

Development Implications of Labour Migration for Origin Societies: The Case of *Manamba* of Njombe District, 1900 - 1960s.

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Abstract

For decades, labour migration scholarship in Africa has focused on social-economic and political problems instigated by colonial labour migration in the origin societies. Very little is available regarding migrants' transformational agency. This paper discusses the role that migrant labourers (manamba) played in economic development in Njombe district, Tanzania from 1900 to the 1960s. The paper argues that, apart from the apparent complications, labour migration also facilitated the development of the district in some ways depending on variations in the economic environment of the migrants' homes and the areas they worked. Deriving from primary and secondary evidence the paper links labour migrants to cash crop production, agricultural innovations and entrepreneurial activities. It concludes that using the knowledge, experience and capital the migrants got in various workplaces, added with creativity, the labour migrants contributed considerably to the wider transformational process of bringing economic development to their places of origin.

Key Words: Labour migration, Migrants, *Manamba*, Rural Development, Bena, Njombe.

1.0 The Context

By the 19th Century Africa experienced the direct intrusion of an alien colonial economy. The new economy became the origin of wage labour which necessitated labour migration in Africa.¹ In Tanzania, the regional distribution of wage employment opportunities during the colonial period best explains the essence of labour migration. Most colonial investments and settlements were in the belt running north from Dar-es-Salaam and Morogoro to Tanga and from the inland to the Usambara Mountains and the slopes of Mounts Kilimanjaro and Meru.² The semi-arid plains of central Tanzania were less favourable for production. The southern highlands (including Njombe), with relatively favourable climatic conditions as north-eastern, were excluded as they received only sporadic colonial investment.³ The favourability to the North-Eastern zone was because the area was entrenched by the world capitalist economy earlier than other parts of Tanganyika. The northeast was, therefore, far developed in transport, communication, markets and other facilities. Europeans preferred jurisdiction over such areas

¹ Abebe Zegeye and S. Ishemo eds., *Forced Labour Migration: Patterns of Movements within Africa*, (London: Hans Zeu Publishers, 1989), 1-2.

² Richard H. Sabot, *Economic Development and Urban Migration in Tanzania, 1900-1971*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 24.

³ James Giblin, *A History of the Excluded: Making Family a Refuge from State in Twentieth Century Tanzania*, (Oxford: James Currey, 2005), 1.

with which they were already familiar.⁴ The concentration of employment and cash cropping opportunities in the same area, coupled with the introduction of taxation, were essential reasons for the development of the colonial labour migration system in Tanzania.

The regional differences experienced provided the basis for the establishment of labour reserves which started with the coming of the Germans in the 1880s.⁵ After the First World War, the same structure of investment, production and trade was reinforced by the British as it was a characteristic of the colonial pattern of development.⁶ To obtain enough and reliable supply of labour, labour reserves were deliberately created in some regions of the colony.

Njombe was marginalised even as it was incorporated into the colonial economy. As such, Njombe people considered themselves as excluded from agricultural markets and other economic opportunities. Disregarded as they were, Bena people could not escape the trap of being migrant labourers; as people, who could not earn money from cultivating their

⁴ Walter Rodney, "The Colonial Economy", in *General History of Africa Vol. VII: Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935* edited by A. Boahen (1985), 333.

⁵ Milline J. Mbonile, "Towards Breaking the Vicious Circle of Labour Migration in Tanzania", *UTAFITI* 3, No.1 (1996), 91.

⁶ Edward Mgaya, "Acquiring Human Capital Skills through Labour Migrancy: The Case of Colonial Njombe District, 1900-1960s", *International and Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 1, (2016), 51-70, 54.

fields, sought cash elsewhere. One can, therefore, think of such migration as migration for 'survival.' To use D. Papademetrious and P. Martin's words, such survival migrants were mostly 'pushed by the lack of alternatives at home'.⁷ Although no record exists to show exactly when labour migration began in Njombe district, it is documented that by the mid-1920s long distance travelling for wage labour had become regular.⁸ During the interwar period, labour migration by Njombe people increased. The increase was in part due to the demand for labour in the sisal plantations of north-eastern Tanzania. It was during British rule that the Bena Migrants were transported by trucks and Lorries as *Manamba*.⁹ The plantations employed about one-third of the country's wage-labourers and earned a large part of its foreign exchange. During the same period, most of this

⁷ Dimetrious Papademetrious and Phillip Martin eds., *the Unsettled Relationships: Labour Migration and Economic Development*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 5.

⁸ Christopher M. Lwoga, "Seasonal Labour Migration in Tanzania: The case of Ludewa District", in *Labour Circulation and Labour Process* edited by G. Standing (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 124-128.

⁹ The term *Manamba* came from the English word numbers. The labourers had to stand in queues while being registered. They had to be counted every time as the food was distributed to them, and in the arrangements for accommodation in transit centres. In plantations, they were given numbers and were known by those numbers when registering their daily tasks.

industry's unskilled workers were peasant migrants from the southern and western parts of the country.¹⁰

Njombe District being part of Southern Tanzania has its historical experience of migrant workers which is broadly illustrative of that of many thousands of peasant migrants from other areas of the country. Such a process was necessitated by the need for money. From the 1930s through the 1950s the magnitude of labour migration in Njombe district was high, and there was little economic development.¹¹ However, not all colonial district officials accepted that areas under their administration remain underdeveloped and continue to be regarded as labour reserves. But, due to the prevailed contradictions inherent in colonial production, there was little they could do to change the status of labour reserves.

The failure to change the status of labour reserves was mainly due to two reasons. First, the district commissioners' local interest in economic development of the areas under their jurisdiction was against the interests of their superiors, plantation owners and financial interests in Europe. For example, the Njombe District Commissioner Mr E.I. Lee tried hard to get some economic development underway in

¹⁰ James D. Graham, "A Case Study of Migrant Labour in Tanzania", *African Studies Review*, 13, No. 1 (1970), 25.

¹¹ Christopher M. Lwoga, "Labour Migration and Rural Development in a former Labour reserve in Tanzania", (PhD Thesis, Cambridge University, 1985), 73.

Njombe district between 1958 and 1959. But he seemed to be working at cross-purposes with the department of labour which still considered Njombe district as one of Tanganyika's largest suppliers of plantation workers.¹² The colonial contradiction was based on the labour and development demands of the local administration on the one hand and the colonial economy centred on plantations on the other.

Berman and Lonsdale suggest the possibility of the colonial state being able to cope with such conflicting requirements of the peasant and settler political economy by distancing itself from the production processes.¹³ However, F.J. Kaijage argues that in the case of Tanganyika the colonial state was not a monolithic phenomenon as there were within it different tendencies which defined the manner of its interventions.¹⁴ Despite its being a subordinate agent of the metropolitan bourgeoisie, the colonial state in Tanganyika also intervened in response to local demands as presented by District Commissioners. In attempts to aid the efforts of

¹² Tanzania National Archive (hereafter TNA) 178/L1/5/IV: Labour Recruiting Permit Returns Contracts: Labour Returning, (1952-1960).

¹³ John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman, "Coping with the Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State in Kenya, 1895-1914", *Journal of African History*, 20, No. 4, White Presence and Power in Africa, (1979), 487-505, 489.

¹⁴ Frederick J. Kaijage, "Labour Condition in the Tanzania Mining Industry", *Boston University Working Papers in African Studies*, no. 83. (1983), 17.

District Commissioners, such as E.I. Lee of Njombe district who sought development for the areas under the jurisdiction, the colonial state periodically passed legislation to regulate labour migration. Such efforts were, however, not very successful in Njombe district.

Second, labour migration became an economic issue for peasants in labour reserves. Peasants from these districts were obliged to go and earn money through wage labour in distant areas. It followed, therefore, that imposing restrictions on labour migration would have meant forcing the peasants to use different alternatives of production for cash within their fields which were already marginalised. Although such attempt would sound like efforts to stabilise the labour force, it would also be at the expense of profit maximisation for the plantation owners. However, as time went on, with various internal and external administrative and individual efforts, opportunities for economic development began to open in the district, but most of the people of Njombe were not receptive to such opportunities.¹⁵ They still considered labour migration as an opportunity to utilise. Such a passive response by the Bena was not expected by colonial officials. The interest of the Njombe district officials to develop the area was also hampered by the lack of basic economic infrastructures in the area. There were no reliable communication systems and markets in Njombe.

¹⁵ Such opportunities included: cash crop production and small businesses.

2.0 Literature Gap

Labour migration in colonial Tanzania has mainly been viewed as a strictly one-way process, only draining the rural areas of male labourers who never came back to share the fruits of their toil with their families. Looking at labour migration from this perspective has eased most scholars to ignore the creativity and initiatives of Africans to manipulate whatever little capital, ideas and experience they acquired, to transform their livelihoods. Africans have, therefore, been portrayed as passive, always being vulnerable to the situation. For instance, James Graham argued for the negative and anti-progressive character of male labour migration due to their long-term absences from their in-need families. He also argued that labour migration deprived rural economies of needed labour and their communities. Referring to Njombe, he pointed out that there were a high proportion of men who left the district for the sisal estates or to the mines of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia, leaving their villages heavily weighed by women and children.¹⁶ C. Lwoga, in his study of labour migration in Ludewa, which was by then part of Njombe District, also argued that the labour migration of men to sisal plantations caused a shortage of labour within the district and in the province. He shows that between 1945 and 1946 there were severe labour

¹⁶ John D. Graham, "Changing Patterns of Wage Labour in Tanzania", (PhD Thesis, Northwestern University, 1968)

shortages in Iringa, leading to employment of women and children.¹⁷ In his studies of Ngoni, Ndendeuli and Nyakyusa, P.H. Gulliver also revealed that the absence of young men from their villages had depressing effects on the rural economy as the most active labour force was away for over one year. In Consideration of the peasant family as an independent family unit, Gulliver concluded that there was serious labour difficulty at home when men were away.¹⁸ The victimisation of migrant labourers and their areas of origin was based on scholars' reliance on archival information as presented by missionaries and anthropologists who themselves took a negative view of labour migration.

Contemporary studies on Tanzania's colonial labour migration have also followed the same pattern. With few exceptions, most scholars still emphasised on the negative impact of labour migration on agricultural production. For instance, D.F. Bryceson indicated the detrimental effects suffered by labour providing societies citing increased poverty.¹⁹ T. Sunseri in his *Vilimani* argues that labour migration led to social consequences such as divorce,

¹⁷ Lwoga, "Seasonal Labour Migration", 126.

¹⁸ Phillip H. Gulliver, "Report on the Migration of African Workers to the South from the Southern Highlands", *Tanganyika* (1954), 12.

¹⁹ Deborah F. Bryceson, *Food Insecurity and the Social Division of Labour in Tanzania 1919-1985*, (Oxford: Macmillan, 1990), 211-216.

household dissolution and decline of childbirth.²⁰ Abortion and infanticide are also reported by Sunseri to have become commonly widespread practices due to labour migration. He argues that abortion was due to immoral behaviour of women because of long absences of their husbands.²¹ He further shows that typically the migrant labourers were made artificially cheap and were super-exploited.

However, being highly exploited does not necessarily mean that these migrant workers were not paid at all. That being the case, it is still imperative to explore on how the little gain they got was channelled into rural communities and to what effect. Such kind of analysis lacks in these studies. The intention of this paper is not to deny the detrimental impacts of labour migration but rather to show that the resultant transformative agency of migrant labourers using whatever small capital, knowledge and experience they obtained from their being labourers in colonial economic ventures should not be neglected.

3.0 Theory and methodology

Fundamental to this study was the understanding of the labour migration-transformation relationship. To create such connections, this paper draws on two approaches: Political

²⁰ Thaddeus Sunseri, *Vilimani: Labour Migration and Rural Change in Early Colonial Tanzania*, (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 166.

²¹ *Ibid.*

economy and transformational approaches as they relate to the rural context. The paper considers the fact that labour migration embraces all dimensions of social existence and, therefore, demands an interdisciplinary approach. The political economy framework is embedded in the new economics of migration and considers human beings as industrious and enterprising people with economic sense (*Homo Economicus*). Being *Homo Economicus*, individuals readily respond to market impulses and other opportunities available by allocating their labour power where the best return is promised.²² This approach allows us to see African labour migration during the colonial period, despite its being in most cases a result of colonial coercion, a function also, in some instances of African calculation of the relative effort price between local production and migrating for wage labour. Understanding labour migration this way provides room for examination of the advantages the labour migrants got from their participation in wage work and how the opportunities they got were manoeuvred for the benefits of their communities. Nevertheless, the political economy framework adopted for this study seems to be more helpful in pinning down motivations for migration than assessing the consequences of the process. Following the flaw embedded in political economy theory, the transformational

²² Oded Stark, "Tales of Migration without Wage Differentials: Individual, Family, and Community Contexts", *Conference Proceedings on African Migration in Comparative Perspective* (2003).

approach has been used as a supplemental framework. It appears that the transformation model is best for assessing the consequences of labour migration.

The transformation approach developed by Stephen Castles provides the basis for a new understanding of the links between human labour mobility and rural change. In this paper, social change is taken as a fundamental shift in the way society is organised that goes beyond the continual processes of incremental social changes which were always at work. It implies a step-change in which the existing social-economic patterns are re-configured. Rural transformation is linked to major shifts in dominant economic, political and strategic relationships. Castle's argument that, in developing countries forms of social change include intensification of agriculture, changes in education, politics and religion²³ is of relevance in this case study.

The information for this study was obtained from both written sources and field work. Written sources encompassed both primary and secondary materials. Primary written sources were mainly sought from Tanzania National Archives (TNA) in Dar-es-Salaam in September and October 2012. The study benefited from the University of Dar es

²³ Stephen Castles, "Understanding Global Migration: A Social Transformation Perspective", *Conference Proceedings on theories of migration and social change*, St Anne's College (Oxford, 2008), 11.

Salaam Library (East Africana section) for published and unpublished sources. Field work involved conducting oral interviews in Njombe District from October to December 2012.

4.0 Returned Migrants and Agricultural Innovations

Although Njombe was regarded as a labour reserve, pockets of cash crop growing began to evolve in the 1930s.²⁴ Coffee was a popular cash crop in the district until the arrival and commercialization of tea production in the region in 1926.²⁵ However, cash crop production was dominated by European settler farmers. By the 1950s Njombe district had a substantial number of men who had been out on wage employment. They had money and were exposed to some technological knowledge while in workplaces.²⁶ Such accumulated knowledge featured even in various stories they exchanged. Among stories preferred to be told by those in the colonial Njombe generation was the one concerning Njombe's transition from labour migration to farming of marketable produce between the mid-1940s and 1960s. Referring to his transition from being a migrant labourer to a large-scale cabbage producer, Penseli Mwajombe said:

It was a very successful project for me. In the beginning I did not know that cabbage farming

²⁴ Lwoga, "Seasonal Labour Migration", 82.

²⁵ John Baffes, "Tanzania's Tea Sector: Challenges and Constraints", *Africa Region Working Paper Series No 69*, (2004), 1.

²⁶ Graham, "Changing Patterns of Wage Labour in Tanzania", 110.

would yield as much as it did for the Greeks for whom I was working as a *Shamba* boy in Iringa. It was an incredible experience for me. As I was walking around streets, I could hear people talking about my success in farming. Farming is what got me out of travelling as a migrant labourer again.²⁷

Stories as the one told by Penseli were, however, being told by men who placed stories of such transformation in a well-organized genre. A more obvious danger in such type as identified by Giblin was their obscuring of the role played by women in such agrarian transition. Because of such danger, Giblin suggests a need to carefully deliberate the purpose of those who tell the stories.²⁸

One of the reasons for such stories being told by men was that men had much easier access than women to a genre that made stories of farming meaningful to outsiders and other men. Men travelled to towns and various distant working places. After several trips to these workplaces, their view of the world changed. Referring to Zambia, Alfeyo Chilivumbo argued that gradually, migrant labourers formed a reservoir of people who were less traditional but more receptive to innovations. These individuals became instrumental in

²⁷ Interview with Penseli Mwajombe, Igosi, 12.11.2012

²⁸ Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 156

agricultural development.²⁹ Following the same trend, Njombe migrant labourers travelled to towns, rode bicycles, practised carpentry, assembled steel ploughs, trained oxen and made diesel engine sputter into life. As Giblin argues, because these people did things that signified modernity, they could readily translate their experience into a genre which had undoubtedly become popular even before villagers began frequently dealing with development-oriented administrators and agronomists during the 1950s and 1960s.³⁰ The stories of these people were of course stories of becoming modern of which the topic of farming became worth talking about.

Njombe women on the other hand, lacked means of acquiring the skills and implements that signified modernity in agriculture as it was for men counterparts. However, this does not eliminate women's participation in agrarian transformation. In fact, women fully participated in the process, only that they did so by using old skills and technologies. For example, while some men learned to run diesel-powered mills, almost all Bena women continued using mortar and pestle.³¹ From such a scenario, it was evident for women to have felt they lacked the authority to speak on matters which agronomists, government officials,

²⁹ Alfeyo Chilivumbo, *Migration and Uneven Rural Development in Africa: The Case of Zambia* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985), xiv

³⁰ Giblin, *A History of the Excluded*, 156

³¹ Interview with Alex Nyalukolo, Igosi, 22.11.2012.

researchers and male villagers regarded as matters of development and progress. Women tended to defer discussion of such agrarian modernization to men.³² These women, therefore, were handicapped regarding a socially valued genre in which to present themselves as farmers. Nevertheless, Bena women were not always submissive to men. As time went on, they found an ingenuity way of surviving and challenging the patriarchal system that existed in Njombe. Most women interviewed for this study revealed that in their husbands' absence despite increased burdens, they also played a greater role in family decision making. Practicing of such roles during their husbands' absence, suggests that these women were able to overcome societal norms which tended to exclude women from leadership and decision making. Increased Bena women autonomy underscores the importance of putting any study of women's contribution to the household economy in its historical and socio-economic perspective.

Njombe villagers who between the 1940s and 1950 seized the emerging opportunities to make money by farming were those who had in one way or another already acquired a variety of resources and skills. In addition to cash, cattle and other material resources, these people had also learned mechanical know-how, Kiswahili, literacy, arithmetic,

³² Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 157.

knowledge of the roads, markets and towns that, together, knitted the colonial economy. They, also, had attained some familiarity with peculiarities of Europeans. Most of them had participated in labour migrations to the coastal sisal plantations. Migrant labourers who worked on settler farms, for instance, learned through practice the new methods of farming. They brought their new knowledge and skills into their home district. These included contour ridging, crop rotation and the use of composite manure in growing vegetables near streams.

Penseli Mwajombe of Makoga worked for four years for the Greek settlers in Dabaga. His working as a 'shamba boy' allowed him to learn and accumulate knowledge especially on vegetable growing. Recalling those days, Penseli remembered the skills of growing cabbage which he learned while practising it in Iringa. He did, of course, discover how to produce a variety of vegetables but he hastily remembered cabbage simply because of the way such skills made a meaning in his life even after his return home. Immediately after returning home at Makoga, Penseli made a quick use of the skills he had obtained. He dug a very long irrigation channel which enabled him to establish a big garden where cabbage was grown. He became a successful person in his project. He mentioned to have built a house in 1957, bought a sewing machine and a bicycle using money earned out of selling cabbages. Above all, the garden became a model from which several other villagers learned cabbage growing skills.

The use of cans in irrigating vegetables was another innovation that was brought by returned migrant labourers in Ubena.³³

Around 1943 the government placed Second World War's Polish internees at Kidugala Lutheran Mission. The camp was said to have housed more than 1000 internees who brought a substantial amount of money to nearby villagers as they were given money for their expenditure. These internees also increased the supply of European vegetables by distributing seeds to nearby villagers who responded by practising horticulture. They began producing cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, onions, turnips and tomatoes. As time went on, the Bena of these areas became experienced in new varieties of vegetables. Agricultural officers were also aware of such efforts by the villagers. In 1945 one agricultural officer expressed his appreciation of natives' experience in growing plants. He said:

These days, the residents of Ubena understand well how to farm for profit. Very many have cultivated large plots and have planted lots of

³³ Penseli Mwajombe in *Giblin, History of the Excluded*.

European vegetables to sell and get a lot of money.³⁴

The bringing of vegetable seeds by Poles at Kidugala cannot by itself explain the spread and cultivation of those vegetables and other new crops in all other parts of Ubena. The way these seeds and knowledge of production of these crops spread in the district, to a larger extent, remained in the hands of ex-migrant labourers within and outside Njombe district. These labourers were particularly on the lookout for knowledge that could help them with farming and trade in their future lives. Dalton Stambul, a villager from Parangavanu who worked on sisal estates, described himself to have always pondered on which crop would put him in an advantageous position. After a long time of thinking and investigating the prices of most products grown in the territory, he concluded that he would grow grapes.³⁵ A few other farmers in Njombe would try growing grapes as well, some successfully and others not.

Other new food crops brought by migrant labourers in Njombe were fast growing yellow maize and Irish potatoes which were first grown by Njombe farmers in the Uporoto

³⁴ TNA 178/12/A: Julius Watson Mtango (agricultural instructor at Wanging'ombe) to Bwana Shamba (Iringa), 30.06.1945, TNA/ 178/P.4/6/i: Njombe District Annual Reports, 1944, 1954 and 1946.

³⁵ TNA 178/D.3/55: A letter by Dalton E. Stambul (Kwamkoro Estates, Amani) to Chief Secretary (Dar es Salaam), 16.06.1958.

Mountains during the 1940s and 1950s.³⁶ It is interesting to note that round potatoes have become, up to now, an important crop that is used by Bena both for own consumption and commercial purposes. Currently, the potato is a crop that every villager in Ubena would be eager to cultivate in large number as possible.

Although a few farmers were using ploughs by the late 1930s, it was during the late 1940s and early 1950s that ploughing became widespread.³⁷ A colonial administrator once commented in 1951 on the increased use of ploughs by the Bena. He said 'the Wabena are making greater use of cattle for draught purposes, in fact, it is reported that over one hundred ploughs were sold at Mtwango in 1951.'³⁸ The adoption of ploughs was not quite simple and straightforward as imagined by the British proponents of ploughing. The process involved, among other things, enticing farmers into sisal labour to earn cash for ploughs and oxen. Elimia Longolela of Katenge explained the way he began the process by making money from his working on sisal plantations: 'I would come home and buy an ox, and return and buy another. Later I purchased a plough, and

³⁶ Jens A. Anderson, 'Potato Cultivation in the Upoloto Mountains, Tanzania,' *African Affairs* 95 (1996), 91.

³⁷ Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 166.

³⁸ A.E.G Markham, "Report on Tuberculosis Survey of Southern Highland Province, Tanganyika from Nov 1949 to Dec. 1951", 35.

after that, I concentrated on farming.'³⁹ Longolela's recollections underscore the extent to which migrant labourers played an invaluable role in initiating agricultural innovations in colonial Njombe district.

Apart from getting cash for ploughs and oxen, the process of using animals for farming also involved experimentation and diffusion of ideas and techniques. Labour migration provided the Bena with such opportunities. In Palangavanu village it was introduced by Mahuna who saw cattle under traction while working for Europeans in Mufindi.⁴⁰ Explaining the way through which most people got ideas about training oxen, Jimu Kilima said:

There was a European in Mufindi who taught oxen to plough. Individuals who went there learned to plough with oxen and they returned home to train the cattle here. In those days, it was hard to train oxen. You had to fasten a log on its neck, and then you would make the ox run here and there until it was tired and accepted the plough.⁴¹

The use of few oxen was a major step in the process of learning how to plough on the part of the Bena. Such a development made ploughing feasible for most farmers. When ploughs were introduced, six oxen were used at once,

³⁹ Interview with Elimia Longolela, Igesi, 30.11.2012

⁴⁰ Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 167.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

but by experimenting, farmers gradually learned to plough with only two oxen.⁴² However, the use of ploughs to some extent caused difficulties in obtaining adequate land. The shortage was because farmers increased their acres under cultivation.

Agricultural innovation was further aided by improvement in transport. From the 1950s an improved transportation system became an additional motivation for many returned migrant labourers to participate in peasant farming and stay at home much longer before going on another trip for wage employment. The decision to stay was because it became remunerative to invest in agriculture. With motor transport, they conveniently carried their surplus crops to the markets within and outside Njombe district. Returned migrant labourers came home with a fundamental mode of transportation, 'the bicycle.' The bicycle revolutionised the transport system and boosted agricultural production. To carry more goods on the bike, the Bena improvised with a larger carrier made from hardwood. Some even bought two bicycles, one for hire and the other for their use.⁴³ Buying bicycles became necessary even for non-migrant labourers. Many of non-migrant labourers bought bikes from Indian

⁴² Interview with Petro Mpingwa and Simon Mgaya, Igosi, 19.11.2012

⁴³ Interview with Petro Mpingwa and Simon Mgaya, Igosi, 19.11.2012

shops in Njombe Township or from migrant workers who had more than one.

Overall, the struggle for knowledge, innovation and diversification produced a substantial increase in crop marketing. The new agricultural skills practised by some of the returned migrant labourers showed increased yields. As a result, such skills were gradually adopted by some non-migrant villagers. The new skills ultimately began a new era in the history of farming among the Bena. It was an era where some peasant farmers were defined as agricultural producers selected by the government for settlement in indeed designated farming schemes. These became relatively wealthy villagers who were even willing to leave their village gardens to take up farming on virgin soil elsewhere. These were more progressive and advanced individuals in the communities, a group to which many Bena migrant labourers belonged. However, labour migration was just one of the reasons for these transformations. In fact, there were more forces at play in shaping agricultural innovations in colonial Njombe. The innovations were also related to broader colonial campaigns such as grow more crops, a creation of progressive farmers, anti-erosion, restocking and another post World War II modernization drives in

Tanganyika and beyond. These constituted what Illife referred to as the 'second colonial occupation'.⁴⁴

5.0 *Manamba* and entrepreneurial activities

The colonial Njombe society did not restrict itself to farmer's accumulation of knowledge and experience. They went further to other social processes that involved embracing of business knowledge both within one generation and onward to the next.⁴⁵ In most of their stories about entrepreneurship, it was common to see a description of personal improvement without much reference to others. For instance, trader's development could be traced about things which one's business made grow in number. These included among other things, shops, motor vehicles, sewing machines and bicycles.⁴⁶ However, a critical scrutiny of those stories reveals that such businesses were forms of social interaction in which one's achievements were through communication, travel and networking.

As it was to other aspects of development, the people of colonial Njombe were excluded from commercial

⁴⁴ John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

⁴⁵ Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 178.

⁴⁶ Edward Mgaya, "Acquiring Human Capital Skills through Labour Migrancy: The Case of Colonial Njombe District, 1900-1960s", *International and Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Sciences* 5 no. 1, (2016), 53.

opportunities. The exclusion included a near-absence of currency and spending power among the Bena. They were also excluded from agricultural markets and banks. Their unfamiliarity with those opportunities left them severely handicapped in competition with those who had fuller knowledge and access to those opportunities particularly the Indians. The problem was predominantly before the 1940s when the government-imposed market controls and rationing.⁴⁷ The attribution of business to the migration experience does not stand to deny the fact that the Bena engaged in trade as early as pre-colonial times. Trade has always been an integral part of village life in Njombe even before the 1940s. But, the colonial government market controls prevented villagers from using their inheritance of trading knowledge to business in the formal economy.⁴⁸ In Njombe, such opportunities in rural trade were left to be dominated by Njombe's Indian community who were concentrated in Njombe Township. In fact, Africans were not allowed to make such trade in competition with Indians.

Njombe people could not always accept a state of exclusion. They continuously tried to break out of it. For example, villagers who wished to get out of state exclusion chose to operate in the shadow of the formal economy. To avoid government controls, these people opted for the use of black

⁴⁷ Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 179.

⁴⁸ Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 179.

markets.⁴⁹ However, it was not easy to operate in those shadow opportunities as there were no easily available chances within Njombe. Such opportunities, therefore, increased with the European establishment of mines and plantations in the southern highlands. These had, of course, set in motion the flows of migrant labourers across the region. It followed, therefore, that the needs for provisions and accommodation by the travelling workers provided an opportunity for entrepreneurial villagers. Giblin argues that, as they filled such shadowy niches and moved on to parallel markets, rural entrepreneurs now turned to family relations. As a result, the family was made both the means of organising activity across space and of accumulating and transmitting knowledge of commercial affairs through time.⁵⁰

Apart from government controls, trading locally for monetary profit among the Bena was virtually impossible before the 1940s. The difficult was because much of the insufficient cash that happened to be in the hands of villagers was collected for taxes. Such collected tax appears to have absorbed most of the cash brought home in Ubena by migrant labourers. For instance, the maximum amount possible to be saved by a sisal worker during a regular nine-

⁴⁹ Interview with Mzee Lunodzo Mwalongo, Igosi, 16.11.2012.

⁵⁰ Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 179.

month term employment was Shs.45/- with a standard tax of 8/- in 1837.⁵¹ The tax was in addition to the cash that workers spent on buying goods in Tanga before returning home.

Although such expenditures reduced the power of Bena migrant labourers to invest in local trade and despite the local business in Njombe district being predominantly an Indian activity, there were, however, some African (Bena) individuals who began engaging in trade in Njombe. In 1937 Njombe District Officer, despite his declaring that 'trade, as such, is practically non-existent', he noted 'several small Indian-owned shops and many native *'dukas'* [small shops].⁵² Since there was little profit from trading within Njombe, for most Bena trading for high profit came to mean travelling long distances. However, not anyone could make such long-distance trade if unfamiliar with various routes and destinations where such business could be profitable. It followed, therefore, that those who had at one point, travelled outside the district as migrant labourers were relatively advantaged to carry out such trade quickly. For example, some men would take hides from Njombe to Iringa and proceed to Tanga when prices in Iringa were not satisfactory. At the coast, they could expect to earn no more

⁵¹ TNA 23544: The Estimates of Maximum Savings by Sisal Workers is found in F. Longland, 'Report on Labour Matters in Sisal Areas, No.1', 29.03.1936.

⁵² TNA 178/1/4: N.F. Burt (DO, Njombe), 'Handling over Report' (July 1937).

than Shs.4/- per trip.⁵³ All the same, some sisal-hands took up trade in Tanga. Recalling how he started a business, Charles Kilumile of Uwemba described:

After working in sisal for a while, we began doing business. We'd go and buy fish which we'd bring back and sell in the worker's camps. We bought the fresh fish and dried it ourselves. We had to keep drinking a lot of tea so we couldn't fall asleep while we were drying the fish all night. We'd send the fish to our friends to the camps by a train, while we remained behind.⁵⁴

Smart men were those who returned home with money to buy cattle. Buying animals was a valued accomplishment by migrant labourers because, with cattle, one could easily pay the bride price and sell it for cash when in need. The sisal region, particularly Korogwe in Tanga Province, was the common destination of cattle before the emergence of Mbeya market during the Lupa gold rush of the 1930s.⁵⁵ Traders ranged over vast areas to assemble herds before departing for Korogwe. The challenge in getting the animals was because few cattle owners were willing to sell their cattle

⁵³ TNA 178/28/21/58: Reports on Njombe District for quarters ending 30 June and 30 September 1930.

⁵⁴ Charles Kilumile as quoted in Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 181.

⁵⁵ Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 181.

at the prevailing prices unless in a time of difficulties, such as food scarcity at home.

The period during and after the Second World War was the beginning of improved commercial activities in Njombe. The war period witnessed increased consumer demand for various goods. As a result, sisal workers now chose to bring home larger proportions of their earnings in cash because consumer goods were not only scarce but also expensive.⁵⁶ Administrators were slow to recognise that Njombe was changing but eventually came to realise the extent of wartime transformations. The rise in the circulation of money roused commercial ambition among the people of Njombe. They realised that huge demands for foodstuffs existed in towns and plantation regions. Unfortunately, they were denied the opportunity to do business both by government controls of crop marketing and by a rationing system that gave the monopoly of distribution of many consumer goods to the Indian business community.

Njombe villagers responded to such restriction by forming cooperatives. Such cooperatives in Njombe began with the Ukena Welfare Society (U.W.S), operating from 1946 to 1955.⁵⁷ The U.W.S was created by traders who wished to mobilise their resources to be able to compete more efficiently against Indian merchants who dominated trade.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 182.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 254.

More wealthy merchants provided leadership in such cooperatives. However, because of the anticipated advantages of the society, smaller peddlers (*wachuuzi*) also joined it. Breaking the monopoly of trade by Indians over the wholesale of consumer goods became their primary goal. John Mhavile, one of the founders of U.W.S recalled their struggles with Indians:

We were struggling against the Indians. All the businessmen joined to buy their goods wholesale from Dar-es-Salaam and bring them to Njombe. Then all the traders operating in Njombe came here to get their products to sell retail. Truthfully, it was above all competition with the Indians.⁵⁸

The move by Njombe traders implied their efforts towards developing an industrial economy in the private sphere. The U.W.S was also trying to break the current dependence of Bena traders on Indian transporters. It did so by acquiring its vehicles.⁵⁹ It was unfortunate that U.W.S collapsed in 1955 due to corruption and inexperience in financial management.

⁵⁸ John A. Mhavile was quoted in Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 254

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Bena traders also campaigned for access to the rationed goods such as sugar and cloth which the government had placed under the monopoly of Indian merchants. Fearing discontent among Africans, in addition to the intention to reduce parallel markets, the government in Njombe began to include some Africans in the rationing system. Giblin points out that in December 1944, they gave the first African share in the sugar allocation to an important trader of Northern Njombe called Andreas Mpingwa. A few months later Kasimu Mtalusito was given a share of one gunny bag per month.⁶⁰ The two traders were ex-migrant labourers who got the opportunity to trade in their home place. In 1948 the rationing of goods was put to an end although Njombe African traders still found it difficult to obtain products from Indian wholesalers. As a result, dedicated Bena traders continued to operate in parallel markets. For instance, they were heavily involved in unsanctioned trading in foodstuffs during the famine of 1949 and other periods of food shortages.⁶¹

Improvement in the transport system by the 1950s gave traders opportunity to operate outside officially sanctioned markets. Rural business operators found ways of improving

⁶⁰ Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 183

⁶¹ John Graham, "Changing Patterns of Wage Labour in Tanzania: A History of the Relations between African Labour and European Capitalism in Njombe District, 1931-61", (PhD Thesis, Northwestern University, 1968), 110.

their situation; some returned migrant labourers got employed to run a business on behalf of Indians who set up shops in the district. After some time, several of them got enough money and built their small shops. However, the majority of the Bena businessmen did not own shops but roamed the district as hawkers.

Andrea Mgaya (Lunguja) who for years worked in sisal plantation became one of the big *Mchuuzi* (pedlar) in Usalaule. He could use the money he obtained from his wage work to buy various goods which he then sold to other villagers on cash or credit. As his business grew, he could employ other people as sub-pedlars distributing different products in different nearby villages.⁶² His *Shajara* (Diary) of 1960 shows names, items and amounts he owed various people in his business. Most of those goods were clothes and domestic requirements that he had brought from employment centres. The increasing demand for products to satisfy the strong consumption appetite of migrant labourers often led to similar behaviour on the part of non-migrant workers as the later tended to emulate the former.

⁶² Interview with Victory Mgaya, Igosi, 20.11.2012

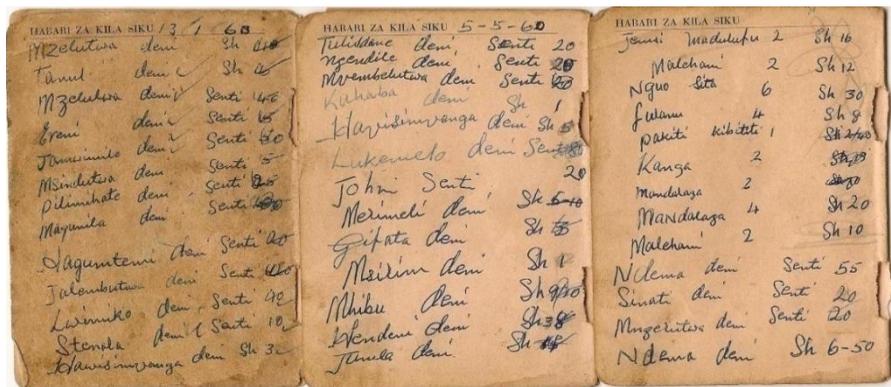
Table 1: Part of names, items and amounts Lunguja owed as per 13 January and 5 May 1960

Name	ITEM/AMOUNT	STATUS
Mdzelutwa	10 shillings	repaid
Tanuli	6 shillings	repaid
Mdzelutwa	40 cents	repaid
Ereni	15cents	repaid
Jamsumile	50 cents	repaid
Msindutwa	5 cents	repaid
Pilimuhate	25 cents	repaid
Magunila	50 cents	repaid
Hagumtemi	20 cents	repaid
Jalembutwa	40 cents	repaid
Lwimiko	40 cents	repaid
Stenala	10 cents	repaid
Havisimuvanga	3 shillings	repaid
Tulisane	20 cents	Not repaid
Nzeulile	20 cents	Not repaid
Mwembelutwa	20 cents	Not repaid
Kahaba	1 shilling	Not repaid
Havisimuvanga	5 shillings	Not repaid
Likemelo	8 cents	Repaid
John	20 cents	Not repaid
Melimeli	6 shillings	Not repaid
Gifata	3 shillings	Repaid
Msilim	1 shilling	Not repaid
Muhibu	9 shillings	Not repaid
Hendeli	38 shillings	Repaid
Jumula	11 shillings	Repaid

Jemsi	2 Madulufu (piece of cloths), 16 shillings, 6 cloths (30 shillings), 8 vests (8 shillings), 1 match box (2 shillings), 2 khangas (38 shillings),	Not repaid
Ndema	55 cents	Not repaid
Sinati	20 cents	Not repaid
Mdzulutwa	20 cents	Repaid
Ndema	6-50 shillings?	Unrepaid

Source: The late Lunguja's personal diary, now under the custodianship of his son Victory Mgya

Figure 1: An extract of a diary page showing items and amounts Lunguja owed as per 13 January and 5 May 1960



At Makambako, one of the early entrepreneurs was Musa Malipula.⁶³ He began his trading career at Idofi, some few kilometres east of Makambako. He obtained such awareness of business opportunities and saved start-up capital while working as a domestic servant for a European in Iringa. He opened a shop at Idofi in the 1930s selling clothes. He after that made the rounds of nearby villages buying crops which he then sold to the Iringa-based Unga Ltd., the Amy camp and to Fazar Murad, who provisioned the Chunya gold mines. Hamis Chang'a, describing how his father Athuman Chang'a learned to do business, he said: "While working for Sudanese soldiers garrisoned by Germans at Iringa during the hunt for Mkwawa, he witnessed how they carried on trade between Iringa and the Kilosa caravan stop."⁶⁴ He was also lucky to have lived with the Nubians of Sudan (who he described as traders of the past) whom he worked for while in Iringa. That is how he learned how to do business.

To Malipula, as was the case with Lunguja and other early Bena traders, wage employment became a preparation for entering the business. Penseli Mwajombe became an entrepreneur at Makoga after his long-term work with Greeks in Iringa.⁶⁵ Thomas Nguku made his trip to Tanga in 1960 with the purpose of raising money to start a business.⁶⁶

⁶³ See Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 195.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Interview with Penseli Mwajombe, Makoga, 12.11.2012

⁶⁶ Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 196.

He went to do plantation work but with awareness that such employment could lead to a more rewarding occupation (business). His knowledge grew out of living with his grandfather and uncle whose example suggested alternatives to migrant labour and unprofitable farming that had been the livelihood of his father. After five years of his working as a migrant labourer on sisal plantations, he had saved Shs. 1500. The money acquired enabled him to begin a business at Makambako. Many other people commenced business that way.

The other area in which returned Bena migrant labourers invested was in the field of small businesses like carpentry, masonry, grain mills and bicycle hire. People with bikes specialised in transporting goods for small retailers from Indian traders to their shops far away in the district.⁶⁷ Money lending business also became a significant enterprise for some returned migrant labourers in Njombe. People borrowed money for various reasons including bride price and school fees payments. Lunguja, for instance, was famous in money lending in Usalaule area.⁶⁸

6.0 *Manamba* and imported assets

Labour migration among the Bena, despite its being in most cases a result of colonial coercion, was a function also, in

⁶⁷ Interview with Penseli Mwajombe, Igosi, 12.11.2012

⁶⁸ Interview with Victory Mgya, Igosi, 16.11.2012

some instances, of African calculation of the relative economic advantage of wage labour. Among other things there were personal effects the Bena wanted to obtain out of their labour migrancy. It is thus imperative asking questions as to what did they bring back home from the centres of wage employment, and how significant it was to the development of their area of origin. Answers to these questions will add a point in understanding their motivation for labour migration.

While returning home with new knowledge and experience was certainly part of *kupagala*,⁶⁹ it was still imperative for migrant labourers to come back with material wealth and assets. It was these elements that could quickly determine whether one was successful or not in his *kupagala*. Having this in mind, most migrant labourers strived to make sure that they brought home assets that signified the success of their employment far away from home. Things that migrant workers could buy to take home depended on some factors among which were the availability of items on the market, the amount saved for those items and sometimes the technical knowledge about the new items one wanted to buy. Knowledge was an important factor not only in determining the level of savings but also what to buy that would be of extended use at home. Discussing the effects of migrant labourers on 'tribal' life, Margaret Read pointed out

⁶⁹ Kupagala is a word from Bena language which refers to searching for wealth especially from somewhere far from home.

that, migrant workers with some knowledge and experience tended to invest their money in durable goods.⁷⁰ In the same vein Jonathan Chengula and Petro Mpingwa revealed that although Bena migrant labourers were not educated as such, there were smart men who were determined in their search for wealth. Such people spent their money on productive endeavours like buying cattle, sewing machines, bicycles and grain mills.⁷¹ However, men of this nature were comparatively few.

The items that migrant labourers brought back to their places of origin can be divided into three categories: money, consumable items and strong assets. The focus on these possessions varied with time and between people. The first two were introduced as early as Bena labour migration began while the last one was more evident after the 1940's. These imported materials reached the Njombe district mainly through returning fellow migrant labourers carrying them to their villages.⁷² Most of the Bena migrant labourers interviewed, mentioned things like Bicycles, hammers, lanterns, *koroboi* (small lantern), shoes, candles, modern hand hoes and knives to have been brought by them while

⁷⁰ Margaret Read, "Migrant Labour in Africa and its Effects on Tribe Life", in *International Labour Review* 14 (1942), 630.

⁷¹ Interview with Jonathan Chengula, Kidugalla, 22.11.2012; Petro Mpingwa, Igosi, 16.11.2012

⁷² Interview with Simon Mgaya, Igosi 16.11.2012

returning to the district as early as the 1940s. Other things brought back during this period were wooden chairs, mattresses, wood stoves, and medicines for treating sores. Torches, radios, guitars, shaving kits, wrist watches and whistles were also of importance to them.⁷³

Grain mills and sewing machines began to enter the district after the 1940s. These items differed in importance to transforming the Bena way of life. For instance, bicycles enabled them to travel faster and trade quickly. Bikes also facilitated the spread of news within chiefdoms and villages. Migrants also brought clothes which a segment of Bena community to abandon their traditional garments made from animal hides. Wristwatches helped in transforming traditional African ways of time telling that was based on events and accomplishment of arranged tasks. Wood stoves added a new mechanism in cooking while grain mills which entered the district in the 1950s slowly replaced the traditional use of stones to crush grains for flour. It should, however, be noted that durable items like sewing machines and grain mills could be brought in the district by very few migrant labourers. For example, at Igosi, Ramboni Mgaya is well remembered to have owed a food mill.⁷⁴ These items were not only difficult to carry but also seemed unprofitable to use in remote areas where people were not familiar with

⁷³ Interview with Simon Mgaya, Victory Mgaya and Scondina Mgeni, Igosi, 19.11.2012

⁷⁴ Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 126.

such things. Also, such articles were expensive to most labourers. A village could have only one person owning a grain mill while other villages did not have one.

To manage bringing the acquired items home was not an easy task. Migrant labourers returning home with their earnings were at risk of being robbed. Giblin points out the danger of becoming separated from one's party. He quotes a description made in 1929 by a robbery victim whose fruits of seven months' employment were stolen:

I was travelling on the road alone and carrying my box. I met the accused on the road about midday. He came up to me and said, 'let me see your goods, I want to buy clothes.' I refused, saying, 'I don't want to sell.' He then pushed the box off my shoulders and ordered me to put it down. He attempted to stab me with a spear. I jumped aside. Having done this, he returned and picked up the box and went into the bush.⁷⁵

Among the stolen items were a cap, shirt, a pair of trousers, coat, whistle, knife, soap, *kitambi* (a piece of cloth often used as a head wrap) and Shs.17/- cash. It was evident that dangers like these made walking journeys a challenging test of courage and purpose. Support from companions and

⁷⁵ Mwangane s/o Mwakawange as quoted in *Ibid*.

Wanyapara (foremen) was the only way labourers could safely reach home with whatever earnings they had accumulated. D. Papademetriou and P. Martin suggest that migrants do use their gains in a manner consistent with their reasons for migrating.⁷⁶ For Njombe migrant labourers, improving their living standards and enhancing their overall social and economic status was part of their reasons to migrate. However, their spending behaviour had intended and unintended economic and social consequences. Assets that were brought by migrant labourers were those considered significant in their rural setting.

There were also some irresolute migrant labourers from Njombe who spent a big proportion of their incomes on counterproductive endeavours like alcohol and prostitution. With emphasis, Simon Mgaya, one of long established labour migrant said ‘smart men were those who could buy cattle and other valuable things but those who returned empty-handed were the ones who drank and ate chicken gizzards’⁷⁷ The scenario was also confirmed by Ludzabiho Mwalongo who once went to Tanga to fetch his poor brother, the empty-handed who ‘loved going to a hotel.’⁷⁸ There was a category of Bena migrant labourers who were lured by the

⁷⁶ Papademetriou and Martin, “Labour Migration and Development”, 19.

⁷⁷ Interview with Simon Mgaya, Igosi, 16.11.2012.

⁷⁸ Interview with Ludzabiho Mwalongo, 30.11.2012; Hotel in this context refers to a place where various food and drinks are sold. The site also serves as a guest house.

pleasures of urban life which would divert them from frugal living, an ethic embodied in *kupagala* and which enabled most of the Bena migrants to accomplish their goals.

It was the undetermined Bena migrant labourers that the *Wanyapara* came to their aid. The *Nyapara*, in most cases, intervened to make sure that these novices did not give way to temptations that would get them fail to accumulate and bring wealth home. For instance, worried about how Mwamgongolwa would spend his money, his uncle took and kept the money for him to make sure he only bought items of value. Mwamgongolwa testified:

My uncle took away my money and kept it. That's what kept me from wasting my money in useless ways. If I wanted to buy something, I told my uncle, and he would consider whether this was something that would help me. When we were ready to leave Tanga, we went together to buy things.⁷⁹

Listening to their *Nyaparas* became an important thing that every labourer from Njombe had to take into consideration if he wanted to be successful in obtaining valuable assets. However, not all the *Nyaparas* were remembered fondly by migrant labourers. Some were blamed for having confiscated

⁷⁹ Lujabiko Mwamgongolwa quoted in Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 129

their companion's money. Clothing was an aspect that almost all migrant labourers managed to bring home. It is not surprising to see Dalton Stambul writing on his fellow Wabena that 'they save their clothes until they go back, so their fiancées, grandmothers and other relatives know they did go to the coast.'⁸⁰ Most of these migrant labourers, after their return home, walked around showing their tightfistedness.

7.0 Conclusion

The history of participation in labour migration by colonial generations of Njombe district was intricately tied to the uneven development of the capitalist economy during the colonial period. Labour migration was a function of an economic compulsion rather than a result of migrants having been bored with life in villages. They did not crave for bright lights and big cities either. In fact, they were not narrow-minded. Instead, after their being excluded from colonial crop markets, labour migration was their only way of obtaining various life necessities and money for tax as demanded by colonial governments. The victimisation of labour migrants and their areas of origin have mostly been argued by compassionate colonial paternalists and anthropologists. However, the evidence coming out of this study has revealed that labour migration in Njombe district, despite its problems, provided opportunities for rural

⁸⁰ Letter of Dalton Elias Stambul (Korogwe), in *Twende Pamoja*, no. 72 (October 1962), 2.

inhabitants to acquire capital with which they transformed their society. They invested their money in household materials and entrepreneurial activities that eventually improved their standards of living. One can, therefore, argue that labour migration produced groups of relatively wealthy individuals in Njombe district with relatively common characteristics based on their acquired incomes and exposure to the environment of the employment centres. This conclusion, however, does not stand to claim all development that happened at the time were due to labour migrants. It rather stands to argue that labour migrants had a contribution in the wider process of the transformation process that was on stage in Njombe during the colonial period.