Estate Agriculture: The Case of Malawi" in Canadian Journal of African Studies vol.24 no.1 (1990) pp.50-74.

⁷⁶ D. Hirschmann, "Malawi's 'Captured' Peasantry: An Empirical Analysis" in The Journal of Developing Areas vol.24 (July 1990) p.473.

cent of the national income, the bottom 69.5 per cent earned 31 per cent, and 90 per cent earned 48 per cent", while the top 1 per cent earned 28 per cent.⁷⁷ The gini coefficient, the index for measuring inequality, increased from 0.491 in 1966 to 0.530 in 1977. As the peasant crisis became deeper and wider, "service and craft activities" flourished. Among the most popular were: beer-brewing and distilling, baking, tailoring, brick-making, carpentry, and trading, "especially in fish".⁷⁸

The reduction in the flow of migrant labour remittances into the rural economy from the mid-1970s contributed to the rural crisis. After a plane crash in Francistown, Botswana, in 1974 in which 74 Malawian migrant workers were killed, the Malawi Government banned recruiting for the South African mines. This was partly a political decision, supported by the Malawi Congress Party - especially its Women's League; and partly also a response to the economic changes in the country. The expanding plantations, the construction of the new capital in Lilongwe, the Nacala Railway Line, and several roads in the country, all needed labour. Thus, the campaign against migrancy started much earlier than the plane

⁷⁷ Hirschmann, "Malawi's 'Captured' Peasantry" p.473. The figures are originally from J.G. Kydd and R.E. Christiansen, "Structural Change and Trends in Equity in the Malawian Economy, 1964-1980" in Centre for Social Research, University of Malawi, Income Distribution Working Paper no.2 (Zomba, Centre for Social Research, 1981).

⁷⁸ Kydd, "Malawi in the 1970s" p.348.

crash. Anybody who listened to agricultural programs on the radio or attended political rallies in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s would be familiar with the popular slogan: chuma chiri m'nthaka, "wealth is in the soil", which was used to discourage labour migration.

The ban on recruiting decisively reduced the flow of remittances flowing into the rural economy. It also increased the numbers of adult males supported by the rural households and thus causing more stress. Prior to the curtailment of recruiting, labour migration absorbed about 15 per cent of the country's economically active population.⁷⁹ Though recruiting resumed in 1977, the numbers were heavily reduced as the table below indicates:

Table 10.4 : Malawians Employed in South Africa, 1970-1982

<u>Year</u>	<u>Contracts</u>	<u>Remittances</u> ('000 Kwacha)	<u>Year</u>	<u>Contracts</u>	<u>Remittances</u> ('000 Kwacha)
1970	90,642	7,836	1978	17,891	12,583
1971	99,849	10,479	1979	19,128	11,027
1972	123,845	11,995	1980	14,236	27,696
1973	123,251	19,390	1981	15,156	30,988
1974	68,448	29,915	1982	16,049	36,990
1975	2,711	30,793	1983	15,785	25,002
1976	- -	3,195	1984	18,180	25,610
1977	17,443	1,505	1985	19,621	29,860

Source: National Statistical Office, Malawi Statistical Yearbook, 1985 (Zomba, Government Printer, 1987).⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Kydd and Christiansen, "The Return of Malawian Labour" p.317, Table 3.

⁸⁰ These figures do not compare with those from South African sources. The latter are generally higher for all the years. See, for example, J. Crush, A. Jeeves, and D. Yudelman, South Africa's Labor Empire: A History of Black Migrancy to the Gold Mines (Boulder, Westview Press, Cape Town, David Philip, 1991) pp.236-237, Table A.5: Mine Labor Recruits by

The sharp rise in the figures of contracts between 1971 and 1973 had more to do with developments in South Africa itself, rather than the agrarian crisis in Malawi. The mines' internal labour supply had dropped sharply during this period.⁸¹ The curtailment of recruiting after the plane crash accounted for the decline in the contracts from 1977. The amounts of remittances had also dropped between 1976 and 1979, but rose again between 1980 and 1985. The reason for the rise was that from 1980 some mining groups had increased the employment of "tropical labour" - Swazis, Mozambicans, and Malawians.⁸² It was also a reflection of the general rise in the wages offered in South Africa starting from the late 1970s.

From the mid-1980s, concerns about AIDS affected the mining companies' willingness to taken in Malawian workers. The Chamber of Mines asked the Malawi Government to allow testing of workers in Malawi before leaving for South Africa. The Malawi Government refused and the Chamber responded by refusing untested workers. The danger in the AIDS debate is that it is likely to be used as an excuse rather than as a reason for barring northern migrant labourers in South Africa.

Source Area, 1973-1985.

⁸¹ Crush, Jeeves, and Yudelman, South Africa's Labor Empire pp.234-235.

⁸² Ibid., pp.114-117.

Without underestimating the spread of AIDS in Malawi,⁸³ as in Africa, if not the world as a whole, it is important to emphasise that this is not the first time that the politics of disease has been used in this way. The ban on migrants from north of latitude 22 degrees north in 1913 came because of the high death rate among the northern migrants. The leading cause of death was pulmonary diseases such as pneumonia which could have been contained by the mining companies by providing warm and well-ventilated accommodation and by improving working conditions in the mines.

Also, throughout the history of labour migration, missionaries, chiefs, settlers, colonial administrators, and some scholars in the northern territories made arguments similar to the ones the South Africans are making now. Labour migration was blamed for the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, and social and moral degradation in the villages. The South Africans are reversing the same arguments. Though the AIDS epidemic is unlikely to be overcome by a medical breakthrough within the next few years, it is not going to stop Malawian migrants from going to South Africa. "Clandestine" migration will continue, and possibly increase as happened between 1913 and 1935.

The changes in labour migration between 1975 and 1985,

⁸³ For a good discussion on AIDS in Malawi see W. House and G. Zimalirana, "Rapid Population Growth and Poverty in Malawi" in Journal of Modern African Studies vol.30 no.1 (1992) pp.141-161.

the rapid growth of the estate sector, and the depressed state of peasant agriculture did not have deleterious short-term effects on commercial fishing and fish-trading which, in fact, expanded rapidly in the 1970s and early 1980s. This expansion might have affected fish stocks and probably resulted in an ecological imbalance. This speculation can only be supported by a comprehensive ecological study of the country's major fishing grounds. The labour employed by the expanding estate sector and construction projects such as the Capital City Development Corporation (CCDC) in Lilongwe provided a new market for fish. Along with the rapid economic growth came the improvement in transportation linking urban centres to cash-cropping areas and the lake, which was a boost to fish-trading. About 3,334,948 pounds (lbs) of various categories of fish reached the four urban commodity markets of Limbe, Blantyre, Soche and Bangwe in the city of Blantyre between January and June 1976 alone.⁸⁴ In contrast, the amounts of other important food items were: 2,999,980 lbs of fresh cassava; 2,309,895 lbs of maize flour; 2,088,512 lbs of maize grain; 291,845 lbs of polished rice; 46,936 lbs shelled groundnuts; 298,465 lbs unshelled groundnuts; and 350,427 lbs

⁸⁴ National Statistical Office, Blantyre Market Survey: Consumer Price and Quantity Data for Selected Types of Produce (Zomba, Government Printer, December 1978), Tables 18-24, pp.30-37. The figures from other markets and for the other years are non-existent. For data relating to an earlier period see T.D. Williams, "Commodity Distribution in Malawi: A Case Study" in I.G. Stewart (ed), Economic Development and Structural Change (Edinburgh, EUP, 1969) pp.83-103.

of dried beans.

The majority of unlicensed fishermen and fish-traders interviewed for this study: 68 out of 113 (or 60 per cent) and 37 out of 45 (or 82 per cent), respectively, started their businesses between 1972 and 1985. Of the 113 fishermen, 61 (or about 54 per cent) were former labour migrants; and only 7 (or about 16 per cent) of the 45 fish-traders. This suggests that the returning migrants invested more in commercial fishing than in fish-trading. A further 40 (about 35 per cent) of the 113 fishermen interviewed got their capital from fishing itself. They had not migrated, or borrowed money, or worked anywhere else in the country.

The majority of the fish-traders had started as alovi, working for fishermen (under "fishing"), or got their capital from "other" sources which included wage employment, family support, and borrowing money from relatives who were often labour migrants or fishermen. Of the 45 fish-traders interviewed, 26 or about 58 per cent got their capital from fishing itself. The majority of these combined "small-scale" fishing with fish-trading, confining their activities to the lake. Of the 11 fish-traders who got their capital from other sources, 7 were "large-scale" middlemen and 4 were "middlewomen". All the men had raised their capital from wage employment while the women got theirs from borrowing from their relatives, or by working as fish processors in their male relatives' businesses.

Noticeable in the oral data was the lack of reference to agriculture as a source of capital invested in fishing. Only 3 fish-traders got their capital from agriculture. This could be a reflection of the low returns from cash-cropping. Also noticeable were the regional variations in patterns of investment in fishing by returning migrants:

Table 10.5: Regional Patterns in Sources of Capital

District/Area	Source of Capital				Total
	<u>Migrancy</u>	<u>Fishing</u>	<u>Farming</u>	<u>Others</u>	
Nkhata Bay					
(i) Fishermen	23	7	0	4	34
(ii) Fish-traders	2	6	0	3	11
Likoma and Chizumulu					
(i) Fishermen	15	13	0	4	32
(ii) Fish-traders	2	5	0	2	9
Nkhota-kota					
(i) Fishermen	7	3	0	0	10
(ii) Fish-traders	2	1	0	0	3
Mangochi					
(i) Fishermen	16	17	2	2	37
(ii) Fish-traders	1	14	1	6	22
Totals	68	66	3	21	158
(i) Fishermen					113
(ii) Fish-traders					45

Source: "'Theba' Is Power": Oral Interviews.

At district/area level the percentages of migrants investing

in fishing were higher in the northern areas - Nkhata Bay, Likoma and Chizumulu Islands, and Nkhota-kota. Of the 16 fishermen in Mangochi who had invested in fishing from labour migration, 11 had migrated from the northern districts and the remaining 5 were from Mangochi itself.

VII

Regional Migrations, Gender and Social Relations

The migration of fishermen and fish-traders from the northern districts and other parts of the country to the rich fishing grounds of the southern portions of the lake began in the 1930s.⁸⁵ It increased in the 1950s and reached its peak in the 1970s.⁸⁶ In a study done in 1985/86, John Kandawire found that 103 out of 200, or about 52 per cent, of the fishermen interviewed were from the northern districts. Of these, 93 or about 47 per cent were from Nkhata Bay; 5 or 3 per cent from Rumphi; and the same number from Karonga.⁸⁷ The number from other districts were: 13 or about 7 per cent for the districts

⁸⁵ See MNA NSF4/1/3 South Nyasa District Annual Reports 1930-1931; NSF4/1/7 South Nyasa District Annual Report, 1933.

⁸⁶ L. Kapeleta, "The Coming of the Tonga and the Commercialization of Fishing in the Monkey Bay Area: A Case Study", B.Soc Sc. (Sociology) Dissertation Paper, Chancellor College, University of Malawi (1979/80). See also McCracken, "Fishing and the Colonial Economy" pp.422-424.

⁸⁷ J.A.K. Kandawire, Commercial Fishing and Food Production Among Lakeshore Dwellers in Malawi: A Technical Report (Zomba, Chancellor College 1986) p.31.

of the Southern Region, other than Mangochi itself; and 79 or about 40 per cent from Mangochi itself.⁸⁸

In addition to their migrant labour background, two other factors accounted for the success of the northerners in the southern parts of the lake: the majority of them did not have access to land and thus concentrated on fishing and fish-trading. Just a few acquired land through marriage in the areas they settled. Second, they migrated in family groups which settled within easy reach of each other. It was thus easy to mobilize labour along family or ethno-linguistic lines. Their fishing and fish-trading activities were household based, with very little use of wage labour. Whenever outsiders were brought in, they were alovi paid in fish or small amounts of money. The majority of the northern fishermen and fish-traders maintained a variety of networks with relatives in town or working abroad as migrant labourers. The relatives in town provided accommodation and access to transportation on fish-trading trips, while those abroad provided financial capital, fishing gear, and other forms of material support - clothing and other domestic items. Both internal wage labour and migrancy thus subsidized fishing and fish-trading activities. The most successful fishermen and fish-traders were those who exploited these pseudo-traditional avenues in combination with new economic opportunities arising

⁸⁸ The percentages do not add up to 100 because of the rounding up of the figures.

from migrant labour and capitalist markets.

Further evidence of the connection between fishing and migrancy comes from the lists of items confiscated by officials of the Department of Customs and Excise for evasion of customs duty. Between 1972 and 1983, not less than 214 nets of various sizes and 39 rolls of twine and rope were confiscated by the Department.⁸⁹ Along with these were long lists of domestic items: clothes, kitchen- and hardware; beauty items, bicycles, sewing machines, and electronics which shows the volume of the "informal" cross-border trade from which commercial fishing benefitted, and still benefits to day. The names and addresses of the importers show that the majority came from the lakeshore areas in the districts of Karonga, Rumphi, Nkhata Bay, Nkhota-kota, and Mangochi. The trade goods were often used as some kind of insurance premium. In case of losses in the fishing business, they were sold and fresh investments were made. The records do not show how many nets and various types of fishing gear passed through. Unlike the trawler operators who depended on the gear imported through the MFD, the unlicensed fishermen could get their supplies through a lot of "informal" arrangements and thus be able to survive periods of economic crisis.

The majority of these items came from Tanzania and Zambia. From Malawi the traders carried plastic products,

⁸⁹ See Malawi Government The Government Gazette (Zomba, Government Printer, 1972-1983).

cotton goods, and food items. From Tanzania came the nets, cotton goods and domestic items. From Zambia came mostly cotton goods, kitchenware and other domestic items. Of late, this trade has moved into the hands of women on both sides of the border. They could be distinguished into two categories: those who operate independently, mostly from Tanzania and Zambia; and those who utilize migrant labour connections, mostly from Malawi. This distinction arises from the fact that there are a lot of Malawians working both in Tanzania and in Zambia whereas very few Tanzanians and Zambians work in Malawi.

Women took to fish-trading in large numbers between the 1970s and mid-1980s, partly as a response to the low returns in agriculture, and partly because of their fish processing skills and traditional entitlements. Of the 11 independent⁹⁰ female fish-traders interviewed for this study, 7 were from the northern areas - 3 of these had settled in the southern portions of the lake and had connections with labour migrants, two started by borrowing money from relatives. Two were interviewed in the north, they both received support from labour migrants. The remaining 4 were from the southern districts, three of which were from Mangochi itself. They got their money from working as fish processors.

Oral accounts maintained that the numbers of independent

⁹⁰ They were independent because they were not working as part of their male relatives' households or husbands' fishing units.

female fish processors increased between the late 1970s and the early 1980s.⁹¹ Mockingly referred to as matenanti a momba, "fish tenants", the majority of them worked line sharecropping tenants. Middlemen or middlewomen traders advanced them money to buy and process the fish. They were allowed to keep part of the processed fish, which they sold as their own, in addition to being paid a small fee. Profit was made in two ways: first, by buying the fish at chipiku, "bulk-and-bargain" price.⁹² That way they were able to retain a greater portion of the processed fish as well as the money advanced by the "middleman" or "middlewoman". Second, by receiving advances from several "middlemen" or "middlewomen" and processing a large amount of fish which was later divided among the traders according to the amounts of money they had advanced. The unit of measurement was a 20-litre tin. The strength and resilience of the female fish processors thus lay in their bargaining ability and traditional fish-processing skills. Since fish processing was, and still is, traditionally a "women's" activity on account of being a component of food preparation, the women thus used their skills and traditional entitlements to make money. They were increasingly becoming

⁹¹ TIP.4/WC/Synod Mankhokwe, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 28/9/89; TIP.10/WC/Pitala Mbewe and Moses Mwale, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 29/9/89; TIP.55/WC/SC/Amai NyaGondwe, Msaka, Monkey Bay, Mangochi, 22/12/90; TIP.59/WC/Joice Mkandawire, Namiasi, Mangochi, 4/2/90;

⁹² Chipiku means "whole", kupikula is "to carry a whole thing". In trading, chipiku means buying the whole thing after bargaining for a lower price, or at wholesale price.

"professional" in fish processing, establishing themselves at the lake.

The position of women in fish-trading has also been influenced by the increasing use of ice which became available to ordinary fish-traders in large amounts from the late 1960s with the establishment of Freshcold Fisheries Company Ltd. The Company was incorporated in the Malawi Development Corporation (MALDECO), a government-aided corporation created by an act of parliament in 1965. MALDECO took over Yiannakis in 1969 and became the major suppliers of both ice and fresh fish to the traders in Mangochi. Of late, the MFD has established its own ice plants in some important fishing grounds in the southern and central portions of the lake. The increasing use of ice reduced the dominance of commercial firms and male fish-traders over the trade in fresh fish. It has also reduced the numbers of "bicycle boys" as fresh fish can reach the markets relatively fast and in good state.

However, in a hot climate, ice without fast and reliable transportation is almost useless. It is in this respect that fish-traders, both male and female, have greatly benefitted from returned migrant labourers who invested in small "box-body" trucks. Popularly known as magalimoto a theba,⁹³ "theba trucks", these vehicles operate between the lake and the markets, hired by the fish traders. Starting from the late

⁹³ The word is made by combining galimoto (singular) or magalimoto (plural), meaning car or vehicle, and a theba, "of theba" to mean vehicles owned by returned labour migrants.

1970s to the mid-1980s, the use of theba trucks in fish-trading became one of the most important connections between labour migration and the expansion of the Malawian fishing industry.⁹⁴

The foregoing account demonstrates that there have been major changes in the Malawian countryside. In the case of the fishing communities along the lake, new entrepreneurial strategies have been combined with pseudo-traditional avenues of accumulation which have enabled some individuals and families to do better than others. At the time of the fieldwork on which this study is partially based, some of the successful entrepreneurs reported monthly incomes pooled from fishing, retail trade, and other activities, as high as K1,500 (US600.00), and yet others as low as K50.00 (US20.00). The informants were, themselves, aware of this disparity. They referred to the successful ones as wodya bwino, "those who eat well" or wopedza bwino, "those who do well". It can therefore be concluded that the incorporation of Malawian rural communities into the capitalist economy and the regional system of oscillating labour migration has brought wealth to some and poverty to others. This is contrary to the concept of universal "rural poverty", held by some scholars.

⁹⁴ The fieldwork on which this study is partially based was, itself, conducted using a theba car rented from a returned labour migrant.

CONCLUSION

The skilled labourer goes abroad not only to earn tax, but to earn money to maintain a higher standard of living.¹

If they re-open theba, I am going again. This time it will be for a boat engine and a box-body truck.²

Of late, a number of studies on rural transformations in South Africa and its neighbouring countries have employed the "power of the periphery" approach or the "view from below" to analyze the content of capitalist penetration and colonial domination.³ They have demonstrated that: "African chiefs and commoners, peasants and proletarians, acting singly and in concert, did mould the terms of their own incorporation into the new order and hence the very nature of that order itself."⁴ The Africans employed a variety of survival

¹ Malawi National Archives (MNA) COM-8/1 Draft Report of the Committee on Emigrant Labour, 1935.

² TIP.9 /WC/Mwazeni Mtira, Mtanga, Chia, Nkhota-kota, 29/9/89.

³ For pioneering studies see, for example, W. Beinart, The Political Economy of Pondoland, 1860-1930 (Cambridge, CUP, 1982); A. Spiegel, "Changing Patterns of Migrant Labour and Rural Differentiation in Lesotho" in Social Dynamic vol.6 (1980) pp.1-13. K. Shillington, The Colonisation of the Southern Tswana, 1870-1900 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985).

⁴ J. Crush, The Struggle for Swazi Labour, 1890-1920 (Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queen's University, 1987) p.4. See also T. Keegan, Facing the Storm: Portraits of Black Lives in Rural South Africa (Cape Town and Johannesburg, David Philip, 1988) p.132.

strategies: "there were always...pseudo-traditionalist avenues for accumulation and the exercise of political patronage by blacks, particularly in the reserves".⁵ New elites emerged and consolidated their economic and political power, sometimes with the blessing of the state. The processes of incorporation, rural dispossession, and impoverishment thus had their ambiguities. There were always winners and losers.

Though similar conclusions have been reached by some scholars working on the same topics in the countries north of South Africa, there has been no attempt to link up the two historiographies.⁶ The view held by most of those writing from the 'south' still remains to be that of the northern countries being the "labour reserves" or the "WNLA's empire".⁷ The

⁵ Keegan, Facing the Storm pp.150-151. On rural accumulation see also, W. Beinart, "'Joyini Inkomo': Cattle Advances and the Origins of Migrancy from Pondoland" in Journal of Southern African Studies vol.5 (1979) pp.199-219, and by the same author, "Labour Migrancy and Rural Production: Pondoland, c.1900-1950" in P. Mayer, Black Villagers in an Industrial Society (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1980).

⁶ The only exception to this was in the 1970s when those writing from the "underdevelopment" perspective tried to adopt a regional approach. See, for example, R.H. Palmer, The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa (London and Los Angeles, Heinemann and University of California Press, 1977).

⁷ See, for example, F. Wilson, Labour in the South African Gold Mines, 1911-1969 (Cambridge, CUP, 1972) p.3; D.G. Clarke, "Accumulation and Migrant Labour Supply in the Labour Reserve Economies of Southern Africa" International Labour Organization (ILO), World Employment Program (WEP) Working Paper (Geneva, ILO, 1977); D. Massey, "Class Struggle and Migrant Labour in South African Gold Mines" in Canadian Journal of African Studies vol.17 no.3 (1983) pp.429-448; M. Legassick, "Capitalism and Migrant Labour in Southern Africa: The Origins and Nature of the System" S. Marks and P.

reason for this is that, when it comes to incorporating the northern countries into their studies, these scholars focus primarily on the gold mines' labour resourcing strategies, the international labour agreements and the activities of the recruiters.⁸

They have convincingly demonstrated that the gold mines' labour resourcing strategies were more problematic than they are usually presented. Mine labour was in short supply especially during the period of expansion, after 1902. As the mining companies competed for labour they began to offer higher wages and thus increased their overhead costs. The operations of independent recruiters who charged exorbitant prices for their services contributed to the rising costs. The creation of a regional labour recruiting monopsony to reduce the costs was accomplished very slowly by opening up new recruiting areas and signing agreements with the labour-supply countries.

Richardson, International Labour Migration: Historical Perspectives (Houslow, Middlesex, Maurice Temple Smith, 1984) pp.140-166; J. Crush, A. Jeeves, and D. Yudelman, South Africa's Labour Empire (Boulder, Westview Press, 1991) chapter 2.

⁸ For a good discussion of these see, for example, A.H. Jeeves, "Over-reach: The South African Gold Mines and the Struggle for the Labour of Zambesia, 1890-1920" in CJAS vol.17 no.3 (1983) pp.393-412, and by the same author, Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy: The Struggle for the Gold Miners' Labour Supply, 1890-1920 (Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985); D. Yudelman and A. Jeeves, "New Labour Frontiers for Old: Black Migrants to the South African Gold Mines, 1920-85" in Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS) vol.13 no.1 (October, 1986) pp.101-124.

This perspective has helped highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the colonial and settler states in the region and the influence of the recruiters on the labour-supplying communities. It has also shown that the South African gold mining industry, despite its strong connections with the state, was unable to impose its will on society. Furthermore, it has demonstrated how the labour agreements and the activities of the recruiters contributed to the knitting of the southern Africa 'regional economic system' and the perpetuation of oscillating labour migration.

However, as an explanatory model for the process of capitalist penetration and socio-economic transformation in the labour-supplying countries of the north, this perspective has restricted value. It does not address the enterprising spirit and economic innovations of the "tropical" workers. The account in the present study suggests that, if anything, it is the migrant labourers themselves who have managed to achieve what most scholars have, thus far, failed to do: to allocate economic changes in their areas in the wider regional economy. While their enterprising spirit grew from within, the impetus to change came from external factors. The expansion of African cash-cropping from the 1920s, followed by the increase in the wage-labour force on the tea plantations from the 1950s, provided the fishermen and fish-traders with markets for their fish. By itself, the expansion in the fish markets was not enough to bring about major transformations in the

organization of commercial fishing and fish-trading. The fishermen needed reliable sources of capital and access to consumer goods which, in effect, subsidized their fishing and fish-trading activities.

It can therefore be concluded that changes in one sector of the Malawian rural economy have always affected the others. Transformations in commercial fishing and fish-trading occurred because there was impetus from labour migration, cash-cropping, plantation wage labour, and cross-border and local retail trade. If put together, all these strengthen the argument that the Malawian rural economy has been more dynamic than the proponents of the "labour reserve" and universal "rural poverty" have presented it. The case of the migrant labourers who invested in tobacco production in the 1920s; the growth of commercial fishing and retail trade; the increasing use of magalimoto a theba in fish-trading; and the economic innovations of the female fish-traders and "matenanti a nsomba", fish processors; all demonstrate that if the incorporation of Malawian rural communities in the expanding regional capitalist economy created a crisis, it also provided ways by which that crisis could be successfully contained. As well, they demonstrate, not only the survival strategies, but the enterprising spirit and the process of accumulation at grassroots level.

The popular saying: "theba is power", does not necessarily refer to the activities of the TEBA, The

Employment Bureau of Africa, the South African labour recruiting organization. It is used to refer generically to the "power" of labour migration as an avenue of rural accumulation. Thus, theba, literally meaning a recruit of the TEBA, is a term often applied to all labour migrants regardless of the way they migrated. Theba thus refers to the concept of migrating and not just the TEBA, the recruiting organization. Similarly, chatheba (singular) or zatheba (plural), generically refer to proceeds of labour migration. Watheba is also a description of a life-style, meaning behaving or living like a migrant labourer. The indices of such a life include lavish spending, accumulation of imported consumer goods, and investing in social networks and risky business enterprises, and thus frequent bankruptcies. The social networks provide the enterprising migrants with pseudo-traditionalist avenues for accumulation while bankruptcies often push the failing ones back into migrancy and thus continuing the cycle.

APPENDIX A**A NOTE ON ORAL SOURCES**

The oral data used in this dissertation were collected in three lakeshore districts of Malawi: Nkhata Bay (including Likoma and Chizumulu islands) in the north, Nkhota-kota in the centre, and Mangochi in the south. A total of 169 interviews were conducted: 158 with male informants and 11 with female informants. Out of the above total, 72 were done by a questionnaire administered by three research assistants: Alex Banda on Likoma and Chizumulu islands, Samuel Chembe in Mangochi, and Patrick Kadango Mwafulirwa in Nkhata Bay. The rest were conducted by the candidate himself in all the three districts: 33 by using a questionnaire and the rest by detailed interviewing some of which were taped. The interviews took between two and six hours with each informant. Some informants were visited more than once. These have been cited more than others. The citations containing more than three names are cases where informants provided the same or similar information. Initials of the three research assistants appear in all the citations where the information comes from the interviews they conducted.

The majority of the informants were chosen at random, often after a "familiarization" visit to the area. Officials of the Fisheries Department and the informants themselves helped in identifying other possible interviewees. The questionnaire (APPENDIX B) was structured in such a way that

the informants' answers generated more questions and detailed discussions. A few group interviews were conducted in all the three districts. From these, some informants were selected for detailed interviews later.

Transcripts of the interviews and tapes will be deposited in the Malawiana Collection of the Chancellor College library of the University of Malawi where they will be readily available to other researchers.

APPENDIX B

RURAL LABOUR, MIGRANCY AND FISHING IN MALAWI

QUESTIONNAIRE

Interviewer W.C. Chirwa/

IDENTIFICATION

Name _____ Age ___ Male ___ Female ___ Marital status ___

Place of interview _____ Date _____

Original place of birth _____

(If migrated, why and when did you come here?)

A brief family history (no. of children, parents' occupation, location of other members of family etc).

School(s) attended _____ Highest level attained _____

How did you/your parents or guardians raise school fees?

PART 1 : EMPLOYMENT RECORD

1. Have you ever worked in the country? If not, why? If yes, where? When? In what capacity? How long?
2. What was your monthly (weekly) wage rate? How would you describe the general working conditions?
3. What did you usually spend your wages on? Any estimates?
4. Have you ever migrated to work outside the country? If not, why? If yes, where? When? How many times? Did you have any particular reasons for migrating? (If migrated more than once, different reasons?) How did you migrate? How long did you stay each time you went? Where were you working (actual place) Were there other Malawians there? How many? From which district(s)? Were you living in the same compound? What type of jobs did you (or/and the other Malawians) like? Did you have any choice?
5. What type of work were you doing? Amount of wages? General working conditions at the place? Did you have any prior knowledge of this place? If yes, from whom?

6. What did you usually spend your wages on? Any estimates? Did you save some? How much (estimate)? How did you spend it here at home? Apart from money, did you bring back any other item(s)? For what use?
7. Are there family members currently working abroad? Where? For how long? Do you receive any support from them? What type? How often? How do you use it? Is it necessary for your survival?
8. Are you economically better (or worse) off now than the time you first migrated? Explain? Do you intend to migrate again? When? Where to? Why?
9. (WOMEN ONLY) Have any male members of your family ever migrated to work outside the country? Where to? How many? How often? What were the reasons? Did they consult you? What was your reaction? Were there any advantages or disadvantages to you, personally? Did you have to support children or other members of the family (state relationship)? How did you manage it? Did the migrants send you any support? In what form? Were you supported by some male or female members of the family remaining at home? Has the migration benefitted your family in any way? Explain. Would you consent to future migration of any members of your family? Why?

PART 2 : ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

1. What were your means of livelihood before you migrated? Did you go back to it? Why? (or why not?).
2. (FOR FISHERMEN ONLY) Do you come from a fishing background? When did you start "commercial" fishing? Why? What type of fishing do you do? How did you start? Did you receive any support from family members? What type of support? What was your source of capital? Did you raise it from different sources? How much capital did you raise (from each source)? What type of fishing gear did you buy (list items and cost). Have you recovered all your money? How long did it take?
3. How many "pulls" do you do a day? Where do you sell your catch? How do you get there? How many times a day/week?
4. Do you employ wage labourers? Since when? How many? How much do you pay them? Do family members help? What do they do? What do they get from you? Has it always been like that?
5. Do you have other businesses? What type? Where? What other

investments have you made since you started your business?
Do you have a bank account? A house?

6. Which would you say was your best/and worse year(s)?
Explain. What did you do those years?
7. (FISH TRADERS ONLY). Do you come from a fishing background?
What were you doing before that? When did you start fish-
trading? Why? How did you start? Where do you normally buy
your fish from? Where do you sell? In what form? Who
processes? Where do the processing materials come from? How
do you get to the market? How much fish do you normally
carry? Do family members help? What do they do? What do you
give them?
8. Do you have other types of businesses? What type? Where?
What do you do when the fishing is bad?

PART 3 : AGRICULTURE AND SUBSISTENCE

1. Do you have access to land? How much (estimate)? Do you grow
your own food? How do you divide the time between food
production and fishing/fish-trading? Do all members of your
family participate in food production? Has it always been
like that?
2. Do you grow cash-crops? What type? Where do you sell? How
do you compare cash-cropping to fishing/fish-trading as a
source of income?

PART 4 : MISCELLANEOUS

1. How do you compare yourself to other people in the
village/area? What do you think are the major obstacles to
success in your business? Can they be overcome? How?
2. Is there a fishermen's/fish-traders' or business
association in the area/district? When was it formed? Are
you a member? Do you belong to any other organization e.g.
church, football club, farmers' club etc? What is the
membership like? Do you hold any position in it?
3. Are you happy with this interview? Who else do you think I
should contact?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH

**NOTE : The questionnaire was administered in vernacular. This
is a translated and condensed version.**

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