



The Dynamics of Labour Migration from Northern Malawi to South Africa since 1974

By

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Declaration

I declare that the thesis titled *The Dynamics of Labour Migration from Northern Malawi to South Africa Since 1974* is my own work, and that all the resources used or quoted have been duly acknowledged by means of in-text citations/ footnotes and complete references, and that I have not previously submitted the dissertation for a degree at any other university.



Harvey Chanaichi Chidoba Banda
February 2019

Dedication

This PhD Thesis is dedicated to my parents, late *Harry Chidoba Banda* and *Edith Njikho*, for their inquisitive minds about my academic pursuits and their sole wish that I reach the highest echelons of the academic ladder.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to sincerely thank my two Supervisors, Dr. Andrew Macdonald and Professor Sekibakiba Peter Lekgoathi in the Department of History at Witwatersrand University for the commendable effort they put in in ensuring that both the research proposal and the thesis took shape and were eventually refined. Thank you for the constructive criticisms. PhD study is a scary pursuit, but in my case this was relatively less so and containable, thanks to their encouragement and helpful guidance. Professor Kings Mbachazwa Phiri deserves my heart-felt gratitude for, in the first place, encouraging me to secure PhD admission in universities outside Malawi partly for the sake of ‘exposure’. It is following his piece of advice that I secured admission at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa.

The pursuit of PhD studies usually incurs huge costs and more so when such studies involve conducting research in two different countries, which are geographically apart. This was exactly the nature of my PhD study. I am, therefore, profoundly grateful to the following institutions for variously providing funding with which I pursued my studies at the University of the Witwatersrand and conducted fieldwork both in South Africa and Malawi: The National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) in partnership with CODESRIA; the Malawi Government under the Malawi Government Scholarship Fund (MGSF); and, lastly, Mzuzu University which provided start-up funds for conducting fieldwork in northern Malawi.

The following people deserve recognition for the various roles they played during data collection for this study. Suffice to mention, though, that they are not listed here in order of priority or importance. Bishop Chavula assisted in identifying informants in T.A.s Malanda and Malenganzoma in Nkhata-Bay. Most of these potential informants were initially sceptical and utterly hesitant to take part in the study, arguing ‘what is the direct (monetary) benefit of our involvement?’ Together, Bishop and myself, eventually convinced such sceptics that they should not always be looking for direct benefits from something; for instance, that research is a normal process involved in writing academic works such as theses (like this one), research papers and academic books. In fact, their own ‘children’ need these in university libraries. In stark contrast, however, I did not encounter such resistance among my informants in Mzimba District.

Standford Banda, *adada badoko* (my younger father i.e. my father’s younger brother) acted both as a research guide and informant in Chipayika, Nkhata-Bay. It was a good rejoinder after a couple of years. Wilson Banda, *munung’una wane* (my younger brother) acted as my research assistant in T.A.s Kapingo Sibande and M’mbelwa in Mzimba District. He took numerous photos during these research trips, some of which have been used in this study. Douglas Nyirenda, my former History student at Mzuzu University, then teaching at Nkhata-Bay Secondary School, assisted in identifying informants in T.A. Mankhambira, particularly Sanga area in Nkhata-Bay. Like Zubayumo Makamo area in Mzimba District, Sanga area is renowned for labour emigration to South Africa. Douglas also assisted in conducting a preliminary survey in T.A. Mankhambira. The results of the survey confirmed the strong existence and rootedness of labour migration to South Africa. Although I personally conducted all the oral interviews and transcribed part of them, it was William Tembo, a teacher at Lubinga Secondary School in Mzuzu, who transcribed the remaining few interviews.

At the Malawi National Archives in Zomba, Malawi, the archivists willingly assisted in identifying documents relevant to my topic. However, I am compelled to single out two officers; firstly, Dr. P. Lihoma, the then Director at the Malawi National Archives (MNA) who granted me a waiver on access period of the material in the Public Archives. This was due to the contemporary nature of my PhD study on international labour migration from Malawi to South Africa.; secondly, though not least, a young, dedicated and jovial officer, Julius Kalenga (Assistant Archivist), who made me ‘feel at home’ while researching at the Archives. As most people know, archival research is a tedious and pains-taking exercise. As such, the light moments I shared with Julius were reinvigorating, indeed.

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Last but not least, it would be a disservice not to extend my gratitude to all the informants who unreservedly put aside all their respective and precious daily schedules to grant me interviews. I do not take this for granted at all. It is unfortunate that, as is usually the case, most of them do not have the opportunity to see the ‘fruits of their labour’. But all I can say is *yebo chomene* (thank you so much).

In a special way, thanks go to my wife, Chifundo Luhanga-Banda, who always stood by my side before and throughout my PhD studies. Indeed, the beginning was so rocky, financially, that a faint-hearted would have been tempted to throw in the towel. But my wife rightly argued that ‘God will not forsake you – will see you through!’ I cannot agree with her more on the saying that ‘there is time for everything’. This is in concurrence with Aeschylus’ famous dictum ‘time brings all things to pass!’

Abstract

This study centrally argues that despite the numerous challenges that Malawian migrants face in South Africa, especially in the post-1990 period, a majority of them are able to improve their households and communities in Malawi using proceeds from their wage employment in South Africa. International labour migration from Malawi to South Africa dates back to the late nineteenth century. However, previous scholars have focused on the period up to the 1970s and 1980s when labour migration was both formal and informal. This comprehensive study plays a complementary and supplementary role by focusing on the nature of informal migration from the 1970s onwards where academic research in Malawi is still in its infancy. The study employed a critical analysis of secondary and archival sources and rich oral testimonies. In this regard, through a large expanse of interviews involving male and female migrants and former Wenela, Theba and selufu migrants in Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts in northern Malawi and also in Gauteng Province in South Africa, the study unveils the dynamics (nature, dimensions and patterns) of migration from northern Malawi to South Africa. Through this approach, the study allows the migrants to tell their own stories and experiences. The study makes a contribution to the social and cultural historiography of Malawi and South Africa.

The study shows that the decline in mine migrancy in the 1970s and 1980s was merely a culmination of the developments favouring this decline which existed since the 1960s, especially following Malawi's attainment of independence in 1964. The study argues that the increase in informal migration was not only as a result of the decline in mine migrancy in question, but also the changes in the political and socio-economic environments of Malawi, South Africa and the entire SADC region. The thesis also argues that despite government restrictions on migration some women managed to emigrate to South Africa during the pre-1990 period. During this period, most of these women largely accompanied their migrant husbands as house wives. During the post-1990 period, the study shows, women emigrate both as migrants accompanying husbands and as autonomous migrants. They also migrate for various reasons including wage employment and commercial purposes. It also argues that women are active financial agents and builders of social capital like their male counterparts.

The study highlights challenges that male and female migrants faced in South Africa. These challenges include xenophobia, lack of jobs, expensive accommodation, high crime rate, and arrests and deportations due to lack of valid visas and work permits. The study also observed that many of the migrants devised such strategies as getting relief and support from welfare societies and churches of Malawi origin in order to overcome these challenges. In addition, some migrants resorted to the use of mankhwala gha chifipa (local medicine) as mankhwala gha mwabi (luck medicine) and protection medicine. Through these measures, migrants elongate their stay in South Africa with a view to maximise their proceeds in order for them to ably achieve their set migration goals.

The study has used the human agency perspective, to show that labour migrants are purposive and rational decision-makers. For instance, in the face of the challenges that they face in South Africa, they are able to change from being career migrants to target migrants. Through this, they have managed to maximise their savings, stay briefly in South Africa, and thereafter return home. The study also attempted to assess the developmental impact of remittances in the source areas. There is efficient flow of remittances in the form of ndalama (money) and katundu (goods) as a result of the improvement in technology, for instance, through the introduction of mabyuro (local money bureaux), the online banking system which ensures swift money transfers, local transporters, and special inter-country money transfer facilities in southern Africa, for example, Mukuru.

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Acronyms and Local (*Tumbuka*) Words Used

<i>Apateti</i>	- apartheid
<i>Bamwenye</i>	- Indians
<i>Basanu</i>	- healers' assistants
<i>Bazungu</i>	- whites
<i>Boma</i>	- the British administrative station in the district, especially during colonial administration
<i>Chibaro</i>	- 'punishment', official recruitment was viewed as a kind of punishment
<i>Chikamwini</i>	- marriage practice where a husband relocates to his wife's place
<i>Chikhoso</i>	- cough
<i>Chilaso</i>	- pneumonia
<i>Chiphaso</i>	- passport
<i>Chipondamthengo</i>	- payment to the healer for going into the bush to fetch medicine
<i>Chitenje</i>	- wrapper
<i>Chitukuko</i>	- economic development
<i>Chizonono</i>	- syphilis, a kind of STD
<i>Foromani</i>	- work place foreman or supervisor
<i>Ganyu</i>	- piece job
<i>Gogo</i>	- grandmother
<i>Joini</i>	- 'to join' i.e. to join mine recruitment
<i>Katapila</i>	- loan where one pays back huge interest rates, for example, one hundred per cent, etc
<i>Katundu</i>	- various types of goods
<i>Kaunjika</i>	- second hand clothes

<i>Khechi</i>	- mine lift
<i>Kuhonga</i>	- to give a bribe
<i>Kutchona</i>	- to overstay
<i>Kuthwasa</i>	- process of becoming a healer
<i>Kuwombeza</i>	- divination; also called <i>kuchima</i> in Tumbuka of northern Malawi
<i>Lasiti</i>	- Last Church
<i>Mabomu</i>	- gonorrhea (an STD)
<i>Mabyuro</i>	- bureaux
<i>Madipotii</i>	- Deportees
<i>Makhuzo</i>	- condolences
<i>Makuni</i>	- plants
<i>Malimidwe</i>	- proper farming practices; Malawians were forced to embark on <i>malimidwe</i> as part of the environmental conservation measures
<i>Malipenga</i>	- a traditional dance of the Tonga and the Tumbuka in northern Malawi
<i>Malobolo</i>	- bride price
<i>Mankhwala</i>	- Medicine
<i>Masenga</i>	- activities bordering on witchcraft
<i>Masuzgo</i>	- troubles
<i>Matchona</i>	- migrants who went to seek employment in other southern African countries e.g. South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia and either overstayed or never returned home i.e. ‘the lost ones’
<i>Matola</i>	- business of carrying people using pick-up tracks (lorries)
<i>Mikhukhu</i>	- shacks
<i>Mlonda</i>	- a watchman or a guard

<i>Mnyasa</i>	- a person coming from Nyasaland (now Malawi)
<i>Moba/mowa</i>	- beer
<i>Msika</i>	- market
<i>Mthandizi</i>	- body recruiting labour for Zimbabwean farms; colloquial term coined from RNLB; it literally meant 'help'
<i>Mutu</i>	- headache
<i>Mvakachi</i>	- a temporary visitor
<i>Nchimi</i>	- healers who rely on divination
<i>Ndalama</i>	- money
<i>Ngolo</i>	- ox-cart
<i>Ngongole</i>	- debt
<i>Nthendero</i>	- groundnut flour
<i>Nyanga</i>	- bad charms which witches use to bewitch others
<i>Nyau</i>	- Chewa spiritual, secret societies in central Malawi
<i>Phungo</i>	- disease as a result of change of weather suffered by Malawians abroad
<i>Sanje</i>	- jealousy
<i>Selufu</i>	- term from the word 'self'; in this context, it means self or independent labour migration
<i>Sila</i>	- disease with malaria-like symptoms
<i>Sima</i>	- thick porridge made from maize flour
<i>Simbo</i>	- cuts on the skin
<i>Sing'anga</i>	- healer or herbalist
<i>Tchezeko</i>	- locally produced salt
<i>Tenanti</i>	- tenant farmer

<i>Thangata</i>	- literally meant ‘help’; a form of community service in lieu of tax
<i>Theba</i>	- local word for The Employment Bureau of Africa (TEBA)
<i>Ukapolo</i>	- slavery
<i>Ukavu</i>	- poverty
<i>Ulere</i>	- free transport
<i>Usipa</i>	- small fish from Lake Malawi
<i>Vimbuza</i>	- dance performed by those who are spirit-possessed in northern Malawi
<i>Vinthenda</i>	- diseases caused by spirits
<i>Vinthumwa</i>	- bad charms
<i>Viphuphu</i>	- bribes
<i>Vizilisi</i>	- convulsions
<i>Wenela</i>	- body recruiting labour for the South African mines; term was coined from WNLA
<i>Ziyoni</i>	- Zion Church

List of Abbreviations

AD	- Anno Domino (After birth of Christ)
ADMARC	- Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation
AIC	- African Independent Church
AIDS	- Acquired Immune-deficiency Syndrome
ALC	- African Lakes Company
ANC	- African National Congress
AVS	- Assisted Voluntary System
BLS	- Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland; these countries were generally referred to as the BLS countries in southern Africa
BOMA	- British Overseas Military Administration
CBD	- Central Business District
CCAP	- Church of Central Africa Presbyterian
CDSS	- Community Day Secondary School
DC	- District Commissioner
DHA	- Department of Home Affairs
EFT	- Electronic Funds Transfer
ERB	- Employment Record Book
FPE	- Free Primary Education
GVH	- Group Village Headman
HAM	- Herbalists' Association of Malawi
HIV	- Human Immune-deficiency Virus
HMs	- Historical Manuscripts
HRP	- Historical Research Papers

ID	- Identity Document
ILO	- International Labour Organisation
IOM	- International Organisation for Migration
LDF	- Local Development Fund
LED	- Local Economic Development
MARS	- Migration and Remittances Survey
MCP	- Malawi Congress Party
MDHS	- Malawi Demographic Health Survey
MLO	- Mine Labour Organisations (<i>Wenela</i>) Limited; WNLA changed its name to Mine Labour Organisations (<i>Wenela</i>) Limited in 1966
MNA	- Malawi National Archives
MPO	- Malawi Post Office
NBS	- New Building Society
NGO	- Non-Governmental Organisation
NPO	- Nyasaland Protectorate Order
PAs	- Public Archives
PO	- Post Office
POSB	- Post Office Savings Bank
RGC	- Re-employment Guarantee Certificate
RMC	- Records Management Centre
RNLB	- Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau
SADC	- Southern Africa Development Community
SAMP	- Southern Africa Migration Programme
SANA	- South Africa National Archives

SEP	- Socio-Economic Profile
STD	- Sexually transmitted disease
STI	- Sexually transmitted infection
TA	- Traditional Authority
TB	- Tuberculosis
TEBA	- The Employment Bureau of Africa
UDF	- United Democratic Front
UN	- United Nations
WHO	- World Health Organisation
WL	- Women's League
WNLA	- Witwatersrand Native Labour Association
WWII	- World War Two

Chapter One

Introduction

1. Background

“Nkanakhala ndi chiphaso nkanapita ku Joni nkapume”.

(“If I had a passport, I would have gone to South Africa to ‘rest’
i.e. from poverty”).

Lawrence Mbenjere is one of the popular Malawian musicians whose music is loved by the rural masses. His songs generally appeal to the plight of ordinary Malawians. In the above excerpt from his song “*chiphaso*” (passport), Mbenjere is saying he is tired of *masuzgo* (troubles) and would wish to travel to South Africa for wage employment. This is the entrenched belief by many rural Malawians who, after failing to make ends meet, resort to trekking to South Africa. This study centrally argues that male and female Malawian migrants are ready to overcome their challenges in South Africa through the accumulation of proceeds which transform their lives and that of the communities.

This study focuses on the voluntary migration of unskilled and semi-skilled labour migrants from the rural areas in northern Malawi. Unskilled labour migrants or migrant workers are those who seek jobs that involve the performance of simple duties. Such workers are engaged in labour that requires relatively little or no training or experience for its satisfactory performance. Semi-skilled migrant workers, on the other hand, are workers that possess some skills but these skills are not enough to enable them do specialised work. Because of this lack of skills, unskilled and semi-skilled workers end up in the informal sector where they “earn low wages, lack an employment contract and benefits such as pensions or medical aid and they have little or no protection against exploitation by their employers”.¹ According to Christian Rogerson and Eleanor Preston-Whyte, the informal sector is described as “the sum total of income-generating activities outside modern contractual relationships of production”.² It is also characterised by flexibility and dynamism in that there exists symbiotic linkages between the

¹ Eleanor Preston-Whyte. “Invisible Workers: Domestic Service and the Informal Economy”. In Eleanor Preston-Whyte and Christian Rogerson (eds.). *South Africa’s Informal Economy*. (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1991). p. 34. For insights on informal workers in Malawi, see Ignasio M. Jimu. “Self-organised Informal Workers and Trade Union Initiatives in Malawi: Organising the Informal Economy”. In Ilda Lindell (ed.). *Africa’s Informal Workers: Collective Agency, Alliances and Trans-national Organising in Urban Africa*. (London: Zed Books, 2010). pp. 99-114.

² Christian Rogerson and Eleanor Preston-Whyte. “South Africa’s Informal Economy: Past, Present and Future”. In Eleanor Preston-Whyte and Christian Rogerson (eds.). *South Africa’s Informal Economy*. (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1991). p. 2.

formal and informal sectors, with individuals easily switching between the two sectors.³ However, Malawian labour migrants fail to switch jobs between these two sectors because they lack requisite skills. In rare circumstances, though, they secure formal sector jobs, for instance, after years of working in South Africa and upgrading their academic qualifications.

In the case of the source areas in Malawi, unskilled and semi-skilled labour migrants are those who quit educational attainment at primary school level and could, therefore, not secure jobs like teaching in the formal sector. In the villages, they are mainly involved in farming and upon arrival in South Africa are engaged to do various jobs, for instance, in the domestic and commercial sectors. Unskilled labour migrants are employed as cooks, cleaners, house keepers and gardeners while semi-skilled migrants are employed as security guards, waiters and shop keepers. In this case, the migration of skilled professionals and also elements of involuntary migration are outside the scope of this study.

Malawi has a unique international labour migration history when compared with neighbouring countries such as Zambia and Tanzania. While these neighbouring countries had mineral deposits, Malawi lacked mines. The majority of Malawians, therefore, failed to secure jobs locally and, instead, resorted to large-scale labour emigration. The lack of employment opportunities in Malawi was similar to the situation that obtained in Mozambique. In addition to this economic factor, in Mozambique social conflict and political instability were other important causes of emigration.⁴ Migrant workers from these countries were ready to work for a lower wage in the mines than the South African labourers. Unlike in Malawi where there was competition for labour between the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) and the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau (RNLB), which recruited labour for colonial Zimbabwe, in Mozambique WNLA established a monopoly regarding the recruitment of mine labourers.⁵ Mozambique was a bigger supplier of labour to South African mines as compared to colonial Malawi. On this, Marie Wentzel indicates that as early as 1898 about 60 per cent of the unskilled labourers on the gold mines were Mozambicans and for many decades in the twentieth century Mozambique remained the main source of labour.⁶ In a related development,

³ Ibid. p. 2.

⁴ Patrick Harries. *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Labourers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860-1910*. Johannesburg and Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994). p. 7.

⁵ Marie Wentzel. "Historical and Contemporary Dimensions of Migration between South Africa and Its Neighbouring Countries". Paper presented at the HSRC Migration Workshop. Pretoria. 17-20 March 2003. p. 3.

⁶ Ibid. p. 3.

Jonathan Crush identified three types of labour-supplying countries in southern Africa: long-standing supplying countries such as Mozambique, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland; episodic supplying countries such as Malawi and Zimbabwe; and occasional supplying countries such as Zambia, Tanzania and Angola.⁷ When Malawi gained independence in 1964, Dr Hastings Banda, the then president, was against the continued emigration of Malawians to South Africa, preferring supplying local labour on the newly established tobacco estates. While labour from Malawi officially came to an end in the 1980s, in the case of Mozambique labour supply continued such that by 1997 there were about 83,000 Mozambican mine workers in South Africa.⁸

In this PhD thesis, I have examined, holistically, the dynamics of international labour migration from Malawi to South Africa since the 1970s. The 1970s and 1980s may be regarded as the watershed in the history of international labour migration from Malawi since it is the period that mine migrancy declined and, thereafter, informal migration increased. The focus of the study is Northern Malawi, and the districts of Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay in particular, which are historically closely associated with labour emigration from the country (see map 1.1). The people from these districts have for many years been migrating to South Africa either formally in the case of the Ngoni from Mzimba or informally (*selufu*) for the Tonga of Nkhata-Bay. The findings of this study also confirm this trend: the entrenchment of activities such as fishing in Nkhata-Bay and livestock (cattle) production in Mzimba are behind the continued image of the two districts as major labour migration districts in northern Malawi. Other districts, for example, Rumphi and Karonga in northern Malawi lack such history, hence could not be used as case studies. These districts have other avenues for income generation, for instance, the production of cash crops like tobacco and rice.

From the 1900s onwards, informal labour migration in these two districts was influenced by the recruitment activities of the external labour recruiters which were based in Mzimba District up to the 1970s.⁹ In addition, the two districts present interesting case studies: the Ngoni of Mzimba because of their Nguni roots and the Tonga of Nkhata-Bay who gained high literacy

⁷ Cited in Marie Wentzel. "Historical and Contemporary Dimensions of Migration". pp. 3-4. For a full account, see Jonathan Crush. "Contract Migration to South Africa: Past, Present and Future". Paper submitted to the Task Team on Green Paper on International Migration. 1997.

⁸ Fiona de Vletter. *Sons of Mozambique: Mozambican Miners and Post-apartheid South Africa*. (Cape Town: Idasa, 1998). p. 12.

⁹ For details on these external labour recruiters, see the section on "migration perspectives from Malawi" later in this chapter.

levels because of the influence of the missionaries from the early 1880s.¹⁰ The other major labour migration areas in Malawi are Ntcheu, Dedza and Mangochi. Ntcheu, Dedza and Mangochi which are located in the central and southern regions of Malawi and Mzimba in the north were labour recruiting centres for the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA), which was locally known as *Wenela*. *Wenela* recruited labour for the South African Chamber of Mines. From the 1940s onwards, the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau (RNLB), locally known as *Mthandizi* (the helper), established parallel recruiting structures in the same districts, in the process creating fierce competition for the local labour supply.¹¹ In addition, the border location of these districts facilitated informal labour recruiting activities by private recruiters from Zambia and Mozambique.

I have situated this study broadly within the “development perspective”.¹² In their original form, orthodox development theories have attracted a number of criticisms, for instance, that they are “heuristic, too general and that their major concepts cannot be operationalised”.¹³ However, “development” is a protean concept and when applied to labour migration, it posits that labour migrants are able to improve their households and communities using proceeds from wage employment in the destination area, in this case South Africa. This is contrary to the “underdevelopment perspective” which maintains that labour migration contributes to the economic stagnation of the source areas. In line with the human agency perspective, the study looks at labour migrants as rational decision-makers during the migration process.¹⁴ For instance, while most labour migrants were long-term or career migrants in the pre-1990 period, during the post-1990 period an increasing number of these migrants have become short-term or target migrants: their aim is to work as briefly as possible in South Africa and thereafter return home. This is in response to the challenges they face in South Africa and also in line with their goal to invest their proceeds back home. The study ascertains whether or not there was economic self-sufficiency of labour migrants and their households upon return. The study

¹⁰ The Scottish missionaries established Bandawe Mission in Nkhata-Bay in 1881 and mission schools followed a few years later. By 1900 a number of Tonga had attained mission education.

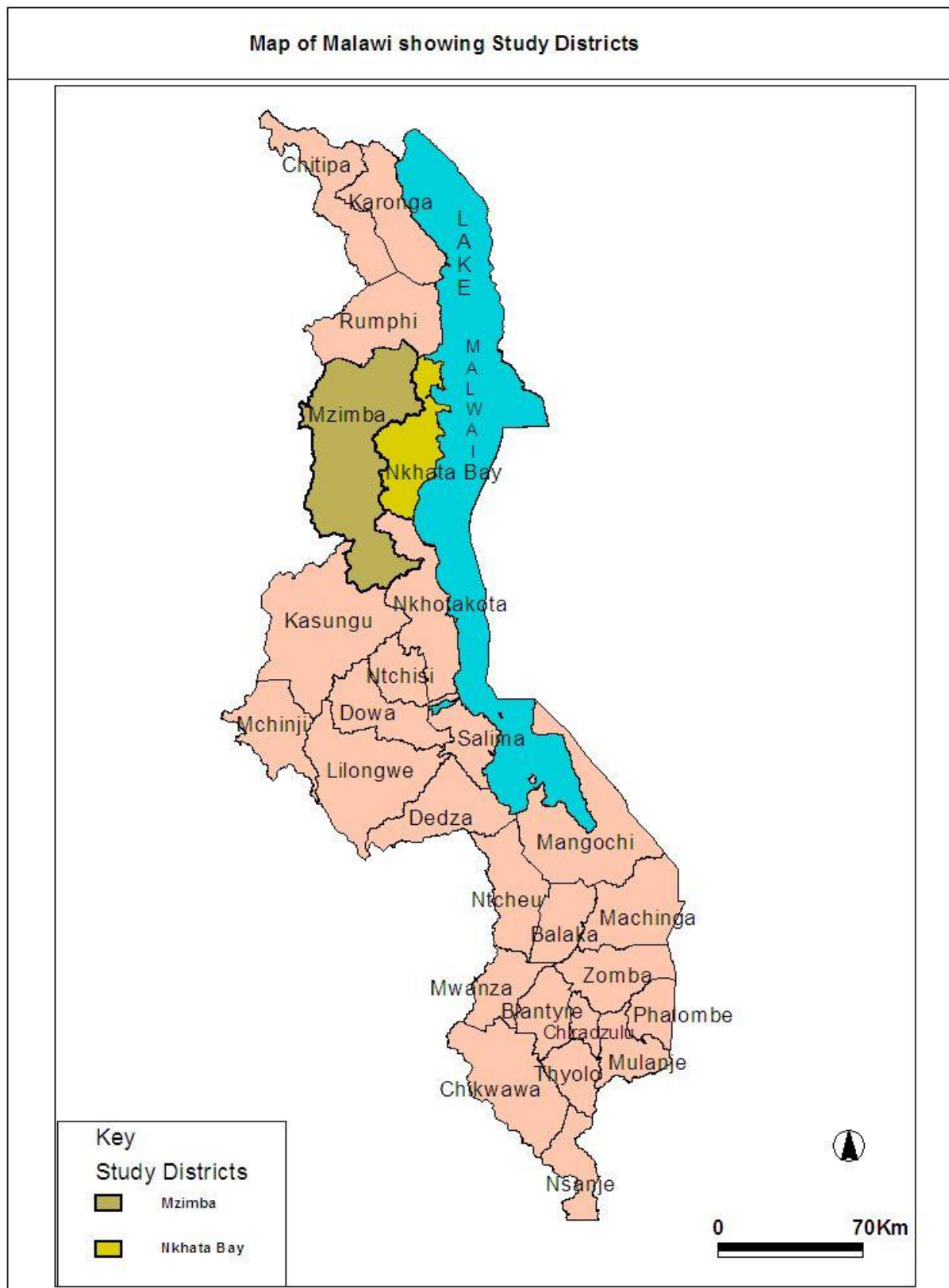
¹¹ B.G. Nkhoma. “The Competition for Malawian Labour: *Wenela* and *Mthandizi* in Ntcheu, 1935-1956”. Zomba. History Department. Chancellor College. University of Malawi. 1995. p. 13.

¹² Despite changes in migration paradigms, the question of whether or not migration leads to the transformation of rural source areas still persists; for details see William Beinart. “A Century of Migration from Pondoland”. *African Studies*. (November 2014, 73: 3). pp. 388 and 406.

¹³ Godfrey P. Okoth. “The Underdevelopment Debate and the Problem of Poverty and Its Relief in Twenty-First Century Africa”. In Godfrey P. Okoth (ed.). *Africa at the Beginning of the 21st Century*. (Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 2000). p. 245.

¹⁴ Jon Goss and Bruce Lindquist. “Conceptualising International Labour Migration: A Structuration Perspective”. *International Migration Review*. (1995, 29: 2). p. 320.

also attempts to find out if there was 'income diversification' using the proceeds from migration.



Map 1.1: Map of Malawi Showing Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay (Study Districts)

The study examines the different phases of economic and political developments in both South Africa and Malawi from the 1970s onwards. These developments had a bearing on the nature of labour migration from Malawi. The first phase, 1974 to 1994, was the last period of Afrikaner political hegemony in South Africa.¹⁵ During this period, effort was made to scale down foreign labour in the mines in favour of black South Africans. At the same time, labour-supplying countries such as Zambia and Tanzania withdrew their labour from the minority-ruled South Africa. However, Malawi pursued some ambivalent economic and political policies: withdrew her labour (1974 and 1988), but continued diplomatic ties with the despised regime. The end of apartheid era and the emergence of democratic South Africa, on one hand, and the introduction of multiparty democracy in Malawi in 1994, on the other hand, increased informal labour migration from Malawi to South Africa. However, from 1994 onwards, the demand for jobs among the South African nationals was high and this marked the beginning of some forms of xenophobia. With the influx of more immigrants as a result of faltering economies in Zimbabwe from the early 2000s, xenophobic sentiments hardened, culminating in waves of attacks in May 2008 and April 2015.¹⁶

With reference to South Africa, the focus of the study is Johannesburg (central Gauteng area) since most informal migrants prefer working here for easy access to transport back home from the Park Station. They generally regard places like Cape Town as outlying areas. In addition, Johannesburg is historically regarded as ‘the land of gold’, that is, a place of many employment opportunities.¹⁷ The study attempts to examine the integration of migrants into the host society over time. This is against a background of persistent xenophobic attacks, high crime rates, arrests and deportations of ‘illegal immigrants’, unemployment, the HIV/AIDS scourge, and rising costs of living, among others. On xenophobia, most scholars are left wondering as to why South African nationals turned against their fellow Africans following the end of the apartheid regime, given that the migrant workers hail from neighbouring countries some of

¹⁵ Sampie Terreblanche. *A History of Inequality in South Africa, 1652-2002*. (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002). p. 15.

¹⁶ See, for example, Loren B. Landau (ed.). *Exorcising the Demons Within: Xenophobia, Violence and Statecraft in Contemporary South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2011); Shireen Hassam, Tawana Kupe and Eric Wolby (eds.). *Go Home or Die Here: Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008).

¹⁷ However, in practice Johannesburg is actually a city of both opportunities and challenges, especially after the collapse of apartheid. For details on this see Martin J. Murray. *City of Extremes: The Spatial Politics of Johannesburg*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); and Richard Tomlinson, Robert A. Beauregard, Lindsay Bremner and Xolela Mangcu (eds.). *Emerging Johannesburg: Perspectives on the Postapartheid City*. (New York: Routledge, 2003).

which stood side by side with South Africans during the struggle against apartheid.¹⁸ Alan Morris has advanced the isolation thesis through which he contends that “the hostility towards foreign nationals emanates from the prolonged isolation of South Africans, which precluded contact with the outside world including Africa itself”.¹⁹ The pertinent question, therefore, is why have more and more Malawians from the study areas been interested in emigrating to and working in a country associated with all these challenges? What have been their coping mechanisms? And why has labour migration from Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay been more of ‘a way of life’ for a cross-section of the population?

2. Key Research Questions and Thesis Statement

Over the past decade, there have been increasing stories of Malawi’s unskilled migrants being deported from South Africa largely because of lack of proper documentation.²⁰ In addition, of late there have been reports of xenophobia against foreign nationals living in South Africa. For instance, in 2008 a number of Malawians were among the victims of the violence in question. Despite these developments, more and more Malawians continued to go to South Africa for wage employment, among other reasons. In addition to that, in April 2015, there had been a new wave of attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa yet people continue migrating to the very same country.²¹

International labour migration between Malawi and South Africa dates back to as far as the 1880s.²² Simply put, the history of international labour migration between Malawi and South Africa can be categorised into two periods: old migration period, 1880s-1980s and the contemporary migration era since the 1980s.²³ In Malawi, most scholars of history have tended to focus on the old period when migration was mostly male dominated. During this period,

¹⁸ See Godfrey Mwakikagile. *African Immigrants in South Africa*. (Pretoria: New Africa Press, 2008); Nyamnjoh, F.B. *Insiders and Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa*. (London: Zed Books Limited, 2006); and Christina Steenkamp. “Xenophobia in South Africa: What Does it Say about Trust?” *The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*. (2009, 98: 403). pp. 439-447.

¹⁹ Cited in David M. Matsinhe. “Africa’s Fear of Itself: the Ideology of *Makwerekwere* in South Africa”. *Third World Quarterly*. (2011, 32: 2). p. 297.

²⁰ This is usually reported by both print and electronic media. The numbers per batch tend to vary, for example, Wanga Gwede. “301 Malawians Deported from South Africa Arrive in Lilongwe”. *Nyasatimes*. 13 March 2014.

²¹ The 2015 xenophobic violence started in and around Durban and later spread to Johannesburg suburbs. Various print and electronic media reported on the violence. Meanwhile the Malawi government embarked on repatriating Malawian migrants affected by the attacks. For details, see Matthew Savides. “Buses Carry Foreigners Home”. *Sowetan*. 20 April 2015; Clive Ndou. “Mob Loots Shops in Durban CBD”. *The Citizen*. 15 April 2015.

²² John McCracken. *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*. (New York: James Currey, 2012). p. 83.

²³ Harvey C.C. Banda. “Gendered Patterns of Malawian Contemporary Migrancy: The Case of Zubayumo Makamo Area in Mzimba District, 1970s-2005” (Unpublished MA Thesis). Zomba. History Department. Chancellor College. University of Malawi. 2008.

labour migration was both formal and informal. In the 1970s and 1980s contract labour migration from Malawi declined and informal migration took over. Since the 1990s, women have joined the migration process in increasing numbers. However, not much has been researched on the nature of informal migration between Malawi and South Africa during the contemporary period. The latter is traced to the 1970s when mine migrancy declined and clandestine migration escalated. The study specifically aimed at examining the informal labour migratory dimensions and patterns over time. The study addressed some of the following questions: Why and how have migrants been deciding to join international labour migration? What have been the migrants' experiences of entering and staying in South Africa? Have they been entering as legal or illegal immigrants? How have migrants coped with the challenges of staying in South Africa? Why have some migrants either integrated into South African society or reintegrated into the source societies from which they come in Malawi? Has international labour migration changed the welfare of the migrants' households and communities in Malawi?

This study addresses the patterns and processes of informal labour migration from northern Malawi to South Africa during the contemporary period. It examines the social categories of male and female migrants involved in labour migration, the decision-making processes behind it and the migrant households' economic status before and upon return. It advances the argument that the socio-economic benefits, both real and imagined, that these male and female migrants accrue (or hope to accrue) while working in South Africa offset the challenges related to marginalisation, xenophobia, deportations, crime and unemployment that they face both in the source and destination areas. The study maintains that as a result of their determination to overcome these challenges or obstacles, these migrants resort to using local medicine, for instance, luck medicine which they believe helps them secure good jobs and protection medicine to avoid arrests and deportations. They also overcome other challenges through the assistance of welfare societies and Malawian churches based in South Africa. The study argues that the remittances they send back home have a transformative impact on the migrants' households and communities. In short, emigrating to, and working in, South Africa is 'a way of life' for the people of Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts in northern Malawi.

3. Review of Literature

This thesis contributes and appeals more to Malawian literature and audience than to the South African literature by filling the glaring literary lacuna, especially on the post-1990 period, on the social and migration history from Malawi to South Africa. Much of the literature on Malawi is concentrated on the period up to the 1980s, particularly on the recruitment activities of *Wenela* and (later) TEBA (locally known as *Theba*) on emigration to South Africa and on those of *Mthandizi* on the emigration to Zimbabwean farms and mines. In the case of South Africa, as the second part of this section shows, much of the literature has tended to be economic in outlook, for example, the works by Jonathan Crush, David MacDonald and Vincent Williams and also the numerous SAMP surveys and research. Nevertheless, in addition to economic issues, in this study I am equally interested in cultural issues and this is shown through my discussion, for instance, in chapters five and six, on how labour migrants make efforts to overcome challenges during their stay in South Africa.

International Labour Migration Perspectives from Malawi

The history of various ethnic groups in Malawi is dominated by migration. The main groups of people, who eventually settled in different parts of the country, originated from outside the country between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries AD.²⁴ The Maravi (eventually known as the Chewa) came from northern Katanga (Congo) and settled in central Malawi; the Tumbuka-Nkhamanga peoples came from Tanzania and settled in northern Malawi; the Yao originated from parts of northern Mozambique and settled in southern Malawi; and the Ngoni of the northern and central regions of Malawi came from northern Zululand in South Africa following the *Mfecane*.²⁵ Before the arrival of these people, Malawi was inhabited by indigenous people, locally known as the *Akafula* or *Abatwa*.²⁶ On the latter, G.T. Nurse has written: “When the Maravi arrived in Nyasaland they encountered a race of small archers whom they referred to as the *Akafula* or *Akaombe*, the former name being that more commonly used”.²⁷

²⁴ David T. Williams. *Malawi: The Politics of Despair*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1978). p. 24.

²⁵ B. Pachai. *Malawi: The History of the Nation*. (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1973). pp. 2-22; see also John McCracken. *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*. pp. 20-24.

²⁶ These two words mean very short people similar to the Bushmen. *Akafula* or *Abatwa* were also known as the *Amwandionerapati* meaning ‘where did you see me as I was coming?’ These people are said to have been rough since other people (immigrants) used to laugh at them because of their short stature.

²⁷ G.T. Nurse. “The Name ‘Akafula’”. *The Society of Malawi-Historical and Scientific*. (1967, 20: 2). p. 17.

In northern Malawi, the dominant ethnic groups were the Tumbuka who settled in some parts of Rumphi and Mzimba districts; the militant Jere Ngoni in Mzimba District and the Ngonde in Karonga District. Other smaller groups include the Tonga between *Tumbukaland* and *Chewaland*, in present Nkhata-Bay District, and the Lambya in Chitipa District. These people were mainly subsistence farmers, growing mainly maize and cassava. They were also involved in ivory trade with the Swahili-Arabs and other traders from the east African coast. In addition, the Tonga and Ngonde were involved in fishing from Lake Malawi. The Tonga and the Ngonde, including a few Tumbuka, relied on exchanging fish with other commodities from the upland areas. Eventually labour migration was seen as a way of finding money with which to buy appropriate nets for fishing.

Between 1850 and 1890, the various ethnic groups in Malawi came under the influence of the Swahili-Arabs who eventually moved inland in pursuit of ivory and slaves. The Swahili-Arab slave trading activities were concentrated in three areas: among the Yao in Mangochi; among the Chewa in Nkhota-Kota; and among the Ngonde in Karonga. The Yao had already been in contact with trade along the east African coast since they originated from northern Mozambique. Swahili-Arabs Jumbe and Mlozi settled in Nkhota-Kota and Karonga, respectively. Consequently, the Ngonde, the Tumbuka, the Tonga and the Chewa became victims of the Swahili-Arab raiding activities. These raiding activities came to an end in the 1890s following the intervention of the Scottish missionaries and the British colonial administrators.²⁸

Labour migration from northern Malawi is closely associated with the Tonga and the Ngoni. The missionaries established Bandawe Mission among the Tonga in 1881. Consequently, the Tonga were among the first people to become Christians and to attain mission education. The missionaries also protected the Tonga from Ngoni raiding activities. In 1886, with the influence of these missionaries, twenty-five Tonga were engaged as porters by the African Lakes Company (ALC) in Blantyre.²⁹ In 1894, three years before tax was imposed among the Tonga, there were 5,500 Tongas working in the Shire Highlands.³⁰

²⁸ B. Pachai. *Malawi: The History of the Nation*. pp. 41-52.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 115.

³⁰ John McCracken. *A History of Malawi*. p. 84. The Shire Highlands was the area around the present Blantyre District.

The Tonga were the first to engage in labour migration, and other people followed later. Among the northern Ngoni, the end of raiding activities and the impact of the rinderpest disease in 1893 which wiped out Ngoni cattle feature among the motives for migration.³¹ In 1901, the Tonga and the Ngoni were emigrating in 'large numbers' to Salisbury and Tanganyika. Consequently, while the imposition of taxation among the Tonga (1897) and the Ngoni (1902) was a significant factor, it merely enhanced labour migration which was pre-existent.

Persistent low wages within the country compelled Malawians to opt for wage employment in such countries as Zambia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and South Africa. They had been introduced to the wage economy and needed better wages for good food, shelter and clothes. By 1904, when an agreement was reached between the Chamber of Mines and the Nyasaland government to formally recruit Malawian labour,³² Malawians had already recognised the comparative advantages of independent migration over contract migration.

Unlike earlier in the century, labour migration later became a Malawi-wide phenomenon. The Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) established recruiting centres in different parts of the country. From the 1940s, the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau (RNLB), locally known as *Mthandizi* (the helper), followed suit and competition for labour later ensued. Despite this, many migrants, including almost all from Nkhata-Bay District, continued to emigrate independently.³³ Hence precise numbers of migrants remain unknown. At the end of 1970, "the total number of migrants engaged by *Wenela* was 92,169, whereas by *Mthandizi* it was 2,514".³⁴

This migration took two forms: official labour migration (mine migrancy) and informal or clandestine migration. In Malawi the latter was locally known as *selufu*.³⁵ Official labour migrants were destined for South African mines and, to a lesser extent, the Zimbabwean farms. Contrariwise, informal labour migrants ended up working in commercial farms in both South Africa and Zimbabwe, and also in South Africa's construction and service sectors.³⁶ This labour migration arguably falls under two periods: old migration period (1880s – 1970s/ 1980s)

³¹ B. Pachai. *Malawi: The History of the Nation*. p. 28.

³² B. S. Krishnamurthy. "Economic Policy, Land and Labour in Nyasaland". In B. Pachai (ed.). *The Early History of Malawi*. (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1972). p. 397.

³³ John McCracken. *A History of Malawi*. p. 257.

³⁴ B. Pachai. *Malawi: The History of the Nation*. p. 127

³⁵ The word *selufu* is a ChiTumbuka word coined from the English word self as in self or independent migration.

³⁶ Jonathan Crush, Vincent Williams and Sally Peberdy. "Migration in Southern Africa". p. 2.

and new migration period (1970s- date).³⁷ The characteristics of Malawi's labour migration during the two periods were largely different. During the old period labour migration was either formal or informal (*selufu*). Although labour migration during this period was male-dominated, a few women ended up joining their husbands under *selufu*. While women mainly played the role of house wives in South Africa, some of them ended up being employed as domestic workers, doing such jobs as *kuchapa* (laundry) and *kuphika* (cooking). In contrast, after the collapse of mine migrancy (the new period), most Malawian labour migrants sought employment in the informal sector. In addition, during the new period, different categories of men and women joined the labour migration process. During the old period, *selufu* migrants largely entered South Africa illegally and once caught were sent to prison farms in Bethal, called *Bethani* in Chitumbuka of northern Malawi. In contrast, *selufu* migrants in the post-1990 period enter South Africa either legally using valid passports, but only become illegal after the expiry of their 30-day visas, or illegally (as border jumpers). Once caught, they are sent to Lindela Repatriation Camp from where they are later deported. In northern Malawi, *selufu* is still used to refer to informal labour migratory movements during the post-1990 period. Labour migration during the latter period is popularly known as contemporary migrancy. However, looked at from a different angle, there is an element of continuity between these two periods, for instance, on the continuation of *selufu*, albeit on an increased scale.

Much of the literature on labour migration in Malawi is concentrated on the old period when labour migration was largely a male preserve.³⁸ During this period scholars like Bryson Nkhoma, Robert Boeder and Wiseman Chirwa have focused on the reasons as to why female migrants were absent.³⁹ Some of the reasons advanced were the tough nature of the mine work and the strenuous journeys under *selufu*. However, literature shows that women were not completely absent from the migration scene as a few managed to migrate, for instance, to South Africa.⁴⁰ As for Zimbabwe, women were allowed to join their husbands under *Mthandizi*.⁴¹

³⁷ Harvey C.C. Banda. "Gendered Patterns of Malawian Contemporary Migrancy". 2008.

³⁸ Bryson Nkhoma. "The Competition for Malawian Labour: *Wenela* and *Mthandizi* in Ntcheu"; Robert B. Boeder. *Malawians Abroad: The History of Labour Emigration from Malawi to its Neighbours, 1980 to the Present*. (Ann Arbor: East Lansing, Michigan State University, 1974); Harvey C.C. Banda, "Competition for the Labour Supply in Mzimba District: The Case of *Wenela* and *Mthandizi*, 1906-1956". Zomba. Chancellor College. University of Malawi. 2000; and Wiseman C. Chirwa. "Theba is Power": Rural Labour, Migrancy and Fishing in Malawi, 1890s-1985" (PhD Thesis). Queens University. Kingston. Ontario. 1992.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ There is archival evidence on this. For instance, see MNA S36/1/2/6: Female Immigration into South Africa.

⁴¹ Harvey C.C. Banda. "Competition for the Labour Supply in Mzimba District". 2000. See also Bryson Nkhoma. "The Competition for Malawian Labour: *Wenela* and *Mthandizi* in Ntcheu". 1995.

During the old period, literature also focused on which was dominant between *selufu* and contract migration. Scholars did not agree on this since each form of migration presented its own advantages over the other. In addition, dominance of a particular type depended on the developments during a particular period. Notably, at times contract migration was suspended and obviously *selufu* became the dominant form during such periods.⁴² There was also debate on the competition amongst the formal labour recruiters in Malawi. The discussion centred on the activities of *Wenela* and *Mthandizi*. It was indicated that although *Wenela* usually emerged dominant, *Mthandizi* at times employed strategies to out-do *Wenela*, for instance, allowing male recruits to emigrate with their wives.⁴³

There was also an endless debate on the causes of international labour migration from Malawi. Scholars such as G. Coleman argued that labour migration was as a result of either pull or push factors.⁴⁴ This was in line with the push-pull models on international migration. On the push factors, the debate centred on unemployment and the imposition of colonial taxation. And, on the pull factors, it was indicated that the wages in Nyasaland were much lower than those obtaining in either South Africa or Zimbabwe.⁴⁵

Much of the debate on international labour migration from Malawi to South Africa also centred on the impact on the source areas. Scholars were divided on this. One group emphasised the positive impact while the other group focused on the negative impact. The guiding theories in the period up to the 1970s were development and underdevelopment schools of thought. On the positive impact, one of the pioneers was Margaret Read who, in the 1940s, argued that the view that labour migration was completely 'evil' was far from the truth.⁴⁶ Others later were van Velsen⁴⁷ and E. Y. Kamanga⁴⁸ who, for instance, argued that Tonga women of Nkhata-

⁴² John McCracken. *A History of Malawi*. p. 256.

⁴³ For a detailed debate on the competition between *Wenela* and *Mthandizi*, see Bryson Nkhoma. "The Competition for Malawian Labour: *Wenela* and *Mthandizi* in Ntcheu". 1995 and Harvey C.C. Banda. "Competition for the Labour Supply in Mzimba District". 2000.

⁴⁴ See G. Coleman. "International Labour Migration from Malawi, 1875-1966". *Journal of Social Science*. (1972, 2: 37).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Margaret Read. "Migrant Labour in Africa and its Effects on Tribal Life". *International Labour Review*. (1942, 14: 2). p. 613.

⁴⁷ J. van Velsen. "Labour Migration as a Positive Factor in the Continuity of Tonga Tribal Society. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*. (1960, 8). pp. 265-278.

⁴⁸ E.Y. Kamanga, "Labour Immigration and Ngoni Labour in Tongaland, 1930-1960s". Zomba. Chancellor College. History Department. Seminar Paper. 1997.

Bay District were transformed into employers using proceeds from their migrant husbands. Wiseman Chirwa in the 1990s presented a comprehensive or detailed account largely on the positive impact of labour migration from Malawi.⁴⁹

Scholars like Leroy Vail⁵⁰ and E.P. Makambe⁵¹ wrote from the underdevelopment perspective and emphasised the concept of the 'labour reserve', arguing that labour migrants contributed to the overall state of stagnation and underdevelopment of their areas. This view is also reflected on the connection between labour migration and the spread of HIV/AIDS, especially in the post-1990 period.

One of the prominent Malawian scholars who has written on the linkage between labour migration and the spread of HIV/ AIDS, especially upon the labour migrants' return to their homes in Malawi, is Wiseman C. Chirwa. He has indicated that this was pronounced following the repatriation of Malawian migrant workers from the South African mines between 1988 and 1992. This large-scale repatriation came as a result of the end of TEBA's formal recruitment operations in Malawi following the HIV/ AIDS wrangle between the governments of Malawi and South Africa in 1987.⁵² In general, Chirwa points out the difficulties of research on HIV and AIDS among labour migrants in Malawi. Among other issues, the sensitivity of the topic affects its objective and effective analysis. In addition, although there is a growing body of literature on HIV/ AIDS in Malawi in the post-1990 period, much of it is unpublished and focuses on such general issues as how HIV is transmitted, prevention measures, counselling, high-risk behaviour, misconceptions of the disease and this literature does not directly examine the interface between labour migration and HIV/ AIDS.⁵³

At the place of work, Chirwa shows, labour migrants live as single men and usually have sexual relations with local women. After returning to their homes, the proceeds from wage

⁴⁹ Wiseman C. Chirwa. "Theba is Power". 1992. pp. 6-18.

⁵⁰ Leroy Vail cited in Wiseman C. Chirwa. "Theba is Power". p. 11.

⁵¹ E.P. Makambe. "The Nyasaland African Labour 'Ulendos' to Southern Rhodesia and the Problem of the African 'Highway Men'". *African Affairs*. (1980, 79: 566).

⁵² Wiseman C. Chirwa. "Aliens and AIDS in Southern Africa". pp. 53-79.

⁵³ Wiseman C. Chirwa. "Migrant Labour, Sexual Networking and Multi-partnered Sex in Malawi". *Health Transition Review*. (1997, 7). p. 5. For details on some of the general issues examined on HIV in Malawi, see P. Kakhongwe and R. Kornfield. "AIDS in Malawi: An Annotated Bibliography". Zomba. Centre for Social Research. 1996; J.A. Kalilani. *Epidemiology of AIDS in Malawi*. (Lilongwe: National AIDS Control Programme, 1989); P.A. Kishindo. "High Risk Behaviour in the Face of the AIDS Epidemic: The Case of Bar Girls in the Municipality of Zomba, Malawi". *Eastern Africa Social Science Research Review*. (1995, 6: 2). pp. 35-43; E. Liner, E. McAuliffe and W. Chitowa. "The Practice of Exchanging Sex for Subsistence among Urban Women in Malawi: Implications for AIDS Prevention". Zomba. Centre for Social Research. 1993.

employment in South Africa play an important role in sexual and marital relations. On this, Chirwa points out, with higher incomes than those of the rural dwellers, returning migrants become a major attraction to rural women. Consequently, returning labour migrants tend to have more than one sexual partner.⁵⁴ This situation is mainly reflecting on male migrants. However, since the joining of women into the labour migration process, especially in the post-1990 period, the situation may even apply to female labour migrants. Chirwa further argues that “these intrinsic relationships between, on the one hand, migration and multi-partnered sex, and, on the other, migration and material comfort, facilitate the spread of HIV infection”.⁵⁵

Other scholars have equally written on this labour migration-HIV/ AIDS nexus in the post-1990 period in Malawi. However, as Chirwa has rightly pointed out earlier, most of these works have not been published. Henry Singogo has documented the impact of labour migration on the spread of HIV in Euthini area in Mzimba District.⁵⁶ Euthini, just like Zubayumo Makamo area, is a major migration area in the district. Writing on the development that results from years of working in South Africa in Bulala area in the western part of Mzimba District, Linda Harawa has argued that this community development goes hand in hand with the spread of HIV: the women left behind to manage the affairs of the household indulge in extra-marital affairs, arguing that the monetary support that they get from their migrant husbands is not in any way a replacement and solution of the sexual and conjugal starving that they experience on a daily basis.⁵⁷ In fact, most of the women I interviewed either in South Africa or in Malawi pointed out that labour migration is behind the spread of HIV, especially in situations where husbands stay away from their wives for extended periods.

Regarding the sexual behaviour of Malawian migrant workers in South Africa, historical studies also show a direct connection between prostitution, extra-marital affairs and beer drinking at the work place.⁵⁸ Malawi migrant workers confirm this:

⁵⁴ Wiseman C. Chirwa. “Migrant Labour, Sexual Networking”. p. 6.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 6.

⁵⁶ Henry Singogo. “The Impact of Labour Migration to South Africa on the Spread of HIV/AIDS in Mzimba District: The Case of Euthini Area, 1985-2012”. BA Dissertation. Mzuzu. Malawi. Mzuzu University. 2013.

⁵⁷ Linda D. Harawa. “The Impact of Migration on the Socio-economic Development of Mzimba District: A Case Study of Bulala”. B.Ed. Dissertation. Rumphi. Malawi. University of Livingstonia. 2009.

⁵⁸ Cited in Wiseman C. Chirwa. “Migrant Labour, Sexual Networking”. p. 9. For a detailed discussion on this, see Charles van Onselen. *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933*. (London: Pluto Press, 1976). pp. 166-182.

...there were beautiful women in shebeens, bars and canteens. They were easy-going women and they did not care if you slept with one of them today and her friend tomorrow. They said whoever had a man, it was her luck, tomorrow would be another one's luck... We had them at will...⁵⁹

As a result of this sexual behaviour, informants argued, the chances of contracting HIV within South Africa were very high.

In this study, although the purpose was not to establish the connection between labour migration and HIV/ AIDS, but partly to examine the challenges of staying and working in South Africa and how labour migrants overcame them in trying to fulfill their set labour migration goals, most informants touched on the issues of extra-marital affairs, multi-partnered sexual activities, and the lack of faithfulness amongst married couples, especially where migrant husbands and their wives stayed apart: either migrant husbands left their wives in Malawi or they stayed and worked in different localities in South Africa. Almost all interviewed labour migrants maintained that such sexual behaviour influenced the spread of HIV/ AIDS, marriage break-ups and, these, collectively, had a deleterious impact on the resultant development in the source areas in Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay in northern Malawi. These issues have been examined at various lengths in chapters three, four and five.

Charles van Onselen indicates that in the first few years of the nineteenth century black workers (local and foreign) formed ethnic, dance and mutual aid societies. They used to meet “on an informal and social basis: weekend compound dances, ‘big dinners’ and ‘tea meetings’, each with their own distinctive roots”.⁶⁰ With time, these informal organisations became formalised and van Onselen advances three possible reasons for this development:

First, and most important, was the dramatic rise in the cost of living during the war and the continued decline in African wages. Perhaps at no other time were black workers in more desperate need of brotherly assistance, when prices rose dramatically and real wages fell. Second, 1918 saw the greatest disaster that ever befell black miners in the compound – the death of 7 per cent of all black workers in the flu epidemic of that year. Third is the fact that the war years saw a mushrooming of organised voluntary action amongst a settler community anxious to make a contribution to Britain and the Empire in their hour of crisis. Everywhere Africans must have been struck anew with the potential of organised activity.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Cited in Wiseman C. Chirwa. Ibid. p. 9.

⁶⁰ Charles van Onselen. *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933*. p. 198.

⁶¹ Ibid. pp. 198-199.

Zoe Groves writes that by the 1920s Malawian migrant workers had settled in Salisbury. Here they secured various jobs such as builders, carpenters, machine operators, domestic servants and gardeners.⁶² During this period, they formed burial societies through which to assist each other in times of need. These labour migrants also took advantage of the presence of mission schools and churches in their localities. In addition, missions in Nyasaland sent out their representatives to establish mission branches in Salisbury. This led to the establishment of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) branches in the area by the 1940s and 1950s.⁶³ Migrant workers from northern Malawi became members of these branches. In the process these migrant workers formed religious and cultural associations in colonial Zimbabwe.

T.O. Ranger writes about the *Beni* and *Mganda* dance societies in East Africa. This dance history, Ranger argues, illuminates some aspects of the colonial migration experience.⁶⁴ These *Beni* and *Mganda* dance societies, as presented by T.O. Ranger, show clearly the impact of migration on the culture of particular societies. *Beni* and *Mganda* seem to have been introduced in Malawi (then Nyasaland) from east Africa through migration and diffusion. With time, *Mganda* became “the dance of the peoples of the ‘kazoo zone’ – the Tonga, the Nyanja, the Henga, the Kisi – together with the Tumbuka and the Ngoni, while *Beni* came to be associated with the Yao of southern Malawi”.⁶⁵

From the 1930s *Mganda* became the dance of the migrant Nyasa workers. By 1940 both *Beni* and *Mganda* were danced by the Nyasa migrant workers in the Copper-belt in Zambia.⁶⁶ It is indicated that many men in the northern region of Malawi (then Nyasaland) made trips outside Malawi to South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Tanzania to work in order to secure money with which to buy clothes and drums for *Mganda*. Whenever they met in large numbers abroad, they danced *Mganda* to rejoice their meeting. In the process they also formed *Mganda* associations. Like the *Nyau* and *Gulewamkulu* associations in colonial Zimbabwe, as indicated by Zoe Groves, these *Mganda* associations reveal a lot about the social organisation ability of Malawian migrant workers away from Malawi. These associations are similar to, and the

⁶² Zoe Groves. “Urban Migrants and Religious Networks: Malawians in Colonial Salisbury, 1920-1970”. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. (2012, 38: 3). p. 497.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 498.

⁶⁴ See T.O. Ranger. *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa, 1870-1970*. (London: Heinemann, 1975). p. 1.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 117.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 118.

foundation of, the welfare associations that were formed by northern Malawian migrants in parts of Johannesburg in the post-1990 period.

By 1875 the Scottish missionaries had established a mission station at Cape Maclear in southern Malawi. These missionaries relocated to Bandawe in 1881, but later moved further up, establishing a mission station at Khondowe plateau in present Rumph District.⁶⁷ Apart from the mainstream churches, in Malawi Pentecostal churches and Charismatic churches got established in the twentieth century. Their beginnings were attributed to the returning labour migrants. While working in various countries, these labour migrants, in this case the *matchona* (the overstayes), got exposed to these Pentecostal churches and upon return they masterminded their establishment in the areas where they settled. For instance, through this process the Apostolic Faith Mission and the Assemblies of God came from Tanzania, Zimbabwe and South Africa.⁶⁸

Looking at the origins of these Pentecostal churches, it is not surprising to see that a good number of Malawian labour migrants still belong to these churches even in the post-1990 period. Apart from normal preaching, these Pentecostal churches provide social welfare, including education and health care. They also deal in spiritual healing and address issues such as witchcraft and spirit possession. “With many people living with HIV/ AIDS and dysfunctional health care systems, the need for healing has never been greater. This is aggravated by the grinding poverty in which many people find themselves”.⁶⁹ Some of the labour migrants emigrating to South Africa for employment either join these churches while in Malawi or upon arrival in South Africa. It is a result of membership to these churches that some labour migrants believe in spiritual healing, in addition to the use of local medicine or the use of medicine from established hospitals.

⁶⁷ For a detailed account of the establishment of mission stations in Malawi, see John McCracken. *Politics and Christianity in Malawi: The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province*. (Blantyre: CLAIM, 2000); T.J. Thompson. *Christianity in Northern Malawi: Donald Fraser's Missionary Methods and Ngoni Culture*. (Leiden: Brill, 1995); and Andrew C. Ross. *Blantyre Mission and the Making of Modern Malawi*. (Blantyre: CLAIM, 1996).

⁶⁸ Kenneth R. Ross, J.K. Asamoah-Gyadu and Todd M. Johnson. *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017). p. 78.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 79.

Contract labour migration under *Wenela* was halted in 1974 following the aviation accident which killed 74 Malawian labour migrants.⁷⁰ However, it resumed under The Employment Bureau of Africa (TEBA) in 1977. Contract migration officially came to an end in 1988⁷¹ following interstate disagreement over the HIV/AIDS policy.⁷² Since then, labour migration from Malawi has been informal. This study, therefore, documents the nature of labour migration in the 1970s and 1980s when contract migration was in decline and, more importantly, since the early 1990s when labour migration has been informal. Besides, labour migration during this period is increasingly becoming gender inclusive.⁷³

Based on the foregoing, I was interested in examining the international labour migration from Malawi since the 1970s. The focus is on the emigration of unskilled and semi-skilled migrants, especially to South Africa. The 1970s and 1980s might be regarded as the watershed in the history of international labour migration from Malawi since they mark the decline of mine migrancy and the beginning, as it were, of 'new' forms of migration: although informal migration continued, it took different forms in the early 1990s. I wanted to critique the plane crash incident of 1974 and the HIV debate of 1987 during this transitory period: Were these the only reasons for the decline in, and eventual collapse of, mine migrancy? Since migrants from other countries continued to work in the South African mines, why should the HIV issue only apply to labour migrants from Malawi? I settled for the two study districts of Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay because each presents a unique case in addition to being historically involved in migration. For example, the Ngoni of Mzimba have the Nguni roots; while the Tonga of Nkhata-Bay were among the first to become educated following the influence of the Livingstonia missionaries in northern Malawi.⁷⁴

International Migration in Southern Africa

It can be argued that human history is dominated, among other things, by the history of migration. People have been moving from one place to another for various reasons since time immemorial. In South Africa, the discovery of diamonds in 1867 and gold in 1886 brought

⁷⁰ Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy*. p. 55.

⁷¹ R. Christiansen and J.G. Kydd. "The Return of Malawian Labour from South Africa and Zimbabwe". *Journal of Modern African Studies*. (1983, 21:2).

⁷² Wiseman C. Chirwa. "Aliens and AIDS in Southern Africa".

⁷³ Aderanti Adepoju. "Issues and Recent Trends in International Migration". *International Social Science Journal* (2000, 165), pp. 384-385; Harvey C.C. Banda. "Gendered Patterns of Malawian Contemporary Migrancy".

⁷⁴ A number of educated Tonga men, for example, Elliot Kamwana of the Watch Tower Society, went to South Africa in the early twentieth century.

about the oscillating migrant labour system.⁷⁵ According to Jonathan Crush, Alan Jeeves and David Yudelman, mineral discoveries eventually influenced the socio-economic and political history of southern Africa.⁷⁶ Migrants' wages, however, remained generally low between 1897 and 1970 and this was largely because the mines relied on exploiting cheap labour from the region.⁷⁷ It can, therefore, be argued that these low wages, together with the negative impacts of mine migrancy, compelled some labour migrants to prefer informal migration.

The history of mine migrancy in South Africa has been well researched.⁷⁸ However, earlier scholars such as Alan Jeeves and Francis Wilson largely emphasised the production and labour recruitment processes rather than the experiences of mine workers.⁷⁹ In the 1970s and 1980s, the South African revisionist historians were critical of this approach and later focused on the experiences of the mine workers. This eventually led to the birth of the 'history from below'.⁸⁰

In his seminal work titled *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933*, Charles van Onselen documents the experiences of the workers in the mines in colonial Zimbabwe since the nineteenth century. He examines a number of themes, for instance, the growth of the mining industry, life in the compound system, labour mobilisation and African workers' resistance to control by the whites.⁸¹ These themes reflect the situation that obtained in the South African mines in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. On efforts to control mine workers in South Africa, Martin Legassick writes: "the non-white work-force of Kimberley was housed in closed compounds, barracks which subjected the worker during his term of employment to well-nigh total regimentation. Ostensibly to prevent diamond theft, the compounds operated to impede the labour force from organising, bargaining, striking, or desertion".⁸² In fact, it is a result of the difficult working conditions in the mines that many

⁷⁵ David Yudelman. *The Emergence of Modern South Africa: State, Capital and the Incorporation of Organised Labour on the South African Gold Fields*. (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers Limited, 1984). p. 19.

⁷⁶ Jonathan Crush, Alan Jeeves and David Yudelman. *South Africa's Labour Empire: A History of Black Migrancy to the Gold Mines*. (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers Limited, 1991). p. 2.

⁷⁷ Ibid. pp. 2-3.

⁷⁸ Francis Wilson. *Labour in the South African Gold Mines, 1911-1969*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Alan H. Jeeves. *Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy: The Struggle for the Gold Mines' Labour Supply, 1890-1920*. (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1985); Jonathan Crush, Alan Jeeves and David Yudelman. *South Africa's Labour Empire*.

⁷⁹ For details on these scholars and their works, see above footnote.

⁸⁰ Paul la Hausse. "Oral History and South African Historians". *Radical History Review*. (1990, 46: 7). p. 347.

⁸¹ Charles van Onselen. *Chibaro*. passim.

⁸² Martin Legassick. "Gold, Agriculture, and Secondary Industry in South Africa, 1885-1970: From Periphery to Sub-Metropole as a Forced Labour System". In Robin Palmer and Neil Parsons (eds.). *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa*. (London: Heinemann, 1977). p. 178.

black South Africans resisted mine work and, as an alternative, the various labour recruiting agencies resorted to recruiting foreign labour. This is what led to the recruitment of Malawians for mine work in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

By providing accommodation in form of mine compounds, the mine authorities thought this would have the advantage of attracting workers. However, “their complementary function of control and discipline of the work force were to earn them the resentment and rejection of the African workers”.⁸³ The general standard of mine accommodation in colonial Zimbabwe, Charles van Onselen shows, was of poorer quality compared to the accommodation provided in the mines in South Africa. The main reason behind this development was the poorer economy that affected mine operations in Zimbabwe. Despite this notable difference, mine workers in both these countries shunned the poor conditions in these compounds. Consequently, a considerable number of informal migrants preferred to secure their own accommodation while working on the mines. In this connection, some of the Malawian labour migrants emigrated to South Africa informally, but ended up securing jobs on these mines. It is mainly such mine workers who stayed outside the mine compounds.

Migrant workers during the pre-1990 period, a period during which a good number of them worked in the mines, suffered from diseases which were markedly different from those of the post-1990 period. For instance, they suffered from phthisis, tuberculosis, scurvy, pneumonia and sexually transmitted diseases, for example, syphilis. Some of these diseases were the cause of the deaths of many migrant workers. In addition to diseases, deaths during the pre-1990 period were partly a result of fatal accidents inside the mining shafts. During the post-1990 period, one of the major diseases behind the deaths of labour migrants is HIV/ AIDS.⁸⁴

In the early days phthisis and tuberculosis were confused. While tuberculosis is contagious, phthisis is not. As a result of this confusion, once diagnosed, phthisis sufferers were released from mine employment and because they did not receive proper medical care, a good number died on their way home. Poor and overcrowded conditions in the compounds led to the spread

⁸³ Charles van Onselen. *Chibaro*. p. 35.

⁸⁴ For a discussion on the linkage between HIV/ AIDS and labour migration in Malawi, see Wiseman C. Chirwa. “Migrant Labour, Sexual Networking and Multi-partnered Sex in Malawi”. pp. 5-15.

of infectious diseases such as smallpox, influenza, tuberculosis and pneumonia. On how pneumonia was caused, van Onselen explains: “Leaking thatch roofs, damp earthen floors, mud walls in a state of despair, the absence of beds and the major fluctuations of temperature in the iron buildings played a part in the spread of the disease”.⁸⁵ Mine workers also suffered from syphilis. Van Onselen argues that although these workers came to the mines without their wives, prostitutes were part and parcel of compound life, with some prostitutes actually living inside these compounds.⁸⁶ The mine authorities made no efforts to eliminate them since they played an important role in attracting and stabilising labour at the mines.

The mining industry in both South Africa and colonial Zimbabwe paid little attention to the medical care and treatment of workers. This was partly due to the expensive medical treatment and a critical shortage of medical doctors. On the other hand, migrant workers had a negative attitude towards the treatment offered in the hospitals: there was a widespread belief that anyone who entered a hospital would die of the ‘white man’s medicine’. As a result of this, migrant workers who refused to go to hospitals turned to their fellow miners or to traditional medical practitioners for assistance. In the case of Malawian migrant workers, some carried traditional medicine from home for personal use and also to assist fellow miners during sicknesses in South Africa.⁸⁷

According to Jonathan Crush, labour migration to the South African diamond, gold and coal mines can be periodised into three major phases: the formative phase (1850-1920); the expansionary phase (1920-1970); and the restructuring phase (1970-present).⁸⁸ During the formative phase, labour migration was largely a result of such factors as “colonial taxation, land dispossession, population increase and ecological collapse”.⁸⁹ Although the Chamber of Mines was largely in control of labour recruiting activities during the second phase, mine

⁸⁵ Charles van Onselen. *Chibaro*. p. 55.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 49.

⁸⁷ A detailed discussion on the use of local medicine comes in chapter six.

⁸⁸ Jonathan Crush. “Migrations Past: An Historical Overview of Cross-Border Movement in Southern Africa”. In David A. McDonald (ed.). *On Borders: Perspectives on International Migration in Southern Africa*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000). p. 13.

⁸⁹ Jonathan Crush, Alan Jeeves and David Yudelman. *South Africa’s Labour Empire*. p. 5.

migrancy entered a period of relative decline from the 1970s onwards. This was partly because such countries as Zambia and Tanzania in the region withdrew their labour supply.⁹⁰

A second (and later) category of historians and scholars from other disciplines writing about South African historiography from the 1970s onwards adopted what came to be popularly known as the ‘history from below’ approach.⁹¹ This approach is also variously called the ‘history from the bottom-up’, and ‘history of ordinary people and everyday life’. Through this approach, which is housed within the domain of social history, effort is made to reconstruct the past by accounts of the experiences of ordinary people. The present study is influenced by this approach, hence my use of oral histories in addition to other methods.⁹² This approach in social history was a reaction to the ‘history from above’ which had been dominant up to the 1960s and through which scholars were reconstructing the past by concentrating on the accounts of selected important societal members (i.e. ‘men of substance’) such as kings, queens and religious leaders.

A good example of scholars under social history who used the ‘history from below’ approach are the contributors to a book titled *A Long Way Home: Migrant Worker Worlds, 1800-2014* edited by Peter Delius, Laura Phillips and Fiona Rankin-Smith.⁹³ In this book, the authors provide a succinct account of the experiences of both male and female migrants from their homes to their respective destination areas. In “Slavery, Indenture and Migrant Labour: Maritime Immigration from Mozambique to the Cape, c. 1780-1880”, Patrick Harries argues that moving labour from Mozambique to the Cape involved what he calls “a greasing of the palms”⁹⁴ of the Portuguese officials. It is noteworthy that such challenges are similar to the untold hurdles that labour migrants continue to face when travelling using buses and lorries, for instance, between Malawi and South Africa during the post-1990 period.

⁹⁰ These countries withdrew their labour partly because they were against the apartheid policies of the South African government.

⁹¹ For details on this approach, see, for example, Paul La Hausse. “Oral History and South African Historians”. p. 347.

⁹² For details on the methods used in this study, see the research methodology section later in this chapter.

⁹³ Peter Delius, Laura Phillips and Fiona Rankin-Smith (eds.). *A Long Way Home: Migrant Worker Worlds, 1800-2014*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2014).

⁹⁴ Patrick Harries. “Slavery, Indenture and Migrant Labour: Maritime Immigration from Mozambique to the Cape, c. 1780-1880”. In Peter Delius, Laura Phillips and Fiona Rankin-Smith (eds.). *A Long Way Home: Migrant Worker Worlds*. p. 44.

In her chapter titled “Surviving Drought: Migrancy and the Homestead Economy”, Michelle Hay looks at labour migrancy from the lens of homesteads in the rural areas. She argues that the view ‘migrants’ remittances were the life-blood of the reserve economy’ is well known.⁹⁵ Michelle Hay examines the impact that migrants’ remittances had on ordinary people’s lives back home, that is, “how they could make a difference between poverty and insecurity and a modicum of comfort and personal pride”.⁹⁶ In short, although sometimes meagre, migrants’ remittances went a long way in helping people in the rural areas.

Sekibakiba Lekgoathi writes about the labour migrants from Zebediela who used to emigrate to areas in the ‘south’ for wage labour. This was partly a result of the shortage of, and inadequate profit from, arable land in Zebediela and a pull of higher wages in the destination areas. Lekgoathi argues that although they were staying and working away from home, Zebediela migrants were able to maintain their own Ndebele ethnic identity.⁹⁷ Most Malawian migrants, evidence shows, display similar traits. Despite staying in South Africa for many years, they continue to strongly identify themselves as Malawians, in the process setting themselves apart from the South African locals and also from other labour migrants in South Africa like the Zimbabweans and Mozambicans.

Up to the 1980s, most scholars focussed on the maleness of mine migration since labour migration was largely a male preserve. The mining companies, with the support of the respective governments, put in place deliberate mechanisms to ensure that only men were engaged in the mines. Mines were interested in making profits and, therefore, paid single men’s wages⁹⁸ only since men’s wives and children remained at home. The engagement of only men in the mines was the centre of controversy for a long time after the 1970s with scholars advancing different explanations to justify this phenomenon. Of these explanations, the cheap labour power thesis stands out in the literature.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Michelle Hay. “Surviving Drought: Migrancy and the Homestead Economy”. In Peter Delius, Laura Phillips and Fiona Rankin-Smith (eds.). *A Long Way Home: Migrant Worker Worlds*. p. 145.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 145.

⁹⁷ Sekibakiba P. Lekgoathi. “Migrants from Zebediela and Shifting Identities on the Rand, 1930s-1970s”. In Peter Delius, Laura Phillips and Fiona Rankin-Smith (eds.). *A Long Way Home: Migrant Worker Worlds*. p. 161.

⁹⁸ See, for example, Harvey C.C. Banda. “Gendered Patterns of Malawian Contemporary Migrancy”. 2008.

⁹⁹ A number of scholars have used the cheap labour power thesis to explain why only men were employed in the mines. For a discussion on this thesis, see Belinda Bozzoli. “Maxism, Feminism and South African Studies”. *Journal of South African Studies*. (1983, 9: 2). p. 143; K. Jochelson. “Women Migrancy and Morality: A Problem of Perspective”. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. (1995, 21: 2). p. 324.

There is general agreement among scholars that mine migration declined in the 1970s. However, these scholars differ on the reasons for the decline. The first group of scholars put emphasis on developments in the labour-supplying countries. They generally argue that following the attainment of independence, these countries were compelled to reassess the question of labour emigration to other countries. They were of the view that labour emigration was a way of losing the much-needed human resource. The latter ought, instead, to have been used in energising the local economies, for instance, the agricultural sector. Following this conviction, countries like Zambia and Tanzania, but not Malawi, withdrew their labour migrants from South Africa after independence as they saw migrancy as a drain on their capacity to develop economically.¹⁰⁰ This view was in line with the debates on development and underdevelopment of the 1950s – 1970s.¹⁰¹

The Malawi government's friendly relations with apartheid South Africa were partly for economic reasons, for instance, migrant workers' remittances brought into the country foreign exchange and South Africa in the 1960s provided funding for the transfer of the capital from Zomba to Lilongwe.¹⁰² However, the relations were also for political reasons:

President Dr. Hastings Banda's mode of functioning was just opposite of what the neighbouring countries of Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique were doing. As per evidence, most of the neighbouring states of Malawi had provided bases to the guerrillas for fighting against the white-ruled South Africa and Southern Rhodesia... He explained that Malawi would not cut its own throat. In fact, if it was good, Malawi would not hesitate to be friendly even with the devil.¹⁰³

The second group of scholars focused on the developments in the host countries. These scholars focused on the policy of localisation, which was also variously called nationalisation and internalisation.¹⁰⁴ Due to the increase in production costs in mining various minerals, mines decided to reduce such costs by concentrating on either local labour or on labour from the immediate neighbouring countries. The policy of localisation was also reinforced by mechanisation. With the latter, mines needed relatively less manpower as a number of mine jobs could now be done by machines. Writing about Zambia's copper mine industry, James Ferguson argues that mine 'industrialisation' was affected by economic decline between the

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan Crush et al. "Migration in Southern Africa". p. 2. For details on this discussion, see chapter two.

¹⁰¹ Details on the development and underdevelopment perspectives come under the guiding theories section later in the chapter.

¹⁰² Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy*. p. 51.

¹⁰³ K.K. Virmani. *Dr. Banda: In the Making of Malawi*. (Dehli: Kalinga Publications, 1992). p. 162. See also Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy*. p. 50.

¹⁰⁴ Jonathan Crush, Alan Jeeves and David Yudelman. *South Africa's Labour Empire*. pp. 127-138; Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy*. pp. 59-60.

1970s and the 1990s. This was a result of poor copper prices, low copper production, coupled with the burden of external debt.¹⁰⁵ One of the measures out of this trap included privatisation of parastatal corporations including copper mines.

In the case of Malawi, the 1974 plane crash incident¹⁰⁶ and the 1987 HIV testing debate¹⁰⁷ are dominant in the literature. However, the two explanations do not suffice in explaining the decline of mine migrancy in Malawi since this was followed by a corresponding increase in informal migration.¹⁰⁸ It is in view of this that the study intended to find out what exactly was behind the phenomenon. The 1970s and 1980s would as well be regarded as a watershed in the history of international labour migration from Malawi to other countries in the region.

Changing Migratory Patterns and Increase in Female Migration

Literature shows that there is a clear-cut change in the migratory patterns and trends not only in southern Africa, but throughout Africa.¹⁰⁹ Aderanti Adepoju contends that “changes in migratory patterns can be attributed to poverty and human deprivation, worsening social conditions and employment situations”.¹¹⁰ However, in the case of migration in southern Africa, scholars emphasise changes taking place at both regional and local levels. On the impact of globalisation, southern Africa got integrated into the world economy and, consequently, different forms of migration emerged. In the case of South Africa, its incorporation into the Southern African Development Community (SADC) compelled South Africa to observe free movement of people and goods.¹¹¹

In addition, most scholars cite the collapse of apartheid in South Africa as a crucial development which brought about “significant opportunities not only for South Africans, but

¹⁰⁵ James Ferguson. *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). p. 10.

¹⁰⁶ Jonathan Crush et al. “Migration in Southern Africa”. p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Barbara A. Anderson. “Migration in South Africa in Comparative Perspective”. In Pieter Kok, Derik Gilderblom, John O. Oucho and Johan van Zyl (eds.). *Migration in South and Southern Africa: Dynamics and Determinants*. (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2006). p. 101; Wiseman C. Chirwa. “Aliens and AIDS in Southern Africa: The Malawi-South Africa Debate”. *African Affairs*. (1998, 97).

¹⁰⁸ Richard Black, Jonathan Crush and Sally Peberdy. *Migration and Development in Southern Africa: An Overview*. (Cape Town: Idasa, 2006). p. 122; Anika Wilson. “Of Love Potions and Witch Baskets: Domesticity, Mobility and Occult Rumours in Malawi”. *Western Folklore*. (2012, 71: 2). p. 156.

¹⁰⁹ Aderanti Adepoju. “Issues and Recent Trends in International Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa”. pp. 384-385; Jonathan Crush, Vincent Williams and Sally Peberdy. “Migration in Southern Africa”. pp. 1-6.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p. 384.

¹¹¹ See, for example, John Daniel, Varusha Naidoo and Sanusha Naidu. “The South Africans Have Arrived: Post-Apartheid Corporate Expansion into Africa”. In John Daniel, Adam Habib and Roger Southall (eds.). *State of the Nation: South Africa, 2003-2004*. (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2003). pp. 368-390.

also for potential migrants in southern Africa”.¹¹² In short, the collapse of apartheid immediately transformed South Africa into a major destination. Southern Africa Migration Programme (SAMP) did conduct a number of surveys and research in South Africa’s satellite countries of Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. These surveys were partly aimed at assessing the motivations and experiences of migrants during the period. However, Malawi is largely missing from these surveys. It was, therefore, the intention of this study to find out the situation that obtained in Malawi since it has traditionally and historically been associated with migration to South Africa.

The changing migratory patterns during the contemporary period were associated with the increase in female migration. This ‘feminisation of migration’ is, in fact, a world-wide phenomenon: it is taking place in many parts of the world.¹¹³ It would, therefore, be proper to argue that labour migration during the contemporary period is no longer a male preserve. However, most studies indicate that in terms of volume, female migrants are still in minority relative to their male counterparts. On gendered migration, Dominic Milazi links globalisation and the burden placed on women and argues that “the impact of globalisation, and, especially, structural adjustment programmes, are the crucial factors in accelerating the change in the gender dimension of migration in southern Africa”.¹¹⁴

For a long time, migration scholars grappled with the concept of feminisation of international migration: Why were women in the past left behind to look after the welfare of the home (female-headed households), while men went away largely to look for wage employment? Why did they join the migration process, initially accompanying the male migrants, but later on as independent migrants? What were the decision-making processes involved for men and women to emigrate from the migrant households? On women’s entry into the migration process, the morality thesis was dominant in the literature. It posits that women joined migration as victims of the impact of male labour migration: the basic argument here was that since men were not sending financial support home, women were compelled to out-migrate to towns.¹¹⁵ However, because the latter lacked employment opportunities, most of these women resorted to

¹¹² Jonathan Crush et al. “Migration in Southern Africa”. p. 1.

¹¹³ Nicola Piper. “Gender and Migration”. Paper prepared for the Policy Analysis and Research Programme of the Global Commission on International Migration. September. 2005.

¹¹⁴ Dominic Milazi. “The Labour Market and Migration Policy in South Africa”. In K. Matlosa (ed.). *Migration and Development in Southern Africa: Policy Reflections*. (Harare: SAPES Trust, 2001). pp. 90-91.

¹¹⁵ Female migration was initially internal (out-migration) before becoming cross-border (emigration).

prostitution. It is in view of this that scholars who subscribed to morality thesis regarded women as 'moral polluters'.¹¹⁶

However, other scholars later critiqued this view and counter-argued that female migrants were not victims, but purposive and rational beings. In one of the pioneer studies in southern Africa, Belinda Dodson examined the gendered dimension of migration in southern Africa.¹¹⁷ She argued that different categories of women migrate to South Africa for a number of reasons including wage employment. A decade later, most studies established that in some cases female migrants do have a comparative advantage over their male counterparts partly as a result of a growing preference among employers for female workers.¹¹⁸ In addition, studies also indicate that motives for migration are gender-specific, with a proportion of women emigrating largely to trade, hence commercial migration.¹¹⁹

Several scholars agree that women's migration to towns both within and between countries was restricted during the colonial period. Clair Robertson indicates that the provision of urban employment for men only was characteristic of central, east and southern African towns.¹²⁰ Examples of these towns included Nairobi, Cape Town, Johannesburg and Lubumbashi. In Zambia too the colonial authorities discouraged female migration. Nonetheless, with time the mining companies relaxed these restrictions after realising the advantages of women migrating with their husbands, for instance, as a source of a more stable labour force.¹²¹ Consequently, after independence, women freely joined their migrant husbands.

When women migrated to towns, either independently or alongside male migrants, they largely joined the informal sector. This was largely because of the scarcity of formal sector jobs for

¹¹⁶ For a discussion on morality thesis and female migrants being viewed as moral polluters, see K. Jochelson. "Women Migrancy and Morality: A Problem of Perspective". p. 324; Harvey C.C. Banda. "Gendered Patterns of Malawian Contemporary Migrancy". 2008.

¹¹⁷ Belinda Dodson. "Women on the Move: Gender and Cross-Border Migration to South Africa from Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe". In D.A. McDonald (ed.). *On Borders: Perspectives on International Migration in Southern Africa*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

¹¹⁸ Literature in southern Africa shows that in the past female workers were preferred in the commercial farming sector. Since women nowadays work in various other sectors, it was my intention to find out if this preference is equally applicable to these other sectors in the contemporary period.

¹¹⁹ Commercial migration has for a long time been a dominant feature among female cross-border migrants between Malawi and Tanzania. A large proportion of the trade merchandise in Mzuzu City, northern Malawi, is from Tanzania. In the past, similar trade also became notable between Malawi and Zimbabwe, but collapsed after the latter's economy faltered.

¹²⁰ Clair C. Robertson. "Women in the Urban Economy". In Margaret Jean Hay and Sharon Stichter (eds.). *African Women South of the Sahara*. (London: Longman, 1984). p. 40.

¹²¹ Maria R. Cutrufelli. *Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression*. (London: Zed Press, 1983). p. 26.

women. The most documented women's informal sector activities include beer brewing, petty trading, for example, sale of prepared foodstuffs to male workers,¹²² and prostitution. Writing about the situation in colonial Nairobi, Luise White presented prostitution as a reliable means of capital accumulation.¹²³ Concurring with White, Clair Robertson argues that most women in Nairobi engaged in 'street walking', locally known as *watembezi*. This form of prostitution "was adventurous and more lucrative than ordinary prostitution, for example, *malaya* (resident prostitution)".¹²⁴ Philip Bonner likewise wrote about the influx of Basotho women into South Africa between the 1920s and the 1940s. He argued that these women ventured into illicit beer trade "under the strain of rural pauperisation and the (male) migrant labour system".¹²⁵ Several scholars, for instance, Christine Obbo, have written on women's petty trading activities in west, east and southern Africa.¹²⁶ They argued that such trade started during the pre-colonial period and merely got entrenched during the colonial period.

In the post-1990 period, most of the Malawian female labour migrants work in the domestic sector in South Africa. In this study, paid domestic work is described as part of the informal sector jobs because of the informal engagement arrangements or procedures adopted by the domestic workers' employers. Shireen Ally has this to say on the informal nature of paid domestic work:

Paid domestic work is distinctive not in being the worst job of all but in being regarded as something other than employment. It is rarely recognised as employment because of its extension of women's seemingly natural roles. Its location in the private household as an apparent continuation of kinship rather than contractual obligations, and in a site of leisure, not work, makes it seem all the more like something other than employment.¹²⁷

The employers take advantage of the illegal immigration status of most of these domestic workers, especially in the post-1990 period. Domestic workers comprise a significant part of the global workforce in informal employment and are among the most vulnerable groups of workers. In South Africa, Malawian migrant domestic workers, most of whom are women,

¹²² This was common around mines in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia during the colonial period.

¹²³ Luise White. *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990).

¹²⁴ Clair C. Robertson. "Women in the Urban Economy". p. 41.

¹²⁵ Philip L. Bonner. "Desirable or Undesirable Basotho Women? Liquor, Prostitution and Migration of Basotho Women to the Rand, 1920-1945". In Cherryl Walker (ed.). *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*. (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers Limited, 1990). p. 227.

¹²⁶ See Christine Obbo. *African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence*. (London: Zed Press, 1981); see also Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch. *African Women: A Modern History*. (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997).

¹²⁷ Shireen Ally. *From Servants to Workers: South African Domestic Workers and the Democratic State*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009). p. 3. See also R. Devey, C. Skinner and I. Valodia. "The Informal Economy in South Africa: Who, Where, What and How Much?" Paper presented at the DPRU/FES Conference on Labour Markets and Poverty in South Africa. Johannesburg. 22-24 October 2002.

work for private households without clear terms of employment and are excluded from the scope of labour legislation. In this case, issues of unionisation, formal work contracts, standardised entry qualifications and wages are out of question. Consequently, these domestic workers are exploited by their employers in various ways: they get relatively low wages, work long hours, have no guaranteed weekly day of rest and are sometimes vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse.

Most of the domestic workers in South Africa, like in the rest of the world, are women. T. Dinkelman and V. Ranchhod indicate that about 80 per cent of domestic workers in South Africa are women.¹²⁸ Malawian migrant domestic workers do household tasks such as cleaning the house, cooking, washing and ironing clothes, taking care of children and elderly or sick members of the family, gardening, guarding the house, driving for the family and taking care of household pets, for example, dogs and cats. They work either on full-time or part-time basis; and are employed either by a single employer or multiple employers. In terms of accommodation, these domestic workers either reside in the household of the employer (i.e. live-in worker) or reside in their own residence (live-out worker). In the case of Malawian labour migrants in South Africa during the post-1990 period, the study shows that they prefer working for a number of employers in a week and prefer piece jobs unlike full-time jobs. On accommodation, they opt for their own accommodation which is cheaper and accords them the flexibility that working for different employers demands. All these are efforts aimed at maximising their savings while working in South Africa.

Labour Migrants' Experiences in South Africa

(a) Xenophobia and Crime

Scholars like K. Matlosa, Jonathan Crush, L. Zinyama, and, more recently, Harvey Banda, Loren Landau and Hussein Solomon,¹²⁹ among others, have grappled with the sensitive, highly

¹²⁸ Taryn Dinkelman and Vimal Ranchhod. "Evidence on the Impact of Minimum Wage Laws in an Informal Sector: Domestic Workers in South Africa". *Journal of Development Economics*. (2002, 99). p. 29.

¹²⁹ K. Matlosa. "Overview of Labour Markets and Migration Patterns in Southern Africa". In K. Matlosa (ed.), *Migration and Development in Southern Africa: Policy Reflections*. (Harare: SAPES Trust, 2001); Jonathan Crush and Vincent Williams. "International Migration and Development: Dynamics and Challenges in South and Southern Africa"; L. Zinyama. "Who, What, When and Why: Cross-Border Movement from Zimbabwe to South Africa". In David McDonald (ed.), *On Borders: Perspectives on International Migration in Southern Africa*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Harvey C.C. Banda. "Xenophobia as a Form of Human Insecurity: The Plight of Malawian Migrants in South Africa". *Southern African Peace and Security Studies*. (2013, 2: 2); Hussein Solomon

politicised and complex issue of xenophobia. They have attempted to examine the underlying causes of xenophobia in Southern Africa, generally, and in South Africa, specifically. However, despite such efforts, the debate on the causes of xenophobia in the host countries is far from over. In fact, with time more and more ugly xenophobic scenes, for instance, in South Africa, continue unabated. Research also shows subtle and continuous forms of xenophobia in addition to the major waves, for example, those of 2008 and 2015.¹³⁰

Scholars have come up with theses or theories in trying to explain the causes of xenophobia in South Africa. Some of these are the scapegoat thesis and the relative deprivation thesis. According to the scapegoat thesis, “the loathing of foreign nationals, for example, blaming them for social ills such as crime and unemployment, is the manifestation of frustration by poor and unemployed South Africans”.¹³¹ Similarly, the relative deprivation thesis contends that “dissatisfaction and the inequalities of apartheid are leading the deprived masses to turn against foreigners”.¹³² This thesis also justifies the existence of xenophobia in South Africa.

One of the basic perceptions among the South African nationals is that immigrants have a deleterious effect on South Africa’s economy and society. In this regard, some South Africans maintain that these foreigners take away jobs and women from them.¹³³ In a recent study on xenophobia in South Africa, Chitja Twala argued that it is high time such perceptions were openly challenged.¹³⁴ While the natives insist that foreigners are a source of various ills in society, immigrants argue that it is the other way round and that, in fact, they have made a significant contribution to the South African economy.¹³⁵

and Hitomi Kosaka. “Xenophobia in South Africa: Reflections, Narratives and Recommendations”. *Southern African Peace and Security Studies*. (2013, 2: 2). See also M. Neocosmos. *From ‘Foreign Natives’ to ‘Native Foreigners’: Explaining Xenophobia in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Citizenship and Nationalism, Identity and Politics*. (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2010). pp. 2-4.

¹³⁰ See, for example, Neville Alexander. *Thoughts on the New South Africa*. (Auckland Park: Jacana Media Limited, 2013). p. 173; and Jonathan Crush (ed.). *Immigration, Xenophobia and Human Rights in South Africa*. (Cape Town: Idasa, 2001).

¹³¹ A. Morris “Our Fellow Africans Make Our Lives Hell: The Lives of Congolese and Nigerians Living in Johannesburg”. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. (1998, 21: 6). p. 1120.

¹³² C. Tshitereke. “Xenophobia and Relative Deprivation”. *Crossings*. (1999, 3: 2). p. 13.

¹³³ David A. McDonald, Lephophoto Mashike and Cecilia Golden. *The Lives and Times of African Migrants and Immigrants in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. (Cape Town: Idasa, 1999). pp. 17-18.

¹³⁴ Chitja Twala. “Xenophobic Attacks on Foreign Nationals in South Africa: A Genuine Attack or Elements of Criminality?” Paper presented during the Mining and Security Workshop at Dag Hammarskjöld Institute for Peace Studies. Copperbelt University. Kitwe. Zambia. 26-29 February, 2015.

¹³⁵ Maxine Reitzes and Sivuyile Bam. “Citizenship, Immigration and Identity in Winterveld, South Africa”. In Jonathan Crush and David McDonald (eds.). *Transnationalism and New African Immigration to South Africa*. (Cape Town: SAMP, 2002). pp. 91-92.

According to Jonathan Klaaren, xenophobia, contrary to popular explanations, can be explained using the concept of citizenship including identity. He argues that it is for this reason that xenophobic violence, for instance, the one that took place in May 2008 in South Africa targeted not only foreigners, but also South Africans. The latter were, therefore, attacked because they had a non-local identity, although they held a South African nationality.¹³⁶

Literature shows that xenophobia takes many forms and has ranged from verbal abuse, use of derogatory terms, for example, *makwerekwere*, to physical attacks.¹³⁷ In the past, xenophobia has targeted not only foreigners, but also fellow South Africans from minority groups, like the Venda, the Pedi and the Shangaan from the north of the country.¹³⁸ Research on the pattern of xenophobia in South Africa has led scholars to suggest that it carries a racial tag. According to K. Matlosa, this would be attributed to “the effects of the colonial legacy in which everything white was considered ‘pure and good’ and everything black was seen as ‘bad and evil’”.¹³⁹ Evidence shows that there has been an increase in levels of xenophobia in South Africa in the post 1994 period. The basic question, therefore, is: Why this increase? These attitudes may be partly explained by the South Africans’ perceptions of the numbers of immigrants in the country. This number is greatly exaggerated, for instance, most believe that immigrants make up over 25% of the population instead of the 2.5% verified in the census.¹⁴⁰ According to the South African Police Annual Report (2008/ 09), there could be as many as 6 million undocumented migrants in South Africa.¹⁴¹

There is also a close relationship in the literature between xenophobia and crime vis-a-vis immigrants in South Africa. There are two dominant views on crime: one view looks at immigrants as perpetrators of crime while the other one looks at them as victims of crime. In line with the first view, it is maintained that some South Africans accuse immigrants of involvement in various crimes, hence xenophobic tendencies against them.¹⁴² In line with the

¹³⁶ Jonathan Klaaren. “Citizenship, Xenophobic Violence and Law’s Dark Side”. In Loren B. Landau (ed.), *Exorcising the Demons Within: Xenophobia, Violence and Statecraft in Contemporary South Africa*. (Johannesburg: Wits University, 2011).

¹³⁷ K. Matlosa. *Migration and Development in Southern Africa*, p. 85.

¹³⁸ Ibid. p. 85.

¹³⁹ Ibid. p. 86.

¹⁴⁰ Jonathan Crush et al. “International Migration and Development”. p. 16.

¹⁴¹ For details here see *Mail and Guardian*. “Home Affairs in the Dark about Number of Illegal Immigrants”. Staff Reporter. 13 November 2013.

¹⁴² See, for example, Loren B. Landau. “Loving the Alien? Citizenship, Law, and the Future in South Africa’s Demonic Society”. *African Affairs*. (2010, 109: 435). pp. 213-230.

second view, although immigrants are accused of being perpetrators of crime, some of the migration literature shows otherwise. For instance, it is indicated that these immigrants are, in fact, victims of crime. In general, labour migrants are said to be abused by their employers largely because of their 'illegal status'. With female migrants, it is maintained that the abuse in question has some sexual connotations.¹⁴³

(b) Citizenship, Identity and Belonging

Literature also shows that there is a close relationship between immigration, on the one hand, and citizenship, identity and xenophobia, on the other hand. The immigrants' foreign identity in a host country is usually a source of various challenges including crime and xenophobia. In the case of South Africa, it is indicated that at times South African nationals steal property from foreign nationals knowing that they cannot report the matter to police for fear of themselves being arrested and deported because of their 'illegal status'. Consequently, most immigrants are forced to deny their national identity and, instead, adopt that of the South Africans as a strategy for survival. This, in turn, brings into the debate the issue of citizenship and belonging.

Maxine Reitzes and Sivuyile Bam argue that one of the criteria for "the construction of citizen and immigrant identities is national origin, which determines the categorisation and definition of 'insiders' and 'outsiders'".¹⁴⁴ Most of the immigrants who end up overstaying in the host country eventually make efforts to change their identity through a process called naturalisation. They are said to be against returning to their home countries because it would be difficult to re-integrate into their societies since they have spent their working lives in the host society. Compared to the mine migrancy period dominantly up to the late 1980s in Southern Africa, this was rather controlled as mine labour migrants, unlike independent migrants, were engaged for a fixed contractual period.

Niklaus Steiner argues that citizenship is acquired through various ways, for instance, by birth (*jus soli*), by descent (*jus sanguinis*) and lastly through naturalisation.¹⁴⁵ Most immigrants acquire citizenship of a host country through a process of naturalisation. Once citizenship is granted through this process, it becomes a solution to a myriad challenges that are associated

¹⁴³ David A. McDonald, Lephophoto Mashike and Cecilia Golden. *The Lives and Times of African Migrants and Immigrants in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. p. 19.

¹⁴⁴ Maxine Reitzes and Sivuyile Bam. "Citizenship, Immigration and Identity". p. 81.

¹⁴⁵ Niklaus Steiner. *International Migration and Citizenship Today*. pp. 105-109.

with working and staying in a foreign country. Once this is done, these immigrants-cum-citizens make efforts to adapt to the culture of the host society.

Apart from the legal means highlighted above, there are several illegal paths that immigrants have devised to gain citizenship in the host countries. For instance, by acquiring identity documents such as work permits and the South African ID through fraudulent means, in the case of South Africa.¹⁴⁶ Other immigrants enter into marriage contracts with South African women and men just to gain citizenship.¹⁴⁷ Writing about India, Kamal Sadiq argues that illegal immigrants easily acquire all the local documents of authenticity:

...it is commonplace to see illegal immigrants settling down and behaving as citizens. Once settled, these immigrants become indistinguishable from those who followed legal immigration procedures and, in some cases, from native-born citizens themselves...foreigners made the transition to full membership (i.e. citizenship) without following any of the paths officially laid out for them.¹⁴⁸

(c) Deportations and Border Control

Deportations and tight border controls are measures employed by various migrant-receiving countries to keep illegal immigrants out. The first move is tightening borders in order to restrict entry and when this fails, they resort to deporting these illegal immigrants. There is therefore, a close working relationship between immigration officials and the police. The increase in illegal migration not only in southern Africa, but also world-wide, despite tight borders and frequent deportations clearly shows how futile it is to 'control' migratory flows. This has influenced migration scholars to shift the debate to migration governance: that is, how best to effectively 'manage' (govern) migration not only at local and regional levels, but also at global level. There is consensus among migration specialists that efforts to manage migration at national level are inadequate. Instead, there is need for collaboration and cooperation among states both at regional and global level. In short, proper management of migration is ultimately a shared responsibility among the sending and receiving countries.

Scholars like Niklaus Steiner are of the view that countries need to settle for a border policy in between the extremes of open borders (porous borders) and closed borders. However, even this

¹⁴⁶ When getting contacts for oral interviews in Johannesburg in March 2015 one Malawian migrant actually showed me his work permit: "This is a fake one, I cannot transact at the bank, but I secured a job using the same", he said. Interview with Jacob (not real name). Hillbrow. Johannesburg. 9/04/2015.

¹⁴⁷ This view was echoed by labour migrants during interviews in Zubayumo Makamo area in the western part of Mzimba District.

¹⁴⁸ Kamal Sadiq. *Paper Citizens: How Illegal Immigrants Acquire Citizenship in Developing Countries*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). pp. 4-5.

option has its own implications: “financial costs worth bearing; human rights worth violating; and moral norms worth upholding”.¹⁴⁹ The experience in some countries like the United States of America has shown that tightening borders with a view to keep out unwanted immigrants is counter-productive: in fact, it is a factor behind increased illegal immigration. This is partly because immigrants are compelled to rely on the services of professional smugglers. In the process, immigration becomes an increasingly underground phenomenon. In addition, circular migration eventually becomes more permanent as most immigrants resort to settling permanently with their families in the host countries.¹⁵⁰

In the case of South Africa, Andrew Macdonald argues that South Africa developed “an ambiguous international border control system in the early twentieth century”.¹⁵¹ As a result, migrants bent on entering South Africa usually took advantage of this ‘porous’ border largely using their vibrant migrant networks. These mobility controls, however, are not a new phenomenon. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Andrew Macdonald shows, these mobility controls were entrenched in the slave trade system. During this period, migrants in South Africa had to produce various documents and these included “church attestations, wills, oaths of obedience, certificates of guild membership, letters of orphan lodges, letters of surety from employers and midwives’ oaths”.¹⁵²

Unlike in the twentieth century, in the previous two centuries undocumented and clandestine migrants were not deported from South Africa, instead they were merely allocated as labourers. This development was a result of the high demand for labourers by the settlers. Consequently, it can be argued that prior to the twentieth century lack of resources and will power made the border porous. British occupation replaced the Dutch company rule (i.e. the Dutch East India Company) at the turn of the nineteenth century in order to secure sea access to India. However,

¹⁴⁹ Niklaus Steiner. *International Migration and Citizenship Today*. p.32.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 33. Due to the challenges that Malawian labour migrants face when crossing borders *en route* to and from South Africa, most of my informants indicated that it was their intention to stay a bit longer in South Africa to avoid such border hurdles.

¹⁵¹ Andrew Macdonald. “Colonial Trespassers in the Making of South Africa’s International Borders, 1900- c. 1950” (PhD Thesis). St. John’s College, Cambridge. August 2012. p. viii; see also Andrew Macdonald. “The Identity Thieves of the Indian Ocean: Forgery, Fraud and the Origins of South African Immigration Control, 1890s-1920s”. *Proceedings of the British Academy*. (2012, 197). p. 255.

¹⁵² Cited in Andrew Macdonald. “Colonial Trespassers”. p. 10. For a detailed discussion on this, see K. Breckenridge and S. Szreter (eds.). *Registration and Recognition: Documenting the Person in World History*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). pp. 327-388.

the British, like the Dutch before them, faced almost similar challenges, for instance, lack of resources, and, therefore, failed to effectively ensure strict border controls.¹⁵³

Since the 1990s South Africa employs “new restrictionism” in line with the South African immigration legislation (i.e. the Aliens Control Act of 1991, as amended in 1995). Under this restrictionist policy, foreigners who want to go to South Africa for temporary employment are expected to apply as individuals while in their countries of origin. These applications are forwarded to the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) “which exercises enormous discretionary power”.¹⁵⁴ In fact, since 1994 lawful entry to work in South Africa by labour migrants, especially from the southern Africa region, Malawi inclusive, is highly restrictive and has become much tighter.¹⁵⁵

Jonathan Crush argues that South Africans favour draconian approaches to regulating immigration, that is, keeping foreigners out. In the 1998 SAMP survey, respondents were asked their opinion of control-oriented policy measures such as

turning on the electric fence on South Africa’s borders, putting more money into border protection, using the army to patrol the borders, increasing taxes to pay for border patrols, requiring foreigners to carry identifications, giving the police the right to detain suspected illegal immigrants and penalising those who employ illegal immigrants.¹⁵⁶

With the exception of raising taxes, each of these measures enjoyed massive support amongst both blacks and whites. South Africans are even in favour of use of electrified fences on the borders. These lethal fences were erected by the apartheid government to deter ANC guerrillas and Mozambican refugees.¹⁵⁷ It is noteworthy, though, that these fences are no longer operational.

After border control has failed to keep illegal immigrants out, countries have no alternative but to resort to deportations. Research in southern Africa shows that once deported, labour migrants make efforts to return to the same destination country upon arrival back home. This also contributes to the futility of the whole process of deporting immigrants. Evidence from the western part of Mzimba District indicates that some of these deportees, locally known as

¹⁵³ Andrew Macdonald. “Colonial Trespassers”. p. 18.

¹⁵⁴ Jonathan Crush. “The Discourse and Dimensions of Irregularity in Post-Apartheid South Africa”. *International Migration*. (1999, 37: 1). p. 132.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 133.

¹⁵⁶ Jonathan Crush. *The Dark Side of Democracy: Migration, Xenophobia and Human Rights in South Africa*. *International Migration*. (2000, 36: 6). p. 109.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 110.

madipotii, have been deported three or four times.¹⁵⁸ This raises a number of questions, for example, “why are *madipotii* determined to re-emigrate after being deported?” The frequent deportations from South Africa and other attendant problems during the migrants’ stay in South Africa bring into the debate the issue of survival strategies.¹⁵⁹ On the survival strategies, this study shows that some migrants have beliefs in the use of local medicine (*mankhwala gha chifipa*) for various purposes including protection from such deportations.¹⁶⁰ In this study I made an attempt to establish how entrenched such practices are in the two study districts, and the extent to which male and female labour migrants rely on the different types of local medicine during their stay in South Africa.

Migration, Remittances and Development

One of the current debates in migration literature is on the migration-development nexus. Scholars look at this relationship from various angles. For example, how migration affects development in both source and destination areas, and how development affects migration patterns in both source and destination areas. Remittances feature highly on the former view of the nexus. There is an endless debate on the role of migrant remittances as a catalyst for socio-economic development, especially in the sending areas. Southern Africa presents a good case study on this role.¹⁶¹

Belinda Dodson et al. (2008) argue that “remittances are a long-standing practice in southern Africa, playing an important historical and contemporary role in household and national economies”.¹⁶² It is not surprising that in the past most remittances were sent home by male labour migrants. This is due to the maleness of international labour migration during the old period. Following the feminisation of international labour migration, highlighted earlier in this chapter, there is need to understand whether or not male and female labour migrants display the same remittance behaviours. Although SAMP has studied the relationship between migrant

¹⁵⁸ A number of my interviewees in Zubayumo Makamo area shared this view.

¹⁵⁹ I have tackled these issues at length in chapter five.

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, Harvey C.C. Banda. “Migrants and Medicines: The Interface of Migration and Traditional Medicinal Beliefs in Mzimba District since the 1940s”. Paper presented at the Moving Bodies Workshop at the ACMS. Witwatersrand University. Johannesburg. September 2014; see also Anika Wilson. “Of Love Potions and Witch Baskets”. pp. 149-173.

¹⁶¹ See, for example, Belinda Dodson, Hamilton Simelane, Daniel Tevera, Abel Chikanda and Fion de Vletter. *Gender, Migration and Remittances in Southern Africa*. (Cape Town: Idasa, 2008). p. 27-43; Ulrich Weyl. *Labour Migration and Underdevelopment in Malawi: Late Nineteenth Century to Mid-1970s*. (Masvingo (Zimbabwe): Belmont Press, 1991). p. 58.

¹⁶² Belinda Dodson et. al. *Gender, Migration and Remittances*. p. 10.

remittances and development in Botswana, Mozambique, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe, there was need to conduct an in-depth examination to establish whether immigrants from Malawi demonstrated the same pattern of behaviour.

Literature also shows that one of the main problems with remittances is that they are not invested, but rather are used to meet household basics, for example, food and shelter. The basic question here is how best can remittances be used by households so that they become self-sufficient in the long run? Remittances are also said not to benefit the very poor in the source areas since they are unable to send out family members on emigration because of lack of financial capacity. This is in line with functional approaches such as the new economics of migration theory. This study therefore examines the social categories of the migrant households in the study areas. For example, do the very poor engage in international migration to South Africa? Are the local transporters still operating between the source areas in Malawi and South Africa? If yes, which categories of people rely on their transport service? In addition, the study also examines the impact of technology on remittance transfers over time, particularly use of letters; telegrams; telephones; cell phones; the internet and banking.

4. Guiding theories

International migration is too diverse and multi-faceted to be explained using a single theory. The causes and impacts of migration are broad. There is at present no single coherent theory that explains international migration, but rather a fragmented set of theories. In addition, there have been shifts in paradigms over time. Functional and structural approaches have been dominant for a long time. In addition, within the South African historiography there has been focus on particular paradigms. This section highlights some of the theories that guide international labour migration between Malawi and South Africa.

There are many theories regarding why many people migrate across borders. These migration theories could be summarised into two categories or classes: functional approaches and structural approaches. However, though different, both of these can be reduced to the same basic assumption about migration process: that “the migration of labour is a response to a wage differential or inequality between the source and destination countries caused by a difference in level of socio-economic development”.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Jon Goss and Bruce Lindquist. “Conceptualising International Labour Migration”. p. 317.

Functional theories focus on the decision-making behaviour (rationality) of individuals whether to join the migration process or not. They posit that labour moves in search of higher wages from areas of capital scarcity and labour abundance to areas of capital abundance and labour scarcity. The dominant functional theories are the neoclassical economics theory,¹⁶⁴ the new economics of migration theory,¹⁶⁵ and human agency theory.¹⁶⁶ The neoclassical economics theory speculates that international migration is a result of an individual's decision that is taken in the interest of maximising the migrant's earning potential.¹⁶⁷ This theory assumes that due to unemployment, underemployment, low wages, poor working conditions and the absence of economic opportunities, migrants concerned with their personal improvement choose in a rational way the destination country which will give them the most benefit.

The new economics of migration theory looks at the household decision-making processes during migration. It views migration as a household affair in which a family decides to send one member abroad to test the opportunities in the destination country. In line with this theory, most labour migration households in Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts send one family member, a pioneer migrant, to South Africa and it is he or she who eventually arranges the migration of other family members. The new economics of migration theory maintains that for economically-disadvantaged families, the risk of migrating is too high and this explains why the very poor in origin countries do not tend to migrate.

The human agency theory argues that rural producers were not passive victims of their transformation into wage labourers. Instead, they were active participants in the process of *proletarianisation*. The theory argues that both male and female migrants, acting as individuals or in groups, make either individual or collective decisions to emigrate depending on their view of the losses and benefits of migrating (cost-benefit analysis). One of the advantages of functional theories is their logic and simplicity, for instance, they show that migrants' decisions, whether to migrate or not, are based largely on economic criteria. However, their

¹⁶⁴ Susan Thieme. *Social Networks and Migration: Far West Nepalese Labour Migrants in Dehli*. (Munster, 2006). p. 1.

¹⁶⁵ Russell King. *Theories and Typologies of Migration: An Overview and a Primer*. (Malmo: MIM, 2012). pp. 11-13.

¹⁶⁶ Jon Goss and Bruce Lindquist. "Conceptualising International Labour Migration". p. 320.

¹⁶⁷ Russell King. *Theories and Typologies of Migration*. p. 12.

prediction that competition among migrants would eventually depress wages in the capitalist-rich destination areas may not be evident in some areas.¹⁶⁸

On the other hand, structural theories focus upon the idea that people make their decisions to migrate based on political, social and economic forces that are out of their control. Some of the structural theories include the neo-Marxist dependency theory;¹⁶⁹ the world systems theory; and the modes of production theory.¹⁷⁰ The structural theories emerged as a critique of, and complimentary to, the functional theories. Dependency theorists argue that labour migration results from the uneven spatial development emanating from colonial and post-colonial relationships between capitalist economies and the underdeveloped peripheries. It is indicated that the processes of underdevelopment create and sustain a dual labour market in which the periphery provides cheap labour to the core.¹⁷¹

Many historians in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s subscribed to the revisionist historiography that had just emerged.¹⁷² They were largely influenced by a rising tide of dependency theory. These revisionist historians looked at the migrant labour system in South Africa as largely exploitative and socially destructive.¹⁷³ This was contrary to the earlier ‘anthropological’ strand which argued that labour migration was not necessarily destructive. The scholars who subscribed to this paradigm focused on African agency in their analyses of migrancy.¹⁷⁴ This was in line with the modernisation or development theories which look at labour migration as positive: labour migrants are able to deal with household challenges using proceeds from wage employment. On the whole, the theory maintains, labour migration has a developmental impact in the labour migrants’ origin areas. In line with this perspective, this study shows that although labour migrants face a lot of challenges while working in South Africa, migration has an overall developmental impact in the migrants’ origin or source areas.

¹⁶⁸ Bill Paton, *Labour Export Policy*, p. 6; Jon Goss and Bruce Lindquist. “Conceptualising International Labour Migration”. p. 320.

¹⁶⁹ Jon Goss and Bruce Lindquist. “Conceptualising International Labour Migration”. p. 322.

¹⁷⁰ Mildred A.J. Ndeda. *The Impact of Male Labour Migration on Rural Women: A Case of Central Nyanza in Colonial Kenya*. (Saarbrücken: VDM Publishing House Limited, 2011). pp. 4-5.

¹⁷¹ Jon Goss and Bruce Lindquist. “Conceptualising International Labour Migration”. p. 322.

¹⁷² Peter Delius. “The Making and Changing of Migrant Workers’ Worlds, 1800-2014”. *African Studies*. (2014, 73: 3). p. 313.

¹⁷³ William Beinart. “A Century of Migrancy from Pondoland”. p. 388.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 388.

With time a new ‘history from below’ emerged following the realisation that the African working class had its own traditions and cultural consciousness.¹⁷⁵ Following this development, Charles van Onselen presented a history from below and argued that “the power exerted by workers could not be separated from their culture”.¹⁷⁶ In addition to the ‘rationality’ and ‘structuralist’ paradigms, historians are currently also focusing on consciousness; culture and migrant identities; mentality; informality; and migrant associations.

On this, Dunbar Moodie writes about the migrant workers’ social organisation and their personal identities. Since migrants belong to two worlds, that is, their homes and their work destinations or places, Moodie argues that “migrant labour implies a bifurcated identity”.¹⁷⁷ This is in line with what he describes as “a two-self theory of migrant identity”.¹⁷⁸ The migrants’ behaviour or socialisation in these two worlds were different: “while working away from home, migrant workers develop special and unique migrant cultures that are different from their home cultures”.¹⁷⁹ On migrant workers belonging to two worlds, Patrick Harries writes: “By developing a system of migrant labour, they had benefitted from both the sale of their labour and the productive energy of their wives and children at home. This form of accumulation on the two fronts... provided the migrant with a strong home community to which he could return in case of a downturn in his conditions of employment”.¹⁸⁰

Within the migrant cultures, there are informal networks of support through which labour migrants survive in a harsh environment away from their homes. In this connection, Moodie cites worker brotherhoods or associations that “are formed around entrepreneurial services (for example, herbal medicines), religious concerns, burial societies and other shared interests”.¹⁸¹ It is these associations including migrants’ leisure activities that make up migrant cultures. Apart from relying on social networks or associations at the work place, Patrick Harries maintains that migrant workers also relied on the support from their homes. On the workers’ class consciousness and identity, Harries argues that “rather than constructing a new social order through confrontation with their employers, workers tended to build their own society on

¹⁷⁵ Paul la Hausse. “Oral History and South African Historians”. p. 347.

¹⁷⁶ Patrick Harries. *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Labourers in Mozambique and South Africa*. p. iv.

¹⁷⁷ Dunbar T. Moodie with Vivienne Ndatshe. *Going for Gold: Men, Mines and Migration*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2001). p. 12.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 12.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 19.

¹⁸⁰ Patrick Harries. *Work, Culture and Identity*. p. 198.

¹⁸¹ Dunbar Moodie. *Going for Gold*. p. 20.

the basis of what was comprehensible and familiar...they strengthened their ties with brothers and uncles constantly arriving on the mines”.¹⁸²

This study is guided by the theories highlighted in this section. For instance, chapters two, three and four are guided by functional theories in that during both the pre-1990 and post-1990 periods male and female migrants have been making decisions whether to join the labour migration process or not. Chapters five and six (on the challenges that migrants face in South Africa and the survival strategies that they devise) are guided by the social history from below. These chapters display the cultural consciousness and identities of these migrants. Chapter seven is largely guided by development and underdevelopment theories because the chapter is trying to assess the developmental impact of labour migration, especially in the labour source areas in northern Malawi.

5. Research Methodology

In terms of research methods, in this study I used oral, archival and secondary sources. Through complementarity of these sources, I hoped to collect information that is not only valid and reliable, but also relevant for the achievement of the goals of this research project. In this connection, Jan Vansina argues that oral sources should be used hand in hand with written sources “so that they check each other’s limitations”.¹⁸³ The data collected using the three sources was analysed qualitatively. This is, therefore, largely a qualitative study and because of the informal nature of the study it was difficult to come up with quantitative data, for example, on the numbers of labour migrants involved during the post-1990 period. It is noteworthy that the findings and conclusions in this thesis are representative of northern Malawi, particularly the study districts of Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay, and not of Malawi as a whole. Similarly, in the case of South Africa, the findings and conclusions are reflective of Malawian labour migrants’ experiences in the selected parts of Johannesburg and not South Africa as a whole. In addition, conclusions like “many of the Zimbabweans are criminals” and “the influx of immigrants in the post-1990 period” reflect the views of my informants and can hardly be verified in the literature. In this case, Malawian labour migrants want to portray themselves that they are not a problem and probably also to increase their chances of securing jobs.

¹⁸² Patrick Harries. *Work, Culture and Identity*. p. 223.

¹⁸³ Jan Vansina. *Oral Tradition as History*. (Oxford: James Currey Limited, 1985). p. 199.

Archival Sources

I conducted archival research mainly at the Malawi National Archives (MNA) main library in Zomba, southern Malawi. However, and in addition, I also examined some relevant archival documents under the South African National Archives (SANA) in Pretoria. However, most of these were limited in terms of periodisation as they mainly contained the experiences of Malawian migrants in South Africa up to the 1970s. I also consulted a few archival files at the Historical Papers section of the William Cullen Library at the University of the Witwatersrand. While the Historical Papers and SANA contained a rich repository of mobility in southern Africa in general, they did not specifically do so on labour migration between Malawi and South Africa. Furthermore, in this study I have also used some archival documents which I consulted at the MNA as part of the research for my master's degree studies at Chancellor College.

The largely contemporary nature of the study meant that archival records would only be useful to a certain extent. For instance, it was envisaged that archival data would be difficult to access from the 1990s onwards because of the 30-year access policy. As a solution to this challenge, I negotiated for a waiver (a reduction in the years of access) with the MNA. The MNA thus granted the waiver by reducing the access period from 30 years to 20 years. This, therefore, allowed me access the documents way into the mid 1990s. In addition to the Historical Manuscripts in the main library of the MNA, the Public Archives at the Records Management Centre (RMC) of the MNA (also in Zomba) were also accessed. Importantly, information which could not be solicited from the archival documents was sourced using other sources, for example, oral sources and secondary sources such as newspapers and journal articles.

The Historical Manuscripts (HMs) had detailed information on the experiences of Malawian labour migrants vis-a-vis their interactions with *Wenela* and its successor, TEBA. I was particularly concerned with the developments in the 1970s and the 1980s (in line with the decline in mine migrancy from Malawi to South Africa). The following are some of the numerous issues I examined: the district origins of labour migrants; the mines where they were working and the type of jobs they were doing; the challenges that labour migrants faced when returning to Malawi, for example, entry into Malawi of their South African wives; details of deserters, deportees and other labour migrants who were barred from future mine employment, including forged re-entry into South Africa; challenges of self-remittances by Malawian labour migrants; experiences of former *Wenela* migrants who were seeking re-employment with

Theba; details about the fatal accidents and illness schemes (i.e. about the deceased mineworkers and their relations who were to receive the gratuities); and the decline in the number of labour migrants on the South African mines during *Theba* as compared to the *Wenela* period.

Likewise, the Public Archives (PAs) documents contained information on various issues on labour migrants. However, some of these documents were specifically on the experiences of labour migrants based in Zimbabwe and not in South Africa. Good examples here were the documents on welfare and burial societies. Nonetheless, these documents were relevant since the element of social organisation of labour migrants at the work place is reminiscent of what obtains among labour migrants in South Africa during the contemporary migration period.

The following issues were then examined under the PAs: social and economic effects of large-scale emigration from Malawi; problems caused by Malawian migrants based in South Africa (e.g. by being members of ferocious gangs); complications regarding migrants' deceased estate, especially those migrants who were married to South African wives; employer assistance towards workers at the work place e.g. some workers being given salary advances with which to solve their family problems; the complaints of labour migrants of non-remittance of deferred pay deductions into their Post Office (PO) savings accounts in Malawi; and, lastly, enquiries about re-employment into South Africa after the 1974 ban and the consequent suspense as to whether *Wenela* would be re-opened.

Archival research also focused on records generated by the District Commissioners of Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay and the departments of Labour and Immigration in the two districts and in Mzuzu, the regional hub of the northern region. These documents provided vital information on the post-1995 period. For instance, unlike in Mzimba District, the people of Nkhata-Bay have a choice to emigrate either to Tanzania or South Africa. Each of the two destinations has a comparative advantage over the other. In terms of periodisation, this greatly supplemented the information collected at the MNA in Zomba from the 1990s onwards. Additionally, newspapers such as *The Nation*, *Daily Times* and *Malawi News* were consulted at the Mzuzu National Library Service; Mzuzu University Library and at the Malawi National Archives. In South Africa, newspapers such as the *Mail and Guardian*; *The Citizen*; *The Star*; and *Sowetan* were also consulted. The information sought was mainly on xenophobia; repatriation; deportations; remittances; and labour migration challenges in the destination area.

Oral Sources

Although in this study I have used three sources, as highlighted above, in the post-1990 period I have largely relied on oral sources, that is, testimonies or accounts given by informants who had personal experiences of engaging in informal labour migrancy to South Africa. This is due to the contemporary nature of the study such that in some cases archival and secondary sources were either limited or virtually absent. This does not imply that these oral sources do not have weaknesses. In this section, I have attempted to highlight some of these weaknesses.¹⁸⁴ However, at the same time I critiqued the various oral sources used by subjecting them to scrutiny and personal interpretation in order to arrive at value judgement and worthwhile conclusions. In this regard, I deliberately interviewed many male and female labour migrants both in Malawi and in South Africa to avoid getting biased and distorted accounts on the changing dimensions of labour migration from Malawi to South Africa over time. This approach allowed the migrants to narrate their own and respective experiences during their stay in South Africa.

Oral sources are important in reconstructing the past. On this, Jan Vansina argues that their role is similar to written sources because “both are messages from the past to the present, and messages are key elements in historical reconstruction”.¹⁸⁵ Alessandro Portelli concurs with Vansina and succinctly argues that “historical work excluding oral sources, where available, is incomplete by definition”.¹⁸⁶ Oral interviews allow for the capturing or foregrounding of the perspectives of the marginalised and oppressed majority in historical texts. Oral history methodology is suitable in this study because it is used to document the social history of the labour migrants from Malawi’s countryside, whose past was not recorded in books or archives. In most cases, official written records reflect the views of the dominant groups in society in line with ‘history from above’. Oral history or ‘history from below’ allows historians to document the everyday experiences of ordinary people in society.¹⁸⁷ Oral sources are valuable

¹⁸⁴ For a detailed discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of the use of oral sources, see, for example, Charles Van Onselen. “The Reconstruction of a Rural Life from Oral Testimony: Critical Notes on the Methodology Employed in the Study of a Black South African Sharecropper”. *Journal of Peasant Studies*. (1993, 20: 3). pp. 506-513.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 1999.

¹⁸⁶ Alessandro Portelli. “What Makes Oral History Different”. In Robert Perks and Aistair Thomson (eds.). *The Oral History Reader*. Second Edition. (London: Routledge, 1998). p. 40.

¹⁸⁷ Sekibakiba P. Lekgoathi. “Voices of Our Past: Oral Testimony and Teaching History”. In J. Bam and C. Dyer (eds.). *Educator’s Guide to the UNESCO General History of Africa*. (South Africa: New Africa Education (NAE), 2004). p. 43.

in this study since the study deals with the Malawian countryside and the experiences of ordinary Malawian labour migrants among whom writing played a very minimal (if any) role.

Despite the numerous advantages to this study, oral sources pose a number of challenges to historians trying to accurately reconstruct past events. For instance, like written sources, they suffer from non-objectivity, lack of credibility, prejudice and partiality.¹⁸⁸ To overcome these, I interviewed a cross-section of informants, that is, not only current migrants, but also former migrants in both study districts. I also did factual verification and credibility of the oral sources, as is required by all types of sources. For instance, this was done by comparing information provided by different informants on a particular issue. This is important in order to establish or ascertain the reliability of information provided by informants. In addition, the quality of information gathered through oral sources largely depends on the ability of the interviewer during the interview process. On this, I, among others, relied on flexibility and rapport¹⁸⁹ and use of probing questions during interviews. This is also why I used semi-structured interviews but not structured ones.

Although sometimes oral sources are used to fill in the gaps left by other sources, for instance, archival sources, for the most part the oral material in this study has been used differently. In this study oral sources have given me access to the voices of labour migrants from rural areas in Malawi (the marginalised in society) who are usually neglected in social and historical research. In other ways, this study provides perspectives of the poor people on the margins of society. Their stories do not simply corroborate the narratives captured in archival sources: they tell stories that often overturn even the chronologies of stories told in the archives because of the subjective experiences and different worlds inhabited by these people. In fact, the subjectivity of the informants is seen as an advantage rather than a weakness as it tells us something about the consciousness of these informants.

On this, I have done my best to bring out the richness of this oral material in this study. Similar to the approach used by Belinda Bozzoli in her book titled *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983*, I have adopted a biographical approach

¹⁸⁸ See Jan Vansina. *Oral Tradition as History*. pp. 192-199; Alessandro Portelli. "What Makes Oral History Different". pp. 37-41.

¹⁸⁹ Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (eds.). *Oral History and Public Memories*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008). pp. 220-222.

in this study. Bozzoli's study is based on the recollections of twenty-two African women from Phokeng. Her work is presented using the women's life histories and emphasis is placed on the women as active participants in their own life choices. Similarly, in this study labour migrants are active participants in the labour migration process. I have given both male and female labour migrants a chance to share their experiences as they migrate from Malawi to South Africa and back to Malawi. Through this approach I have unveiled rich oral material on the migrants' experiences in question. One case in point is when I am discussing the challenges that labour migrants face: one female migrant decides to visit her husband who is working in South Africa and upon arrival, she discovers that her husband has a girlfriend. Not ready to confront the girlfriend, the wife hides under the bed while her husband is making love with the girlfriend on the bed (see page 151). A second instance is when I am discussing the migrants' belief in the effectiveness of local medicine: a labour migrant administers local medicine on a fellow sick migrant who gets healed instantly, but fellow migrants advise the patient to pretend he is still sick in order not to draw suspicions from the white bosses (see page 218). A third example is when I am discussing the challenges that labour migrants face in the residential areas in Johannesburg: a migrant vividly recounts how his friend was killed through necklacing after being caught stealing (see page 187).

One of the problems that arises in using oral sources is when one is writing about the developments that happened in the remote past. In this case oral sources are said to "undergo the distortion of faulty memory".¹⁹⁰ The informants tend to forget details about what actually happened. This problem tends to be complicated if the accounts are narrated by non-participants. However, in this study a good number of the informants are themselves participants in the labour migration process and they talk about developments in the recent past, that is, from the 1950s and 1960s onwards. In fact, some of them were interviewed right in their places of work in parts of Johannesburg. This is in line with the view by Alessandro Portelli who argues that "oral sources compensate chronological distance with a much closer personal involvement".¹⁹¹

There is also the widespread view that oral sources generally provide information about illiterate people or that it is mainly illiterate people who are involved. However, the reality is

¹⁹⁰ Alessandro Portelli. "What Makes Oral History Different". p. 37.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. p. 37.

that not all oral informants are illiterate. Some of these oral informants are able to “read books and newspapers, listen to the radio and television...keep diaries, letters and photograph albums”.¹⁹² This is true of the oral informants in this study: they are literate having attained basic primary school education before embarking on their labour migration journeys to South Africa. A good case in point here is Winfred Mphande¹⁹³ from Mtota Bota Village in Mzimba District who recorded his experiences in a diary while working in South Africa. During the interview with him in March 2016 he gave me his diary so that I should cross-check what he said during the interview with what he had recorded.

According to Elizabeth Tonkin, in using oral sources one of the ways a historian may use in reconstructing the past is by “bringing out old photographs or even objects which were current in the interviewee’s period”.¹⁹⁴ Tonkin justified this approach by arguing that

material evidences have all sorts of uses to those who wish to reconstruct the past. Oral historians may take advantage of the conditions of human life, which can include the survival of buildings, earthworks and documents beyond the lives of those who made them, and the emotional ties of humans to the objects which help to make their identity. No historian would want to rely only on oral accounts without making use of these other human features...¹⁹⁵

I conducted several oral interviews in different parts of northern Malawi over the years and being ‘a cultural insider’, informants were free to share their migration experiences. This is the reason one of the subjects said, “You are doing a very commendable job. Document our history and let people read it in the libraries. We do not want outsiders to document our history because they present a biased account”.¹⁹⁶ The informant here meant that outsiders do not understand the local languages and, therefore, rely on information being translated and interpreted by research assistants. In the process, some of the information gets distorted and diluted without these outsiders knowing, hence the end product is in some cases not a true reflection of what is obtaining on the ground. But the assumption being made by my informant above that my research findings will not be biased simply because I am a Malawian researcher is not correct. Such nativist approach to history is myopic and should not be condoned. However, a Malawian native would certainly have the advantage of being able to add an interesting perspective on

¹⁹² Ibid. p. 37.

¹⁹³ Interview with Winfred Mphande. Mtota Bota Village. T.A. M’mbelwa. Mzimba. 24/03/2016.

¹⁹⁴ Elizabeth Tonkin. *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). p. 94.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. pp. 95-96.

¹⁹⁶ Charles Makamo. Lead Informant and Ex-migrant. Zebediya Makamo Village. Mzimba. 17/01/2015.

the history of his country and illuminate on certain aspects that a non-native might not be able to do because of the former's cultural embeddedness into the people he or she is studying and the advantages that knowledge of a variety of local languages affords him or her.

At the same time, it was necessary to scrutinise the information from the subjects because in some cases there was a possibility of getting biased accounts since some informants would selectively divulge what they thought was needed. This is one of the challenges of being 'a cultural insider' during oral interviews. Benedict Carton and Louise Vis also point out another challenge of the interviewer's insider status: "Although it is easy for interviewers to gain access to interviewees, even the highest degree of insider status has its own drawbacks".¹⁹⁷ They cite the experiences of historian Mxolisi Mchunu in one of his research projects:

It was more difficult (for the interviewees) to tell me secrets, because unlike an outsider, I will not just leave... I found that with confidential things it might have been easier for them to talk to an outsider... [It] would be difficult for men to talk to me because then I would know things about their family. I am from that area, so they might worry that I would talk to others.¹⁹⁸

However, in this study, I was a cultural insider and an outsider at the same time. Being a cultural insider helped me in establishing a certain affinity and rapport usually not often accorded to an outsider. Reflecting on my positionality, I was a cultural outsider on a number of respects, for instance, I was not particularly from these specific study areas, hence this gave me an advantage in that the informants did not worry that the secrets they told me would be shared with their neighbours. In addition, I was an outsider on account of my education and gender: I am an educated young Malawian historian and I was interviewing elderly Malawians who are barely literate but knowledgeable on their own pasts and the history of their communities, and I am a man and my interview sample included women informants who were not completely at ease with my gender identity when it came to discussing issues related to their sexuality. This may help to explain why in certain cases I was getting limited information from my interviews with some women informants.

It is noteworthy that I used the life histories approach during oral interviews. Through this approach, I was able to get in-depth knowledge not only about my informants but also about the migrant households from which they came. In the end, I was able to conclude as to whether

¹⁹⁷ Benedict Carton and Louise Vis. "Doing Oral History". In Philippe Denis and Radikobo Ntsimane (eds.). *Oral History in a Wounded Country: Interactive Interviewing in South Africa*. (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008). p. 55.

¹⁹⁸ Cited in Philippe Denis and Radikobo Ntsimane (eds.). *Ibid.* p. 55.

labour migration during the contemporary period is a household issue or individual affair. By doing so, it was possible to test migration theories such as the new economics of migration and human agency.

Furthermore, some of the general challenges associated with gathering and utilising oral material are also applicable to this project. For instance, although ChiTumbuka is widely used in both Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts (and I am fluent in this language), I envisaged that some interviewees would be comfortable to be interviewed in ChiNgoni (Mzimba) and ChiTonga (Nkhata-Bay). In this case, I planned to use an interpreter. This brings in the challenge of accurate translation and transcription of recorded material.

However, during the actual interview process, I conducted most of the interviews in ChiTumbuka and ChiTonga. Being a Tumbuka from Mzimba, I had no problems conducting interviews among the Ngoni of Mzimba. This is because ChiNgoni has largely been inundated by ChiTumbuka, the dominant language of the conquered Tumbuka people of Rumph District (see map 1.1).¹⁹⁹ Even in Nkhata-Bay District, although the people speak ChiTonga, ChiTumbuka is also widely spoken. Hence, the interviews were also done in ChiTumbuka. However, for those predominantly done in ChiTonga, Mr Bishop Chavula, the research assistant, helped with the interpretation.

When conducting oral interviews, Benedict Carton and Louise Vis are of the view that researchers should be aware of age and gender protocols that govern hierarchical relationships. They give an example whereby a male researcher interviews a female informant: “If a male interviewer sets up a one-on-one interview with an unaccompanied (young) female interviewee, this meeting could stir uneasiness in a patriarchal community”.²⁰⁰ They, therefore, argue that the presence of an observer might be required. While Carton and Vis appreciate the advantages of such an arrangement, for instance, cross-checking of information, they also realise that it has notable disadvantages, for example, the observer might end up being a censor or even a distractor.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ ChiNgoni is currently only dominant in selected or few areas, for example in T.A. Mpherembe in the district. Although ChiTumbuka of the Ngoni of T.A.s M’mbelwa and Chindi is slightly different from the original or pure ChiTumbuka, I was able to comprehend the entire conversations.

²⁰⁰ Benedict Carton and Louise Vis. “Doing Oral History”. p. 52.

²⁰¹ Ibid. p. 52.

Similar situations cropped up while interviewing young female labour migrants in this study. The first scenario happened at Euthini Trading Centre in Mzimba where an interview with a female labour migrant, who owned a grocery shop, attracted the attention of her fellow business counter-parts and passers-by. It was only after they had realised that it was merely a formal, professional and academic encounter that they continued their ways. Likewise, at T.A. Malengamzoma's area in Nkhata-Bay while interviewing a young mother, although I was in the company of Bishop Chavula, a teacher in the area, female village elders were not pleased with this conversation. The elders suggested that the interview be cut short and allow her to attend to her bawling baby. From the background arguments, it was clear that they simply did not want her to be in a company of strange men. We then allowed her to attend to the elders, after which she came back. She told us that she had convinced them and that had allowed the interview to proceed.

Another challenge faced was resistance on the part of some informants to take part in this study. This was mainly common among the Tonga in Chintheche area of Nkhata-Bay. They strongly argued that they were not ready to take part in the study unless there were rewards from the outset. Their stand required a hard-edged response. Consequently, Bishop Chavula and I had to go into a long session of negotiation, arguing that academic research does not offer such benefits since the information sought is not for sale. We further educated them that such academic endeavours are not new in many places like the western part of Mzimba District. They eventually softened their stand and reluctantly helped us. The other problem that I faced was that some of their responses were rather prevaricating. However, we overcame this challenge by targeting many informants who were, conspicuously, willing to take part in the study.

Likewise, in Johannesburg, some of the interviewees were not willing to give in-depth interviews because of a sense of insecurity. This was a result of a hangover of the xenophobic atmosphere following the attacks on black foreigners in April 2015. It was also difficult to interview labour migrants since they were either working or in-doors. As a result, conducting the interviews during weekends especially after or before church services offered the solution. A number of labour migrants were also traced in Hilbrow, Johannesburg, at a place popularly known as *PabaMalawi* (literally meaning 'Malawians' place'). This is an area with many entertainment places and drinking joints where Malawian labour migrants in and around Johannesburg usually congregated on Saturdays and Sundays. During these days, most of them

were off-duty.²⁰² Consequently, by the time of the interviews in 2016, contacts with some Malawian labour migrants in Johannesburg were already made, for example, with a transporter and a driver.²⁰³

For fieldwork, I used a sample population of 100 informants (40 informants in each of the two study districts and 20 informants in Johannesburg). This included migrants and former migrants of both sexes. Purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that various categories of both men and women were interviewed. Thereafter, snowball sampling was used to identify targeted informants. I conducted semi-structured individual interviews using prepared questions in line with the life histories approach. In addition, I conducted key informant interviews with village headmen, teachers, politicians, the clergy and civil society leaders with knowledge of labour migration in the areas concerned. These interviews, among others, sought information on the labour migrants' motivations; categories involved; decision-making processes; the migrant households' economic self-sufficiency before and upon return; and also income diversification, generally.

In Mzimba District I conducted fieldwork in the areas of Traditional Authorities (T.A.s) M'Mbelwa, Chindi and Kapingo Sibande while in Nkhata-Bay, fieldwork was concentrated in areas of Mankhambira, Malanda and Malengamzoma. These areas were historically associated with international labour migration in northern Malawi. The interviews were then recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically.

In addition to the interviews held in Malawi and South Africa, I conducted several interviews with labour migrants and traders aboard Intercape and Chipozani buses plying between Malawi and South Africa (in transit) between June 2015 and October 2016. For instance, in 2015 alone I made four trips to and from South Africa. Labour migrants were either going to Malawi for holidays or returning to South Africa to resume work. As for traders, the majority of them were women who were going to South Africa to buy trade goods for resale in Malawi. These people were commonly interviewed during stoppages at border posts which mainly lasted one hour on

²⁰² These migrant workers took advantage of such meetings and social gatherings to share some of the problems that they were facing during their stay in South Africa. Some of these challenges include sicknesses, lack and loss of jobs, arrests and deportations of fellow migrants, and how to send both monetary and material assistance back home. These challenges have been examined at length in chapters five and seven.

²⁰³ The transporter operates between Johannesburg and northern Malawi; the driver works with a company in Johannesburg.

average. Although some of these interviews were informal, they were an eye opener on the challenges that these migrants and traders faced, not only *en route*, but also in South Africa.

This is work in progress since the oral material I generated through fieldwork in both Malawi and South Africa has not been fully processed. As such, I am currently using the material for personal use. However, the aim is to complete transcribing all the material into English. Once this is done I plan to deposit these transcripts either with Malawi National Archives Library in Zomba or with Mzuzu University Library so that other researchers can access them. Once this is done, the material will provide an alternative view on the dimensions of labour migration history between Malawi and South Africa, especially when compared with the colonial and post-colonial narratives currently available at the Malawi National Archives.

One of the practical advantages I had at the outset of this PhD study was the research experience I had acquired in social history (as an interviewer; recorder; transcriber; and translator) between 2004 and 2014 which proved very useful at the beginning of this study in 2015. I had worked as a research assistant under Dr. Makku Hokkanen (historian) and Dr. Jens Andersson (anthropologist) on labour migration issues in Mzimba District. I had also conducted several oral interviews in Zubayumo Makamo area²⁰⁴ and Ekwendeni (in Mzimba) and Livingstonia (in Rumphi). These interviews revealed the gendered dimension of migration during the contemporary period. I also had experience working with research assistants, having conducted a full-fledged research project on women's itinerant trading activities in Jenda area (Mzimba District) between November 2013 and July 2014.²⁰⁵

In January 2015, I made a preliminary research visit to T.A.s Mankhambira, Malanda, Fukamapiri and Malenganzoma in Nkhata-Bay District. The visit showed the pervasiveness of labour emigration to South Africa. Through this trip I made contacts with Mr. Bishop Chavula, a primary school teacher at Chintheche, and it is through his assistance that I compiled a list of potential interviewees.²⁰⁶ I also visited Zubayumo Makamo area, Engalaweni (T.A.

²⁰⁴ Part of these interviews culminated in my MA thesis in 2008. Some of these, especially on gendered migrancy, were relevant to my present study. The oral interviews I conducted with Dr. Markku Hokkanen between 2009 and 2011 on medicine and healing practices were relevant to a discussion on the interface between migration and local medicinal beliefs.

²⁰⁵ This project was co-funded by the Local Development Fund (LDF) under the Ministry of Finance (Malawi Government) and the African Development Bank (AfDB).

²⁰⁶ Mr. Bishop Chavula worked with me during oral interviews and actually proved useful in ChiTonga translations.

M'mbelwa), Chasato (my home area), Mathandani and Eswazini (T.A. Kampingo Sibande) in Mzimba District. This trip also confirmed the continuation of emigration to South Africa. Consequently, when I actually embarked on conducting oral interviews in these areas, it was relatively easy to identify and convince my research informants since some of them had already been alerted about the need for their involvement during the preliminary visits a year earlier.

Secondary Sources

For comprehensive literature review, on international labour migration from Malawi both during the old and new periods, I relied on resources at Chancellor College Library in Zomba and Mzuzu University Library in Mzuzu. However, for the perspectives on international labour migration on South Africa, specifically, and in southern Africa, generally, I relied much on the libraries at the University of the Witwatersrand. Secondary literature included books, theses, dissertations and research articles by social and economic historians and anthropologists such as Wiseman Chijere Chirwa, Markku Hokannen and Jens Andersson. These sources provided valuable information on the informality and illegality of labour migration, especially in the early 1990s. The works by Markku Hokannen and Boston Soko did shed light on the traditional medicinal beliefs among northern Malawians in general.

6. Chapter Outline

This thesis has a total of seven substantive chapters including this chapter. The foregoing chapter has highlighted the rationale, central arguments and guiding theories and methodologies used. It has also examined literature with a view to establish a gap which this study attempts to fill. Chapter two revisits both primary and secondary literature on the nature and decline of mine migrancy from Malawi. It argues that 'the decline incidents' (i.e. the 1974 plane crash and the 1987 HIV debate) were merely a culmination of the developments (favouring the decline in question) which started in the 1960s, especially following the attainment of independence.

While chapter two highlights the developments preceding and surrounding the decline in mine migrancy, chapter three examines the escalation of labour migration from Malawi on an informal basis. The chapter examines the informal labour migration, which occurred alongside formal migration, during the pre-1990 period and the reasons behind its increase during the post-1990 period. The following are some of the macro-level factors discussed: the transition

from the apartheid regime to democratic governance in South Africa in 1994, and, similarly, the transition from one-party regime to multi-party politics in Malawi in 1994 and the free movement of peoples at the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) level. The chapter also examines the following micro-level factors: the development of long-term migrant strategies; information flow between Malawi and South Africa through pioneer migrants; language convergences; and cultural practices.

Chapter three examines the informal nature of labour migration during both the pre-1990 and the post-1990 periods. Chapter four continues with the discussion of this informal migration by examining women's joining of migration during these two periods. Although men's informal migration to South Africa is traced to as early as the 1880s, women's migration only became notable later on, for instance, from the 1930s and 1940s onwards. Women largely joined as wives accompanying their husbands. During the post-1990 period, however, women emigrate for various reasons and these reasons are largely associated with seeking wage employment. The chapter argues that women are active financial agents and builders of social capital like their male counterparts.

Chapter five unveils the challenges of stay and the devised survival mechanisms in South Africa. It is the labour migrants' determination to fulfil their goals (of migrating) that compels them to resort to 'ulterior' means of survival. Some of them resort to re-emigrating to South Africa after being deported, hence circular labour migration. In sum, the chapter examines some of the following issues: the easiness and difficulty of securing jobs; the frequent arrests and consequent deportations; high crime rate and xenophobia or Afro-phobia; and the process of integrating into the South African society. Interestingly, while some migrants achieve their goals and return home, others end up overstaying in South Africa despite the fierce challenges.

In chapter six I examine the interface between labour migration and traditional medicinal practices among labour migrants both in Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts. I argue that most migrants have entrenched beliefs in the use of *mankhwala gha chifipa* (local medicine) for various purposes, for example, job-seeking and protection from various challenges while in South Africa. Although such medicinal practices are entrenched in both districts, evidence shows that labour migrants from Mzimba District rely on the use of such medicine to a greater degree than their Nkhata-Bay counterparts. In this chapter I also examine the role played by hospitals and Malawian-owned private clinics in popularising biomedicine amongst labour

migrants since the 1960s. This is in addition to the exposure to biomedicine that Malawian mine workers had in South Africa in the early twentieth century.

Chapter seven examines the linkage among labour migration, role of remittances, and the resultant development in the labour-source areas. It unveils the role of technology by comparing how remittances were sent during the old period and during the contemporary period: use of letters; telegrams; phone bureaux; internet and banking. The study advances the argument that the improvement in technology has had the desirable impact on the sending of *ndalama* and *katundu*. The chapter also shows some of the major challenges associated with remittance usage: lack of sound investment and diversification. On the whole, the chapter attempts to assess the developmental impact of labour migration in the source areas.

Lastly, chapter eight presents worthwhile conclusions drawn from the study. For instance, it argues that there was salient competition between formal migration and *selufu* throughout the 20th century. Here, while labour migrants from Mzimba District preferred to emigrate under the auspices of *Wenela* and (later on) TEBA, their counterparts from Nkhata-Bay preferred *selufu* in its stead. The chapter also argues that both male and female labour migrants from the two study districts were making rational and purposive decisions whether to emigrate or not at any given point in time. In addition, the study also shows that their determination to succeed was an engine that propelled them to remain focused and to overcome the myriad challenges which they faced in South Africa. In the course of their stay, the study has shown that these labour migrants devised and employed survival strategies. One of these was reliance on the use of *mankhwala gha mwabi* (luck medicine) and protection against arrests and deportations and other unforeseen circumstances.

Chapter Two

The Nature and Decline of Labour Migration, 1970s-1980s

1. Introduction

This chapter examines the history of labour migration from Malawi to South Africa in the twentieth century, especially from the 1970s. The aim is to trace the decline in mine migration and, in its stead, the gradual increase in informal labour migration, locally known as *selufu*.¹ It is noteworthy that for a larger part during the stated period, formal labour migration occurred alongside *selufu*. While labour recruitment from Nyasaland was intermittent, due to the banning and unbanning of recruitment by the government, *selufu* continued undisturbed. This was in spite of the government restrictions and control of informal labour migration. This chapter largely examines the male nature of labour migration since women were not officially allowed to join the labour migration process. Despite this, there were still elements of female migration, especially under *selufu*. In short, this chapter focuses on the end of the recruitment activities of the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA, commonly referred to as *Wenela*) in Malawi following the 1974 plane crash incident, and the beginning and the end of labour recruitment by The Employment Bureau of Africa (TEBA)² during the 1970s and 1980s.

It also gives an overview of the competition for Malawian labour supply on different fronts: between the recruiting agencies and also between formal labour migration and *selufu*. It shows that although the Malawi government made efforts to control the numbers of labour migrants emigrating for wage employment abroad, it managed to regulate formal employment, but somewhat failed to control *selufu*. Part of this failure emanated from the government's own ambivalent attitude not only towards *selufu*, but also towards female labour migration. This government's failure to control *selufu* has been examined in chapter three.

¹ *Selufu* is a Tumbuka word in northern Malawi and is derived from the word self and it stands for self or independent migration.

² TEBA was formed by merging WNLA and the Native Recruiting Corporation (NRC) to mastermind labour recruitment for the South Africa's mines. TEBA was locally known as *Theba*.

For close to a century since the 1880s, Malawi was one of the major labour-supplying areas in southern Africa. A greater part of the labour supply³ from Malawi was destined for South African mines⁴ and, to a lesser extent, Zimbabwean mines and farms⁵ (see Map of Southern Africa below). This development was largely due to lack of wage-earning opportunities within Nyasaland or colonial Malawi.⁶ Where wage employment opportunities were available locally, for instance, in the Shire Highlands and Blantyre District area, the wages on offer were comparatively little compared to those obtaining abroad, especially in the South African mines. Coleman indicates that in the early years of the twentieth century, wages in Nyasaland were between 3 and 6 shillings per month while the same kind of job attracted between 30 and 45 shillings per month in South Africa.⁷ Low wages in Nyasaland paled in the face of hut taxes imposed by the Nyasaland Protectorate around the 1890s. It is against this background that many Malawian migrants sought better-paying employment outside Nyasaland either through formal labour recruitment channels or *selufu*. The situation was such that during certain periods, for example, during the colonial period, “the majority of wage earners from Malawi were employed outside the country”.⁸

³ Informants indicated that Malawian migrants preferred emigrating to South Africa because of the higher wages than those obtaining in colonial Zimbabwe. However, even the archives do not indicate the actual numbers involved.

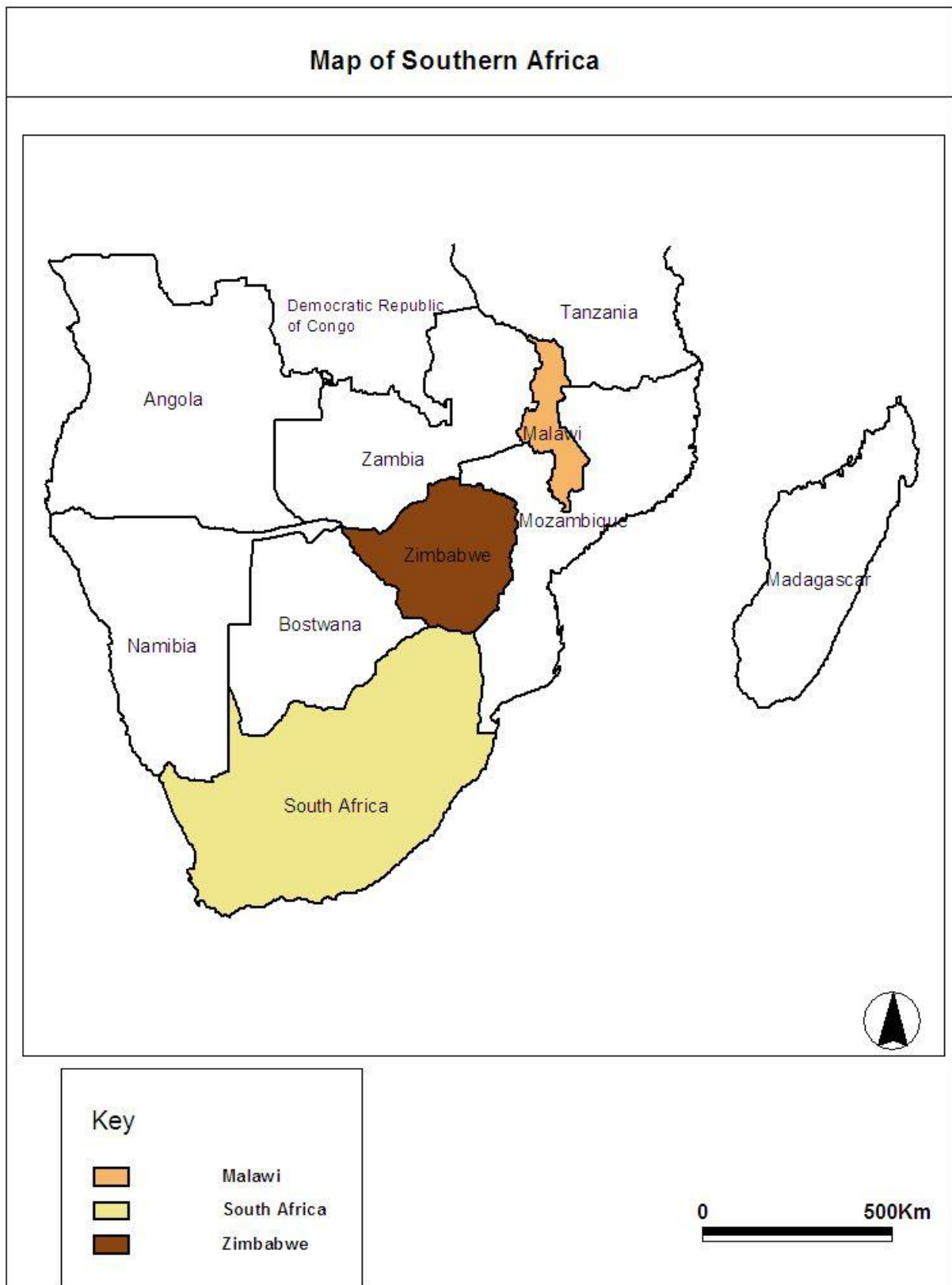
⁴ For details on labour migration from Malawi to South Africa during the earlier period from the 1880s to the 1950s, see Robert Boeder. *Malawians Abroad: The History of Labour Emigration from Malawi to its Neighbours, 1980 to the Present*. (Ann Arbor: East Lansing, Michigan State University, 1974); F.E. Sanderson. “The Development of Labour Migration from Nyasaland, 1891-1914”. *Journal of African History*. (1961, 2). pp. 259-271; G. Coleman. “International Labour Migration from Malawi, 1875-1966”. *Journal of Social Science*. (1972, 2). pp. 31-46; and John McCracken. *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*. (New York: James Currey, 2012). pp. 74-99 and 162-192. For information on the South African mines and how they ‘exploited’ foreign migrant labour from the ‘satellite countries’, see, for example, Jonathan Crush, Alan Jeeves and David Yudelman. *South Africa’s Labour Empire: A History of Black Migrancy to the Gold Mines*. (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers Ltd., 1991); Alan Jeeves. *Migrant Labour in South Africa’s Mining Economy: The Struggle for the Gold Mines’ Labour Supply, 1890-1920*. (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1985); and David Yudelman. *The Emergence of Modern South Africa: State, Capital and the Importation of Organised Labour on the South African Gold Fields, 1902-1939*. (Cambridge: CUP, 1972).

⁵ For details on the nature of labour migration from Malawi to Zimbabwe during the colonial period, see Zoe R. Groves. “Malawians in Colonial Salisbury: A Social History of Migration in Central Africa, c. 1920s-1960s” Unpublished PhD Thesis. Keele University. 2011. By focusing on the period between the 1920s and the 1960s and on colonial Salisbury, Zoe Groves argues that Malawian migrants made significant contributions towards the creation of particular urban and ethnic identities. She also appreciates in her study that these labour migrants comprised both men and women. The latter either emigrated as wives or independent single women. It is noteworthy that the emigration of various categories of both women and men from Malawi, especially since the 1990s is examined in depth in chapters three and four in my thesis. See also E.P. Makambe. “The Nyasaland African Labour ‘Ulendos’ to Southern Rhodesia and the Problem of the African ‘Highway Men’, 1903-1923”. *African Affairs*. (1980, 79). pp. 548-566.

⁶ Nyasaland which was declared a British Protectorate in 1891 became Malawi following the attainment of independence in 1964.

⁷ G. Coleman. “International Labour Migration from Malawi”. p. 37.

⁸ Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy in the Development of Southern Africa* (Macmillan: Macmillan Press Limited, 1995). p. 26.



Map 2.1: Map of Southern Africa showing Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa⁹

⁹ In the past, Zimbabwe was equally an important destination for Malawian migrants because of the attractive mines and farms. However, it is no longer a major attraction for labour migrants following the faltering of its then buoyant economy. It is worth noting that during the period of mine migrancy from Malawi up to the late 1980s,

Literature shows that the Tonga of Nkhata-Bay District were the pioneers of labour migration from colonial Malawi to South Africa.¹⁰ At the end of the nineteenth century, the Tonga were relatively well educated as compared to other ethnic groupings, for example, the Tumbuka and the Ngoni in northern Malawi. This was attributable to the missionary influence, especially Bandawe Mission¹¹ which was established in the Chintheche area by the Church of Scotland Missions in 1881, and became part of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian in 1926.¹² The missionaries did not only open churches but also mission schools where the Tonga attained education. Consequently, by 1900 a few Tonga were able to read and write and questioned the lack of employment opportunities in their area and thus out-migrated to the Shire Highlands for wage employment. Although most of them secured employment here, the wages were low.¹³ For instance, it is maintained that during the early years of the twentieth century, the rate of pay for wage employment, for example, plantation labour in colonial Malawi was 3 shillings per month. However, similar kind of wage labour could earn between 30 and 45 shillings per month in the Transvaal mines, and between 15 and 30 shillings per month in colonial Zimbabwe.¹⁴ It was the white missionaries who alerted the Tonga around the 1880s about the availability of relatively higher-paying jobs outside the country. This marked the beginning of the phenomenal labour migration from Malawi not only to South Africa, but also to other colonies in the region such as Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and even Tanganyika to the north.¹⁵

On the issue of securing employment during the earlier period of labour migration, Ulrich Weyl argues that Malawian labour migrants were usually able to obtain better paid employment in

Malawian labour migrants under *selufu* largely used to emigrate on foot. In this case, they usually headed westwards through Zambia stopping in Zimbabwe before eventually reaching the ultimate destination, South Africa. As later sections of this chapter indicate, this would rightly be termed step migration. Interestingly, some of these migrants failed to reach South Africa, either working in Zimbabwe and thereafter returning back home or settling permanently there-in, becoming *matchona* (the overstayers) in the process. See also MNA S36/3/2/5 Nyasaland Natives in the Union of South Africa.

¹⁰ See chapter one for details on this.

¹¹ Bandawe Mission was initially part of the Church of Scotland Missions (i.e. under the Free Church of Scotland), but in 1926 it became part of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (C.C.A.P.).

¹² B. Pachai. *Malawi: The History of the Nation*. (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1973). p. 17.

¹³ See John McCracken. *A History of Malawi*. p. 84; and B. Pachai. *Malawi: The History of the Nation*. p. 119.

¹⁴ G. Coleman. "International Labour Migration from Malawi". p. 37.

¹⁵ Although Malawian migrants have for a long time been freely emigrating to these countries, the strength in the attraction or pull by each country has always depended on the comparative wages offered to the wage earners. That is why in terms of prominence one would argue that these countries have always been ranked as follows: South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Tanzania as the least desirable destination country. The situation seems applicable even during the democratic era in Malawi. Some informants from Nkhata-Bay argued that although they go to Tanzania, the major destination country remains South Africa, in spite of the numerous challenges that labour migrants face there. For details on this, see chapters three, five and six.

the mining industry because of their higher level of literacy. This was a result of the missionary education system, as highlighted above.

With the advantage that an early mission education gave them, many of the 'Nyasa' workers sought the better-paid, semi-skilled jobs. In general, they shunned underground work and were more prominent in roles like compound police, cooks, hospital orderlies and stores assistants.¹⁶

Available archival information on *Wenela* and TEBA in the 1970s and 1980s also supports Weyl's view and highlights the kind of mine jobs that Malawian miners usually secured in the South African mines: underground police, winch driver, cook, driller, engineer, mason, crushers and night guard.¹⁷

Oral evidence also confirms the view that Malawian labour migrants were versatile workers, that is, they were engaged to do different jobs.¹⁸ Davison Chakwira is a former *Wenela* and TEBA miner. He comes from Tadeyo Chakwira Village in Mzimba District. He first went to South Africa under *Wenela* in 1972 and worked at Bevasfontein Mine. He used part of the proceeds to buy cattle with which he used to pay *lobola* (bride price). Between 1982 and 1989, he went back under *Theba*; this time he worked at Harmony Mine. He largely worked as a "mtchini boy" (machine operator). Chakwira's account below shows the labour migrants' eagerness to learn various jobs:

At first, under *Wenela*, I was just doing temporary jobs here and there right in the mine. But I realised I was getting little money. That's why I requested the white bosses that I be allowed to go for training...Thereafter, I was sent for an engineering course. I did that successfully. After that I was moved to the engineering section right inside the mine. I was involved in operating various machinery. I then noted that my wages had significantly improved. During the second trip, under *Theba* (TEBA), they said I should do the same job (engineering section); that I was very energetic. But I refused and engaged the white bosses for change of jobs until they sent me for training. This time I trained as a "mtchini boy" (machine operator). As a result, my wages went up and I was very happy. I was drilling holes. In addition to my normal job, I used to be given some piece jobs and used to be paid per hole drilled. Hence if I drilled 100 holes, I used to get a lot of money.¹⁹

Anthony Chauma is a former *Wenela* and *Theba* migrant who also did several jobs in the mines. He started working in South African mines in 1966 and finally returned home in 1989 after *Theba*'s recruitment operations were terminated in Malawi. He once worked at St. Helena Mine in the Orange Free State. In addition to doing various jobs such as those of a driller and a crusher, he was promoted to a supervisory position, upon which he was also trained in first aid

¹⁶ Ulrich Weyl. *Labour Migration and Underdevelopment in Malawi: Late 19th Century to Mid 1970s*. p. 53. See also Charles van Onselen. *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933* (London, 1976).

¹⁷ MNA 172/TEBA/1/8/5 Repatriates: March – April 1988. For more information, see also MNA 172/TEBA/1/9/22 Arrival and Departure Register, June 1987 – March 1988.

¹⁸ See chapter five for details on the versatility of Malawian labour migrants.

¹⁹ Interview with Davison Chakwira. Tadeyo Chakwira Village. T.A. Kampingo Sibande. Mzimba. 27/08/2015.

to assist colleagues in case of accidents. “In the South African mines there was a policy that as a leader among your colleagues, you needed to know first aid, for example, how to stop bleeding in case of an accident”, Chauma explained.²⁰

It was partly because of their ability to do different mine jobs that their immediate bosses preferred working with them. As a result of this, some migrants were moved from underground mine jobs to the surface jobs as part of promotion. A good example is Gilbert Ndhlovu, who first went to South Africa under *Wenela* between 1971 and 1973 when he worked at Frankfontein Mine in Benoni on the East Rand. He worked as a machine operator. Gilbert eventually worked as a Stores Clerk at the mine surface at the same mine after previously working underground.²¹ He later did several contracts under *Theba* (1978-1989). This time he worked at Harmony Mine in Orange Free State. Migrants preferred working at the mine surface because underground jobs were both tough and risky (see photographs 2.2 and 2.3).

However, some ex-migrants indicated that they initiated their transfer from the surface to the underground in order to get better wages. Reyneck Mvula from Thateya Mvula Village in Mzimba actually staged a sit-in and had to beat a white mine policeman in order to be moved from the surface job to an underground one in a bid to get more wages:

At first they said I was young so I was working on the surface. But that was not well paying. I insisted to go underground but they refused. So I stopped going to work. They sent police officers to threaten me but I stood my ground. I never returned to work. The police came again. One of them whipped me. I grabbed the whip. Now it was my turn, I whipped him until he ran away. Then they sent three other police officers who picked me to the Manager. There I explained my position. I was told that a doctor was to assess me first before going underground. So I was allowed. I went for a two weeks training for that job. I was happy now because money was enough.²²

On this, it is proper to argue that mine workers were attracted by the wages attached to a particular mine job, whether this job was on the surface or underground (see table 2.1 below).

²⁰ Interview with Anthony Chauma, Yokobe Ngwira Village. T.A. Kampingo Sibande. Mzimba. 26/08/2015.

²¹ Interview with Gilbert Ndhlovu, Bonga Ndhlovu Village. T.A. Kampingo Sibande. Mzimba. 26/08/2015.

²² Interview with Reyneck Mvula, Thateya Mvula Village. T.A. Chindi. Mzimba. 13/01/2016.

Table 2.1: Surface and underground mine wages – minimum rate per fortnight²³

Job Category	Surface	Underground
Category 1	R34.62	R46.15
Category 2	R38.32	R52.44
Category 3	R45.48	R59.52
Category 4	R54.24	R67.68
Category 5	R64.56	R79.20
Category 6	R77.52	R92.64
Category 7	R91.98	R108.36

It is clear from this table that although underground jobs attracted higher rates than those on the surface, what mattered most was the type of job (job category) that a miner occupied. For instance, a Stores Clerk (category 6) on the surface got higher wages than a crusher (for example, in category 2) underground.

2. Nature of Labour Migration, 1880s – 1970s

The period from the 1880s to the 1970s and 1980s, which is generally referred to as the old labour migration period,²⁴ can be further sub-divided into three clear-cut and smaller phases based on the nature of labour migration, the numbers of labour migrants involved and the role of the state in controlling labour migration. The first phase starts from the 1880s to the 1920s. This may be regarded as the formative stage. During the latter period, there was competition between mining companies for labour. Consequently, the mining companies formed the Native Recruiting Corporation (NRC)²⁵ and WNLA as labour recruiting agencies. NRC was in charge of local recruitment while WNLA focused on foreign recruitment. The second stage, the 1920s to the 1960s, is the ascendancy period. By the 1920s the NRC and WNLA had dealt with competition and established monopoly on both local and foreign labour recruitment. The last stage, clearly visible from the 1970s, marks the decline in mine migration.²⁶ During the last

²³ MNA 172/TEBA/1/3/4 WNLA Agreement, January 1976-March 1983. These were the new mine wages following the 1980 Wage Review by TEBA. It is worth noting that the details on the types of jobs under each category are missing in the file since the intention was to show the new rates following the review in question.

²⁴ International labour migration from Malawi to South Africa is categorised into two broad periods: old labour migration (1880s – 1980s) and contemporary migration period (since the 1990s). For details on these periods, see chapter one. See also Harvey C.C. Banda. “Gendered Patterns of Malawian Contemporary Migrancy: The Case of Zubayumo Makamo Area in Mzimba District, 1970s-2005” (Unpublished MA Thesis). Zomba. History Department. Chancellor College. University of Malawi. 2008.

²⁵ This body was specifically established to oversee local labour recruitment for the South Africa’s mines.

²⁶ For details on these phases, see Jonathan Crush, Alan Jeeves and David Yudelman. *South Africa’s Labour Empire*. pp 4-12; and Jonathan Crush. “Migrations Past: An Historical Overview of Cross-Border Movement in

phase, South Africans joined the mines in large numbers and this was partly a result of the introduction of the policy of internalisation by the mines.²⁷

Although the last period became notable in the 1970s, it dates back to the 1960s when most African countries attained independence. Following the latter, most independent African countries in southern Africa were not willing to supply their labour to South Africa, partly because of high labour demands within their countries, hence the decline. These phases, which will be elaborated in the ensuing sections of the chapter, are similar to categorisation of the South African mine industry by Jonathan Crush, Alan Jeeves and David Yudelman in the *South Africa's Labour Empire*: the formative phase (1890 – 1920); the expansionary phase (1920 – 1970); and the contemporary phase since the 1970s.²⁸

During the formative phase, 1880s to the 1930s, there was huge demand for labour in the diamond and gold mines which had just been opened in South Africa. Coincidentally, there was also high demand for labour from the supplying areas both within and outside South Africa. This was partly because of colonial taxation and lack of better-paying jobs in southern African countries including colonial Malawi. This demand for labour compelled the South African Chamber of Mines to enter into negotiations with labour-supplying countries further afield, hence the beginning of formal labour recruitment from Malawi in 1903.²⁹ Thus using the NRC within South Africa and WNLA, or *Wenela*, within South Africa's neighbouring countries, the Chamber of Mines ensured a somewhat steady supply of labour into the mines. By 1920, the NRC and WNLA had achieved monopoly in recruiting labour for the mines.³⁰

However, this period was characterised by a lengthy ban on foreign recruiting from 1909 to the 1930s. This was due to the high death rates amongst black mine workers, especially those from the tropics.³¹ In the case of colonial Malawi, the local planters in the Shire Highlands, who

Southern Africa". In David A. MacDonald (ed.). *On Borders: Perspectives on International Migration in Southern Africa*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). pp. 13-14.

²⁷ The policy of internalisation is discussed at length later in the chapter.

²⁸ For details on these phases, see Jonathan Crush, Alan Jeeves and David Yudelman. *South Africa's Labour Empire*. pp. 4-12.

²⁹ See, for example, B. Pachai. *Malawi: The History of the Nation*. p. 119.

³⁰ Jonathan Crush. "Migrations Past". p. 14.

³¹ The major reasons for the high mortality rate during this period were pulmonary diseases, for example, tuberculosis and pneumonia, which were aggravated by poor ventilation both in the mines and compounds and cold weather. Malawian labour recruits including others from the tropical areas were not accustomed to such conditions. For details on this, see for example Randall M. Packard. *White Plague, Black Labour: Tuberculosis and the Political Economy of Health and Disease in South Africa* (California: California University Press, 1989);

were looking to tap the same labour supply, took advantage of this development to impress on the government to ban recruiting.³² Consequently, foreign recruiting was banned between 1909 and 1934, the impact of which is illustrated in the drastically reduced numbers of formal migration to South Africa in table 3.³³ It is worth noting, though, that the government failed to control informal labour migration, *selufu*, during this period. The increase in the number of informal labour migrants from Nyasaland during this ban period attests to this.³⁴ In 1928 some 11,000 *selufu* migrants were reported in South Africa.³⁵ In 1941 approximately 28,000 travelled to South Africa independently, compared to 3,621 who were recruited for the mines.³⁶ In fact, *selufu* proved difficult to control by the government since the 1880s. Sanderson also sheds light on this ban and the consequent increase in *selufu* migrants during this period:

The death-rate of those recruited from Malawi (then Nyasaland) by the WNLA was consistently above 100 per mille per annum, and it was evident that the rate of those travelling independently and unsupervised and contracting for work on the farms and on the unfederated mines was likely to be higher ... Again the cessation of recruitment did not deter migration, though the conditions in the mines must have been well known to the migrants who tended to travel abroad in groups led by experienced travellers.³⁷

Regarding the destination of labour migrants from Nyasaland, at first, they were going not only to South Africa, but also Southern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia before developments in the latter two countries forced them to concentrate on South Africa. In this connection, Francis Wilson argues that

Malawi had long depended on the earnings of her migrants not only to South Africa, but also to Rhodesia and to the copper mines of Central Africa. But the copper mines no longer employed oscillating migrants and the Rhodesian economy, faced by a high rate of population growth, was becoming increasingly troubled by unemployment of its own citizens. Thus Malawi's dependence on the economy from South Africa was likely to grow.³⁸

An examination of the changing pattern of the geographical sources of labour for the South African mines supports this view. In fact, it shows the increasing dependence of the South African mines on labour migrants from Malawi over the years before the decline in the 1970s.

and W.C. Chirwa. "*Theba is Power: Rural Labour, Migrancy and Fishing in Malawi, 1890s-1985*" (PhD Thesis). Kingston, Ontario. Queens University. 1992. p. 124.

³² See, for example, G. Coleman. "International Labour Migration from Malawi". p. 38.

³³ The numbers were particularly small during the ban years; see the years 1920-1935 on table 3.

³⁴ Literature shows that Malawian labour migrants continued to 'flow' to South Africa, but clandestinely this time. For more information, see F.E. Sanderson. "The Development of Labour Migration from Nyasaland". p. 268.

³⁵ Wiseman Chirwa. "*Theba is Power*". p. 161. See also MNA S36/3/2/5 Nyasaland Natives in the Union of South Africa.

³⁶ Henry Mitchell. "Independent Africans: Migration from Colonial Malawi to South Africa, c. 1935-1961" (MA Thesis). University of Edinburgh. August 2014. p. 30.

³⁷ F.E. Sanderson. "The Development of Labour Migration from Nyasaland, 1891-1914". p. 267.

³⁸ Francis Wilson. *Migrant Labour in South Africa*. (Johannesburg: South African Council of Churches, 1972). p. 114.

Literature shows that between 1936 and 1972, the total number of blacks who were employed by the Chamber of Mines rose from 318,000 to 381,000. Of these, 172, 793 are said to have been recruited from Malawi.³⁹ However, the number of South Africans in this total (figure) fell drastically from 166,000 to 85,000.⁴⁰

The increase in the numbers of labour migrants became notable in the 1930s following the lifting of the ban in 1935. By 1940, the Southern Rhodesian farms were formally recruiting labour from colonial Malawi through the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau, known in colonial Malawi as *Mthandizi*, a term which literally meant ‘a helper’, deriving from the fact that most of its recruits for the Southern Rhodesian farms had actually failed to meet *Wenela*’s recruitment requirements. In addition, RNLB also allowed migrants to emigrate with their wives and at least one child.⁴¹ Thus, the lifting of the ban ushered in competition over Malawian labour supply between *Wenela* and *Mthandizi*.⁴² However, official recruiting was suspended repeatedly during the WWII.⁴³ With the increase in the number of Malawian labour migrants after the 1930s, colonial Malawi eventually came to acquire the role of ‘a labour reserve’.⁴⁴

Several changes were notable in the nature of labour migration: first, the origins of labour within the country broadened – labour migrants started coming from almost all parts of the country; second the destination areas also changed – at first labour migrants were destined mainly to the South African mines and plantations, but after *Mthandizi* started its recruitment operations, some migrants were recruited to work on the farms in colonial Zimbabwe. For instance, between 1931 and 1972 total migration from Malawi rose from a meagre 50,000 migrants to over 480,000 migrants.⁴⁵ In addition, during the first years of this period, most of the migrants came from the Northern Province (northern region). In 1934 out of a total of 63,078 migrants outside the Nyasaland Protectorate, 52,571 came from the northern region, while only 10,507 migrants came from the south.⁴⁶ By the 1960s, the origins of the labour migrants had shifted and this was partly a function of changed patterns of internal migration in

³⁹ Jonathan Crush. “Migrations Past”. p. 15.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 114.

⁴¹ See Harvey C.C. Banda. “Competition for the Labour Supply in Mzimba District: The Case of *Wenela* and *Mthandizi*, 1906-1956”. Chancellor College. University of Malawi. Zomba. 2000.

⁴² Details about competition between *Wenela* and *Mthandizi* come later in the chapter.

⁴³ See Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy*. p. 27.

⁴⁴ See Ulrich Weyl. *Labour Migration and Underdevelopment in Malawi*. p. 51.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 52.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 58.

Malawi. One development which was behind this was the opening of tobacco estates in the northern and central regions.⁴⁷

It is clear that mine migrancy in South Africa entered a decline in the 1970s. This was a result of both internal and external factors. On the one hand, the move towards internalisation or localisation, the abolition of fixed international gold prices, and growing violence and social and political instability, as well as the consequent production disruptions caused economic decline and reduced demand for external migrant labourers.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the intention by the newly-independent countries to use labour within their countries, despite the need for foreign exchange revenue, compelled them to discourage emigration for wage employment.

Government Control of Labour Migration

Government control was aimed at discouraging informal labour migration and regulating formal or official labour migration. The government was against *selufu* and unregulated formal recruiting because of the disruptive effects on rural life.⁴⁹ The government embraced this stand following a string of complaints from the missionaries.⁵⁰ The white planters in the Shire Highlands echoed the missionaries' sentiments since reduced or controlled labour emigration meant increased local labour supply in their tea plantations.

In order to ensure that Malawians paid various forms of colonial taxes and, at the same time, provided labour in the estates and plantations within the country, government introduced a system of forced labour in lieu of rent, locally known in Chichewa as *thangata*.⁵¹ *Thangata* evolved three different meanings as the nature of off-farm labour mutated through time. According to Kandawire, *thangata*'s original meaning was that of reciprocal exchange of labour amongst neighbours in a particular village:

thangata simply means 'help'. Africans assist one another in different ways. When someone builds a hut others assist him today and tomorrow the order will be reversed. The former may assist the latter not necessarily in a similar kind of work. This time it may be the cultivation of fields which needs more than one pair of hands to attend to. In whatever type of work, Africans assist one another, such assistance is given voluntarily. The concept of *thangata* in this sense refers to the voluntary and reciprocal cooperation among kinsmen, affines, friends or neighbours. Secondly, *thangata* referred to villagers' tribute labour to their chiefs in return for their protection. And thirdly was an element of forced or coerced labour; for instance, European planters demanded labour service from those residing on the land that they 'owned'

⁴⁷ See Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy*. p. 49.

⁴⁸ Jonathan Crush et al. *South Africa's Labour Empire*. p. 14.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Robert Boeder. *Malawians Abroad*. pp. 195-208; and Margaret Read. "Migrant Labour in Africa and Its effects on Tribal Life". *International Labour Review*. (1942, 14: 2). pp. 605-631.

⁵⁰ Robert Boeder. *Malawians Abroad*. pp. 195-197.

⁵¹ *Thangata* is a local Chichewa or Chinyanja word which literally means 'coming to somebody's rescue'.

in lieu of rent payments. It is not surprising that the local population was bitter with this arrangement and consequently avoided payment.⁵²

This system was in operation between 1904 and 1962. Under *thangata*, Africans were compelled to perform one month's labour *in lieu* of hut tax and another month's labour as rent. In addition, this was also in exchange for eight acres of arable land by the estate or plantation owner. However, Africans were not allowed to grow their own crops on their pieces of land, not even during their free time.⁵³ At its worst, planters deliberately stretched the two months of labour by with-holding their signature from the tax certificates – the only proof of the need for tax exemption. *Thangata*, locally regarded as a form of slave labour, consequently drew bitter reaction from Malawians.⁵⁴

In general, farmers were against the formalisation of *thangata* by the colonial government. This resentment deepened with time, leading in 1953 to an outbreak of peasant-based violence, which John McCracken has described as “the nearest that Central Africa experienced at this period to the Mau Mau revolt in Kenya”.⁵⁵ Apart from *thangata*, the 1953 riots were also a result of the resentment against *malimidwe* (conservation rules and farming techniques) imposed by the Department of Agriculture. However, *thangata* was finally abolished in 1962 when the 1928 Ordinance was replaced by the 1962 Africans on Private Estates Ordinance that granted tenant farmers security of tenure and replaced all forms of *thangata* with cash rents.⁵⁶

The question one would ask at this juncture is: What happened after the abolition of the infamous *thangata* system? After *thangata* practices were outlawed, Malawians could instead either work for wages on large tobacco, tea and sugar estates or as labour tenants on these farms. Landlords allocated land to labour tenants and bought back the produce at prices they, themselves, determined. This was the beginning of the exploitative tenancy system still in

⁵² J.A.K. Kandawire, *Thangata: Forced Labour or Reciprocal Assistance?* (Blantyre: Hetherwick Press, 1979); also cited in Deborah Fahy Bryceson, “Ganyu: Casual Labour, Famine and HIV/ AIDS in Rural Malawi: Causality and Casualty”. *Journal of Modern African Studies*. (2006, 44: 2). pp. 175-176. See also John McCracken. *A History of Malawi*. p. 257; and John G. Pike. *Malawi: A Political and Economic History*. (London: Pall Mall Press, 1968) pp. 187-188.

⁵³ Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy*. p. 31.

⁵⁴ *Thangata* together with *malimidwe* i.e. proper farming practices became the rallying point in the 1950s amongst nationalists as they fought the colonialists for self-rule. For details on *thangata* and *malimidwe*, see for example, Wapulumuka O. Mulwafu. “The Interface of Christianity and Conservation in Colonial Malawi”. *Journal of Religion in Africa*. (2004, 34: 3). p. 311; and Erik Green. *Peasant Production and Limits to Labour: Thyolo and Mzimba Districts in Malawi, mid-1930s to late-1970s*. (Lund: Lund University Press, 2005). *passim*.

⁵⁵ John McCracken. *A History of Malawi*. p. 304.

⁵⁶ Landeg White. *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village*. (Cambridge: CUP, 1987). pp. 87-88.

practice in Malawi up to date.⁵⁷ The remainder of income earners was absorbed into the peasant small-holding sector. Peasants grew food crops mainly to sell to estate labourers and visiting tenants, who did not have time and land to grow their own food.⁵⁸ It is noteworthy that peasants also grew cash crops like tobacco for export.

The colonial government displayed an ambivalent attitude in trying to control *selufu*. It aimed at discouraging it; and, at the same time, it also permitted it. For instance, Christiansen and Kydd indicate that the Nyasaland Protectorate Order (NPO) required those who wanted to emigrate and stay away (from the country) for two years or more to pay tax in advance. This was an instance of directly allowing independent labour migration. Based on this, the two scholars have rightly argued that independent labour migration was “discouraged but permitted” by the government.⁵⁹ Oral evidence also supports this view on the ambivalence of the government in its efforts to control *selufu*. For instance, Litson Nkhoma argued that it was partly as a result of government’s ‘less strict measures’ that *selufu* gained ground during the old labour migration period. Litson is an example of migrants from Nkhata-Bay District that went under *selufu* but secured jobs in the mines in South Africa. It was difficult to go under *Wenela* and later *Theba* because there were no recruitment depots in Nkhata-Bay. He worked in such mines as Breskorp Platinum Mine in Rustenburg, Misisi Mine, Nolike Mine, and, lastly, Madikivi African Coal Mine. In these mines, he largely worked as a mechanic, fixing pumps and other machines.⁶⁰

Between 1900 and the 1930s, government control was in the form of a ban on formal recruitment following high death rates on the South African mines. However, the government could not completely stop formal recruiting because it was a vital source of the much-needed foreign exchange earnings. By the 1930s, it became crystal clear that prohibition of labour migration was rather impossible, hence the need to regulate it. In 1936 the Nyasaland government, therefore, commissioned an enquiry, the Lacey Commission, into the migrant

⁵⁷ Under the tenancy system, peasant farmers are virtually exploited in various ways by the landowners. For instance, they are provided with foodstuffs and farm input on exorbitant loans and after sale of their produce, usually almost all their money is deducted in settling the loan incurred during the growing season.

⁵⁸ R. Christiansen and J.G. Kydd. “The Return of Malawian Labour from South Africa and Zimbabwe”. *Journal of Modern African Studies*. (1983, 21: 2).

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 34.

⁶⁰ Interview with Litson Nkhoma. Kachikhokho Bongolo Village. T.A. Malengamzoma. Nkhata-Bay. 7/01/2016.

labour system.⁶¹ The Lacey Report, the outcome of this enquiry, was highly critical of the evils of foreign employment. It even condemned Nyasaland's pass system as a complete failure.⁶²

The Report exposed abuses associated with labour emigration, some of which were as follows: high taxes versus unattractive local alternatives to labour emigration – this actually compelled people to emigrate; deteriorating living standards for Africans; and corruption and exploitation by recruiters and transporters.⁶³ As a way forward, the Report made a number of recommendations, including the establishment of a labour department by the Nyasaland government whose duty would be, among others, to facilitate the collection of taxes and the payment of deferred pay. It also recommended that the Southern Rhodesian government establish a similar department and a recruiting agency, like *Wenela*, whose duties would include, among others, the safeguarding and protection of the interests of labour migrants from the Nyasaland Protectorate.⁶⁴ The Southern Rhodesian government agreed to such recommendations and this culminated in the establishment of *Mthandizi*. The latter started its labour recruitment operations in Nyasaland in 1938.

The government reached agreements with South Africa to ensure that labour migrants were engaged for a fixed period, for example, eighteen or twenty-four months, on completion of which they returned home. Such agreements also ensured smooth flow of remittances to migrants' households and to the government.⁶⁵ While this was done at national level, at company level, the government allocated an annual quota of migrants that *Wenela* could recruit in a year. It was, however, in the interest of both the government and *Wenela* to increase this quota as years went by. While to *Wenela* this meant more labourers for the mines, for the Nyasaland government this meant more money in the form of foreign exchange. Agreements with *Wenela* required the South African mines to defer a fraction of the migrants' pay and send it directly to Malawi, from where migrants used to withdraw their wage upon their return. Through this arrangement, the government was certain that incomes earned abroad would be spent at home.⁶⁶

⁶¹ See MNA COM-8/1 Committee to Enquire into Emigrant Labour 1935; and Robert Boeder. *Malawians Abroad*. pp 198-199, p. 201.

⁶² Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy*. p. 38.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 38.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 39.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Crush. "Migrations Past". p. 14

⁶⁶ This is clearly where contract migration was advantageous over *selufu*; migrants under the latter made their own decisions on how to spend wages from their work in South Africa.

In 1903 the Nyasaland government allocated an annual quota of 3000 migrants for the South African gold mines. Between 1946 and 1959, the *Wenela* quota increased from 8,500 men to 20,000 men per year.⁶⁷ In fact, until 1967, labour recruitment agreements between Malawi and the Chamber of Mines restricted the number of workers *Wenela* could recruit to a few thousand workers per year. It is worth noting that these restrictions were lobbied for by the European plantation owners in Nyasaland as a way to protect access to a cheap source of labour.⁶⁸ In addition, the Southern Rhodesian government was also in favour of such restrictions since her local enterprises could not offer as much wages as those paid on the South African mines.⁶⁹

Following the attainment of independence from Britain in 1964, the prime minister of the independent state of Malawi, Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, realised the need for more foreign exchange with which to develop the country. He, therefore, pursued a policy of cooperation with the white minority regimes in South Africa, Southern Rhodesia and Mozambique. “In a complete and sudden reversal of his opposition to labour export up until independence, Dr Banda decided to allow *Wenela* to expand recruiting in Malawi to 30,000 men per year”.⁷⁰ In addition, Malawian migrants’ remittances were fully institutionalised, in the process reversing Malawi’s negative balance of payments. As a result of this development, Bill Paton argues, by 1967 “the combined inflow from all migrant sources averaged 2.4 million pounds per year, then the third largest export in foreign exchange terms after tobacco and tea”.⁷¹

In 1967 Dr Banda signed a new agreement, dubbed the five-year labour treaty (1967-72), with *Wenela* removing all quotas on recruitment of Malawian migrant workers.⁷² There was, therefore, a sudden increase in the number of workers recruited by *Wenela* in the years following this agreement (see table 2.2). As can be seen from table 2.2 below, between 1968 and 1974, there was an unprecedented increase from 47,446 to 108,431 Malawian migrants for the South African mines. Through this (1967) agreement, the Malawi government aimed at asserting more control of the international labour migration with South Africa. For instance,

⁶⁷ Taryn Dinkelman and Martine Mariotti. “What are the Long-run Effects of Labour Migration on Human Capital? Evidence from Malawi”. 2014. <http://federation.ens.fr/ydepot/semin/texte1314/WHA2014TAR.pdf>. p. 10.

⁶⁸ For a detailed debate on the competition for Malawian labour between the local plantation owners (settlers) and the external labour recruiters, see, among others, G. Coleman. “International Labour Migration from Malawi”. p. 37.

⁶⁹ Taryn Dinkelman and Martine Mariotti. “What are the Long-run Effects of Labour Migration?” p. 9.

⁷⁰ Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy*. p. 50.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 50.

⁷² Ibid. pp. 51-52.

Malawi requested South Africa to verify that Malawian migrants had passports and that all contracted labourers had employment record books. In addition, following this treaty, Malawi would place staff in Johannesburg to formalise the status of the estimated 30,000-40,000 clandestine Malawian migrants to South Africa.⁷³ It is clear from this that the Malawi government wanted as many migrants working in South Africa as possible as a source of foreign exchange. Indeed, remittances from legal Malawian migrants working in South Africa significantly increased thereafter.⁷⁴ However, this agreement prevented Malawian migrants from going to white farms where conditions were appalling. In short, the 1967 inter-governmental agreement “aimed at increasing employment of Malawians in various sectors of the South African economy provided that a shortage of readily available indigenous labour existed.”⁷⁵

Table 2.2: Malawians employed on South Africa’s mines

Year	Workers	Year	Workers
1964	35,658	1974	108,431
1965	38,580	1975	27,904
1966	39,014	1976	571
1967	38,182	1977	3,495
1968	47,446	1978	17,910
1969	53,315	1979	15,033
1970	78,492	1980	13,569
1971	92,782	1981	12,937
1972	111,768		
1973	119,141		

Source: Jonathan Crush, Alan Jeeves and David Yudelman. *South Africa’s Labour Empire*. pp. 234-35.⁷⁶

⁷³ This was another botched attempt to control *selufu*. Following the 1967 Treaty, Malawi established the Employment Services Division under the Ministry of Labour in order to regularise the position of Malawians who were working illegally in South Africa before 1967. For details here, see MNA ESD/3/5/8 Domestic Servants in South Africa; MNA ESD/6/1/11 Enquiries for Labour, South Africa, 1970-1976; and MNA ESD/6/3 Volunteers in South Africa, 1968-1972. See also B. Pachai. *Malawi: The History of the Nation*. p. 127.

⁷⁴ For instance, remittances increased from MK2.8 million to MK4.8 million. For details here, see Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy*. p. 52.

⁷⁵ W.R. Bohning (ed.). *Black Migration to South Africa: A Selection of Policy-Oriented Research*. (Geneva: International Labour Organisation (ILO), 1981). p. 31.

⁷⁶ Also cited in Wiseman C. Chirwa. “The Malawi Government and South African Labour Recruiters, 1974-92”. *Journal of Modern African Studies*. (1996, 34: 4). p. 627.

3. Official Migration for the South African Mines

Labour migration to South Africa was largely informal or clandestine in nature at first. This followed the establishment of diamond mines in Kimberley and gold mines in the Witwatersrand in the 1870s and 1880s, respectively.⁷⁷ However, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the government of South Africa through the Chamber of Mines (hereafter the Chamber) decided to introduce formal labour recruitment with a view to ensure steady labour supply to the mines. Labour-supplying countries in the region entered negotiations with the Chamber in order to control the numbers of labour recruits at any given time.



Photograph 2.1: Some of the *Wenela* and TEBA former migrants in T.A. Chindi, Mzimba District. Most of them had already filled claim forms for their pension benefits under the 1970 Provident Fund at the time of the interview in January 2016 (photo by author).

Throughout the twentieth century, Malawians took advantage of the available wage opportunities on the Rhodesian farms and the South African mines to improve the welfare of their households back home. The South African mining industry established *Wenela* which eventually opened recruiting stations in different parts of not only Malawi, but also other South

⁷⁷ For details on this, see, for example, David Yudelman. *The Emergence of Modern South Africa*. p. 19.

Africa's neighbouring countries by the 1930s. In Malawi, these stations were opened in selected districts across the country. After this, potential labour migrants from Malawi had a choice either to emigrate under *Wenela* (and later TEBA) or under *selufu*.

On the choice between *Wenela* and *selufu*, labour migrants considered the comparative advantages of each over the other. One of the advantages of official recruitment over *selufu* was that *Wenela* shouldered all the requirements from transportation, food, medication up to the securing of mine jobs for the recruits. As Lovemore D. Banda, the headman from a labour-supplying village in Nkhata-Bay put it:

I didn't want to go to South Africa through *selufu* because you had to make arrangements for the entire trip. But as for *Wenela*, everything was being provided. All you had to do was to undergo a selection process, which included a medical examination. Once you were successful, *Wenela* took over your burden and made provisions all the way until you reached your designated mine.⁷⁸

Lovemore Banda first went to South Africa in 1974 under *Wenela* and worked at Roy Beck Mine. He came back in 1976 after *Wenela* was closed. He later went back in 1987 under *Theba* and came back in 1988. Thereafter, he stayed at home for 10 years before going back under new *selufu* in 1998. He finally came home in 2010. "At Roy Beck Mine, I was working as a miller; milling the rocks from underground the mine. I was actually in charge of sifting the rocks from the minerals used for making metals", Banda said. The other big comparative advantage was that you had to return home at the end of the eighteen-month or twenty-four month contract. However, you were eligible for another contract after this. In addition, most formal labour migrants never came back home empty-handed because part of the wages was kept and was only accessed upon returning home under the deferred payment system.⁷⁹

Since the majority of labour migrants from Mzimba district emigrated through official means unlike their counterparts from Nkhata-Bay, who preferred *selufu*, they were even able to compare the proceeds not only between *Wenela* and *selufu*, but also between *Wenela* and its successor TEBA. Most of them maintained that TEBA migrants later on got better wages than their *Wenela* counterparts, previously. Edington Ng'oma, an ex-*Wenela* migrant, had this to say on this matter: "When I look back, I realise that under *Wenela* we used to get less money as compared to our friends who went there under TEBA. At least our friends got more money

⁷⁸ Interview with Lovemore D. Banda. Matatiyo Banda Village. T.A. Malanda. Nkhata-Bay. 29/08/2015.

⁷⁹ Every former *Wenela* or *Theba* migrant I interviewed spoke highly of this system. Unlike *selufu* migrants who at times went back home with little proceeds having been exploited by unscrupulous employers in South Africa, official migrants received their deferred payment right in Malawi, hence even the most careless and extravagant migrant reached home with money and *katundu*.

later on”.⁸⁰ Edington Ng’oma comes from Chapangalika Ng’oma village in Mzimba district. Edington went to South Africa under *Wenela* in 1974 and came back home in 1975. He was working at Wicklyhank Mine as *malayitcha* (a labourer using a shovel) underground the mine. After returning home, he chose not to go back to South Africa either under *Theba* or *selufu*. In 1993, he relocated to Nkhata-Bay where he lived up to the time of the interview, August 2015.

The distribution and location of *Wenela*’s recruitment stations had an influence on the pattern and nature of international labour migration from Malawi to South Africa. Although potential migrants from northern Malawi usually emigrated under *Wenela* via Mzimba *boma*⁸¹ recruitment station, it was mainly people from Mzimba District itself who emigrated through it *en masse*. In this connection, fewer and fewer numbers originated from neighbouring districts to register with *Wenela* at Mzimba depot.

Oral evidence confirms this view. It is partly for this reason that migrants from Mzimba emigrated largely under *Wenela* and few under *selufu*.⁸² The opposite was true for migrants from Nkhata-Bay: many emigrated independently and few under *Wenela*.⁸³ In addition, because Tonga migrants were pioneer *selufu* migrants to South Africa before the institutionalisation of *Wenela*, they continued to emigrate under *selufu* throughout the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, official labour migration had its own setbacks: potential labour migrants had to go through a thorough medical examination in the recruitment district right before the onset of their journey to South Africa. A medical certificate, issued by a qualified medical doctor, read as follows: “This is to certify that I have examined the holder of this book and I am satisfied that he is fit for the work for which he has been contracted and consider him (*not her: maleness emphasised*) physically and mentally healthy and free of infectious and contagious diseases”.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Interview with Edington Ng’oma, Chapangalika Ng’oma Village, T.A. Chindi, Mzimba District, 29/08/2015. This view is corroborated by archival information which shows that over the years mine management used to review the employees’ wages upwards; see, for example, MNA 172/TEBA/1/3/4 WNLA Agreement, January 1976-March 1983 for the 1980 Wage Review under TEBA.

⁸¹ *Boma* is a local word for the *Central Business District* (CBD) (administrative centre) within a town or district. Originally, it was an abbreviation standing for the British Overseas Military Administration used by the British colonial administrators in administering the districts within their colonies.

⁸² This view was shared by most interviewed former labour migrants in Mzimba District.

⁸³ This view (contrary to the one above) was shared by most labour migrants in Nkhata-Bay District.

⁸⁴ MNA 172/TEBA/1/3/4 *Wenela* Agreement, January 1976-March 1983. This information was found in the medical certificate (page 4) of the migrant’s Employment Record Book (ERB) and was supposed to be certified by a qualified doctor during medical examination of the potential labour migrants in Malawi. For more information

This shows the rigorousness of the official recruitment process in Malawi before recruits were even taken to South Africa. Apparently this contrasts sharply with *selufu* under which migrants simply left the country out of their own volition. Mine work was rigorous (see photograph 2.2) and, therefore, debilitating.⁸⁵ Hence the dominant view that it was only suitable for tough and energetic men. This was one of the reasons that mine industry officials advanced at the beginning of the twentieth century as to why only men were recruited into the mines.⁸⁶ It was also dangerous since the mines were prone to walls collapsing (see photograph 2.3), water flooding and other accidents. Moses Manda, who comes from Kabeta Village in Nkhata-Bay District, narrated that he survived from three fatal accidents in a row while he was working in the South African mines under *Wenela*. When his contract came to an end, he could not believe he had reached home alive and vowed never to go back to South Africa to work in the mines:

At one time, the mine collapsed and killed all my colleagues on my left side. This was the first fatal accident from which I barely survived. It was very tragic – to imagine that people who were your colleagues a short while ago are ‘now’ (then) dead bodies being taken to the mortuary. The second accident involved the *khechi* (mine lift) which got stuck for six hours with people inside and I was one of those inside. The technicians tried to work on it, but to no avail. At the end of six hours, management reluctantly decided to cut off the faulty section of this *khechi* and this meant death of all the people inside. Now about five minutes before cutting off the section, the *khechi* suddenly started moving (since technicians had still been working on it) and that’s how we reached the surface. The third incident involved flooding inside the mine! The water flooded the mine section where we were working after pumps developed a fault and stopped pumping water out. Luckily, we had a white *foromani* (foreman) who showed us an escape channel and that’s how we managed to come out onto the surface!

I came back in 1974, but I almost boarded the plane which eventually crashed in Francistown, Botswana. When we were about to board this plane, they discovered that it had developed a technical fault. Hence they off-loaded all the *katundu* and sent it for ‘screening’, replacing it with another plane in the process. We eventually boarded its replacement up to Lilongwe. But the following day, we learnt that the ‘faulty’ plane had crashed immediately after coming out from service. I would have been in that plane!⁸⁷

Moses Manda went to South Africa in 1972 and came back in 1974. He worked in a mine in Durban. He maintained that those migrant workers who were physically fit, like himself, worked underground while the rest worked on the surface. He further indicated that many miners were running away to look for jobs under *selufu* because of the tough nature of

on these medical examinations and the attendant rejections, see MNA 172/TEBA/1/6/10 Reports Book and Medical Returns, January-October 1987.

⁸⁵ For details on the toughness of mine work, see T. Dunbar Moodie with Vivienne Ndatshé. *Going for Gold: Men, Mines and Migration*. (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001). p. 16.

⁸⁶ There is a whole debate in the literature around the cheap labour power thesis, for details, see, for example, Belinda Bozzoli. “Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies”. *Journal of South African Studies*. (1983, 9:2). p. 143; and K. Jochelson. “Women Migrancy and Morality: A Problem of Perspective”. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. (1995, 21: 2). p. 324.

⁸⁷ Interview with Moses Citizen Manda. Kabeta Village. T.A. Malanda. Nkhata-Bay. 9/01/2016.

underground mine work. This was also because of the harshness of the Boers, who, as supervisors, never allowed miners to rest on the job.



Photograph 2.2: Illustration of the rigorous nature of mine work underground (photo: Google images).



Photograph 2.3: Mine roofs, with such supports as the one in the picture, usually collapsed killing miners in the process (photo: Google images).

Archival evidence from the Historical Manuscripts at the Malawi National Archives (MNA) also sheds light on the comparative advantages and disadvantages of formal labour migration and *selufu*:

The argument is appreciated that recruitment can be a means of safeguarding the interests and welfare of the recruits and their dependents and ensuring their return; recruitment, however, involves the recruit being tied for the period of his contract to an employer whom he does not know and may not like; the majority of Nyasa are independent and like to pick and choose their employers according to their own inclinations.⁸⁸

By 1940, *Mthandizi* established recruitment stations in almost the same districts as *Wenela*. *Mthandizi* unlike *Wenela* recruited labour for the Southern Rhodesian farms. This development brought about fierce competition between these two rival agencies over Malawian labour.⁸⁹ Each employed strategies to out-do the other in its quest to recruit more labour. It was during the course of this competition that *Mthandizi* introduced the system of allowing its male recruits to emigrate with their wives, that is, the emigration of a couple with at least one child.

In addition to women going to Southern Rhodesia together with their husbands, archival evidence shows that in some cases wives were actually following their husbands afterwards.⁹⁰ It was easy for women to join their husbands working in Southern Rhodesia unlike those working in South Africa. In fact, in the latter case, it was not officially permissible. The different workplace addresses in Zimbabwe show that Malawian labour migrants were working in different work places in addition to the (usual) farms.⁹¹ One of the requirements, though, for these wives to join their husbands was identity certificates of their husbands, proof of their husbands' employment, and availability of space (home) to accommodate the wives and children.⁹² However, sometimes there were complications along the way as women embarked on their journey to stay with their husbands in the destination country. One of these complications was the unforeseen increase in transport fare while their husbands had sent them money in line with the old, lower fare. There were also allegations that some husbands were sending less money which could not enable their wives to pay for the full bus fare.⁹³

⁸⁸ An extract of communication by Labour Advisor, Zomba, Malawi. For details, see MNA LB 10/4/7 General Correspondences, 1951-1952.

⁸⁹ For a detailed debate on the competition between *Wenela* and *Mthandizi*, see, for example, Harvey C.C. Banda. "Competition for the Labour Supply in Mzimba District" and Bryson G. Nkhoma. "The Competition for Malawian Labour: *Wenela* and *Mthandizi* in Ntcheu".

⁹⁰ MNA 2/9/11 Emigration: Application for Women and Juvenile Travel Permits; MNA 2/4/10 Labour Migration Arrangements, 1958-1973; and MNA B/5 Applications for Women's Travelling Permits, 1963-1965.

⁹¹ MNA 2/9/11 Emigration: Application for Women and Juvenile Permits.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ MNA 2/4/10 Labour Migration: Travel Arrangements, 1958-1973.

Apart from the competition between the labour-recruiting organisations as highlighted above, there also existed competition among mining companies in southern Africa, for instance, among companies in South Africa, Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia. In one instance, there arose competition for labour between Northern Rhodesia's copper mines (newly established in the early 1920s and early 1930s) and the South Africa's gold and diamond mines. The latter paid comparatively higher wages and hence attracted migrant workers from far afield, including Northern Rhodesia. As a strategy to overcome this challenge, that is, Northern Rhodesians going to the South African mines in large numbers, the copper mining companies decided to allow women and children into their mine compounds.⁹⁴ George Chauncey contends that "it would have been practically impossible to attract labour to the (copper) mines during the earliest days if women had not also been admitted to the compounds".⁹⁵

TEBA recruitment operations in Malawi were halted towards the end of the 1980s and, thereafter, most Malawian labour migrants got repatriated back home.⁹⁶ Some of them had their contracts terminated following the inter-state wrangle between Malawi and South Africa. Consequently, at the time of the interviews for this research, the former *Wenela* and TEBA labour migrants were in the process of claiming their pension and insurance money from the Chamber of Mines in South Africa.⁹⁷ They reported that in the course of doing that, some fellow former migrants came forward and offered to assist in coordinating the entire process. However, some of these coordinators ended up duping these migrants. According to Gilbert Ndhlovu from Bonga Village, Mzimba District,

this issue did not actually start in January 2014. Previously, there came a man named... Matola. He came to Mzimba *boma* and promised us that 'you will get your compensation from the Chamber of Mines in South Africa'. In fact, we really started getting this money. But we used to get very little money. For instance, we used to get MK1,000 each at a given time. But we eventually learnt that he was actually duping us by indicating in the records that each former migrant was getting MK10,000. At the end of each MK1,000 he was adding an extra zero to make MK10,000!⁹⁸

⁹⁴ George Chauncey. "The Locus of Reproduction: Women's Labour in the Zambian Copperbelt, 1927-1953". *Journal of Southern African Studies*. (1981, 7:2). p. 137.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 137.

⁹⁶ For a detailed account of the end of *Wenela* and TEBA recruitment operations in Malawi in the 1970s and 1980s, respectively, see the ensuing section.

⁹⁷ However, informants indicated that this process was marred by irregularities, hence the delay in payments.

⁹⁸ Interview with Gilbert Ndhlovu. Bonga Village. T.A. Kapingo Sibande. Mzimba District. 26/08/2015. Other former migrants who echoed the crookedness of such unscrupulous pension coordinators include: Mayisoni Mangwani. Chinombo Jere Village. T.A. Chindi. Mzimba. 15/01/2016; Tchayisoni Phiri. Kaweche Village. T.A. Chindi. Mzimba. 13/01/2016; and Stock Kumwenda. Vuki Village. T.A. Chindi. Mzimba. 13/01/2016. All these were former *Wenela* migrants who, at the time of the interview in January 2016, were waiting for pension money from South Africa.

However, oral evidence also showed that these ex-migrants had a lot of money in the form of compensation, as this account confirms:

Although I have not had the chance to chat with the recipients, I have heard that about three people in Mzimba District from Yesaya Nkosi Village have so far received their compensation money. I have heard figures like MK5,000,000 (equivalent to R125,000). This is a lot of money by Malawian standards. Even the District Commissioner (DC) of Mzimba District assured us, the ex-migrants, that we have a lot of money in the form of compensation money under the 1970 Provident Fund.⁹⁹

The above accounts show that the ex-*Wenela* and TEBA labour migrants were worried because of lack of proper coordination in the process of accessing their unclaimed benefits. This is against a background that their unclaimed benefits were worth millions of Malawi Kwachas. One of the main problems that the Chamber of Mines faced was the difficulty to trace members of the 1970 Provident Fund because many former employees came from rural areas of not only South Africa, but also neighbouring countries including Malawi.¹⁰⁰

4. Decline of Mine Migrancy from Malawi

Developments in the labour-supplying countries apart from Malawi, especially following the attainment of independence, contributed to the reduction in foreign labour supply to the South African mines. Independent countries like Tanzania and Zambia were against the continued supply of labour to the mines, arguing that their local economies needed this labour if they were to become powerful. Tanzania and Zambia took the lead in ending the labour supply from their countries. In the case of Malawi, the numbers of formal migrants into the South African mines kept on increasing even after the attainment of independence, as can be seen from table 2.2. This was in spite of the fact that the government encouraged Malawians to secure jobs in the agricultural sector following the opening of tobacco estates in the central and northern regions. It can be concluded, therefore, that Malawi pursued an ambivalent policy regarding labour migration during this period: encouraging recruitment by *Wenela* in order to benefit in form of foreign currency inflows and, at the same time, wooing Malawians to provide labour for the newly-opened estates. On the reluctance by independent countries to supply labour to South Africa, Francis L. Coleman argues that “as these countries became independent, so they

⁹⁹ Interview with Davison Chakwira Op. Cit. By the time I was conducting interviews in Malawi, the District Labour Offices in Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay had compiled a list of beneficiaries (former *Wenela*/ TEBA migrants or their dependents in case migrants were dead), which they had sent to the Chamber of Mines to be considered for payment. (Interview with Mr. Russell Mhone. District Labour Officer. Mzimba. 19/05/2016; Interview with Mr. Kondwani Msukwa. Assistant Labour Officer. Nkhata-Bay. 12/05/2016). This development was also reported in the media in Malawi, for instance, *The Daily Times*. “9,000 Ex-TEBA Workers Qualify for Payment”. Tuesday, 12 April 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Eva-Lotta Nansson. “Migrant Workers Owed Billions in ‘Unclaimed’ Social Security Funds”. 22 February 2013.

became increasingly reluctant to supply the mines with labour. Tanzania and Zambia banned recruitment and supplies from other countries became increasingly tenuous.”¹⁰¹ As for Zimbabwe, continued labour supply to South Africa was rather absurd since labour was equally needed in the local mines and farms.

This section critically examines the reluctance by the labour-supplying countries to send labour to the South African mines, the 1974 plane crash incident (to be discussed later), and, thereafter, the boycott in the same year, in order to understand the factors for the decline in mine migrancy in the 1970s. The 1974 boycott, which was imposed by Dr Banda following the plane crash led to the end of *Wenela* recruiting activities in Malawi. Two years later, formal recruiting was re-introduced in Malawi, under TEBA. The latter also recruited labour on behalf of the South African Chamber of Mines. However, in 1987 inter-state disagreement arose between Malawi and South Africa over HIV testing of potential Malawian labour migrants.¹⁰² The ensuing paragraphs are devoted to a critique as to what exactly led to the collapse of TEBA recruiting activities in Malawi thereafter. It also examines the reaction by the Chamber of Mines in trying to mitigate the impact of reduced foreign labour supply.

In Malawi the need for local labour within the estates, which got established from 1964 onwards, was followed by the 1974 plane crash incident, in which seventy-four Malawian migrant workers were killed at Francistown in Botswana *en route* to Malawi from the South African mines.¹⁰³ This incident prompted Dr Banda to impose the famous 1974 Labour boycott. Although the Malawi government encouraged labour emigration to the South African mines in the 1960s, as indicated under the 1967 inter-state agreement earlier, efforts were made during the same period to discourage emigration of the lowest paid, that is, unskilled labour. These labour migrants were equally needed to work in the newly-established plantations and estates. Dr Banda frequently boasted about the ban, saying ‘he had killed *Wenela*’. For example, on this occasion in 1983:

I have ‘killed’ two recruiting agencies, the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) (*Wenela*) and the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau (RNLB) (*Mthandizi*) ... They no longer recruit in Malawi. They

¹⁰¹ Francis L. Coleman (ed.). *Economic History of Africa*. (Pretoria: HAUM Educational Publishers, 1983). p. 193.

¹⁰² Wiseman C. Chirwa. “No TEBA...Forget TEBA: The Plight of Malawian Ex-migrant Workers to South Africa, 1988-1994”. *International Migration Review*. (1997, 31: 3). pp. 628-629.

¹⁰³ See W.R. Bohning (ed.). *Black Migration to South Africa*. p. 34.

have surrendered all their buildings to the government ... because the majority of the people have responded to my appeal to stay here and work in their gardens or on the estates.¹⁰⁴

The government encouraged the opening of new estates, especially for tobacco. Hence, it has been argued that

although the 1974 boycott appeared to be sudden, Dr. Banda had begun reversing his position on emigration in 1973. He had called on workers to stop going to South Africa, Zimbabwe and Tanzania, where he claimed they received low wages compared with the new opportunities for cash-crop profits at home.¹⁰⁵

In March 1974, a month before the imposition of the boycott, the Malawi government stopped labour recruitment for Zimbabwe.¹⁰⁶ The 1974 boycott was, therefore, a painful result of the shortages of labour on the estates and plantations in the country. In other words, it is proper to argue that Dr. Banda merely took advantage of the 1974 plane crash to officially stop recruitment and withdraw Malawian migrants from the South African mines. Deborah Fahy Bryceson succinctly argues that Dr. Banda “had become concerned with the restricted wage labour supplies to Malawi’s large-scale tea and tobacco plantations”.¹⁰⁷

In line with the argument in this study, Wiseman C. Chirwa argues that “the campaign to divert labour to the estates started earlier than the 1974 plane crash”.¹⁰⁸ He continues to point out that the adage *chuma chili mdongo* (‘wealth is in the soil’) was popularly used by Dr Banda during his political rallies and was meant to encourage Malawians to concentrate on food-crop and cash-crop farming or to engage in wage or tenant labour on the estates.¹⁰⁹ In addition, the songs composed and sung by the members of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) Women’s League (WL) also emphasised the social evils of migrancy. The following song in *ChiTonga* from Nkhata-Bay District is a good case in point:

Ndalindirira! Ndalindirira!
Ndalindirira waka ine eee
Alumu wangu we ku Wenela
Ndalindirira waka ine eee
Watuwa uko wato munyangu!
Ndalindirira waka ine eee
Danilopu wavwala munyangu

¹⁰⁴ State Address to Malawi Parliament, 3 August 1983 cited in Wiseman C. Chirwa. “The Malawi Government and South African Labour Recruiters, 1974-92”. It should be noted that *Mthandizi* initially stopped operating in Malawi (then Nyasaland) in 1956 over poor working conditions during the construction of the Kariba Dam. For details here, see for example Robert R. Boeder. “We Won’t Die for Four Pence: Malawian Labour and the Kariba Dam”. *Journal of Modern African Studies*. (1977, 15: 2).

¹⁰⁵ Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy*. p. 54.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 54.

¹⁰⁷ Deborah Fahy Bryceson, “*Ganyu Casual Labour, Famine and HIV/ AIDS in Rural Malawi*”. p. 181.

¹⁰⁸ Wiseman C. Chirwa. “The Malawi Government and South African Labour Recruiters, 1974-92”. p. 629.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 629.

Ndaliya waka kotu eee!

I have waited! I have waited!
I have waited in vain
My husband went to *Wenela*
I have waited in vain
He came back and married someone else!
I have waited in vain
The (plastic) shoes have been worn by someone else!
I have cried in vain! Poor me!¹¹⁰

It has been maintained in the literature that some labour migrants began returning to Malawi to take up jobs in the newly-opened estates in the 1960s and early 1970s.¹¹¹ The returning migrants were not just those whose mine contracts had expired, but also those who curtailed their contracts in preference for wage employment in these estates. The establishment of these estates greatly reduced the problem of unemployment in Malawi. The government also created a conducive environment for these estates by offering the estate owners free land and soft, low-interest loans. However, despite these offers by the government, the estates could not engage enough labour because of the low wages that they were offering. What is more, most returning labour migrants generally shunned estate employment just upon arrival back home.¹¹²

Nonetheless, the above developments contributed to a substantial reduction in international formal labour migration, in the process replacing it with internal migration. Most of the returning labour migrants were headed not only to the estates in question, but also to the various wage-earning opportunities in the building of the new capital city in Lilongwe.¹¹³ Consequently, Bill Paton argues, although there were still some continuing and new emigrants, on the whole, the estimated numbers of Malawians formally working abroad fell from 400,000 in 1973 to 150,000 by 1977.¹¹⁴ These figures do not include the numbers of *selufu* migrants who emigrated not only for mine work, but also employment in other sectors in South Africa. It is certain that the numbers of *selufu* migrants increased following the 1974 boycott.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Also cited in Wiseman C. Chirwa. Ibid. p. 629.

¹¹¹ Jens A. Andersson. "Informal Migration and Trade in Northern Malawi: Why a Nokia 3310 is Cheaper in Mzimba than in Johannesburg". Paper presented at the History Seminar. Chancellor College. University of Malawi. Zomba. November 2005. p. 3.

¹¹² Ibid. p. 3.

¹¹³ Dr H.K. Banda had masterminded the transfer of Malawi's capital from Zomba, southern region, to Lilongwe, central region. And as part of the terms of the 1967 Treaty, South Africa loaned Malawi a sum of \$33 million to construct the new capital in Lilongwe. For details on this, see Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy*. p. 51.

¹¹⁴ Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy*. p. 57.

¹¹⁵ In fact, even after the beginning of TEBA operations in 1977, the numbers of formal labour migrants remained relatively small, and did not equal those of the pre-1974 ban period. For illustration, see years 1975 to 1990 under table 3.

The decision by the newly independent countries in the north to focus on internal migration at the expense of supplying labour to the South African mines opened the eyes of the South African Chamber of Mines about the unreliability of foreign labour. The Chamber, therefore, easily switched to its alternative supplies in the Botswana-Lesotho-Swaziland (BLS) countries. This reduction in the labour supply, however, was also generally in line with the plans of the Chamber to switch to mechanisation which would eventually result in the reduction in the numbers of mine employees.¹¹⁶ Simultaneously, there was pressure inside South Africa to create a more stable black mine workforce of skilled workers with migrant labour from within South Africa, a move generally referred to as internalisation or localisation. Francis Wilson argues that developments in the gold mining industry necessitating the move towards internalisation and mechanisation could be traced to as early as the end of the 1960s:

By the end of the 1960s, the mining industry was faced with crucial decisions: the declining number of South Africans willing to work on the mines – these opted for higher wages in the other economic sectors; either they had to compete with other high-paying manufacturing sectors or they had to employ labour from ‘further afield’. With the increase in gold price, they opted to engage South Africans at higher prices.¹¹⁷

In addition to local South Africans shunning low wages then obtaining on the mines, there were other developments from the late 1970s to the early 1980s: the incremental collapse of the apartheid policies. This development in turn brought about an end to compulsion in recruitment of black workers in South Africa. Reflecting on this, Wiseman C. Chirwa argues that “following the abolition of various laws in 1986, black South Africans became free to seek work wherever they wished”.¹¹⁸ Consequently, from the mid-1980s, the South African mining industry increased its recruitment of local workers, leading to a process of internalisation (or ‘stabilisation’) of its labour supplies. It is noteworthy, however, that recruitment of black South Africans into the mines started earlier than the 1980s. In fact, the process of internalisation in question started way back, but during the 1980s many South Africans joined because of increasing pauperisation.¹¹⁹

In addition to the offer of higher wages to South African black labourers, the mine authorities devised means of attracting more local recruits. These included embarking on campaigns in

¹¹⁶ For details on mechanisation, see Francis L. Coleman (ed.), *Economic History of Africa*. p. 193; and T. Dunbar Moodie with Vivienne Ndatshé, *Going for Gold*. p. 5.

¹¹⁷ Francis Wilson. “International Migration in Southern Africa”. *International Migration Review*. (1976, 10: 4). p. 464.

¹¹⁸ Wiseman C. Chirwa. “No TEBA...Forget TEBA”. p. 630.

¹¹⁹ For a detailed discussion on this, see Colin Bundy. *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry*. (London: Heinemann, 1979). pp. 230-236.

“the homelands” (i.e. black residential areas); making use of labour bureaux as recruiting facilities, for instance, for disseminating information on vacancies in the mines; and establishing mine labour training centres and mine schools in the homelands.¹²⁰ The labourers from the homelands were engaged partly under the Assisted Voluntary System, briefly called the “A.V.S”. The A.V.S. labourers were assisted to come to the mining areas and obtain work on the mines of their choice.¹²¹ What is more, the travel expenses to and from the mines, after the completion of the contracts, were covered by the mine authorities. This was one of the substantial benefits to the local miners.

The withdrawal of Malawian migrant labour following the 1974 Boycott was immediately followed by the reduction in the labour supply by the Mozambican government. This came after the socialist-oriented Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) took over leadership from Portugal in 1974. Thereafter, Mozambique’s self-reliant and socialist development policy went in the opposite direction from that of apartheid South Africa.¹²² Hence Mozambique was not willing to continue supplying its labour to South Africa. However, the decline in Mozambican migrant workers did not coincide with the Malawians’ withdrawal; otherwise the impact would have been catastrophic for the South African mines. While Malawi withdrew its labour in 1974, reduction of Mozambican workers only started in 1976.¹²³ Suffice to mention that Malawian and Mozambican mine workers had been making a significant contribution to the South African mining industry by virtue of their large numbers.

Many potential migrants, a good number of whom were ex-*Wenela* migrants, were enquiring about the re-opening of *Wenela* recruitment operations in Malawi following the 1974 ban. Here is an example of such letters by Malawian migrants desperate for mine employment in South Africa: “Firstly, I want to find out if you re-opened ‘joyini ya Kamuzu’. In case you will re-open, please inform us. Right now we are getting conflicting information about the re-opening of *Wenela*”.¹²⁴ This is an excerpt of a letter dated 14th August 1974 by Renford Mkandawire of

¹²⁰ SANA BAO/2332/C-28-26 Witwatersrand Native Labour Association, Mine Labour Organisation (*Wenela*) Limited. See also SANA BAO/2331/C-28-26 Witwatersrand Native Labour Association.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² W.R. Bohning (ed.). *Black Migration to South Africa*. p. 36.

¹²³ Ibid. p. 37.

¹²⁴ In this context, “joyini ya Kamuzu” refers to “Dr Kamuzu Banda’s *Wenela*” i.e. *Wenela* during Dr Kamuzu Banda’s reign. “Joyini” in Chitumbuka (in northern Malawi) literally means ‘to join’ or to get recruited, in this case by *Wenela*, for the South African mines. For more details, see MNA ESD/6/1/II Enquiries for Labour, South Africa.

Mubanga Juba Village, T.A. Chindi in Mzimba, Malawi and was addressed to the Ministry of Labour, Lilongwe, Malawi. The following is an excerpt of a general response by the Secretary for Labour in Malawi (dated 29th August 1974) to the numerous letters by potential migrants enquiring about the re-starting of *Wenela* recruitment operations: “I acknowledge receipt of your letter and I would like to inform you that in the event that labour recruitment operations for mines in South Africa have re-started, you will all be notified through your home districts. I am sure that the same message will be disseminated through the courts”.¹²⁵

The 1974 boycott was ended in 1976. This followed the realisation that Malawi’s feeble economy badly needed the foreign exchange from migrant jobs like mine work abroad. This compelled the Malawi government to re-negotiate with South Africa to resume formal recruitment for the South African mines. Consequently, formal recruitment resumed in Malawi in 1976, not under the then defunct *Wenela*, but under TEBA. Earlier in 1966 the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) changed its name to Mine Labour Organisations (MLO) (*Wenela*) Limited and in 1977 it changed from the latter to The Employment Bureau of Africa (TEBA).¹²⁶ Despite the boycott’s end, however, the volume of labour migration from Malawi to the mines did not revert back to the pre-1974 situation. In fact, it kept on declining. The attestations of labour migrants in the South African mines (archival data) show a decline in migrants during TEBA as compared to the *Wenela* period. For instance, in 1982 there were about 15,000 Malawian labour migrants against about 120,000 in the 1970-1973 period.¹²⁷ This is enough proof of the declining trend in labour migration in the 1970s and 1980s. This decline is clearly illustrated by table 2.3 below:

¹²⁵ MNA ESD/6/1/II Enquiries for Labour, South Africa, 1970-1976. Most of the letters in this file refuted categorically that *Wenela* had re-started recruiting labour for the South African mines after the 1974 ban.

¹²⁶ MNA 172/TEBA/1/3/4 WNLA Agreement: January 1976-March 1983 (Birth of TEBA/ Change of Recruiting Company Name).

¹²⁷ MNA 172/TEBA/1/9/20 Attestation and Despatch Returns, January 1980-September 1982; MNA 172/TEBA/1/9/21 Attestation and Despatch Returns, January 1983-december 1986.

Table 2.3: Contract labour migration to South Africa mines, 1920-1990

Year	Angol	Bots	Les	Malw	Moz	Swaz	Tanz	Zam	Zim	Other	Total
1920	0	2,112	10,439	354	77,921	3,449	0	12	179	5,484	99,950
1925	0	2,547	14,256	136	73,210	3,999	0	4	68	14	94,234
1930	0	3,151	22,306	0	77,828	4,345	183	0	44	5	99,355
1935	0	7,505	34,788	49	62,576	6,865	109	570	27	9	112,498
1940	698	14,427	52,044	8,037	74,693	7,152	0	2,725	8,112	70	168,058
1945	8,711	10,102	36,414	4,973	78,588	5,688	1,461	27	8,301	4,732	158,967
1950	9,767	12,390	34,467	7,831	86,246	6,619	5,495	3,102	2,073	4,826	172,816
1955	8,801	14,195	36,332	12,407	99,449	6,682	8,758	3,849	162	2,299	192,934
1960	12,364	21,404	48,842	21,934	101,733	6,623	14,025	5,292	747	844	233,808
1965	11,169	23,630	54,819	38,580	89,191	5,580	404	5,898	653	2,686	232,610
1970	4,125	20,461	63,988	78,492	93,203	6,269	0	0	3	972	265,143
1975	3,431	20,291	78,114	27,904	97,216	8,391	0	0	2,485	12	220,293
1980	5	17,763	96,309	13,569	39,539	8,090	0	0	5,770	1,404	182,449
1985	0	18,079	97,639	16,849	50,126	12,365	0	0	0	4	196,068
1990	0	15,720	108,780	72	50,104	17,816	0	0	2	0	192,044

Source: TEBA¹²⁸

TEBA was restricted to relatively small quotas from Malawi because of adequate supplies from more proximate sources. There was also pressure on the Chamber of Mines to reduce

¹²⁸ Also cited in Jonathan Crush, Vincent Williams and Sally Peberdy. "Migration in Southern Africa". A paper prepared for the Policy Analysis and Research Programme of the Global Commission on International Migration. September 2005. The years 1920-1935 reflect the impact of the ban following high death rate amongst 'tropical workers' (see also figures under Zambia and Tanzania on the same table), whereas the years 1970-1990 depict the decline in mine migrancy following the recruitment ban from Malawi due to the 1974 plane crash and the 1987-88 HIV wrangle between Malawi and South Africa.

dependency on countries other than the BLS countries. Most of the migrants who were engaged by TEBA were usually those with past mining experience, i.e. those who had earlier been recruited by *Wenela*. Anthony Chauma, a former *Wenela* and *Theba* migrant from Yakhobe Ngwira Village in Mzimba District, indicated that a large number of potential migrants failed to make it to South Africa in the late 1970s and 1980s because of lack of the requisite mine work experience.¹²⁹ The use of false documents, therefore, shows an element of desperation on the part of Malawian (potential) labour migrants to ensure re-engagement by TEBA.¹³⁰ The following excerpt of a letter on forged re-entry of Malawian labour migrants into South Africa sheds more light on this: “We should be grateful if you could please look out for any similar letters which clearly indicate that they have been forged to facilitate the re-entry of some ex-miners into South Africa”.¹³¹ This is an extract of a letter which the Administrative Officer, Mr. Dokiso Chirwa, wrote to the TEBA Representatives in Lilongwe, Malawi on 10th February 1984. The aim was to curb this practice. Efforts were also made to trace TEBA Officers involved in this malpractice: “You may wish to take this matter up with the Manager (Malawi) to see if the officer issuing this fraudulent letter can be traced”.¹³² Consequently, some of these potential migrants ended up emigrating independently, that is, under *selufu*. It would, therefore, be proper to argue that the decline in the numbers of formal recruits by TEBA in one way or another encouraged *selufu*.

Letters of reference, re-employment guarantee certificates (RGCs)¹³³ and leave letters represented a sample of documents used to facilitate easy re-engagement of the ex-migrants.¹³⁴ Employers were issuing these documents to their employees at the end of a contract with the understanding that they would assist the employees’ re-engagement by the same mines later

¹²⁹ Interview with Anthony J. Chauma, Yakhobe Ngwira Village, T.A. Kampingo Sibande, Mzimba, 26/08/2015. This view was supported by a cross-section of ex-migrants in Mzimba District because they were relying on recruitment first by *Wenela* and later by *Theba*. As for the ex-migrants from Nkhata-Bay District, they largely emigrated independently under *selufu*. An example of migrants who supported this view in Nkhata-Bay is Litson Nkhoma, Kachikhokho Bongolo Village, T.A. Malenganzoma, Nkhata-Bay, 7/01/2016.

¹³⁰ MNA 172/TEBA/1/1/23 Former Senior Malawi Employees, 22 November 1977-2 December 1977. For some migrants, out of sheer luck, the mine authorities did not repatriate them back to Malawi upon discovery that they had used such false documents; rather they merely deployed them to mines in need of labour.

¹³¹ For more details, see MNA 172/TEBA/1/1/26 Former Malawi Employees.

¹³² Ibid. This is an extract of the memorandum by the Chief Liaison Officer, Mr. H.S. Peters, dated 21st November 1977 to the TEBA General Manager.

¹³³ For details on the operation of these RGCs, see W.C. Chirwa. “The Malawi Government and South African Labour Recruiters”. pp. 632-638.

¹³⁴ For details on these documents, see, for example, MNA 172/TEBA/1/1/20: Malawi Employees, October 1987; and MNA 172/TEBA/1/1/21 Malawi Employees, October 1987.

on. The excerpt below is an example of letters of reference which migrants attached to their application (letter) for mine employment during TEBA days to ensure re-employment:

This is to certify that Brown Alidi had been working under the above address (i.e. Bafokeng North Mine, Impala Platinum Limited) as a Shaft Clerk, in the Study Department, from January 1974 to November 1975. During his working, he greatly showed joy on and hard working to his daily work. I stand to recommend if he intends to come back at the same mine, he may re-join in my department.¹³⁵

Since some ex-*Wenela* migrants who failed to be recruited by TEBA did not emigrate under *selufu* during the TEBA days, this meant impoverishment of their households as a result of loss of remittances. Examples of ex-*Wenela* migrants who did not get recruited by TEBA, and did not equally emigrate under *selufu* during the *Theba* days include Short Nyirenda from Nkhweta Lupunga Village, T.A. Chindi in Mzimba. Short went to South Africa under *Wenela* between 1970 and 1972 (first contract) and between 1974 and 1976 (second contract). He managed to buy cattle and a plough; Stock Kumwenda who comes from Vuki Village, T.A. Chindi in Mzimba. Stock went to South Africa under *Wenela* between 1970 and 1975. After that, he wanted to go back under *Theba*, but was told there was no space; Kingston Nkhalikali from Vyalema Village, T.A. Chindi in Mzimba. Kingston went to South Africa under *Wenela* in 1973 and came back in 1975. He was working at Durban Deep Mine as a machine boy. He failed to go under *Theba* because they were recruiting few people. All these are from Mzimba District; and Edington Ng'oma from Ngombo Village, TA Malanda in Nkhata-Bay District.¹³⁶ On a national level, this loss of remittances greatly affected the country's economy by the mid-1980s. It can, therefore, be safely argued that the decline in mine migrancy that started following the 1974 boycott continued during the TEBA period. Consequently, this had a deleterious effect on the country's already faltering economy.

With this background, it is important to critique what actually led to the end of TEBA's recruiting operations in Malawi in 1987 and 1988. Although the official view cited in the literature is the inter-state disagreement between Malawi and South Africa over the need to test Malawian recruits for HIV,¹³⁷ several factors reveal otherwise. For instance, negotiations between the government of Malawi and TEBA had become rocky as early as January 1987.

¹³⁵ MNA 172/TEBA/1/1/21 Malawi Employees, October 1977.

¹³⁶ Interview with Short Nyirenda. Nkhweta Lupunga Village. T.A. Chindi. Mzimba. 13/01/2016; Stock Kumwenda. Vuki Village. T.A. Chindi. Mzimba. 13/01/2016; Kingston Nkhalikali. Vyalema Village. T.A. Chindi. Mzimba. 13/01/2016; and Edington Ng'oma. Ngombo Village. T.A. Malanda. Nkhata-Bay. 29/08/2015.

¹³⁷ See, for example, Richard Black, Jonathan Crush and Sally Peberdy. *Migration and Development in Africa: An Overview*. (Cape Town: Idasa, 2006). p. 122; and Wiseman C. Chirwa. "Aliens and AIDS in Southern Africa: The Malawi-South Africa Debate". *African Affairs*. (1998, 97).

This was partly because TEBA was finding recruitment operations expensive in Malawi by the day. This was occasioned by the availability of steady and relatively cheaper sources of migrant labour from within South Africa (amongst blacks) and from the BLS countries.¹³⁸ The credibility of the HIV testing in this wrangle becomes more questionable because “when the incidence of HIV among Botswana’s migrant miners rose above that of Malawi’s, nothing similar was done.”¹³⁹ It is, therefore, in view of this, that this study emphatically argues that the 1987 recruitment deadlock was caused by factors other than the HIV testing in question.¹⁴⁰

In line with the argument presented earlier under the 1974 boycott, Dr Banda was already looking for ways of curtailing labour emigration to the South African mines, with a view to making labour available to the newly-established and burgeoning tobacco and tea estates in the country. He, therefore, merely took advantage of any opportunity on the scene to achieve his goal. In this case, he capitalised on the weakness of the argument by the South African mines to have Malawian migrants screened for HIV. This is somewhat supported by Christiansen and Kydd, who argue that “whereas political decision-making was the immediate cause of declining mine migration, reduction in international migration was induced mainly by economic opportunities”.¹⁴¹ Since an expanding estate sector producing for export markets demanded labour, the agricultural sector absorbed large numbers of returning migrant workers.¹⁴²

The deadlock officially marked the end of TEBA labour recruitment operations in Malawi. Consequently, “20,000 Malawian mine workers dwindled to only 7,000 by the end of 1988, 6,000 by May 1989 and none by the end of 1989.”¹⁴³ This deadlock was followed by the process of repatriating Malawian labour migrants from the South African mines to Malawi between 1988 and 1992. By the latter year, all Malawian mine migrants had returned home.¹⁴⁴ Archival evidence at the MNA shows that Malawian labour migrants were subjected to compulsory repatriation during this four-year period.¹⁴⁵ Eventually formal labour recruitment which had

¹³⁸ The availability of local labour followed, among other reasons, the collapsing apartheid laws. This has been highlighted earlier in the section.

¹³⁹ Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy*. p. 59.

¹⁴⁰ This argument is in line with Bill Paton’s view. For details see Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy*. p. 59.

¹⁴¹ Christiansen and Kydd. “The Return of Malawian Labour from South Africa and Zimbabwe”. p. 311.

¹⁴² Jens A. Andersson. “Informal Migration and Trade in Northern Malawi”.

¹⁴³ Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy*. p. 59.

¹⁴⁴ See Wiseman C. Chirwa. “No TEBA... Forget TEBA”. pp. 628-654.

¹⁴⁵ MNA C/13/15 Compulsory Repatriation of Nyasaland Africans from the Union of South Africa. For more details, see also Wiseman C. Chirwa. “No TEBA...Forget TEBA”. pp. 628-654. For the list of repatriates, see MNA 172/TEBA/1/8/5 Repatriates, March-April 1988; and MNA TEBA/1/8/9 Repatriates, March-August 1989.

for a long time occurred simultaneously and side by side with informal or ‘clandestine’ migration came to an end and in its stead *selufu* picked up.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the early labour migration from Malawi to South Africa. While this chapter has focused on the labour migrants from Malawi to South Africa, there was also a considerable number of Malawian migrants who went to work in the Zimbabwean farms.¹⁴⁶ In both cases, some of these migrants ended up *kutchona* (overstaying). The chapter has provided a broad overview of the nature of labour migration between the 1880s and 1980s. It has also shown that labour migration during the period took two forms: official recruitment by *Wenela* and later TEBA (for South African mines) and *Mthandizi* (for the Zimbabwean farms), on the one hand, and *selufu*, on the other hand.

The chapter has shown that there existed competition in both overt and covert forms of migration between the official recruiting agencies, on the one hand, and between official migration and *selufu* on the other.¹⁴⁷ It has also been maintained that the government of Malawi made strenuous efforts to control labour migration during this period. However, unlike *selufu* which proved difficult to regulate since it occurred clandestinely, the Nyasaland (later Malawi) government closely monitored and regulated formal labour migration. For instance, formal labour migration was banned between 1909 and 1934 and also during the Second World War (WWII). The government imposed recruitment quotas which specified the number of men (and not women) that could be recruited at each point in time.

On the decline of mine labour migration, the core discussion in this chapter is that, while much of the literature focuses on the 1974 plane crash incident and the 1987 HIV test debate as developments behind the decline and eventual collapse of mine migrancy, respectively, these incidents were merely ‘final sparks that lit the fire’. There was a long build-up of events towards this climax. For instance, the chapter has highlighted the intention by the newly independent African states to use their labour locally, and in the case of Malawi, to use the local labour on the newly-established tobacco estates. The subsequent chapter examines the

¹⁴⁶ For details on the nature of labour migration from Malawi to Zimbabwe, see Zoe Groves. “Malawians in Colonial Salisbury” (Unpublished PhD Thesis).

¹⁴⁷ However, competition between *Wenela* and *Mthandizi* has been examined in depth elsewhere, see Bryson Nkhoma. “Competition for Malawian Labour: *Wenela* and *Mthandizi* in Ntcheu, 1935-1956”; Harvey Banda. “Competition for the Labour Supply in Mzimba District”.

nature of *selufu* during the old and new labour migration periods. *Selufu* actually gained ground during the post-1994 period and this followed the end of apartheid in South Africa and the beginning of democratic governance in Malawi in 1994.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ This forms the gist of discussion in chapter three.

Chapter Three

Informal Labour Migration

1. Introduction

The previous chapter examined the nature of labour migration from Malawi to South Africa in the twentieth century. It discussed labour migration from Malawi to the South African mines under the auspices of *Wenela* and *Theba*. The chapter focused on the decline and eventual collapse of mine migrancy following the 1974 plane crash incident and the 1987 HIV wrangle between Malawi and South Africa. This chapter focuses on the informal labour migration or *selufu* in the twentieth century which occurred alongside formal or contract migration. The chapter also examines *selufu* during two periods: the old period or pre-1990 period when informal migration occurred on a relatively limited scale and during the new period or post-1990 period when informal migration, in this case referred to as new *selufu*,¹ increased partly as a result of the decline in mine migrancy at the end of the 1980s.

The chapter compares informal migration during these two periods. For instance, it shows that informal labour migratory movements under new *selufu* are rooted in the past informal migration practices. Informal labour migration during the contemporary period is similar to *selufu* during the old period since labour migrants during both periods are seen to choose the types of jobs and employers they wanted and also decide when to go back home. In some cases, because of the difficulty to find better-paying jobs during the contemporary period, migrants tend to stay longer than envisaged in order to achieve their set goals. In this case, there is also an element of *kutchona* (oversrtaing) among new *selufu* migrants. New *selufu* also takes the form of circular migration:² labour migrants are determined to work in South Africa for as brief periods as possible in order to rejoin their families back home. In this case, informal migrants behave like target migrants: accumulating as much proceeds as possible within the shortest period and thereafter returning home to invest part of their proceeds, for instance, in farming and various businesses. In addition, this circular nature of migration is occasioned by the

¹ While labour migrants emigrated either through *selufu* or under *Wenela* and later *Theba* during the old period, all migrants emigrate informally under new *selufu* since the early 1990s.

² Circular migration in this context is similar to contract migration during the old period where formal migrants made several trips under *Wenela* and, later, *Theba* in the quest of maximising proceeds. See chapter two for details on this.

frequent arrests and deportations in South Africa. After being deported, *madipotii*³ (the deportees) quickly reprocess their way back to South Africa to continue with wage employment. This shows that migrants are rational and purposive individuals, who will do everything within their means to ensure that they achieve their set goals.

The chapter provides a brief overview of the economies of South Africa and Malawi over time. Thereafter it examines the origins of informal migration from Malawi to South Africa. It advances the argument that Malawian migrancy to South Africa cannot be fully captured by a focus on mine or contract labour. It also examines the escalation of *selufu* after 1990. It largely uses qualitative evidence to establish this numerical escalation. This is mainly because, unlike contract migration where statistics on labour migrants were captured and kept by the labour recruiting agencies (in this case *Wenela* and *Mthandizi*), *selufu* migrants were undocumented because of their illegal status. This problem continues even during the post-1990 period when there is still no formal mechanism of documenting informal migrants who go to South Africa.

The chapter also discusses factors behind the escalation of *selufu* migrants in the post-1990 period. These factors are discussed at macro- and micro-levels. The following are some of the macro-level factors behind the escalation of *selufu*, especially since the early 1990s: the collapse of apartheid and, in its stead, the introduction of democratic governance in 1994 in South Africa; the end of one-party regime under the tutelage of Dr Hastings Banda and the emergence of multi-party politics in 1994; and the free movement of peoples at SADC or southern Africa level. At micro-level, the chapter discusses the following: the development of long-term migrant strategies or traditions; information flow between Malawi and South Africa through pioneer migrants and other migrants; language convergences; convivial motivations; and cultural practices.

This chapter presents two categories of labour migrants who later indulge in commercial pursuits, especially from the 1990s onwards: migrants who sell Malawian foodstuffs and other merchandise to Malawian labour migrants based in South Africa and those Malawian labour migrants who buy South African products at wholesale prices with the intention of making

³ *Madipotii* is a local Tumbuka word and stands for deportees (plural form). The singular form is *dipotii* (i.e. the deportee). *Dipotii* literally comes from the English word deportee.

profit in Malawi. Some of them accumulate these South African products slowly while working in South Africa. The labour migrants-cum-traders have also been examined in later chapters.

2. Overview of South Africa's and Malawi's Political Economies

(a) South Africa

The discovery of gold and diamond on the Witwatersrand marked the transition in the history of South Africa from an agrarian economy to an industrial one. This development had huge implications not only for South Africa, but also for the countries in the southern Africa region. The period 1886-1994 is characteristic of white domination in South Africa. This was based on what has been called “the uneasy union of ‘gold and maize’ or, at the very least, of a multitude of white factions linked in some ways to mining, industry and agriculture”.⁴ The mineral revolution was put in motion by the discovery of diamond around Kimberley and, a few years later, of gold on the Witwatersrand. This eventually led to urbanisation, industrialisation and the creation of a network of roads and railways and the provision of various services such as hospitality that this economy needed.

In trying to reflect on the (economic) history of South Africa, it is important to touch on whether South Africa is exceptional from the rest of the continent or not. On this, Robert Ross et al. argue that it has both unique and similar traits from the rest of the continent. For instance, it has cultures and industrial and agricultural bases of the economy that are similar to those of other African countries. However, while most African countries gained political independence between 1957 and 1968, in South Africa apartheid remained in control up to 1994. This is one of the unique features when South Africa is compared with the rest of the African continent.⁵

By the 1970s South Africa was facing sanctions and economic boycotts because of apartheid. By this time, neighbouring African states, Malawi inclusive, had gained political independence. By the mid-1970s South Africa's economy was unstable, partly because of the decline in gold prices on the international market.⁶ As a result, the costs of maintaining the apartheid regime

⁴ Robert Ross, Anne K. Mager and Bill Nasson. *The Cambridge History of South Africa* (Volume 2). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). p. 13. For a full discussion on this, see Stanley Trapido. “Africa in a Comparative Study of Industrialisation”. *Journal of Development Studies*. (1971, 7: 3). pp. 309-320.

⁵ Robert Ross et al. *The Cambridge History of South Africa*. pp. 15-16.

⁶ Gail Natrass. *A Short History of South Africa*. (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2017). p. 199.

were high. However, by the late 1970s, with improvements in technology and the implementation of the policy of mechanisation, mining industries no longer needed many unskilled workers. By the 1980s the effect of the apartheid policies on the economy were significant. In response to both local and international pressure, the apartheid government was compelled to start implementing the long-awaited reforms. For instance, the government allowed the registration of black South Africans' trade unions. By 1986 the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) had been established. COSATU soon became quite influential and because of its intervention, wages for black workers improved.⁷

In 1990 the political situation greatly improved as a result of more pressure. In February 1990, Prime Minister F.W. de Klerk was in favour of holding negotiations with representatives of various political groupings in South Africa. This development culminated in the release from prison of Nelson Mandela in the same month. In 1994 South Africans voted in the first general elections in which the African National Congress (ANC) won with an overwhelming majority. Nelson Mandela, leader of the ANC, became South Africa's first democratically-elected president of the ANC-led Government of National Unity (GNU), with Thabo Mbeki and F.W. de Klerk as deputy presidents.⁸

Since the transition from apartheid to democratic governance in 1994, South Africa has experienced significant economic problems: "more than a third of adults and more than half of young people are jobless. Income inequalities are wider than before; only social grants separate millions of South Africans from destitution".⁹ According to Hein Marais, the challenges in the South African economy would be traced to as far back as the 1980s following international boycotts and sanctions against the apartheid policies.¹⁰ After 1994 the ruling African National Congress largely failed to improve this economic situation. This is partly a result of political in-fighting among ANC leadership, for instance, between Jacob Zuma and Thabo Mbeki, which diverted attention from economy to politics.

⁷ Ibid. p. 215.

⁸ Ibid. p. 224.

⁹ Hein Marais. *South Africa Pushed to the Limit: The Political Economy of Change*. (London: Zed Books, 2011). p. 388.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 388.

With this background, the influx of undocumented migrants into South Africa in the 1990s and early 2000s has simply worsened the situation. There is now competition between the black South Africans and these foreigners over resources and basic survival. The influx of illegal immigrants is worsened by South Africa's weak immigration and refugee policies by which some economic migrants enter the country under the disguise of being asylum seekers. It is the conflict between South Africans and illegal immigrants that led to violent xenophobic attacks on foreigners first in 2008 and later in 2015. The immediate pretexts for these attacks involved grievances about jobs and housing. On this, Charles Feinstein has shown that there has been a sharp rise in unemployment in South Africa, especially from the 1990s onwards.¹¹

(b) Malawi

Malawi has an agricultural economy and a predominantly rural population. Partly because of its land-locked position and the size of its domestic market, the economic history of Malawi since 1890 has been confined to the development of a dual role "as an exporter of agricultural produce and as a labour reserve for southern Africa".¹² Before independence, the colonial authorities clashed with the local people because of the imposition of agricultural policies. These policies were aimed at ensuring food security and dealing with the problem of soil erosion. On this, Simon Thomas argues that "fines and imprisonment were the penalties for not obeying the National Resource Ordinances, which made ridge cultivation and erosion bunding compulsory, set planting and uprooting dates and even required the cultivation of cassava as an insurance against maize shortages".¹³ After independence in 1964, Dr. Hastings Banda, the president, abandoned such policies. However, this had undesired results: loss of fertility and failure to realise enough crop yields.

According to the Malawi government, economic progress had been rapid since the attainment of independence in 1964. In addition, the combination of flexibility within the economy and a realistic foreign policy had enabled Malawi to take advantage of the changing situation within southern Africa. Internally, there had been a significant increase in African participation within

¹¹ Charles H. Feinstein. *An Economic History of South Africa: Conquest, Discrimination and Development*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). p. 240.

¹² Simon Thomas. "Economic Developments in Malawi since Independence". *Journal of Southern African Studies*. (1975, 2: 1). p. 36.

¹³ Ibid. p. 36.

the economy. This improved economic situation was even appreciated by the international aid donors. Some of these donors were actually comparing the economic situation in Malawi before and after the attainment of independence. For instance, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development in 1972 commented that in the federal period, that is, between 1953 and 1963, “the infrastructure had been neglected and the country did not have enough revenue to support even a rudimentary type of administration...against this background progress achieved during the subsequent period should be considered quite remarkable”.¹⁴ This progress is considered to have been notable bearing in mind that Malawi’s natural resources were limited to land and labour.

After independence, Dr. Banda embarked on the construction of three main projects: a new capital at Lilongwe in central Malawi; a lakeshore road that was meant to connect the three regions of the country; and the University of Malawi. He was determined to move the colonial capital from Zomba, southern Malawi, to Lilongwe. In his foreign policy, Dr. Banda was preoccupied with securing funding for these three projects. He was obsessed with doing something new in order to prove his critics wrong; these critics maintained that after attaining independence Malawi “would remain a financial burden upon others”.¹⁵

It is noteworthy that Dr. Banda and his Malawi Congress Party (MCP) displayed dictatorial tendencies between 1964 and 1994, hence, to an extent, Malawi’s economic policies during the period were those of Dr. Banda himself and not of the government. In practice, there was hardly collective decision making during this period. In addition, what took centre stage was propaganda on the performance of Malawi’s economy and this included agriculture. In this connection, Elias Mandala writes:

In post-colonial Malawi, the discrepancy between official chronicles and social reality grew wider as the Banda regime became increasingly repressive. Everyone, including agricultural officers, had to echo the party song, announcing how, under Dr. Banda, nothing could go wrong in the country; every year was a year of unqualified success. No one went hungry because peasants faithfully followed Dr. Banda’s call for people to work hard in the fields and to adopt modern methods of farming.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 32.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 32.

¹⁶ Elias C. Mandala. *The End of Chidyerano: A History of Food and Everyday Life in Malawi, 1860-2004*. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005). p. 23.

Malawi, like many other sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries was caught in the 'new wave' of political liberalisation of the early 1990s. Being a member of the Commonwealth, an important development was the 1991 Harare Declaration of Commonwealth Heads of Government on Good Governance, which linked aid to good governance.¹⁷ Since Malawi largely depended on foreign aid, it had to pay attention to the Harare Declaration. Within Malawi, the government was moved by the Pastoral Letter issued in March 1992 by the Catholic Bishops which openly criticised the government. It questioned the way Malawi was governed and also raised issues of human rights abuses. A few months later, Malawi experienced the first workers' strike in decades. The workers did not only demand more wages, but also political liberties and press freedom. Thereafter, political groups emerged on the scene and independent newspapers were established.¹⁸

Consequently, a referendum on political democracy was conducted in June 1993 in which about 63 per cent voted in favour of multi-party politics. This was followed by the parliamentary and presidential elections in 1994. Dr. Banda and his MCP were defeated during the elections and a new democratically-elected government was formed by the victorious United Democratic Front (UDF) under the leadership of Bakili Muluzi.¹⁹ After 1994 the economy had a number of features which needed to be liberalised. An example here is the fact that Dr. Banda had personally owned Press Corporation, a company that controlled about 30 per cent of the national economy. The UDF government soon showed commitment to improve the economic situation, for example, through privatisation of state-owned companies and demonopolisation of Press Corporation.²⁰

The economic situation in Malawi worsened during the reign of Bakili Muluzi (1994-2004). This was partly a result of the deterioration of state bureaucracy. After taking over government, Muluzi faced stiff opposition from opposition parties and this compelled him to shift his focus from improving the weak economy to ensuring his own political survival. In order to retain

¹⁷ Lapido Adamolekun, Noel Kulemeka and Mouftaou Laleye. "Political Transition, Economic Liberalisation and Civil Service Reform in Malawi". *Public Administration and Development*. (1997, 17). p. 210.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 210.

¹⁹ For details on the political transition in Malawi in 1994, see Heiko Meinhardt and Nadin Patel. *Malawi's Process of Democratic Transition: An Analysis of Political Developments between 1990 and 2003*. (Lilongwe: KAS, 2003). pp. 15-52.

²⁰ Lapido Adamolekun et al. "Political Transition". p. 212.

support, the President needed resources to distribute: “He appointed unqualified loyalists to parastatal boards, increased the size of his cabinet to include more cronies and oversaw the siphoning of funds from government coffers for personal and political ends”.²¹ In addition, corruption worsened. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) *per capita* remained around US\$160 after the mid-1990s and Human Development Index (HDI) dropped.²² The result was negative economic performance during Malawi’s ‘lost decade’ (1994-2004).

After failing to secure the Third Term Bid in 2003, Muluzi handpicked as his successor Bingu wa Mutharika who, by then, was not a member of the United Democratic Front (UDF). Muluzi masterminded the political campaign and ensured that the UDF was victorious in the 2004 general elections under Bingu wa Mutharika. After Mutharika took over, economic performance improved. GDP growth rates went up and there was an improvement in smallholder agriculture “which was supported by the continuation of the input subsidy programme and the intensification of irrigation agricultural programmes”.²³ However, after 2009 the economy faltered and stumbled from one crisis to another: the exit of cotton and tobacco buyers, shortages of foreign exchange and fuel shortages.²⁴

3. The Origins of Informal Migration in the Twentieth Century

In order to have a clear picture of the nature of migration from Malawi to South Africa, there is need to examine informal migration (*selufu*) which occurred alongside contract migration. Informal labour migration from Malawi to South Africa dates to as far back as the late nineteenth century. In fact, much of the literature shows that it predates official labour recruitment operations in colonial Malawi.²⁵ While some Malawian labour migrants were destined to work in the mines in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, others migrated

²¹ Diana Cammack and Tim Kelsall. “Neo-patrimonialism, Institutions and Economic Growth: The Case of Malawi, 1964-2009”. *IDS Bulletin*. (2011, 42: 2). p. 92.

²² International Monetary Fund (IMF). “Malawi: Letter of Intent”. 2003.

²³ Government of Malawi. Country Report on Economic Performance of Malawi. (Lilongwe: Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, 2008).

²⁴ Diana Cammack and Tim Kelsall. “Neo-patrimonialism”. p. 93.

²⁵ See, for example, Wiseman C. Chirwa. “‘TEBA is Power’: Rural Labour Migrancy and Fishing in Malawi, 1890s-1985”. pp. 133-134; Harvey C.C. Banda. “Competition for the Labour Supply in Mzimba District”. p. 16. Wiseman Chirwa argues that these *selufu* migrants were able to distinguish between “*chibaro*” (official recruitment viewed as a kind of punishment) and “*joini*” (that is, to join, as in ‘to join mine recruitment’) and *selufu*, and usually they preferred *selufu* instead. For details on this, see Wiseman C. Chirwa. “‘TEBA is Power’”. p. 133.

informally to work on commercial farms in both countries and in South Africa's service sector. Richard Black, Jonathan Crush and Sally Peberdy argue that "the majority of this was goal-directed. The model of a successful migrant career was to accumulate sufficient rural resources to invest in business activity at home and opt out of the system".²⁶ This largely applies to *selufu* during the contemporary period. Because of the negative effects of migration and the challenges experienced during the migrants' stay in South Africa (see chapter five), most migrants' intention is to work for as brief a period as possible and thereafter return home for good. Despite this, there have equally been fascinating stories of how *selufu* migrants ended up *kutchona* (overstaying) in South Africa.²⁷

This section examines the origin and nature of *selufu* during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century. It examines such factors as agricultural 'push factors'; government restrictions; shift to partial *proletarianisation* and wage employment; advantages and disadvantages of informal employment; and destination of informal migrants. The main argument here is that although *selufu* was not allowed by the government, it existed throughout the period in question. This was partly a result of the determination of *selufu* labour migrants to make ends meet by migrating to, and working in, South Africa. This determination is further explained below:

The risks they take are indicative of their determination to find work, and to help themselves. Migrating illegally is a wager, which they might lose, but they know they will definitely lose if they do not migrate. It is, indeed, economic risk-taking, if of an unconventional kind.²⁸

Informal labour migration started as a result of the "push" of low wages on plantations in Nyasaland and the attraction of relatively higher wages on the commercial farms in South Africa. After attaining basic education in mission schools, Africans looked for employment within Nyasaland. The only available wage employment was in the tea plantations in the Shire Highlands area in southern Malawi. Since they were already farmers, Malawians easily adapted to the kind of labour on these plantations. However, from quite as early as the 1890s, these educated Malawians faced the problem of low wages on these plantations. They regarded the wages as too low for people with some measure of education. Consequently, with the advice

²⁶ Richard Black, Jonathan Crush and Sally Peberdy. *Migration and Development in Africa: An Overview*. (Cape Town: Idasa, 2006). p. 122.

²⁷ One reason why some migrants overstay in South Africa is when they are failing to make ends meet due to lack of steady jobs. Consequently, they are shy to go back home empty-handed for fear of becoming laughing stocks in their home village.

²⁸ Cited in Pieter Kok, Derik Gelderblom, John O. Oucho and Johan van Zyl (eds.). *Migration in South and Southern Africa: Dynamics and Determinants*. (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2006). p. 9.

from the missionaries, Malawians learnt about the higher wage labour that obtained in different sectors in South Africa. Although the recruited migrants were destined to the mines, the majority of these informal labour migrants ended up securing agricultural wage labour on the farms in South Africa. With a background of farming, these migrants easily adapted to the working conditions on these commercial farms. Though relatively lower than wages on the mines, the wages on these farms were higher as compared to the wages in the Shire Highlands in Nyasaland. The interviewed migrants indicated that they used to hear stories about these wage differences from their grandparents: “In Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts labour migration to South Africa started long time ago, but although we got stories from our forefathers that wages in Nyasaland were lower compared to those abroad, it is difficult to recall the actual figures that were involved”.²⁹

Selufu migrants were rural dwellers in Nyasaland where they engaged in small-scale and subsistence farming. They reared livestock such as cattle, goats and sheep and also cultivated crops such as maize (a staple food crop), beans and groundnuts. With time, white settlers introduced the cultivation of cash crops like tobacco, tea and coffee.³⁰ The attraction of higher wages abroad transformed these rural dwellers from being farmers to becoming wage earners through *proletarianisation*. However, they did not become fully-fledged workers since they still maintained ties with their villages in colonial Malawi. In fact, they mainly invested their proceeds from working in South Africa in farming at home. “Many of us, the old *selufu* and formal migrants, were obsessed with investment in farming.”³¹ They returned home after a period of working in South Africa. These migrants, therefore, underwent a process of partial *proletarianisation*.

Although the wages in South African mines and farms were attractive, these farmers were also transformed into wage workers in line with the human agency theory. In this case, the attraction of the capitalist or industrial sector was not adequate to fully transform these workers into wage workers. They actually made a decision either to become labour migrants or not. In doing so, they considered the advantages and disadvantages of whether to join labour migration or not. After making a decision to emigrate to South Africa, they further had to decide whether to go

²⁹ Interview with Anthony Chauma. Yakobe Ngwira Village. T.A. Kapingo Sibande. Mzimba. 26/08/2015.

³⁰ For details on the cultivation of these crops in colonial Malawi, see, for example, Joey Power. *Political Culture and Nationalism in Malawi: Building the Kwacha*. (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010). pp. 69-70; B. Pachai. *Malawi: The History of the Nation*. (London: Longman Group Limited, 1973). pp. 110-116.

³¹ Interview with Anthony Chauma. Op. Cit.

under *Wenela/ Theba* or *selufu*. What guided their decision to emigrate were the perceived advantages of emigrating to, and working in, South Africa. This explains why some people from the same labour migration areas in Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay did not join the labour migration process. To them, it was not beneficial and justifiable to emigrate. Dominic Jere is a non-migrant from Mzimba and explains why some people in the district did not emigrate: ‘For some of us, emigrating not only to South Africa, but even to Zimbabwe was a waste of time. We felt we could easily make ends meet without bothering ourselves to join the migration process.’³²

Both the South African and Nyasaland governments were opposed to informal labour migration from Malawi to South Africa. In fact, the South African government was against informal labour migration from all the countries in the southern African region. During the colonial period, the Nyasaland government was supported by the planters (white settlers) and missionaries, each of whom had their own reservations against informal labour migration. Following the increase in informal migration, the missionaries argued that migration had deleterious effects on rural life, that is, disruption of families whereas the planters were against the resultant loss of man-power. The missionaries too had economic interests: in some instances they were directly involved in cash crop production, hence they, too, directly felt the negative effects of male emigration.³³

After the attainment of independence in 1964, Dr Banda preferred Malawians to provide labour on the newly-established tobacco estates. In spite of this, the burgeoning tobacco estates were less attractive to the labour migrants returning from South Africa. This was due to a number of reasons. First, the wages offered on these estates were generally low. In fact, following the end of mine migrancy, many migrants continued to go to South Africa as informal labour migrants because wages in sectors other than mining in South Africa were still higher as compared to wages on these tobacco estates.³⁴ Second, most Malawians, especially those from the northern parts of Malawi, preferred maize cultivation over labouring on these estates. Owen

³² Interview with Dominic Jere. Kazezani Makamo Village. T.A. M’mbelwa. Mzimba. 27/03/2016.

³³ For details on the missionaries’ and white settlers’ stand on labour migration during the colonial period, see, for example, Robert Boeder. *Malawians Abroad*. pp. 196-198.

³⁴ Most of the people I interviewed, especially in Mzimba District, gave this as a justification as to why wage labour on tobacco estates was not as attractive. However, they did not specify the actual wages offered in each case.

Mkandawire, who worked in South Africa and later invested in garage business at Euthini Trading Centre in Mzimba, provided the following account on the Ngoni of Mzimba:

For many years, the people of Mzimba have been opposed to working on tobacco estates as *matenanti* (tenant farmers). For us, the Ngoni, it is better to emigrate to South Africa for wage employment rather than being relegated to the status of a *tenanti* (tenant farmer), which, according to the Ngoni, is not different from *wuzga* or *ukapolo* (slavery).³⁵

The South African and Nyasaland (Malawi) governments wanted to control the numbers of migrants going to South Africa for wage employment. That is why both were in favour of formal labour migration since recruitment was controlled by the South African Chamber of Mines through *Wenela* and later *Theba*. Despite such efforts, the two governments failed to control *selufu*. More and more people continued to enter South Africa clandestinely. Consequently, it is difficult to state with certainty the number of migrants who emigrated from Malawi to South Africa during the last part of the nineteenth century, the entire twentieth century, and during the first part of the twenty-first century. Much of the statistical information on the numbers of *selufu* migrants are based on mere estimates (See tables 3.1 and 3.2 below).

In fact, *selufu* had an upper hand over official migration for most part of the period. For instance, Henry Mitchell writes that “in 1941 approximately 28,000 travelled independently to South Africa compared to 3,621 who were formally recruited for the mines”.³⁶ This was due to the advantages that the migrants associated with *selufu*. One of the notable advantages that *selufu* had over official migration was the migrants’ choice of employers at the destination points, nature of work and length of stay, and hence maximum accumulation of proceeds.³⁷ The correspondence below from the Labour Advisor of Zomba, Malawi, in 1952 captures some of the benefits and disadvantages that the migrants took into account when opting for either formal or informal labour migrancy:

The argument is appreciated that recruitment can be a means of safeguarding the interests and welfare of the recruits and their dependants and ensuring their return; recruitment, however, involves the recruit being tied for the period of his contract to an employer whom he does not know and may not like; the majority of *Nyasas* (as the people from colonial Malawi were officially identified then) are independent and like to pick and choose their employers according to their own inclinations.³⁸

The quotation above strongly suggests the existence of a strong current of *selufu* alongside formal migrant recruitment. While official migration was banned or restricted during certain

³⁵ Interview with Owen Mkandawire. Zubayumo Zoba Village. T.A. Chindi. Mzimba. 12/01/2016.

³⁶ Henry Mitchell. “Independent Africans: Migration from Colonial Malawi to South Africa, c. 1935-1961” (MA Thesis). University of Edinburgh. August 2014.

³⁷ Harvey C.C. Banda. “Competition for the Labour Supply in Mzimba District”. pp. 18-19.

³⁸ MNA LB 10/4/7. General Correspondence, 1951-1952: Contract Labour Migration versus Independent Labour Migration (Extracts from Communication by Labour Advisor. Zomba. 29/09/1952).

periods, for example, between 1909 and 1934 due to high mortality rates on the mines,³⁹ and between 1939 and 1945,⁴⁰ as a result of World War Two (WWII), *selufu* migrants emigrated to South Africa throughout the period. Litson Nkhoma from Kachikhokho Bongolo Village in Nkhata-Bay is an example of such *selufu* migrants. Litson said that he went to South Africa as a young, unmarried man, but eventually got married to a South African wife and had children together. He came home in 1986 following the death of his mother, but he quickly went back thereafter. He was escorted home in 2011 after he pleaded with his children to allow him to go home to die amongst his kin in his home village. Since 2011, the children regularly come home from South Africa to visit him. He also said they give him monetary assistance now and then.⁴¹



Photograph 3.1: Litson Nkhoma from Nkhata-Bay District who went to South Africa under *selufu* but ended up working in the mines throughout. He went in 1950 but finally came back home in 2011 (photo by author).

³⁹ For details see Randall M. Packard. *White Plague, Black Labour: Tuberculosis and the Political Economy of Health and Disease in South Africa*.

⁴⁰ See Bill Paton. *Labour Export Policy*. p. 27.

⁴¹ Interview with Litson Nkhoma. Kachikhokho Bongolo Village. T.A. Malengamzoma. Nkhata-Bay. 7/01/2016.

Table 3.1: Countries of Origin and Distribution by Sex of Foreign-Born Bantu, 1951 Census (Fronemann)

Country of Origin	URBAN		RURAL		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
South –West Africa	3023	188	789	209	4129
Basutoland	75668	41557	61391	40424	219065
Swaziland	14942	8109	11779	8084	42914
Bechuanaland	24723	5866	13860	6568	51017
Rhodesia	24701	1215	20380	945	47241
Nyasaland	29464	796	32175	1220	63665
Kenya	316	16	48	4	387
Tanganyika	6347	9	766	5	7127
Mozambique	111535	591	44375	4739	161240
Angola	5990	2	318	12	6322
Belgian Congo	115	4	50	14	183
Other territories	1751	851	694	416	3712
Total	298598	59204	186345	62645	606992

Source: Interdepartmental Committee of Inquiry into Foreign Bantu (Froneman) Report. Republic of South Africa. Pretoria. 1962. p. 9. From the table, note that about 40% of the foreign Bantu were in the rural areas and approximately 60% in the urban areas; and about 20% of the foreign Bantu were women, more than half of whom were in the rural areas.

Table 3.2: Foreign-Born Africans in South Africa, 1911-1985

Country	1911	1921	1936	1946	1951	1970	1980	1985
Angola			28	6716	6322	3859	589	392
Botswana	5020	11959	4048	38559	51017	49469	33366	26015
Lesotho	75132	111733	163838	199327	219065	157499	172879	135563
Malawi	4573	22122	17657	61005	63655	110777	36087	28712
Mozambique	114976	110245	98031	141417	161240	142512	64813	63561
Namibia	2230	2926	1879	4990	4129	2518	10342	9210
Swaziland	21662	29177	31092	33738	42914	29167	31981	30722
Tanzania			118	2937	7127	288	145	887
Zambia	2158		12189	13515	13544	2194	1495	926
Zimbabwe	2526		2167	32034	32697	13392	20552	7019
Other	930	5146	2730	22569	4282	4369	4234	14003
Total	229207	279819	333777	556807	605992	516044	376483	317010

Source: South African Census Reports, 1911-1985. The number of informal migrants are difficult to state with accuracy since record-keeping was poor. One reliable estimate is the South African census which recorded the birthplace of every person in South Africa. The figures above show a gradual increase in the numbers of foreign-born Africans as the twentieth century progressed.

Nonetheless, *selufu* too had a host of disadvantages and that is why some migrants preferred official recruitment over it. For instance, *selufu* was rigorous and hazardous since migrants had to walk on foot through dangerous forests. They also had to process travel documents on their own and were liable to arrests and deportations upon entry into South Africa. Because of the arduous nature of the journey, migrants usually engaged in what has been termed in scholarship as “step migration”. This entailed Malawian migrants going to South Africa in stages, that is, they worked briefly along the way, for example, in Zambia and Zimbabwe before finally reaching their destination.⁴² Most of the interviewed migrants who went to South Africa under *selufu* indicated that they had work stoppages along the way; for instance, Winstead Lupafya went to South Africa in 1955 under *selufu*. He first worked in Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia, and only reached South Africa in 1956. He came back home in 1958. Between 1959 and 1983, he largely worked in Zimbabwe. But because of low wages in Zimbabwe, he decided to go back to South Africa between 1989 and 1992. Lazarus Chikoma Bota, one of my informants and a group village headman from Mzimba, attests to the rigorous nature of the ‘step-by-step’ journey to South Africa:

Actually, migrants under *selufu* walked to South Africa. *Wakatemanga simbo m'malundi kuti ghaleke kutupa*. (They were applying some powdered medicine on the razor cuttings on their legs to allow the medicine to get into the blood stream so that the feet do not swell). They would set off via Lundazi (Zambia) then to Lwangwa, Fela in Mozambique, then to Wanke Coal Mine in Zimbabwe. Upon arrival in Zimbabwe, they would split going to various towns to look for work. After working for some months, they would proceed to South Africa passing through Mashivingo and cross Limpopo into South Africa.⁴³

Lazarus Bota trained as a primary school teacher in Malawi and taught for 38 years before being dismissed on political grounds in 1982.⁴⁴ In 1983 he went to South Africa where he worked in a gold mine as a machine boy. While in South Africa, he managed to do a lot of things at home, including buying two cars. He returned home in 1992.

Because of the government restrictions, the South African border posts like Mafeking, Beitbridge and Komatipoort were heavily policed. However, certain sections of the border were unguarded, thus making it easy for the migrants to cross the border.⁴⁵ However, those *selufu* migrants that were caught trying to enter South Africa illegally used to be imprisoned at a notorious farm prison in Bethal (in the then Eastern Transvaal and present day Mpumalanga

⁴² Interview with Winstead Lupafya, Zubayumo Makamo Village, T.A. M'mbelwa, Mzimba. 17/04/2005.

⁴³ Interview with Lazarus Chikoma Bota. Chikoma Bota Village. TA Chindi. Mzimba. 14/01/2016.

⁴⁴ Unlike Lazarus Bota, a good number of labour migrants in this study went to South Africa as unskilled and semi-skilled labour migrants.

⁴⁵ For details on this, see Fronemann Commission. Interdepartmental Committee of Inquiry into Foreign Bantu. Republic of South Africa. Pretoria. 1962. pp. 13-14.

province), known as *Bethani* in Chitumbuka language of northern Malawi. Winstead Lupafya gives the following account of his own experiences:

We went to South Africa under *selufu*. We used to walk. I first went to South Africa in 1955. Immediately after we entered the South African border from Botswana, we got arrested and we were sent to *Bethani*, a farm prison, where most of the illegal immigrants were sent. There we were forced to dig Irish potatoes using hands. Luckily, we managed to escape.⁴⁶

The imprisonment at Bethal was for six months and those who completed the service were given a letter (permit) and released. They were then allowed to proceed into towns to continue with their quest for employment using this permit. Lazarus Bota claims that most of those who got 'work permits' in this way did not return home: they integrated into the host society.⁴⁷ Bota indicated that despite the availability of train transport connecting South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia, most *Bethani* (Bethal) prison 'graduates' chose not to return home. One possible reason for this is the 'work permit' which might have given them courage to 'walk freely' in South Africa.

In South Africa, employers other than mine companies relied on informal migrant networks. One of the reasons cited was that these employers could not compete with the mining industries on the amount of wages offered to their employees. In other words, they were looking for cheap and exploitable labour.⁴⁸ It is these employers who tended to encourage informal international labour migration. Oral evidence from Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay also shows that many of the migrants who migrated informally went to South Africa to work in such sectors as domestic, construction, transport and service sectors. A significant number of the migrants who preferred to emigrate under *selufu* did not want to work in the mines partly because they considered mine work as tough and rigorous (*chibaro* i.e. punishment). They instead worked as gardeners and cooks. Examples of such migrants include Wales Chima from Mzimba. He went to South Africa under *selufu* in 1984 via Zambia using a minibus. He worked as a gardener in a white man's compound. In 1986 he was arrested for being a rogue and vagabond, and was imprisoned

⁴⁶ Interview with Winstead Lupafya. Op. Cit.

⁴⁷ Interview with Lazarus Chikoma Bota. Op. Cit.

⁴⁸ For details, see, for example, Jonathan Crush, Vincent Williams and Sally Peberdy. "Migration in Southern Africa". p. 2.

for two weeks before being deported to Malawi.⁴⁹ However, while already in South Africa, some migrants diverted and ended up working on the mines.⁵⁰

Although some *selufu* migrants were against the rigorous nature of mine work, others only hated certain aspects of formal recruitment, for instance, the binding contract arrangement (i.e. eighteen to twenty-four months contracts) and they devised a strategy of overcoming this drawback. They, therefore, went under *selufu*, but upon entering South Africa, they still secured mine work. In this way, they were not bound by any contract arrangement. As a result, they used to get higher wages as compared to recruited migrants since the deferred pay arrangement did not apply to them. In addition, they were not staying in mine compounds but, rather outside, and in private residences. Hence they were able to lead a good life.⁵¹ The following account sheds light on this:

When I got there, I joined the mines. They taught us *Chilapalapa* (the language used at the mines). Even if you were able to speak English, this was the common language. I was an assistant in a *makalanyani* (earth removing plant). I did not stay long at the mines because my father, who was in Cape Town by that time, told me to move out of the mines. He sent me money for transport. We discussed with my late brother and we fled from the mines. We went to Alexandra town to board a vehicle to Johannesburg. We had several addresses of relatives. We started searching for them. We started looking for jobs. It was not difficult to find jobs in those days; in two days a job could be found. I started working as a garden boy, watering flowers at a certain white man's compound. Later I was trained to do household chores. I was sent to school for two weeks to learn how to prepare food. I received a certificate. I came back home in 1958 and married. It was just a holiday. I went again in 1959 and worked at another place. I worked with several whites, cooking and baking. I had good knowledge about baking and the white bosses were actually impressed. I had learnt a lot from my uncle when I had come home for holiday. He was a hotel manager in South Africa. I could make very nice bread. This helped me when it came to jobs. When my boss is moving out and I'm not interested to follow him, he could recommend me to his friends to employ me.⁵²

Benson is one of the old *selufu* migrants who first went to South Africa via Salisbury, Zimbabwe, in 1953. Although he was a *selufu* migrant, he also worked in the mines. However, deserters from the mines, once caught, were repatriated and black-listed for future employment in South Africa.⁵³ This was also typical of labour migrants from Nkhata-Bay during the old migration period. Litson Nkhoma is an example of *selufu* migrants from Nkhata-Bay who ended up working in the mines.⁵⁴ However, though fewer, even in Mzimba there were migrants

⁴⁹ Interview with Wales Chima. Sitonya Vinkhumbu Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 24/03/2016. For details about the sectors in which *selufu* migrants worked, see, for example, Jonathan Crush, Vincent Williams and Sally Peberdy. "Migration in Southern Africa". p. 2.

⁵⁰ This view was maintained by ex-migrants in Nkhata-Bay, the majority of whom emigrated under *selufu*. As for the migrants in Mzimba District, they indicated that it was fashionable to emigrate under *Wenela*.

⁵¹ Interview with Litson Nkhoma. Kachikhokho Bongolo Village. T.A. Malenganzoma. Nkhata-Bay. 7/01/2016.

⁵² Interview with Benson Phiri. Jikhoni Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 25/03/2016.

⁵³ For details on this, see SANA BAO/2332/C-28-26 Witwatersrand Native Labour Association, Mine Labour Organisation (*Wenela*) Limited.

⁵⁴ Interview with Litson Nkhoma. Op. Cit.

who went under *selufu*, but diverted into mine work. Benson Phiri is a good example of such *selufu* migrants from Mzimba District.⁵⁵

Although the Nyasaland government was against the emigration of women, oral evidence from Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts shows that some women accompanied their husbands under *selufu*.⁵⁶ In terms of gender and generational distribution, during the old period, both men and women emigrated to South Africa. However, in terms of age, both were already married and, in most cases, had children. Their intention was, therefore, to work and accumulate money for use in their households back home. While staying with their husbands in South Africa, these women were not working but rather acting as house-wives; taking care of their working husbands. Nonetheless, in rare circumstances wives too could be engaged to do laundry jobs (*kuchapa na kusita vyakuvwara*).⁵⁷

Many *selufu* migrants ended up becoming *matchona*⁵⁸ (the overstayers) during the old period. The challenges that they faced upon entering South Africa, for example, being imprisoned at Bethal and continuously being hunted by the police thereafter, compelled them to overstay. For some *selufu* migrants, this development was as a result of carelessness such as excessive drinking and womanising habits, but for others it was due to failure to accumulate enough money because of lack of steady and better-paying jobs. They, therefore, overstayed for fear of being laughed at for returning home empty-handed from the so-called “land of opportunities”. Trywell Mtchona Chisi is an example of *selufu* migrants who overstayed in South Africa during the pre-1990 period. He was nicknamed *Mtchona* because he spent thirty years in South Africa.⁵⁹

4. Escalation of *Selufu* after 1990

This section examines the changing dimensions and patterns of informal migration from Malawi to South Africa since the early 1990s. The composition, destination, motives and volume of migrants changed rapidly. The ensuing section examines the reasons behind this change. This section provides some evidence to establish the numerical escalation in question.

⁵⁵ Interview with Benson Phiri. Op. Cit.

⁵⁶ Details on female migration come in the next chapter.

⁵⁷ Interview with Tikhole Chisambi. Zubayumo Makamo Village. T.A. M’mbelwa. Mzimba. 27/03/2016.

⁵⁸ For details on *kutchona*, see MNA NNM 1/14/6 Tribal Organisation and History.

⁵⁹ Interview with Trywell Mtchona Chisi. Zebediya Makamo Village. T.A. M’mbelwa. Mzimba. 27/04/2005.

However, much of this evidence is qualitative and this is mainly because of the informal nature of migration, especially since the 1990s. Among others, the section examines wider geographical distribution and sectoral penetration of informal migrants.

Unlike in the past when labour was destined not only to South Africa, but also to Zimbabwe, Zambia and Tanzania, during the contemporary period labour migrants are destined mainly to South Africa. In rare cases, for instance, in the case of Nkhata-Bay, they also migrate to Tanzania for wage employment. However, this form of labour migration has a commercial connotation as labour migrants mainly target to buy various types of nets using part of their wages. These nets are used for fishing in the lakeshore district. Justice Nyirenda, who hails from Nkhata-Bay, worked in Tanzania for five years before returning home. After a few years, he went to South Africa. He indicated that Tonga migrants from Nkhata-Bay choose to go either to Tanzania or to South Africa:

Here in Nkhata-Bay we choose to go either to Tanzania or to South Africa. Each of these destinations has its own advantages. For instance, jobs are not scarce in Tanzania and it is close to Nkhata-Bay. But the jobs are low-paying as compared to those in South Africa. Again the South African Rand is very powerful. If you get R3,000 per month, in Malawi that is equivalent to MK150,000. That is why the majority of the people go to South Africa.⁶⁰

South Africa, therefore, remains a major destination because of the strength of the South African Rand and the entrenched belief by labour migrants of the relative availability of jobs in South Africa. Most of the countries in the region have had their economies weakened over time, hence they are no longer the destination of labour migrants.

In the past, migrants used to go to Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. But over the years, the economy of Zimbabwe crumbled and people stopped going there for wage employment. In Zambia, Malawian migrants used to work in the copper-belt, but working there is no longer profitable. Since then South Africa is the only major destination.⁶¹

Zimbabwe has over the years been transformed from a labour-destination country to one of the major labour-sending countries in the southern Africa region.⁶²

The early 1990s saw an unprecedented increase in the numbers of *selufu* labour migrants. Following the end of mine migrancy, many Malawians were not interested to secure wage labour on the tobacco estates in central and northern Malawi. They despised the low wages that

⁶⁰ Interview with Justice Nyirenda. Chizonga Village. T.A. Malenganzoma. Nkhata-Bay. 6/01/2016.

⁶¹ Interview with Charles Makamo. Zebediya Makamo Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 19/07/2009.

⁶² For details on Malawian migrants' preference for South Africa for wage employment over such countries as Zimbabwe, see, for example, Anika Wilson. "Of Love Potions and Witch Baskets: Domesticity, Mobility and Occult Rumours in Malawi". *Western Folklore*. (2012, 71: 2). p. 157.

were obtaining on these estates.⁶³ Consequently, most of these former *Wenela* and *Theba* migrants went back to South Africa under *selufu*. During the old period, the numbers of recruited migrants were restricted by fixed quotas, for instance, 5,000 per annum, whereas *selufu* numbers were restricted by the arduous nature of the journey to South Africa and government restrictions.

During the post-1990 period, different categories of male and female labour migrants were involved. Oral evidence from the study districts shows that in the 1990s fewer numbers of women were involved. But after 2000 the situation radically changed; these female migrants went to South Africa not only to visit their husbands, but also to secure wage employment. In the 1990s, approximately 10% of Malawian migrants were women, but by the 2000s about 30% were female migrants.⁶⁴ Gilbert Ndhlovu, a former *Wenela/ Theba* migrant from Mzimba District, had this to say on the increase in *selufu* migrants since the 1990s:

These days so many people, unlike in the past, migrate to, and work in, South Africa. If you go through these villages, you will realise that most houses are either empty, with both husbands and wives in South Africa, or are female-headed, with only a husband away. However, it is difficult to come up with actual figures involved.⁶⁵

Similarly, Joyce Wanda, also from the same district, concurred with Gilbert Ndhlovu.

In this village, the majority of the people are those that are working in South Africa. Very few remain here. For instance, in this compound, only two men are at home while seven men are away. This is the trend in most migration areas in the district. The situation was, however, different in the past since only few people went to South Africa.⁶⁶

Joyce has never been to South Africa and yet her husband has been working in South Africa since the 1970s. In fact, Joyce maintained, her husband started working there before they even got married. She indicated that she was not interested in going to South Africa since her main concern was looking after the welfare of their children and grand children.

Informal migratory movements from Malawi to South Africa are rooted in past migrancy practices. Consequently, informal migration is entrenched in districts like Mzimba, Nkhata-Bay (northern Malawi), Dedza, Dowa, Ntcheu (central Malawi), and Blantyre and Mangochi

⁶³ Informants, that is, both *selufu* and former *Wenela/ Theba* migrants, did not specify the actual wages, but maintained there was a notable difference in the wages offered.

⁶⁴ I came up with this percentage increase in female migration using a sample survey from Zubayumo Makamo area in Mzimba District. This scenario was generally applicable to the situation in major labour migration areas in both Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts.

⁶⁵ Interview with Gilbert Ndhlovu. Bonga Village. T.A. Kapingo Sibande. Mzimba. 26/08/2015.

⁶⁶ Interview with Joyce Wanda. Mzondi Ndhlovu Village. T.A. Kapingo Sibande. Mzimba. 26/08/2015.

(southern Malawi), which are historically associated with labour migration.⁶⁷ Many migrants in the study areas indicated that they originated from labour migration families in that their parents and grand parents had earlier emigrated to either Zimbabwe or South Africa for wage employment. At the time of the interviews between 2015 and 2016, former *Wenela/ Theba* and *selufu* migrants indicated that their children were working in South Africa. Raphael Jere is a former migrant who worked in the South African mines under *Wenela* and *Theba* in the 1970s and 1980s. His son too went to South Africa for wage employment under new *selufu*. “When I was growing up my father used to tell me stories about life and job opportunities in South Africa. That is why I developed love for South Africa and went there immediately after dropping out of school”,⁶⁸ John said.

These migrants continue to emigrate to South Africa for wage employment. But since most of them are unskilled and semi-skilled, they end up in South Africa’s burgeoning informal sector. Migrants from Malawi are also partially *proletarianised*, hence they are not fully-fledged workers. In other words, they do not have the requisite skills with which to enter the formal sector. This is also partly due to the general scarcity of jobs following the influx of immigrants from different countries into South Africa in the post-1994 period. Evidence from Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay shows that migration during the contemporary period continues to be undertaken for wage employment. However, a proportion of the new *selufu* migrants since the 1990s invest part of their proceeds from wage employment in trade between Malawi and South Africa. Observations on coaches between Malawi and South Africa reveal that passengers aboard these coaches are either migrant workers or labour migrants-cum-traders who go to South Africa *kukawoda* (to purchase their merchandise for resale in Malawi). From South Africa, the coaches are also full of either migrant workers going back to Malawi for holidays or these labour migrants-cum-traders returning to Malawi with their merchandise.

In 2005, I first went to South Africa by coach. Ten years later, in 2015, I made four trips between Malawi and South Africa using different coaches such as Intercape (South African Company), and Chipozani Coaches owned by Mr. Chipozani Ngwira, a Malawian. These buses were full of male and female labour migrants and traders as usual. The migrants traveling using these buses had varied reasons for using these buses. Edith Nayela, a former labour migrant

⁶⁷ The *bomas* of these districts housed recruiting stations for *Wenela* and later *Theba* and also *Mthandizi*.

⁶⁸ Interview with John Jere. Kavezani Makamo Village. T.A. M’mbelwa. Mzimba. 27/04/2005.

and later a business woman, had this to say on this matter: “We, the business people, prefer local coaches like Chipozani Coaches because they are still getting established in business and, therefore, make efforts to attract customers through customer care. For instance, they don’t restrict and charge much on *katundu* that one is carrying, unlike Intercape”.⁶⁹ Madalitso Kacheche, another labour migrant-cum-trader, also shed light on how migrants and traders settle for a particular bus: “Most migrants traveling between Malawi and South Africa prefer to travel using coaches like Munorurama (a Zimbabwean Company) because whenever they have problems along the way, the hosts make efforts to get them out of trouble, whereas in executive coaches like Intercape, they do not bother to assist. In fact, Intercape discontinued using hosts in July 2015; not to mention the fact that Munorurama, Business Times and others are very affordable”.⁷⁰

The labour migrants who later indulge in commercial pursuits are in two categories. The first category is that of migrants who go to South Africa to buy South African products in bulk and at wholesale price to sell in Malawi at a profit. Most of these products are manufactured items like electronic equipment such as television flat screens, laptops, cell phones; kitchenware like stoves, refrigerators; and various other merchandise. Most of the people who sell such items are former labour migrants who have used proceeds from years of working in South Africa to venture into business. One of the reasons for this move is that they operate their businesses from Malawi where they want to oversee the upbringing of their children. “When you are based in South Africa, your children miss your care. Just imagine when both parents are working in South Africa, and the children are under the charge of their grand parents, what sort of citizens will they be in future? And sometimes these grandparents are aged and frail”.⁷¹

The second category is made up of migrants who sell Malawian items in South Africa to Malawians based there. These are female migrants who are wives of migrants working in South Africa. They use part of their husbands’ wages to invest in small-scale businesses. Because of the increased numbers of Malawian migrants working in South Africa since the early 1990s, some Malawians have taken advantage of the huge demand for Malawian items by these labour migrants. Labour migrants always carry some items from Malawi when returning to South

⁶⁹ Interview with Edith Nayela. Former Labour Migrant (Later Trader). Johannesburg. 7/10/2015.

⁷⁰ Interview with Madalitso Kacheche. Former Labour Migrant (Later Trader). Johannesburg. 23/10/2015.

⁷¹ Interview with Fiskani Kayira (Female Migrant). Berea. Johannesburg. 4/11/2016.

Africa and, because of information flow, some Malawian labourers-cum- traders have eagerly responded to the demand.

Whenever we go to Malawi for holiday, we always make efforts to bring items from Malawi for example *usipa* fish. This is because the South African items like foodstuffs are not tasty. When we are here in South Africa, we always miss the nice Malawian foodstuffs. With the increase in the numbers of labour migrants, traders eventually started bringing such foodstuffs. Initially the demand was low, but nowadays the demand is huge.⁷²

The items that are on high demand among Malawians based in South Africa are different varieties of fish from Lake Malawi, sweet potatoes, rice, dried vegetables, and beans. Many traders from Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay do not have adequate capital and, therefore, bring these items in small quantities, for instance, four 50kg bags of these items at a time. The other limitations are the challenges that they encounter at various border posts between Malawi and South Africa. These traders face untold problems in trying to clear these goods at Beitbridge Border Post when entering South Africa. Those with large quantities of such goods are charged a lot by customs officials; hence they deliberately carry limited quantities. In trying to circumvent this problem, the traders resort to making frequent trips to South Africa, for instance, once or twice every month. These traders sell the items in selected and designated places like residential areas and in the recreational parks during welfare society meetings which are held once every month (see photograph 3.2 below).

⁷² Interview with Sara Mlotha. Randburg Park. Johannesburg. 6/11/2016.



Photograph 3.2: Malawian migrants buying Malawian foodstuffs like sweet potatoes, fish (from Lake Malawi) and rice during monthly welfare society meetings at Parkmore Park, Johannesburg on 7 August 2016 (photo by author).

Unlike during the old period when migrants, especially *selufu* migrants, used to overstay in South Africa, during the post-1990 period new *selufu* displays an oscillating or circular migration pattern. Labour migrants from Nkhata-Bay and Mzimba indicated that their intention is not to overstay in South Africa, but rather to work as briefly as possible and thereafter return home. In this case, labour migrants during the post-1990 period behave like ‘target workers’.⁷³ Steven Phiri, a primary school teacher in Chintheche in Nkhata-Bay argued that the majority of migrants during the contemporary period behave like target workers. He gave an example of a young man who went to South Africa to work and use the proceeds to buy equipment with which to open a mechanical garage:

I can give an example of a young man who attained secondary school education and later on started working at a garage here in Chintheche. After working there for some time, he could not find a stable job. Then he decided to go to South Africa to work but to accumulate the machinery required to open a garage. While working he used to buy the required equipment and used to store it. After working there

⁷³ For details on this, see also Richard Black, Jonathan Crush and Sally Peberdy. *Migration and Development in Africa*. p. 123.

for about five years, he had bought all the equipment for the garage and he came home and opened his own garage. Right now he owns a very reputable garage at Malaza Trading Centre here in Chintheche.⁷⁴

A similar case is that of Omega Mhango who comes from Londowala Bota Village in T.A. Kampingo Sibande in Mzimba District. Omega first went to South Africa in 2008 and came back in 2009. He secured a job as a gardener. He went back in 2012 and got deported in 2013. Despite this, he was determined to go back and achieve his migration goals:

My mind is focused on business. My aim is to go back to South Africa, work for some time, but during this period accumulate money (as capital) with which to start business. I am not interested in working in South Africa years on end. During the first trip, I was disturbed by the electricity project: I used the money from South Africa to ensure that my house had electricity. The rest of the money was later spent on a few other issues requiring money. During the second trip, the deportation affected the whole thing.⁷⁵

The intention not to stay long in South Africa has been occasioned by the desire to rejoin their families as one way of preventing the numerous problems which creep into migrant households as a result of a migrant staying apart from his household members (wife, children and other dependents). Migrants indicated that *kutchona* merely happens out of circumstances beyond their control, for instance, failure to secure steady and better-paying jobs.⁷⁶

Circular labour migration during the contemporary period is applicable to the concept of ‘men of two worlds’⁷⁷ where labour migrants stay both in South Africa, the industrial world, and in Malawi, the traditional or subsistence society. When going to South Africa, these labour migrants have set migration goals which they want to fulfil. While in South Africa they, therefore, work towards the achievement of these goals. According to labour migrants in the study areas, these goals include accumulating money with which to look after their families, to invest in agriculture, to meet their children’s education expenses and, of late, to invest in various small-scale businesses. Migrants prefer investing in businesses so that they can rely on profits for basic subsistence after years of working in South Africa.

From experience, we have realised that using money from South Africa on basic foodstuffs and the general welfare of the household is not enough. What is very important is investing the proceeds from South Africa either in small-scale businesses or in our children’s education. With proper care, the business soon grows and we start getting larger profits. With the latter, we can ably support our households. Again, after investing in education, we rely on support from our children once they get employed. In this case, there would be no need for us to continue staying in South Africa for wage employment.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Interview with Steven Phiri. Chirumu Primary School. T.A. Malanda. Nkhata-Bay. 6/01/2016.

⁷⁵ Interview with Omega Mhango. Londowala Bota Village. T.A. Kampingo Sibande. Mzimba. 27/08/2015.

⁷⁶ Details here come in chapter five.

⁷⁷ For details on the application of this concept to ‘circular migrants’ in twentieth century South Africa, see, for example, Hobart D. Houghton. *The South African Economy*. (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1984). p. 84.

⁷⁸ Interview with Lazarus Bota. Op. Cit.

Many labour migrants have drawn lessons from the experiences upon returning home of both *Wenela/ Theba* and old and new *selufu* migrants, who ended up becoming poor despite accumulating a lot of proceeds from South Africa during their hey days. This was mainly due to lack of sound investment of such proceeds, for example, in viable businesses. As a result of this, nowadays labour migration is usually followed or done simultaneously with commercial migration to enable migrants to rely on such businesses during the aftermath of labour migration days.

This circular or oscillating migration is at times occasioned by the frequent arrests and eventual deportation of migrants. While staying in South Africa, most of these labour migrants lack requisite documentation to enable them to work peacefully. Such documents include valid visas, residence and work permits. Consequently, they are prone to arrests by the South African police, immigration officers and officials from the Home Affairs Department. Once arrested and deported, these migrants would have failed to fulfil their set migration goals. Consequently, upon arrival back home, migrants quickly reprocess their journey back to South Africa to resume the curtailed wage employment. For the migrant, the process of organising a journey back to South Africa mainly involves securing money for transport expenses, food and other eventualities along the way and, most importantly, reprocessing of the passport in case it was ‘cancelled’, that is, nullified by the authorities. The latter put a special stamp into the passport, indicating that the owner has overstayed in South Africa. The same information is uploaded online, barring the migrant not to use this passport for the next five years.

Consequently, affected labour migrants process a new passport with new personal details like different name and home village. Once done, they use the new passport to enter South Africa as first-time labour migrants. Nkhwachi (not real name) who hails from Bulala, one of the major migration areas in T.A. Chindi, Mzimba District, indicated that she stayed in South Africa for two years before going back to Malawi in 2015. Since authorities at Beitbridge Border Post nullified her passport, she was compelled to process a new one:

I first came to South Africa in 2012 where I was following up my husband who had come here for wage employment in 2011. Upon arrival, my husband assisted me in looking for a job. However, in 2015 I went home to leave my newly-born baby with my parents. Since my baby was quite young, I stayed for a year before returning to South Africa. But when going to Malawi, the authorities quashed my passport such that I could only use it to come back to South Africa after five years. That is why in Malawi I simply processed a new passport with different personal details. For your information, I am currently using my husband’s surname in the new passport. Otherwise I couldn’t have returned to South Africa.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Interview with Nkhwachi (not real name). Randburg Park. Johannesburg. 6/11/2016.

For those labour migrants whose passports have not been nullified, the process of organising a journey back to South Africa is a simple one as it only involves securing money for transport, food and other eventualities along the way. However, since the passport will still show that they overstayed in South Africa, such migrants rely on giving a bribe at every border post between Malawi and South Africa. Although the issue of overstaying in South Africa concerns immigration authorities at Beitbridge Border Post, authorities at border posts in Mozambique and in Zimbabwe simply take advantage of the situation to harass such migrants with the aim of equally getting a bribe. Corruption at these border posts has become so institutionalised that migrants with overstay visas, though they overstay in South Africa, are forced to part with some money in the name of *viphuphu* (bribes). This makes preparing for a journey to South Africa very expensive for migrants originating from Malawi's countryside. Masuzgo (not real name) comes from Sanga area in Nkhata-Bay and has been working in South Africa since 2008. He lamented about the unnecessary harassment at these border posts:

These people really harass us for no particular reason. Does it make sense for migrants who overstayed in South Africa to be forced to pay R50 at every border post including in Mozambique and Zimbabwe? You need to pay R50 at every border and a minimum of R500 at Beitbridge Border Post. So in total you need about R700 only for *viphuphu*. This is grossly unfair! We merely do this because we desperately need to resume working in South Africa and also because of lack of alternative income-generating opportunities back in Malawi. Otherwise, most of the migrants would simply have stayed home. That is why these days we aim at staying in South Africa briefly, that is, for a few years.⁸⁰

Oral interviews with Malawian migrants aboard these buses and personal observations during these trips confirmed this institutionalisation of *viphuphu* at all the border posts. Some migrants indicated that they are forced to pay as much as R1,500 at Beitbridge for them to be allowed entry into South Africa.

Upon being arrested, labour migrants make efforts to safeguard their jobs before they are deported. Such efforts include informing their employers through phone calls that they have been arrested and making arrangements through friends and relatives that a caretaker should take up their job momentarily while they are away. That is why, once home, they see to it that they should easily go back to South Africa. It is the determination of these *madipotii* to fulfill their set goals and motives that accords new *selufu* an oscillating, circular and regular migration status. Joseph Phiri comes from Zubayumo Makamo Village in Mzimba District. After getting married in 1994, he faced financial problems in taking care of his wife and two children. That is why he decided to go to South Africa in 2000. However, in 2002 he got deported. He

⁸⁰ Interview with Masuzgo (not real name). Randburg Park. Johannesburg. 6/11/2016.

indicated that he secured the money for the passport and transport through moulding and selling bricks. After being deported, he also relied on selling bricks in order to return to South Africa:

For me to find money for transport and for processing my passport, we moulded bricks. There were six of us. After selling the burnt bricks, we shared the money realised. All the six of us went to South Africa. After being deported, I joined forces with my other friends (potential migrants) who also wanted to go to South Africa. For them, this was going to be their first trip. We moulded and easily sold our burnt bricks. In our area, burnt bricks are on a high demand since labour migrants working in South Africa embark on building projects back home through their relatives.⁸¹

5. Factors Behind Escalation of *Selufu*

The late 1980s and early 1990s marked the transition from migration which was both formal and informal to migration that became exclusively informal. *Selufu* escalated following the decline and eventual collapse of mine migrancy at the end of the 1980s. While the preceding section has examined the actual escalation in question and the changing patterns involved, this section discusses some of the pertinent factors behind this escalation. It examines these factors at two levels: first, at regional level, that is, at macro-level; and, second at local level i.e. micro-level. It advances the argument that wage differentials were one of the many reasons behind informal migration. Instead, a mixture of cultural, gendered, political and technological reasons must be considered. As will be noted, information flow between Malawian migrants based in South Africa and the potential migrants in Malawi about the changing circumstances encountered when going to South Africa proved useful. Through such information, many Malawians came to know about the ease of going to South Africa in the post-1990 period unlike in the past.

(a) Macro-level Factors

The increase in the volume of labour migrants not only from Malawi, but also from other countries in the region to South Africa largely for wage employment followed the collapse of the apartheid government in South Africa in 1994.⁸² However, in practice despite the collapse of apartheid and the transition to democracy in 1994, the Aliens Control Act of 1991, one of the remnants of the apartheid regime, still prohibited entry of ‘aliens’ (persons who are not South African citizens) into South Africa way after 1994.⁸³ In spite of this, since 1994 the

⁸¹ Interview with Joseph Phiri. Zubayumo Makamo Village. T.A. M’mbelwa. Mzimba District. 24/03/2016.

⁸² See, for example, Jonathan Crush and Vincent Williams. “International Migration and Development: Dynamics and Challenges in South and Southern Africa”. United Nations Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development. New York. July 2005. p. 12.

⁸³ See, for example, Thomas F. Hicks. “The Constitution, Aliens Control Act and Xenophobia: The Struggle to Protect South Africa’s Pariah – the Undocumented Immigrant”. *Journal Indiana of Global Legal Studies*. (1999, 7: 1). pp. 393-417; Jonathan Klaaren and Jaya Ramji. “Inside Illegality: Migration Policing in South Africa after

African National Congress (ANC) government has been facing an immigration dilemma and this is attributed to the apartheid regime's infamous destabilisation campaign.⁸⁴ Through the latter, the apartheid government pursued a total military strategy against neighbouring countries (also known as the frontline states) that were giving refuge to members of the ANC and other political organisations in exile.

This campaign uprooted families from their homes and created a region of asylum seekers in southern Africa. This campaign's legacy remains with South Africa since many of those uprooted fled to South Africa, in the process increasing immigration into the country. This set in motion an endless immigration influx into South Africa. In addition, the poor economic conditions in these neighbouring countries added to the immigration influx in question as people from the southern African region continuously emigrate to South Africa seeking better social and economic opportunities.⁸⁵ Although Malawians were not directly affected by this destabilisation campaign since Malawi was not one of the frontline states, Malawians joined the bandwagon or wave and went to South Africa for better opportunities. This is not surprising since Malawi has a poor, agro-based economy which worsened during the 1990s. Malawi's economy weakened during the political transition from one-party state to democratic governance in 1994.⁸⁶ Again while in South Africa, Malawian migrants too applied for asylum documents to legitimize their stay. Being outside the region's frontline states and not ravaged by civil war, Malawi does not necessarily have a refugee status, hence its people are not entitled to political asylum. However, while in South Africa, Malawian migrants do benefit from asylum like immigrants from refugee status countries, for example, Mozambique.

The Aliens Control Act (ACA) of 1991 consolidated pieces of legislation into a law governing the terms and conditions of entry of non-citizens into South Africa. This legislation has proved to be a very ineffective instrument for migration management in post-apartheid South Africa. The government is still using some structures that were established during apartheid to control the influx of migrants. For instance, the Aliens Control Act of 1991 gave powers to the police

Apartheid". *Africa Today*. (2001, 48: 3). pp. 35-47; Jonathan Crush. *Beyond Control: Immigration and Human Rights in a Democratic South Africa*. (Canda: Idasa, 1998). For details on asylum determination procedure and asylum laws in South Africa, see "Evaluating Refugee Protection in South Africa". Migration Policy Brief Number 7. SAMP. 2002.

⁸⁴ Ibid. pp. 393-417.

⁸⁵ For details on the disparity in the standard of living index between South Africa and neighbouring countries, see "Southern Africa Dreams of Unity". *Economist*. September 2 1995. p. 35.

⁸⁶ Details here come later in the section.

to control the influx in question. These enforcement authorities have maintained that “their duty is to uphold the law and that until the law changes, they can hardly be blamed for enforcing it”.⁸⁷ On this, they are seen to be using draconian enforcement practices, for instance, harsh methods of rounding up illegal aliens by the police, Department of Home Affairs and immigration officers.⁸⁸ Despite this, the years after 1994 have witnessed significant increases in the numbers of illegal immigrants deported from South Africa. Corruption of officials has become institutionalised as these illegal aliens desperately make efforts to avoid arrests and deportations. In addition, numerous human rights abuses occur in the arrest and detention of illegal immigrants and refugees.⁸⁹

In addition to lacking an effective immigration post-apartheid immigration policy, South Africa has a weak refugee policy. Before 1994 South Africa refused both the UN and OAU conventions on refugees. Asylum seekers were, therefore, treated as illegal aliens under the 1991 Aliens Control Act. However, after 1995 the South African government was committed to the practice of international refugee protection. After becoming a signatory to the UN and OAU refugee conventions in 1995, the government put in place a refugee protection system. This became even more necessary after South Africa became a destination for asylum seekers from the rest of the continent. In 1998 the government passed the Refugee Act, another landmark development on matters of refugees. Despite this, South Africa still lacks a sound and effective refugee determination system. Consequently, there is a strong suspicion that most asylum seekers (including those from Malawi) are in fact economic migrants.⁹⁰ However, in normal cases asylum seekers are supposed to originate from politically-volatile regions and between 1991 and 2001 in Africa the countries included Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Jonathan Crush and David A. Macdonald. “Introduction to Special Issue: Evaluating South African Immigration Policy after Apartheid”. *Africa Today*. (2001, 48: 3). p. 6.

⁸⁸ For details on the roles of these three groups in migration policing and for details on the South African migration policing policy, see Jonathan Klaaren and Jaya Ramji. “Inside Illegality: Migration Policing in South Africa after Apartheid”. *Africa Today*. (2001, 48: 3). p. 35.

⁸⁹ For details on this, see Human Rights Watch. 1998. *Prohibited Persons: Abuse of Undocumented Migrants, Asylum Seekers and Refugees in South Africa*. (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1998).

⁹⁰ Jonathan Crush and David A. Macdonald. “Introduction to Special Issue”. p. 6.

⁹¹ “Evaluating Refugee Protection in South Africa”. Migration Policy Brief Number 7. SAMP. 2002. p. 2.

The two immigration amnesties between 1997 and 2000 also attracted a lot of immigrants including Malawians into South Africa.⁹² Through these amnesties, the South African government legalised the stay of citizens from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries who had entered the country illegally before 1990. Several Malawian labour migrants then residing in South Africa benefitted from this development. Through this, they acquired the South African Identity Document (ID) and in so doing became bona fide South Africa's citizens. John Nyirenda, who comes from Eswazini in Mzimba, worked in South Africa under *Wenela* and in the 1980s secured his own wage employment under *selufu*. He is one of the beneficiaries of the amnesties in question: "After I worked under *Wenela*, I later decided to work under *selufu*. I thereafter worked for twenty years till I retired. Because I stayed for many years in South Africa, I was granted a South African ID".⁹³ While on holiday in Malawi, these migrants passed on the information to their friends and relatives. Consequently, the latter flocked to South Africa, hoping to equally benefit from such amnesties. Upon arrival in South Africa and after the expiry of their visas, Malawian migrants resort to securing work permits to legitimise their stay since it is not easy to secure the South African ID.

The move towards liberalisation, that is, free movement of the peoples, and free trade within the SADC member states also created a conducive environment for the emigration of Malawians to South Africa. Malawi is one of the SADC countries with a huge population of people residing in the rural areas where income-earning opportunities are limited. Gilbert Ndhlovu indicated that "in Malawi the people who are hardest hit by poverty are the rural dwellers because of the persistent lack of economic opportunities".⁹⁴ There is, therefore, the tendency of these rural dwellers to move to urban areas and, with this free movement of people at SADC level, to indulge in cross-border migration. With the long history of labour migration to South Africa, Malawians emigrate to South Africa to look for jobs in such sectors as construction, service, domestic and commercial farming sectors.⁹⁵ However, since 1994 there is also a tendency for a cross-section of these labour migrants to use proceeds for commercial purposes.

⁹² For more information on these amnesties, see, for example, Jonathan Crush and Vincent Williams. "International Migration and Development". p. 12.

⁹³ Interview with John Nyirenda. Park Station. Johannesburg. 23/10/2015.

⁹⁴ Interview with Gilbert Ndhlovu. Op. Cit.

⁹⁵ For details, see Jonathan Crush and Vincent Williams. "International Migration and Development". p. 12.

Following the collapse of apartheid and economic liberalisation within SADC later on, studies have revealed three main streams of these undocumented migrants: first, lawful entrants/ unlawful stayers including migrants who are employed without a work permit or are working in the informal sector; and also migrants with valid residence and work permits that have expired; second, unlawful entrants/ lawful stayers including asylum seekers and refugees; and successful applicants for the immigration amnesties; third, unlawful entrants/ unlawful stayers including migrants who have jumped the border, acquired false documentation or have been trafficked.⁹⁶ In the case of Malawi, the majority of informal labour migrants fit into the first category since they enter with proper documentation (valid passport, R3000 cash for upkeep and use in case of eventualities, and valid 30-day visa accorded upon entry at Beitbridge Border Post). However, since they mostly go to South Africa with the intention of seeking wage employment, almost all of them stay longer than the 30 days; hence they become unlawful stayers.

There is also a small proportion of Malawian labour migrants who fit into the fourth stream of lawful entrants/ lawful stayers. These are labour migrants who enter as legal migrants (as explained in the above paragraph), but before the expiry of their 30-day visa, they apply for asylum from the Home Affairs Department. Once successful, they are granted a six-month asylum document, which they keep on renewing every six months. Again there are those who apply for asylum after the expiry of their visa. In this case, they realise they are vulnerable to arrests and deportations and are, therefore, looking for survival mechanisms.⁹⁷ However, applying for, and securing, an asylum status is not easy. Samson Jika came to South Africa as a semi-skilled labour migrant, but upgraded and was at the time of the interview working as an accountant. However, his last contract job had ended in February 2016 and was in the process of looking for another job. He had stayed in South Africa for nine years. This is what Jika said on the difficulty of securing an asylum document:

A good number of labour migrants from Malawi rely on securing an asylum status. However, it is a process which is very rigorous. They spend a couple of days outside the Department of Home Affairs in Pretoria waiting for the outcome of their application. They cannot commute from their outlying residential areas, for example, Diepsloot; hence they are forced to camp there. At times, it takes a week before they get feedback and yet they have problems to buy food and have difficulty to access public amenities like toilets. At one time, a big fight erupted amongst foreign migrants over allegations of rampant corrupt practices amongst officials at the Department. The matter reached the UN Office in Pretoria, which intervened. Since then, the process has rather been improved in that a weekly schedule was drawn whereby nationals of various countries are given specific days in a week during which their

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 12. See also Jonathan Crush, Vincent Williams and Sally Peberdy. "Migration in Southern Africa". p. 12.

⁹⁷ More information on these survival mechanisms come in chapter five.

applications are attended to and duly processed. Since then, it only takes a few days and overcrowding is very rare.⁹⁸

As for Malawi, the political changes that occurred in 1994 created a conducive environment for the increase in *selufu*. The one-party regime under the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), led by Dr Banda until 1994, paved way for multi-party and democratic politics. Bakili Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF) took over leadership in 1994. However, Malawians interpreted the coming of democracy in various ways. For a cross-section of Malawians, democracy meant freedom: freedom to do things they could not do under the one-party regime. These freedoms included the right to travel to other countries for work and business irrespective of gender. During the old period, both Malawi and South Africa did not allow men to emigrate with their wives.

Furthermore, after taking over the government, Bakili Muluzi weakened Malawi's economy with his policy of privatising state-controlled institutions. Following this privatisation, a number of workers got retrenched or had their salaries slashed. A number of those who got affected in this way opted to work in South Africa. Gift Jere, who was working at Viphya Plantations (VIPLY) Limited in Mzimba, was one of the victims. He explained what actually prompted him to go to South Africa for wage employment:

After VIPLY was sold in 1995 (it later became RAIPLY), our salaries were drastically reduced. That really affected us. For instance, in my case I was getting MK19,000 per month and this was reduced to MK11,000 per month (i.e. R475 to R275 per month). Consequently, many people went to South Africa for better wage employment. At that time one bag of fertilizer was around MK5,000 (R125). So the question was: "how many bags could I afford to buy?" This prompted me to go to South Africa for work.⁹⁹

However, apart from the political changes both in Malawi and South Africa, it was socio-economic changes in transport that brought about rapid transformations in migratory practices. In the 1980s, for example, the majority of Malawians entering South Africa travelled by plane and train,¹⁰⁰ while in the 1990s, the vast majority travelled more cheaply by bus and trucks. Consequently, more and more potential labour migrants from the rural areas could afford to travel this time. Initially the various coaches started operating between Malawi's major cities (Blantyre and Lilongwe) and, first, Harare, and, later, Johannesburg in South Africa. With time, these coaches started operating from Mzuzu, a city in northern Malawi. While at first labour

⁹⁸ Interview with Samson Jika. Pretoria. 1/06/2016.

⁹⁹ Interview with Gift Jere. Mzondi Ndhlovu Village. T.A. Kampingo Sibande. Mzimba. 27/08/2015.

¹⁰⁰ Malawians recruited by either *Wenela*/ TEBA or *Mthandizi* were transported by train, lorries or planes while the majority of *selufu* migrants travelled on foot (at first) and later both on foot and by lorries.

migrants had to catch these coaches from Lilongwe (central region), later migrants from Nkhata-Bay and Mzimba conveniently boarded these coaches right in Mzuzu (see map 1.1 about the relative locations of Mzimba, Nkhata-Bay, Mzuzu, Lilongwe and Blantyre).

With time, local transporters appeared on the Malawi-South Africa transport scene. Examples of transport companies by Malawians include Chipozani Coaches, Chinjoka Bus services and *R and R* Bus Services. Most of these transporters were initially migrant workers based in South Africa. After looking at the numerous challenges of migrant husbands staying in South Africa away from their wives and children, most graduated from merely working in South Africa into various businesses, one of which was *matola* (transport) business (see photograph 3.3). Examples of these migrants-cum-transporters are Synod Phiri and Anthony Lupafya, both from Mzimba District.¹⁰¹ However, the involvement of local transporters in labour migration, operating in Mzimba, Nkhata-Bay and other migration districts across Malawi, is not very new. It was in practice as early as the 1950s. A good example is a local recruiter, Misheck Mfune, employed by Messrs George Wimpey and Company in Salima District.¹⁰²

Consequently, it became much easier for first-time labour migrants to find their way to South Africa on a lorry or pick-up vehicle. The advantage with these local transporters is that they eventually specialised in door-step delivery of these first-time migrants to specific addresses in South Africa. In addition, most of them transported these migrants to South Africa and also *katundu* (goods) and money to Malawi both on cash basis and on a pay-forward arrangement. Through this arrangement a transporter would agree to transport these first-time migrants using his personal resources and would only get paid upon arrival in South Africa. In this case, it is the labour migrant's relative who would pay them in South Africa. At times, the migrant would promise to pay for his own transport, but after securing a job in South Africa, say after three months. Transport costs for such arrangements are usually more exorbitant than through cash. Numerous transporters started operating in the 1990s,¹⁰³ especially in districts traditionally associated with labour migration like Mzimba, from where many international labour migrants to South Africa originated.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Synod Phiri. Londowala Bota Village. T.A. Kampingo Sibande. Mzimba. 26/08/2015; Anthony Lupafya. Zubayumo Makamo Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 18/04/2005.

¹⁰² For details on this, see MNA PCN 1/21/16 Recruiting Organisations, 1951-1960.

¹⁰³ The earliest transporters were South Africans and Malawians gradually learnt the business from them.



Photograph 3.3: Pick-up trucks, owned by Synod Phiri, a migrant-cum-transporter, in T.A. Kampingo Sibande in Mzimba, used to transport migrants and *katundu* between Malawi and South Africa (photo by author).

Initially, these transporters were using small pick-up trucks, but with time they also started operating big buses and coaches, a sure sign that their businesses were steadily growing (see photograph 3.4). At the time of the interviews between August 2015 and June 2016, Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay had many local transporters plying their transport business between Malawi and South Africa. However, of the two districts, Mzimba had more established local transporters than Nkhata-Bay. In other words, the labour migrants from Mzimba relied on the use of both local transporters and coaches from established companies like Intercap and Munorurama, while those from Nkhata-Bay largely relied on coaches.



Photograph 3.4: A booking office at Mzimba *boma* for a bus service owned by a former labour migrant from the district. As can be seen from the notice, the transporter uses both the South African and Malawian phone numbers. When he, himself, is in South Africa, the office in Malawi is managed by one of his assistants. This means that migrants in both Malawi and South Africa can conveniently book transport at the same time (photo by author).

The retention of the South African number plate, as can be seen from photograph 3, shows that the trucks are mobile (i.e. to and from South Africa) otherwise the Malawi Road Traffic Department would have forced the owner to change them into Malawian number plates. Again most transporters have South African IDs and are, therefore, regarded as South African bona fide citizens. Synod Phiri commented on this: “It was in 2003 when my employer assisted me in processing the ID. All this was because of the cordial relations which existed between my employer and myself. After securing the ID, it became very easy to do transport business as I could move freely without fear of the police”.¹⁰⁴ Synod indicated that he started with a one-tonne pick-up in 2005 and by the time of the interview (2015) he had three pick-ups and had employed two young men from the area as drivers.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Synod Phiri. Op. Cit.

However, some informants in the study areas lamented that some of these local transporters are not trustworthy in their business operations. A number of them are associated with various forms of crookedness and shady deals.¹⁰⁵ For instance, some of the *katundu* sent by labour migrants to their relatives either fails to reach home or is delivered after a long time and in bad shape. As for labour migrants, they take too long to reach South Africa, for instance, one to two weeks,¹⁰⁶ and sometimes the transporters keep on raising the transport fare in order for them to meet fuel and other border expenses along the way. This is partly because these transporters do not have adequate capital to run their businesses. Synod Phiri explained some of the challenges he faced, which are also applicable to other transporters:

One of the challenges in my transport business is that I was not conversant with the transport regulations which I had to observe in different countries, for example, in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. When you go through Zimbabwe you have to pay a lot of money; their transit charges are very high. When you are transiting *katundu* in Zimbabwe, they are always suspecting that you are smuggling goods and they impose high charges. In addition, there are so many little things that happen at various border posts which need money. All these were hindrances in my transport business.¹⁰⁷

In relation to lack of adequate capital outlay, there is another category of transporters who do not have vehicles and rely on use of public transport to transport either labour migrants (to South Africa) and *katundu* and money to the respective people's homes in Malawi. It is this category which is associated with more challenges to and from South Africa. A good number of transporters in this category fail to make it with the passage of time, especially due to the ever-increasing transport costs. Gift Jere, a former labour migrant from Mzimba, was frank to point out that despite his determination to quit working in South Africa and concentrate on transport business, he was forced to quit the business and go back to wage employment in South Africa. This was after he realised that he was always making losses: at times he would be compelled to use his own money to clear *katundu* with Customs Department officials at Dedza Border Post upon entry into Malawi.¹⁰⁸

(b) Micro-level Factors

Informal labour migration during both old and new period was facilitated by an interplay of factors not only in the two study districts, but throughout the country. This section examines

¹⁰⁵ Examples of labour migrants who complained about the crookedness of these transporters include: Anayi Chiumia, Msani Village. T.A. Mankhambira, Nkhata-Bay. 8/05/2016; Kondwani Banda, Ndiweli Village. T.A. Mankhambira, Nkhata-Bay. 8/05/2016; and Mary Theu, Mzondi Ndhlovu Village. T.A. Kapingo Sibande, Mzimba. 26/08/2015.

¹⁰⁶ One of the female labour migrants who fell victim of such delays is Mary Theu. Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Synod Phiri. Op Cit.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Gift Jere, Mzondi Ndhlovu Village. T.A. Kapingo Sibande, Mzimba. 27/08/2015.

the local factors behind the escalation of *selufu* during the post-1990 period. It focuses on long-term migrant strategies; cultural practices; information circuits between regions and the role of pioneer migrants; the role played by cash and consumer goods from South Africa; language convergences and convivial motivations in the two districts. Although the Tonga in Nkhata-Bay District were pioneers of labour migration to South Africa,¹⁰⁹ by the early 1990s *selufu* was more entrenched in Mzimba than in Nkhata-Bay. It is some of these factors that were behind this development.

Despite Mzimba District having soils that are suitable for the cultivation of both food crops like maize and cash crops like tobacco,¹¹⁰ especially in the northern part of the district, many of the Ngoni people continued to emigrate to South Africa during the 1990s and beyond. One of the reasons behind this is the declining soil fertility over the years and the ever-increasing prices of fertilizer and other farm input. During Dr Banda's reign (1964-1994) fertilizer was heavily subsidised by the government, hence prices were controlled. However, from 1994 onwards, the successive democratically-elected governments introduced the farm input subsidy programme from which only poor Malawians benefitted. Consequently, people emigrated to accumulate money to invest in farming.

Labour migrants indicated that as a result of increased *selufu*, it is mainly the labour migrant households that are able to realise bumper yields and this is due to remittances from South Africa. Crane Chima, who worked as a *selufu* migrant in South Africa between 1990 and 2010, explained why *selufu* escalated as a result of the increase in fertilizer prices:

Since the early 1990s, you have to spend a lot of money on fertilizer. In the 1990s, a bag of fertilizer was MK2,000, but by 1995 it jumped to MK5,000. Right now, as you are aware, it is at MK22,000. On average, a household needs four bags of fertilizer. So how can rural dwellers raise all this money? No wonder many people, even those from the non-migration households, went to South Africa from 1994 onwards. The multi-party governments have simply messed up the economy through *viphuphu* and mal-administration.¹¹¹

The collapse of tobacco prices on the international market since the 1990s also inexorably led to the escalation of *selufu*. For many years during the colonial and post-colonial periods many households in Malawi relied on tobacco, dubbed Malawi's 'green gold', as a main income earner. This is partly the reason members of some households did not bother to emigrate for

¹⁰⁹ For more information on this, see chapter one.

¹¹⁰ For details, see Mzimba District Socio-Economic Profile (SEP), 2013-2018. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) section. Mzimba DC's Office. Mzimba.

¹¹¹ Interview with Crane Chima. Sitonya Vinkhumbo Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 25/03/2016.

wage employment. However, the world-wide tobacco ban and the anti-smoking campaigns led by the WHO in the 1990s and early 2000s negatively affected the tobacco industry. These events are the factors behind the ever-diminishing and unstable prices on the market. Since farmers can no longer make profits from tobacco both as cash croppers (commercial farmers) and *matenanti* (subsistence farmers), they resort to labour migration as an alternative. Winfred Mphande, who hails from Manyamula in Mzimba District, went to South Africa in 1994 where he worked as a security guard. He once worked as a *tenanti* in the tobacco farms in northern Mzimba District and had this to say on the diminishing returns from tobacco production:

In the past, tobacco was more like gold in Malawi. Tobacco farmers, including *matenanti*, were making a lot of money out of it. But since the 1990s tobacco prices collapsed. For instance, a 100 kilogramme bale of tobacco used to fetch MK50,000, but nowadays it only fetches MK20,000 and below. That is why many farmers abandoned tobacco and went to South Africa for wage employment. Tobacco farming nowadays is a waste of one's precious time.¹¹²

However, the farming situation is different in Nkhata-Bay District. The district has shallow, stony soils which are suitable for growing cassava. The latter does not need fertilizer and, therefore, is not a factor behind migration. But it is fishing in Nkhata-Bay that compels the Tonga to emigrate. Fishing requires capital outlay, for instance, money to buy fishing equipment and to engage fishing assistants known as crew members.¹¹³ Although the Tonga have always relied on fishing, the prices of nets increased in the 1990s as Malawi's economy faltered following the introduction of multi-party politics in 1994. Consequently, even those fishermen who earlier bought nets using money generated locally were compelled to work abroad in order to accumulate capital. Moses Manda, a former *Wenela* migrant and a fisherman in the district, indicated that "fishing as an economic activity in Nkhata-Bay requires even greater capital outlay since the 1990s. It is mainly the labour migrants who ably venture into fishing on a commercial scale".¹¹⁴

Apart from fishing, the other notable income-earning opportunity in the district is wage employment at Vizara Rubber Plantations and Limphasa Rice Scheme. However, the rice schemes in Malawi were vibrant in the period until 1990s, but collapsed due to poor management thereafter.¹¹⁵ They are, therefore, no longer employing as many people as before.

¹¹² Interview with Winfred Mphande. Mtota Bota Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 24/03/2016.

¹¹³ For details on this, see Nkhata-Bay District Socio-Economic Profile (SEP). Nkhata-Bay DC's Office. Nkhata-Bay.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Moses Manda. Kabeta Village. T.A. Malanda. Nkhata-Bay. 9/01/2016.

¹¹⁵ For details on this, see, for example, Bryson G. Nkhoma and Wapulumuka O. Mulwafu. "The Experience of Irrigation Management Transfer in Two Irrigation Schemes in Malawi, 1960s-2002". *Physics and Chemistry of the Earth*. (2004, 29: 15-18), pp. 1327-1333.

Sanga area in T.A. Mankhambira is close to Vizara Plantations and yet it is one of the major migration areas in the district. Following the privatisation of Vizara Plantations in 1994, most workers were pushed out because of the ensuing low wages. A good number of people also lost their jobs following the ‘harvesting’ of rubber trees and the consequent planting of new ones. This development compelled the Tonga around Sanga area to resort to labour migration.¹¹⁶

Another factor behind the escalation of *selufu* during the new migrancy period, especially in Mzimba District, is the change which was taking place in the nature of *malobolo* (bridewealth) payments. During the pre-colonial period, *malobolo* were paid in the form of cattle. However, following the introduction of the money economy during the colonial and post-colonial periods, payment was also made in the form of money.¹¹⁷ For instance, a man was expected to pay money equivalent to five cattle. With the increase in the prices of cattle and the corresponding decrease in the size of livestock in rural Malawi, most people struggle to settle *malobolo* payments during marriages. This trend is common particularly among the Ngoni of Mzimba. During the pre-1990 period, it was parents who used to go to South Africa to accumulate money with which to pay *malobolo* for their sons. But since the 1990s, the sons within the migration households emigrate to South Africa after dropping out of school in order to accumulate money for *malobolo*, not in cattle, but rather in the form of money. There is also a tendency of settling *malobolo* through instalments. Hence even after getting married, a young man would still want to accumulate money to pay the remaining instalments. In this case, the easiest way to find such money is through working in South Africa.¹¹⁸

In Mzimba, livestock continues to be the basis of Ngoni wealth.¹¹⁹ Hence, although *malobolo* are no longer settled only using cattle, parents still encourage their sons working in South Africa to invest in livestock. Because of the ever-increasing prices of cattle, there is also a tendency to invest in goats, sheep and pigs. During the contemporary period, the buying of livestock is considered as a sound investment since investing in small-scale businesses is considered a risky venture. Owen Mkandawire, a Ngoni from Euthini in Mzimba, argued that

¹¹⁶ Interview with Pastor Elias Munthali. Ching’anya Village. T.A. Mankhambira. Nkhata-Bay. 8/05/2016.

¹¹⁷ For details on *malobolo* settlement during the colonial period, see G. Coleman. “International Labour Migration from Malawi”. p. 6; MNA COM-8/1 Committee to Enquire into Emigrant Labour, 1935; and Travers Lacey. “Report of a Committee Appointed to Enquire into Migrant Labour”. The Travers Lacey Report. Zomba. 1936. p. 21.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Davison Chakwira. Tadeyo Chakwira Village. T.A. Kampingo Sibande. Mzimba. 27/08/2015.

¹¹⁹ For details on this, see MNA NNM 1/9/1 General 1927 January-1936 September.

“businesses are not 100% reliable unlike investing in livestock”.¹²⁰ He was speaking from experience since after he had invested much of his proceeds from South Africa in garage business, five years later his garage was no longer as profitable as it had been before.

In Nkhata-Bay, marriage among the Tonga either follows the *malobolo* system of the Ngoni, whereby a wife relocates to a husband’s village, or the matrilineal system of the Chewa of central Malawi, locally called *chikamwini*, whereby the husband follows the wife. In Nkhatabay *malobolo* involves fewer cattle, for instance, two instead of five, and its money equivalent. Justice Nyirenda argued that

in Nkhata-Bay marriage is not complicated because the Tonga are very understanding, unlike what happens in other districts in Mzimba, Rumpi and Karonga. Even when you don’t have any money, but you are sure you will find money in future, you can still get married in Nkhata-Bay. What is important is to make preliminary payments so that officially the parents of the lady should know that their daughter has found a man. You can give them, say, MK25,000 (R500) and you can stay one or two years with your wife. In fact, you can even have children together. But you should not forget that you have a case to settle. In case the marriage crumbles, the wife’s parents simply claim custody of the children until the balance is paid in full.¹²¹

This shows that in Nkhata-Bay *malobolo* are not a serious factor behind migration unlike in Mzimba. Hence in Nkhata-Bay, the increase in *selufu* since the 1990s is a result of other pressing issues other than marriage.

In both Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay, there is a practice of a labour migration household sending a pioneer migrant. This is usually a father, a son or, since the 1990s, a daughter. This pioneer migrant eventually arranges the emigration of other household members. It is these pioneer migrants who pass information to potential migrants at home in Malawi about the existence of income-earning opportunities in South Africa. This is how women came to learn about the availability of jobs in South Africa. Following the spread of this news about the improvements in transport technology in the 1990s and the reduction of hurdles *en route* between these countries through *viphuphu*, large numbers of men and women eagerly joined new *selufu* from the early 1990s onwards. Although jobs became scarce by the 2000s, potential migrants learnt about *maganyu* (piece jobs), hence, in spite of this problem, larger numbers emigrated.

Language has also played a significant role behind the Ngoni labour migration over the years. In fact, the Ngoni of Mzimba were of Nguni origin since their forefathers originated from South

¹²⁰ Interview with Owen Mkandawire. Op. Cit.

¹²¹ Interview with Justice Nyirenda. Op. Cit.

Africa; hence going back to the latter for migrant work was more like ‘going back to their roots’.¹²² On this, many migrants indicated that once in South Africa, they easily adapt since Chingoni is more similar to, than different from, IsiZulu and other South African languages.¹²³ As for Nkhata-Bay, in addition to Chitonga, the Tonga, like the Nkhonde of Karonga, speak Chiswahili because of the border location with Tanzania across Lake Malawi. This gives the Tonga migrants in Tanzania an added advantage since Chiswahili is a *lingua franca* there. Tonga migrants easily interact with prospective employers and landlords in Tanzania. Consequently, with the rising cost of living due to the weak currency and improvement in transport, language proficiency propelled large numbers of the Ngoni and the Tonga to emigrate to South Africa and Tanzania, respectively, for wage employment since the early 1990s.

Convivial motivations have for a long time been behind the migration of both the Tonga and the Ngoni. The Tonga really value *kunjoya* (enjoying life).¹²⁴ They enjoy some of the following dances: *malipenga*, *honala*, *visekese* and *chilimika*. This enjoyment is associated with the way some labour migrants use proceeds from working either in South Africa or Tanzania. They buy entertainment equipment such as *kodiyoni* (a type of musical instrument used during *honala* and *malipenga*) and *unifomu ya malipenga* (*malipenga* uniform). This development is similar to what happens in Mzimba District. Although the Ngoni also like traditional dances like *vimbuza*¹²⁵ and *mganda*, a dance similar to the *malipenga* version of Nkhata-Bay, migrants, especially in the past, were fond of buying musical equipment, for example, *gumbagumba* (stereo) or *redilogilamu* (i.e. radio-gram) which were used to entertain people during weddings. The difference, though, was that such equipment was and still is available for hire; hence a form of income-generating venture, unlike in Nkhata-Bay. With the passage of time, *magumbagumba* (stereos) became very profitable since traditional weddings came to be closely associated with *magolowazi*. Apart from emigrating to raise money with which to meet household needs, the two migrant groups still emigrate to buy musical equipment.

Simon Mulungu from Mzimba *boma* described *magolowazi* as an “intimate, pair-wise dance involving two people of the opposite sex aimed at generating money and members entertaining

¹²² Harvey C.C. Banda. “Competition for the Labour Supply in Mzimba District”. p. 9.

¹²³ Interview with Gilbert Ndhlovu. Op. Cit.

¹²⁴ Interview with Moses Manda. Op. Cit.

¹²⁵ For details on *vimbuza* as a spirit dance in northern Malawi, see, for example, Boston Soko and Gerhard Kubik. *Nchimi Chikanga: The Battle against Witchcraft in Malawi*. (Zomba: Kachere Series, 2008).

each other during traditional wedding ceremonies in rural areas in Malawi”.¹²⁶ *Magolowazi* took place after officiating the wedding and this usually took place from the evenings onwards. The dancers had to pay gate fees in order to be allowed to dance with young ladies, and to music, of their choice. This was locally termed *kubecha* (similar to betting). The event organiser, in turn, used part of the gate collections to pay for the hired equipment. *Magolowazi* are no longer in practice because they have been denounced as having been behind the rampant spread of the HIV scourge. They usually ended in the dancing couple having unprotected sexual encounters towards the end of the function. However, suffice to mention that *magolowazi* originally meant *ntchito yakalavula gaga* (difficult wage employment) associated with the opening up of vast, thick forests for tobacco estates in the central region of Malawi. It is most probable that the term *magolowazi* literally comes from ‘growers’, as in tenant-farmers. With time it came to ‘colloquially’ refer to young men and women engaging in such dances as highlighted above.¹²⁷

Last but not least, *ukavu* (poverty) has been a major cause of emigration not only in Mzimba, but also in all migration areas in Malawi since the beginning of labour migratory movements in the nineteenth century. During the colonial period, imposition of taxes compelled men to work abroad.¹²⁸ In addition, the introduction of monetisation meant that money was needed to meet subsistence needs.¹²⁹ Between 1964 and 1994 Malawi’s economy was strong under Dr Banda. For instance, the cost of living was low since Malawi had a vibrant manufacturing industry: farm produce was processed locally. However, following the inception of democratic governance in 1994 and the ensuing privatisation of state-controlled institutions, the manufacturing industry collapsed. As a result, Malawi resorted to importing basic manufactured commodities. Prices of these commodities were high. Thereafter, the general impoverishment and suffering of the rural masses followed. Informants in both Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay maintained that the ensuing *ukavu* compelled large numbers of men and women in the 1990s to emigrate to South Africa for wage employment.

¹²⁶ Interview with Simon Mulungu. Mzimba DC’s Office. Mzimba. 18/05/2016.

¹²⁷ Interview with Elija Wanda. Mzondi Ndhlovu Village. T.A. Kapingo Sibande. Mzimba. 7/01/2016.

¹²⁸ For details on the colonial taxes in Nyasaland, see B. Pachai. *Malawi: The History of the Nation*. pp. 110-116.

¹²⁹ For details on food shortages during the colonial period, see MNA NNM 1/9/1: General, January 1927-September 1936 (Report about the Labour Conditions among Natives in Mzimba District).

6. Conclusion

The chapter has examined the nature of informal migration from Malawi to South Africa during two periods: old period and new period. It has highlighted the continuing and changing migratory patterns during the new period: new *selufu* is a continuation of the old *selufu*, but at the same time *selufu* during the two periods was rather different in terms of volume of migration, composition of labour migrants and motives of migrants, among other factors. While *selufu* migrants during the new period continue to emigrate to South Africa for wage employment, some of these labour migrants use their proceeds to venture into cross-border trade between Malawi and South Africa.

The chapter has also examined the actual increase in *selufu* migrants since the early 1990s. It has produced qualitative evidence to establish numerical escalation of *selufu*. It has also argued that new *selufu* displays traits of wider geographical distribution and wider sectoral penetration, especially the shift from wage to commercial pursuits. Lastly, the chapter has discussed reasons for the escalation of *selufu*. These factors have been examined at macro-level and micro-level. Macro-level factors include liberalisation and free trade at SADC level; improvements in transport and the changing political dispensations both in Malawi and South Africa. For instance, the introduction of local transport operators meant that large numbers of labour migrants, including those who were not financially able, could go to South Africa through *ngongole* and the pay-forward arrangement.

At micro-level, the chapter has examined the local factors that pushed different categories of men and women into labour migration. The chapter has compared the situation obtaining in Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts. It has examined such factors as the role of pioneer migrants, declining agricultural economy, language convergences, and convivial motivations. For instance, the chapter has also argued that although both the Ngoni and the Tonga emigrate in order to deal with financial challenges within their households, in Mzimba labour migration is driven more by the zeal to buy livestock for *malobolo*, while in Nkhata-Bay it is propelled by the need to invest in the fishing industry.

Chapter Four

Women Migrants

1. Introduction

The previous chapter has examined the nature of informal labour migration during the old and new periods. It has argued that *selufu* migrants were part and parcel of labour migration from Malawi to South Africa. However, despite the restrictions imposed by the Malawi government, the patriarchal society and the church, women too migrated to South Africa under *selufu*. This chapter focuses on this female *selufu* migration and examines its beginnings during the old period and its continuation during the new period. The chapter argues that women have been marginalised in studies of Malawian migration to South Africa. Although relatively few women went to South Africa in the early and mid-twentieth century, broader and more regional focus, especially in the post-1990 period, highlights Malawian women's mobility within Malawi and the surrounding countries in the region. The chapter further examines women's migration as a strategy to better their households and shows that while in town, particularly in South Africa, they were concentrated in the informal sector.

In fact, women joined the migration process to secure jobs in the formal sector just like men. However, colonial government restrictions and differential employment opportunities for men and women in towns compelled women to join the informal sector. Although prostitution is also regarded as a form of wage labour elsewhere, for instance, by Luise White in her study of prostitutes in colonial Nairobi, in this study it is considered as an economic activity in the informal sector to which women resorted after failing to secure more formal jobs in the formal sector. In short, on prostitution my findings are not in line with those of scholars such as Luise White. Unlike Luise White who interviewed prostitutes in Kenya, in my case I interviewed labour migrants and the views on prostitution are of these labour migrants (whose intention is to secure employment as house keepers, waiters, cooks, etc.) and not of prostitutes themselves.

During the colonial period, women were regarded as a residual category, as the 'left-behind'¹ and the society expected them to take care of households while men emigrated. When women

¹ See, for example, Belinda Dodson. "Women on the Move: Gender and Cross-Border Migration to South Africa from Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe". In David A. McDonald (ed.). *On Borders: Perspectives on International Migration in Southern Africa*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). pp. 120-122.

migrated, they were regarded as migrating for prostitution and not for wage employment, hence the view that they were “moral polluters”.² However, oral evidence from the northern Malawi suggests that during the old period, Malawian women migrated in the company of male migrants either as “house wives” or as wage labourers not as prostitutes as it was generally believed. Female migration, just like *selufu*, witnessed escalation at the beginning of the 1990s. In the case of Malawi, the macro-level and micro-level factors discussed in the previous chapter also facilitated the increase in female migration. However, this increase in female migration was not unique to southern Africa alone, rather it was a global phenomenon. Although there has been an increase in female migration in Malawi, male migrants still dominate the labour migration scene.

During the post-1990 period, emphasis on female migration shifted from women who are “left behind” (during the old period) to women who accompany or join their husbands (during the later part of the old period and the early part of the new period) to women as autonomous migrants such as widows, divorcees and school leavers. The chapter shows that although the major reason for women emigrating to South Africa, especially during the post-1990 period, is wage employment, there are other reasons behind. Some of these reasons include liberation from patriarchal family structures; emigration to secure capital for businesses and to resolve debt bondage; marriage surveillance and to seek new partnerships. In this chapter I have used information from oral interviews with thirteen women and five men in both Malawi and South Africa. The aim behind was to compare the views of female migrants with those of male migrants while making sure that the women’s voices remained dominant.

2. Historical Precedents of Women’s Migration from Malawi to South Africa

During the entire period of *Wenela* and, later, *Theba* recruiting operations in colonial Malawi, when only physically fit men were recruited for mining jobs in the South Africa, female migration remained prohibited as women were regarded as physically unfit and ‘prohibited persons’.³ It was, therefore, the responsibility of *Wenela* and *Theba* to see to it that only men emigrated to South Africa under the auspices of the South African Chamber of Mines. On the part of the Chamber of Mines, it was cheaper to look after the welfare of recruited men while their wives remained back home. They paid such workers single men’s wages or bachelor

² Details on this are examined under the morality thesis. For more information, see, for example, Harvey C.C. Banda. “Gendered Patterns of Malawian Contemporary Migrancy”. 2008.

³ See MNA S36/1/2/6 Female Migration to South Africa.

rates.⁴ As in other colonial territories, the Malawi government also worked hand in hand with the chiefs, District Commissioners and churches to discourage women from joining migration. This section examines the nature of female migration during the old period and the reasons behind it. Because of the restrictions imposed by the Malawi and South Africa governments, the women who left their rural villages largely emigrated together with men under *selufu*. However, women were officially allowed to emigrate with their husbands for the Zimbabwean farms.⁵ The section provides a brief account of women's migration in southern Africa before focusing on women's migration from Malawi during the old migration period.

During the colonial period, women were mostly 'left behind' in the rural areas to take care of their households and to manage the farms under the tutelage of chiefs, headmen or senior elders.⁶ They largely did this on their own; with little or no help from the men. In addition, they rarely had the authority to make decisions since, despite being away, almost all the resources were traditionally controlled by their 'absentee husbands'.⁷ This generally made women's survival very difficult. They were, therefore, compelled to devise survival mechanisms right in the rural areas. Jean Hay has described how the Luo women managed to cope with male absence: "they adopted new trading strategies and new agricultural techniques".⁸ Despite this, male decision-making powers and their continued absence from their respective homes had a deleterious effect on family welfare.

In most cases, the colonial governments in Africa placed restrictions on women migration to towns even within the same country. The thinking behind this was that Africans were by nature rural dwellers: "that only male labour was needed for the mines and other industries and that men should return to their rural homes upon completion of their work contracts".⁹ Much of the literature maintains that this was encouraged by the various governments, among others, in an

⁴ For details on this, see, for example, Harvey C.C. Banda. "Gendered Patterns of Malawian Contemporary Migrancy". 2008.

⁵ See, for example, Zoe Groves. "Malawians in Colonial Salisbury"; and Harvey C.C. Banda. "Competition for the Labour Supply in Mzimba District".

⁶ See MNA NNM 1/18/3 Rights of Women.

⁷ Jean K. Henn. "Women in the Rural Economy: Past, Present and Future". In Margaret Jean Hay and Sharon Stichter (eds.). *African Women South of the Sahara*. (London: Longman, 1984). p. 15.

⁸ Cited in Margaret Jean Hay and Sharon Stichter (eds.). *African Women South of the Sahara*. (London: Longman, 1984). p. 15.

⁹ Clair C. Robertson. "Women in the Urban Economy". In Margaret Jean Hay and Sharon Stichter (eds.). *African Women South of the Sahara*. p. 40.

attempt to preserve rural life.¹⁰ The provision of wage employment for men and not women in urban areas was characteristic of central, east and southern African towns like Lubumbashi, Nairobi, Harare, Johannesburg and Cape Town. Other towns later joined the scene, for example, Lusaka following the establishment of copper mines in the 1920s and the early 1930s.¹¹ Maria Rosa Cutrufelli sheds more light on the restriction of female migration in question:

In the early stage, the colonial government tried hard to discourage female migration by enacting specific ordinances and prompting the native authorities to restrict the movement of women, and, especially single women. The aim was both to have a frequent replacement of migrant labour and consequently keep labourers 'toing' and 'froing' between labour centres and to hold women as near hostages in their villages so that their husbands would be lured into going back home and thus a regular and foreseeable ebb and tide of manpower would be ensured.¹²

Nonetheless, this control of women's migration to towns eventually failed during the colonial period. The beginning of women's migration to town, however, differed from place to place. In Kenya and Tanzania, for example, Clair Robertson argues, women's migration to towns increased during the post war (WWII) years. She also argues that female migrants were going "more independently rather than as dependents of males".¹³ It has also been maintained that where women were migrating independently during the colonial period, they were actually migrating as a reaction to the negative effects of male migration. This usually led to marriage break-ups since female migration was not sanctioned by both their husbands and society.

Migration of women to urban areas, wherever it existed, during the colonial period can hardly be described as having been for labour or wage employment. This is largely because wage employment opportunities continued to be available for men at the expense of women. As a result of this, most women in towns ended up joining the informal sector.¹⁴ In other words, women entered the informal sector in towns due to their exclusion from what was regarded as 'men's work' in the formal sector. Since women were not allowed to leave rural areas for

¹⁰ One of the concerns expressed by the labour-sending countries was the loss of man power needed for agricultural production, if men were to emigrate permanently to towns and other industrial areas. For a discussion on Malawi, see, for example, Robert Boeder. *Malawians Abroad*. pp. 196-201.

¹¹ George Chauncey. "The Locus of Reproduction". p. 136.

¹² Maria Rosa Cutrufelli. *Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression*. (London: Zed Press, 1983). p. 22.

¹³ Clair C. Robertson. "Women in the Urban Economy". p. 40.

¹⁴ For details on the women's joining of the informal sector during the colonial and post-colonial periods, see, for example, Clair Robertson. "Women in the Urban Economy". pp. 40-42; Jeanne K. Henn. "Women in the Rural Economy". p. 15; Maria Rosa Cutrufelli. *Women of Africa*. pp. 27-31; and Philip L. Bonner. "Desirable or Undesirable Basotho Women? Liquor, Prostitution and the Migration of Basotho Women to the Rand, 1920-1945". In Cheryl Walker (ed.). *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*. (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers Ltd., 1990). pp. 222-234.

towns, they were then compelled to indulge in informal sector activities such as beer brewing and selling and prostitution for survival. Philip Bonner has examined the Basotho women's illicit beer activities in Vereeniging and Benoni in Johannesburg. However, Bonner has argued that women were involved in such activities out of choice as they preferred this to domestic services.¹⁵

Belinda Bozzoli has examined the migrant lives of twenty-two Basotho women from Phokeng, a Tswana settlement, as they migrated to, and worked in, Johannesburg in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁶ A number of these women ended up working as domestic workers, though some indulged in beer brewing and other informal activities. These women, Belinda Bozzoli shows, were preoccupied with accumulating money with which to improve their households back home.¹⁷ Some similarities can be drawn here between women of Phokeng and Malawi's women migrants. For example, Malawi's women migrants were equally preoccupied with improving the welfare of their households although this became very common in the post-1990 period.¹⁸

There has been a long-drawn debate on the motives of female migrants during the colonial period, with some scholars suggesting that women migrated for prostitution in towns. In this case, women were labelled as 'moral polluters'.¹⁹ Relative to this, Clair Robertson argues that "the differential employment opportunities in turn encouraged the employment of women in services such as the provision of prepared foods and prostitution".²⁰ Similarly, Maria Rosa Cutrufelli argued that "being denied wage labour, the women were often compelled to cohabit with working class men for survival".²¹ This clearly shows that most of these women were forced into prostitution for survival purposes. Luise White looked at women who went into prostitution in colonial Nairobi as 'economic agents' with their own agendas. Instead of

¹⁵ Philip L. Bonner. "Desirable or Undesirable Basotho Women? Liquor, Prostitution and the Migration of Basotho Women to the Rand, 1920-1945". In Cheryl Walker (ed.). *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*. (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers Limited, 1990). pp. 229-234.

¹⁶ Belinda Bozzoli with the Assistance from Mmantho Nkotshe. *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983*. (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991).

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 237.

¹⁸ For details on this, see women's migration motives in the next section.

¹⁹ See, for example, K. Jochelson. "Women Migrancy and Morality: A Problem of Perspective". p. 324; and J. Gugler. "Women Stay on the Farm No More: Changing Patterns of Rural-Urban Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa". *Journal of Modern African Studies*. (1989, 27: 2). pp. 347-352.

²⁰ Clair Robertson. "Women in the Urban Economy". p. 40.

²¹ Maria Rosa Cutrufelli. *Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression*. pp. 30-31. Maria has argued that in Lubumbashi after 1950 about a quarter of African urban women were *femmes libres* earning a living through prostitution.

looking at prostitution as a moral problem, or the result of rural breakdown, Luise White was in favour of looking at it as a form of wage labour. She argued that prostitution was the women's 'rational economic choice'.²²

Although men's migration to South Africa under *selufu* is traced to as far back as the late nineteenth century, women's migration to South Africa, also under *selufu*, became visible by the 1930s and 1940s.²³ Anayi Manda from Nkhata-Bay shed light on the beginnings of female migration under *selufu*: "We went to South Africa in the 1950s, but by that time, women had already been going to South Africa under *selufu*. The latter had already been going on for many years".²⁴ However, before this period, it was preceded by internal migration. Both men and women were under pressure to generate money following the imposition of various taxes, for example, hut tax by the colonial administration.²⁵ In Mzimba District, the Ngoni also needed money to buy cattle primarily for *malobolo* payments and consumption. Following the introduction of monetisation and commoditisation, there was also the ever-increasing demand for various manufactured goods such as cloth, salt and hoes.²⁶ At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, colonial Malawi was a society in transition or a society undergoing rapid change. Before monetisation, life was simplistic and not materialistic. Dickson Sakala, himself a former *Wenela* migrant between the 1950s and 1980s, commented on this change:

Our parents used to tell us that when they were young life was not complicated. They never bothered to buy manufactured items like cotton cloth and salt; instead they relied on items like bark cloth and *tchezeko* or *chidulo* (locally-produced salt). In addition, those societies or communities, which did not produce such items, did not need money to have them but rather use the barter method. However, with commoditisation and the consequent monetisation, every household needed money for basic subsistence and survival.²⁷

Consequently, this study advances the view that it was 'poverty amidst plentiful natural resources', or the need to get money for subsistence needs, that ignited formal migration and *selufu*. Female migration became part and parcel of *selufu* since it was not officially permitted by colonial Malawi and South Africa. The inter-related processes of commoditisation and monetisation followed the introduction of trade in legitimate goods after the abolition of slave

²² See Luise White. *Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990). p. 13.

²³ See John McCracken. *A History of Malawi*. p. 182.

²⁴ Interview with Anayi Manda (female). Kalindizga Village. T.A. Malenganzoma. Nkhata-Bay. 7/01/2016.

²⁵ For details on these taxes in colonial Malawi, see, for example, B. Pachai. *Malawi: The History of the Nation*. pp. 110-114.

²⁶ See John McCracken. *A History of Malawi*. p. 180.

²⁷ Interview with Dickson Sakala. Zubayumo Makamo Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 20/06/2010.

trade and slavery in the 1870s and 1880s. The two processes also followed the coming of colonialism which facilitated the entrenchment of capitalism. The colonial masters supported the white settlers, who were themselves ardent capitalists. The coming of various Christian churches also established mission schools, for instance, among the Tonga, the Ngoni and the Tumbuka in northern Malawi, as part of their 'civilising mission'.²⁸ This brought about the need for school fees for pupils. In short, these inter-related developments created a difficult capitalistic environment not only in Malawi, but also in most colonial territories, in which only those with money could lead comfortable lives.

Female migration met stiff government restrictions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The government joined forces with traditional rulers, white farmers and missionaries in opposing uncontrolled migration. This was because labour migration arguably led to the destruction of rural life, among other social ills.²⁹ For instance, women alone suffered in looking after the upbringing of their children within households while men were away. They also suffered in single-handedly shouldering the burden of food crop production through the cultivation of maize among the Ngoni and cassava among the Tonga. However, it was later revealed that men's absence was felt the least in some societies in Nyasaland. For instance, cassava, unlike maize, could easily be cultivated by Tonga women while their husbands were away.³⁰ Nonetheless, the government preferred a system whereby women remained home as their men emigrated under formal migration. The intention was to ensure that men returned home at the end of their fixed contracts with the mines in South Africa. It is a result of these restrictions that with time women joined the migration scene under *selufu* (see table 4.1 below).

²⁸ The missionaries regarded Africans as 'primitive' and 'backward' and, therefore, introduced Christianity and education to ensure they departed from such primitive lives and, instead, became civilised. This civilisation included converting to Christianity.

²⁹ Robert Boeder. *Malawians Abroad*. pp. 196-198.

³⁰ The 1935 Travers-Lacey Report cited in Robert Boeder. *Malawians Abroad*. p. 201.

Table 4.1: Foreign-Born African Women in South Africa, 1960-1985

Country	1960	1970	1980	1985
Angola	4	82	96	152
Botswana	5259	7387	3974	4591
Lesotho	33387	32568	20978	16642
Malawi	564	969	1159	898
Namibia	179	401	1742	2571
Swaziland	7646	10834	10423	9405
Tanzania	12	63	24	419
Zambia	1152	875	744	578
Zimbabwe	137	96	108	111
Other	344	412	3921	1293
Total	48684	53687	43169	36660

Source: South African Census, 1960-1985. Note that the numbers of foreign-born women in South Africa generally remained minimal. This was partly due to the harsh living conditions, for instance, harassment by the police, during the apartheid years in South Africa.

For northern Malawi, despite soils being suitable for agriculture, the markets for these crops were in southern Malawi. Hence huge transport costs were incurred as tobacco and cotton were being transported to these markets. This then led to little profits unlike those enjoyed by farmers closer to these markets. This is one of the reasons why the people of Mzimba abandoned tobacco farming in favour of migration to South Africa. Within Malawi, women migrated to the central and southern regions where cash cropping opportunities were greater and profitable. Because of the white settler population, Blantyre, Thyolo and Mulanje in southern Malawi had tea, coffee and tobacco estates which were constantly looking for cheap labour. Much of the labour in these places was provided by women and children since men preferred to emigrate to South Africa for better wages.³¹ In addition, some women managed to migrate on their own from the rural areas to urban areas not only for wage employment, but also for prostitution. According to Margaret Read:

In the dowry districts, it is almost unknown for women to leave the village and go off on their own. In other areas, it is becoming common. Some manage to get to southern Rhodesia, others to Blantyre, Lilongwe, Nkhota-Kota, Mponela (i.e. current Dowa), to any place in fact where money is plentiful and a prostitute's trade is a paying one.³²

³¹ For details on women and child labour in southern Malawi during the old migration period, see, for example, Wiseman C. Chirwa. "Child and Youth Labour on the Nyasaland Plantations, 1880-1953". *Journal of Southern African Studies*. (1993, 19: 4). pp. 662-680; Joey Power. *Political Culture and Nationalism in Malawi: Building Kwacha*. (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010). pp. 69-70.

³² Margaret Read. "Emigration from Nyasaland: Effects on Village Life. Preliminary Report". June 1939. MNA S36/1/4/2.

Although female migration from Malawi to South Africa remained restricted by the two governments, some women managed to emigrate clandestinely with their husbands under *selufu*. These governments managed to regulate recruited migrants, but could hardly control *selufu*. By the 1940s several hundred women left Nyasaland for South Africa and the number kept on growing with each passing year.³³ This being the case, government officials in colonial Malawi were divided on the prohibition of female migration to South Africa. For example, others supported the move, while others felt it was no longer justifiable to bar women from accompanying their husbands. Regarding this, I.C. Ramsay, who was the Acting Labour Commissioner based in Zomba, Nyasaland, confirmed that, despite government controls, there was covert female migration to South Africa. But W.S. Phillips, the Labour Commissioner in Zomba, maintained that, clandestine migration or not, female migration from Nyasaland to South Africa remained illegal:

While it is appreciated that from humanitarian motives you wish to do your best for our natives, and that Nyasaland natives, both male and female, are able to enter the Union clandestinely, this does not alter the fact that, legally, they are classed as “prohibited immigrants” by the Government of the Union of South Africa, and as such as far as passes are concerned at any rate, they must be treated as such by this Government.³⁴

However, E.H. Warren, the Nyasaland/ Northern Rhodesia Officer based in Johannesburg, was of the view that allowing women to accompany their migrant husbands could eventually lead to less promiscuous sexual behaviour and reduced conflicts between South African men and migrant workers over South African women. This is what Warren opined:

On several occasions I have tried to persuade the Immigration Authorities to permit the entry into South Africa of these Extra Union Native women who wished to join their husbands...I showed that if such permission were granted, there would be considerably less promiscuous cohabitation with Union women and this could result to a large extent in one of the causes of strife between South African and Northern natives being abolished.³⁵

It was this ambivalent attitude on the part of government officials in Nyasaland that prompted them to ignore the glaring existence of female emigration, albeit on an informal basis.

Warren’s view is also supported by oral interview accounts on the reasons for female migration during both the old and the new migration periods. Bishop Makamo, a female migrant from Lithuli Makamo Village in Mzimba explained that she went to South Africa after getting

³³ MNA S36/1/2/6. Report by E.H. Warren, Nyasaland/ Northern Rhodesia Officer, Johannesburg to Acting Labour Officer, Zomba. 26 September 1942.

³⁴ MNA S36/1/2/6. Female Immigration into South Africa. I.C. Ramsay’s response to E.H. Warren on the idea of allowing female migration to South Africa.

³⁵ MNA S36/1/2/6. Female Immigration into South Africa. Report by E.H. Warren, Nyasaland/ Northern Rhodesia Labour Officer to Acting Labour Commissioner. Zomba. 26 September 1942.

reports that her husband was having an extra-marital affair with a South African woman: “After I arrived in South Africa, I confirmed the rumours about my husband having a girlfriend. But I didn’t want to confront the lady. It was our landlord who advised my husband to terminate the affair”.³⁶

Although the Malawi government (previously Nyasaland Protectorate) and the South African government were against female migration during the period under discussion, some women, especially from Nkhata-Bay managed to emigrate alongside men under *selufu*. In the study area it was men from Nkhata-Bay who preferred to emigrate independently to South Africa.³⁷ As for the Ngoni women from Mzimba, they remained at home since their husbands emigrated formally under *Wenela* and *Theba* and they would return upon the end of the contract. Vivian Banda from Kachikhokho Village is an example of such Tonga female ex-migrants. Vivian went clandestinely to South Africa following her husband who also went under *selufu*. She recalled that she was 22 years old when she went there. While there, her husband was working as a mechanic in a bus company. They had seven children together; all born while in South Africa.³⁸ It is, therefore, proper to argue that labour migration was predominantly, but not exclusively, male during the old migration period.

³⁶ Interview with Mrs. Bishop Makamo. Zubayumo Trading Centre. Mzimba. 27/04/2005.

³⁷ This was partly because *Wenela* did not establish recruitment depots in Nkhata-Bay.

³⁸ Interview with Vivian Banda (female), Kachikhokho Bongolo Village. T.A. Malenganzoma Nkhata-Bay. 7/01/2016.



Photograph 4.1: Maria Manda, a female *selufu* ex-migrant from Nkhata-Bay. She emigrated to South Africa in the 1970s. Here she is captured at her home together with her grand-child (photo by author).

Joyce Mwale from Kalindizga village in Nkhata-Bay is another female migrant who went to South Africa under *selufu* during the old period. She first went to South Africa in 1955 when she was relatively young. She went together with her husband. She stayed there for three years and later came back. Joyce then went back in 1961 and came back in 1964 and never went back again. She indicated that they went through Mozambique, unlike other *selufu* migrants during the same period who usually used Zambia and Zimbabwe routes: “When going to South Africa we went through Mozambique. During the second trip, we stayed at a certain rest house for one week. It was a dangerous place where thugs used to break into buses, stealing things”, Mwale said.³⁹

Vivian Banda maintained that although women from Nkhata-Bay used to emigrate informally to South Africa, just like their husbands, the journey was tough. “Whenever we reached a border, where the authorities were against women’s emigration, we used to drop from the

³⁹ Interview with Joyce Mwale (female). Kalindizga Village. T.A. Malenganzoma. Nkhata-Bay. 7/01/2016.

vehicle and walked till we crossed that area. Once they caught you, they arrested you straight away”,⁴⁰ Banda explained. It is said that upon arrival in South Africa, they faced problems with accommodation and jobs. They used to stay in single bed rooms. It was also extremely difficult to secure jobs. Women only did simple jobs such as *kuchapa* (laundry) for *bamwenye* (Indians) and *bazungu* (whites).⁴¹ The challenges narrated by Vivian Banda and Joyce Mwale above may help explain why relatively fewer Tonga women emigrated to South Africa during that period. This scenario contrasts sharply with the situation in Mzimba. Here, Ngoni women easily accompanied their husbands not to South Africa, but to Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) under *Mthandizi*, which was providing transport, food and accommodation upon arrival.

Despite women emigrating to South Africa under *selufu* since the 1930s and 1940s, the Nyasaland government continued to join forces with village headmen and men within the patriarchal societies in preventing women from officially emigrating to South Africa. However, by the 1950s, these strictures were relaxed. During the 1966 Malawi Population Census, the total number of migrants enumerated (excluding dependents) was 266,000. Of this total, some 22,000 were females and a further 2,000 were juveniles, leaving a total of 242,000 adult male migrants.⁴²

It was during this same period that the government allowed *Mthandizi* to recruit male migrants together with their wives. *Mthandizi* started allowing men to go along with their wives as a strategy to out-do *Wenela* in their competition for local labour supply in Malawi.⁴³ Consequently, in 1958, 1,733 women travelled to Southern Rhodesia from Nyasaland under *ulere* (free) transport alongside 17,813 men.⁴⁴ In fact, *ulere* was a Chichewa word that meant free migrant labour transport service which had been introduced by the Southern Rhodesian government. The service was meant to benefit the Southern Rhodesian tobacco farmers who were constantly short of labour.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Interview with Vivian Banda. 7/01/2016.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² See, for example, G. Coleman. “International Labour Migration from Malawi, 1875-1966”. *Journal of Social Science*. (1972, 2: 37). p. 45.

⁴³ For details on this competition, see Harvey C.C. Banda. “Competition for the Labour Supply in Mzimba: The Case of *Wenela* and *Mthandizi*, 1906-1956”. Chancellor College. University of Malawi. Zomba. 2000; Bryson G. Nkhoma. “The Competition for Malawian Labour: *Wenela* and *Mthandizi* in Ntcheu, 1935-1956”. Chancellor College. University of Malawi. Zomba. 1995.

⁴⁴ Teresa Barnes. “Virgin Territory? Travel and Migration by African Women in the Twentieth Century Southern Africa”. In S. Geiger, J.M. Allman and N. Musisi (eds.). *Women in African Colonial Histories*. (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 2002). p. 165.

⁴⁵ Bryson G. Nkhoma. “The Competition for Malawian Labour”. p. 4.

Mthandizi allowed men to emigrate with their wives because of the nature of jobs in these Southern Rhodesian farms: both men and women could do these farming jobs. Since colonial Malawi had an agro-based economy, men and women were already used to working on crop gardens. Elise Ndhlovu, who emigrated under *Mthandizi* with her husband George Thika, narrated her experiences:

I was one of the women who emigrated to Zimbabwe in the 1950s. As you are aware, *Mthandizi*, unlike *Wenela*, started allowing husbands to go with their wives. But you could only go with one child. Most people in Mzimba were attracted by this, especially those who had been left by *Wenela*. While in Zimbabwe, we worked on the tobacco farms. Both my husband and I were working on the farms. But for us, women, we were doing lighter tasks. More so, men were getting higher wages than us. But because both of us were working, we came back with a lot of money, part of which was used in buying the cattle.⁴⁶

However, although female migration to South Africa remained officially banned, people in Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay made efforts to emigrate clandestinely to South Africa because of the attraction of higher wages. Some of these *selufu* migrants tended to emigrate with their wives. Female migration to South Africa gained ground from the 1950s and 1960s onwards with the improvement in road and railway transport. Before this period, going to South Africa was rigorous as *selufu* migrants emigrated on foot, hence it was largely a men's undertaking.⁴⁷

3. Explaining Women's Participation in the New *Selufu*

Since the early 1990s, there has been an increase in female migration from northern Malawi to South Africa. This increase was part and parcel of the general escalation in *selufu* that occurred in the 1990s. In fact, the macro-level and micro-level factors behind this escalation discussed in the previous chapter also facilitated the increase in women's emigration to South Africa. Along with this increase, the composition of female migrants also changed. Since the 1990s, different generations of women joined the labour migration scene. These included migrants' wives, divorcees, widows and school leavers. While during the old period women largely emigrated for wage employment, since the 1990s women emigrate for varied reasons, including commercial purposes. The discussion in this section focuses on such motives as liberation from patriarchal structures, wage employment to raise business capital, emigration to resolve debt bondage and to fund household maintenance, marriage surveillance and seeking new partnerships. In short, this section advances the argument that women are active financial agents and builders of social capital. Although there might have been this element during the

⁴⁶ Interview with Elise Ndhlovu (female). Londowala Bota Village. T.A. Kampingo Sibande. Mzimba. 25/08/2015.

⁴⁷ For details on the problems that *selufu* migrants faced *en route* to South Africa, see the previous chapter.

pre-1990 period, in the case of northern Malawi this has been more pronounced during the post-1990 period. Hence the story of women's migration cannot be contained by notions of escape.

After learning about the existence of job opportunities for women in the domestic sector, both married and single women begin to emigrate to try to secure jobs in South Africa. For married women, the thinking is that if both husband and wife are employed, this would translate to better wages. Since migrants migrate to resolve household financial problems such as marriage payments, children's education, sicknesses and buying agricultural input, for example, fertilizer, a wife's wage also goes a long way in helping to solve these familial problems. Women are, therefore, determined to go to South Africa to work mostly in the domestic sector.⁴⁸ They are not ready to go to South Africa and merely play the role of a house-wife, like what used to be the case with *selufu* women during the old period. In fact, some wives are ready to part ways with their husbands, in case the latter prove to be a stumbling block towards their desires to work. Abraham Mgungwe, a new *selufu* migrant from Galamala Mgungwe Village in Mzimba District, shed light on this development:

There are some women who were married to migrant husbands working in South Africa. While married, such women were pressurising their husbands to allow them to follow them in South Africa. But due to persistent resistance from their husbands, the wives decided to abandon the marriages and go on their own. Consequently, these wives left their husbands' patriarchal homes and returned to their homes, after which they left for South Africa to seek jobs; in the process fulfilling their motives: to work, earn money, and ably take care of their children.⁴⁹

Raphael Jere, a new *selufu* migrant from Zubayumo area in Mzimba, also narrated a story about a migrant family in which the husband working in South Africa was against being joined by the wife: that the wife stays in Malawi to take care of the household. However, this did not go well with the wife who was determined to equally work in South Africa. The wife had earlier visited her husband and knew that domestic jobs were available for women.

There is another migrant in this area whose wife joined him in South Africa without his knowledge. The wife sold household items like video screen in order to secure money for the trip to South Africa. The husband did not allow his wife to travel to South Africa on the grounds that she should simply be based at home and look after their children. But the wife, who had already visited the husband in South Africa before, decided to go on her own. It is now about three years since the two are there in South Africa, but staying apart. The husband told the wife to go back home but she refused; and instead, she decided to go her own way.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Since 1990s Malawian migrants are concentrated in the informal sector due to scarcity of jobs. Women find jobs as domestic workers, doing cooking, laundry and general cleaning.

⁴⁹ Interview with Abraham Mgungwe. Galamala Mgungwe Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 29/04/2005.

⁵⁰ Interview with Raphael Jere. Galamala Mgungwe Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 29/04/2005.

Since the year 2000, jobs became scarce in South Africa following the influx of immigrants. Consequently, most migrant workers relied on *maganyu*. This also coincided with the increase in the cost of living there. Hence informants indicated that it was an advantage if both a husband and a wife were working. Lucy Mwanza from Mzimba said she had concluded with her husband that they could no longer rely on her husband's wage alone:

My husband first came to South Africa in 2010. I followed him a year later (2011). At first I was not working, but after realising that his wage was not enough, I secured a job as a domestic worker. Each one of us gets R3,000 per month. But we pay R1,500 for accommodation. At the same time, we have to buy food for the month and we also have to save some money for our children in Malawi. This time we are able to save a little money every month because both of us are working.⁵¹

As for single women, for instance, divorcees and widows, going to South Africa for work is the only way out of their predicament. Before the deaths of their husbands, these widows were relying on their husbands' income either from businesses in Malawi or jobs in South Africa. After their deaths, the women have to find money to solve all their financial problems since they are now the heads of the households. Towera Gondwe is a *selufu* migrant who comes from Chimbizga Gondwe Village in Mzimba District. Towera's husband died in 1995 and she was forced to go to South Africa in 2000. While in South Africa, she was forced to marry a fellow Malawian migrant because she did not have accommodation. While staying with her husband and doing *maganyu*, she was able to send money to her children in Malawi.

I had no choice but to marry him because I have had no permanent job since 2000. Now the situation is a bit bearable since at least I have somewhere to stay. Although I still don't have a stable job, I am able to send some money to my children in Malawi. The other good thing is that my husband is understanding and allows me to fulfill my goals of working in South Africa. I, too, don't interfere with his dreams. He also sends money to his home.⁵²

The same applies to divorcees: after being divorced from their husbands, they return to their parents' homes and it is worse if they also have to look after the upbringing of their children. Most of them are eventually invited by their female friends who are already working in South Africa. Jane Msofi from Mzimba District is an example of a divorcee who went to South Africa after her husband divorced her. "After my divorce, I left my child with my mother and went to South Africa for wage employment. But while there, I became pregnant and got dumped by my boyfriend, in the process worsening my problems instead of alleviating them".⁵³

⁵¹ Interview with Lucy Mwanza (female). Mzondi Ndhovu Village. T.A. Kampingo Sibande. Mzimba. 27/08/2015.

⁵² Interview with Towera Gondwe (female). Chimbizga Gondwe Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 16/02/2005.

⁵³ Interview with Jane Msofi (female). Zikhole Sakala Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 24/03/2016.

Women's migration from Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay is also a way of attaining marital independence. This is very common in patriarchal family structures where the wife has no authority and decision-making powers. She is expected to remain submissive to her husband even when the husband is openly abusing her. In this case, women are seen to be freeing themselves from marital bondage.⁵⁴ For a long time, women have suffered as a result of men's migration. Men overstay in South Africa and while there they do indulge in extra-marital affairs with South African women, while wives suffer at home. Wives have to fend for their households in the absence of their husbands' support. As a result of this, some women process their way to South Africa for wage employment in order to take care of their households. Their focus, therefore, is no longer on maintaining marriages, but rather accumulate money for supporting their dependents.

In this regard, Sara Mkandawire at Chintechi in Nkhata-Bay, is a female *selufu* migrant, who decided to go to South Africa as one way of taking a holiday from her marriage because it was on the rocks. Sara's husband eventually married another woman. But, at the same time, she was going to look for wage employment while in South Africa. She was determined to make good use of her 'marriage holiday'. She saved a lot of money from her working in South Africa. After she returned home, she embarked on a house building project. Although her husband already had a good modern house, she wanted a house of her own. As if this was not enough, the break she had from her collapsing marriage made her husband to come back to his senses. He realised that he was in the wrong and this compelled him to 'make peace' with Sara's parents. Consequently, they re-united as husband and wife and agreed to open a new chapter.⁵⁵

Women's migration from the two study districts is also a way of saving collapsing marriages. There are widespread stories of women in the labour migration areas losing their husbands to South African women. Actually the latter reportedly propose love to Malawian migrant men working in South Africa and this is in contrast to what happens in Malawi, where traditionally it is men who approach women for love. Hence women go to South Africa in order to be close to their husbands. Once wives join them in South Africa, husbands are compelled to terminate

⁵⁴ Since the early 1990s women have become empowered through assuming decision-making powers at community level. For instance, they are elected into positions of authority at the church and in society organisations. Since then, they see themselves as decision-makers just like men and apply this into their households.

⁵⁵ Interview with Sara Mkandawire (female). Wachaza Village. T.A. Malanda. Nkhata-Bay. 7/01/2016. At the time of the interview, the husband was away from home doing business. Among other property, they had a three tonne pick-up which they were using for hire and general transport business.

love relationships with South African women in trying to respect their wives and also to prevent their marriage from collapsing. Joyce (not her real name) from Zubayumo Makamo area in Mzimba District came to learn that her husband had a girlfriend in South Africa. She then decided to visit her husband for a few months. Knowing that he had a girlfriend and that his wife had come for a visit, the husband, Joseph (not his real name), warned his wife, Joyce, that South African women are dangerous and violent and that she should not over-react to her presence. Joyce narrated that her husband used to sleep with this girlfriend while she hid under the same bed. This happened for some time until the girlfriend terminated the affair after learning that Joseph's wife had come from Malawi.

After I learnt that my husband had a girlfriend in South Africa, I pressurised him that I should be allowed to visit him. At first he refused, but because of my insistence, he eventually agreed. I didn't want to lose my husband to another woman. We had children together and I was scared I couldn't take proper care of our children alone. Upon arrival in South Africa, I confirmed that, indeed, my husband had a girlfriend. They were almost married as the lady used to come to my husband's place on a regular basis. But what used to happen was very bad. My husband warned me not to confront the lady, saying she could kill me if I did. Hence whenever she came, I used to hide under the bed and used to witness my own husband having sex with the lady. I used to shed tears under the bed. This was very painful to me. I told my husband that if this continued, I was ready to divorce him. Eventually, my husband told his girlfriend about my presence and thereafter she stopped coming, marking the end of the affair.⁵⁶

Women's migration is also an avenue for enjoyment. When husbands emigrate to South Africa, they go to secure jobs, but while there they get exposed to life full of enjoyment. They, therefore, spend their hard-earned money on beer and women. In the process, they end up forgetting their familial responsibilities back home. Even when they return home, they despise their wives as traditional and backward and continue with their lives of enjoyment and merry-making in town. Once fed up, women, too, indulge in extra-marital affairs back home. However, because of information circulation, the wives learn about the opportunities obtaining abroad and, consequently, they decide to emigrate to South Africa.

While in South Africa, there are stories of such women equally resorting to enjoying life in addition to working, largely as domestic workers. These are women who are respectable in their homes in Malawi, but due to exposure to town life in South Africa, they become outgoing. In September 2016 on my way to Malawi I accompanied Ruth (not her real name) on Intercape Bus who was going to Malawi for a holiday. She narrated that while working in South Africa, she at times takes men out to drink beer, meeting all expenses on her own:

In South Africa, I am free to go out in the company of male friends, especially on weekends. I don't work on Sunday, hence I prefer going out on Saturdays. Whenever I have money, I am able to take these

⁵⁶ Interview with Joyce (not real name) (Female). Zubayumo Makamo Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 24/03/2016.

friends for beer drinking till late, bearing in mind that the following day I am not working. Sometimes we come back at 2:00 a.m. Nowadays, my friends are used; they know that once I invite them, I will be the one buying beer for them. Most men find this strange since it is usually men buying beer for us, women.⁵⁷

For some women, particularly the young, unmarried school leavers, going to South Africa is an avenue for them to find husbands. Although immediately upon arrival they look for jobs, these young women are also looking for men whom to marry. They originate from the rural set up where most young men are not working. They do not want to get married to these unemployed villagers. They have dreams of a happy married life where both a husband and a wife are working to better fend for their household. While in South Africa, they enter into sexual relationships with fellow Malawian migrants. However, not all such relationships actually culminate into marriage. This is because some men, who are unfaithful to their wives back home, cheat them that they are single, when in fact they are married with children in Malawi. Jane Msofi is a new *selufu* migrant from Manyamula in Mzimba District. She explained how she was abandoned by a boyfriend in South Africa:

I was educated up to form 4. After finishing secondary school in 2010, I got married for four years and later divorced. Thereafter, I went back to my parents but there was no support because my father had then died. In 2014, I was invited by my cousin who was in South Africa. I went and worked for two months. It was difficult for me to stay at my cousin's place so I found a boyfriend and moved out of the house partly because it was small. The boyfriend promised to find me a job. Later, I got pregnant and the boyfriend was nowhere to be seen. He changed his phone number so that I should not get him. At my work place, my boss said I could not work while pregnant. I called the cousin explaining my predicament. I said I wanted to go home. With the help of his friends, he raised transport money and sent me back to Malawi. That is how I'm found here.⁵⁸

For a cross-section of informants in both Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay, female migration, especially since the early 1990s, is done mainly for prostitution. Women go to South Africa to indulge in prostitution, but under the disguise of wage employment. It is these women who are behind the collapse of many marriages of male migrants working in South Africa. The informants maintained that the worst thing that happened to labour migration from Malawi to South Africa is the joining of different categories of women since the early 1990s. They further maintained that although both men and women end up working in South Africa and accumulating greater proceeds; this is done at huge social costs such as collapse of stable marriages. Burnett Kadaleka, a teacher at Manyamula Community Day Secondary School (CDSS) commented on this:

Marriages collapse after either a husband or a wife discovers that their partner is involved in promiscuity. When the wives go to South Africa, they discover that their husbands have girlfriends there. Thereafter,

⁵⁷ Interview with Ruth (not real name) (Female). Johannesburg. Park Station. 1/09/2016.

⁵⁸ Interview with Jane Msofi. Op. Cit.

wives too find boyfriends either there in South Africa or even here in Malawi. The result is that the marriage collapses.⁵⁹

A visit to Honeydew high density residential area in Johannesburg in October 2016 revealed that there are many young Malawian girls who went to South Africa, but are jobless. These girls are able to buy food and pay for their rooms every month, but they also manage to send home a lot of money and *katundu*. Austin Chirwa, who is from Mzimba and resides in the same area, indicated that these girls are able to do all these through prostitution.⁶⁰

However, some women emigrate to South Africa in order to fulfill their business dreams in Malawi. A number of the women in Malawi are involved in small-scale businesses, for instance, sale of various farm produce (rice, vegetables, maize and beans), in order to look after the welfare of their households. However, they usually face the difficulty to secure adequate capital to ensure that their businesses grow. Since bank loans attract high interest rates, they rely on loans from village banks.⁶¹ Although loans under the latter have lower interest rates than those from commercial banks, some women (and men) prefer to secure wage employment abroad as a quick way of accumulating adequate capital for their ‘struggling’ businesses. This is the case with women from Manyamula in T.A. M’mbelwa in Mzimba District (see picture below).

⁵⁹ Interview with Burnett Kadaleka. Manyamula CDSS. Mzimba. 24/03/2016.

⁶⁰ Interview with Austin Chirwa. Honeydew. Johannesburg. 19/10/2016.

⁶¹ For details, see Mzimba SEP and Nkhata-Bay SEP.



Photograph 4.2: Women in front of a grocery shop at Manyamula Trading Centre, T.A. M'mbelwa in Mzimba. Although these women are doing small-scale businesses using loans acquired through *ngongole* and *maganyu* in people's gardens, they consider working in South Africa as a better alternative.

It can, therefore, be argued that a cross-section of male and female migrants emigrate to get out of 'debt bondage'. In line with the universally-held position that 'debt is bad, but credit is good',⁶² this study establishes that some Malawian migrants work in South Africa in order to transform themselves from being victims of debt bondage to being creditors at societal level. Oral evidence from the study areas shows that before emigrating to South Africa, they are perpetual victims of *ngongole*⁶³ (debt) and *katapila*⁶⁴ in their quest to ensure growth of their small-scale businesses.

There are also a number of women whose dream is to use proceeds from South Africa to invest in well-established businesses. Patience Msuku from Euthini in Mzimba District is one of these new *selufu* female migrants. Patience went to South Africa after divorcing her husband. When she went there, she faced a lot of problems from her boyfriend who did not want her to work.

⁶² This view is also shared by Deborah James in her book *Money from Nothing: Indebtedness and Aspiration in South Africa*. In this book, Deborah also discusses the aspirations of urban and rural women in South Africa. This thesis has established that the aspirations in question are also applicable to migrant rural women in northern Malawi. For details, see Deborah James. *Money from Nothing: Indebtedness and Aspiration in South Africa*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015). pp. 42-51.

⁶³ Women usually get small-scale and short-term *ngongole* in line with the size or capacity of their businesses. These *ngongole* are usually in form of *katapila* (see below for meaning of *katapila*).

⁶⁴ This is a special, localised loan system usually with a 50 per cent or 100 per cent repayment arrangement.

Although she did not fully achieve her business goals during the first two trips, at the time of the interview in January 2016, she was still planning to go back to South Africa for wage employment. The following account shows what she went through in South Africa and her level of determination:

After we divorced with my husband, I went to visit a boyfriend in South Africa. I went with a female transporter known as Esther Phiri. I don't know where she is now but she is still doing the transportation business. While there, I wanted to start working but the boyfriend refused to allow me. We were in Sandton (this is a rich suburb outside Johannesburg). He used to lock me up so that I don't go out to see relatives. We couldn't agree. Then one day, I was reading a newspaper and I saw an advert seeking a domestic worker. I expressed interest and was picked. As I was working, my boyfriend called me saying I should visit him. There he locked me up again. He beat me severely and I reported him to police. When the police came, he told them that it was a marriage issue and off they went. I went to another police station and told them that my boyfriend was a thief and had a gun. He wasn't a thief. It was only a way of vengeance. So he was arrested. The police also discovered some goods he was hiding in the ceiling. His friends ganged up threatening to kill me. I sensed danger. My relatives sent me home. That is how I came back to Malawi. But later in 2012 I went again.⁶⁵

Patience maintained her goal was to own a classic restaurant. The interview was conducted right at her business premises at Euthini Trading Centre. She had a grocery shop and was running a chips take-away business. She also had four small rooms which people were renting as grocery shops. Next to these, was an incomplete building which, once completed, would house her dream restaurant (see photograph 4.3 below).

⁶⁵ Interview with Patience Msuku (female). Zubayumo Zoba Village. T.A. Chindi. Mzimba. 12/01/2016.



Photograph 4.3: Building belonging to Patience Msuku at Euthini Trading Centre in Mzimba District. Once completed, the building will house Patience's dream restaurant. Also note her small groceryshops for rent on the far right (photo by author).

Some migrants emigrate to acquire and sharpen their skills bearing in mind that, with requisite skills, it would be easy for them to secure alternative jobs not only in South Africa, but even back home in Malawi. Most people in northern Malawi see education as a route to upward mobility. During the contemporary period, a cross-section of migrants go to South Africa immediately after dropping out of school either at primary or secondary education levels. As a result, some of them aspire to further their education while working in South Africa. Menace Banda from Chakuluma Village in T.A. Mankhambira in Nkhata-Bay went to South Africa following her husband in 1997 and came back in 2014. However, while in South Africa, she did a course in Accounting:

While in South Africa I told my husband that I wanted to further my education. I enrolled for an Accounting course. Now I have a Diploma in Accounting. I came back in 2014 after my husband died. Although I am currently not working, I can easily secure a job right here in Malawi because of my qualifications.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Interview with Menace Banda (female). Chakuluma Village. T.A. Mankhambira. Nkhata-Bay. 16/05/2016.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the nature of women's migration during the old and new migration periods. During the old period, the chapter has highlighted female migration at southern African regional level before focusing on colonial Malawi. It has shown that women migrated as a result of suffering within the rural areas and moved to towns for income-earning opportunities. However, since they migrated against a background of restrictions by the colonial governments and patriarchal, societal structures, in towns, both within their countries and abroad, they hardly secured formal sector jobs. The latter were classified as 'men's work'. Consequently, women entered the informal sector where they did such activities as beer brewing and beer selling, prostitution and other domestic chores.

In the case of colonial Malawi, the chapter has shown that women from northern Malawi, like their male counterparts, were initially compelled to secure jobs in tea and coffee plantations and in tobacco estates in southern Malawi although these paid little wages. They later began emigrating to South Africa in the 1930s and 1940s for improved wages. While in South Africa, these women either secured domestic work or merely took care of their working husbands. The chapter has also shown that by the 1950s some women emigrated with their husbands to Southern Rhodesia where they worked in tobacco farms. Female migration to Southern Rhodesia was facilitated by *ulere* transport that was provided by *Mthandizi*.

The chapter has also examined the nature of female migration from Malawi to South Africa since the 1990s. It has argued that women emigrate for a variety of reasons in addition to migrating for wage employment unlike during the pre-1990 period. In addition to emigrating for wage employment, they also migrated to raise business capital; to gain marital independence; to save collapsing marriages; to seek new partnerships; to seek enjoyment and for prostitution. The chapter has centrally argued that women migrants are active financial agents and builders of social capital. The next chapter looks at the challenges that both male and female migrants face in South Africa and the mechanisms that they devise to overcome these challenges.

Chapter Five

Labour Migrants' Challenges and Survival Mechanisms

1. Introduction

Chapter three discussed the nature of *selufu* during the old and new periods. It highlighted macro-level and micro-level factors behind the increase in *selufu* since the early 1990s. Chapter four focused on women's labour migration during these periods and argued that since the 1990s women still emigrate to South Africa for wage employment. This chapter examines the experiences of male and female *selufu* labour migrants in South Africa during these periods. It shows that these labour migrants face a lot of challenges as they are staying and working in South Africa. These problems have to do with the process of looking for jobs and the type of jobs; accommodation; hatred and xenophobic attitudes from South Africans; arrests and deportations due to lack of valid documentation; and high crime rate, especially in the high density residential areas like Alexandra, Diepsloot and Honeydew. Most labour migrants prefer to work in Johannesburg area due to proximity to Park Station i.e. it is easy to access buses back home. However, evidence shows that the influx of immigrants, not only from Malawi, but also from other countries, seeking jobs in South Africa at the time when economic growth remained stagnant, has resulted in the scarcity of jobs. As a result, an increasing number of migrants prefer leaving Johannesburg for outlying areas such as Durban and Cape Town. In addition, these labour migrants prefer other provinces other than Gauteng because there are fewer incidents of harassment and arrests by the police in those provinces.

On the type of jobs, the chapter shows that in the period between 1994 and 2005 labour migrants easily secured better-paying and more-steady jobs and this was largely because there were relatively fewer labour migrants looking for those jobs. In contrast, the influx of more regional migrants in the post-2005 period made jobs to be scarcer. Consequently, most jobs were not as well paying as before. In an attempt to maximise wages, labour migrants started relying on piece jobs, popularly known as *maganyu*. This also had a bearing on the kind of accommodation they could secure. For instance, with *maganyu* these workers had to secure rented accommodation in a neutral place since they were no longer working under one employer. The chapter also shows that labour migrants rely on migrant networks to secure jobs upon arrival in South Africa. It is either their relatives, for instance brothers, sisters or cousins, or friends who assist them to secure jobs upon arrival. However, in some cases these labour

migrant networks are not reliable partly because of the scarcity of jobs and jealousy. It is feared that the in-coming migrant might end up doing better financially than the pioneer or earlier labour migrants. However, this jealousy is mainly experienced among labour migrants who are related and not mere friends.

On xenophobia, the study shows that although there have only been two major waves of xenophobic attacks against foreigners (i.e. in 2008 and 2015), labour migrants in South Africa have continually faced subtle forms of xenophobia since 1994. Since Malawians enter South Africa as legal migrants with thirty-day visas, they become illegal migrants when these visas expire. Thereafter, their stay is miserable as they have to rely on bribes (*viphuphu*) whenever they meet the police. It is not a surprise, therefore, that some of them end up being arrested and deported back to Malawi through Lindela Repatriation Centre.¹ Despite this, and convinced that the welfare of their families relies on wages from informal work in South Africa, they easily reprocess their way back to South Africa. In addition, there have been allegations by the South African nationals that foreigners are behind the increase in crime rate. However, interviews with labour migrants in South Africa have shown that, on the contrary, they are victims of crime at the hands of the locals, who take advantage of their illegality and informality during their stay in South Africa.

Because of their determination to achieve their migration goals, labour migrants have devised mechanisms to overcome these challenges over time. In this regard, the chapter discusses the role played by burial or welfare societies to alleviate the plight of these labour migrants. Through these societies, the chapter shows how labour migrants pool financial resources for their survival in times of need. Societies serve as avenues for socialisation and assistance in addition to providing basic services in line with their dictates and mandates. In addition to the roles played by welfare societies, labour migrants also make efforts to integrate themselves into the South African society. During the post-1990 period, this integration is temporary since the labour migrants' intention is to stay briefly in South Africa. One of the major ways of getting integrated is through intermarriages. Intermarriages are one of the reasons behind *kutchona* and, interestingly, the latter has remained a common feature amongst Malawian

¹ Lindela Repatriation Centre in Randfontein is a deportation camp i.e. a temporary detention centre for captured illegal immigrants before they are sent home.

labour migrants since the old labour migration period. However, even *kutchona* during the post-1990 period is not as widespread as was the case during the old period.

2. Working in South Africa

This section discusses the job-seeking processes upon arrival in South Africa. It critiques the roles played by migrants' networks during job-seeking. The chapter also examines the types of jobs sought and done by male and female labour migrants. It shows that although both sets of migrants enter either the formal sector or the informal sector, the jobs for male and female migrants are rather different. The chapter shows that there have been changes over time regarding the types of jobs and nature of contracts. Informal labour migrants have for a long time relied on the network of family members, relatives or friends already working in South Africa. They use such networks upon arrival in South Africa for assistance in terms of a place to stay before they find own accommodation and also securing a job, whether temporary or permanent. Oral evidence from labour migration areas in Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay indicate that such areas have many people working in South Africa at each point in time because of these family networks.² Good examples are migrants from Zubayumo Makamo area in T.A. M'mbelwa in Mzimba. Here members of a labour migration household rely on pioneer migrants: a family processes the emigration of one of its children, in most cases the first son, who after securing a job in South Africa sends money home to ensure the emigration of his siblings. In most cases, these siblings, one after another, live with their elder brother before they secure their own job and accommodation.³

² Sekibakiba P. Lekgoathi has examined the migrant networks amongst Zebediela migrants and has argued that these migrants "became more reliant on their village or homeboy networks to get jobs in urban areas". For details, see Sekibakiba P. Lekgoathi. "Migrants from Zebediela and Shifting Identities on the Rand, 1930s-1970s". In Peter Delius, Laura Phillips and Fiona Rankin-Smith (eds.), *A Long Way Home: Migrant Worker Worlds, 1800-2014*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2014). p. 158. Although Lekgoathi is writing about the developments around the 1950s, this 'network of assistance' is applicable to the contemporary period.

³ This practice of a pioneer migrant later facilitating the emigration of siblings is common, for instance, in Zubayumo Makamo area in Mzimba District. On this, Bonface Mwanza indicated that the practice has facilitated the emigration of not only siblings, but also relatives like cousins, nephews and nieces in the area. Interview with Bonface Mwanza. Galamala Mgungwe Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 28/04/2005. Bonface went to South Africa in 1998 but returned home after two years after he was diagnosed with asthma. Consequently, he could not continue working in South Africa.



Photograph 5.1: A Malawian labour migrant working at Mangwa Valley Lodge in the Dikoneng area, north of Pretoria. He hails from T.A. Chindi, Euthini in Mzimba District. He came and first worked as a gardener before his friends alerted him about the cook job in the restaurant at Mangwa Valley Lodge. After some time, he assisted his brother to secure a job as a waiter at the same place. Upon enquiry, I learnt that there were four Malawian migrants working at this place. All this was due to the role of migrants' network in linking each other to available jobs in South Africa. These Malawian labour migrants always find out if among the guests there was one from Malawi so that they should link up with them and that is how I connected with them. They were very happy to meet with someone from the same district (Mzimba) (photo by author).

There is also the practice of job inheritance amongst Malawian labour migrants working in South Africa. They inherit the jobs of relatives or friends either on temporary or permanent basis. This practice is entrenched among people from Mzimba. Apart from sons taking over their fathers' jobs, sometimes migrants inherit jobs of their relatives or those of their friends. If a father wants to return home for good, he arranges that one of his sons should take over his job.⁴ This is a strategy to ensure continued financial support towards their household. If a migrant worker wants to briefly go home for a holiday, he or she arranges with their employer to allow their friend or relative to sit in until after they return to South Africa. This also happens when a migrant worker has been arrested and is awaiting deportation to Malawi. While in police custody, they make efforts to contact the employers informing them about the arrest and that someone will temporarily sit in.

⁴ Interview with Crane Chima. Sitonya Vinkhumbo Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 25/03/2016. Crane's father was working in South Africa under *selufu* and had arranged with Crane, his son, to replace him in 1987. However, this did not materialise because Crane then was still young. His father returned home in 1987 while Crane only managed to go to South Africa in 1990. Since this did not materialise, Crane faced difficulties to secure jobs, but was saved by his friend and his father's cousin, who assisted him in securing a job.

However, in some situations these migrant networks are not reliable. This is partly a result of competition amongst family members. For example, a pioneer migrant may not be keen to facilitate the eventual emigration of his siblings for fear that they might end up securing a better job and, therefore, doing better than himself or herself. Consequently, the pioneer migrant cites lack of steady and better-paying jobs as a reason for failure to facilitate the relatives' emigration and yet the actual reason is *sanje* (jealousy). Irene Theu, a non-migrant and wife to Steven Tembo (a former *Wenela* migrant) from Mzimba District, explained as follows:

In my home village, most labour migrants cannot do that i.e. assisting their younger brothers and sisters to equally emigrate mainly because of jealousy. They are afraid of their close relatives' possible success. My elder son (Lyson), for example, has written a letter restraining his immediate brother (Ephraim) not to go to South Africa, arguing that he is in the process of arranging for his driving and mechanic training followed by eventual employment right here in Malawi. He got the news of Ephraim's intention to equally emigrate from his youngest brother (Lazaro).⁵

In such cases, friends or distant relations have been seen to be more helpful to new migrants than close family members. In addition, although migration is heavily dependent on social networks within a household and community, especially in the labour source areas, in this case northern Malawi, in South Africa, partly because of the level of development and the high cost of living, labour migrants no longer value social relationships and obligations.⁶ Consequently, labour migrants already working in South Africa are not ready to assist their in-coming relatives: "When we are in South Africa, we pretend not to know each other. In fact, there is nothing like 'being related to each other' here".⁷ As a result of the challenges that *selufu* migrants had been facing upon arrival in South Africa, partly due to the unreliable networks, new migrants made efforts to secure and carry additional money on top of transport. The aim was to fall back on this money should they find themselves in problems. However, this was a far-fetched dream and, in reality, most labour migrants could only afford money for processing a passport and for transport, in view of limited income-generating activities back home.

There have been changes in terms of job scarcity over the years: in the earlier period, for instance, from early 1990s to early 2000s, jobs were not as scarce as in the post-2005 period.⁸

⁵ Interview with Irene Theu. Lithuli Makamo Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 30/04/2005. Irene and Steven Tembo got married in 1973. Together, they had three sons working in South Africa. However, at the time of the interview one of the sons had stayed for 7 years without returning home and providing steady assistance to both his parents and his wife.

⁶ This will be substantiated later in the chapter by the general increase in the cost of living in Johannesburg.

⁷ Interview with Penjani Manda. Wachaza Village. T.A. Malanda. Nkhata-Bay. 6/01/2016. Penjani was invited to South Africa by her girlfriend, who actually sent him money to facilitate his trip to South Africa. However, it is the same girlfriend who abandoned him after he failed to secure a steady job for two years.

⁸ Most of the interviewed migrants indicated jobs were not as scarce in the 1990s due to fewer immigrants.

During the earlier period, migrants exercised choice over the type of jobs they wanted. This choice was based on the kind of wages offered; the commuting costs; and the toughness or the intensiveness of the work involved. However, by 2005 jobs started becoming scarcer due to the increase in the numbers of migrants. By 2004, Malawi's economy became weak following the financial mismanagement under the leadership of Dr. Bakili Muluzi who had been in power since 1994. Zimbabwe's economy continued to be run down under the leadership of President Robert Mugabe. Due to financial mismanagement and corruption, the economy became weak, forcing some companies to close down. This development led to unemployment and forced people to emigrate to South Africa for wage employment. Hany Besada and Nicky Moyo shed light on the numbers involved:

The deteriorating social, economic, and social crisis in Zimbabwe has contributed to an unprecedented exodus of Zimbabweans, with more than 3.5 million people, approximately 25% of the population, having emigrated over the past few years to countries such as Zambia, Botswana and South Africa, which, by conservative estimates, more than a million Zimbabweans have entered, the majority illegally.⁹

This influx had a stifling effect on the availability of jobs in South Africa.¹⁰ Consequently, most migrants were compelled to rely on part-time jobs. It is during this period that migrants' networks become very useful. It was also indicated that some migrants stayed long without securing a job. Residential locations like Honeydew, Diepsloot and Alexandra had so many labour migrants from different countries and yet a good proportion of them have no jobs.

I have four of my children and also four of my brothers and my sister's child and cousin here in South Africa. There are also a number of my relatives from the neighbouring villages in Mzimba District. In the past jobs were not scarce, but I was in the forefront assisting fellow Malawians to secure jobs. I usually tell them about the existing job and they eventually secure it. Most relatives used to come and stay with me for some time until they got a job. At times I could assist them in securing a room by contributing their monthly rental... But these days, jobs are very scarce. You can stay for three years before you get a job. There are so many migrants looking for the same jobs. That's why these days there is a tendency of some migrating to Cape Town and Natal. The thinking behind this is that there are fewer labour migrants that side; hence more jobs. But these days even Cape Town is 'flooded'.¹¹

This influx of labour migrants, especially in the post-2005 period is of concern not only to migrants, but also to South Africans. It is partly due to this influx that Joshua Mvula has failed to secure a reliable job since 2008. He has failed to fulfil his goals back home but still hopes that he will make it one day. At the time of the interview, he was only working two days a

⁹ Hany Besada and Nicky Moyo. "Zimbabwe in Crisis: Mugabe's Policies and Failures: Mugabe's policies and Failures". Working Paper Number 38. October 2008. www.cigionline.org

¹⁰ See Miriam Altman. "The State of Employment and Unemployment in South Africa". In John Daniel, Adam Habib and Roger Southall (eds.). *State of the Nation, 2003-2004*. (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2003). pp. 158-183.

¹¹ Interview with Robert Banda. Parktown. 28/08/2016. I interviewed Robert Banda in Parktown where he rents a bachelor's flat. He said he had been in South Africa for seventeen years by the time of the interview in September 2016. Consequently, he indicated it was time for him to go back to Malawi. He had assisted his four sons and many of his relatives not only to come to South Africa, but also to secure jobs.

week and was compelled to ask his employer to assist him in looking for additional *maganyu* so that he works more days in a week.¹²

Labour migrants also face the problem of language barrier when looking for jobs, especially when they have just arrived in South Africa. Most of them do not go far with education; hence they are not fluent in English. To make matters worse, just upon arrival they can hardly communicate in the various local languages, for example, IsiZulu. In such circumstances, it becomes difficult to look for a job, or to bargain for good working conditions. In general, this accounts for failure to find jobs, especially during the first six months of their stay. Joshua Mvula is one of the many migrants who faced such a problem: “In my case, the problem was that I dropped out of school, hence it was rather difficult for me to find jobs on my own just upon arrival since I could neither speak English nor IsiZulu”.¹³ This is what Joshua Mvula said:

In 2008 jobs were not as scarce as nowadays only that there was little goodwill from relatives whom I found. But this time, I don't know why there are many Malawians looking for jobs. Is it a result of the weakening of the Malawi Kwacha currency and the eventual impoverishment of Malawians back home? I can't figure out the main reason for this. In my view, I feel Malawian migrants top the list in terms of their numbers in South Africa. If you go to Diepsloot, Honeydew and Ivory Park, you will be perplexed to see the multitudes of Malawians living there. They are seconded by Zimbabweans. The rest of the foreign nationals follow in limited numbers. That is why jobs are scarce.¹⁴

However, comparatively, a good number of labour migrants from Malawi in the post-2000 period are secondary school leavers, hence are better-off than the primary school leavers, who used to come to South Africa before 2000.¹⁵ These days even the secondary school leavers hardly find jobs in Malawi and are compelled to go to South Africa. Out of this group, some excel because they tend to upgrade themselves by embarking on on-the-job courses. Although most of the old *selufu* migrants in the pre-1990 period withdrew from junior primary school, and the new *selufu* migrants in the post-1994 period generally withdrew from senior primary school, the pre-1994 migrants were good language-wise. This was mainly due to the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 1994 soon after the emergence of democracy.¹⁶ FPE has been said to have been behind the lowering of the general education standards in Malawi. Lazarus Bota, one of the old *selufu* migrants, openly boasted, thus, on this matter:

¹² Interview with Joshua Mvula. Parkmore Park. Johannesburg. 7/08/2016.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ However, informants here were comparing the type of labour migrants before and after the 2000s and they could hardly provide the exact numbers involved.

¹⁶ For details, see Esme Kadzamira and Pauline Rose. “Can Free Primary Education Meet the Needs of the Poor? Evidence from Malawi”. *International Journal of Educational Development*. (2003, 23). pp. 505-507.

In my case I stopped schooling in standard six in the old Kamuzu Banda era primary school system, but I was able to speak good English unlike what happens with students of the multi-party era. Today's students can go up to form four (grade 12), but can hardly speak good English. No wonder most of them have problems looking for jobs. Their oral and written communication skills are poor.¹⁷

The greatest difference between male and female labour migrants in South Africa is in the employment profiles i.e. in the type of jobs that they do. Belinda Dodson et. al argue that female labour migrants are spread across a wider range of occupations than their male counterparts.¹⁸ Oral evidence,¹⁹ however, shows that the opposite is true for labour migrants from Malawi. Thus while women are restricted to the domestic and service sector, their male counterparts work in various sectors such as manufacturing, construction, service and domestic sector. In this case, it is clear that there are jobs that are done by both men and women, even though there are some jobs that are male dominated. Even within the domestic sector, there are some jobs that are women dominated and vice versa. Robert Banda, who first went to South Africa in 1998 and has since worked as a gardener, plumber and a general worker, supported this view: "There is a difference: female migrants cannot do gardening, rather they are better suited to do cleaning in the house, washing clothes, cooking, etc."²⁰

Male and female labour migrants in Mzimba, Nkhata-Bay and Johannesburg echoed that there are a number of jobs done by male labour migrants outside the domestic sector.²¹ The following were the examples of these jobs: working as security guards; fuel attendants; cooks in restaurants and lodges; and shop attendants.²² The account below by Winfred Mphande, a *selufu* labour migrant from Mzimba District, shows the difficulty of working in South Africa with one's family back home in Malawi:

¹⁷ Interview with Lazarus Bota. Chikoma Bota Village. T.A. Chindi. Mzimba. 14/01/2016.

¹⁸ Belinda Dodson et. al. *Gender, Migration and Remittances in Southern Africa*. (Cape Town: Idasa, 2006). p. 24.

¹⁹ Male and female labour migrants both in Malawi and South Africa, including key informants in Malawi, alluded to the view that there are both similarities and differences in the kind of jobs that male and female migrants do in South Africa during the contemporary migration period.

²⁰ Interview with Robert Banda. Parktown. Johannesburg. 28/08/2016. Robert Banda was influential in the formation of Mzikubola Burial Society in which he had acted as chairman for many years.

²¹ The following are some informants who shed light on the kind of jobs for men and women in South Africa: Interview with Getrude Banda. Mkumpha Village. T.A. Mankhambira. Nkhata-Bay. 8/05/2016; and interview with Joshua Mvula. Parkmore. Johannesburg. 7/08/2016. Joshua Mvula first went to South Africa in 2008 and struggled to find a steady and better paying job. By the time of the interview (2016), he was still trying to find a better paying job. He had since been arrested and deported once. He stayed in Honeydew before moving to stay with his employer since he could not afford to pay for his own accommodation.

²² The majority of migrants from both Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay shun working as shop attendants whereas the opposite is true for migrants from southern Malawi who prefer working in shops over working as house-keepers, cooks and gardeners. This tendency has a historical tradition: the migrants from northern Malawi have always worked in the mines and as domestic servants. Contrariwise, migrants from southern Malawi were mostly businessmen, hence loved working as shop assistants.

I found a job as a security guard. However, I couldn't cope with life there because I was used to doing business at home, in Malawi. I realised that it was better staying at home than in South Africa. There you are always in confinement while in Malawi you are free. In South Africa people are violent and they don't value marriage. I thought of my family at home. After working for nine months, I came back home where I started farming and doing business.²³

After Mphande failed to secure selection to secondary school, he went to work in tobacco estates in Rumphi District (see map 1.1). Thereafter, he embarked on doing small-scale businesses such as selling timber. But because most of his peers were going to South Africa, he decided to follow suit. He first went to South Africa in April 1994. He was welcomed by friends there. He later realised that there were so many serious problems in South Africa that he decided to go back to Malawi after nine months only. Since Mphande was working as a security guard, he had time to record some of his experiences in South Africa. Mphande compared the advantages between Malawi and South Africa, thus:

Malawi is a very peaceful country. You can walk anyhow without anybody harassing you. You have all the right to worship God and not live like an animal. However, Malawi is generally poor so that it is difficult to ensure a better living. For instance, it is not easy to build a house in Malawi.²⁴

Although labour migrants join the informal sector and have a chance of doing different types of jobs, the majority of them work as domestic servants. Furthermore and as indicated above, a larger proportion of these domestic workers are women. In fact, about 80% of the domestic workers of Malawian origin are women.²⁵ Much as wages in the informal sector are low compared to those in the formal sector, domestic sector wages are particularly low. Most informants in South Africa indicated that when you are working as a domestic worker and your employer provides everything, for example, food and accommodation, the wages are generally low. Hence most of them prefer to stay away from their employers in order to ensure a little savings by going for cheaper accommodation in such residential areas as Diepsloot and Honeydew. It can be concluded from this that domestic workers are usually under the mercy of their employers.

In South Africa few Malawian migrants have worked under one employer for a long period. This is occasioned by the fact that most informal sector jobs are low paying. For most labour migrants, they keep on changing jobs in an effort to maximise their wages. A good example here is Lucky Tchaungwe from Mzimba District. He first went to South Africa in 2006. He

²³ Interview with Winfred Mphande. Mtota Bota Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 24/03/2016.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ The remaining 20 per cent of male domestic workers are those who could not secure jobs in other sectors. This is my conservative estimate based on the information from my interviewees both in Malawi and in South Africa.

narrated that he stayed for a year without finding a job. Thereafter, he found a painting job in a certain company where he worked for a year. Then he found another job because the wages were better. Here he worked for a few months and he quit again and joined forces with a South African friend and they started working as contractors – fixing floor tiles. But after a few years his friend relocated to Cape Town and he discontinued contract jobs in favour of gardening jobs since it became difficult for him to secure contracts.²⁶

There have also been changes over time in the nature of jobs since the early 1990s. Initially labour migrants preferred long-term jobs over temporary ones. For instance, deliberate efforts were made to secure more permanent and steady jobs. Such jobs guaranteed labour migrants' security and guarded them against the need to regularly look for fresh jobs. However, the influx of immigrants have tended to depress wages of most jobs. It is easy for employers to fire and hire new employees in such a working environment because temporary workers are not protected by labour laws.²⁷ Consequently, as a way of securing financial security in such a hostile environment, labour migrants prefer doing *maganyu* instead of more permanent ones. They, therefore, work for different employers on different days in a week. As Lucky said,

working for different employers is better. The problem comes in when you lose your job; it means you are jobless. But when you work for different employers, you lose one job and you continue working for another. For example, you might be getting R250 per day and you work five days in a week; on each day, you work for a different employer. From just one employer, for example, working on Mondays only, you may get R1000 at the end of the month. Hence you may get R5000 from the five employers. But if you work under one employer, you may only get R3000 per month.²⁸

However, this strategy of relying on *maganyu* mainly applies to people who have stayed longer in South Africa and are not worried in case something happens because they know how to go about it. For example, they may even start a small-scale business to get them going until they get another job. Lucky continued: "But when you are new, you don't choose the type of job you want."²⁹ It is, therefore, mainly those who have stayed in South Africa for some time who prefer *maganyu*.

²⁶ Interview with Lucky Tchaungwe. Parkmore Park. Johannesburg. 7/08/2016. Lucky explained that it was easier for his contract partner to secure contracts because, unlike him, he was a professional contractor, but also because he was a South African.

²⁷ For details on South Africa's labour laws, see Labour Law in South Africa. COSATU. <http://www.cosatu.org.za>.

²⁸ Interview with Lucky Tchaungwe. Op. Cit. Although Lucky had not fulfilled all his migration goals, he indicated his intention to return home in December 2016 and was doubtful if he would return to South Africa for wage employment. He was determined to start a business using the money he had accumulated in South Africa.

²⁹ Ibid.

On a slightly different note, there are similarities and differences about the types of jobs done by labour migrants from Malawi and those from other labour-supplying countries in the region, for example, Zimbabwe. While in general labour migrants from all these countries look for better-paying jobs, labour migrants from such countries as Zimbabwe tend to choose certain jobs and despise others.³⁰ Anthony Mvula, a *selufu* migrant from Chidyake Village, T.A. Chindi, in Mzimba District, clarified: “As for us Malawians, we don’t choose jobs here. But our brothers from Zimbabwe like working in companies only; while with us, we work even in peoples’ homes just for money”.³¹ However, just like on the nature of employment (i.e. temporary versus permanent), explained earlier in the section, upon arrival Malawi labour migrants are desperate and, therefore, do not exercise choice. But after staying for some time, choices open up.

Some people prefer working inside the house, while others outside the house and yet both are domestic workers. In my case, I like jobs like gardening, that is, outside the house. I worked as a house cleaner for six months, but I later told my employer to look for another person because I could not cope partly because there is too much work to do in the house. Since then I am not ready to work inside the house.³²

3. Challenges of Staying in South Africa

Labour migrants not only from Malawi, but also from Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique face untold problems during their stay in South Africa during the contemporary period. These problems include sicknesses (and terminal illnesses); arrests and deportations; job scarcity and low wages; lack of affordable accommodation; xenophobia; and the prevalence of STDs including HIV/ AIDS. This section examines these problems to highlight the gravity of suffering these people have been subjected to while in South Africa, especially from the early 1990s onwards. The ensuing section will explain the efforts migrants make in order to overcome such challenges.

In addition to the scarcity of jobs highlighted above, migrants face serious accommodation problems. They particularly face accommodation problems upon their arrival in South Africa. There have been cases where migrants have ended up being stranded in South Africa despite assurances from their relatives and friends that they will stay with them before securing their own accommodation and jobs. It was indicated that some migrants are cheated by their relatives and friends so that they literally have nowhere to stay. In such cases and as a last resort, they

³⁰ Interview with Anthony Mvula. Parkmore Park. Johannesburg. 7/08/2016.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

seek refuge in Malawi churches in different parts of Johannesburg. These churches provide temporary shelter and appeal to well-wishers to provide temporary accommodation to these newly-arrived migrants until they secure their own accommodation and jobs. Among those stranded are single female labour migrants, for example, widows, divorcees and female school leavers. Peterson Moyo, who visited his cousins working in South Africa although he, himself, has not worked there, indicated that there is a Malawian church in Sandton where Malawian labour migrants congregate on Sundays. Peterson shed light on the abuse against female migrants:

There is a Malawian church in Sandton where most labour migrants usually congregate on Sundays. In addition to going there for prayers, these migrants use the opportunity to socialise and share their experiences of staying in South Africa. They share problems of joblessness, sicknesses, lack of food and accommodation. During such discussions, those who can afford pledge to assist their friends in need. As for those who have just arrived and have nowhere to stay, during church service, the church authorities announce to the congregation that there are Malawians without jobs, accommodation, or both, and that those who can afford should come forward and offer any assistance. Through this, the stranded migrants are picked one by one to stay with the well-wishers. However, for female labour migrants, at times they are picked by male migrants some of whom end up sexually abusing them. Since they share a single room, they end up staying like husband and wife.³³

Some labour migrants initially stay with their relatives or friends until they secure a job, upon which they, in turn, secure their own accommodation. But along the way, they sometimes become destitute, especially after losing their jobs. This was the case for Crane Chima of Manyamula in Mzimba. He worked in South Africa between 1990 and 2010 before he returned home. While in South Africa he initially faced difficulties in securing a job. His father, Sandwell Chima, who had promised him a job, had returned to Malawi in 1987, three years before Crane went to South Africa. Upon arrival, he stayed with his father's cousin in Dunhill until he secured a job as a gardener. He later quit this job because he did not like working on Sundays. Most Malawian migrants prefer working in white suburban households because of the belief that whites give better wages than blacks. Afterwards Crane got another job near Kempton Park. There, he was doing both gardening and domestic tasks. He worked here for eight years. Thereafter, he kept on changing jobs because he was ready to confront his employers after realising that he was being exploited. He was ready to do any job at his disposal. Through this he became popular in Johannesburg and was nicknamed *Mnyasa*.³⁴

³³ Interview with Peterson Moyo, Johannesburg, 14/10/2016. Peterson Moyo is a key informant who comes from Chitapa Moyo Village in T.A. M'mbelwa, a labour migration area in Mzimba. He personally visited this church in Sandton and witnessed female labour migrants desperately looking for shelter and eventually being rescued by fellow Malawian migrants who offered to provide accommodation.

³⁴ *Mnyasa* is a common name of a person coming from Nyasaland as Malawi was called before the attainment of independence. The plural for *Mnyasa* is *Manyasa*. Most Malawian labour migrants were popularly called *Manyasa* during the old migration period.

However, in between these different jobs, Crane once had significant accommodation problems, which he narrated as follows:

At one point, I had no place where I could sleep; so I was sleeping in the bush in Rivonia near a park. I found a mat people had dumped somewhere and slept in the bush near Boring Road. I survived on two litres of drinks and bread. From Monday to Wednesday I was sleeping in the bush, and then from Thursday I could sleep in a kitchen. I was rescued by a friend called Brave from Zubayumo Makamo area in Mzimba. He took me to his house. We were six people there. Later I found a place where to stay.³⁵

Where migrants were working as gardeners, cooks and house cleaners and were residing in the servant's quarters inside the employer's compound, it was difficult for them to accommodate their relatives and friends who had just arrived from Malawi. Hence the new migrant was forced to stay indoors for, say, three months, coming out only at night. Anthony Mvula experienced such accommodation problems because he reached South Africa when his father had just been arrested. Consequently, he was forced to stay with his in-law, whose boss did not allow him to welcome and stay with any visitor.

When we went to North Cliff, we learnt that my father had been arrested. We then went to Port-view to learn more about my father's arrest from my in-law. My uncle, who escorted me, left me in the hands of this in-law. Unfortunately, my in-law's boss never allowed *mvakachi* (a visitor) at his place. He tried to contact my father's young brother, but we failed to link up since his boss was just cutting the phone line. We were then using a public phone. Hence we just came back to my uncle's home...I only managed to get into the house at night. I was spending all the time under a bed for fear of being discovered by my in-law's boss. I was doing everything inside: toilet, bathing, etc. I was coming out only at night. At this point, I felt it was very tough for me and it was better to return home (Malawi).³⁶

Since most of the jobs are generally low-paying, migrants fail to get decent accommodation. In residential areas like Berea, Hillbrow, Yeoville and others cheap accommodation was going at R1,500 per month as of 2016, and yet on average the majority of labour migrants were getting R3,000 per month. As a result, they were compelled to resort to squatting in high residential areas like Alexandra, Diepsloot, Honeydew, among others. In these locations, they are able to stay in *mikhukhu* (shacks) where living conditions are poor. In such locations, accommodation was going at R500 (or even lower) per month during the same period. In case they stayed in 'expensive locations' like the ones highlighted above, two or three labour migrants shared an

³⁵ Interview with Crane Chima. Op. Cit. Crane Chima went to South Africa determined to succeed. Despite challenges, he worked very hard to make ends meet. Luckily, he was naturally gifted and ably and passionately did any jobs that came his way, in spite of its difficulty. Through this, he stated that he became very popular amongst his peers and employers. He is a good example of versatile Malawian labour migrants. He was also canning, for instance, he was ready to argue with the police 'hours on end' that their job was to arrest criminals and not 'innocent people' like him. He never got arrested in this way.

³⁶ Interview with Anthony Mvula. Parkmore. Johannesburg. 7/08/2016. Anthony Mvula went to South Africa in the early 2000s. He boasted of having achieved most of his migration goals: He had built two houses at his home and at the time of the interview was completing constructing a rest house with fourteen rooms at Eswazini Trading Centre in Mzimba District. "Once the rest house is complete, I am ready to return home for good", he said.

apartment in order to reduce rent per person; for instance, three people contributing R500 each monthly for a self-contained room going at R1,500 per month.

The problem of Malawian labour migrants overstaying in South Africa and in the process abandoning their wives, children and other dependents is not new as discussed in chapter three. It started during the old migration period and continues up to the present day. In the past, overstaying was more prevalent amongst *selufu* migrants unlike amongst the contract migrants. This is partly because *selufu* migrants were under no obligation to return home. The opposite was true of labour migrants under *Wenela* and later TEBA. They were obliged to return home after the expiry of their contracts. With the increase in independent or informal labour migration since the early 1990s, the situation is more complicated than before. In the past, a good number of migrants made efforts to be engaged by *Wenela*/ TEBA for the South African mines and *Mthandizi* for the Zimbabwean farms and other employment sectors. Furthermore, it was after failing to get engaged by these recruiting agencies that potential migrants emigrated on their own. Since the majority of migrants were in this way recruited by *Wenela*/ TEBA and *Mthandizi*, incidents of *kutchona* were somewhat minimal.

Following the demise of apartheid, black South Africans gained political but not economic freedom.³⁷ They had high hopes for a better South Africa, yet the opposite was true. The majority were living below the poverty line.³⁸ This was mainly due to the increase in unemployment levels. According to Geeta Kingdom and John Knight, between 1995 and 2005 “unemployment was a result of the slow growth of the economy, and thus slow growth in the demand for labour relative to the rapidly growing supply”.³⁹ In the 1970s and 1980s, unemployment was relatively low and this was because only a small percentage of black South Africans was allowed in white urban areas whereas the bulk were restricted to the Bantustan or Homeland areas. Around 1994 unemployment was 13% but a decade later, around 2004, it had risen to 30%.⁴⁰ This was a result of the influx of men and women into the urban labour

³⁷ See Michael R. Carter and Julian May. “One Kind of Freedom: Poverty Dynamics in Post-Apartheid South Africa”. *World Development*. (2001, 29: 12). p. 2002.

³⁸ See Martin J. Murray. *City of Extremes: The Spatial Politics of Johannesburg*. (London: Duke University Press, 2011). *passim*; Jeremy Seekings and Nicoli Nattrass. *Policy and Poverty in South Africa*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Hein Marais. *South Africa Pushed to the Limit: The Political Economy of Change*. (London: Zed Books, 2011).

³⁹ Geeta Kingdom and John Knight. “Unemployment in South Africa, 1995-2003: Causes, Problems and Policies”. *Journal of African Economies*. (2007, 16: 5). p. 840.

⁴⁰ Abhijit Banerjee et. al. “Why Has Unemployment Risen in the New South Africa?” *Economics of Transition*. (2008, 16: 4). pp. 715-740.

market where they competed for similar jobs. In Johannesburg, after 1994 whites who controlled the major business establishments moved out to suburbs like Sandton as they paved way for black South Africans' control. Johannesburg soon got transformed from 'the city of gold' and 'land of opportunities' to a 'city full of crime and joblessness'. Consequently, the general failure by black South Africans to secure jobs heightened violence and crime.⁴¹ It is this environment that Malawians encountered when they came looking for employment and business opportunities.

Following increased labour migratory flows since the 1990s, there is a 'scramble' for jobs in South Africa not only amongst immigrants, but also between the latter and South Africans themselves. As a result, jobs are more difficult to find during the contemporary period. Consequently, most labour migrants are forced to rely on *maganyu*.⁴² It is, therefore, difficult for labour migrants to accumulate enough savings from the wages and thereafter decide to return home. In other words, these migrants are not ready to go back home before realising their life-long goals, for example, accumulating capital with which to start small-scale businesses in Malawi. These labour migrants are also ashamed to return home empty-handed. These are some of the many reasons as to why labour migrants end up *kutchona* in South Africa even in the post-1990 period. During the old period, cases of *kutchona* were rampant amongst labour migrants in Nkhata-Bay but not really in Mzimba, since most of the Nkhata-Bay people emigrated through *selufu*.

The issue of Malawian migrants marrying South African women was both cause and effect of *kutchona*. For instance, it was a cause of *kutchona* in that after marrying South African women, they became so entangled in this web. Because of the ensuing responsibilities, for example, looking after the welfare of the new begotten household (and its members), they could not think of going back and take care of their original families. This was mostly because of the saying that the 'nearest is the dearest'. The situation could as well be equated to a man who has entered polygamy by marrying a second wife. It is usually the second wife who takes centre-stage, in as far as attention from the husband is concerned. In this way, the first wife at home (in Malawi) became a victim of circumstances. The original and ultimate aim of emigrating to South Africa

⁴¹ See Martin J. Murray. *City of Extremes*. Passim.

⁴² A good number of migrants rely on *maganyu*, especially a few months upon arrival in South Africa. Securing a steadier and better-paying job in South Africa during the contemporary period is a matter of luck. Some migrants indicated that in case you are not lucky, it might take a year or more before you land a better job.

was to look for means of dealing with financial woes in the original household and not to get married. Yet instead of achieving this goal, husbands end up creating new and unprecedented social and economic problems.

From the flipside of the coin, marrying South African women was equally the effect of *kutchona* in South Africa. As migrants stayed longer in trying to achieve their set migration goals, they started ‘missing’ their wives, who unfortunately in the past could not join them in South Africa and Zimbabwe given the migration restrictions then.⁴³ This argument is supported by oral evidence both in Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts during the contemporary period. For instance, Bonface Mwanza, who went to South Africa in 1998, gave the following account:

While staying in South Africa, you tend to forget about home. This usually happens when you do not have a good job and you are struggling to make ends meet. However, sometimes this happens even after one secures a good job...What you must know is that there are marriageable women there to whom some migrants get married. Many Malawian men do this. That’s why they forget about their wives at home in Malawi.⁴⁴

Archival evidence from MNA PCN 1/21/15, compiled by the *Wenela*’s Labour Representatives in trying to document the problems associated with working in South Africa, also shows that because of *kutchona*, many migrant workers working in South Africa ended up marrying South African women.⁴⁵ In addition, there was a problem when these labour migrants reached retirement and wanted to return home:

Some married women already had children with their previous husbands. They later also had children with their new Malawian husbands. At times, at the time of departure to Malawi their South African wives would refuse to come to Malawi with their husbands, in which case the husband was compelled to come home with their real children and leave behind the wife and step children.⁴⁶

In some cases the South African wife would willingly accompany their Malawian husbands to Malawi, but would eventually find it extremely difficult to adapt to the new environment. In this case, the wife would later pressurise the husband to release her so that she goes back home.⁴⁷ Given this situation, administratively, the authorities in South Africa would get in

⁴³ It was officially illegal for women to join their husbands, especially to South Africa. For details here, see chapter three.

⁴⁴ Interview with Bonface Mwanza. Op. Cit.

⁴⁵ For details here, see MNA PCN 1/21/15. Problems in South Africa – Marrying South African Women. This practice is still applicable during the contemporary period.

⁴⁶ MNA PCN 1/21/15. Ibid.

⁴⁷ Oral evidence has it that these South African women were initially taken up to join their husbands to Malawi based on information the husbands provided: for instance, that they would be welcomed by their relations and that life was ‘generally easy’. But in practice some information was withheld, for instance, that they were already married and with children and that life in the village was but tough (e.g. drawing water from streams, fetching firewood and gardening). When these South African wives arrived in Malawi, they were shocked. Since they could hardly cope with the situation, they had no option but to demand to be released. On this, Reverend A.D.

touch with their counterparts in Malawi to verify if the migrant, intending to come home with the South African wife, did not have another Malawian wife.⁴⁸ In most cases, this was a very futile endeavour because the migrant had overstayed in South Africa as such most of his relatives had died. Sometimes this was difficult to verify since the relatives in question had out-migrated to other unknown villages and could not be traced. In their husbands' villages, Robert Boeder argues, "they quickly became disillusioned, unhappy and a nuisance. Their husbands often deserted them for local women".⁴⁹ It is partly based on these experiences that South African women are often not interested in accompanying their husbands to Malawi.⁵⁰

In the post-1994 period, *kutchona* in South Africa continues to be one of the major problems that labour migration households face. The phenomenon seems to have become increasingly more complicated over time since all labour migrants emigrate informally unlike in the past when a cross-section of migrants emigrated under *Wenela* and, later, TEBA. Both new and old migrants feel that *kutchona* is more rampant and deleterious to households in the contemporary period than before. Gift Jere, a *selufu* migrant from Mzondi Ndhlovu Village in Mzimba District, gave the following perceptions as reasons behind *kutchona* during the contemporary period:

There are two or three reasons that compel migrants to overstay in South Africa: the first one is failure to find a job upon arrival. While there, you need to eat, rent a room, etc and if, for instance, you work only two days a week, you can't come home within a short period of time. And back home, they also need financial assistance. The second problem is to do with carelessness, for example, excessive beer drinking. Most Malawians regard beer in South Africa as cheap and hence end up being drunkards. Also there is the problem of lack of self-control when it comes to women. As you are aware, women there are very loose. In fact, it is women in South Africa who propose love to a man. Once you start engaging in such affairs, just know that that is the beginning of *kutchona*.⁵¹

As a result of *kutchona* and migrants' general failure to support their wives and children back home, wives usually seek intervention and redress by the courts. The practice of courts

Kayira is quoted as having argued that "many of the South African women brought back to Malawi by their husbands became ill and unhappy, perhaps because the climate did not agree with (welcome) them or because they were not used to the food and other conditions in Malawi" (MNA PCN 1/21/15).

⁴⁸ MNA PCN 1/21/15. The government eventually requested all husbands wishing to return home with South African wives to make a deposit, before they left South Africa, sufficient to pay for the return fare of the wife (Ibid.). For more complications regarding South African wives returning to Malawi with their new husbands, see Robert B. Boeder. *Malawians Abroad*. pp. 206-207.

⁴⁹ Robert Boeder. *Malawians Abroad*. p. 206.

⁵⁰ Most informants in the study areas indicated that what the South African women want from Malawian labour migrants in South Africa is not real marriage, but rather to benefit from the wages. They further indicated that this marriage goes as far as the man is employed; once they are out of job, the marriage crumbles. This also happens when the man is returning to Malawi.

⁵¹ Interview with Gift Jere. Mzondi Ndhlovu Village. T.A. Kampingo Sibande. Mzimba. 27/08/2015.

intervening in such migrants' cases is equally an old phenomenon⁵² and continues up to date. These wives usually ask the courts to dissolve their marriage and, in so doing, allow them to be free. Once dissolved, they can get another man. It is indicated that courts usually grant divorce after an absence of the husband for three years. Since most migrants under informal migration usually stay more than three years, the divorce rate in the labour migration areas in Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay is very high. This is in sharp contrast with the rate in the non-migration areas. During divorce, the issue of children and property is also considered. In line with the Ngoni culture of dowry and patrilineal succession in Mzimba, which still prevails, it is usually the father's family who are awarded custody of the children. The opposite is true with matrilineal Tonga societies in Nkhata-Bay where the children belong to the wife's family. In fact, here it is the brother to the wife's mother that claims authority over children.⁵³

During the contemporary period, divorce cases are increasingly frequent and tend to be dominant in both local and magistrates courts in the study areas. According to Mr. Mpumulo, Magistrate at Euthini Court,⁵⁴ these days (i.e. during the post-1990 period) the court simply grants divorce to a wife after complaints of *kutchona* and abandonment by the migrant husband.⁵⁵ Mr. Mpumulo added that the courts are overwhelmed by such cases and, as long as there is evidence of abandonment, they do not hesitate to dissolve the marriage. This is done to allow the wife to get married and get the expected support from the husband, including enjoying conjugal rights. Such court cases were also the order of the day at Zubayumo Makamo traditional court in T.A. M'mbelwa in Mzimba District.⁵⁶ Malawi's legal code has historically been accommodative of women on marriage and divorce issues. For instance, the Malawi Divorce Act (1910) stipulates that both a husband and a wife have the right to file for divorce

⁵² For details on divorce cases during the old period, see MNA NNM 1/9/2 Emigrant, April – November 1935. However, during the old period, divorce cases were common among *selufu* migrants as *Wenela* and, later, *Theba* migrants came home after the end of the contract and could only go back to South Africa after negotiating and securing a fresh contract.

⁵³ For details, see, for example, Robert B. Boeder. *Malawians Abroad*. pp. 199-200.

⁵⁴ Euthini Magistrate's Court is in the area of T.A. Chindi in Mzimba District. The court is close to Euthini Trading Centre and people from the trading centre usually attend such court cases. On the day I attended one such court case, people sympathised with the suffering that the migrants' wives endure and were of the view that it is better if such marriages were dissolved: "These husbands go to South Africa to look for money with which to support their families back home. But look at what happens: they get obsessed with extra-marital affairs in South Africa. This defeats the whole purpose of emigrating in the first place", lamented one attendee.

⁵⁵ In January 2016 I attended a court session at Euthini Magistrate Court where such divorce verdict was passed. The complainant was a youthful wife virtually abandoned by her husband a few years after their marriage. The husband then was working in South Africa and was represented by his relatives. The latter were to communicate with the husband about the ordeal.

⁵⁶ At Zubayumo Makamo Court they usually have court sessions every Wednesday and cases involving divorce and husbands and wives indulging in extra-marital affairs, both at home and in South Africa, were dominant.

as long as they have enough grounds for doing so. Such grounds include committing adultery and deserting the partner for at least three years.⁵⁷

Another result of migrants overstaying in South Africa are extra-marital affairs amongst migrants' wives in the labour source areas. Usually wives remain faithful with the hope that their husbands will eventually return. But this hope fades with time and, partly due to peer pressure and the financial problems women face in their households, they are compelled to indulge in extra-marital affairs. The women struggle to look after the welfare of their households.⁵⁸ They have problems feeding, clothing their children and also educating them. Despite the introduction of free primary education in Malawi, the children need notebooks and uniform, among other necessities.⁵⁹

Apart from financial support, married women simply miss their husbands physically and emotionally. The common practice in the labour migration areas in both Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay is for husbands to leave for wage employment in South Africa a few years after getting married. This tradition has continued to be practised since the old migration period. A few years into marriage, a couple realises they have financial problems, hence the need for the husband to emigrate for wage employment. Yet this is a very crucial period in their marriage since the wife would like to enjoy conjugal rights. But once in South Africa, the husband usually starts an affair with another woman. Consequently, even though the husband may send money and clothes, etc to his wife, cases of women having sexual intercourse with other men are very common. On this, female informants maintained that men leave their wives at the age when they are sexually active. As such most of them resort to promiscuity, as alluded to by Thoko (not her real name): "Without a man making love to me, I cannot afford to stay; unless if he leaves his penis in the bedroom".⁶⁰ In this regard, most wives from Mzimba District

⁵⁷ See https://s3amazonaws.com/landesa_production/resource/937/malawi_divorce-act_1905_English.pdf? Malawi Divorce Act (1905). Resource Equity. 2017.

⁵⁸ For details on the problems in the female-headed households, see Sylvia Chant. *Women-headed Households: Diversity and Dynamics in the Developing World*. (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997); Ann Varley. "Women Heading Households: Some More Equal Than Others?" *World Development*. (1996, 24: 3). pp. 505-520.

⁵⁹ A good number of migrants' wives, especially of those husbands who hardly send adequate assistance, cited this as one of the problems they face in raising children 'single-handedly'.

⁶⁰ Interview with Thoko (not real name). Galamala Mgungwe Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 29/04/2005. The informant is emphasising the fact that the physical presence of the husband in the household is paramount. Much as the family lacks financial resources, these are secondary. That is why most wives either indulge in extra-marital affairs or seek divorce from the courts after their husbands overstay in South Africa. This happens whether the husband sends support home or not.

indicated that they got married to their husbands and not to their husbands' money, arguing 'why should they be abandoned at home in Malawi?'

It is this complex situation that has led most male and female suitors in these migrant households to contract STDs including HIV/ AIDS. Available information from the Malawi Demographic Health Survey (MDHS) on HIV prevalence by marital status shows that prevalence is very high among those who are widowed (51%) and also relatively high among divorced and separated men and women (24.8% and 20.7%, respectively).⁶¹ After the return of the husband, one of the partners ends up infecting the other. It is not surprising, therefore, to see a good number of migrant households being either single-headed or widowed.

Labour migrants in South Africa indicated that they faced a lot of problems during their stay at the hands of not only the police, but also the South African nationals, especially when their visas have expired. South Africans also accuse foreigners of stealing their jobs and women and that many immigrants including Malawians do accept even lower salaries which are then pushed over to the natives. However, the impact of immigrants on jobs and social life is a complex one since there are both positives and negatives related to this. The influx of cheap labour is said to depress wages for everybody in South Africa and immigrants are said to be a cost to labour-importing countries like South Africa due to increased incidents of crime and violence.⁶² However, these immigrants also have the potential of initiating the transfer of knowledge and skills, innovation and new business opportunities. Business ventures may lead to the development of the outlying areas where these migrants are based. Once they indulge in more formal activities, immigrants also contribute to the economy through the payment of taxes.⁶³

The ensuing paragraphs highlight problems to do with arrests, deportations by the police and Home Affairs officials and xenophobic attitudes by the South African nationals. On xenophobia, although so far there have only been two major waves of attacks against foreigners, that is, in May and June 2008 and April 2015, workers of foreign origin face subtle

⁶¹ For details, see HIV Prevalence: Data from the 2010 Malawi Demographic and Health Survey. <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/HF34/HF34.pdf>.

⁶² See B. Maraja. "Immigration to Post-Apartheid South Africa". Global Migration Perspectives No. 1. Global Commission on International Migration. June 2004. <http://refworld.org>.

⁶³ See Caesar Mathebula. "Are Immigrants a Big Contributor to the Country's Unemployment Problems or Contributors to our GDP as Bringers of Skills, Opportunities and Creators of Small Businesses?" *SOE Review*. December 2014.

forms of xenophobia almost daily. This is pronounced and aggravated in shanty residential areas like Diepsloot, Honeydew, Tembisa, and Alexandra where these labour migrants live amongst the locals in very poor slum conditions.⁶⁴

A number of scholars have examined the problem of xenophobia against foreign workers in South Africa.⁶⁵ Most scholars have focused their attention on the two dominant waves of attacks: May and June 2008 and April 2015.⁶⁶ However, a few have focused their attention on the historical origins of xenophobia. It has been maintained that these xenophobic sentiments date to as far back as the early 1990s. In fact, it has been indicated that xenophobia has been endemic in South African society since 1994.⁶⁷ However, the actual origins of the hatred of ‘foreigners’ can be traced to as far back as the nineteenth century. Since then, there have been changes in the terminologies used on anti-foreigner sentiments: ‘faction fights’, ‘black-on-black violence’, ‘tribalism’, ‘ethnicity’, and ‘ethnic conflict’.⁶⁸ In short, South Africans have always displayed elements of ‘us’ against ‘them’, that is, ethnic self-identity. Following the institutionalisation of labour migrancy to the mines, South Africans always looked at themselves as different from migrant mine workers. However, for the large part of the twentieth century, South Africans were preoccupied with the fight against apartheid. It is only after the demise of apartheid that they turned their attention to foreigners. This scenario may help to explain how xenophobia took centre-stage after 1994.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ In these high density and shanty locations, South African locals easily notice that their foreign neighbours are not struggling to make ends meet. This is because they live in compact and temporary dwelling units, commonly known as *mikhukhu*.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Loren B. Landau (ed.). *Exorcising the Demons Within: Xenophobia, Violence and Statecraft in Contemporary South Africa*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2011); Shireen Hassim, Tawana Kupe and Eric Worby (eds.). *Go Home or Die Here: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008); David Everatt. “Xenophobia, State and Society in South Africa, 2008-2010”. *South African Journal of Political Studies*. (2011, 38: 1); and Neville Alexander. *Thoughts on the New South Africa*. (Auckland Park: Jacana Media (Pty) Ltd., 2013).

⁶⁶ See for example, Hussein Solomon and Hitomi Kosaka. “Xenophobia in South Africa: Reflections, Narratives and Recommendations”. *Southern African Peace and Security Studies*. (2013, 2: 2); and Harvey C.C. Banda. “Xenophobia as a Form of Human Insecurity: The Plight of Malawian Migrants in South Africa”. *Southern African Peace and Security Studies*. (2013, 2: 2).

⁶⁷ Jonathan Crush, Sujata Ramachandran and Wade Pendleton. *Soft Targets: Xenophobia, Public Violence and Changing Attitudes to Migrants in South Africa after May 2008*. (Cape Town: SAMP, 2013). p. 9. See also Jonathan Crush and Robert Mattes. “Xenophobia: Hostility Growing Alarmingly”. *Crossings*. (1998, 2: 3).

⁶⁸ See Gerhard Mare. *Ethnicity and Politics in South Africa*. (London: Zed Books, 1993).

⁶⁹ For details on tribalism and ethnicity, see, for example, Leroy Vail (ed.). *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. (California: CUP, 1989); Gerhard Mare. *Ethnicity and Politics in South Africa*. Ibid.

Some migrants link the beginnings of xenophobia with the indoctrinating impact of apartheid on the South African nationals. An example here is Newton Banda of Chitukwi Village in Nkhata-Bay District and this is what he said:

In the past there was harsh *apateti* (apartheid) in South Africa. Whites and blacks were staying apart, doing all things separately, for example, whites and blacks could not share a toilet. Now whatever whites were doing towards blacks during apartheid got stuck in the minds of blacks. Black South Africans these days take themselves as whites and when they speak IsiZulu, Afrikaans and other South African languages, they feel bossy and start despising black foreigners. That's why they ascribed the name *makwerekwere* to foreign blacks.⁷⁰

Even oral evidence from Mzimba District shows that labour migrants were subjected to xenophobic attacks way before 2008. As early as 2004 and 2005 a good number of labour migrants and ex-migrants⁷¹ in Zubayumo Makamo area⁷² in Mzimba touched on such violent attacks when narrating the challenges they faced while working in South Africa.

Oral evidence shows that South Africans look at foreign nationals as a source of various ills in their society. For example, they claim that these immigrants are, among others, responsible for rising unemployment and crime rate (in which they are perpetrators and not victims of crime); that they depress wages; snatch South African women; and that they bring diseases to South Africa.⁷³ However, foreign labour migrants have dismissed such claims as both unfounded and frivolous. For instance, they counter-argue that, rather than being perpetrators of crime, they are, instead, only victims of crime at the hands of South African nationals. They further argue that, in fact, laziness and lack of initiative are behind South Africans' failure to make ends meet in a highly competitive and capitalistic world. On laziness, the following view sheds more

⁷⁰ Interview with Newton Banda. Chitukwi Village. T.A. Malenganzoma. Nkhata-Bay. 6/01/2016. Newton, whose father was a South African and his mother a Malawian, bemoaned xenophobic sentiments against innocent workers of foreign origin. He could not believe why South African black nationals could reach the point of killing fellow blacks.

⁷¹ Interview with Fletcher Makamo. Zebediya Makamo Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 15/04/2005. Fletcher had worked in people's homes as a gardener in South Africa. By the time of the interview, he had just returned home. In February 2004 when I had gone to interview labour migrants in Johannesburg, Fletcher was one of my targeted informants. However, I failed to trace him and, therefore, only managed to interview him upon his return back home. Even during interviews I conducted in 2015 and 2016 in Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts, most informants highlighted the xenophobic threats in South Africa. For instance, interview with Simon Katundu. Euthini Secondary School. Mzimba. 13/01/2016; and interview with Penjani Manda. Wachaza Village. T.A. Malanda. Nkhata-Bay. 6/01/2016.

⁷² Zubayumo Makamo area is in the western part of Mzimba district in northern Malawi. This is one of the most popular labour migration areas in the district. Other equally-popular areas are Manyamula, Engalaweni, Chiseng'ezi, Kamteteke and Bulala. In these areas men had been going to South Africa since the beginning of the 20th century. Following the decline in mine migrancy at the end of the 1980s, both men and women continued to go to South Africa under *selufu*.

⁷³ This view is also corroborated in the literature. See, for example, Jonathan Crush and Wade Pendleton. *Regionalising Xenophobia? Citizen Attitudes to Immigration and Refugee Policy in Southern Africa*. (Canada: SAMP, 2004).

light: “what do you expect of a people who expect government to provide them with everything including basics? No wonder they suffer from dependency syndrome. With us, we know that if we do nothing, we will not eat, and, therefore, we are bound to work hard in whatever we embark on”.⁷⁴

One of the serious problems that labour migrants face in South Africa is the hatred from the South African locals, especially in the residential areas. The foreigners are hated for showing an element of prosperity at the expense of, arguably, ‘deserving’ South Africans. A visit to Honeydew revealed that labour migrants display a hard-working spirit even amidst appalling living conditions. They make efforts to make ends meet despite difficult conditions. Where a husband is working and a wife is not, the wife embarks on small-scale businesses using the already meagre proceeds from the husband’s wage employment.⁷⁵ Many of these migrants already have an enterprising spirit from home: they embark on small-scale businesses like hawkers and small grocery shops in Malawi using proceeds from farming. However, most of these small businesses do not thrive due to limited capital in Malawi. When going to South Africa, one of the dominant reasons is to work with the aim of accumulating capital with which to boost these businesses back home. Equipped with this spirit, and taking advantage of the good business environment within the residential areas in South Africa, for example, a dense population with an appetite for cheap consumer goods, they easily establish such small businesses. Sooner, such businesses thrive and start to grow. With a background of laxity among the locals, it is not surprising that foreigners are then hated and harassed by their South African neighbours.

With such a humble beginning, some of these businesses have grown in scale so that these wives eventually go into cross-border trade. They begin bringing Malawian foodstuffs for resale at a profit in South Africa and also South African goods such as bicycles and television sets for resale in Malawi. Since they trade in Malawian products like *usipa* (small fish from Lake Malawi) and other types of fish, *nthendero* (groundnut flour), *mphangwe yakwanika* (dried vegetables), cassava, sweet potatoes, high grade rice like *kilombero* and *faya*, they target

⁷⁴ Interview with Newton Banda. Op. Cit.

⁷⁵ Samson Banda, a labour migrant who escorted me to Honeydew, told me that most of the women selling small items like vegetables, tomatoes, onions and beans along the streets in Honeydew were of Malawi origin. He further said it was easy to establish they were from Malawi from their dress and conduct: “All these women you see here, like those ones over there (pointing), are from Malawi. They are different from South African women; they usually put on *chitenje* (wrapper) and are humble and not rough. For you to prove what I am saying, let’s ask them if indeed they are from Malawi”. We then approached one of them who indeed confirmed she was from Malawi.

places where Malawian labour migrants usually congregate as their outlet. Such places include churches of Malawian origin, parks where Malawian migrants hold monthly society meetings, for example, Parkmore, Randburg, Diepsloot and Honeydew, and areas around Park Station in Johannesburg. A visit to these churches and parks around Johannesburg confirmed this view: Malawian labour migrants were seen to be busy buying these Malawian products before and after the church services and society meetings.

Sara Mlotha, a female labour migrant working in South Africa, indicated that they usually face hatred from South Africans who accuse them of depressing wages. “South Africans blame us for accepting very low wages and, they maintain, this practice has a depressing effect on the wages as these South Africans cannot negotiate for better wages from the same employers. They accuse us that we accept any wages on offer, for example, wages as low as R150 per day. For South Africans, they only accept wages from R250 per day upwards”.⁷⁶ Sara added: “Consequently, they always tell us that they are planning to attack us so that we should go back home. This is very scaring in view of what happened in 2008 and 2015. Some of us are staying with our children and every day we are left in suspense, not knowing what will happen next”.⁷⁷ Despite this suspense, Sara indicated that they were planning to stay in South Africa for a couple of years to ensure that their two children attained education, which they felt was of higher quality than the education in Malawi’s countryside.

On staying with their children and educating them in South Africa, Sara indicated that they discovered that their children were not receiving proper treatment at the hands of their relatives in Malawi. She indicated that, comparatively, it was much better to stay with their children in South Africa despite the high cost of living.

We made a decision to stay with our children despite the challenges of low wages and job scarcity in South Africa. However, we have a challenge of securing relevant documentation, for example, valid work permits and visas, to enable our eldest son sit for high school examinations in South Africa. Since we know that it is extremely difficult to secure such documentation nowadays, we have decided to send our eldest son to attend boarding secondary schools in Malawi because he is already in high school here in South Africa. The idea behind is that he would spend less time with our relatives, hence less likelihood of being ill-treated.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Interview with Sara Mlotha. Randburg Park. Johannesburg. 6/11/2016. Sara Mlotha and her husband, Lyton Chirambo, first worked in Lilongwe, Malawi, where her husband worked as a security guard. But due to low wages, the husband emigrated to South Africa in 2010. A few years later, Sara followed her husband and, luckily, she too secured a job as a house keeper. I interviewed Sara just after their welfare society’s meeting in Randburg.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

However, this does not mean everything is rosy. She indicated that her husband and herself were getting R3000 a month each and were staying in a room going at R1,500 per month. This means they were going to struggle to fully finance their child's education.

Some Malawian labour migrants were directly affected by the xenophobic attacks that arose in South Africa in April 2015. The following account by Justice Nyirenda attests to this: "Following the outbreak of xenophobic attacks in South Africa in April 2015, I told my boss that I wanted to come home; I was afraid of being killed. And my boss bought me an air ticket from Johannesburg to Lilongwe. That's how I came home and why I am here at home".⁷⁹ Justice indicated that he used the money that he had to buy a battery charger. With it, he charged car batteries and fishing boat batteries because, he maintained, "people stopped fishing using lamps these days".⁸⁰ Through this small-scale business, he was able to buy basic provisions like sugar, salt, bread, and cooking oil. However, he could not find enough money for bigger projects like house construction and this was partly the reason he wanted to go back to South Africa.⁸¹

On the South Africans' attitude towards foreigners, Newton Banda could not believe the treatment he got in South Africa despite his father having been South African. His mother was Malawian from Nkhata-Bay District. Newton was born in Johannesburg and his parents were residents of Westonaria. Newton and her mother left Westonaria for Malawi in 1972 following the death of his father. Upon arrival in Malawi, they went to Chitukwi Village in T.A. Malenganzoma, her mother's home. After withdrawing from school due to fees problems, he went to Tanzania in 1990 where he worked for five years and came home empty-handed because of low wages. In Tanzania he had worked as a watchman. In 1994, his relative took him to South Africa. In South Africa Newton secured work as a gardener, a job which was comparatively better. However, he bemoaned hatred by the South African nationals:

⁷⁹ Interview with Justice Nyirenda. Chizonga Village. T.A. Malenganzoma. Nkhata-Bay. 6/01/2016. I conducted this interview at Malanda Trading Centre in Chintheche, Nkhata-Bay, where Justice Nyirenda was operating a battery charging business. He was willing to grant me an interview despite his busy schedule at his shop. He said he was determined to go back to South Africa, accumulate enough capital with which to establish a bigger business at Malanda Trading Centre.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ This shows the determination of labour migrants to achieve their goals by emigrating to South Africa for work. This determination was shared by the majority of labour migrants who I interviewed both in Malawi and in South Africa. Those in Malawi were making efforts to go back to South Africa whereas those already in South Africa were determined to overcome all odds, stay longer there-in, in the process increase their chances of meeting their set migration goals.

I was able to differentiate the lifestyle here in Malawi and in South Africa. For example, I noted that there was a lot of discrimination there. I was still referred to as *makwerekwere* despite the fact that my father was also South African. It was only my mother who was a Malawian, but those people thought I was wholly Malawian. I once went to the Department of Home Affairs to verify my status: everything came out. I then managed to secure a South African ID. After that that's when I was able to stay freely.⁸²

In early April 2015, xenophobic attacks started in Durban⁸³ and eventually spread to other areas including parts of Johannesburg. Malawians staying and working in South Africa were amongst the victims of these attacks: a repetition of the xenophobic attacks in May and June 2008. It was reported in the media that by mid April 2015 two Malawians were killed and 3,200 were affected by the attacks.⁸⁴ Malawians, like people from other countries, staying in South Africa underwent traumatic experiences. One Malawian victim narrated how he witnessed a fellow Malawian, Hassan Mohamed, being stabbed by a mob, covered with a blanket and later set ablaze while alive.⁸⁵ The Malawi government eventually came in and repatriated the victims back home.⁸⁶ However, it was reported that, amidst this violence, some Malawian labour migrants refused to return home, arguing 'if I go home, what will I be doing in order to make ends meet?' In a related development, a group of Malawian labour migrants were caught in Lilongwe *en route* to South Africa barely a week after being repatriated.⁸⁷ This shows the kind and level of desperation on the part of these labour migrants in as far as fulfilling their set goals is concerned.

⁸² Interview with Newton Banda. Chitukwi Village. T.A. Malenganzoma. Nkhata-Bay. 6/01/2016.

⁸³ These attacks, reportedly, started following the xenophobic sentiments expressed by King Goodwill Zwelithini. A few days after such sentiments, a large group of South Africans rushed out, attacking foreigners and looting their shops; demanding that they 'go back home'. This was sensationally described in the print media in South Africa as "looting for our king!" For details on this, see, for example, Clive Ndou. "Foreigners Must Go Home – King Zwelithini". *The Citizen*. 23 March 2015.

⁸⁴ For details, see for example, Macdonald Thom and Ntchindi Meki. "3,200 Malawians now affected". *The Daily Times*. 21 April 2015.

⁸⁵ For details, see "Chaponda visits xenophobia victims in South Africa". *The Daily Times*. 29 April 2015.

⁸⁶ For details, see Chikondi Masuso. "K30 million set aside for xenophobia victims". *The Daily Times*. 14 April 2015. See also Harvey C.C. Banda. "Where from? Where to? Malawian Migrants in the Wake of the April 2015 Xenophobic Attacks". 8 May 2015 (<http://saccps.blogspot.com>)

⁸⁷ For details, see Ntchindi Meki. "70 detained *en route* back to South Africa". *The Daily Times*. 30 April 2015. In this same newspaper, Jimmy Gama, Officer-in-Charge for Lilongwe Police Station in Malawi was quoted as wondering as to why the just-repatriated migrants were going back to South Africa: "There are young boys and girls in the group and one tends to wonder why they are risking going back to a country where their own lives are not safe".



Photograph 5.2: A foreign national shows a sign that reads: “We have to go back home”. This group must have been from Malawi looking at the inscription. This followed the xenophobic attacks on foreigners in April 2015. (Source: AFP/ Rajesh Jantilal).



Photograph 5.3: Malawian labour migrants in a bus being repatriated home following the upsurge of xenophobic attacks in South Africa, 18 April 2015 (Source: <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/>).

The other major problem labour migrants faced in South Africa was being arrested by police for failure to produce valid documents, for example, visas and work permits. Once arrested, migrants are temporarily remanded in police cells before being sent to Lindela Repatriation

Centre,⁸⁸ ready for deportation.⁸⁹ This is a serious problem and is largely behind the migrants' failure to realise their migration goals. For instance, some labour migrants had been arrested and deported for a record three or four times.⁹⁰ As a result of the fear of being arrested, most labour migrants remain in-doors whenever they are off duty. "Each day we are in suspense as we don't know whether we will meet the police or not on our way to and from the work place".⁹¹ The only time they are compelled to go out is on Sundays to attend church services and other social gatherings like the monthly welfare society meetings.⁹²

Labour migrants arrested for expired visas and later sent to Lindela reported about harassment by the police and Home Affairs officials. This harassment usually follows failure by the labour migrants to give bribes to the police to ensure release. The following accounts attest to this:

I was standing on the street, going to see my brother. They drove up to me and told me to stop; and asked for my passport. I did not show them. Then they told me to get into the car and took me to the police station. They did not ask me anything. My brother had figured out that I had been detained and came to the police station with my passport. The police told me I had 'overstayed'. The policeman told me that if I wanted to leave I would have to give him R250. I told him I had nothing. I stayed at the police station from 16th until 23rd April (1998). They then told me that if I had no money, I would be sent to Malawi.⁹³

I was coming from work and I had boarded a taxi. The taxi was stopped by traffic officers. Apparently they were checking the car, but then decided to ask passengers about their IDs. I was the only one in the taxi who did not have an ID and they got me off the taxi. They took me to the police station. Whilst in the taxi, I told them that I only had a passport. On the way to the police station, they asked me to 'make a plan'. They said if I had R300 they would let me go. I said I only had R150, but they refused and said

⁸⁸ The Centre won a contract from the Department of Home Affairs and was, reportedly, charging R22.75 a head per day for accommodating detainees. For details here, see Hein Marais. "Deporting for Cash". *Mail and Guardian*, 7-13 February 1997. The Human Rights Commission conducted an investigation into the treatment of detainees. For details, see Historical Research Papers (HRP) AG 2847 Lindela Repatriation Centre Records, 1997-1999.

⁸⁹ For details on the suffering of Malawian migrants here see, Harvey C.C. Banda. "From 'Bethani' to Lindela: The Plight of Malawian Migrants in South Africa". 9 December 2014. (<http://saccps.blogspot.com>).

⁹⁰ Interview with Abraham Gomezgani Mwanza. Galamala Mgungwe. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 29/04/2005. Abraham's three sons were arrested three times each while working in South Africa. This greatly affected the family welfare since he used to sell cattle to enable his sons go back to South Africa after each arrest. Abraham Mwanza was, himself, a former migrant, having gone to South Africa in the 1950s and 1960s first under *selufu* and later under *Wenela*.

⁹¹ Interview with Fiskani Kayira. Berea Location. Johannesburg. 4/11/2016. Fiskani followed her husband in 2010 together with their two children. This suspense is worrisome because their intention is to stay longer in South Africa, in the process accord their children better education and accumulate capital with which to start a viable business back home. Most migrants indicated they usually met the police but tried to 'buy their way' in order to ensure continued stay in South Africa. However, they were left wondering as to why immigrants from other countries were easily processing work permits, a thing that was almost impossible in their case.

⁹² Between men and women, the study established that men are more out-going than women and this explains why it is mainly male migrants who are usually arrested and deported. They usually go out drinking and womanising. The other explanation behind this development are the numbers of migrants involved: although female migration increased in the post-1994 period, there are still more male migrants in South Africa as compared to their female counterparts.

⁹³ Historical Research Papers (HRP) AG 2847 Lindela, Detainee Questionnaire Forms. This is an account of a Malawian migrant arrested and later detained at Lindela before deportation. This was part of an investigation by the Human Rights Commission in 1998 following complaints of ill-treatment by police and other officials. See also HRP AG2847 Lindela Repatriation Centre Records, 1997-1999.

they would better take me to the police station and I would later be deported. I stayed a few days at the station before they took me to Lindela.⁹⁴

Much of the literature also talks about the “culture of violence” in South Africa and this shows that violence and crime are not a new phenomenon.⁹⁵ There are also allegations of underground networks between the police and South African criminals and that, at times, the police, themselves, are seen to be violent against foreigners.⁹⁶ On the allegations by the black South Africans that labour migrants were perpetrators of crime, most interviewed migrants counter-argued that, in fact, they were victims of crime. They indicated that out of all migrants from various countries, it was mainly migrants from Zimbabwe and Mozambique, who were associated with criminal activities.⁹⁷ “These migrants connive with South African nationals to indulge in criminal activities like armed robbery, petty theft and burglary”.⁹⁸ It was further indicated that South African nationals target foreigners during these criminal activities because they know that these foreigners can hardly report such cases to police because of their illegal status. Lingston Kapinda, a resident of Berea, explained: “Since our visas expired, they know we can’t go to police, hence we become easy targets. In such a way, we lose a lot of property through theft. As a solution, we quickly send money home for fear of being robbed”.⁹⁹

Austin Chirwa, a resident of Honeydew, indicated that theft and armed robbery were a worrisome problem in Honeydew slum residential area. Many people in the area are jobless, hence they resort to theft and crime. Most of the houses in this area are very temporary; in some cases they are virtually demarcated by plastic and carton papers. In addition, they are compact and numerous. Robbers, therefore, take advantage of these slum conditions to launch criminal activities. But the residents of Honeydew take crime seriously, as Austin Chirwa explained: “Anyone caught committing crime, for example, stealing, is harshly dealt with there and then. The punishment for such offences is simple: death”.¹⁰⁰ There is a place in Honeydew (a football

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ For details on this, see Richard Tomlinson et.al. *Emerging Johannesburg: Perspectives on the Postapartheid City*. (New York: Routledge, 2003). pp. 102-114.

⁹⁶ See Mark Shaw. “Organised Crime in Post-Apartheid South Africa”. Institute for Security Studies. Occasional Paper No. 28. January 1998.

⁹⁷ See Bronwyn Harris. “A Foreign Experience: Violence, Crime and Xenophobia during South Africa’s Transition”. *Violence and Transition Series*. (2001, 5).

⁹⁸ Interview with Gift Jere. Op. Cit.

⁹⁹ Interview with Lingston Kapinda. Berea Location. Johannesburg. 3/11/2016. Lingston Kapinda first went to South Africa in the early 2000s. He hailed the introduction of local bureaux in Malawi as facilitating the easy transfer of funds back home. Details on the operations of these localised bureaux come in chapter seven.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Austin Chirwa. Honeydew. Johannesburg. 19/10/2016. Austin indicated clearly that he stayed in Honeydew simply because he could not afford other better places, but that, all things being equal, Honeydew was not a good place. “This place is a very difficult one to stay in. So many things do happen here: thefts, murders

ground) called *Gologota* (Golgotha). This is where all those found committing criminal activities are taken to and killed by being publicly burnt.

Just last week, they caught one of the men who had been terrorising this location through theft and murders. They simply took him to *Gologota* and killed him. They tortured him until he released names of people in his gang. He said their gang leader stays in Soweto. Most of the gang members have since fled to Soweto. Despite such revelations, they did not set him free. In fact, once caught, then you know they will kill you. They tied his hands at the back, put old tyres around his neck (necklacing);¹⁰¹ poured petrol on him and set him ablaze.¹⁰²

Although most culprits are South African nationals, Austin indicated that he had a friend from the same village in Embangweni, Mzimba District, who was killed at *Gologota* in the same manner in 2009. He had been caught stealing. Austin stated that he was not surprised to learn that his friend was caught stealing in South Africa since he started stealing way back in Malawi. “Here they don’t care whether you are South African or not; as long as they catch you either stealing or with another man’s wife, they just kill you”.¹⁰³

of innocent people, prostitution and general immorality (promiscuous sexual practices); all these take place here. We simply stay here because there is no any other alternative. But we don’t like it here at all”, Austin stated.

¹⁰¹ Necklacing is one of the ways through which South African nationals killed foreigners during xenophobic attacks in 2008 and 2015. In the pre-1990 period (in South Africa), necklacing ‘sentences’ were sometimes handed down against alleged criminals by the ‘people’s courts’ established in black townships as a means of enforcing their own judicial systems. However, this practice is also practised in other countries. In the early 1990s, for example, it is indicated that university students in Abidjan, Cote d’Ivoire, were plagued by burglars stealing from their dormitories. The students took action by capturing the alleged thieves and then executed them by placing tyres around their necks and setting the tyres on fire. For details on this, see Robert Kaplan. *The Ends of the Earth: A Journey to the Frontiers of Anarchy*. (New York: Random House, 1996). p. 14.

¹⁰² Interview with Austin Chirwa. Op. Cit.

¹⁰³ Ibid.



Photograph 5.4: Football ground called *Gologota* in Honeydew where criminals are killed through necklacing. Note: shanty houses in the immediate background and planned houses across the stream in the remote background (photo by author).

4. Labour Migrants' Survival Mechanisms

Despite a horde of challenges that labour migrants face while staying and working in South Africa, they devise strategies with which to overcome them. This is done in an effort to prolong their stay in South Africa and, in so doing, maximise proceeds from their wage employment. Some of these survival strategies include resorting to use of *mankhwala gha chifipa* (local medicine) believed to have the power to enhance the chances for migrants securing better-paying jobs and warding off 'disasters', for instance, arrests and eventual deportation; integrating into the South African society through various means; finding relief from the welfare societies and churches; embarking on small-scale businesses during periods of 'job droughts'; financial prudence to ensure maximum savings; and diversification, for instance, using the proceeds from wage employment as a springboard into various businesses back home. It is in view of this that the study argues that labour migrants working in South Africa are ready to overcome challenges in order to realise their goals.

Many informal labour migrants face huge problems whenever they fall sick in South Africa during the contemporary period. When this happens, there is need for the sick migrants to travel home for proper medical attention. The situation becomes more complex when the migrant dies in South Africa. This is different from formal recruitment during the old *Wenela/ TEBA* days when after a contract migration employee died in course of delivering his duties, his relatives back home would get compensation in cash. This was after verifying if, indeed, they were actually related to the deceased.¹⁰⁴

It is noteworthy that the welfare societies started operating during the pre-1990 period and their role has significantly remained the same. Scholars have examined different types of migrant associations, for example, secret societies, credit associations, mutual benefit societies and religious societies.¹⁰⁵ One notable difference between these and the welfare societies discussed in this study is on political involvement. The founders of Malawian welfare societies are interested mainly in alleviating the suffering of Malawian labour migrants during their stay in South Africa. Sekibakiba P. Lekgoathi has examined the burial societies and migrant associations among the migrants from Zebediela area in present-day Limpopo who were working in Pretoria around the 1950s and 1960s. He argues that these societies “acted as forms of self-help associations or funeral insurances”.¹⁰⁶ Robert E. Boeder has documented the activities of these welfare societies operated by Malawian labour migrants during the old migration period.¹⁰⁷ As can be noted, these societies were very useful among informal (*selufu*) migrants since they were not represented by similar bodies like workers unions at the work place.¹⁰⁸ Again for recruited labour migrants working in various mines in South Africa, their mine employers were responsible for their welfare and, hence, such societies were in a way out of question. Zoe Groves has documented the activities of these welfare societies amongst Malawian labour migrants in colonial Salisbury.¹⁰⁹ According to Groves, these burial societies in colonial Zimbabwe started around the 1930s and remained a common feature in the 1940s

¹⁰⁴ For details on the verification process (i.e. verification letters), see MNA LB 4/3/9 Workmen’s Compensation.

¹⁰⁵ For details on these, see, for example, Jose C. Moya. “Immigrants and Associations: A Global and Historical Perspective”. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. (2005, 31: 5). pp. 833-864.

¹⁰⁶ Sekibakiba P. Lekgoathi. “Migrants from Zebediela and Shifting Identities on the Rand” p. 158.

¹⁰⁷ See Robert B. Boeder. *Malawians Abroad*. pp. 236-241.

¹⁰⁸ This section is mainly concerned with the welfare of informal labour migrants in South Africa; hence the activities of the workers unions are somewhat out of context. However, for details on these, see Franco Barchiesi. *Precarious Liberation: Workers, the State, and Contested Social Citizenship in Post-apartheid South Africa*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁹ See Zoe R. Groves. “Malawians in Colonial Salisbury: A Social History of Migration in Central Africa, c. 1920s-1960s” (Unpublished PhD Thesis). Keele University. 2011.

and 1950s. These societies were established according to religious affiliation, for example, the Mponda Yao (Muslim) Burial Society; ethnicity or tribalism; politics; and along gender lines, for example, the Daughters of Africa Burial Society based in Salisbury.¹¹⁰

Other burial societies in colonial Zimbabwe included: Alendo Burial Society, Msamaliya Wachifundo Burial Society, Nsanje Bulala Burial Society and Northern African Brotherhood Society. The latter society was formed by labour migrants from northern Malawi and this is depicted from the names of the committee members, viz, Gondwe, Mungwira, Kachale and Nkhambule.¹¹¹ As for the other three societies, it is clear that they were formed by migrants from central and southern regions of Malawi.¹¹² Although membership was open to ‘outsiders’, the society leadership was concentrated on tribal lines. As will be noted below, most of the societies among Malawian migrants in South Africa during the contemporary period carry the same traits.

During the contemporary period, especially since the early 1990s, this is where welfare societies, usually the burial societies, come in. These welfare societies were established in the early 1990s when the numbers of informal labour migrants increased. This brought about the need for labour migrants to get organised into some kind of organisations or societies to take charge of their welfare. Society members make monthly contributions. Whenever a disaster such as the death of a member strikes, part of the society’s savings is used to cover the expenses of repatriating the dead body back home. For terminally-ill migrants, members approach the society for monetary assistance to enable the sick travel back home. But before taking the sick person home, society members take turns to visit and cheer the sick member whenever they are off duty. In fact, the society management (each society has a working committee of about ten members) releases some funds and allocates a few members, for example, two or three, to escort the sick. A similar arrangement applies when repatriating the dead body. This monetary assistance is not in the form of a loan; it is a grant; in fact, welfare societies, in this case, operate like medical insurance schemes. Anthony Mvula, who is actively involved in these welfare societies, sheds light:

As we are staying and working here, we meet various problems: sometimes one of us falls sick and if the situation does not improve despite taking him or her to various hospitals, then the society releases money

¹¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 121-122.

¹¹¹ For details on these societies, see MNA 4/5/5 Burial Societies Operated by Malawi Nationals, 1967.

¹¹² *Alendo* is a Chichewa word meaning visitor; *Nsanje* is a name of a district at the southern tip of Malawi; whereas *Musamaliya Wachifundo* is a Chichewa expression meaning ‘a good Samaritan’ in English. The latter name was probably formed in line with religious affiliation.

to repatriate the sick back to Malawi. At times, such a person dies. That's why people came up with the idea of forming societies to assist each other during these difficult moments.¹¹³

There are a number of societies amongst labour migrants in Johannesburg. The following are examples of these societies: Manyamula, Engalaweni, Kafukule, Embangweni, Bulala and Mzikubola societies. These societies are named after the area in northern Malawi where labour migrants come from. These societies, like the ones in the pre-1990 period, are governed by a constitution. All the society activities are run by a committee of roughly ten members, led by a chairman, secretary and treasurer, who hold office for one year. These societies have specific places where they meet on the first Sunday of every month. The following are some of the meeting places: Parkmore, Randburg, and Honeydew. The public parks in these areas are the meeting places since they are vast empty lands which can conveniently accommodate the huge numbers of society members. Most societies have an average of 50 members. On this particular day, members congregate at one place within the park. A visit to these parks showed that the members start flocking to these places from as early as 9 a.m. but actual society meetings only begin around 11 a.m. and end around 1 p.m. Again during the period before the official beginning of these society meetings, committee members hold caucuses during which they discuss issues to share with the rest of the members later on. At the end of the caucus, they draw up an agenda for the ensuing society meeting. A visit to Randburg Park showed that the various society groupings meet on the left and right hand sides of the main road. On the left, there were huge crowds of people unlike on the right (see picture below). Upon enquiry, I learned that this was a meeting place of societies of people from T.A.s M'mbelwa, Chindi and Kampingo Sibande which are the dominant labour migration areas in Mzimba District. In contrast, migrants from Mzukuzuku, Mzikubola meet in smaller groups on the park to the right side of the road. The people from these areas are fewer in numbers and most of them have joined the labour migration process between Malawi and South Africa as recently as the early 1990s.

¹¹³ Interview with Anthony Mvula. Op Cit.



Photograph 5.5: A park on the left side of the road from Johannesburg to Randburg. This is the meeting place of labour migrants from the western part of Mzimba District i.e. from Bulala, Kamteteke, Chiseng'ezi, Zubayumo Makamo, Manyamula and Engalaweni. The picture was taken around 9 a.m. on Sunday, 6 November 2016 when labour migrants had just started gathering. The cars parked on the side of the road belong to these labour migrants. This is a clear indication that some of these migrants have accumulated wealth over the years. However, even many more labour migrants were being dropped by public taxis and minibuses (photo by author).

Membership of these societies is largely based on kinship ties: usually people, who are related and come from adjacent villages at home, form these societies. Innocent Nyirenda, who comes from Mzimba, sheds more light: “Usually people from the same villages, for example, three or four villages, constitute membership of a society. In most cases, you know each other very well. In our case, we are about fifty members”.¹¹⁴ However, in some cases, membership is open even to outsiders. Robert Banda explains:

In our case, membership is open to all interested Malawians. In fact, some labour migrants from Zimbabwe are members of our society. In the past, we even had members from Lilongwe (central Malawi) and Blantyre (southern Malawi), but these were women and after they got married, their

¹¹⁴ Interview with Innocent Nyirenda. Diepsloot. Johannesburg. 30/10/2016. Innocent comes from Eswazini area in T.A. Kampingo Sibande in Mzimba District. He first worked as a gardener and did other piece jobs before being employed by an international High School in 1996. Again here he started as a gardener, but since he had attained secondary school education in Malawi, he was moved into the library and at the time of the interview in 2016, he was working in the stationery-photocopier section. He has had a very stable and better-paying job since 1996.

husbands did not allow them to continue with membership, suspecting that their wives might be seeing other men. But their husbands were fellow Malawian labour migrants.¹¹⁵

Although many of these welfare societies are called burial societies, they do not only look after the sicknesses and deaths of society members. Their roles are broader, but suffice to mention that sicknesses and deaths are their core functions. “In case there are deaths at home in Malawi, we also use part of the society contributions to cover *makhuzo* (condolences) exactly how we do it at home i.e. in line with societal culture”.¹¹⁶ In addition, some societies also assist their members who have experienced theft of personal property in their respective homes. Robert Banda sheds light: “In case a member loses property through theft, the society also gives out some money, though not much, as part of *kukhuza* (condoling) and also that this money should act as a cushion and support a member up to the end of the month”.¹¹⁷ There are other societies which also assist members in case they lose their jobs, as Samson Banda explains: “If you lose your job, the society pauses your monthly contributions and assists you to secure employment. And once you get a job, you inform them and you continue with your membership contributions”.¹¹⁸ But in general, although all societies look after sicknesses and deaths of their members, they differ in their additional roles and flexibility.

It was emphasised that non-members are not entitled to any form of assistance from these societies. That is why the onus is on labour migrants working in South Africa to join these societies on their own volition. In fact, it was revealed that only paid-up members benefit from these services. For instance, a member who has for some months not been paying his contributions is deemed inactive and can only restart to enjoy the services after settling the backlog. Samson Banda said that he was forced to discontinue payment of membership fee because for some time he was experiencing financial hurdles. But he paid up all his debts after his financial situation improved. Samson said he was afraid he could not enjoy the society membership benefits during hard times with this debt: “I joined Mzikubola Burial Society but they removed me from membership because I had a debt of R800. I sent them R300, arguing

¹¹⁵ Interview with Robert Banda. Parktown. Johannesburg. 28/08/2016.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Anthony Mvula. Op. Cit.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Robert Banda. Op. Cit.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Samson Banda Op. Cit.

that I would pay R500 later on. But they said no, we want all the R800 you owe us. But after some time I went back, settled all my debt and continued with my membership”.¹¹⁹

Many society members take these monthly meetings seriously. On whether they are busy or not, most of the informants in South Africa indicated that they were generally busy: working on particular days, going to church on Sundays, and attending society meetings on the first Sunday of a month. In short, most migrants skipped attending church service on this particular day. As for those who were reporting for work on this day, they either knocked off early, for instance, around 11 a.m. and quickly headed for the meeting or virtually failed to report for duties altogether. “During some Sundays, we simply fake illness to our employers to ensure that we don’t miss these society meetings. You know they come once a month and they are very important for us to meet with our relatives and friends from home”.¹²⁰ Even for those who were seemingly irresponsible migrants, for example, the drunkards, they still showed up during the meetings. I met one of them, who was drunk as early as 9 a.m., but he still showed up for the meeting. “You know what? I came to make my monthly contribution. Now that I have done that and I have caught up with some relatives from home and there are no developments, I can happily go back to my drinking”.¹²¹ As for others, we learnt around 10 a.m. that they were not working on this Sunday, but that they were busy drinking. John (not his real name), himself of sober habits, explained: “You see that there are few people here, but when it comes to 11 a.m., there will be many people. Some are now drinking, but they never miss the meeting; they still show up albeit in their drunken state”.¹²²

In this regard, a visit to Parkmore Park in August 2016 also showed a similar development. I reached this place around 11 a.m. and by this time, the park was already full of labour migrants from different parts of Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay. Most society meetings were already in session

¹¹⁹ Ibid. Samson went to South Africa in 2008. He got married in Malawi in 2003 and for five years tried to do *maganyu* in Malawi. Realising that he was not making enough money to look after his family of three children, he decided to go to South Africa.

¹²⁰ Interview with Jane (not real name). Berea. Johannesburg. 4/11/2016. Jane indicated that apart from the social gatherings at the church premises on Sundays, society meetings are of paramount importance in as far as socialising amongst labour migrants away from home is concerned.

¹²¹ Interview with Joseph (not real name). Randburg Park. Johannesburg. 6/11/2016. Joseph informed me that he actually had a second wife of South African origin and that this was not a problem for a Ngoni like him. Most of the Ngoni in Mzimba are patriarchal and patrilocal; hence polygamy is officially allowed. He boasted that despite the challenges in South Africa, he had built a house at his home (Malawi) and had facilitated the migration of two of his sons who were, reportedly, happily working in South Africa.

¹²² Interview with John (not real name). Randburg Park. Johannesburg. 6/11/2016. John asked for anonymity in case his colleagues would think he was there to expose their irresponsibility.

and while the majority were attending these sessions, a few labour migrants were busy drinking beer. The difference between Parkmore and Randburg was that in Parkmore there was a section in the park where beer was being sold; hence people were drinking beer right at the venue of the meetings. I actually saw some migrants struggling to stand on their feet, but were seen walking to their society meeting. “This is actually the norm for a cross-section of migrants here in South Africa. Whenever they are off-duty, then that’s time for them to drink. No wonder some spend years on end before accomplishing whatever they set out to do by coming to South Africa for work”.¹²³

However, there are clear-cut differences between the societies of migrants from Mzimba and those of migrants from Nkhata-Bay. The differences are on several fronts, for instance, commitment of these migrants; and willingness to belong and attend to these societies. Penjani Manda shed more light on such differences:

In South Africa we have societies. You will find that the society of Mzimba migrants and that of us, Nkhata-Bay migrants, are different: our friends have a large membership. Our society was small; this is because for the Tongas, we don’t have much to do with a society. For instance, our friends from Mzimba would be about fifty members; but for us, only ten. And you would find migrants from Nkhata-Bay joining the society, but also quitting sooner or later. What is more, they would not be willing to attend society meetings. In my view, some of the reasons would be lack of commitment and lack of trust amongst migrants from Nkhata-Bay.¹²⁴

Malawian labour migrants make efforts to integrate into the South African society (i.e. mingle readily with South Africans) through various means. This section will discuss some of the ways through which integration is achieved. Labour migrants from the two study districts were in agreement on these factors. In short, this is done by labour migrants creating friendly ties with South Africans. One of the important ways amongst male labour migrants is through marrying South African women. This practice is quite common between Malawian male labour migrants and South African women, but uncommon between Malawian women and South African men. Malawian female migrants prefer fellow Malawians. This may help explain why it is these male migrants who are victims of overstaying in South Africa and failure to achieve set migration goals since they are entangled in a web of sexual affairs not only with South African women, but also Malawian diaspora women.

¹²³ Interview with Kenneth (not real name). Parkmore Park. Johannesburg. 7/08/2016. Kenneth indicated there were two main problems that male labour migrants continued to face in South Africa: beer drinking and promiscuity. Although better-paying jobs were scarce in the post-2005 period, these two factors actually aggravated the situation.

¹²⁴ Interview with Penjani Manda. Wachaza Manda Village. T.A. Malanda. Nkhata-Bay. 6/01/2016.

Furthermore, on intermarriages between Malawians and South Africans, there is a strong belief among South African women that foreigners, for example, Malawians make better husbands unlike South African men. On this, Elias Munthali suggests: “The South African ladies claim that Malawians are generous and that they are kind-hearted; they know how to take care of a woman physically and emotionally. In South Africa people easily kill each other, while we are very cheerful. So they look at us as people who will take care of them than their fellow South Africans”.¹²⁵

Marrying a South African woman is advantageous to Malawi men as they easily access South African IDs. Elias Munthali further explained: “Once you secure the ID, you end up staying freely in South Africa and you also have access to good jobs unlike when you have none; the police are always after you”.¹²⁶ A good number of labour migrants who came to South Africa in the early 1990s gained South African citizenship through this process of naturalisation, in this case, through intermarriages. This brings with it a host of rights, duties, benefits and privileges, especially on the part of labour migrants.¹²⁷

It was evident that most migrants would like to secure the South African ID. During trips I made in 2015 to and from South Africa using coaches, I usually noticed labour migrants without these IDs envying their colleagues who had such IDs: “You, our friends with IDs, are very lucky as you don’t experience any problems with the authorities at the borders, especially at Beitbridge Border Post. As for us, we part with a lot of money, trying to buy our way to and from South Africa”.¹²⁸ After crossing Beitbridge, most labour migrants were interested in finding out how their fellow migrants acquired the IDs: “How did you acquire the ID? Do you have any connections in South Africa so that you can assist me in equally processing one?” Such questions were not uncommon aboard these buses. However, the common view was that it was easier to secure the IDs in the 1990s, especially after 1994, when the South Africa

¹²⁵ Elias Munthali. Ching’anya Village. TA Mankhambira. Nkhata-Bay. 08/05/2016. Elias, who was a Pastor of a local church in Sanga area in Nkhata-Bay, thought he would find good life for his family by working in South Africa. However, he realised it was not as easy as he had thought.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ For details on the process of naturalisation in South Africa, see Niklaus Steiner. *International Migration and Citizenship Today*. (London: Routledge, 2009). pp. 105-114.

¹²⁸ Samson Banda aboard Intercape Coach from Malawi to South Africa. 23/10/2015. I had a brief chat with Samson during this trip, but I later had a formal interview with him in 2016. In fact, he later acted as a Research Assistant in South Africa, taking me to labour migrants in Hillbrow, Berea, Honeydew and other places.

government allowed all foreigners who had overstayed in South Africa to secure the ID.¹²⁹ The Malawian labour migrants with IDs actually boasted that, with the ID, problems with the police were a thing of the past. On this, Mr. Francis Mphepo, a former *Wenela* migrant from Mzimba, said: “Since I got the ID I freely move within South Africa and also to and from Malawi. In fact, I am a South African citizen and a visitor in Malawi”.¹³⁰

After the expiry of their 30-day visas in South Africa, a large number of labour migrants make efforts to secure work permits with which to secure jobs. These work permits also partly justify their stay in South Africa. For instance, once they meet the police, these labour migrants produce such work permits instead of expired visas. However, due to the difficulty of securing such valid papers, some migrants clearly indicated that they secure papers which are not genuine, but nevertheless suffice as far as securing informal sector jobs is concerned. The following account from James (not real name), a migrant who pleaded for anonymity, sheds more light:

I use this work permit to secure jobs in the informal sector. However, I pretty know that I cannot use the same to look for jobs in the formal sector; doing so would be tantamount to risking my stay as I would be handed over to the police. For instance, I cannot use such papers to transact at the bank: just after submitting the papers to the bank official, the police would be behind me, ready to apprehend me. But with the jobs in the informal sector, these papers become handy. For instance, since last year, I keep going with such jobs. But because the jobs I secure are not as paying as the formal sector ones, I will take longer to fulfil my dreams of working in South Africa.¹³¹

I met James at an entertainment place called *PabaMalawi* (literally meaning ‘Malawians’ place’) in Hillbrow, Johannesburg. Like many Malawian labour migrants, James had come to this place to relax and socialise with fellow Malawians over a bottle of beer. He told me he had been in South Africa for one and a half years when we met and had not yet gone home to see his family. This was because he could not secure better-paying jobs. The money he got was only enough for his upkeep in South Africa and a few remittances to his wife back home. Most Malawians frequent this place during weekends, particularly on Saturday afternoon and entire Sunday, when most of them are off-duty.

¹²⁹ This view was shared by Fred Tembo aboard Intercape Coach from Malawi to South Africa on 23/10/2015. Fred first came to South Africa in 1991 and personally experienced the easy acquisition of these IDs in 1994 just after the ANC and Nelson Mandela took over power from the whites.

¹³⁰ Interview with Francis Mphepo. Johannesburg. 23/10/2015. Mphepo indicated that he had worked in the South African mines since the 1970s and after the decline in mine migrancy, he continued staying in South Africa during which period he secured another job and eventually retired. All his children were raised and attained university education in South Africa. After his retirement, Mphepo went back to his home village in Mzimba, but continued to visit his children and during these visits he sought better medical attention in South African hospitals. When we met, he was to stay with his daughter in Diepsloot for six months to ensure a thorough medical check-up.

¹³¹ Interview with James (not real name). Johannesburg. 6/04/2015.

I also learned that it was easy to integrate amongst the South African nationals by adopting their local languages and culture. On language, the Ngoni of Mzimba easily learnt IsiZulu and other local languages because of their similarity to ChiNgoni of Mzimba. The Tonga had a disadvantage and, therefore, took longer to learn the local languages. On culture, some of the ways included adopting their way of dressing and the culture of drinking beer, especially among men. Lovemore Banda, a *Wenela-cum-selufu* migrant, stated that language is even learnt faster when you interact with the locals over beer: “I did not find problems over the issue of language because when you drink beer, you easily learn their language. While you are out drinking, you easily pick, and start speaking, the language”.¹³²

5. Conclusion

The chapter has highlighted a number of problems that Malawian labour migrants face during their stay in South Africa during the contemporary period. Some of these problems include problems in securing steady jobs and, hence their reliance on *maganyu*, especially in the post-2005 period; expensive accommodation vis-a-vis their wages, hence their resort to staying in shanty locations; xenophobia by South African locals, especially in high density residential areas; high crime rate; and arrests and deportations by the police due to invalid visas. Another problem they face while in South Africa is failure to contain their sexual desires since their wives are left in Malawi. They hence engage in sex with prostitutes or indeed go into formal or informal marriages with South Africans or diaspora Malawian women. The same situation applies to their wives left at home. Consequently, such practices have fuelled the spread of STIs and STDs including HIV/AIDS. It is such diseases which are behind the deaths of many labour migrants.

The chapter has also shown that labour migrants make concerted efforts to overcome such ‘stumbling blocks’. They devise survival strategies, some of which bear fruit, for instance, assisting each other during sicknesses, deaths and periods of joblessness through welfare societies. The chapter has also shown how some of the labour migrants become naturalised citizens through intermarriages with the South African locals. These intermarriages enable them get the South African ID: a lasting solution to the problem of arrests and deportations by

¹³² Interview with Lovemore Banda. Matatiyo Banda Village. T.A. Malanda. Nkhata-Bay. 29/08/2015. Lovemore, who earlier went to South Africa under *Wenela*, went back to South Africa under *selufu* between 1998 and 2010. During this period, he was doing two jobs simultaneously: he was working as a gardener and a paint boy, both under one employer. His boss had won a contract of constructing houses and he was the one painting those houses. After that he was also working as a garden boy.

the police and harassment by immigration authorities whenever travelling. In trying to overcome arrests and deportations by the South African authorities, some labour migrants resort to using *mankhwala gha chifipa* (local medicine). They also seek assistance from churches of Malawi origin based in South Africa. This forms the discussion in the next chapter.

Chapter Six

The Role of the Church and Medicine in Malawian Labour Migration

1. Introduction

The previous chapter has examined the challenges that labour migrants face during their stay in South Africa, especially during the contemporary migration period and the strategies they devise to overcome these challenges. It has highlighted the assistance that welfare societies provide to these migrants. As part of the survival mechanisms, this chapter examines the role played by the church and medicine in solving these challenges. In order to cure various diseases and to overcome 'misfortunes' such as failure to secure jobs and arrests and deportations in South Africa, labour migrants resort to the use of local medicine¹ from healers, biomedicine from hospitals and faith healing in the African Independent Churches (AICs) and Pentecostal churches. The chapter, therefore, argues that migrancy complicates indigenous healing and medicine cosmologies by facilitating Christian and biomedical understandings of disease and 'misfortune', in the process creating novel or hybrid practices. It also argues that despite the impact of Christianity, attempts to squash indigenous medicinal and healing practices were vain, given sympathetic missions and the role of African independent churches.

The chapter briefly highlights the diseases such as tuberculosis, pneumonia and silicosis that labour migrants contracted while working in South Africa, especially during the twentieth century. These diseases, the chapter shows, were largely a result of poor working conditions on the mines. Migrants suffering from these diseases were treated using biomedicine in the mine hospitals before being repatriated to Malawi. While working in South Africa, labour migrants, therefore, relied on both biomedicine and local medicine from healers. This practice continued even back in Malawi where biomedicine was popularised in the rural areas by medical assistants through their private clinics. However, the chapter argues that despite advances in biomedicine, labour migrants continue to rely on both local medicine and biomedicine.

¹ Local or indigenous medicine is medicine prepared by healers using roots, herbs and leaves to cure diseases and deal with various problems in society. In this chapter, local medicine or indigenous medicine is contrasted from biomedicine that patients access in hospitals and private clinics.

The chapter also shows that various churches have their own positions regarding their members accessing local medicine. Some churches allow their members to access local medicine while others are against their members consulting healers for various medicines. In addition to its spiritual roles, the chapter argues, the church actively assists labour migrants in solving their problems such as lack of accommodation and food. This is in addition to the support migrants get from welfare societies.

This chapter provides a sketch of how people in northern Malawi become healers: being trained by established healers, that is, mentorship and training like what happens in a formal school set up, and through *kuthwasa*.² Both these types of healers are found in the labour migration areas in Mzimba and Nkhata-bay. The chapter also examines the kind of assistance labour migrants get from the healers before departure as part of *kunozga ulendo* (preparing the journey) and what eventually happens in South Africa after having used this medicine. Regarding this, the study shows that, once sick, labour migrants either go to Western hospitals or to local healers for treatment. It also shows that some labour migrants believe that they do not face arrests and deportations because of the use of *mankhwala gha chifipa*³ (local medicine).

2. ‘Indigenous Medicine’ in Northern Malawi in Historical Perspective

In Malawi there is a dualistic system of medical care consisting of modern biomedicine found in the hospitals and clinics and local medicine, popularly known as *mankhwala gha chifipa* in Chitumbuka of northern Malawi, provided by the local medical specialists. These two systems, as the chapter shows, are not mutually exclusive, but rather interact on a regular basis. People choose which system to utilize according to the types of symptoms they manifest, the etiology of their illness and the reputation and effectiveness of each health care system. This section examines the indigenous understandings of sickness, medicine and good and evil. It also explains the process of becoming a healer and some of the medicinal assistance that these healers provide to labour migrants. In so doing, the section establishes the entrenchment of local medical practice in spite of the introduction of hospitals and private clinics.

² *Kuthwasa*, as a process through which those who are spirit-possessed become healers or herbalists, has been explained in depth in later sections of the chapter.

³ *Mankhwala gha chifipa* in Chitumbuka comes from *mankhwala gha bafipa*, which means ‘black people’s medicine’ i.e. local medicine. This is contrasted from *mankhwala gha chizungu* which is coined from *mankhwala gha bazungu* (white people’s medicine) referring to Western medicine in the hospitals. These local terms are commonly used in the rural areas (themselves a source of labour migrants) in northern Malawi.

Of these systems, the indigenous system of health care is the most dominant and widespread in Malawi. Literature shows that about 80% of the 12 million people in Malawi utilize local healers for various needs.⁴ In the rural areas, Malawians rely on local medicine because of the lack of access to modern health care facilities and also because biomedicine is considered to be more expensive than local medicine from healers.⁵

The term ‘traditional healing’ falls into a terrain of contested discourses and at times is used to refer to ancient healing methods rooted in a particular history and place.⁶ Wrenford asserts that it is important to understand that traditional healers “are not relics of Africa’s history but actors in a complex and dynamic world in which they find ways to thrive and adapt to constant change”.⁷ What makes the term ‘traditional healing’ more complex is the fact that these healers can occupy multiple social roles. As Green states: “traditional healers’ are priests, religious ritual specialists, family and community therapists, moral and social philosophers, visionaries, empirical scientists, and perhaps political leaders in addition to being healers in the more restricted Western sense”.⁸ In this chapter, the terms ‘local healers’ and ‘indigenous healers’ and herbalists are, therefore, used in favour of ‘traditional healers’. Similarly, the term ‘Western medicine’ is sometimes used to describe evidence-based medicine which emerged from ‘Western’ civilization, that is, countries that were originally populated by Europeans. However, nowadays this term is practised throughout the world. In this chapter, the terms ‘biomedicine’ and ‘conventional medicine’ are used in preference for ‘Western medicine’.

Malawians have relied on local healing practices for centuries even before the introduction of Christianity between 1850 and 1900. Christianity introduced faith healing and later, together with the colonial government, introduced scientific healing practices in the hospitals. Before

⁴ Andrew Simwaka. Karl Peltzer and Dixie Maluwa-Banda. “Indigenous Healing Practices in Malawi”. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*. (2007, 17: 1). p. 155.

⁵ For a discussion on the popularity of local medicine in Malawi, see, for example, J.A. Brouwer, M.J. Boeree, P. Kager, C.M. Varkevisser and A.D. Harris. “Traditional Healers and Pulmonary Tuberculosis in Malawi”. *International Journal of Tuberculosis and Lung Disease*. (1998, 2: 3); P. Courtright, M. Chirambo, S. Lewallen, H. Chana and S. Kanjaloti. *Collaboration with African Traditional Healers for the Prevention of Blindness*. (New Jersey: World Scientific, 2000); R. Komfield and D. Namate. “Cultural Practices Related to HIV/ AIDS Risk Behaviour: Community Survey in Phalombe, Malawi”. STAFH Project No 10. Lilongwe, Malawi, 1997.

⁶ Elizabeth Mills. “HIV Illness Meanings and Collaborative Healing Strategies in South Africa”. CSSR Working Paper No. 157. Centre for Social Science Research. Cape Town. 2006. p. 3.

⁷ Wrenford J. ‘We Can Help!’ A Literature Review of Current Practice Involving Traditional African Healers in Biomedical HIV/AIDS Intervention in South Africa. CSSR Working Paper 108. Centre for Social Science Research. Cape Town. 2005. p. 3.

⁸ E. Green. *AIDS and STDs in Africa: Bridging the Gap Between Traditional Healing and Modern Medicine*. (Colorado: Westview Press, 1994). p. 36. See also Mariana G. Hewson. “Traditional Healers in Southern Africa”. *Annals of Internal Medicine*. (1998, 28). p. 1030.

the coming of Christianity, people believed in local gods. The latter were not against the use of local medicine. Even during droughts, people were using local medicine and also offering prayers to these gods. The belief in the use of local medicine has persisted up to the present.

Many Malawians believe that sickness is caused by spirits of the dead (ancestors) and witchcraft in addition to natural causes. Diseases, as John McCracken notes, were categorised into two: “those which resulted from human malice or breach of custom and which were investigated by a witchcraft specialist, and those diseases regarded as natural which could be treated by a herbalist (*sing’anga*)”.⁹ Consequently, if a sickness fails to respond to treatment, people suspect that either witchcraft or spirits are involved. Similarly, people attribute misfortune or bad luck to the activities of the witches and that is why there is a tendency to consult herbalists for a solution to such societal problems.

Medicines (*mankhwala*) are used for a variety of purposes and not just within the therapeutic context. In the context of Malawi, *mankhwala* are used as good luck charms for assistance in a variety of activities, for instance, hunting, friendship, employment, marriage and agriculture. They are also used as protective medicines (*mankhwala ghakuphezgera masuzgo*), for potency and reproductive purposes, for various rituals (for example, funerals and initiation rites), and as herbal remedies for a variety of ailments.¹⁰ It is within this context, as the chapter shows, that labour migrants approach healers for *mankhwala* for various purposes.

In Malawi the distinction is made between woody plants (*makuni*) and medicine. However, for northern Malawians, the two are sometimes closely identified, for instance, among the Tumbuka and the Ngoni in northern Malawi, the expression “*kumanya makuni*” (to know trees) also means ‘to know various local medicines’. Local medicine is described variously in the literature: ‘traditional medicine’, ‘indigenous knowledge systems’ and ‘complementary and alternative medicine’.¹¹ These terms are used interchangeably to refer to “all forms of medicine that are not scientific, or that are not supported by ‘scientific proof’”.¹² In addition to the above terms, anthropologists also played a crucial role in popularising the term ‘indigenous

⁹ John McCracken. *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*. (New York: James Currey, 2012). p. 116.

¹⁰ See Brian Morris. “Indigenous Knowledge”. *Society of Malawi Journal*. (2010, 63: 1). p. 4.

¹¹ Julie Laplante. *Healing Roots: Anthropology in Life and Medicine*. (New York: Berghann, 2015). p. 136.

¹² Ibid. p. 136.

medicine’.¹³ In this study, the terms ‘indigenous medicine’ and ‘local medicine’ will be used to refer to herbal medicine prepared by healers and herbalists.

During the colonial period, *mankhwala* in Malawi were administered by various practitioners: medical personnel in Western hospitals and traditional healers or herbalists. On this, Megan Vaughan has argued that “in colonial Africa indigenous healers were part and parcel of the ‘medical orthodoxy’ whereas Western medics were more akin to those of the ‘quacks’ in Europe”.¹⁴ In his book titled *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*, John McCracken has argued that when mission doctors came to Malawi (then Nyasaland) in the nineteenth century, they discovered that *mankhwala* had a double meaning. McCracken writes that “*mankhwala* was applied to the herbs and lotions that these doctors would also describe as medicines. But it was also used as a term for magical charms bringing individuals health or harm or else providing protection...farming, hunting or any other activity”.¹⁵

Like medicine, witchcraft is a difficult term to conceptualise and understand. The term ‘witchcraft’ designates a perception of spiritual power employed in an evil manner or for evil purposes. This is how it was used by Evans-Pritchard, the founder of modern anthropological studies in this field, on his work on the Azande of Sudan.¹⁶ Anthropologists working in Central Africa (Malawi inclusive) distinguish between witches and sorcerers: witches are viewed as ‘supernatural beings’ whereas sorcerers are understood as ‘ordinary humans with learned malevolent skills’.¹⁷ In simplistic terms, witchcraft refers to mystical harm-doing as opposed to ‘real’ harm-doing. That is why some people are convinced that it does not really exist. The other complication is that it is only witchcraft accusations, and not witchcraft beliefs, that can empirically be observed and analysed.

¹³ A. Wahlberg. “Bio-politics and the Promotion of Traditional Herbal Medicine in Vietnam”. *Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine*. (2006, 10: 2). pp. 123-147. Also cited in Julie Laplante. *Healing Roots*. p. 141.

¹⁴ Cited in Markku Hokkanen. *Medicine, Mobility and the Empire: Nyasaland Networks*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016). p. 8.

¹⁵ John McCracken. *A History of Malawi*. pp. 121-122.

¹⁶ See E.E. Evans-Pritchard. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937). pp. 9-10; also cited in Stephen Ellis and Gerrie Ter Haar. *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). p. 149.

¹⁷ See James Ferguson. *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*. (Berkeley: California University Press, 1999). p. 119.

There are different categories of local medicine practitioners in Malawi, for instance, there are herbalists (ordinary healers) and *nchimi*. *Nchimi* are healers who rely on *kuwombeza* (divination) to screen patients for diseases and their causes.¹⁸ In the case of South Africa, there are three main types of healers amongst the Zulu:¹⁹ the traditional doctor (*inyanga*) who is usually male and specialises in herbal medicine, the diviner (*isangoma*) who is traditionally female and operates within a traditional religious supernatural context as an accepted medium with the ancestral shades, and the faith healer (*umthandazi* or *umprofethi*).²⁰ Contrariwise, there are two basic types of traditional healers in Swaziland: the diviner-healer (*sangoma*, *inyanga*) and the herbalist (*lugedla*, *inyanga yemitsi*).²¹

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Malawians were keen on using local medicine in case of diseases and other societal problems. This was in line with their medicinal beliefs and practices. In the villages, there were local healers who were popular because of their specialty in dealing with particular cases. In addition, ordinary people had some knowledge of local medicine. Consequently, the healers dealt with major cases, while ordinary people with basic knowledge in *mankhwala* attended to mere illnesses and petty issues.

As highlighted in chapter five, labour migrants face a lot of challenges during their stay in South Africa. Some of these challenges include difficulty to secure jobs; arrests and deportations; high crime rate; xenophobia and diseases. Largely because of their traditional medicinal beliefs and practices, a cross-section of labour migrants resort to seeking assistance from healers before and during their labour migration trips to South Africa.²² The healers indicated that for a long time they have been assisting labour migrants in various ways: curing their diseases; and giving them *mankhwala gha mwabi* (luck medicine) with which to easily secure jobs and *mankhwala ghakuponoska ku masuzgo* (protective medicine) to ward off any

¹⁸ For details on these categories, see, for example, B. Morris. "Herbalism and Divination in Southern Malawi". *Social Science and Medicine*. (1986, 23). pp. 367-377; and M. Marwick. "The Social Context of Chewa Witch Beliefs". *Africa*. (1952, 22). pp. 120-135.

¹⁹ These categories of healers in South Africa also apply to other ethnic groupings such as the Sotho and the Tswana.

²⁰ For details, see S.D. Edwards. "Traditional and Modern Medicine in South Africa: A Research Study". *Social Science and Medicine*. (1986, 22: 11). p. 1273.

²¹ For details on this, see Edward C. Green and Lydia Makhubu. "Traditional Healers in Swaziland: Toward Improved Cooperation between the Traditional and Modern Health Sectors". *Social Science and Medicine*. (1984, 18: 12). p. 1072.

²² However, there are some labour migrants who do not believe in the use of local medicine as a survival mechanism during their stay in South Africa. This group of migrants largely believes in the miraculous healing powers of God and that through hard work, God would enable them to realise their set goals.

attacks. This section examines the kind of migrants' diseases that healers cure and how various medicines assist labour migrants to cope with their problems in South Africa. The section also briefly examines the process of becoming a healer in the two study districts.

Research in Mzimba, Rumphu and Nkhata-Bay districts shows that there are two dominant ways through which people become healers: through a process of *kuthwasa* and through training. *Kuthwasa* in this context means becoming 'ripe', that is, ready to start practising as a healer. During *kuthwasa*, a person who is usually spirit-possessed falls sick and during this sickness he or she experiences spiritual dreams about medicines to cure various diseases. In South Africa, this process is similar to *ukuthwasa* which means 'the calling to be a traditional healer or diviner'.²³ However, of the two processes, healers who undergo *kuthwasa* are deemed to be more effective in administering their medication. As for those who undergo training, it was learnt that some do not possess intricate knowledge of the medication for various diseases and problems as they rely on referring to a book with a list of medicines for various diseases handed down to them by their mentors.

Linesi Mhone is a female healer in Zubayumo Makamo area in T.A. M'mbelwa in Mzimba District who also became a healer through *kuthwasa*. Linesi makes efforts to identify the real cause of the problem before administering medication. Most of the labour migrants in the study areas prefer approaching healers like Linesi Mhone so that these migrants are screened before embarking on their journey to South Africa. This is done to get rid of bad omen which would result in them not securing a job in South Africa. In this context, visiting healers before going to South Africa is part of *kunozga ulendo* (preparing one's journey).

Bungamapiri Chipeta is a healer in Wachaza Village in T.A. Malanda in Nkhata-Bay District. He is originally from Mzimba, but is settled in Wachaza in Nkhata-Bay, his mother's home village. He is also one of the healers who underwent *kuthwasa*. Bungamapiri Chipeta specialises in *mankhwala gha mwabi*. He was quick to point out that protective medicine is not his area of specialisation. However, in addition to luck medicine, he treats a cross-section of

²³ For a detailed discussion on this, see Amanda Gcabashe. "The Process of *Ukuthwasa*". 2009. (<http://www.africaspeaks.com>); and Ziyanda Claire Xaso. "The Meaning of *Ukuthwasa*: Urban Youth Perspectives on Social Change and the Persistence of Tradition in the Eastern Cape" (Unpublished MA Thesis). Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities. University of Fort Hare. 2015.

diseases. Like other healers in the district, he pointed out that he assists both labour migrants and non-migrants who come to his place with a variety of problems.²⁴



Photograph 6.1: A healer, who comes from Mzimba, but is based in Nkhata-Bay. He became a healer under the mentorship of a renowned healer in Mzimba, nicknamed *Bungamapiri*, after whom he took the practice name. He travelled to Nkhata-Bay in the 1970s, where he was given a young lady to marry after he healed her of an incurable disease. He also assists labour migrants with various diseases in T.A.s Malanda and Malenganzoma (photo by author).

Dickson Sakala is a male healer who also underwent *kuthwasa*.²⁵ When he was going through *kuthwasa*, it was a terrible experience: He could not eat ordinary food, rather he preferred very bitter herbs. Dickson narrated his experience: “In 1984, I was filled with *vinthenda* (spirits) and through them I stayed for six months without eating *sima* (Malawi’s staple food). During this period, I was eating *nkhazi*, *nthuma*, *chinthembwe*, and *mwazaghamba* (very bitter, wild herbs). These spirits showed me 397 local trees (traditional medicine) which I use to heal the

²⁴ Interview with Bungamapiri Chipeta. Wachaza Village. T.A. Malanda. Nkhata-Bay. 7/01/2016.

²⁵ Dickson Sakala comes from Zubayumo Makamo Village in Mzimba District. He worked in various mines in South Africa between the 1950s and 1970s. While working in the mines, he used to carry medicine in powder form. After his migration days, he concentrated on his traditional medical practice at his home village.

sick. This is how I became a healer”.²⁶ Dickson explained that during the process a sick person comes under the charge of an established healer. In this case, once sick, i.e. suffering from spirit possession while in South Africa, the labour migrant is sent to Malawi for proper medical attention. In other words, a Malawian migrant cannot undergo *kuthwasa* while in South Africa. Dickson explained that “the patient is admitted at an established healer’s place and while there, the patient is attended to by giving him or her various spirit-enhancing drugs in order for *kuthwasa* to be complete”.²⁷

While working in various mines in South Africa between the 1950s and 1970s, Dickson Sakala used to carry *mankhwala gha chifipa*, part of which he himself took once sick, but he also used the other part to assist others.²⁸ Dickson explained: “When I was working in South Africa, we were working in a mine and were, therefore, staying in a mine compound. Now when I was going there, I carried some medicine with me, but I didn’t know that the local medicine was on a very high demand”.²⁹ This medicine was not used openly; it was administered secretly. He indicated that partly because of the effectiveness of the medicine, healers from Malawi became very popular not only in the mines, but also in the other work places and residential areas.³⁰

The second major category of healers are those that are trained by their parents, grand parents and other healers without any kind of kinship ties. In this case, practising healers engage their sons, daughters and mentees as *basanu* (healers’ assistants) who run errands for them. They usually accompany them to the bush to fetch medicine to treat various cases. At home, they are given tasks of preparing medicine while the healer is busy attending to other patients. With time, whenever the healer is busy, they go into the bush alone to fetch medicine for specific diseases following the healer’s instructions. In the process, these *basanu* master the medicines for various diseases. After some time, they too start practising, though still under the tutelage of the senior healers. Once certified, they are allowed to go to their respective homes to continue with their practice. Even afterwards, they rely on the senior healer for guidance on the healing of some complicated cases. Apart from healers training their relatives, they also

²⁶ Interview with Dickson Sakala. Zubayumo Makamo Village. T.A. M’mbelwa. Mzimba. 20/06/2010.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Dickson indicated that in those days he was administering his medicine free of charge. This contrasts sharply with nowadays when, like some healers, he gets a token of appreciation from his clients.

²⁹ Interview with Dickson Sakala. Op. Cit. Because of the ever-increasing demand for *mankhwala gha chifipa* from Malawi, later healers after Dickson tended to prepare larger volumes of local medicine when going to South Africa.

³⁰ Healers from Malawi have remained popular in South Africa.

train people who come to them with a view to learn the practice. This is equated to what normally happens in a school environment.

A good example of trained healers is Hope Chimduzi Gondwe, who is a herbalist and also a civil servant, working in the Department of Parks and Wildlife in Nkhata-Bay. Hope explained how he became a healer: “My grand father, who died in 1926, was a herbalist. He compiled a reference book which he was using. He handed it to my father, who later handed it to me. In my medical practice, I use this reference book. I am also learning new things through my interaction with my fellow herbalists”.³¹ Mr. Gondwe indicated that he belongs to the herbalists’ association, where, as healers, they share experiences, especially during meetings. In this case, if one is stuck, he or she gets insights from fellow healers. He indicated that he helps several labour migrants while they are working in South Africa. He also prepares local medicine and sends it to them in powder form through Malawi Post Office (M.P.O.).³²

However, according to Bungamapiri Chipeta (discussed above), the majority of the herbalists in Nkhata-Bay undergo training in order to become healers: “In this district, most people just go through training in order to become *sing’angas*. For others, they come to a place like this one (referring to his place) and request to be given some medicine so that they too should start practising in their places. But, as for me, I actually had to fall sick, as I explained”.³³ This contrasts sharply with the scenario that obtains in Mzimba District where most people become healers through *kuthwasa*.³⁴ This simply means that most healers in Mzimba indulge in *kuwombeza* or *kuchima* when attending to their clients. In contrast, most healers in Nkhata-Bay simply provide medicine to their clients without *kuwombeza*.

A large number of labour migrants pointed out that they were bound to get sick upon arrival in South Africa. This was generally due to change of environment (i.e. weather) between the two countries. As was pointed out in chapters two and three, both formal and informal (*selufu*) labour migrants went to South Africa for wage employment and, as a result, stayed longer. Before acclimatising to this new environment, most labour migrants fell sick. This kind of

³¹ Interview with Hope Chimduzi Gondwe. Chintchehe Forestry. T.A. Malenganzoma. Nkhata-Bay. 7/01/2016.

³² With the increase in ‘cross-border’ traffic between Malawi and South Africa following the introduction of democracy in both Malawi and South Africa in 1994, some healers indicated they send some medicine through transporters and other labour migrants going to South Africa.

³³ Interview with Bungamapiri Chipeta. Op. Cit.

³⁴ This is because *vimbuza* (spirit-possession) is widespread in Mzimba District.

sickness is referred to as *phungo*. However, different healers³⁵ and labour migrants³⁶ have a different understanding of what *phungo* actually is. For some, *phungo* was as a result of drinking different types of water in a new place. According to Ratwell Lungu, “you suffer from *phungo* because the water in a new place is different from your home water. In our case, when departing for either South Africa or Zimbabwe, we were being given local medicine to add to the water until we got used to it”.³⁷

However, for others *phungo* was a result of change of weather.³⁸ In this connection, Landwell Jere,³⁹ a former migrant-cum-healer in Mzimba District, argued that “*phungo* is a common disease among labour migrants during the first few months upon arrival in South Africa. It is due to change in weather as the body is not used to ‘bad’ weather. That is why we give local medicine to counter the effects of this change in weather”.⁴⁰ The other disease that was treated by local medicine was *sila*.⁴¹ This was malaria-like disease which labour migrants suffered from, also as a result of change of weather.⁴² However, migrants indicated that both *phungo* and *sila* were also treatable by medicine from the hospitals.

A cross-section of labour migrants, especially those that migrated to South Africa in the pre-1990 period, indicated that they used to carry local medicine for use while in South Africa. Whenever they fell sick, migrants sought medical attention in the hospitals. But depending on the disease at hand, some sicknesses could not be healed using Western medicine. In other words, they could go to the hospital, but upon realising that the medication was not effective, they could then resort to the use of the local medicine which they had brought along. If they did not have the medicine, they could request their home people to send some medicine and

³⁵ These are male and female healers I interviewed in Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts in northern Malawi.

³⁶ These are Malawian labour migrants who I interviewed between August 2015 and November 2016. I interviewed these migrants either in Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts or in South Africa.

³⁷ Interview with Ratwell Lungu. Ekwendeni. Mzimba. 18/06/2010.

³⁸ For details on this view, see Markku Hokkanen. *Medicine, Mobility and the Empire*. p. 77.

³⁹ Landwell Jere worked in the South African mines in the 1960s and 1970s. After the end of *Wenela*, he came home and did not go back to South Africa under *Theba*. It is during this aftermath that he focused on his healing practice. But as a result of depletion of natural trees for medicine due to deforestation, Landwell plants some trees at the back of his house to use as an additional source of medicine.

⁴⁰ Interview with Landwell Jere. Kazezani Makamo Village. T.A. M’mbelwa. Mzimba. 15/07/2009.

⁴¹ In some cases, *sila* is described as one of the adolescents’ sicknesses i.e. a condition which adolescents suffer from when reaching puberty. This view was also shared by Rita Kachali.

⁴² Interview with Wyness Mdumuka. Op. Cit. *Sila* is likened to malaria because both have fever as one of their symptoms.

they used to send.⁴³ Although most healers pointed out that they provided medicine in powder form, Bungamapiri Chipeta had a different story:

In my case, I don't deal in medicine for them to carry; I administer medicine right here through *simbo* (cuts on the skin). Labour migrants come and I give them luck medicine...and they actually secure jobs in South Africa using it. Some of them send me *katundu*, thanking me because the medicine enabled them get a job. At times they give me a video or television screen; a radio; and even blankets.⁴⁴

On the provision of *mankhwala gha mwabi*, Dickson Sakala, a migrant-cum-healer, pointed out that while he was working in the mines in South Africa between the 1950s and 1970s he was assisting fellow miners with this luck medicine to enable them secure jobs. Part of this medicine would also see migrant workers being promoted at the work place.⁴⁵ David Phiri, a healer based in Nkhata-Bay, also gives luck medicine to labour migrants who seek wage employment in South Africa. In his own words, Phiri had this to say:

Most migrants need the assistance of local medicine so that when they go to South Africa, they should have increased opportunities, that is, to remove bad luck. So we get some herbs, process them and give them. Once I do that, I no longer hear that there is a problem in South Africa. There are some people who came all the way from Mzimba. They brought someone who had been to South Africa for five times but could not get a job ... and they asked me 'how can you help this man?' I actually assisted them. Since they went to South Africa, I have never heard about any complaints. I hope God helped them solve their problem.⁴⁶

David Phiri is a healer-preacher who believes in the healing powers of God. Although he became a herbalist through training by his grand father and also through *kuthwasa*, he believes his clients' problems are solved through God's intervention. He bemoaned the tendency of people looking at healers as indulging in *masenga*, arguing not all herbalists practice witchcraft and that they, therefore, deserve respect and recognition. During the oral interview with him, he kept on referring to the word of God and cited *Mphunzitsi* 38: 1-4, '*Za Matenda ndi Mankhwala*' (i.e. Sirach 38: 1-4, Sickness and Medicine) from the Bible, which reads:

Give doctors (*ba sing'anga*) the honour they deserve, for the Lord gave them their work to do. Their skill came from the Most High, and kings reward them for it. Their knowledge gives them a position of importance, and powerful people hold them in high regard. The Lord created medicines from the earth, and a sensible person will not hesitate to use them.⁴⁷

Rita Kachali, a female traditional healer in Zubayumo Makamo area, specialises in luck medicine for labour migrants in addition to treating various diseases. She indicated that most of the labour migrants who go to South Africa visit healers for medicine before they depart: 'I treat several diseases, for example, *chilaso* (pneumonia), *chikhoso* (cough), and *mutu*

⁴³ Interview with Albert Ndhlovu. Op. Cit.

⁴⁴ Interview with Bungamapiri Chipeta. Op. Cit.

⁴⁵ Interview with Dickson Sakala. Op. Cit.

⁴⁶ Interview with David Phiri. Wachaza Village. T.A. Malanda. Nkhata-Bay. 7/01/2016.

⁴⁷ Quoted from the Bible i.e. from the Good News Translation (GNT). American Bible Society. 1992.

(headache). I also deal in *mankhwala gha mwabi* for those emigrating to South Africa for work”.⁴⁸ Rita Kachali gave an example of a labour migrant who, after getting luck medicine from her, secured a good job in South Africa. The labour migrant, who was based in South Africa, sent his father in Malawi to thank her for the medicine which had proved useful.⁴⁹ Rita also gave an example of her husband, Kingston Lupafya, who, after using the wife’s luck medicine, never encountered any problems in South Africa. Kingston Lupafya confirmed Rita’s view: “In my case, I walked from Zimbabwe to South Africa without meeting problems along the way. When I came back from South Africa, most people in my village got attracted to migrate after envying me. In fact, I was the first person in this area to own a beautiful house. This proved to be an inspiration to many people”.⁵⁰

Kingston further indicated that, as a result of luck medicine, he found favours with his employer. The latter regarded him highly. However, this was not without a hard working spirit. He was quickly made a supervisor over eleven other workers. These workers (under his charge) included both blacks and whites. He was even their pay master. “Let me tell you, it is very important for someone to know usage of some local trees as *mankhwala*. If someone doesn’t know, that’s a very big mistake”,⁵¹ Kingston claimed. He indicated that he worked for this employer for twenty-six years, that is, between 1965 and 1991. Whenever he was going to Malawi for holiday, he used to board a plane. “As I am saying now, the return ticket would have been with me here in the house!” he boasted.

Some herbalists indicated that they are specialised in particular types of medicine. John Jere is a labour migrant who comes from Mzimba District.⁵² He has worked in South Africa in people’s homes in the post-1994 period. While in South Africa, his major problem was getting arrested and deported: he has been deported three times. However, when it comes to securing jobs, that is not a problem to him. His father, a former migrant, specialises in *mankhwala gha mwabi*, but specifically *mankhwala ghakupenjera ntchito* (medicine for securing jobs). This is what John said regarding his father’s specialisation:

⁴⁸ Interview with Rita Kachali. Op. Cit.

⁴⁹ Rita Kachali indicated that the migrant sent MK50,000 (equivalent to R1,000) through his father as a token of appreciation.

⁵⁰ Interview with Kingston Lupafya. Zubayumo Makamo Village. T.A. M’mbelwa. Mzimba. 16/07/2009.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² John Jere is a labour migrant whose dream to accumulate capital with which to start business in Malawi was affected by frequent deportations. However, his main advantage is that his father was an expert in providing luck medicine. With the latter, for John finding a job in South Africa was not difficult at all.

When I go back to South Africa I am sure I will not stay long before finding another job. When it comes to knowing local medicine for finding jobs, my father is an expert. Even the bosses there (in South Africa) do scramble for me, telling me 'stop working here (referring to my current work place); come and start working for me'.⁵³

John indicated that while doing gardening outside his employer's gate in South Africa, other potential employers driving through the area would stop and start pleading with him to quit and work for them; promising to give him a higher wage. Others would give him their contact details so that he should call them should he decide to change jobs. But in most cases he would be reluctant, bearing in mind that 'a rolling stone gathers no moss'. However, if anything, this in his view proves the effectiveness of the local medicine for finding jobs provided by his father. On specialisation, Bungamapiri Chipeta is another healer that deals in luck medicine only and not in protective medicine.⁵⁴

Apart from luck medicine, most herbalists are also specialists in protective medicine. This is medicine which protected labour migrants from facing problems in South Africa, for example, arrests and deportations at the hands of the South African police. Trywell *Mtchona* Chisi, a former *selufu* migrant, relied on such medicine.⁵⁵ Trywell had worked in South Africa for close to thirty years. During all these years, he never got arrested and deported. He indicated that going to South Africa for wage employment can be likened to building a house:

Going to South Africa is like someone who wants to build a house; you protect your house; you can't just build it. So the same with working in South Africa, you prepare your journey right here at home so that you have no problems with, say, the policemen. If you meet them, then they will catch your friends and not you ... In the end, they would realise they grabbed the wrong person who had documents quite alright, and would release him. But later on for them to turn to me, it was too late; I am nowhere to be seen! That's how I stayed long without being deported.⁵⁶

In this context, preparing for one's journey means approaching a healer and getting the necessary protective medicine or luck medicine. A good number of labour migrants, especially those who have earlier been deported from South Africa, make efforts to approach a reputable herbalist specialising in protective medicine before departing for South Africa. However, this protective medicine is generally sought alongside general local medicine to cure diseases whenever these labour migrants fall sick in South Africa.

⁵³ Interview with John Jere. Galamala Mgungwe Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 29/04/2005.

⁵⁴ Interview with Bungamapiri Chipeta. Op. Cit.

⁵⁵ Trywell Chisi was nicknamed *Mtchona* i.e. the overstayer because he stayed in South Africa for three decades. According to Trywell Chisi, this was partly possible because of the use of local (protective) medicine.

⁵⁶ Interview with Trywell *Mtchona* Chisi. Zebediya Makamo Village. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 27/04/2005. In this context, by protecting one's house Trywell meant using charms (local medicine) to protect the house from wizards and witches. This is the mindset of villagers in most parts of Malawi. It emanates from the traditional medicinal beliefs and practices.

3. Health and Malawian Migrants to South Africa

Malawians have worked in South Africa since the 1880s following the establishment of the diamond and gold mines. Between the 1880s and the end of the 1980s, these migrants were working either in these mines (under *Wenela* and later *Theba*) or in various sectors (under *selufu*).⁵⁷ During their stay in South Africa, Malawian migrants, just like other migrants from the southern African region, have been suffering from various diseases, for instance, STDs,⁵⁸ tuberculosis, pneumonia, malaria and various diseases associated with the change of weather and environment between Malawi and South Africa.⁵⁹ This section shows that diseases like tuberculosis and pneumonia, which labour migrants contracted on the mines, introduced them to biomedical treatment in the mine hospitals and, therefore, upon return to Malawi, they started relying on both *mankhwala gha chifipa* and biomedicine. The section also shows that access to biomedicine in Malawi was increased through the opening of private clinics by retired medical assistants. However, the chapter maintains, labour migrants working in South Africa have continued, up to the post-1990 period, relying on *mankhwala gha chifipa* in addition to biomedicine. As will be noted later, some labour migrants working in the mines also acted as healers, providing local medicine to colleagues in times of sicknesses.

Migrant workers working in the mines in South Africa at the end of the nineteenth century and during the twentieth century suffered from such diseases as tuberculosis, silicosis, scurvy and pneumonia as already started above. Although it is difficult to precisely explain how tuberculosis (TB) got established on the mines, Randall Packard argues that “it is likely that it arrived along with the skilled European miners who first came to these mines for work”.⁶⁰ Cedric De Beer concurs with Packard and explains: “Many of the skilled mine workers that came from Europe were infected with TB, although few suffered from this disease in its active form”.⁶¹ As a result of poverty, overcrowding and poor working conditions which resulted from the Industrial Revolution, TB was very common in Europe. It is due to the difficult conditions

⁵⁷ For details on this, see chapters two and three.

⁵⁸ For details on STDs in twentieth century South Africa, see, for example, Karen Jochelson. *The Colour Disease: Syphilis and Racism in South Africa, 1880-1950*. (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001).

⁵⁹ A good example of diseases associated with the change of environment is *phungo*, which has been examined in the previous section.

⁶⁰ Randall Packard. *White Plague, Black Labour: Tuberculosis and the Political Economy of Health and Disease in South Africa*. (London: James Currey Publishers, 1989). p. 73.

⁶¹ Cedric De Beer. *The South African Disease: Apartheid Health and Health Services*. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 1986). p. 4.

on these South African mines that most of these immigrants lost their resistance and developed active TB. Packard explains:

Immigrant miners often carried with them tubercular infections acquired in childhood. Under the conditions of gold mining, many of these miners developed silicosis, a disease characterised by fibrosis of the lungs due to inhalation of silicosis dust. This condition contributed to the activation of dominant foci of tubercular infection.⁶²

As part of mine management and ‘business strategy’, managers of the various mines in South Africa maintained that African workers did not acquire TB on the mines, but that they brought it from their rural areas upon being recruited.⁶³ This theory, however, ran contrary to the results of the ‘tuberculin surveys’ which were conducted between 1910 and 1912 among migrant workers from Basutoland, Nyasaland and Mozambique. The results of these surveys showed that “men who had worked on the mines had higher positivity rates than men who had not”,⁶⁴ implying that TB was largely contracted on these mines.

Conditions inside the mine shafts facilitated the spread of TB between infected and non-infected miners. Miners worked in poorly ventilated shafts, hence it was very easy for miners with TB to infect the non-infected miners through coughing. Cedric De Beer argues that many African miners contracted TB as they encountered the two conditions necessary for the spread of TB: “One involves the presence of the TB bacillus which causes the infection. The other is the presence of people who are weakened by poor diet, physical strain or other illness”.⁶⁵ This marked the beginning of the TB epidemic which had deleterious effects on the mining activities in South Africa.

The spread of TB was facilitated by overcrowded conditions in the mining compounds. This overcrowding was worsened by the introduction of closed mine compounds. The latter were adopted in order to check illicit gold and diamond buying and selling activities in the mines and also to control the mobility of migrant mine workers. As part of the control and prevention efforts by the mine authorities, various mines provided better housing, food, working conditions and medical services. Meals were improved since poor diet was behind the high infection rates as a result of reduced body resistance. Overcrowding was reduced by reducing

⁶² Randall Packard. *White Plague, Black Labour*. p. 73.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 74.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 74.

⁶⁵ Cedric De Beer. *The South African Disease*. p. 4.

the number of people sharing a room in the mine compounds. Medical services were also improved, for instance, by increasing the number of hospitals at the mines. “With improved medical services”, Packard argues, “greater care was taken in the examination of recruits, hence reducing the number of infective or susceptible Africans who entered the mining industry”.⁶⁶ With poorer medical services before, migrants who were already weak were recruited and it is these migrants who easily contracted TB on the mines.

Following the high incidence of TB and pneumonia on the mines, the South African government banned the recruitment and employment of migrant workers from the tropical areas between 1913 and the 1930s. Following this ban, the official number of these tropical workers on the mines dropped from 19,394 in 1913 to 6,732 in 1914 and to 2,046 by 1918.⁶⁷ Despite this ban, some tropical workers, including migrant workers from colonial Malawi, continued to informally make their way into South Africa and eventually onto the mines. This practice continued during the ban years such that some of the tropical workers remained on the mines though they were not recorded in the official statistics.⁶⁸

Workers on the mines also suffered from silicosis, a disease of the lungs which facilitates the ‘activation’ of TB. According to Elaine Katz, “silicosis is classified under *pneumoconiosis*, a group of lung diseases associated with dusty occupations”.⁶⁹ There are two types of silicosis regarding its manifestations: “The slow developing disease, known as chronic silicosis; and the swiftly advancing version, known as accelerated silicosis”.⁷⁰ Although both are not contagious, they reduce a person’s resistance to lung infections, especially TB. Silicosis affected many miners, especially during the early years of the twentieth century when dust control techniques had not yet been improved. However, since African miners were employed on short contracts, their exposure to dust was minimal, unlike whites who worked for lengthy periods on these mines. Consequently, whites died more from silicosis than Africans and, as a result, silicosis

⁶⁶ Randall Packard. *White Plague, Black Labour*. p. 159.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 162. See also Randall M. Packard. “The Invention of the Tropical Worker: Medical Research and the Quest for Central African Labour on the South African Gold Mines, 1903-36”. *Journal of African History*. (1993, 34: 2). pp. 271-292.

⁶⁸ Clandestine migration from Malawi to South Africa remained an important aspect of the overall labour migration from Malawi even during the ban years, for instance, during the World War Two (WWII) period.

⁶⁹ Elaine Katz. *The White Death: Silicosis on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines, 1886-1910*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1994). p. 13; see also Shula Marks. “The Silent Scourge? Silicosis, Respiratory Disease and Gold Mining in South Africa”. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. (2006, 32: 4). pp. 569-589.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 1.

was nick-named the “white death”.⁷¹ In the mines, silicosis was prevented by controlling workers’ exposure to ‘silica’ dust.

Apart from tuberculosis, pneumonia and silicosis, mine workers also suffered from scurvy. This was a disease which was closely associated with poor diet. These mine workers developed acute vitamin deficiencies as a result of having meals which lacked vegetables and meat. Scurvy was also caused by excessive energy requirements of mine work, as Randall Packard points out: “The high energy demands of mine labour were not usually met due to low food intake and poor diet and these caused physiological stress”.⁷² Between 1902 and 1905, it is reported, 186 African miners died in South Africa.

The mine authorities usually tried to treat mine workers diagnosed of such diseases as TB, silicosis and scurvy in the mine hospitals but eventually they repatriated them to their respective homes. The mine authorities resorted to repatriation, arguing the sick migrants did better in their home surroundings. But the main reason was an attempt to keep mortality rates down on the mines. Archival evidence at the MNA on mortality rates and occupational diseases shows that, indeed, a significant proportion of Malawian migrants recruited under *Wenela* and, later, *Theba* died on the mines. In such an event, their relatives back home were duly communicated to in order for them to receive compensation in the form of death gratuities.⁷³

For those labour migrants who were repatriated because of diseases like TB, they were being compensated in accordance with the Occupational Diseases in Mines and Works Act. This compensation was a result of the realization that mine work was ‘risk work’.⁷⁴ The policy of repatriating sick mine workers was responsible for the spread of diseases like TB to the migrants’ homes. Because of the lack of knowledge on how to prevent the spread of the disease, family members such as wives and children also acquired the diseases.

Many of the sick migrant workers were treated with biomedicine in the mine hospitals. However, the poor quality of medical care in these government hospitals and mine clinics and the high mortality rates within these hospitals in the first part of the twentieth century instilled

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 2

⁷² Randall Packard. *White Plague, Black Labour*. p. 80.

⁷³ MNA 172/TEBA/1/6/2: Death Reports.

⁷⁴ MNA 172/TEBA/1/6/3: Occupational Diseases.

a negative attitude towards hospitalization in these workers. Consequently, once repatriated home, these migrant workers tended to rely on local medicine. This was also due to the fact that these hospitals were far apart in Malawi. Nonetheless, it is through working in the mines in South Africa that these migrant workers were introduced to biomedicine in the hospitals and clinics. With the spread of hospitals and the opening of private clinics by medical assistants in Malawi, as discussed in the ensuing paragraphs, the labour migrants were able to use both *mankhwala gha chifipa* and *mankhwala gha chizungu*. In some cases, they exercised choice between these two types of medicine. This choice partly depended on the type and severity of the disease at hand.

Even in South Africa, labour migrants eventually started using both local medicine and biomedicine from the hospitals. Some labour migrants were also acting as healers while working in South Africa. However, since mine authorities and doctors in the hospitals were against the use of local medicine, the latter was administered secretly. Migrant workers-cum-healers were eagerly assisting their colleagues, but at the same time they made efforts to hide it from their supervisors and doctors. This shows that sick labour migrants were using local medicine while simultaneously seeking medical attention from the hospitals. On this, David Chakwira, who worked in various mines in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, narrated how his colleague, Dinga Shumba, was miraculously healed by a healer in their midst, Christopher Mwahimba, from Karonga⁷⁵ District in northern Malawi:

Let me narrate a story of my friend, Dinga Shumba, who was bewitched. He was working as a driver and after knocking off, we heard news that he had just collapsed while in the toilet. They got him out of the toilet, but he could not walk. Then we concluded he had been bewitched. But when you looked at him, he looked just fine. After we told Christopher Mwahimba, he said: 'I am going to give you local medicine and please administer this medicine by applying it to small cuts on all joints only. I am telling you, he is going to wake up instantly! But make sure the doctors don't notice anything, otherwise you will be in great problems. You may easily hide this by administering this medicine inside the *khechi* (mine lift)'.⁷⁶

Davison explained that after administering the medicine, Dinga Shumba stood up immediately. He had been healed. However, they advised him to pretend to be sick for the next few days to prevent the authorities, including the doctors, from suspecting what had happened. At this point, they all realised the effectiveness of the local medicine that had been administered.

⁷⁵ Karonga District in northern Malawi is one of the districts renowned with people who are knowledgeable about local medicine. The other such districts in Malawi are Chitipa, Rumphi and Mulanje. A closer look at these districts reveals their border location i.e. Chitipa and Karonga border Tanzania to the north, Rumphi borders Zambia to the west while Mulanje borders Mozambique to the south. This border location suggests interaction with foreigners and the spread of ideas through diffusionism.

⁷⁶ Interview with Davison Chakwira. Tadeyo Chakwira Village. T.A. Kapingo Sibande. Mzimba. 27/08/2015.

Davison argued that over-relying on hospital medicine usually resulted in patients, who were suffering from such miraculous diseases, dying.

Davison Chakwira further explained that while working in a mine, he, himself, suddenly fell sick and simultaneously discovered that one of his shirts went missing. He suspected that this had to do with witchcraft. He then wrote a letter to his home people in Malawi, explaining to them what had happened.

It is my home people who approached a herbalist. The latter provided medicine in powder form, which was sent to me in an envelope. I was advised to administer the medicine through cuts made on the skin. Once that was done, I immediately got better and I was surprised to learn that the shirt, which got lost in South Africa, had been found in Malawi at my home. It is at this point that I realised witchcraft was real.⁷⁷

The above scenario is another example of the problems that labour migrants face while working in South Africa. This is a result of jealousy from the non-migrant relatives in Malawi who are against labour migrants fulfilling their goals. However, due to the timely intervention by healers, people like Davison Chakwira survived.

It was also learnt that there are particular diseases that herbalists attend to and for the rest, they usually refer them to hospitals.⁷⁸ In a similar manner, medical doctors too do not hesitate to refer some patients to healers whenever Western medicine has failed.

If I am treating a patient and I discover that they have inadequate water in the body, I don't hesitate, I refer this patient to the hospital for the attention of medical doctors. In some cases, after the water problem is dealt with, the patient is brought back and I continue administering my local medicine. Even medical doctors refer cases to us, especially those bordering on witchcraft. For instance, those patients who are tormented because of the bad charms in their bodies or homes.⁷⁹

Over the years the relations between healers and medical practitioners have steadily improved. In fact, it was indicated that most healers belong to the Herbalists Association of Malawi (HAM),⁸⁰ which urges healers to work together with hospitals for the good of the patients. The association also fights for the healers' recognition by the government of Malawi. The latter, in

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Even at international level, the World Health Organisation (WHO) supports the integration of biomedicine and local medicine. For details on this, see Mariana G. Hewson. "Traditional Healers in Southern Africa". p. 1030.

⁷⁹ Interview with Linesi Mhone. Op. Cit.

⁸⁰ Membership to the Herbalists Association of Malawi (HAM) is voluntary: herbalists personally decide whether to belong to it or not. HAM has organisational structures, for instance, it has committees at national, regional and district levels. In addition to belonging to HAM, some healers run medical clinics where they administer local medicine to their clients, as indicated earlier in the chapter. In a similar development, traditional healers in South Africa and Mozambique developed organisations that are recognised by the Department of Health and by the Ministry of Health, respectively. For details, see Mariana G. Hewson. "Traditional Healers in Southern Africa". p. 1030.

turn, recognises healers who belong to this association by giving them practice certificates also known as certificates of recognition.⁸¹

Many healers indicated that their medicine cures most of the diseases brought to their attention by labour migrants and the general public. However, almost all the healers pointed out that they still fail to treat HIV that causes AIDS. In case they come across such cases, they do not hesitate to refer them to the hospitals. On this, Linesi Mhone commented: “I deal with different cases, for example, *vizilisi* (convulsions); stomach pains; STDs e.g. *mabomu* and *chizonono* (gonorrhea and syphilis). I cure all these. In fact, the list is endless. The only disease which I fail to handle is HIV. This requires our colleagues in hospitals and, as you are aware, HIV is not curable”.⁸²

While labour migrants were working in the mines under *Wenela* and *Theba*, back in Malawi retired medical assistants embarked on the establishment of private clinics. It is these clinics which popularised biomedicine in the countryside, including the major labour migration areas. Leonard Wayinga Singini, who is a group village headman in Lupaso area in Mzimba, had a deep-seated ambition of becoming a medical doctor. However, he only qualified as a medical assistant at the Lilongwe Medical Training School in the 1960s. In the 1970s and 1980s, he also worked as a pharmacist and a family planning officer under St. John’s Hospital in Mzuzu. Although Leonard grew up in a family in which his father used to consult traditional healers, he did not understand how local medicine works. But because his home area is close to Ekwendeni Hospital, he really wanted to train as a medical doctor in order to help other people. Leonard explained how he got inspired: “Whenever I went to Ekwendeni Mission Hospital, I could see nurses treating people, hence I got inspired”.⁸³

Leonard indicated that for a long time people in northern Malawi had largely relied on local medicine because hospitals were far from each other. For instance, “in the past there was a hospital in Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts and the other nearest one was Ekwendeni Mission Hospital”.⁸⁴ This made it difficult for people to adjust to biomedicine. This was also partly because of local beliefs, as Leonard explained: “it is only now that some of our beliefs are

⁸¹ To show recognition by the government, these certificates bear the government official stamp.

⁸² Interview with Linesi Mhone. Op. Cit.

⁸³ Interview with Leonard Singini. Lupaso. Mzimba. 17/06/2010.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

disappearing, although not much, for example, the belief in witchcraft; people were very much attached to witchcraft. There was a belief that almost any societal problem was due to witchcraft”.⁸⁵ As a result, they could consult a healer who explained how the problem came about. Consequently, in many villages misunderstandings arose because of these witchcraft accusations.

In addition to working in the various hospitals, from the 1980s onwards medical assistants established their own private clinics in northern Malawi where they treated people including labour migrants. This trend popularised biomedicine in a region where hospitals were far apart. Wales Chavula, who is based in Ekwendeni area in Mzimba District, was trained as a medical assistant in the 1970s and he opened his clinic after retiring in 1987: “I was trained by Dr. Kenneth Irvine, a medical doctor at Ekwendeni Mission Hospital. He trained me as a medical orderly and, thereafter, I worked at Ekwendeni Mission Hospital from 1970 to 1987. From 1987 I established my own clinic”.⁸⁶

Wales Chavula is one of the few medical practitioners who deal in both local medicine and biomedicine. While his medical clinic specialises in biomedicine, he resorts to *mankhwala gha chifipa* if it fails. Behind his clinic there are natural trees and Wales indicated that he fetches herbs, roots and leaves of these trees for medication. Since Ekwendeni is also a labour migration area, Wales Chavula assists both migrants and non-migrants at his clinic. However, since most of the labour migrants live in South Africa, most of his clients are other members from these labour migration households.

Chimdima Mhango is another medical practitioner operating a clinic around Ekwendeni area. Mhango too deals in both *mankhwala gha chifipa* and biomedicine. However, unlike Wales Chavula whose main focus is on biomedicine, Chimdima’s bias is local healing, but he also uses biomedicine to treat specific diseases that cannot be healed by local medicine. Mhango too was trained as a medical assistant while working with Ekwendeni Hospital. Chimdima Mhango spoke highly of *mankhwala gha chifipa*:

Mankhwala gha chifipa are very effective in treating various diseases. In my case, I largely rely on them and there are rare diseases that specifically look for biomedicine. However, the only problem that I face is deforestation. Ekwendeni being a trading centre and being semi-urban, there is a problem of natural

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Interview with Wales Chavula. Ekwendeni. Mzimba. 18/06/2010.

trees as a source of medicine. That is why we, the traditional healers, belong to the healers' association which promotes re-planting and preservation of natural trees.⁸⁷

Lackson Mchizi is a clinical officer who retired in 1990 after working for several years in Lundazi, Chipata and Copperbelt areas in Zambia. He was inspired to train as a medical person by Mr. John Lungu, a senior medical assistant who worked for some time at Ekwendeni Hospital. Lackson indicated that it was actually John Lungu's lifestyle and dedication to duty that impressed him:

He was a senior medical assistant and I was inspired by his dedication to duty. Everybody respected him and that is why I decided to go for medical training and, later, medical practice. He was a good man. He was twenty-four hours on duty. He was, then, one of the few Africans trained in the field. Financially, he was doing better than most people in the area; in some cases much better than church reverends. Perhaps he was second to whites.⁸⁸

It is this kind of inspiration that helped Lackson to develop a life-long interest in the medical practice in the 1960s and 1970s. Initially he trained as a medical assistant, but later upgraded and qualified as a clinical officer. After retirement, he opened a clinic right at his home area outside Ekwendeni.

Lackson Mchizi explained that in the old days there was a problem of language and communication in the medical practice. White medical doctors had problems conducting their medical practice using vernacular language. This is where trained African medical personnel like Lackson Mchizi, John Lungu and Wales Chavula proved to be very useful. They used to urge people from their areas suffering from diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and pneumonia to seek medical attention in the hospitals because such diseases could hardly be treated by local medicine. Again during consultation, Lackson Mchizi maintained, African personnel could clearly understand what the patients were suffering from. This was important if they were to give out the right type of medication for particular diseases. Before these medical assistants came in, people, including labour migrants, had a negative attitude towards biomedicine, and, therefore, preferred local medicine instead. Sicknesses and deaths were also closely associated with witchcraft; that someone had been bewitched. But medical assistants impressed on people that these sicknesses and deaths were a natural occurrence.

⁸⁷ Interview with Chimdima Mhango. Ekwendeni. Mzimba. 18/06/2010.

⁸⁸ Interview with Lackson Mchizi. Ekwendeni. Mzimba. 21/06/2010.

4. 'Misfortunes' and Religious Lives of Malawian Migrants

As with diseases, most Malawians believe that 'misfortunes' are caused by various factors. For instance, they believe that they are caused by spirits of their ancestors, especially when these spirits are unhappy with them; and by the 'witchcraft' activities of their relatives, who are not happy with their success. In the case of labour migrants working in South Africa, these 'misfortunes' include failure to secure jobs, sicknesses, being victims of criminal activities, and, arrests and eventual deportations. In trying to solve these problems, labour migrants resort to getting relief and various forms of assistance from their churches in addition to resorting to the use of local medicine as discussed earlier in the chapter.

This section examines the roles played by different types of churches in mitigating migrants' 'suffering'. It shows that mainstream churches like Livingstonia Mission in northern Malawi faced difficulties to monitor the activities of their members such that the latter were able to consult healers for herbal medicine. It also shows that because of the hard stance of such mainstream churches, Christian converts like Charles Chidongo Chinula and Elliot Kamwana formed the African Independent Churches in order to better practise their local medicinal beliefs. Consequently, labour migrants belonging to such churches had the liberty to access biomedicine from hospitals (as highlighted in the previous section) and *mankhwala gha chifipa* from indigenous healers. The section further shows that some churches are against their members using both local medicine and biomedicine and, instead, rely on faith healing. Lastly, the section highlights the role played by the Malawian churches based in South Africa. These churches provide various forms of assistance to labour migrants, just like the welfare societies, as examined in the previous chapter.

Evidence from Malawi shows that healers meet resistance from certain churches in practising their trade. Such churches feel that healers practise *masenga* (witchcraft), hence they have to be discouraged. In addition to some mainstream churches in Malawi, for instance, the Catholic Missions, the Seventh Day Adventist Mission and the Scottish Missions, most of the charismatic churches in Malawi have this stance towards healers. Such churches literally discourage their members from approaching healers for medicinal assistance. In practice, however, the church members usually visit these healers discretely to avoid excommunication from the church.

The Livingstonia Mission of the Free Church of Scotland was against “un-Christian practices”. However, there was no official policy guiding the relationship of Christians to African healing and the use of local medicines. This gave room for Malawian Christian converts to continue with their medicinal beliefs and practices even after getting converted. The other source of the problem is that the missionaries had difficulties to precisely define what these “un-Christian practices” were. For instance, *vinthumwa* (bad charms) were difficult to define, more so because these missionaries had limited knowledge of the local languages in northern Malawi (for example, Chingoni, Chitonga, Chitumbuka, and Chingonde). Hokkanen argues that for missionaries, a ‘charm’ was “an object believed to have magical, spiritual or supernatural properties, which was objectionable on both religious and scientific grounds”.⁸⁹

During the twentieth century, the other source of the problem was that gradually African converts started taking over leadership responsibilities from the missionaries as the church expanded. Consequently, these ‘new’ African church leaders, especially in the rural areas, easily continued with the use of *mankhwala gha chifipa* because they were already tolerant of Africans’ medical beliefs and practices. McCracken calls this ‘indigenous Christianity’ in which Malawians introduced mini-reforms from within the Christian church.⁹⁰ In fact, they adapted Christianity to suit their personal needs. Linden argues that “Christians simply chose within Christianity those elements that were meaningful and helpful to them and ignored the rest”.⁹¹

Christian converts who were also practising as healers had problems practising their medical trade because of the negative stand of the church. For instance, while some churches allow their members to visit the *sing’angas* (healers) for local medicine, they are still opposed to certain aspects of indigenous medicinal practices. Rita Kachali, for example, indicated that “the church is against *kuwombeza* (divination) because once you are back from the *sing’anga*, you will cause havoc against those who, reportedly, bewitched you”.⁹² Despite the stand by most

⁸⁹ Markku Hokkanen. “Quests for Health and Contests for Meaning: African Church Leaders and Scottish Missionaries in the Early Twentieth Century Presbyterian Church in Northern Malawi”. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. (2007, 33: 4). p. 737.

⁹⁰ John McCracken. *A History of Malawi*. p. 121.

⁹¹ Cited in John McCracken. *A History of Malawi*. p. 121. For details, see Ian Linden. *Catholics, Peasants and Chewa Resistance in Nyasaland, 1889-1939*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

⁹² Interview with Rita Kachali. Op. Cit. In this context, *kuwombeza* means the *sing’anga* divining with a view to find the cause of the problem, for example, the cause of the disease or why the labour migrant is failing to make ends meet in South Africa.

of these churches, a cross-section of church members still visit the *sing'angas* up to date. On this, Kingston Lupafya, husband to Rita Kachali, argued: "What is happening is that most people go underground when visiting the traditional healers. This includes church elders and even reverends or pastors. They do visit the *sing'angas* without people noticing them".⁹³

Wyness Mdumuka, a wife to Ratwell Lungu (a former labour migrant), became a *sing'anga* in the 1980s and she has been practising as a healer since then. However, partly because of the strong influence of the church (i.e. the CCAP), Wyness' healing practice has undergone a measure of transformation over time: at first she was into *vimbuza* dance and *kuwombeza*, that is, divination with a view to establish the real cause of the problem including a particular disease, but later she abandoned these and started concentrating on mere administration of local medicine, especially after the 1990s. This transformation was also partly due to the calamity that befell her family along the way. Wyness explained that in the 1980s and 1990s, she over-relied on *kuwombeza* and *vimbuza* dance in carrying out her duties: "When I was starting, I over-relied on dancing *vimbuza* and in the process attending to my clients. You may wish to know that drum beating is partly a remedy for someone's sickness. For example, someone would be vomiting, but after dancing *vimbuza*, the following day he or she would say 'I am feeling much better today'".⁹⁴

However, between 1993 and 1998, Wyness maintained, a calamity befell her family: four members of her family died during this period. That is when she decided to go back to the church as part of desperate attempts to save the remaining children in her household. This development unveils a unique revelation about Wyness' beliefs: although she was a healer who believed in the effectiveness of local medication, she equally believed in the omnipotent healing powers of God. This is unlike other healers who strongly believe in traditional medicine and less in the influence of religion and God.

Churches which were completely against their members resorting to the use of *mankhwala gha chifipa* in the twentieth century led to the establishment of the African Independent Churches (AICs). In fact, these AICs were formed from the mainstream churches as a result of misunderstanding on a number of issues including polygamy and beer. These AICs have no

⁹³ Interview with Kingston Lupafya. Op. Cit. Kingston is Rita Kachali's husband. He is a former labour migrant, who spent about thirty years in South Africa, courtesy of his wife's luck medicine.

⁹⁴ Interview with Wyness Mdumuka. Ekwendeni. Mzimba. 18/06/2010.

problems whatsoever with their members consulting traditional healers, as long as they do not indulge in witchcraft. To them what matters is a person getting cured of their sicknesses whether through the use of *mankhwala gha chifipa* or biomedicine. Examples of such local churches in Malawi include *Chipangano*, *Ziyoni* (Zion), *Mpingo wa Abrahamu* (African Abraham) and *Lasiti* (Last Church of God).

Charles Chidongo Chinula broke away from the Livingstonia Mission and established Sazu Home Mission in Mzimba District. His church is a good example of the AICs that combined the use of local medicine and biomedicine during the twentieth century. Chinula had knowledge of local medicine and also used biomedicine which he initially accessed from the Livingstonia Mission and, later, from the colonial government.⁹⁵ After completing his studies at Livingstonia Teacher Training School in 1907, Chinula noticed that the prohibitions of indigenous practices and dances within the church were impoverishing the cultural patrimony. Serman Chavula wrote in relation to Chinula's positions:

Even when he (Chinula) was Headmaster at Loudon (Embangweni) in Mzimba District, he believed that African customs should be 'purified' and preserved rather than neglected and destroyed. He had, therefore, secretly encouraged pupils to take part in the dances while at Loudon.⁹⁶

Relative to this, Boston Soko indicates that northern Malawians eventually shared the attitude adopted by Charles Chinula.⁹⁷

In Nkhata-Bay, Eliot Kamwana was a preacher who popularised the Watch Tower movement from South Africa into South Central Africa. After being frustrated within the Livingstonia Mission, he left for South Africa where he was introduced and affiliated to the Watch Tower teachings. Because of his 'millennial teachings', around 1914 the Nyasaland colonial government expelled Kamwana first to Mauritius and then to Seychelles. He was only allowed to return to Nyasaland in 1937, after which he formed his own AIC, the "*Mlonda*" or Watchman Healing Mission in Nkhata-Bay. His church rejected biomedicine in favour of spiritual healing.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Charles Chinula could no longer access biomedicine from Livingstonia Mission after breaking away and forming his own church.

⁹⁶ Serman Chavula. "The History of Loudon Mission, 1902-1973". History Seminar Paper. University of Malawi. 1974.

⁹⁷ For details, see Boston Soko. *Vimbuza: The Healing Dance in Northern Malawi*. (Zomba: Imabili Indigenous Knowledge Publications, 2014). p. 15.

⁹⁸ John McCracken. *A History of Malawi*. p. 122. For a detailed discussion on Elliot Kamwana, see, for example, Wiseman C. Chirwa. "Masokwa Elliot Kenan Kamwana Chirwa: His Religious and Political Activities, and the

Other churches, however, are against both types of medicine (local medicine and biomedicine), preferring that their members resort to prayers to God for healing powers and blessings. Two of the major independent movements practising faith healing in Malawi are the Zionists and the Apostolics. This type of healing originated from the Christian Catholic Church in Zion and the Apostolic Faith Mission in the nineteenth century. Faith healing in independent churches can be divided into three categories: “healing during church services, healing by immersion, and healing through consultation with a prophet”.⁹⁹ In these Zionist and Apostolic-type churches, the prophet is a healer “who has the ability to predict, heal and divine, and who draws power to do this from God”.¹⁰⁰

Faith healing is assumed to be unique to African Independent Churches and Pentecostal or charismatic churches.¹⁰¹ However, faith healing appears to be more widespread in Malawi. A number of reasons are behind this development. First, historically most religious groups make healing a central part of their preaching message. Second, over the past thirty years, Malawi, like other African countries, has experienced a rise in Pentecostal churches and the ‘pentecostalisation’ of mainstream churches.¹⁰² Churches like the CCAP and the Catholic Church, which were not initially associated with faith healing and miracles, have begun to engage in ‘pentecostalism’. There is, therefore, a probability that labour migrants belonging to such ‘pentecostal’ churches resort to faith healing in case of sicknesses and other problems, while they are in Malawi for holidays or following their deportations.

There are some labour migrants who are against use of *mankhwala gha chifipa* in favour of either the healing power of God or the use of biomedicine from the hospitals. These labour migrants believe that healers indulge in *vinthumwa* (bad charms). Beatrice Nkhata is wife to Vincent Ngwira, a long time labour migrant from Kagogo Village in Nkhata-Bay District. The two got married in 1966 and by the 1970s, her husband had already started going to South Africa. By the time of the interview in January 2016, her husband was still in South Africa.

Effects of ‘Kamwanaism’ in South-east Nkhata-Bay, 1908-56”. History Seminar Paper. Chancellor College. University of Malawi. 1984.

⁹⁹ Andrew Simwaka, Karl Peltzer and Dixie Maluwa-Banda. “Indigenous Healing Practices in Malawi”. p. 156.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 156.

¹⁰¹ See David Martin. *Pentecostalism: The World and Their Parish*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

¹⁰² Nicole D. Manglos and Jenny Trinitapoli. “The Third Therapeutic System: Faith Healing Strategies in the Context of a Generalised AIDS Epidemic”. *J. Health Social Behaviour*. (2011, 52: 1). pp. 107-122. See also Harri Englund. “Pentecostalism Beyond Belief: Trust and Democracy in a Malawian Township”. *Africa: The Journal of the African International Institute*. (2007, 77). pp. 477-499.

However, he had retired and was relying on pension money. Beatrice also had one daughter and two sons working in South Africa. When she suffered from stroke, her children came home and took her to South Africa for better medical attention in hospitals. Beatrice Nkhata's account below shows labour migrants' belief in the healing powers of medicine from the hospital and God:

In 2008 I was found with high blood pressure and eventually suffered from stroke. I couldn't walk on my own. Then one of my children working in South Africa sent his wife to pick me from here to South Africa. Upon arrival in South Africa, my son suggested we go for prayers, but I argued we go to the hospital first. Hence we went to the hospital in April 2008. After several months, I started getting better because I could then walk on my own up and down the flats. I stayed there until I got well. I then wanted to come back home. My son told me to stay there, arguing there was nobody at home here to take care of me. My husband, who was also in South Africa, said he would buy a piece of land and build a house for me there. But I insisted to come home; I told them that my husband's South African wife would not be happy with that. Eventually, they brought me home.¹⁰³

This scenario shows that within the labour migration areas, for instance, Chintheche and Sanga in Nkhata-bay and Zubayumo Makamo, Manyamula and Euthini in Mzimba, labour migrants know that there are particular diseases like high blood pressure which can better be treated by medical doctors. In addition, efforts are made to seek better medical attention, for instance, taking patients to better hospitals in South Africa or buying prescribed medication from private clinics and pharmacies in Malawi. However, it is largely those labour migrants who secured better jobs in South Africa that can afford this. As for ordinary labour migrants, they either seek medical attention in ordinary hospitals in Malawi or from healers within their villages.

¹⁰³ Interview with Beatrice Nkhata. Kagogo Village. T.A. Malenganzoma. Nkhata-Bay. 8/01/2016.



Photograph 6.2: Not all labour migrants believe in the use of traditional medicine to cure diseases in the labour migration areas. The *gogo* (grandmother) in this photograph was taken by her children to South Africa for proper medical attention following her continued sickness. After she got better, the children insisted she stayed with them in South Africa, but she refused arguing she cannot abandon their home. Her husband was the first to go to South Africa for wage employment and ended up *kutchona* there (photo by Bishop Chavula, Research Assistant, Chintheche, Nkhata-Bay).

In Malawi missionaries belonging to different groupings like the Dutch Reformed Church, the Free Church of Scotland, the Established Church of Scotland and the Catholic Missions established mission stations in different parts of the country between 1850 and 1900.¹⁰⁴ In addition to teaching the word of God, they also established schools where converts were taught basics in reading, writing and counting.¹⁰⁵ This was part of the missionaries' efforts to 'civilise' Africans. However, due to the lack of employment opportunities, these Christian converts and mission school leavers emigrated to various countries in southern Africa for wage employment. They were attracted to mine employment in South Africa and Zambia and to commercial farms in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Lackson Mchizi, a retired clinical officer from Mzimba

¹⁰⁴ For details, see, for example, John McCracken. *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966*.

¹⁰⁵ Basic literacy was the focus of mission schools, especially during the colonial period.

District, indicated that he came across a number of Malawians in the Copperbelt region in Zambia between the 1970s and 1990s:

Zambia has got a lot of Malawians. At one time most of the hospitals in the northern part, for example, Chipata, were led by Malawians. Hence the pertinent question here is why? The response is that in those days most Malawians attained mission education. There were several mission schools, for instance, Livingstonia and Bandawe in northern Malawi. If you tried to find out, most of the professionals were from the northern region. If you went to the Copperbelt, there were a lot of Malawians there, for example, in Mufulira Mine. All these people were looking for better wages.¹⁰⁶

However, a number of Malawian labour migrants were attracted to the higher wages obtaining in the gold and diamond mines in South Africa.¹⁰⁷ In fact, South Africa remained a major destination for Malawian labour migrants throughout the twentieth century. As chapters three and four show, Malawian migrants continued going to South Africa even after the decline in migrancy at the end of the 1980s.¹⁰⁸

Following the increase in the numbers of *selufu* labour migrants in the 1990s, a number of churches from Malawi started establishing church branches in South Africa in order to cater for the spiritual needs of Malawians there. In addition to these unskilled and semi-skilled labour migrants, for a long time countries like South Africa and Botswana have been a major destination of skilled personnel like lecturers and nurses from Malawi. These migrants too created a conducive environment for the expansion of Malawian churches to South Africa. One of these churches is the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (C.C.A.P.). In Malawi the latter has three synods: the Livingstonia Synod (northern Malawi), the Nkhoma Synod (central Malawi), and the Blantyre Synod (southern Malawi). Each of these synods has branches in Johannesburg. Church membership of Malawian migrants in South Africa largely depends on the synod under which they come in Malawi. Consequently, most Ngoni and Tonga migrants from Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay, respectively, belong to the Livingstonia Synod branches in South Africa (see photograph 6.3).

In addition to societies, the church also plays an important role in alleviating migrants' problems. For instance, the church in Berea, Johannesburg, provides accommodation to a few migrants, in most cases church members, who have just arrived in South Africa and are yet to secure jobs.¹⁰⁹ As for those who have secured jobs, this church also makes available a few

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Lackson Mchizi. Op. Cit.

¹⁰⁷ For details on this, see chapter two.

¹⁰⁸ See chapters two and three for details.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Evans Mhone. Berea. Johannesburg. 4/11/2016.

rooms for rent as an income-generating venture. There is another church in Sandton patronised by migrants from northern Malawi. This church also provides temporary assistance to labour migrants in need from time to time. In fact, it has become more of a tradition for those stranded to avail themselves at this church for help. Consequently, they are provided with accommodation and food until they link up with their relatives. During the church service on Sundays formal announcements are made about new migrants in need of assistance. Consequently, well-wishers usually come forward and offer various forms of assistance: for instance, foodstuffs, money and accommodation at their homes. Some of these stranded migrants include those avoided by relatives, despite initial promises of support before arrival in South Africa; those who were working, but suddenly have become jobless; and wives of migrants following fights or virtual divorce with their husbands. Since society meetings are held once every month, labour migrants also use the church premises to hold informal social gatherings to update each other about various developments: deaths and sicknesses both in South Africa and back home, and the consequent programmes about condolences and patient visitations; arrival schedules of new migrants (relatives); and departure schedules of migrants so that they know who to send money or *katundu* home, among others.



Photograph 6.3: Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (C.C.A.P.), Synod of Livingstonia (Northern Malawi) branch in Berea, Johannesburg, where labour migrants from northern Malawi resident congregate every Sunday. Some labour migrants resident in Berea, Yeoville and Hillbrow were contacted at this church and later interviewed in their respective homes. A few interviews, however, were conducted at this church in October and November, 2016 (photo by author).

5. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that churches in South Africa play an important role in alleviating the general suffering of Malawian migrants: they provide accommodation and also link Malawians in need to fellow Malawians who have the potential of providing different forms of assistance. The chapter has shown that various churches have different positions regarding the use of local medicine: some churches are against their members accessing local medicine and members in these churches still secretly consult healers. Others allow their members to use local medicine. In the case of Malawi, most of these churches are African Independent Churches which broke away from the mainstream churches. However, there are also churches which are against both local medicine and biomedicine. Instead, these churches focus on faith healing.

Evidence also shows that there are two dominant ways through which people become healers in northern Malawi i.e. through *kuthwasa* and training. The process of *kuthwasa* is associated

with *vimbuza* (spirit-possession) and is more common in Mzimba and Rumphu than in Nkhata-Bay. Consequently, there are more *bathwasi* in Mzimba whereas in Nkhata-Bay it is the trained healers who dominate the field. Since *bathwasi* know the local medicine for various diseases and problems through spirits and also through *kuwombeza*, their medicine is deemed to be more effective. Consequently, their services are highly sought after at societal, national and international levels. It is, therefore, not surprising that some of these healers migrated from Mzimba to Nkhata-Bay from where they ply their trade.

The chapter has shown that labour migrants working in the mines in South Africa in the twentieth century contracted such diseases as TB, pneumonia and silicosis. As a result they were treated in the mine hospitals, in the process being exposed to biomedicine. Despite this development, a good number of labour migrants still resort to the use of local medicine as a solution to their diseases and problems while in South Africa, hence hybrid medical practices. Before departing to South Africa, migrants approach healers, as part of *kunozga ulendo*, for such medicine as *mankhwala gha mwabi*, *mankhwala ghakupenjira ntchito* (medicine for fetching jobs), *mankhwala ghakuponoska ku masuzgo* (protective medicine) and medicine for various illnesses. While in South Africa, they use several means to access local medicine from Malawi, for instance, accessing such medicine from fellow labour migrants who carry some local medicine when going to South Africa; requesting home people to send them processed medicine; physically approaching healers back in Malawi during their holidays and once deported; and, last but not least, approaching Malawian healers either based in South Africa or merely visiting South Africa, based on demand. Through this, the labour migrants' wish is to extend their stay in South Africa and find better-paying jobs; and accumulate enough proceeds before returning to Malawi. The ultimate goal is to fulfill their set migration goals. The next chapter, the last substantive chapter, examines the resultant development in the labour migrants' source areas after years of working in South Africa.

Chapter Seven

Remittances and Development

1. Introduction

The previous chapters have, collectively, discussed the changing dimensions and patterns of labour migration from northern Malawi to South Africa since the 1970s. For instance, they have examined the nature of this labour migration from different angles: the decline in mine migrancy, which brought about an escalation in informal migration (*selufu*); the gendered nature of labour migration after 1994 and the factors behind it; and the challenges that labour migrants face in South Africa and the survival strategies. On survival mechanisms, while chapter five examined the role of welfare societies, chapter six focused on the role of healers and the church in labour migration. Among others, chapter six argued that despite the dilution of traditions and customs over time and the stand of some churches against *mankhwala gha chifipa*, a significant proportion of labour migrants continue to approach healers for various medicines.

This last substantive chapter discusses the impact of changing technology on the flow of remittances to Malawi; remittance usage and the resultant development at household and societal levels. It is worth noting that the development being discussed is small-scale and usually at a personal and family or household level and that the overall national impact of this migration is yet to be established. The chapter argues that the improvement in technology over time has had the desirable impact on the sending of proceeds in the form of money (*ndalama*) from labour migrants in South Africa to their homes in Malawi. The chapter highlights such changes in technology as the improvements in the banking system, for example, from Post Office savings accounts to internet banking which ensure swift money transfers; and the introduction of special inter-country money transfer facilities in southern African countries, for example, Mukuru (of Zimbabwe origin).

The proliferation of local money bureaux (*mabyuro*) in the Malawian countryside, in addition to the already-existing foreign exchange bureaux, has also greatly aided the quicker transfer of funds from abroad into Malawi. As will be noted in the chapter, local money bureaux (*mabyuro*) enable real-time delivery of money from South Africa. Furthermore, the improvement in cell phone network coverage in the rural areas has enhanced efficient

communication between labour migrants and their relatives in Malawi. Such a scenario has also led to the creation of an environment which is conducive for development. Moreover, the proliferation of local transporters between Malawi and South Africa was also behind the creation of such an environment. These transporters carry not only people to and from South Africa, but also *katundu* (goods) and *ndalama* (money) at a reasonable commission.

As we have seen in the foregoing chapters, formal and *selufu* migrants regarded working in South Africa as a form of long-term occupation. That is largely why *selufu* migrants in the pre-1990 period tended to overstay in South Africa. Similarly, formal migrants under *Wenela* and *Theba* signed a number of two-year contracts before retiring back home. Again during the first years of new *selufu*, after 1994, most migrants tended to overstay in South Africa. However, as a result of continued physical separation between husbands and wives, several social problems crept into migration households. Consequently, in the most recent years, migrants prefer to stay in South Africa as briefly as possible; accumulate enough proceeds (savings) and return home. This trend has resulted in migrants initiating a number of commercial ventures back home. In addition, as a result of the challenges that migrants face in South Africa since the mid-2000s (e.g. xenophobia and arrests and deportations), most labour migrants now try to avoid overstaying in South Africa. Instead, they seek to maximise their savings with a view to investing back home. In short, this chapter shows that the various experiences and challenges that labour migrants experienced in South Africa over time have propelled a cross-section of migrants to quickly return home, and in the process home districts have benefitted.

Finally, this chapter compares and contrasts proceeds from labour migration (and how they are utilised) on a number of fronts: it compares the proceeds from pre-1990 period with those during the post-1990 period; and between the labour migrants from Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts. In general, the chapter provides evidence that shows that despite the challenges that migrants face in South Africa, working there during the post-1994 period is more beneficial than in the pre-1994 period. On the comparison of migration from Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay, this chapter argues that there are more development initiatives at household and community levels in Mzimba District than in Nkhata-Bay. This is in spite of the fact that it was labour migrants from Nkhata-Bay who were pioneers in labour migration to South Africa.

2. Impact of Changing Technology on Remittance Transfers

Labour migrants play an important role in international money transfers and the money transfer industry. The amount of money sent home by labour migrants depends on a number of factors, for example, their monthly income and their family needs and development initiatives back home. According to Manuel Orozco and Caryn Gay Ellis, the remittances are sent through either official channels (e.g. money transfer operators, banks or post offices) or informal mechanisms (e.g. in person, a member of a family or an agent).¹ As this chapter shows, this applies directly to how Malawian labour migrants working in South Africa send proceeds home. In Africa, “intraregional remittance flows are predominantly informal because laws do not allow individual outbound international transfers except in extreme circumstances and through the ownership of bank accounts”.² This situation largely applies to countries under the SADC in general, and, in this case, in international money transfers between Malawi and South Africa.

In addition to sending money, these proceeds are also sent home in the form of goods (*katundu*). This way, the Southern Africa Migration Programme (SAMP) adopted the concept of the ‘value-package’ in which it viewed remittances as being a combination of cash and *katundu* transfers.³ In the 1990s SAMP came up with the Migration and Remittances Survey (MARS) and conducted a survey in Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland and Lesotho in order to shed light on remittance flows. The people from these countries rely on South Africa for migrant work. The survey found out that 85% of the migrant-sending households in these countries receive cash remittances.⁴ In the case of Malawi, migrants working in South Africa send both money and *katundu*. However, as the section shows, more than 70% of them rely on informal mechanisms of transferring money because of their illegal status in South Africa.

Before the 2000s, there was limited use of technology in Malawi, but nowadays technology has greatly been advanced, hence the use of cell phones, internet and internet banking, and other forms of technology. This advancement in technology has greatly enhanced easy money

¹ Manuel Orozco and Caryn Gay Ellis. “Impact of Remittances in Developing Countries”. In Rudolf Anich, Jonathan Crush, Susanne Melde and John O. Oucho (eds.). *A New Perspective on Human Mobility in the South*. (New York: Springer, 2014). p. 93.

² Ibid. p. 93.

³ Wade Pendleton, Jonathan Crush, Eugene Campbell, Thuso Green, Hamilton Simelane, Daniel Tevera and Fiona de Vletter. *Migration, Remittances and Development in Southern Africa*. (Cape Town: Idasa and SAMP, 2006). p. 4.

⁴ Ibid. p. 4.

transfers, which have, in turn, enabled efficient sending of proceeds from South Africa to Malawi. In Malawi, improvement in telecommunications, for example, cell phone network coverage was noticeable from 2000 onwards. Between the 1960s and the 1990s, both formal migrants and *selufu* migrants were using the Post Office (PO) and commercial banks to send money home. In the POs, they used telegrams to send money. The migrant deposited the money and in the process filled a deposit slip at the PO and details of the money deposited in form of a summarised message were transferred to the destination Post Office through telephone. A copy of the deposit slip was sent to the money receiver which he used as evidence that he or she was the rightful beneficiary. However, only limited amounts of cash could be sent using this service.⁵

Apart from that, and probably the most reliable means then, they used to open bank accounts with local banks through which they could send money.⁶ Anthony Chauma, who made several trips under both *Wenela* and *Theba*, had this to say on the sending of money through bank accounts:

When coming back home under each trip, I was buying ten cattle using money (proceeds) from my work in South Africa. In fact, my wife used to bank part of the money I used to send her. She used to keep her own book (i.e. banking details). That's how we used to assist each other, my wife and myself. There was no problem at all and all my children were educated using the same proceeds.⁷

An example here is the then popular and locally-available Post Office Savings Bank (P.O.S.B.).⁸ As for *Wenela* and *Theba* migrant workers, they were required to have an account with one of the banks because of the deferred payment system. At the end of the contract, they were accessing their money upon arrival in Malawi. On the deferred payment system, Joey Power argues that "...all contracted workers would have tax withheld at the source and had to agree to a system of deferred pay and compulsory family remittances. In this way, the participating governments ensured tax revenues, but also ensured that a certain portion of migrant wages would find its way back to the Malawi economy. In theory, this would make more funds available for domestic consumption and investment".⁹ One of the problems with

⁵ Interview with Anthony Chauma. Yakobe Ngwira Village. T.A. Kapingo Sibande. Mzimba. 26/08/2015. During the interview, Anthony made available some of the old Post Office Savings Bank documents which he used to withdraw money from his account.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ After the attainment of independence in Malawi in 1964, these banks were available in all the districts in Malawi, hence 'highly-accessible'.

⁹ Joey Power. *Political Culture and Nationalism in Malawi: Building the Kwacha*. (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2010). p. 26. Indeed, in practice effective use of the money from working in South Africa on investment would depend on the migrants' willingness to do so. This also applies to the new migration period:

the compulsory family remittances was that the remittance slip was given to the migrant worker to post to his nominee (beneficiary) at home in Malawi. But the worker was not sending the slip (i.e. was retaining it), and was only claiming payment by presenting the same slip upon repatriation in Malawi. This tended to paralyse the whole remittance system. The migrant workers were also making private communication to the beneficiaries of these remittances at their respective homes, that is, threatening them not to show up at the DCs Offices to get the remittances. As such, most nominees were scared and were, therefore, not claiming these remittances.¹⁰

Through the deferred payment system, both Malawi as a country and the labour migrants themselves benefitted from proceeds from South Africa. Ulrich Weyl uses the terms ‘national effects’ and ‘local effects’, respectively, to describe the impact of these remittances at both national and societal levels in Malawi. For instance, in the mid-1970s these remittances from South Africa to Malawi had grown to over MK20 million.¹¹ Scotch Mvula, a former *Wenela* and *Theba* migrant, also hailed this system:

The wages were good. There was free food and accommodation. Some money was being deducted and sent to our accounts domiciled in local banks back home. For instance, in 1989 I was given about R7,000. When we came home, we had money (*ndalama*) to get from the banks.¹²

Scotch used part of his proceeds to buy cattle, an ox-cart, and to open a bottle store business. Since he started this business while still working in the mines, he left it in the hands of his brother, as a manager. Unfortunately, his brother swindled the money and the business collapsed. This problem applies to the post-1990 period: most labour migrants have had their proceeds from South Africa misused by their relatives in Malawi while they are still working in South Africa. However, migrants hardly take culprits to task, for instance, having them arrested, because they are related. That is why these days labour migrants make efforts to keep such proceeds in form of money in the bank and only embark on a desired investment themselves upon return.

despite accumulating proceeds, some migrants hardly make sound investments, in line with their migration goals. For challenges on the deferred payment system, see MNA ESD/3/11/VII Deferred Pay Claims, Vol. VIII.

¹⁰ For details on such complications, see MNA LB 10/4/7 General Correspondence; Compulsory Family Remittance; MNA LB/10/4/5 Remittances: Compulsory and Voluntary Policy.

¹¹ Ulrich Weyl. *Labour Migration and Underdevelopment in Malawi: Late Nineteenth Century to Mid-1970s*. (Masvingo (Zimbabwe): Belmont Press, 1991). p. 58.

¹² Interview with Scotch Mvula. Thateya Mvula Village. T.A. Chindi. Mzimba. 14/01/2016.

In the 1990s money transfers through bank accounts were slow. But with the improvement in technology, banks have introduced swift money transfer services by which money is delivered instantly to the recipient's account. Swift money transfers fall under Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT). The latter is the electronic transfer of money from one bank account to another either within a single financial institution or across multiple institutions. Through EFT, money is transferred via computer-based systems without the direct intervention of bank staff. In addition to these bank services, labour migrants in South Africa also rely on foreign exchange bureaux to transfer money home. These are recognised money transfer dealers regulated by the respective governments, in this case, Malawi and South Africa. Examples of these foreign exchange bureaux are Western Union and Money-gram.¹³ Nowadays banks also have foreign exchange sections which specialise in foreign exchange transactions. These banks and formal money bureaux require clients to have official identification and, in the case of migrants working in South Africa, they are also supposed to have valid visas. Each money transaction through various banks in South Africa attracts a commission of around 20% of the amount sent while through the foreign exchange bureaux attracts a commission of between 10% and 15% (see table 7.1).¹⁴

¹³ See Daniel Tevera and Abel Chikanda. *Migrant Remittances and Household Survival in Zimbabwe*. (Cape Town: Idasa and SAMP, 2009). p. 3.

¹⁴ See Remittance Prices Worldwide. The World Bank. Sending Money from South Africa to Malawi. 2017. <http://remittanceprices.worldbank.org/en/corridor/South-africa/Malawi>.

Table 7.1: Sending Money from South Africa to Malawi (ZAR)

Firm	Payment Instrument	Access Point	Transfer Speed	Receiving Method	Fee	Total Cost %	Total Cost ZAR
Paisa	Cash	Agent	1 hour	Cash	65.24	8.24	112.89
Mukuru	Bank transfer	Call Centre	Same day	Bank transfer	137.00	10.83	148.37
Mukuru	Cash	Agent	1 hour	Cash	137.00	10.83	148.37
Money Gram	Cash	Agent	1 hour	Cash	140.38	12.08	165.50
Western Union	Cash	Agent	1 hour	Cash	152.04	13.64	186.87
Nedbank	Bank transfer	Bank Branch	3-5 days	Bank transfer	224.50	17.16	235.09
Standard Bank	Bank transfer	Bank Branch	2 days	Bank transfer	267.00	23.95	328.12
First National Bank	Bank transfer	Bank Branch	3-5 days	Bank transfer	280.00	25.04	343.05
ABSA	Bank transfer	Bank Branch	3-5 days	Bank transfer	300.00	27.33	374.42

(Source: Remittance Prices Worldwide: <http://remittanceprices.worldbank.org/en/corridor/South-Africa/Malawi>)

Labour migrants also rely on sending money through formal banks, despite the fact that they have a number of drawbacks. The first disadvantage is the high interest rates or money transfer charges. Most labour migrants complained of these charges. “The problem with sending money through the bank is that a significant proportion of the money sent is deducted in form of transfer charges. This greatly affects our business and investment plans”.¹⁵ The other problem is that a number of labour migrants working in South Africa either have fake work permits or do not have permits. Consequently, they cannot transact money at the banks without proper and formal identification. Thirdly, these banks are only located at the centre of the district, hence recipients in the rural areas in Malawi have to board lorries (*matola*) to and from the

¹⁵ Interview with Towera Nkhonjera. Diepsloot. Johannesburg. 30/10/2016. After her husband died in a car accident in Malawi, Towera came to South Africa to work in order to look after her three children. She used her proceeds from South Africa to buy cattle, built a house, and bought a plot of land for future construction. Her plans were to work a few years in South Africa and go back to her children. She was also making some savings with the bank in Malawi to support her during the aftermath of working in South Africa.

districts. This is a challenge because money is already a problem in the rural areas. In order to solve this problem, some banks introduced mobile banking services whereby they offer services in the major trading centres like Euthini in Mzimba and Chintheche in Nkhata-Bay, say, once or twice every week. This is a big relief to the rural masses. Because of the limited number of local bureaux in Nkhata-Bay (unlike in Mzimba District), the Tonga migrants from Nkhata-Bay rely on these banking services more than the Ngoni of Mzimba.

Apart from the formal banks and money bureaux such as Western Union and Money-gram, Mukuru is a money bureau that is popular amongst Malawian migrants working in South Africa. Mukuru is a Zimbabwean firm which also specialises in money transfer. In South Africa Mukuru partnered with Standard Bank and other big shops such as Shoprite, PEP, Pick and Pay, Checkers and Spar.¹⁶ This means Malawians easily send money under Mukuru through these agents which are found even in their residential locations. Money bureaux in South Africa only allow those people with a valid passport and proof of residence to send money through their facility. However, the other advantage with Mukuru is that it allows even people without valid passports to register with them. More than 50% of Malawians staying and working in South Africa have expired visas and this explains why they prefer sending money home through Mukuru.

Mukuru has additional comparable advantages over other money transfer facilities. According to Lingston Kapinda,¹⁷ “labour migrants prefer sending money through Mukuru because of lower interest rates, for example, Mukuru charges 10% interest while most local bureaux charge 20% on all the money sent”.¹⁸ Comparatively, “both Mukuru and local bureaux charge lower rates than bank to bank money transfer between Malawi and South Africa”.¹⁹ In Malawi, Mukuru partnered with commercial banks in the districts and Post Offices in the major trading centres in the countryside. Examples of these Mukuru outlets are New Building Society (NBS) Bank and Nedbank branches in the country and Post Offices like Euthini in T.A. Chindi in Mzimba District. With this arrangement, labour migrants send *ndalama* through Mukuru

¹⁶ Mukuru Money Transfer Facility. <https://malawi24.com>. For details on the origins of Mukuru, see Manuel Orozco and Anna Ferro. *Migrant Remittances*. (2008, 5: 4).

¹⁷ Lingston Kapinda is a Malawian migrant who has worked in South Africa close to fifteen years. He was focused on sending proceeds home through the most efficient and affordable means, hence his thorough knowledge about Mukuru, reliable transporters, and local bureaux in Malawi. He indicated that without scrutiny, labour migrants lose a lot of money through exorbitant interest rates and commissions.

¹⁸ Interview with Lingston Kapinda. Berea Location. Johannesburg. 3/11/ 2016.

¹⁹ Ibid.

facilities in South Africa, but in Malawi recipients receive *ndalama* through these designated outlets. This is because Mukuru does not yet have branches in Malawi. Recipients in Malawi receive a text message on their phone about details of the money transferred including a secret pin code (*nambala ya chisisi*) which they submit together with their Identity Card (ID) as part of proof and self-identification in order to get the money. Some labour migrants, however, complained about unforeseen delays in money transfers because of internet network problems.²⁰ That is partly the reason why more and more people rely on money transfers using local money bureaux.

As a result of the limitations associated with sending money through banks and formal bureaux, local people have come up with their own version of money bureaux. Apart from the fact that these bureaux operate informally, they are even found in the rural areas, hence highly accessible to labour migrants and their relatives. These local bureaux (*mabyuro*) also do not require migrants to produce documentation such as passports, valid visas or valid work permits when sending money from South Africa. Wilson Banda explained the operation of *mabyuro*:

In South Africa a migrant gives money in Rands to the agent (i.e. bureau owner), then this agent communicates, using a phone, to the other agent here (i.e. in Malawi) and instructs him or her to give the recipient (labour migrant's wife or relative) the equivalent money in Malawi Kwacha. In this process, the money is collected here at home instantly.²¹

Davison Chakwira highlights the advantage of these local bureaux.

In the past, things were a bit difficult; it was not easy to send money. These days it's not difficult at all. There are *mabyuro* which greatly facilitate money transfer. The money sent through these bureaux is instantly delivered. For instance, during funerals, migrants in South Africa send us money through the bureau and we instantly use the money, for example, in buying coffins. This is one example of the benefits of working in South Africa.²²

Davison Chakwira pointed out that there are a number of money bureaux in his village, Tadeyo Chakwira, in T.A. Kampingo Sibande in Mzimba District. "Once the money (*ndalama*) is sent from South Africa, the bureau operator calls you to go and get the money either the same day or, if it is a bit late, early in the morning the next day".²³ Through these money bureaux, migrants easily send money to their relatives for household use and also for investment. For

²⁰ Internet in Malawi is generally unreliable (i.e. on and off) and this affects the quality of the services that rely on it. However, Mukuru is, reportedly, very efficient in countries like South Africa where internet connectivity is relatively better.

²¹ Interview with Wilson Banda. Londobala Bota Village. T.A. Kampingo Sibande. Mzimba. 25/08/2015. Wilson is a non-migrant based in Londobala Bota Village in Mzimba District. However, most of his friends emigrated to South Africa for wage employment. Some of them returned and invested their proceeds in various businesses including the local bureaux in question.

²² Interview with Davison Chakwira. Tadeyo Chakwira Village. T.A. Kampingo Sibande. Mzimba. 27/08/2015.

²³ Interview with Davison Chakwira. Op. Cit.

instance, Joyce Wanda²⁴ from Mzondi Ndhlovu Village in Mzimba District built a big, iron-roofed house using money (*ndalama*) sent by her husband working in South Africa.

Tobias Chirwa²⁵ is a businessman who operates a number of businesses in Mzimba District. For instance, in addition to selling groceries and operating a lodge, he also runs a bureau in his home area. “I operate a bureau whereby people in South Africa send money to me and I distribute to their relatives. There is also Mr. Charles Sakala, who was operating a bureau, but has now started operating as a transporter”.²⁶ Although Tobias Chirwa has not worked in South Africa himself, it was his brothers working in South Africa who requested him to start a money bureau, which he has operated for six years:

My brothers in South Africa wanted an easy way of sending *ndalama* (money) and some goods home. So I was interested to be the agent – receiving money and goods and then distributing to owners. I have done this for a long time, but the best business for me is operating a shop. As an agent, there are many challenges that come to the fore: money gets lost and that can cause conflicts. The owners may think I have stolen, and in such cases, I use my own money to replace the lost cash.²⁷

Tobias Chirwa here is explaining the initial version of a local bureau where the owners were working hand in hand with transporters: the latter bring *ndalama* and *katundu* from South Africa and, upon arrival at home, they hand over everything to this bureau operator, who either personally delivers *ndalama* and *katundu* to the respective owners (i.e. door-step delivery) or invites the owners to collect their stuff from his bureau. In this case, Tobias was indeed working as an agent and convenience on the part of recipients was that they were collecting money right in their village instead of going to the banks located at Mzimba *boma*. However, in terms of time, service delivery was not very fast since it depended on the speed of the transporters. Because of the long chain involved, that is, the sender-the transporter-the bureau agent-the recipient, it is not surprising that the arrangement was full of complications such as money and *katundu* getting lost along the way.

²⁴ Joyce Wanda is wife to Orton Ndhlovu, a labour migrant working in South Africa. Mr. Ndhlovu last came home in 2010, when he brought money to start the house-building project. Between 2010 and 2015 he was merely sending money to his wife until the project was completed, thanks to the improved technology which brought about easy money transfer.

²⁵ Tobias Chirwa is from Kacherenga Village in Tchiri area, T.A. Kampingo Sibande in Mzimba District. He was born in 1975. He has never worked in South Africa because he believes ‘it’s a waste of time’. After dropping out of school, he ventured into various businesses e.g. selling second hand clothes (*kaunjika*) and, later on, groceries. The latter proved profitable: he used profits to build two houses and a lodge at Mzimba *boma*.

²⁶ Interview with Tobias Chirwa. Euthini Trading Centre. T.A. Chindi. Mzimba. 12/01/2016.

²⁷ Ibid.

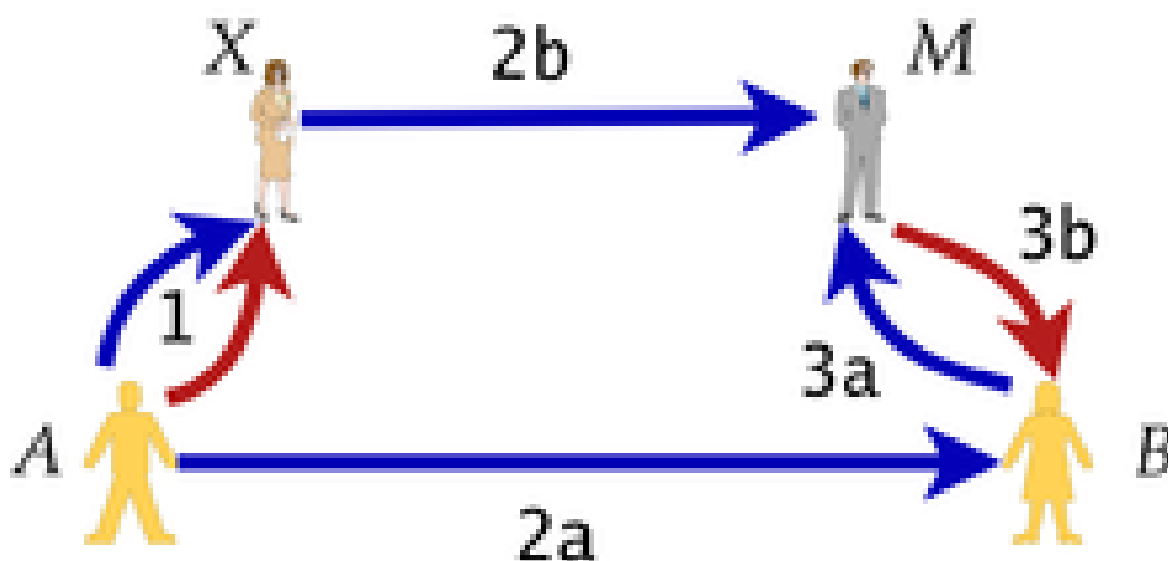
However, there have been changes and improvements in the operationalisation of money bureaux over the past years. Since the early 2000s, the money to be delivered home is not carried by the transporters. Rather the owner of the bureau is based in South Africa and there is, still, an agent back home. So the sender delivers *ndalama* to the bureau owner in South Africa, upon which he (the bureau operator) instructs his agent in Malawi to give out an equivalent amount in Malawi Kwacha to the recipient. This arrangement heavily relies on the use of cell phones to deliver the details of a particular transaction. In both scenarios, the owner of the bureau gets a commission as his profit for facilitating the transaction. The clear advantage with this improved arrangement is that *ndalama* is delivered on the spot i.e. within the same day, ideally once the money transaction message has been delivered back home.

This informal way of sending money through *mabyuro* is similar to the *hawala* system, which is part of the Informal Funds Transfer (IFT) systems, and is used mainly in the Middle East and South Asia.²⁸ *Hawala* is an informal system through which money is transferred from one area to another, either within or across countries, using service providers known as *hawaladars*.²⁹ The *hawala* system has been in operation since the eighth century, but was eventually replaced by elements of the formal banking system in the twentieth century. The following illustration explains how the *hawala* system works:

²⁸ Mohammed El Qorchi, Samuel Munzele Maimbo and John F. Wilson. "Informal Funds Transfer Systems: An Analysis of the Informal *Hawala* System". A Joint IMF-World Bank Paper. International Monetary Fund. Washington DC. 2003. p. 1.

²⁹ David C. Faith. "The *Hawala* System". *Global Security Studies*. (2011, 2: 1).

Illustration 7.1: How *Hawala* System Works



(Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hawala.png>)

Note: A customer A (left-hand side) approaches a *hawala* broker X in one city and gives a sum of money (red arrow) that is to be transferred to recipient B (right-hand side) in another, usually foreign, city. Along with the money, he usually specifies something like a password that will lead to the money being paid out (blue arrows). 2b the *hawala* broker calls another *hawala* broker M in the recipient's city, and informs M about the agreed password (or gives other disposition of the funds). Then the intended recipient B, who has also been informed by A about the password (2a), now approaches M and tells him the agreed password (3a). If the password is correct, then M releases the transferred sum to B (3b), usually minus a small commission. X now basically owes M the money that M had paid out to B; thus M has to trust X's promise to settle the debt at a later date.³⁰

There are many local bureaux in Mzimba than in Nkhata-Bay District to distribute remittances. This also shows or proves the difference in terms of the entrenchment of labour migration between the two districts. Since there are many labour migrants from Mzimba than from Nkhata-Bay, it follows that operating bureaux would be profitable in Mzimba but not really in Nkhatabay. In the latter, these bureaux have flourished right within the labour migration villages in the three study areas (i.e. T.A.s M'mbelwa, Chindi and Kampingo Sibande).

³⁰ The *Hawala* System. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/hawala>.

In the past, for example, between the early 1990s and the mid-2000s, there was a proliferation of telephone bureaux in the labour migration districts, which facilitated easy communication between labour migrants in South Africa and their relatives in Malawi. This was the period when cell phone network was just being introduced and was still restricted to urban areas. A good number of labour migrants invested in such bureaux and made profits out of them. One reputable bureau at Mzimba *boma* in the 1990s was Dosma Communications Bureau.³¹ Through such bureaux, migrants in South Africa informed their relatives about *ndalama* sent home either through transporters or banks. They also gave details as to how the money sent should be utilised. These telephone bureaux were, therefore, a faster way of delivering messages both to and from South Africa. The telephone bureaux rapidly replaced the system of sending messages between Malawi and South Africa using letters through the Post Offices.

However, with the spread of cell phone network coverage into the rural areas and the introduction of cheaper cell phones, telephone bureaux collapsed. Telephone bureaux phased out between 2005 and 2010 with the influx of cheap phones from China. This was as a result of the Chinese opening shops selling cheap merchandise even in the districts like Mzimba, Nkhata-Bay and Rumphu. Around 2000 ordinary phones were selling at an average price of K25,000 (R500). Consequently, people in the rural areas could hardly buy them. In fact, there was a tendency of people getting loans to buy cell phones. But these Chinese shops started selling them between K5,000 and K10,000 (around R150), hence making them easily accessible even to the rural masses. Consequently, labour migrants were able to buy cheap phones and distribute amongst their relatives at home.

In addition, cheap, second-hand phones were amongst the goods sent home by labour migrants. Labour migrants have a tendency of selling part of the goods brought home in order to realise money with which to go back to South Africa to resume work. When selling these goods, they do not consider the actual value of a particular item. For instance, a cell phone whose price is K12,000 (R250) would be sold at K6,000 (R125). Through this, people in the labour migration areas easily bought cell phones, especially with the spread of network coverage to Malawi's countryside between 2005 and 2010. Labour migration areas are popular for the sale of cheap, second-hand South African products like cell phones, televisions, refrigerators, mountain

³¹ Dosma Communications Bureau was, reportedly, owned by a Malawian labour migrant working in South Africa. This bureau provided reliable and affordable services to a cross-section of people at Mzimba *boma*, and the clientele here included labour migrants working in South Africa.

bikes, cookers, musical equipment, sewing machines, etc. These items are sold cheaply because the migrants or their relatives want quick money with which to sort out a pressing family matter, for example buying fertiliser.³²

These cheaper phones made the problem of communication a thing of the past. Husbands and wives, staying apart, were, and still are, able to discuss business and investment ideas and plans through phones. A combination of cell phones, local transporters, improved banking services and the proliferation of money bureaux in the rural areas have made efficient and effective use of proceeds from South Africa more possible than was the situation in the pre-2000s. The fact that the above services are more widespread in Mzimba than in Nkhata-Bay may help to explain why Mzimba takes the lead not only in the number of labour migrants, but also in the resultant development initiatives at household, societal and district levels.

Apart from the use of *mabyuro* under informal remittance channels, labour migrants rely on the use of transporters, friends or colleagues returning home. In certain cases, especially during annual holidays, these labour migrants personally take these remittances home. However, if the reason of going to Malawi is merely to transport these remittances, then this option proves to be very expensive. Zimbabweans residing in South Africa visit their country on a regular basis because of its border location with South Africa and, consequently, for them personal transfer of cash and goods is one of the important means of sending remittances.³³

On the contrary, Malawians tend to overstay in South Africa partly because of the great distance to Malawi. Hence with their illegal status, it is difficult for these Malawians to personally carry a lot of *katundu* and money since much of it is lost through bribing border police, immigration and custom officials. This is one of the reasons Malawians working in South Africa continuously use local transporters: "Since the police and all other security personnel know that we stay illegally in South Africa, they always make efforts to get part of our remittances through bribes. Consequently, we use transporters to send remittances to Malawi. These transporters are frequent travellers and usually do not have expired visas".³⁴

³² For details on this, see Jens A. Andersson. "Informal Migration and Trade in Northern Malawi: Why A Nokia 3310 is Cheaper in Mzimba than in Johannesburg". Paper presented at the History Seminar. Chancellor College. University of Malawi. Zomba. November 2005.

³³ Wade Pendleton, Jonathan Crush, Eugene Campbell, Thuso Green, Hamilton Simelane, Daniel Tevera and Fion de Vletter. *Migration, Remittances and Development in Southern Africa*. p. 5.

³⁴ Interview with Davison Chakwira. Op. Cit.

Before the proliferation of the money bureaux in the 1990s, migrants working in South Africa were relying on the services of local transporters to carry goods and money back home. However, because custom duty for clearing goods was unpredictable, most of them ended up using part of the migrants' money to clear these goods.³⁵ This was a bone of contention between the senders and the transporters.³⁶ During the post-1990s, there is a tendency for migrants to send more money and less goods home. This development follows the realisation that upon entry in Malawi, migrants are required to pay a lot of money as part of customs clearance. Hence the preference to send money with which to embark on various businesses and to buy items while in Malawi. However, for migrants who acquire these items through gifts or clearance sale from their employers, they have no option but to send them home usually through transporters.

The transporters' failure to deliver money and goods greatly affected the labour migrants' business and development initiatives in Malawi. With the coming of the money bureaux, transporters concentrate on transporting goods and people between Malawi and South Africa. However, there are some transporters who have adequate capital and are, therefore, reliable: these are still engaged to transport cash home. Moreover, in some villages, money bureaux are not there, hence these transporters are still used in the post-2000 period in favour of sending money through banks, which are only found at the district centre. Even after the introduction of *mabyuro*, labour migrants still rely on the services of local transporters to carry goods and money from South Africa to Malawi as well as labour migrants and local medicine (*mankhwala*)³⁷ on the return trip. Davison Chakwira sheds light on the continued reliability of some transporters despite the fact that some transporters leave a lot to be desired:

As for *katundu*, they send transporters, although there are some transporters who are thieves. For instance, one of my sons sent goods using these transporters and up to now the goods have not been delivered at home. But there are some established, long-time transporters, who are very reliable. Once the goods are sent in South Africa, they are delivered home intact.³⁸

3. Role of Remittances in Development

The previous section discussed how proceeds from South Africa, in cash or kind, are remitted to the migrants' homes. This section furthers this discussion by examining how the labour

³⁵ In the past, labour migrants used to buy relatively expensive items, for example, bicycles and radios. For details, see Robert Boeder. *Malawians Abroad: The History of Labour Emigration from Malawi to its Neighbours, 1980 to the Present*. (Ann Arbor, East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1974). p. 244.

³⁶ Most transporters lost clients as a result of this 'crookedness' and their businesses eventually collapsed.

³⁷ See chapter six for details on local medicine.

³⁸ Interview with Davison Chakwira. Op. Cit.

migrants (upon return) and their relatives use these remittances. Part of the debate is on the developmental impact of remittances in the source areas, in this case in Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay. Specifically, this debate zeroes in on whether this impact is positive or negative and also whether these remittances are put to their intended use.

Scholars who regard labour migration as having a positive impact on development of the source areas emphasise the role of remittances in poverty alleviation in developing countries. They also indicate that remittances help to stabilise irregular incomes of the migration households, in the transfer of skills and in the form of stimulus to business activity. In other words, members of the migration households are generally better off financially when compared with their counterparts from the non-migration households. The positive impact of remittances is also traced at national level within the recipient countries. For instance, in Malawi in the 1970s, Ulrich Weyl maintains, “these remittances to Malawi had grown to over K20 million” and, in so doing, had “exceeded the value of every agricultural export except for tobacco”.³⁹ Robert Boeder concurs with Weyl and states that in 1972 “an estimated K10 million was earned from deferred pay, family remittances and other migrant-connected expenditures in Malawi”.⁴⁰ Even at national level, these remittances had a stabilising effect on the country’s economy, albeit on a short-term basis.

Michelle Hay examines the impact of remittances in the source areas by tracing the improvement in the financial and material conditions of individuals, and the households from which they come, over time. She indicates that remittances could “make a difference between poverty and insecurity and a modicum of comfort and personal pride”.⁴¹ As a result of the remittances from their husbands, Michelle shows, lives of women from these migrant households could sometimes radically change over time:

Beyond a certain level of structural social stratification, a single household’s material circumstances could change over the years or even over one year. A woman wearing a sack and eating grass one year could be wearing fine clothes and eating ‘*sima*’ (maize meal thick porridge) and meat another, as rural women’s life histories make abundantly clear.⁴²

³⁹ Ulrich Weyl, *Labour Migration and Underdevelopment in Malawi*. p. 56.

⁴⁰ Robert Boeder, *Malawians Abroad*. p. 240.

⁴¹ Michelle Hay, “Surviving Drought: Migrancy and the Homestead Economy”. In Peter Delius, Laura Phillips and Fiona Rankin-Smith (eds.), *A Long Way Home: Migrant Worker Worlds, 1800-2014*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2014). p. 145.

⁴² Ibid. p. 146.

The above scenario reflects the dominant stories of migrant households in Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay over the years, especially during the post-1990 period.⁴³ The remittances from (informal) work in South Africa are used in various ways such as to buy farm input (for example, fertiliser), to start small-scale businesses; and to invest them in various construction projects. The latter are largely masterminded by migrants' wives or relatives since the migrants are still working in South Africa. However, other scholars focus on the negative impact of these remittances by citing some of the following reasons:

First, there is the difficulty of converting remittances into sustainable productive capacity. Second, remittance income is rarely used for productive purposes, but for direct consumption; very little is directed to income-earning and job-creating investment. Finally, remittances increase inequality, encourage import consumption and create dependency.⁴⁴

In southern Africa, the SAMP conducted a series of surveys in a number of countries under the Migration and Remittances Survey (MARS) and these surveys showed how these remittances are used. For instance, migrant-sending households spend a greater proportion of cash remittances on food. This is in line with the above view that remittances are largely used on consumption-spending and not on productive investments. In fact, “food and groceries are the most important expenditure (93% of the households purchased food), followed by transportation (44%), fuel (44%), utilities (38%), education (31%) and medical expenses (30%)”.⁴⁵

A similar picture obtains in the two study districts during the post-1990 period. During the latter, labour migrants make efforts to stay in South Africa for as brief periods as possible and thereafter return home. During their years of working in South Africa they accumulate proceeds (in cash and kind), send these home with which they personally embark on a number of investments. Burnett Kadaleka, a teacher at Manyamula Community Day Secondary School (CDSS), indicated that labour migrants have drawn lessons from migrants who worked in South Africa under *Wenela* and *Theba* between the 1960s and the late 1980s.⁴⁶ Despite years of working in South Africa, these labour migrants became poor following their retirement. Consequently, new labour migrants in the post-1990 period are development-conscious and

⁴³ Migrants in both districts indicated that they use remittances to solve the material and financial challenges within their households.

⁴⁴ Wade Pendleton, Jonathan Crush, Eugene Campbell, Thuso Green, Hamilton Simelane, Daniel Tevera and Fion de Vletter. *Migration, Remittances and Development in Southern Africa*. p. 1. See also Niklaus Steiner. *International Migration and Citizenship Today*. (London: Routledge, 2009). pp. 51-53.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 6.

⁴⁶ Interview with Burnett Kadaleka. Manyamula C.D.S.S. Manyamula. T.A. M'mbelwa. Mzimba. 24/03/2016.

this is proven by the resultant development initiatives in the source areas: they invest in grocery shops, maize mills, houses for rent and rest houses.

Burnett gave an example of a young man who in a period of five years built two imposing rest houses at Manyamula Trading Centre in Mzimba District. The owner, a young man from the area, was compelled to convert one of the two rest houses into a boys' hostel for Manyamula Community Day Secondary School. He, himself, is a product of the school and showing appreciation of the accommodation hardships at the school, he made available the block for occupation by the male students. The arrangement was that each student was expected to pay a modest amount for a bed in the hostel. He called this gesture 'my humble contribution to my former school' (see photograph 7.1 below).

In the pre-1990 period, formal and *selufu* migrants regarded working in South Africa as a form of occupation. They thus worked in South Africa until they attained old age and thereafter returned home upon retirement.⁴⁷ A good example are old *selufu* migrants who were working as cooks and gardeners under (white) employers in South Africa in the period up to the late 1980s. Some worked for twenty or thirty years before returning back home. Oral evidence has it that some of these migrant workers were being requested by their employers to find their replacement before they could be released. Usually such workers brought in, and oriented, their sons or nephews to take up their jobs upon retiring.

These old *selufu* migrants usually spent their remittances on foodstuffs and consumer goods such as maize flour, salt, sugar, bicycles, radios and chairs. That is why they easily drifted back into poverty upon retiring. Consequently, they were compelled to continue working in South Africa during the post-1990 period. Orton Ndhlovu is one of these *selufu* migrants who has been working in South Africa since the 1970s. His wife, Joyce Wanda, indicated that despite working in South Africa all these years, her husband only managed to build a big iron-roofed house between 2010 and 2015. In fact, it is Joyce who built this house using her husband's proceeds from South Africa. Joyce has never gone to South Africa, herself, arguing "I take care of the children and the entire household".⁴⁸ During the oral interviews in 2016 she did not

⁴⁷ For details on the nature of migration during the pre-1990 period, see chapters two, three and five.

⁴⁸ Interview with Joyce Wanda. Mzondi Ndhlovu Village. T.A. Kampingo Sibande. Mzimba. 26/08/2015.

sound anxious to go and visit her husband, saying “as long as my husband sends money for our upkeep and the children’s education, I am okay with the arrangement”.⁴⁹

Hein de Haas in his work titled “International Migration, Remittances and Development: Myths and Facts” discusses a number of myths about international migration as it relates to development, especially in the source areas. However, several of these ‘myths and facts’ are on the migration of skilled personnel, for instance, that migration provokes *brain drain*⁵⁰ which, in turn, affects development in the source areas. Nonetheless, one of the migration myths he discusses is that “the money migrants remit to sending countries is mainly spent on conspicuous consumption and non-productive investments”.⁵¹

Migration and remittances are, therefore, thought to lead to a passive and dangerous dependency on remittances. The dominant perception since the 1970s has been that remittances are spent mainly on feasts, cars, clothes and imported consumer goods, while investment in productive enterprises are rare. As a consequence of a massive departure of young and supposedly successful and entrepreneurial men and the concomitant dependency on remittances, people living in migrant-sending areas are said to be inclined to withdraw from the local economic activities. The lost labour effect is generally supposed to have a negative impact on local production. For instance, migration is typically blamed for causing a critical shortage of agricultural labour, depriving areas of their most valuable, able-bodied workforce. Consequently, this lost labour effect is blamed for the de-intensification of agriculture and the decline of land under cultivation.⁵²

However, Hein de Haas counter-argues that there is increasing evidence that this pessimistic view is founded on a rather poor empirical and analytical basis. He further argues that more recent empirical work from Latin American, Asian and African countries suggests that remittances potentially enable migrants and their family members to invest in agriculture and other private enterprises.⁵³ “International migrant households often tend to have a higher propensity to invest than do non-migrant households”.⁵⁴ This seems to be true for the situation that obtains in labour migration areas in northern Malawi. Although there are still cases of lack of sound and effective use of remittances by some migrant households, the majority

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Labour migration specialists have argued that emigration of professionals leads to loss of skilled man-power, hence *brain drain*. This, in turn, leads to brain gain in the labour-receiving countries. However, nowadays the focus is on brain circulation i.e. arguing that both labour-sending countries and labour-receiving countries stand to benefit from this kind of labour migration.

⁵¹ Hein de Haas. “International Migration, Remittances and Development: Myths and Facts”. *Third World Quarterly*. (2005, 26: 8). p. 1274.

⁵² Ibid. p. 1274. For details on remittances and dependency, see Niklaus Steiner. *International Migration and Citizenship Today*. p. 53.

⁵³ For details, see, for example, M. Lipton. “Migration from the Rural Areas of Poor countries: The Impact on Rural Productivity and Income Distribution”. *World Development*. (1980, 8). pp. 1-24; H. Rubenstein. “Migration, Development and Remittances in Rural Mexico”. *International Migration*. (1992, 30: 2). pp. 127-154; and J.E. Taylor. “The New Economics of Labour Migration and the Role of Remittances in the Migration Process”. *International Migration*. (1999, 37: 1). pp. 63-88.

⁵⁴ Hein de Haas. “International Migration, Remittances and Development”. p. 1274.

increasingly seem to have the zeal to invest in somewhat long-lasting investments and business ventures, as the ensuing sections show. However, suffice to mention that the levels of investments tend to vary between the two study districts and this has been highlighted by the comparative dimension and approach adopted in this chapter.

Evidence shows that labour migration from northern Malawi to South Africa has metamorphosed over the years: both formal labour migrants (under *Wenela* and *Theba*) and *selufu* migrants during the old period tended to stay longer in South Africa. This was done in order to maximise proceeds. For formal labour migrants, this meant signing a number of two-year contracts under *Wenela* or *Theba* (or both). As for *selufu* migrants, this meant staying endlessly in South Africa either under one employer or changing employers with a view to secure a better-paying job at the end of the day. This was done in line with the *Chitumbuka* saying '*kamsonkhomsonkho ndiyo wakupalura thumba*' (putting together bits and pieces eventually makes the empty bag full), that is, pooling proceeds either from several years' work or from different jobs actually made the labour migrants satisfied, having achieved their migration goal. However, from the early 1990s onwards, the trend changed: labour migrants were generally in favour of staying for relatively shorter periods before returning back home.⁵⁵ This was partly a response to, and a solution of, the numerous problems that migrants faced within their households⁵⁶ and in South Africa.⁵⁷ At home, they start different types of businesses and these become steady sources of income during the aftermath of labour migration.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ This is an instance of notable changing patterns and trends over time.

⁵⁶ These migrants and their wives faced challenges of staying apart for extended periods. Most migrants preferred their wives to remain at home and oversee the upbringing of their children.

⁵⁷ For details on challenges faced while staying in South Africa, see chapter five.

⁵⁸ Oral evidence, however, shows that this is more pronounced or entrenched in Mzimba District as compared to Nkhata-Bay District.



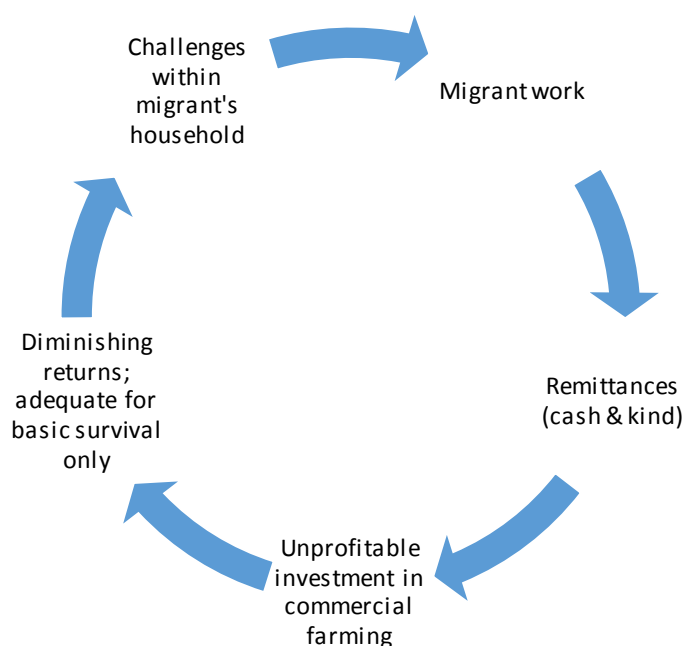
Photograph 7.1: A Rest House block at Manyamula Trading Centre in T.A. M'mbelwa in Mzimba District owned by a young labour migrant working in South Africa. This is actually wing two as part of expansion in line with the ever-increasing demand for Guest Houses at Manyamula.⁵⁹

Malawi has an agro-based economy and relies on tobacco as the main foreign exchange earner. However, following the anti-tobacco campaigns world-wide and the resultant slump in tobacco prices on the international market, Malawi's economy tumbled for the worst. Following this, the cost of living in Malawi actually skyrocketed. This also partly explains why there was an increase in the influx of labour migrants from Malawi to South Africa after the 1990s. With the increase in the cost of living, the prices of consumer goods went up. As a result, it was difficult for Malawians, including migrants in South Africa, to use their income on investments. They were merely using this income for basic survival. The other result of the slump in tobacco prices is that Malawians have generally failed to diversify cash crop production.⁶⁰ Migrant households continue to invest remittances in tobacco farming and, in turn, continue to get diminishing returns. The latter are, in themselves, not enough to be re-invested in other commercial, profit-making ventures (see illustration 7.2: vicious cycle).

⁵⁹ Interview with Burnett Kadaleka. Op. Cit.

⁶⁰ This is a result of the entrenched mindset that tobacco is the most lucrative of all the cash crops in Malawi. Efforts by the Malawi government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to influence farmers to start growing alternative cash crops have not yielded positive results so far.

Illustration 7.2: Vicious Cycle of Remittance Usage in Commercial Agriculture



In rural Malawi, there is a general lack of income-earning opportunities partly because of the increasing prices of fertiliser against a background of declining soil fertility. As a result, people do not have surplus yield for sale. In addition, the farm produce is bought cheaply by the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC), a body entrusted by the government to oversee the buying and selling of farm input and farm produce.⁶¹ Consequently, many households rely on borrowing money from friends and relatives in times of the lack of the remittances from migrant workers.⁶² In this case, once received, migrant households use part of these remittances to settle these debts, albeit with interest rates as high as 50% to 100%. After settling these debts, the borrowers are short of money than previously and hence are compelled to borrow again.⁶³ Consequently, they are trapped in the vicious cycle of perpetual borrowing. Such a scenario prevents migrant households to invest remittances in commercial ventures.

⁶¹ ADMARC was very effective in carrying out its operations between 1964 and 1994 in Malawi. However, from 1994 onwards it has been abused by the successive democratically elected governments to the extent that it usually fails to buy farm produce from farmers at good market prices.

⁶² Wade Pendleton et. al. *Remittances and Development in Southern Africa*. p. 36.

⁶³ This debt-bondage cycle is typical of *katapila* in Malawi and *sekoloto* in South Africa. *Katapila* is a loan system where borrowers pay back loans with either 50 or 100 per cent interest. For details on *sekoloto* and informal money lending as practiced by the *mashonis*, see Deborah James and Dinah Rajak. "Debt or Savings? Of Migrants, Mines and Money". In Peter Delius, Laura Philips and Fiona Rankin-Smith (eds.). *A Long Way Home: Migrant Worker Worlds, 1800-2014*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2014). p. 248.

Songs are a common feature in labour migration not only in the study districts, but in Malawi, in general. These songs depict the conviction by the societal members that emigrating and working in South Africa is a source of wealth. Women sung songs during festivities and when carrying routine tasks such as pounding maize sessions and the intention was to encourage their husbands to emigrate for wage employment not only to South Africa, but also to Zimbabwe and Zambia for wage employment. Men who were not involved in emigration were viewed as cowards and lazy. In the same vein, analysing folktales from southern Mozambique, Patrick Harries argues that “men who did not leave home and spend a period of time as migrant labourers were considered boys, ‘hens’ or ‘mamaparas’ and received the scorn of women.”⁶⁴ The following is an example of the songs sung by women in the migration areas in northern Malawi:

*Wanalume awa mbauwo
m'malo mwakuya ku Joni
suti nkhaiwonenkhu ine
ndowo nkhaiwonenkhu ine
bedi nkhalirawire kuchipatala
aaa ine nathamba!*

(These men are useless.
They are just loitering around
instead of going to South Africa
Where can I get the suit?
Where can I get the pail?
Should I sleep on the bed
only when I am at the hospital?
Aaa I am frustrated!)

⁶⁵

This song shows clearly that emigration is what every woman hopes her husband should consider if they are to find basic necessities at household level.

4. Comparison of Proceeds from South Africa Over Time

This section compares proceeds accrued from South Africa by the labour migrants from different angles: between formal migration and *selufu* during the pre-1990 period; and between labour migration from Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts over time. Most informants were of the view that labour migration during the post-1990 period is generally more profitable than migration during the pre-1990 period. That is why development (*chitukuko*) is more pronounced in the labour migration areas during the post-1994 period. However, labour

⁶⁴ Cited in Michelle Hay. “Surviving Drought”. p. 153.

⁶⁵ Linda D. Harawa. “The Impact of Migration on the Socio-Economic Development of Mzimba District: A Case Study of Bulala”. B.Ed Dissertation. Humanities Department. University of Livingstonia. Rumphi. Malawi. 2009. p. 15. See also Robert Boeder. *Malawians Abroad*. pp. 202-204.

migration during the post-1994 period is marred by numerous challenges which impede the fulfilment of labour migrants' goals.⁶⁶

During the pre-1990 period, the study compares proceeds between formal migration and *selufu*, and between *Wenela* and *Theba* among the formal labour migrants. Most former migrants (ex-migrants) were of the view that they got more proceeds from working under *Theba* (i.e. they were getting higher wages) unlike under *Wenela*. This was a result of the increase in wages by *Theba* over time (see table 7.2 below). This view was echoed by Edington Ng'oma, a former migrant who worked in the South African mines under *Wenela*: "When I look back, I realise that under *Wenela* we used to get less money as compared to our friends who went there under *Theba*. At least our friends got more money later on".⁶⁷ This is not surprising because *Theba*'s recruitment operations coincided with the agitation for increased wages in the mines by the South African nationals in the 1970s and 1980s. South Africans managed to influence the Chamber of Mines to increase wages and this paved way for the entry of more South Africans into the mining sector, in the process displacing some foreign workers. As a result of this, coupled with mechanisation, the recruitment quota of *Theba* in countries like Malawi was significantly reduced. Consequently, although *Theba* offered higher wages than *Wenela*, before it, fewer Malawians benefitted from these wages.⁶⁸

Table 7.2: 1980 TEBA Wage Review

	Surface	Underground
Category 1	R34.62	R46.15
Category 2	R38.32	R52.44
Category 3	R45.48	R59.52
Category 4	R54.24	R67.68
Category 5	R64.56	R79.20
Category 6	R77.52	R92.64
Category 7	R91.98	R108.36
Category 8	R116.04	R137.16

Source: MNA 172/TEBA/1/3/4 Agreement, January 1976-March 1983. The new rates of pay, paid fortnightly, imply that at this time *Theba* was paying higher wages as compared to *Wenela* before it. This view was corroborated by former migrants, especially those who had worked under both *Wenela* and *Theba*.

⁶⁶ The details on these challenges have been examined in chapter five.

⁶⁷ Interview with Edington Ng'oma. Ngombo Village. T.A. Malanda. Nkhata-Bay. 29/08/2015.

⁶⁸ For details on mechanisation and internalisation or localisation, see chapter two.

But, in general, labour migrants during the post-1994 period get more proceeds than from *Wenela* and *Theba* combined.⁶⁹ It is because of this scenario that most labour migration areas (i.e. households and communities) are better developed during the post-1994 period.⁷⁰ This development is also facilitated by the improvement in technology (highlighted earlier in the chapter). In this connection, Ephraim Soko was of the view that the new *selufu* migrants (of post-1994 period) are better-off than the old labour migrants.

These days labour migrants get more money because when you leave home, you have needs you want to fulfil. You can't go to South Africa and not put your money to good use. For instance, I am speaking from experience. My son of this house (pointing at a house nearby) started going to South Africa in 1993 up to now: he is not supposed to be staying in such a dilapidated house! When he went home, he was shocked to see his friends progressing there. When he came back, he actually admitted: 'Ah, grand father, I have to admit, I don't know why I went to Johannesburg, South Africa.'⁷¹

Ephraim Soko indicated that his friend built a good house with two satellite dishes on top; solar-powered electricity, etc. "That's why my stand is that, with seriousness, there is money in South Africa", Soko concluded. Indeed, not all migrants who work in South Africa make it and this is a result of a number of problems in addition to lack of seriousness.⁷² During new *selufu* there are various income-earning opportunities e.g. *maganyu*⁷³ in South Africa and, as a result, more and more people are benefitting.

⁶⁹ This view was advanced by former *Wenela/ Theba* migrants and *selufu* migrants in the two study districts. However, these informants did not present figures partly because of the informal nature of *selufu*.

⁷⁰ Informants maintained that, comparatively, there are more indicators of development nowadays than in the past, for instance, good houses, better yields from fields due to ability to buy enough fertiliser, establishment of small-scale businesses e.g. grocery shops which steadily grow with time, and, in the case of the Tonga migrants from Nkhata-Bay, the steady growth of the fishing industry.

⁷¹ Interview with Ephraim Soko. Kapekenya Village. T.A. Malanda. Nkhata-Bay. 29/08/2015. Ephraim Soko, who worked in South Africa under *Wenela* and *Theba* in the 1970s and 1980s, is based in Nkhata-Bay, but is originally from Mzimba district. In this account, he is explaining about his son who is failing to make ends meet despite working in South Africa. At the time of the interview in Chipayika area (Nkhata-Bay), the son in question was still in South Africa.

⁷² These problems have been examined at length in chapter five.

⁷³ Most migrants maximise wages by working for a number of employers in a week; hence preference for *maganyu* over one long-term job under one employer. See details in chapter five.



Photograph 7.2: A former labour migrant (*selufu* migrant) next to his grass-thatched house in Sanga area, T.A. Mankhambira in Nkhata-Bay. Not all labour migrants and former migrants manage to build iron-roofed houses upon return from South Africa. For some this is a result of either failure to secure stable and better-paying jobs in South Africa or instability there-in due to frequent arrests and deportations (photo by Douglas Nyirenda, Research Assistant, Nkhata-Bay).

On comparing proceeds from the two periods, Albert Ndhlovu argued that the benefits accrued during the pre-1990 period outweigh those during the post-1990 period:

The money in South Africa (i.e. the Rand) was stronger than the Malawi Kwacha; hence we used to buy cheaper commodities in South Africa.⁷⁴ Using this money, we used to do a lot of things back home, for example, building houses, rearing livestock, and organising weddings for ourselves and our children. These days they work in South Africa, but clearly the benefits are few; for instance, these days they can only use proceeds from South Africa to do one thing only, for example, building a house. These days some just end up overstaying in South Africa. Whereas in those days the system was very strict; we were strictly being guarded and monitored so that you could not overstay. If they were to allow the form of migration during our days (i.e. *Wenela* and *Theba*) to continue, things would have been far much better: the source areas could have been much more developed than is the current situation.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ However, the Malawi Kwacha is far much weaker when compared with the South African Rand these days than during *Wenela* and *Theba* days. Hence it can rightly be concluded that prices of goods in Malawi nowadays are much more expensive than they were in the 1970s and 1980s.

⁷⁵ Interview with Albert Ndhlovu. Kamsomeni Ndhlovu Village. T.A. Kapingo Sibande. Mzimba. 26/08/2015.

It is a result of the strict monitoring in question that many labour migrants took their jobs seriously and even back home they tended to effectively use such proceeds.⁷⁶ In this case, working in South Africa under *Wenela* and *Theba* was also a form of training in financial discipline and upright conduct. This contrasts sharply from the ‘free range system’ of the old *selufu* and new *selufu*.⁷⁷ *Selufu* migrants working in South Africa during the pre-1990 period were not being housed in mining compounds: they were free to secure their own accommodation within the residential areas where their lives were not controlled, hence the use of the term ‘free range system’.⁷⁸

Reyneck Mvula⁷⁹ is also of the view that labour migration under *Wenela* and *Theba* was much better as compared to old *selufu* and new *selufu*. During the post-1990 period, there are numerous problems which distract labour migrants in their quest to achieve their set goals. In his opinion:

Everyone goes there; some of these eventually change to transport business; some migrants stay there and never come back. You should know that a number of women whose husbands are in South Africa are prostitutes.⁸⁰ If they are invited there, they easily change (their behaviour) and marriages collapse. Back home, children starve and do not attend school. Furthermore, other migrants come back home empty-handed. They may bring a television set, but this is eventually sold. Other migrants concentrate on drinking and womanising. Some are arrested and spend six months at Lindela Repatriation Centre. Things were better in those days than nowadays.⁸¹

With this kind of environment, it is rather difficult for a cross-section of labour migrants to optimise their savings for investment back home.⁸² According to Reyneck Mvula, relatively fewer migrants, therefore, fulfil their dreams. In contrast, in the pre-1990 period, especially under *Wenela* and *Theba*, there were few of such problems because migrants’ lives were strictly

⁷⁶ It is indicated that the majority of repatriates invested their money in ‘reasonable things’ to improve the living standards of themselves and their families. For more information on this, see MNA 172/TEBA/1/1/27 Repatriates General, 1973 January-1974 January (Enquiry on how mine workers spend their wages in Malawi).

⁷⁷ During these two types of migration, labour migrants were, and still are, not subjected to any form of control; hence tended to have loose morals which manifested in such things as excessive beer drinking, promiscuity, and involvement in criminal activities, among others.

⁷⁸ Most of the former labour migrants I interviewed used this term to emphasise the freedom that old *selufu* migrants enjoyed.

⁷⁹ Reyneck Mvula was born in 1951 in Group Village Headman (GVH) Thateya Mvula in T.A. Chindi (Mzimba) in a family of five sons. He did not go far with education because he was busy doing *maganyu* to assist in the raising of his younger brothers. This is because his father was very poor and his mother was sickly. After dropping from school, he went to South Africa where he worked under *Wenela* and *Theba*, consecutively.

⁸⁰ This is Reyneck Mvula’s personal opinion and is hardly verifiable.

⁸¹ Interview with Reyneck Mvula. GVH Thateya Mvula. T.A. Chindi. Mzimba. 13/01/2016.

⁸² On the contrary, one labour migrant argued that one of the ‘indirect benefits’ of working in South Africa is that you develop a saving culture. You are able to save from the little money you get as wages. You learn to spend your money wisely. This is because you make this money through hurdles, for example, by exposing your life to such risks as crime and xenophobia. Interview with Pastor Elias Mnthali. Ching’anya Village. T.A. Mankhambira. Nkhata-Bay. 8/05/2016.

controlled, as they were residing inside the mine compounds. More so, largely because of the deferred payment arrangement, it was somewhat impossible for someone to come home empty-handed.

Lytwell Chiwowa concurred with Reyneck Mvula by explaining the difficult situation created by his two migrant sons: “My two sons have completely forgotten home. They left children and wives, but cannot ‘remember’ them. I advised them to remember home, but they cannot send even soap. Consequently, I just do *maganyu* to help my grand children and my sons’ wives”.⁸³ This story is a very sad development. In fact, one can conclude from Chiwowa’s story that it would have been better if his two sons did not emigrate in the first place, because they would have been making efforts to fend for their families, themselves. One can only imagine how relatively worse off the situation was in their households, that is, after the two sons emigrated to South Africa for wage employment.

The ensuing paragraphs examine the similarities and differences in the nature of migration from the two districts, especially since the 1990s. They assess the effectiveness in the use of proceeds in these districts. Labour migrants from these districts go to South Africa because of family problems, that is, they go to South Africa to accumulate money with which to solve their respective family problems. This section attempts to argue that there are more commercial ventures in Mzimba than in Nkhata-Bay.

The people in Mzimba District are farmers, growing different types of crops and rearing livestock. It is not surprising therefore that returning migrants invest part of the proceeds from South Africa in farming. On this, Ephraim Soko indicated that, “in addition to construction, the Ngoni invest in farming, for instance, buying cattle and farming equipment, for example, ploughs and *ngolo* (ox-carts)”.⁸⁴ Consequently, the people of Mzimba are, arguably, self-sufficient on food.

In contrast, with time the Tonga from Nkhata-Bay also started going to Tanzania for wage employment. Evidence shows that there are a number of reasons the Tonga diversified their labour migration destination:

⁸³ Interview with Lytwell Chiwowa. Vuke Chiwowa Village. T.A. Chindi. Mzimba. 14/01/2016.

⁸⁴ Interview with Ephraim Soko. Kapekenya Village. T.A. Malanda. Nkhata-Bay. 29/08/2015.

First, because jobs started being scarce in South Africa following the influx of regional migrants in the post-1994 period; second, because returning migrants from South Africa were still compelled to go to Tanzania to buy fishing equipment since their main investment is in the fishing industry. Consequently and with time, they decided to head to Tanzania for both wage employment and buying the fishing gear. Third, Tanzania is closer to Nkhata-Bay than South Africa, hence male migrants easily cross Lake Malawi to be with their wives and children back home. Fourth, and also a major attraction, is the fact that Malawians staying in Tanzania are largely not harassed by the police for visas and work permits and Tanzanian nationals for taking away their jobs, like what happens in South Africa.⁸⁵

Although relatively fewer Tongas go to Tanzania as compared to those who continue going to South Africa, this development may help to explain why the Tongas are trailing in labour emigration to South Africa. This development also makes it complicated to ascertain whether or not the resultant development in Nkhata-Bay is a result of proceeds from South Africa or Tanzania or from both countries. However, most informants agreed that labour migration from the district to South Africa remains dominant.⁸⁶

In Nkhata-Bay returning labour migrants prefer settling in towns or urban areas, for example, in Mzuzu, Nkhata-Bay, or Chintcheche Trading Centre, and not in their home villages.⁸⁷ This tendency deprives the villages of investments using proceeds from South Africa. As a result, the source areas are likely to be poorer than the period before labour migrants started off for South Africa. This partly defeats the initial purpose of emigrating for wage employment which was to uplift the status of migrants' households and communities.

During the post-1990 period migrants go to South Africa with migration goals already set. They already know what type of businesses to venture into or the kind of investments to establish. About 80% of the informants from both Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay indicated that they did not want to work for many years in South Africa, but rather to work towards fulfilling their set goals. Once these goals were met, it was time to return home. Lucky Tchaungwe, who comes from Msapata Village in T.A. Chindi in Mzimba, had such a goal. He got married in Malawi in 2009 and after a few months, he went to South Africa for wage employment. Before leaving for South Africa, he had established a small grocery shop at his home and his aim was to use the proceeds from South Africa to stock his shop with more merchandise and also to expand his

⁸⁵ These reasons were advanced by a number of informants in Nkhata-Bay; for instance, Penjani Manda. Op. Cit.; Justice Nyirenda. Chizonga Village. T.A. Malegamzoma. 6/01/2016; and Samuel Banda. Kalindizga Village. T.A. Malenganzoma. 8/01/2016.

⁸⁶ Most informants also indicated that the wages from working in Tanzania pale in the face of wages in South Africa; again not to mention the fact that the South African currency (the Rand) is stronger than the currencies in Malawi (the Malawi Kwacha) and Tanzania (the Tanzanian Shillings).

⁸⁷ Interview with Edington Ng'oma. Op. Cit.

business by establishing additional shops. During an interview with him in 2016, Lucky narrated his business story and ambitions: “I have a small shop at home, but my aim is to open a number of shops and run them while based at home. I am against staying and working in South Africa for a long time, for instance, for fifteen years”.⁸⁸

Lucky first came to South Africa in 2009 and by 2016 he confidently said he had fulfilled about 70% of his goals and was ready to return home.

I must say that if I had not come, I would not have managed to do whatever I have done. For instance, I managed to build a brick house with electricity. My family members don't have problems with lighting at night and are able to watch television. But this is right in the rural area at home in Mzimba District.⁸⁹

Lucky Tchaungwe was planning to return home in December 2016. He explained his plans: “If I go this December I am not sure when I will come back. I might be going for good. If it is coming back, I might be coming to buy goods for resale in Malawi as part of my business, but not to work”.⁹⁰

In Mzimba District returning migrants have a tendency to establish shops where they sell groceries such as salt, sugar, soap, clothes, and hardware items, among others. There is also vibrant itinerant trading system where traders sell these items in periodic or rotational markets, locally known as *misika ya kabwandire*. The latter are concentrated in the labour migration areas like Manyamula, Engalaweni, Chiseng'ezi and Zubayumo Makamo in T.A. M'mbelwa; Bulala and Euthini in T.A. Chindi; and Eswazini and Mathandani in T.A. Kampingo Sibande in Mzimba. Like other returning migrants, Lucky Tchaungwe's aim was to sell his trade items in his shops and also in these periodic markets.

In Mzimba, *misika ya kabwandire* have over the years brought about trade increase in related businesses such as restaurants or canteens and rest houses. Consequently, migrants have seized the opportunity and made investments in such businesses. Although *msika wa kabwandire* at Manyamula Trading Centre takes place on Thursdays, traders and buyers from the outlying areas camp at Manyamula from as early as Tuesday, hence there is a demand for restaurants and lodges. In addition, there is also demand for entertainment places where people can relax after a tiresome business day. Anthony Mvula, from Chidyake Gama Village in T.A. Chindi in

⁸⁸ Interview with Lucky Tchaungwe, Parkmore. Johannesburg. 7/08/2016.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Mzimba built a house in his village using proceeds from South Africa. But after realising the demand for rest houses, he embarked on building a rest house at Eswazini Trading Centre. He built a rest house with fourteen rooms. Thereafter, Anthony switched to building a bottle store next to this rest house. At the time of the interview in 2016, he was struggling to finish furnishing the bottle store.

My grandfather assisted with securing a plot at Eswazini. I eventually built a rest house with fourteen rooms. After furnishing the rooms, the rest house started operating. After that I embarked on a bottle store building project. Through chatting with friends here in South Africa, I learnt about the need to buy entertainment equipment for this bottle store: a pool table, television set, music equipment, fridge, etc”.⁹¹

In Mzimba labour migrants prefer building nice houses right in the villages, where they eventually settle. A good example here is Zubayumo Makamo area in the western part of Mzimba. When you are approaching this area, it is as if you are entering a town and yet it is rural. There are nicely-built, permanent houses in such villages as Galamala Mlungwe, Zebediya Makamo, Luthuli Makamo, Kazezani Makamo, and Zubayumo Makamo.⁹² In terms of design, the main house is joined to the kitchen and bathroom block with a small brick fence, setting the house apart from others, clearly depicting individualistic (rather than communal) lifestyle right in the countryside.⁹³ In addition, some of the houses have car ports next to them. The car ports depict labour migrants’ ambition of owning a car after years of hard work in South Africa.

⁹¹ Interview with Anthony Mvula. Parkmore. Johannesburg. 7/08/2016.

⁹² All these five villages are popularly and collectively referred to as Zubayumo Makamo area after the name of one of the villages, Zubayumo Makamo Village (proper). For details on these villages, see Harvey C.C. Banda. “Gendered Patterns of Malawian Contemporary Migrancy: The Case of Zubayumo Makamo Area in Mzimba District” (Unpublished MA Thesis). 2008.

⁹³ Once in South Africa, labour migrants are exposed to the capitalistic and individualistic lives of their employers, and, since some migrants stay longer in South Africa, they get used to such lifestyle and tend to continue with such a lifestyle back home. However, in terms of societal perception, there is a mixed reaction: for some villagers, these incoming migrants are *banthu bachigolo* (i.e. people who are mean) and for others, they are *banthu bakuzindikira* (i.e. people who are exposed and literate) as a result of their wide and envious travels.



Photograph 7.3: A former labour migrant who went to South Africa in 1994 under new *selufu*. He hails from Manyamula, T.A. M'mbelwa in Mzimba District. While in South Africa, he once worked as a company security guard and passed time at his work place jotting down in a diary his business plans which he was to implement after returning to Malawi. He was determined not to stay long in 'dangerous' South Africa and to make it big in 'peaceful' Malawi through commercial farming and business. At the time of the interview, he was seen to be doing fine by village standards and he was satisfied that he had fulfilled most of his plans. He was photographed together with his second wife, whom he married after the death of his first wife (photo by author).

In addition to family cars, labour migrants in Mzimba have a tendency of investing their proceeds in pick-up trucks for *matola*⁹⁴ (transport) businesses. Some of the bigger trucks are used for transport business between Malawi and South Africa.⁹⁵ About 70% of migrants-cum-transporters are in *matola* business while the remaining 30% are into cross-border transport business between Malawi and South Africa.⁹⁶ In fact, a visit to Mzimba *boma* shows how hot this business is. There are numerous small trucks transporting people to and from the *boma*. Some of these trucks are available for hire, ready to pick any kind of goods. Some of these are hired to carry construction material like sand, quarry, cement and bricks to the numerous construction projects.

⁹⁴ *Matola* is the type of business whereby lorries operate like minibuses or taxis, transporting goods or people in established business routes. Most of the rural areas in the district rely on *matola* since the roads are not tar marced, hence not attractive to minibuses and big buses. *Matola* business is also associated with *misika yakabwandire* (periodic markets). For details on the latter, see Harvey C.C. Banda. "Women Empowerment in Local Economies: Women's 'Itinerant' Trading Activities at Jenda in Mzimba District". Final Report: Local Economic Development (LED). Local Development Fund (LDF). Lilongwe. Malawi. June 2014.

⁹⁵ Mzimba District leads in this kind of transport business. In fact, a good number of former labour migrants invested their proceeds in transporting goods and fellow migrants between Malawi and South Africa. For details on transport business and the associated challenges, see chapter three.

⁹⁶ These percentages were arrived at as a result of personal observations: comparing the number of labour migrants' vehicles involved in local *matola* business, on the one hand, and in cross-border transport business, on the other. This scenario applies more to Mzimba than to Nkhata-Bay.

Some of these local transporters also specialise in transporting trade items and traders to various *misika ya kabwandire*. John Kamanga, who comes from Ekwendeni in Mzimba, has worked in South Africa for nine years. During these years, he has worked in a livestock production company and a construction company. From the first company, John acquired vast knowledge, skills and experience which he would like to use when he finally settles down back home. In fact, he has ambitions of starting his own livestock company in Malawi. But because such a venture requires a huge capital outlay, he decided to venture into *matola* business first. John, therefore, bought two pick-up trucks. In order to maximise savings, John quit his job in South Africa and started his own small construction company, specialising in carpentry, painting and plumbing. At first, John maintained, “it was difficult to win building contracts, but with time I became known and consequently many people started engaging me”.⁹⁷

Although Nkhata-Bay cannot compare favourably with Mzimba in terms of levels of development, there are still worthwhile developments there. This is clearly notable if one compares the situation between the past and the present.

The benefits of migrating to South Africa can readily be seen in Nkhata-Bay. When you go to most villages, you find nice, iron-roofed houses. In the past, most houses were not iron-roofed; this time you rarely find grass-thatched houses. But if you try to find out, you realise that some of the owners of these houses are migrants working in South Africa. Even here at Malaza Trading Centre, most of the property are associated with labour migration.⁹⁸

It is probably because of this that most people in the study districts would like to emigrate so that one day they, too, can equally own such property.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Interview with John Kamanga. Park Station. Johannesburg. 23/10/2015.

⁹⁸ Interview with Penjani Manda. Op. Cit.

⁹⁹ This shows the likelihood of labour migration from Malawi to South Africa continuing for the foreseeable future.



Photograph 7.4: A woman outside her iron-roofed houses at Chikoko Village in the area of T.A. Malenganzoma in Nkhata-Bay District. This woman followed her husband in South Africa in 2008 and came back in 2011. Her husband had first gone to South Africa to find his roots since his late father was a South African national. But while there, he also managed to secure a good job through his father's South African relations. Upon return, he built three houses: two in the picture and a third one, which is behind the two houses. This is an example of a labour migrant who largely fulfilled his migration goals (photo by author).

According to Newton Banda, proceeds from working abroad are not only used in financing big projects like construction and businesses, but also in buying even basic things like clothes. Newton argued that most of the items or goods in Malawi are either expensive or not genuine. In addition to that, he indicated that income-generating activities are hard to come by. Hence it is difficult for people to buy basic things like clothes. "That's why people prefer going to South Africa. Although labour migrants go to South Africa to use proceeds for big projects like construction, they also go there for simple things like clothes".¹⁰⁰ This scenario was likened to the situation obtaining in both Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay. In Mzimba people rely on farming, but because of the challenges like unpredictable rains and the diminishing soil fertility which needs fertiliser, people go abroad to accumulate money to invest in farming. In Nkhata-Bay, likewise, the main source of money along Lake Malawi is fishing. However, even fishing business is greatly unpredictable. For instance, fishing is off when the lake is rough and during the breeding season. During these periods, fishermen struggle to make ends meet. Newton Banda shed light on complications that force people to go abroad:

For ordinary people, buying clothes in Malawi means buying second-hand clothes. But even these are relatively expensive. This is unlike in South Africa where clothes are cheap. Everything in Malawi is expensive; for example, costing a minimum of MK3, 000 (R60)...The first benefit is that people are able to build houses using proceeds from South Africa. Apart from that, it's our lake; we rely on small fish (*usipa*). Through *usipa* sales, people are able to make a lot of money. But one thing with *usipa* money:

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Newton Banda. Chitukwi Village. T.A. Malenganzoma. Nkhata-Bay. 6/01/2016.

it's like someone was cursed (*kutemberereka*); you don't do something productive with it: you buy foodstuffs, but the rest goes into *kumwera moba* (beer drinking) instead of, for instance, paying school fees...The lake also has 'seasons'; at times it's very rough and nobody can go fishing. This happens for three or four weeks. During all this period, a fisherman is surviving through *ngongole* (debts). That's why people in Nkhata-Bay prefer migrating to South Africa because the currency there is relatively strong.¹⁰¹

A significant number of informants agreed that, indeed, because of the strength of the South African Rand, labour migrants are able to fulfil most of their migration motives.

There are a number of ways how labour migrants finance their projects. About 80% save their money on a monthly basis through financial prudence and controlled expenditure. After saving some money, for instance R5, 000 or R10, 000, they send this money to Malawi using the various mechanisms already discussed. Some migrants decide to use part of their savings to buy refrigerators, radios, cookers, solar panels and television sets. After some time they send these goods home through local transporters. The idea behind is that it is easier for them to save money at home in the form of goods rather than cash. This is after learning that their relatives in Malawi ended up spending the cash remittances on trivial issues. Upon return, usually during the migrants' annual holidays, they sell these items and use the money in various projects like constructing houses for rent.

There is also another arrangement where two or three migrants with similar business interests in Malawi team up and form a savings cooperative society. They agree on how much each one of them would be contributing savings on a monthly basis. After pooling financial resources for, say, a year, they either share the savings and each one uses his or her share for investments or they decide to use the savings to jointly finance their respective projects in Malawi. Anthony Mvula is a beneficiary of this cooperative society arrangement and he recalls:

I teamed up with my two friends and all of us had similar plans. We, therefore, put our savings together and decided to buy three houses in Malawi, one at a time, for the three of us. Unfortunately, one of us went his own way and bought a maize mill. So the two of us went ahead with our agreed savings. That is how I managed to finance my construction projects (a rest house and a bottle store) at Eswazini Trading Centre.¹⁰²

Other labour migrants enter into agreements with their employers. For instance, for those who want to buy a pick-up truck, they inform their employer to start deducting small amounts of money, for example, R1,000, from their salary on a monthly basis. After an agreed period of,

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Interview with Anthony Mvula. Op. Cit.

say, three years, the employer gives them the total savings which labour migrants then use to buy cars. Alternatively, the employer buys a car for his worker using these savings. Sometimes they agree to buy one of the employer's cars using such savings. The advantage with this arrangement is that the employer sells the car cheaply, for instance, at the value of R20,000 (total money saved) when the actual, market value of the car is R40,000. For most labour migrants, especially in Mzimba, apart from other forms of investment, coming home with a car is a symbol of status and a goal for most young men.¹⁰³ This is the reason many Malawian labour migrants purchase not only cars, but also other goods like beds, refrigerators, motor cycles, bicycles, radios, cookers and television sets. After remitting such property to Malawi, they later decide either to use them or sell them and use the money realised on various commercial ventures.

5. Conclusion

The chapter has highlighted the linkage between remittances from South Africa and the developmental impact that they have on the labour-source areas. Although part of these proceeds are merely used to meet basic consumption needs within the migrant households, the chapter has argued that proceeds from South Africa, once properly used, lead to significant investments. It can rightly be concluded, therefore, that these proceeds have a transformative impact not only on migrant households, but also on migrant societies. The chapter has also discussed the various means of sending remittances from South Africa to Malawi. It has examined the changes in remittance transfer over time in line with the changing technologies. It has argued that the improvement in technology has facilitated the quick transfer of remittances and also increased the likelihood of these remittances reaching the recipients. For example, while *ndalama* used to get lost while in transit through the sender-agent-transporter-recipient chain in the past, nowadays it is easily remitted using the local money bureaux.

Oral evidence from labour migrants in the two study districts and South Africa shows that there has been a notable change in the nature of migration from Malawi to South Africa over the years. In the pre-1990 period, both formal and *selufu* migrants tended to stay longer with the aim of maximising proceeds. Formal labour migrants used to sign a number of contracts with

¹⁰³ In my home village, Londowala Bota Village in T.A. Kapingo Sibande, there was a labour migrant who, before departing for South Africa, told his peers that "I will only come back after buying a car". Indeed, he brought a car, but it took him ten years to fulfil his dream and in the process he became a *mtchona* (an overstayer). He, however, faced untold difficulties in maintaining the car while at home so that he was forced to sell it within two years.

Wenela and *Theba* whereas *selufu* migrants used to overstay. In contrast, in the post-1990 period, it is largely the intention of the majority of Malawians to stay briefly in South Africa and return home. This is mainly to re-join their families and personally invest the proceeds in businesses.

The chapter has adopted a comparative approach to compare the amount and effectiveness in the use of proceeds over time. This comparison has been done based on formal migration and *selufu* during the old period; on the old period and the new period; and, on the Ngoni migrants (Mzimba) and the Tonga migrants (Nkhata-Bay). Oral evidence showed that migrants from Mzimba accrue more benefits than the Tonga. The Tonga also showed two separate migration destinations and these are South Africa and Tanzania although Tanzania's jobs pay less. On the whole, the chapter shows that migrant households and migration areas in Mzimba are, therefore, more developed than those in Nkhata-Bay.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

1. Conclusions

This comprehensive study of labour migration from northern Malawi to South Africa starts from the 1970s onwards. It advances the argument that the 1970s and 1980s can be regarded as a watershed, demarcating the old migration period (pre-1990 period) during which migration was both formal and informal (*selufu*), from the contemporary period (post-1990 period) during which migration is dominantly informal (i.e. new *selufu*). This is a unique period in the history of labour migration from Malawi in that it is a transitory period when labour migration changed its nature: from the decline in mine migrancy (the end of *Wenela* and *Theba* operations) to the increase in informal migration (*selufu*). However, as chapter three shows, informal migration, which was prevalent during the pre-1990 period, only increased in scale in the post-1990 period. The study shows that this period experienced a transition from male-dominated migration to a mixed, gendered migration of, especially, the post-democratic era in both Malawi and South Africa. Nonetheless, the study has provided evidence about the existence of female informal migration (*selufu*) alongside male migration during the old period, albeit on a limited scale.

While previous scholarship on the social history of Malawian labour migration from Malawi to South Africa has focused on the period up to the 1970s,¹ this study plays a complementary role by focusing on the period from then (1970s) onwards where academic research is still limited. By using oral sources, the study unveils the nature of informal migration during the contemporary period. This study has, therefore, completed the ‘otherwise incomplete’ story of the history of migration from Malawi to South Africa. Through a critical review of literature, the study indicated that Malawians began going to South Africa in the late nineteenth century following the establishment of gold and diamond mines. This was a result of lack of better-paying jobs in Malawi (then Nyasaland). While these migrants emigrated informally, at the beginning of the twentieth century some migrants started emigrating formally initially under

¹ The following are examples of such key scholarship: Wiseman Chijere Chirwa. “‘*Theba* is Power’: Rural Labour, Migrancy and Fishing in Malawi, 1980s – 1985”. PhD Thesis. Kingston, Ontario. Queens University. 1992; Zoe Groves. *Malawians in Colonial Salisbury: A Social History of Migration in Central Africa, c. 1920s – 1960s*”. PhD Thesis. Keele University. 2011; Robert Boeder. *Malawians Abroad: The History of Labour Emigration from Malawi to its Neighbours, 1890 to the Present*. (Ann Arbor: East Lansing, Michigan State University, 1974), etc.

Wenela (1903-1974) and later under *Theba* (1977-1988). This study has focused on the escalation of *selufu* migration following the end of *Wenela* and *Theba* operations in Malawi.

This study is situated broadly within the ‘development perspective’, which when applied to labour migration posits that labour migrants are able to improve their households and communities using proceeds from wage employment obtained in the destination area. This study has shown that in spite of the many challenges that labour migrants face in South Africa, a majority of Malawian labour migrants are able to transform and improve their households. They use the proceeds in worthwhile investments and businesses. For instance, they build houses, improve farming and initiate a number of small-scale businesses.² This is in addition to using part of the proceeds in basic consumption in order to ensure comfortable subsistence within the household. Furthermore, the study has used the human agency perspective³ to show that labour migrants are purposive and rational decision-makers. These migrants have largely shown to be flexible in their pursuit of migration goals. For instance, in the face of challenges, some are able to ‘graduate’ from being career migrants and recurrent migrants to being target migrants. Through this, efforts are made to stay briefly in South Africa, maximise savings during this brief stay, and, thereafter, return home. The ensuing paragraphs highlight the issues discussed, arguments advanced, and conclusions drawn in the chapters of this study.

Chapter One critically reviewed the existing literature on international labour migration between Malawi and South Africa with a view to establishing a point of departure for the study. The chapter maintained that the origins of the informal migration during the contemporary period can better be understood by examining the developments surrounding the decline in formal mine migrancy in the 1970s and 1980s. The study wanted to unravel the paradox as to why there was an influx of labour migrants from Malawi into South Africa against a background of persistent xenophobic attacks, high crime rates, arrests and deportations, unemployment, the HIV/ AIDS scourge and the general rising costs of living. On this, the thesis centrally argues that the socio-economic benefits these labour migrants accrue while working in South Africa offset the challenges they face both in South Africa and in Malawi. In Malawi,

² For a discussion of whether or not labour migration leads to the transformation of rural areas, see William Beinart. “A Century of Migration from Pondoland”. *African Affairs*. (2014, 73: 3). pp. 388 and 406.

³ For details on this perspective, see Jon Goss and Bruce Lindquist. “Conceptualising International Labour Migration: A Structuration Perspective”. *International Migration Review*. (1995, 29: 2). p. 320.

the lack of employment and income-earning opportunities, generally, has been worsening, especially following the inception of democratic governance in 1994.⁴

The study argues that labour migrants are ready to do whatever possible to ensure that they surmount the challenges above in order to fulfil their goals. In this case, it presents labour migrants as rational decision-makers and purposive individuals during the labour migration process. Overall, the thesis argues that emigrating to, and working in, South Africa has been ‘a way of life’ for the Ngoni of Mzimba and the Tonga of Nkhata-Bay in northern Malawi since the early 1990s. In an attempt to understand the intricate nature of labour migration from northern Malawi to South Africa, the thesis has examined the processes, dimensions, and trends over time, especially since the 1970s. This has been done by employing a comparative approach on different facets: old versus new migration periods, male versus female migration, labour migration from Mzimba versus that from Nkhata-Bay.

Chapter One also highlights the key methods used in collecting data for the study. The study relied on the use of archival,⁵ oral, and secondary sources. This approach, that is, ensuring that there is complementarity of the sources, was adopted because each of these sources has its own limitations.⁶ However, because of the contemporary nature of the study, archival sources could only be used up to the mid-1990s. Thereafter, in this study I relied more on oral sources. With proper use of oral sources, for instance, the ability to pose thought-provoking questions, and the use of semi-structured interviews in line with the life histories approach, it was possible to get in-depth knowledge not only about informants, but also about their households and migrant communities. I conducted these oral interviews in the T.A.s of M’mbelwa, Chindi and Kampingo Sibande in Mzimba and in the T.A.s of Mankhambira, Malanda and Malenganzoma in Nkhata-Bay. In South Africa, I conducted interviews in different parts of Johannesburg⁷ including Diepsloot and Honeydew. The data collected was analysed qualitatively.

⁴ The leaders of the successive democratically-elected governments in Malawi since 1994 are pre-occupied with enriching themselves (personal aggrandisement) at the expense of providing for the needs of the populace.

⁵ Archival research was conducted at the Malawi National Archives (MNA) in Zomba, Malawi; South African National Archives (SANA) in Pretoria; and at the Historical Research Papers (HRPs) at Witwatersrand University. However, because of the contemporary nature of the study the archival documents at the MNA proved to be more relevant to the study as compared to those at the SANA and the HRPs.

⁶ For details on the advantages of using this approach, see Jan Vansina. *Oral Tradition as History*. (Oxford: James Currey Limited, 1985). p. 199.

⁷ Interviews were concentrated within Johannesburg because labour migrants are concentrated in areas which are relatively close to Park Station in order to have easy access to buses to and from Malawi.

Chapter Two examined the developments in the 1970s and 1980s regarding labour migration from Malawi to South Africa. It focused on the decline in mine migrancy which was followed by an increase in informal migration (*selufu*). *Wenela's* recruitment operations in Malawi were banned in 1974 following the plane crash incident in which 74 Malawian mine workers perished. Thereafter, Malawi negotiated with South Africa for the resumption of recruitment. Consequently, TEBA resumed recruitment operations in 1977. However, these operations came to a grinding halt in 1987-1988 following the HIV wrangle between Malawi and South Africa. In addition to previous scholarship arguing that the decline in mine migrancy from Malawi was a result of the 1974 boycott and the 1987-1988 HIV 'debate', this thesis argues that the Malawi Government, under Dr H. Kamuzu Banda, was already in favour of the decline from as early as the 1960s and later it merely took advantage of these incidents. In fact, Chapter Two argues that the decline in question may partly be attributed to the establishment of tobacco estates, especially in central Malawi and that the government, therefore, wanted people to work in these estates rather than emigrate to South Africa.

While Chapter Two focused on formal migration during the pre-1990 period, Chapter Three concentrated on the informal nature of migration from Malawi to South Africa during both the pre- and the post-1990 periods. The chapter argues that due to their determination to achieve their migration goals, labour migrants may be categorised either as circular migrants⁸ or target migrants.⁹ In this case, the chapter presents labour migrants as purposive individuals whose eyes are fixed on achieving their goals. On the nature of migration during the post-1990 period, the chapter argues that the increase in informal migration was a result of political and socio-economic factors in Malawi and South Africa, especially after 1994. The change of governments in both Malawi and South Africa; the improvements in mode of transport and the consequential entry of local transporters in the transport business between the two countries; and the free movement of peoples within the SADC in the early 1990s are some of the facilitating factors discussed.

Chapter Four examines the beginnings of female migration during the pre-1990 period and its continuation after 1990. During both periods, the study shows, female migration was part of *selufu*. The chapter advances the argument that women managed to equally emigrate, like their

⁸ These are labour migrants who easily reprocess their way to South Africa after being deported from South Africa.

⁹ These are labour migrants who, while working in South Africa, accumulate savings with which to fulfil set targets at home in Malawi.

selufu male counterparts, despite governmental and societal restrictions. In terms of proportion, the study shows that fewer women emigrated to South Africa in the pre-1990 period unlike in the post-1990 period when more women joined the migration process. These women emigrated not only for wage employment, but also for commercial purposes. During the pre-1990 period, women emigrated largely as house wives, though a few of them also managed to secure domestic jobs.

Although previous scholarship presents formal and informal labour migration in the pre-1990 period largely as a male phenomenon, this chapter has proved that the existence of elements of female informal migration was on a limited scale. The chapter also notes that there have been changes in the nature of female migration in question, for instance, from women accompanying their husbands to women as autonomous migrants. This study, therefore, contributes towards a better understanding of the nature of labour migration from northern Malawi to South Africa during both the old and new migration periods. During both periods, women emigrated as a strategy to improve their households and, due to lack of employment opportunities in the formal sector, they were compelled to enter the informal sector.

Chapter Five has focused on two core issues: challenges that migrants face during their stay in South Africa and the strategies they devise in order to overcome such challenges. An examination of these challenges reveals the difficult situation to which labour migrants are subjected while in South Africa. This contrasts sharply with the image of South Africa as ‘a land of opportunities’ that potential migrants have in Malawi before departing for South Africa’.¹⁰ That is why some male and female labour migrants become overwhelmed by these challenges, which in the process derail them in their fight towards the fulfilment of their goals. An interview with a cross-section of labour migrants in South Africa revealed the numerous problems they face: “Let us be frank with you, if you make it here in South Africa, you are lucky and you need to thank your God. Life is not rosy; it is a socio-economic struggle. In fact, it is a battle and in a battle, you either win or lose”.¹¹ In this case, for labour migrants, staying in South Africa would be equated to life in the industrial cities in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Cities meant different things to different classes. For instance, to the

¹⁰ For details on this, see Martin J. Murray. *City of Extremes: The Spatial Politics of Johannesburg*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); and Richard Tomlinson, Robert A. Beauregard, Lindsay Bremner and Xolela Mangcu (eds.). *Emerging Johannesburg: Perspectives on the Postapartheid City*. (New York: Routledge, 2003).

¹¹ Interview with Andrew (not real name). Randburg. Johannesburg. 6/11/2016. Andrew’s view reflects the views of a cross-section of labour migrants I interviewed in South Africa.

‘labouring classes’ cities were like ‘volcanoes ready to engulf them’. This is typical of labour migrants staying in South Africa as their lives are full of problems such as joblessness, poor accommodation, inability to secure valid domicile documents, arrests and deportations, and high incidence of diseases.

The chapter shows that upon arrival in South Africa, migrants lack good accommodation and jobs. Despite being promised assistance by friends and relatives, some migrants end up being stranded after being abandoned. The chapter shows that this practice is common amongst relatives. This view was echoed by a number of migrants who maintained that *‘pala tiri ku Joni tikumanyana yayi’* (when we are in South Africa, we don’t know each other).¹² Although this is partly occasioned by jealousy, at times this is also a result of the labour migrant’s unstable financial base, for example, due to a low-paying job which cannot support the migrant worker and his or her relatives.

Due to lack of steady jobs, migrants can hardly accumulate savings within a short period of time hence they end up *kutchona* to meet their set targets. In turn, this means some labour migrants staying away from their wives, children and relatives for a long period.¹³ Socially, this partly leads to promiscuity and contracting diseases such as STDs. The study also shows that the *kutchona* problem is common among *selufu* migrants in the pre-1990 period and continues to be one of the main problems in the post-1990 period. Such problems are largely behind the impoverishment of labour migrant households back home.

The chapter also argues that labour migrants fail to achieve their goals through arrests and deportations. Some of the accumulated proceeds, for example, money and property, are lost in the process. Although labour migrants usually reprocess their way back to South Africa, they have had to start afresh as far as accumulating savings is concerned. Together with high crime rates in residential areas and xenophobia, the chapter shows that deportations lead to social

¹² Cases of first-time migrants being abandoned by either relatives or friends are very common in South Africa. This is because once in Malawi labour migrants create the impression that they are doing fine in South Africa and yet they lead lives full of struggle. Once joined in South Africa, reality sets in that in case their relative takes long to find a job, they might not afford to keep him at their place. Again, most of the employers do not allow their workers to keep relatives or friends at their residence.

¹³ Although since the early 1990s there is a tendency of migrants either going together, or being followed by their wives, there are still migrants whose wives remain at home to take care of the children and also to oversee investment and development initiatives.

instability among labour migrants and, in turn, this is behind the labour migrants' failure to uplift the economic welfare of their households back home.

Determined to fulfil their set migration goals, the chapter argues, labour migrants have devised survival mechanisms during their stay in South Africa such as getting support from welfare societies. The chapter argues that burial societies should rightly be called welfare societies because their roles are broader than merely assisting labour migrants during deaths and sicknesses. For instance, once robbed, these societies provide the affected migrants with a small 'survival allowance' to allow them replace part of the stolen property. During periods of joblessness, these societies provide a modest 'subsistence allowance' until a member secures another job.¹⁴ In a nutshell, the survival strategies discussed in chapters five and six reveal the unparalleled determination and steadfastness on the part of labour migrants as far as fulfilling their set migration goals is concerned.

Chapter Six examines the role played by churches in alleviating the labour migrants' challenges during their stay in South Africa. Like the welfare societies, churches provide relief to its members, for instance, providing food and accommodation to destitute migrants until they become self-reliant. The chapter has also highlighted the contributions that healers make towards solving some of the obstacles that labour migrants face in their quest to achieve migration goals. Although some of these obstacles are natural phenomena like diseases such as *vilaso* (pneumonia), *chikhoso* (cough), *mutu* (headache), etc., others border on *masenga* and *ulowi* (witchcraft). While the earlier category requires the intervention of any ordinary herbalist, the second requires the expertise of special healers: *bathwasi* (diviners). The chapter shows that *bathwasi* involve *kuwombeza* (divination) in order to establish the real cause of a particular problem. That is why, the chapter shows, these *bathwasi* are highly sought after in the labour migration areas unlike the ordinary healers, most of whom become healers through training by established healers. *Bathwasi* actually become healers through a very rigorous process of *kuthwasa*.

In this regard, since *kuthwasa* is associated with *vimbuza* (spirit possession) and the latter is prevalent in Mzimba and Rumphu in line with the Tumbuka and the Ngoni beliefs and culture,

¹⁴ It is the responsibility of a member to inform the society once they secure a job so that the society should focus on supporting other equally-vulnerable members.

there are more *bathwasi* (diviners) in Mzimba than in Nkhata-Bay. This is why, the study shows, some of these healers originated from parts of Mzimba and settled in Nkhata-Bay in order to ply their trade.¹⁵ In fact, it has been indicated that such healers maintain ties with their original homes in Mzimba largely for a continued source of relatively more effective medicine since the vegetation in the two districts is different: “I go to my home in Mzimba regularly to collect various local medicine for my clients”.¹⁶ Overall, the chapter argues that the general local medicinal beliefs are seen to be entrenched more in Mzimba than in Nkhata-Bay.

Because of the entrenchment of the labour migrants’ beliefs in *mankhwala gha chifipa*, a cross-section of labour migrants approach healers for medicinal assistance. For instance, healers provide labour migrants with *mankhwala gha mwabi* (luck medicine) to enhance their opportunities, *mankhwala ghakupemjera ntchito* (medicine for fetching jobs), and *mankhwala ghakuphezga ku masuzgo* (medicine to ward off any problems). The chapter argues that it is through the use of such medicine that some labour migrants secure better-paying jobs and also elongate their stay in South Africa. Consequently, they are able to accumulate savings, remit these savings back home, and use them to solve domestic problems and embark on various investments. In short, the chapter has proved that local medicine increases migrants’ chances of success while in South Africa. However, the chapter also argues that not all labour migrants in the two study districts solve their problems through the use of local medicine. There are some labour migrants who have a negative attitude towards local medicine and, instead, strive to overcome their problems through the use of biomedicine to cure diseases, belief in God’s healing and blessing power, and also personal hard working spirit.

Chapter Seven has highlighted the improvements in technology over time and how these improvements have facilitated the quick transfer of *ndalama* from South Africa to Malawi, for example, the introduction of swift bank transfers; formal bureaux and *mabyuro*; and the role of local transporters not only in the transporting of *ndalama*, but also *katundu* (goods) and people. The proliferation of *mabyuro* into the labour migration areas in northern Malawi has enabled fast and safe delivery of *ndalama* to the migrants’ relatives, whereas the spread of cell phone network coverage to the rural areas has facilitated easy communication between Malawi and

¹⁵ This development follows the realisation that there is demand for diviners in Nkhata-Bay District, more especially in the labour migration areas like Chintcheche (under T.A. Malanda), Sanga (under T.A. Mankhambira), and Malaza (under T.A. Malenganzoma).

¹⁶ Interview with Bungamapiri Chipeta. Op. Cit.

South Africa. Furthermore, the spread of cheap mobile phones into the rural areas has enabled the discussion of business and investment plans between labour migrants in South Africa and their relatives at home. In essence, this has bridged the communications gap between couples and relatives staying apart.

The chapter argues that remittances from labour migrants in South Africa during both the old and new migration periods have had a transformative and developmental impact on the labour migrants' households and communities. The thesis has proved that remittances, once effectively utilised, have the ability to transform households. It has highlighted a number of developments at household and community levels. It has been shown that over time labour migrants' households have graduated from using remittances merely to meet household basics to effectively using these remittances to achieve self-sufficiency in the long-run.

In a related development, through a comparative approach the chapter has shown that Mzimba leads in these development initiatives partly because some Tonga labour migrants migrate to Tanzania where jobs are generally low-paying. Moreover, development in Mzimba is concentrated in the labour migrants' homes unlike in Nkhata-Bay where the Tonga prefer to settle in urban areas upon return from South Africa. Consequently, over time the labour-source areas in Mzimba are more developed as compared to those in Nkhata-Bay.

2. Areas for Further Study

- This study has focused on labour migrants from Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts in northern Malawi, thus further studies could be done on the experiences of labour migrants from other migrant districts in Malawi such as Ntcheu, Mangochi, Zomba and Salima, among others, since these too have a rich migration history. Unlike the Ngoni and Tonga of Mzimba who largely emigrate to South Africa for wage employment, the Yao of Mangochi, Machinga and Balaka districts emigrate largely for commercial aspects of migration.
- Jens A. Andersson touched on commercial migration from Malawi to South Africa in 2004 and 2005, albeit on a limited scale. A longitudinal research could, therefore, be conducted on this theme with a view to establish the origins and dimensions of commercial migration between the two countries.

- Although Malawi's economy is agro-based, there has been limited coal mining activities in Kaziwiziwi and Mchenga in Rumphi in northern Malawi. Since the 2000s, mineral explorations led to the beginning of uranium mining at Kayerekera in Karonga District. Further explorations revealed the potential mineral deposits in various parts of the country. There is, therefore, need for some studies on the potentiality of mining in Malawi as a viable alternative to the century-old labour migration to South Africa.
- Migration from Malawi to Tanzania has been occurring for a couple of decades now. For a long time, Malawians have emigrated to Tanzania for trade purposes. Since the early 1990s, the Tonga have emigrated to Tanzania for wage employment. There is also need for some rigorous studies on the origins, dimensions and patterns of migration from districts such as Nkhata-Bay, Chitipa and Karonga to Tanzania.

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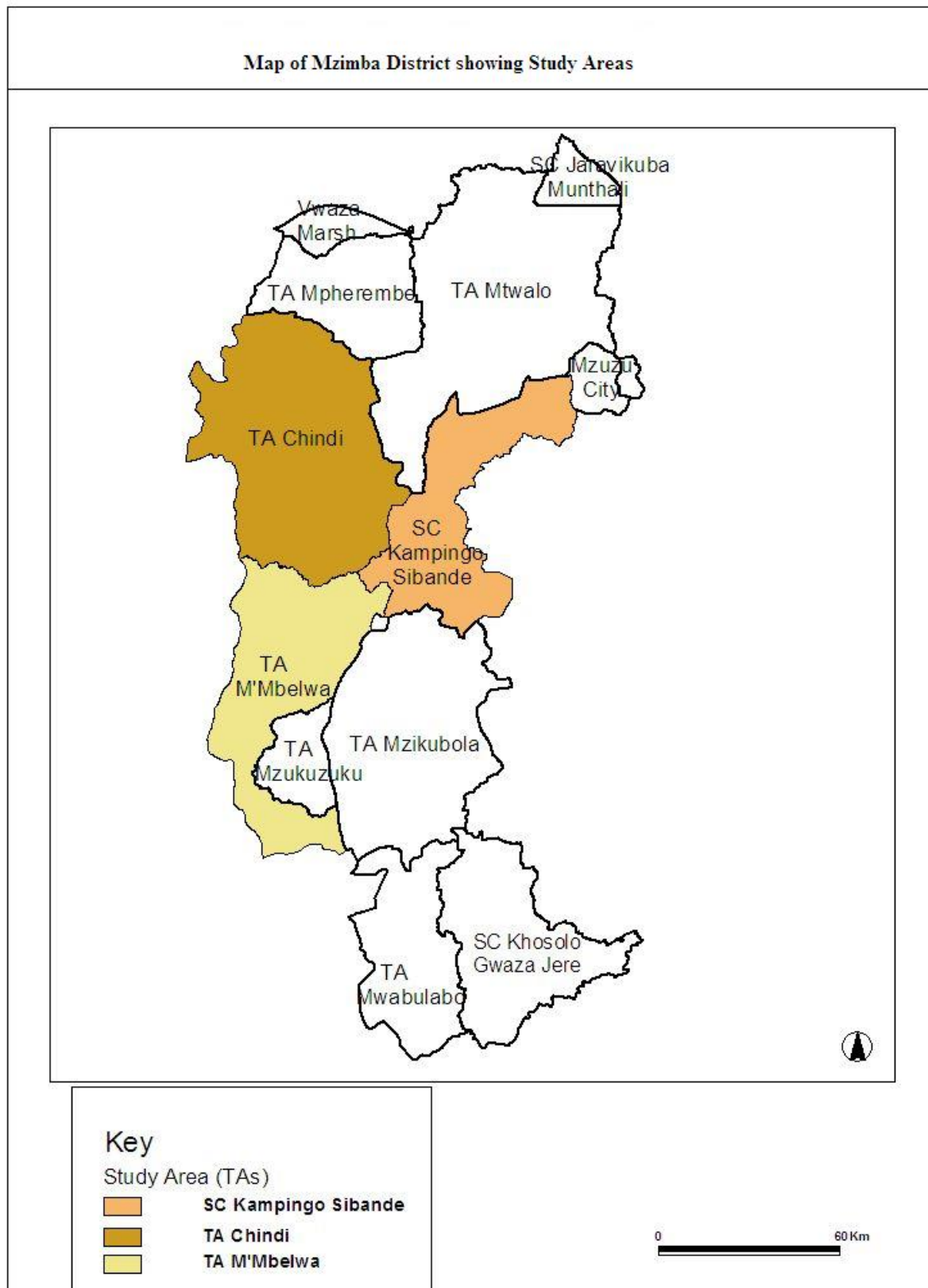
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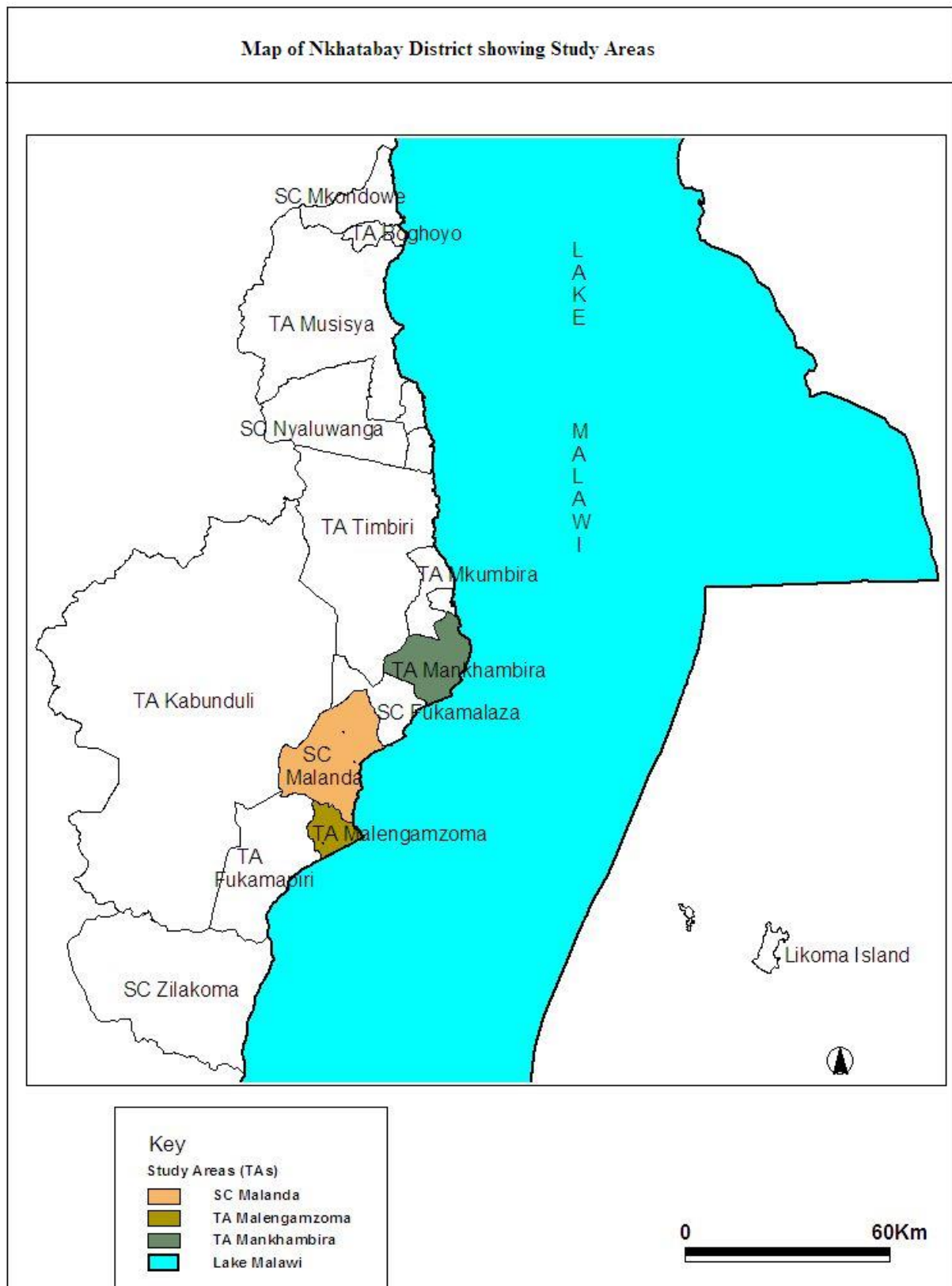
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Appendices

Appendix 1



Appendix 2



Appendix 3



Department of History
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag X3, Wits 2050
Johannesburg
South Africa

Participant Information Sheet

Research Title: The Dynamics of Labour Migration from Northern Malawi to South Africa Since 1974

Dear Potential Participant/ Interviewee,

Receive my warm greetings.

My name is Harvey C.C. Banda and I am a PhD Student in the Department of History at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. I am conducting research for my PhD thesis on the title highlighted above. The aim of the research is to understand the nature (dimensions and patterns over time) of informal labour migration from Malawi to South Africa since the 1970s. Specifically, it aims at examining the motivations behind migration, the challenges while working in South Africa and the developmental impact in the source areas. I am, therefore, kindly inviting you to be part of this research. You were selected to take part because you are a migrant/ ex-migrant/ key informant. Your role is to provide answers to the questions posed during the oral interview which will roughly take one to two hours. The interview will be conducted at your place of residence. You may wish to know that the research does not involve any form of payment. Your participation in this research is voluntary and your refusal to participate will not involve any kind of penalty. You are free not to answer any questions posed with which you are not comfortable and you are free to withdraw from the research at any time of your choice. You may wish to know that the research takes the form of oral interviews, which are audio recorded using a digital camera. You are free either to agree to being recorded or not.

For the potentially illegal migrants, I would like to assure you that this PhD research project is a bonafide research endeavour and is not linked in any way to any government institutions like the Police, Home Affairs, Customs and Immigration Departments both in South Africa and in Malawi. There will, therefore, be no legal implications on your part for taking part in the project and for providing the information sought. Should you need legal support, I am ready to refer you to organisations that offer free legal services for example the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CoRMSA) and the Lawyers for Human Rights in South Africa and Legal Aid in Malawi.

I would also like to assure you of confidentiality (i.e. that the information gathered will be processed confidentially) and anonymity (i.e. that your names/ identities will be concealed through the use of pseudonyms). Your name will only appear when you want it to appear. The information gathered is for academic purposes and will be reported in the PhD thesis and academic papers and also during seminars and conferences. You are free to contact me if you have any questions. Furthermore, I am ready to make a summary of research available to you, in case you request it.

Thank you.

Harvey C.C. Banda, PhD Student
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Appendix 4



Department of History
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Johannesburg
South Africa

Consent Form

Research Title: The Dynamics of Labour Migration from Northern Malawi to South Africa Since 1974

I agree to participate in this research (on the above topic). The research has thoroughly been explained to me and I am fully aware what it is all about. The following is a summary of the issues explained:

- Aims of the research
- The selection process (i.e. how they were selected)
- That participation is voluntary; that they are free to withdraw at any time; and that they are free to ignore questions they with which they are not comfortable
- Promises of confidentiality; how information gathered will be used/ reported and that they are free to have access to research results
- That they are free to contact the researcher in case they have questions/ queries

I, therefore, agree to be interviewed. I further agree to being recorded during the interview.

Thank you.

Name and signature of

participant.....

Date of

consent.....

Appendix 5



Department of History
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag X3, Wits 2050
Johannesburg
South Africa

Informal/ Verbal Consent Form (for Potentially Illegal Immigrants)

Research Title: The Dynamics of Labour Migration from Northern Malawi to South Africa Since 1974

The aim of the research is to understand the nature of international labour migration from Malawi to South Africa during the contemporary period. This is a purely academic exercise and is part of my PhD studies at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. It is not aimed at exposing you to the government authorities (for example, the police, home affairs and immigration officials). Because of your potentially illegal status in South Africa, I have put in measures to protect your identities. For instance, your identities will remain anonymous throughout the research project. This will be done by using pseudonyms. I would also like to assure you of confidentiality throughout the research exercise.

You may wish to know that you have the right to agree or refuse to take part in the project and that there would be no consequences whatsoever in case you decide not to take part. Furthermore, you are free to stop taking part at any point during the oral interview. The research takes the form of oral interviews which are audio recorded using a digital recorder. The interview questions are broadly based on the migrant's experiences both at home (Malawi) and in South Africa.

Having explained to you what the research is all about and having assured you of both anonymity and confidentiality, are you willing to take part in this PhD research project? **Yes/ No**

Are you willing to be audio recorded during the oral interview? **Yes/ No**