

“We faced Mabvuto”: The State, African Authorities and Nyasa Women experiences of Migration to Rhodesia, 1935 -1960s.*

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Abstract

Historians have primarily presented the history of African colonial migration as an exclusively male labor experience. Pioneering scholarship, which interrogated this male bias, mostly emphasized women's internal rather than inter-colonial mobility. Though work on women's cross border migration is gaining ground, focus remains contemporary. This article redirects attention by examining Nyasa Women's migration to Southern Rhodesia, and argues that African women's cross territorial mobility has roots going deep into the colonial era. The study begins in the 1930s, when the effects of migration to Zimbabwe first raised concern and ends in the mid 1960s, with the end of colonial rule in Nyasaland. In this era, women's migration became particularly important in light of the official view of inter-colonial migration as a male terrain. Driven to migrate by socio-economic needs, the women confronted colonial and African authorities, whose economic interests and patriarchal perceptions justified efforts to deny them mobility. They thus fought against, resisted and subverted the system of control constituted by male officials, African household, village and chiefdom heads and 'police-boys'.

Key words: Migration, Women, African, state, Rhodesia.

Introduction

The study of women's inter-territorial migration has gained significance in light of the contemporary decline in socio-economic and political conditions in Africa. However, scholars must explore women's migration from its colonial roots especially since mainstream scholarship takes a male labor perspective, silencing women's mobility (Gould, 1995; Zeleza, 1985; Sunseri, 1996; Freund, 1981; Phimister, 1994). Although other scholars have begun to interrogate the silences (Schmidt, 1990; Barnes, 1992, 2002; Buijis, 1993; Simelane, 2004; Bozzoli and Mmantho 1991; Bonner1990), they have primarily focused on women's intra-territorial mobility.

**Mabvuto is a Chewa term meaning serious hardships.*

**Instead of the post colonial terms such Malawi and Zimbabwe, the researcher uses Nyasaland and Southern Rhodesia respectively and hence refers to Nyasa rather than Malawian women. (henceforth Nyasa) migrant women and men offers a unique angle of vision into their interior world.*

This androcentric presentation of inter-colonial migration among scholars reflects how the colonial system generated records marginalizing women. Nevertheless, a juxtaposition of the letters, minutes, memos, censuses, passports and migrant labor regulations, reports on migrant labor routes, camps and transportation, with accounts of two generations of Malawian

The state of Nyasaland institutionalized a male centered migrant system in a series of inter-colonial agreements leading to the 1948 Migrant Workers Act, extant till the 1960s. Migration also became a gendered experience as male authorities took center stage in enforcing such legislation. European Native Commissioners (NCs), District Officers (DOs), African household, village and chiefdom heads cooperated to curtail women's migration. However, neither such interventions, nor marginalization could immobilize women. Like their counterparts in Lesotho and Swaziland, Nyasa women exercised their partial autonomy to maneuver, resist and subvert the system entering the migrant stream to escape escalating poverty, labor demands, family disintegration, and to join migrant husbands and others in Southern Rhodesia.

Colonial and African Authorities: Marginalizing Women

As argued in this paper, oral records and colonial records reveal that from the 1930s decade, African authorities such as chiefs, headmen and household heads and colonial officials in Nyasaland colluded to institutionalize migration between Nyasaland and Southern Rhodesia as a male centered phenomenon. The state especially passed legislative measures marginalizing women from the migrant stream.

Such attitudes against women's migration initially came to light in the 1930s, a decade when Nyasa people's exodus to Rhodesia escalated from 20 000 in 1920/1 to 42 598 laborers by 1934/5 (Malawi Archives (MA), Annual Reports, 1920; 1921; 1934; 1935). These figures represent men legally recruited by the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau (RNLB), excluding thousands of clandestine migrants. While African authorities lamented the impact of this exodus, including the loss of control over their migrant subjects to District Officers (DOs), a 1935 Commission of Inquiry Report confirmed that, "the growing migration has brought social disintegration, misery and poverty" (British Foreign Office (BFAO), File 137/1934-1948, Ref. 51C). Even though it proposed family migration as a panacea, headmen and chiefs still regarded even family migration as breaking up village life, with such families failing to return (BFAO, File 137/1934-1948).

The state therefore instituted laws designed to, at once, draw financial benefits from labor migration and placate chiefs, headmen and household heads (henceforth

African authorities). Based on a series of negotiations with colonial Zimbabwe, for instance, the state encoded the 1936 Migrant Workers' Ordinance, institutionalizing male migrancy. By labeling it a "Migrant Workers Ordinance" the state confirmed women's exclusion since, in all the documents the word "workers" is used to refer to men engaged in capitalist labor who were the breadwinners mandated to engage as migrant laborers for family survival. The 1936 Ordinance required that, "All migrating native workers [with 'native' referring to men unless the word woman is attached to it] must obtain certificates in their districts of origin." The District Commissioner (DC) issued certificates only to men with headmen and chiefs' approval (BFAO, File 137/1934-1948). In this way, the state recognized the authority and concerns of African authorities, who included *ankoswe*/household elders and *mafumu*/headmen and chiefs, over migration and with forestalling women's mobility.

Extant between the 1940s and 1960s, this legislation stressed the gendered order of migration by defining only men as migrant laborers. Revealing state biases against women's mobility or the expectation of their stereotypical rural shiftlessness, that is, the immobility of rural women, the 1940 Convention particularly stressed that every "native migrant worker" had to return to his wife and children after three months. The 1946 Convention extended the return period to after every six months of work. Ideally, this mitigated family disintegration and ensured continued rural production where returnee migrants worked alongside wives before re-migrating. This clause reappeared in the 1948 Migrant Workers Agreement with Southern Rhodesia encoded into an Act extant till the 1960s. The Act introduced migrant workbooks authorizing men to migrate on condition that employers in Southern Rhodesia dismiss the workers at two years work intervals so they could return to wives and children in Nyasaland (NAZ, File 482/22/42-48). This placated *ankoswe*/male household heads and *mafumu*/village and chiefdom heads with the assurance of able-bodied men's return and by reducing the concern that women would migrate. The expectation was that, "as long as our Nyasaland natives return regularly, the women-folk will not be impelled to flock down to Southern Rhodesia" (NAZ, File 482/22/42-48).

These Ordinances, Conventions and Acts running up to the 1960s required that migrant workers take care of women and children in Nyasaland through cash remittances (NAZ, File 482/22/42-48). Initially, the system was voluntary obliging employers to aid willing workers to remit to Nyasaland. Between 1944 and 1946, the Nyasaland government however negotiated with Southern Rhodesia for compulsory remittances, proposing that migrant men would obtain $\frac{3}{4}$ of their wages, while employers directly remitted the rest to wives and dependents based in Nyasaland (BFAO, File 137/1934-1948, Ref. 51C). Due to employers' non-cooperation, the system however remained voluntary till 1948. As migration trebled

the 1930s figure of 42 598 to reach hundreds of thousands in the 1940s (MA, Annual Report, 1948), the 1948 Act demanded that employers withhold between a quarter and a fifth of each worker's wages for monthly remissions to wives, sisters, mothers or betrothed women in Nyasaland. Men registered recipients' names in their work-books (NAZ, File 482/22/42-48). Apparently, women entered official considerations as sedentary beneficiaries of men's earnings. Yet, the correlation between women's expected sedentary rural life and the state's financial benefit was clear. The system of family remittances ensured that revenue trickled into Nyasaland bringing good backward linkages with the economy (NAZ, File 482/22/42-48). Women and other beneficiaries aided the weak economy of Nyasaland by expending on food, clothing and other needs or wants. However, though women were primary collectors of remittances at the *Boma*/ District Offices, as legal minors, *ankoswe*, that is, male guardians or elders accompanied them. Some *ankoswe* used part of the cash to purchase personal needs such as clothing, seed, tobacco and alcohol among others (Interview: Kinjika, 2009). Most significantly, the expectation was that remittances gave women the security to remain in the villages, constituting a stable labor force.

Notwithstanding, the debate initiated by the 1935 Commission on family migration reemerged in the 1940s between some employers and officials in Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland respectively. Some argued that women should accompany husbands to reduce men's travel expenses to and from Nyasaland. The return also affected production when workers left Southern Rhodesia in the middle of the high production season. However, for Nyasaland, women would only migrate with the special approval of DCs, household, village and chiefdom heads. This was partly because, "In Nyasaland, far too much consideration is given to the financial aspect. The government desires the earnings of the natives to be circulated within Nyasaland with wives spending on basic family needs" (BFAO, File 137/1934-1948, Ref. 52C.). Indeed, if approximately 150 000 pounds in remittances to wives passed through state coffers yearly as in 1953, it was expedient to keep them in Nyasaland (MA, Annual Report, 1953). The state was thus quick to add the deferred wages clause. In 1956 alone, total deferred pay receipts on behalf of expectedly sedentary wives amounted to 59 466 pounds (MA, Annual Report, 1956). Employers withheld, recorded a sixth of each migrant's wages monthly in his workbook, and forwarded it to Nyasaland for collection by each migrant man himself at the *Boma*/ District Office for family use on return after two years of work. Of course, in case men became *matchona*/the never returned, deferred payments became an uncontested part of state revenue (MA, Annual Report, 1954)

The state also associated labor migration with the taxation system further peripheralizing women. The 1940 Tax Ordinance confirmed men's tax obligations on their own account and on behalf of additional wives after the first. As taxes

increased from the 1930s figure of eight shillings to a single pound, adult and juvenile men increasingly tramped to colonial Zimbabwe. Indeed, the tax collected in five northern districts in 1941 amounted to 18 379 pounds and yet the total wages earned locally reached merely 8 000 pounds (MA, File LB5/1/1). As most men apparently earned their tax money outside Nyasaland, the state stressed that only those who showed proof of current tax payment could obtain workbooks in any district of Nyasaland (NAZ, FileS482/171/1/44-9) Migrants without workbooks could not obtain legal employment in Southern Rhodesia. The link between the tax system and men's migration further institutionalized men's central place as migrants, marginalizing women. Bendasi Arumenda, who first went to Southern Rhodesia as a juvenile in 1948 explained, "the government didn't give women much thought, they weren't workers or taxpayers, they did not get migrant workbooks like us" (Bendasi Arumenda, 2008). Based on the perception of women as sedentary, the Labor Commissioner mailed 400 copies of a Nyasaland Government Notice to Southern Rhodesia urging Native Department Offices, Post Offices and employers to assist Nyasa men's tax remissions "for themselves and on account of wives in Nyasaland" (MA, File LB5/1/1). As the reasoning went, maintaining wives and families in Nyasaland would reduce the incidence of *matchona* families, that is, families who migrated and never returned, since men no longer had reason to return to Nyasaland. Because the state could not reach *matchona* families to ensure that they met their tax obligations, this affected the state's tax revenue.

Keeping women in Nyasaland was good not only for the state and African authorities who both benefited from taxes but for some migrant men as well who held on to rural resources. Indeed, from 1946 the governor of Nyasaland decreed that, "every migrant native is under obligation to register his name and that of his wife/wives in his Native Authority, Village Headman and District Commissioner's census records" (File LB5/1/1). Village headmen and district chiefs received an annual wage of 5 and 10 percent of the total tax they collected respectively (File LB5/1/1). While this gave headmen and chiefs the incentive to curtail women's mobility, migrant men themselves required their women in the villages to ensure continuity of access to rural resources. Matrilineal Man'anja, Yao, Lomwe and Chewa men settled in their wives homesteads where they obtained land. Those in polygamous marriages had access to land in different homesteads of their wives' people. The patrilineal Ngoni, Tonga and Tumbuka brought wives into their homesteads and received adequate land for each. With headmen and chiefs empowered to "delete from district registers names of natives who leave their villages and chiefdoms without sign of return...", with wives being such signs, "...and all who fail to meet their obligation to remit taxes through their wives" (File LB5/1/1), some men chose to leave wives behind as entitlement holders.

Added to the above, colonial capitalism itself marginalized women from the migrant stream. Within Nyasaland, the state supported the occupation of thousands of acres of land by European entrepreneurs who, by the 1940s, had established tea and tobacco estates in the Tchiri Highlands and cotton estates in Tchiri Valley. They also launched modern tea and tobacco grading and packaging factories in Blantyre and Tchiri and cotton processing factories at Port Herald. For these enterprises to flourish, they needed cheap African labor. Up to the 1960s, they worked with the state to recruit more than 10 000 male workers from different regions of Nyasaland, as compared to a mere 300 women (M.A, Annual Report, 1939). In Southern Rhodesia, women constituted a mere 5% and a third of urban and farm labor force respectively, while men made up 90% of the colony's labor force (Barnes, 2001, p56).

Capitalist recruiting agents, the Rhodesia Native Labor Bureau (RNLB) and Ulere focused solely on male recruitment just like South Africa's Witwatersrand Native Labor Association (WENELA) operating in Mozambique. While the RNLB liaised with the Nyasaland government to recruit over a hundred thousand men by the 1940s (BFAO File 137/1934-50, Ref. 27C), Ulere also transported 20 000 and 16 000 Nyasa men in 1958 and 1959, for example (NAZ, File 2239, Migrant Labor). Even though Ulere opened some space for women from the 1950s, it was only in exceptional cases where husbands' employers wrote letters to DOs requesting wives migration. The women it transported in 1958 and 1959 remained less than one ninth of the men transported at the same time since just like RNLB it was "only concerned with accommodating migrant men" (NAZ, File S3292/37/3, Nyasaland Labor; File CNC/S235/425, Migrant Labor Camps). They provided food, transport, clothing and medical attention to male recruits in migrant camps at Blantyre and Muzuzu in Nyasaland; on routes running across Mozambique all the way to Harari Township (Mbare), Highfields and Letombo camps in Southern Rhodesia's capital city.

Women Confronting the Effects of Male Migration

The whole system seriously affected women who faced increased workloads, starvation and other economic pressures or lost contact with migrant men. As this section argues based on the analysis of a combination of written records and oral testimonies, by instituting a male biased migrant system, the state ironically contributed to the disruption of peasant socio-economic life, driving many women to migrate.

In Nyasaland, the household formed a gendered labor unit where members shared responsibility over *madimba*/swamp and *minda*/ dry land or rain fed fields. *Madimba*, located on the exceptionally fertile banks of rivers such as the Tchiri, Mwanza, Mkombedzi and Ruo or lakes such as Chilwa and Malombe, sustained intercropping of different nutritious food crops, ensuring food security in times of

drought. Because preparation of *madimba* started from April when the floodwaters of the rivers and small lakes subsided, also a time of *minda* harvest, the labor needs of *madimba* and *minda* sometimes clashed. In a well-orchestrated division of labor, men dominated the preparation of *madimba* at a time when women would be busy storing up the harvest from *minda*. Men dominated the preparation of both *madimba* and *minda*, clearing, breaking and ridging the land before planting. Within patrilineal communities, the allocation of separate fields for each wife, not to mention the rivalry between them reduced the possibility of cooperation as able-bodied men increasingly migrated leaving behind "less energetic and older men" (BFAO, File 137/1934-48 Ref.34A). The migration of thousands of men also eroded *chikamwini*, a system whereby *akamwini*/sons-in-law worked for mothers in law to prove their worth. Women now undertook men's as well as their own tasks of food processing, pot making, salt panning, fetching household water, gathering firewood and food-stuffs such as water lily bulbs or *kasunika* /a spicy vegetable from riversides. Women in other parts of Africa such as Kenya's Nyanza District experienced the same effects of male labor exodus whereby "the loss of male labor began to be felt by women in farm production" (Francis, 2000, p.174).

In Nyasaland, women lost the benefits of male labor in house building, hoe making and hunting for hippos, elephants and other animals or guarding food crops against birds and marauding animals. By the 1940s, "the exodus of the ambitious and energetic men not only means that women are fully occupied in the fields etc. but also that they have no support to maintain or improve living standards" (BFAO, File 137/1934-48, Report). With almost 50 % of able-bodied Nyasa men staying away for years, living conditions deteriorated. Many women confronted seasonal hunger in the household and turned to the migrant stream for relief (BFAO, File 137/1934-48, Report). Agnes Kunjika, a Sena widow who migrated in 1958 explained that, "Except for two, all my uncles and three brothers were in Rhodesia. Only one remained at home until 1955...So I was like other women whose children starved without fathers or uncles to help" (Kunjika, 2009). According to Meripa Kongoti, for those whose husbands left them with their in-laws in patriarchal homesteads, such as the Tonga, Ngoni and Tumbuka, "it was difficult when you did not know if the husband would return! Even when pregnant, you woke at dawn, worked in the fields, dug out tubers, fetched vegetables, firewood, water from as far as here to Njanike's (3km)" (Kongoti, 2009). The women also faced "*malimidwe*"/soil conservation policies where agricultural officers and chiefs supervised the labor-intensive ridging, increasing women's workloads and diverting labor from food production (Mandala, 1990, p334).

Not surprisingly, *nsima* [maize meal polenta], the staple food in Nyasaland became scarce. Just like in Kenya's Nyanza district where migration exposed women and children to starvation (Francis, p175), Nyasa women such as Estere Banda who left

Muzikuora in 1949 for Southern Rhodesia faced chronically poor yields and starvation (Banda, 2008). She states, “you did not see even *nkute*/left-over *nsima*. So I fled because I did not want my children to starve” (Banda, 2008). Starvation claimed six in every ten children of up to ten years annually, between 1941 and 1956 (Annual Reports). As the Nyasaland Governor noted, “the growing emigration has brought misery and poverty... The waste of life, health and wealth is colossal...” (BFAO, File 137/1934-48, Ref 27A). Major F.T. Stephens, the Resident Nyasaland Labor Officer in Southern Rhodesia added, “many of the natives leave their families, settle down here with local attachments...it is breaking up home life in Nyasaland” (File 137/1934-48). While some women coped with the situation in Nyasaland, many ultimately took long, hazardous journeys to trace *matchona*/lost men (Interview: Chunga, 2008). Under the 1946 and 1951 Native Urban Areas Registration and Accommodation Act (NUARAA) extant till the 1970s, the municipality of Salisbury (Harare) defined all single women as illegal (File S3615/7/1: NUARAA) and local women married Nyasa men or used absentee Nyasa wives’ marriage certificates to legitimize urban access. For Nyasa women, to salvage their own marriages, many followed husbands. Emma James Tembo from Gaga village of Chikwawa district, like many others, left the village in the 1950s to find her husband who left for Southern Rhodesia during her first pregnancy. “He never sent a letter or money and our child was seven when I found him in 1956. I travelled to Rhodesia with his cousins (Interview: Tembo, 2008).”

Women such as Emma contended with cunning husbands who had concubines in Southern Rhodesia and collected their marriage certificates from Nyasaland under the pretext that they were going to “show this to *muzungu*/the white employer so we can get “help for you to come”(Interview: Chunga, 2008). Nyasa women referred to this practice as “*chikara ndimabwera*/ stay-here-I am-coming-back-for-you” (Interview: Kufansiyaji, 2009). Such men faced a dilemma since Shona concubines adamantly protested in Chewa, “*Ngati upiteko ukamutenge, inenso sitisiyana*”, that is, “if you want to go get your wife, I will follow you, I won’t be abandoned” (The African Weekly, May, 1957). Up to the 1960s, Malawian women had to migrate clandestinely to confront concubines who ensnared their husbands or betrothed men (Interview: Nyirenda, 2009). Clearly, the state’s male biased migrant system worsened women’s rural existence, propelling many to migrate.

Maneuvering the Gendered Migrant Stream

As it negotiated with Southern Rhodesia to regulate cross border migration along gender lines, the government of Nyasaland pushed for the institution of rules resulting in the international agreements such as the 1948 Migrant Workers Act. To ensure the success of the clauses in the Act designed to curtail women’s movement, the state needed not only Southern Rhodesia’s support, but also that

of internal players within Nyasaland. Such supporters would ensure the implementation of the 1948 Act, especially its permit clause, which remained extant till the 1960s. The clause charged any woman intending to leave Nyasaland to seek approval from their *Boma*/ district office. As of 1948, the *Boma* showed approval by issuing a document known as *karata zaurendo*/ travel permit" (Chunga, 2008; Nyirenda, 2009). Only wives of migrant workers with employers' support to migrate could hold this permit. The state also instituted a surveillance system including male authorities, *ankoswe*/ household heads, *mafumu*/ village headmen, chiefs and policemen. The women had to liaise with these male authorities who exercised patriarchal power over their migration.

Under customary law, male authorities became the first hurdle in women's way. To obtain travel permits, women needed marriage certificates and had to persuade husbands to register marriages. However, women as legal minors also needed *ankoswe*/ male guardians' support. *Ankoswe* could be mothers' brothers in matrilineal societies such as the Chewa or the father, uncles or brothers as among the patrilineal Tonga. *Ankoswe* held the mandate to approve or disapprove of the marriage before the D.C. Apart from marriage certificates women needed husbands' migrant workbook registration numbers and husbands' letters of invitation, letters from husbands' employers approving the wife's migration and availability of adequate housing. Officials could thus make decisions based on husbands' employment status and location in Southern Rhodesia (NAZ, File S14/8/1834). However, it was difficult for any woman to get all these documents together.

Dominant gendered perceptions of migration and of power as masculine terrains intersected, making female mobility questionable, but also consolidating a male hierarchy of control made up of *ankoswe*, village and chiefdom heads and District Officers (DOs). Reflecting Michel Foucault's "carceral archipelago of surveillance", the state ensured control through already existing hierarchies, enhancing or even distorting them by increasing men's power over women (Luibheid 2002, p.xxvii). Indeed, "the *Boma*/District Office gave too much power to *ankoswe*/household heads" (Interview: Marizani, 2009). With customary law defining women as perpetual minors under *ankoswe*, these male guardians became the first huge obstacle against their mobility. They exercised exclusive jurisdiction to request migrant permits for female wards at village, chiefdom and D.O level. *Ankoswe*'s need for labor power and other socio-economic benefits ensured that they mainly worked to obstruct women's migration. Especially among the matrilineal Man'anja, Chewa and Yao, even when women obtained all initial documents to apply for permits, *ankoswe* could obstruct them by refusing to represent them. Married in 1943 and intending to join her husband in 1944, Alice Gomeza's *nkoswe* persistently refused to take her to the headman and chief stating that, "Rhodesia *ndishatini yoipa*/an evil jungle or immoral place, what parent allows a girl to go into a *shatini*?"

(Interview: Gomeza, 2008). Up to the 1960s, others contended with a commonly asked question, "*iwe muntu wankazi, ufuna upite kuRhodesia? Ufuna umachiteko chiani?*" translated, "You a mere woman, you want to go to Rhodesia, what for?" (Interview: Mlewa, 2008).

Women had to negotiate with African authorities, even liaising with their mothers who persuaded their brothers, the said *ankoswe*, to assist them (Interview: Marizani, 2009). Some women played *ankoswe* against each other, offering gifts, showing more deference and persuading one *nkoswe* against the other (Interview: Gomeza, 2008). Others threatened adultery, invoking the Nyasaland Native Adultery Ordinance of 1939, charging male guardians of women impregnated during husbands' absence a fine of a cow or its cash equivalent. With an approximated average of 310 adultery cases tried in courts per year between 1949 and 1959, the women threatened adultery in their demand to join migrant husbands (Channock, 1990). Yao women also went on long drawn-out hunger strikes, used suicide threats, bribery and withdrawal from normal life in a bid to manipulate *ankoswe* to assist them. One Yao woman, Twasume Chigwegwere migrated in 1956 since her only surviving *nkoswe* blocked her mobility from 1946 until late 1956 when her husband bribed the *nkoswe* with a new "Rhodesian bicycle and clothes". The *nkoswe* then obtained the headman and chief's approval of Twasume's application for a travel permit and accompanied her to the D.O. in Mangoche (Interview: Chigwegwere, 2008).

The village headmen and chiefs were however equally obstructive given their reliance on men's tax remittances, "in respect of wives left behind" (MA, File LB5/1/1). Among the most ruthless headmen were Chapweteka and Muomba of Mlanje and Zomba respectively who regarded themselves as senior *ankoswe*/ guardians in their villages. Without their approval women's requests could not reach chiefs or even the D.O. and many women in Southern Malawi had to run away to avoid the experiences of women represented by Mwaiwatu Mavhuto of Chapweteka, who lost contact with their migrant husbands as headmen obstructed their aims to join them (Interview: Mavhuto, 2009). Another Man'anja woman, Luwina Jasi, of Kuntiwa's village recalled that, "everybody knew headman Kuntiwa for his cruelty. Every girl knew him for saying "*nsikana*, (girl) you are going nowhere" or for saying, "If I sign, you must never set foot here again" (Interview: Jasi, 2009). The women also recalled that chiefs who occupied the highest position in the hierarchy of African authorities "showed our oppression by our own people" since, like chief Muroro of Port Herald District they reversed decisions made at household and village level (Interview: Maluwa, 2008). Between 1948 and 1962, stories about Muroro's 'cruel' treatment of aspiring migrant women and his threats of permanent banishment or arrest on return of illegal migrants circulated in Nyasaland. Muroro obstructed Jessie Maluwa's migration between 1955 and 1959, despite approval by her *nkoswe* and village head. It was not until 1960 when Jessie's *nkoswe* bribed

him with one *kasu*/ hoe and “a new Rhodesian coat” that the chief allowed her *nkoswe* to take her to the highest realm of power, the *Boma*/ D.O (Interview: Maluwa, 2008). However, illegal migrants risked arrest, detention and harassment by headmen, chiefs and state police. Between 1949 and 1963, headmen Kuntiwa, Namwera and Chief Muroro ordered police boys to apprehend and beat up culprits to deter them from flight (Interview: Mlepa, 2009).

The situation was worse for single, divorced and widowed women without marriage certificates, husbands work book numbers or invitations. To migrate clandestinely, they risked encounters with predatory animals that killed many (The Nyasaland Times, 7/9/44) and their journeys sometimes coincided with the rainy season. Estere Banda left Mzikuora in February 1949 with a baby, Austen, to walk for days in forests made lush by the rains, to reach the road to Blantyre near Vipya to catch a truck (Interview: Banda, 2008). On arrival, she and her companion had a soggy blanket and nothing but wild berries to eat (Banda). Even those who reached Blantyre’s Paurere to find transport to Mozambique faced police document checks. Those who reached Mozambique’s Dondo Junction near Tete to catch buses or the train to Southern Rhodesia found that, “At Dondo, the police boys beat women lacking papers, or make them fetch water for Sumani’s Eating House before repatriation to Nyasaland” (African Weekly, 4/1/61). Some women faced sexual exploitation (Mlepa, 2009) and many thus sought illegal recruiters’ assistance despite the decree extant till the 1960s that, “any person who assists any native woman to leave the Protectorate without a travel permit shall be guilty of an offence” (NAZ, FileS482/22/44-48).

In addition, the system did not guarantee women access to migrant camps en-route and thus they endured the elements, mosquitoes and predatory animals. Recruiting agencies mostly excluded women from main camps on the Mzalanyana-Mrewa – Salisbury route. It started on the Mozambique- Malawi border at the nearest point to Lilongwe and Angoniland where men congregated for transportation via Pandanjala Mountain and Tete camps, reaching Zimbabwe’s Mt Darwin and then Mrewa (NAZ, File S3292/37/5; File S881/288). A fleet of trucks ferried men along another route, Misale, established in 1954 to start from Northern Malawi. Along the ways, men took shelter in several barracks with ‘huts of corrugated iron accommodating 30 migrant workers each’ (NAZ, File S253/402/419). However, women’s exclusion and disciplinary power against them was not pervasive enough to immobilize them.

Conclusions

With evidence drawn from a combination of colonial records, newspapers and oral testimonies, the paper has shown just how difficult it was for Nyasa women to

migrate from Nyasaland to Southern Rhodesia between 1930 and the 1960s. The state and African authorities, that is, *ankoswe*/male household heads and *mafumu*/chiefs and headmen as well as policemen colluded to curtail women's cross border mobility and defined such migration as a male labor phenomenon. The state passed various pieces of interrelated legislation such as the series of Migrant Acts running between the 1930s and the 1940s to culminate in the 1948 Migrant Workers Act extant till the 1960s, designating inter-colonial migration a male preserve. The Nyasaland government therefore co-opted the African authorities to ensure that, under these acts, only men obtained migrant pass-books while women had to remain in their villages constituting the much needed stable rural labor force. For both the state and African authorities, women's presence would not only be the surety that migrant men would return, but they would also boost the economy through cash remittances received. Any aspiring migrant woman needed a marriage certificate, the husband's work-book number, place of employment and proof of adequate accommodation in Rhodesia, as well as the employers request that the wife migrate. Very few women could get all these documents and even when they did, they needed *ankoswe*/household heads, *mafumu*/headmen and chiefs and finally the District Commissioner's anonymous consent to obtain the necessary "visitor's permit" to migrate. At most, *ankoswe* and *mafumu* exercised their veto power to object, in efforts to keep women in the villages.

The study has also emphasized that, the promotion men's exodus at the expense of women brought serious hardship as women undertook men's traditional gender roles in agriculture in addition to their own. The result was social breakdown, a marked decline in production, escalating rural poverty, starvation, malnutrition related deaths, mounting friction between the wives of absentee men and elderly in-laws who expected the women to work harder. Ironically, the migration that the state sought to curtail became the most attractive option for such women who thus entered the migrant stream to reconcile with *matchona*/lost husbands, fathers, uncles, brothers and betrothed men. Unlike men who used designated routes with shelter, food, medical care and transportation, the women had to migrate clandestinely facing serious hazards including police harassment, exposure to predatory animals and the elements.

Inter-colonial migration was therefore a highly gendered terrain shaped by the patriarchal conceptions of the state officials and African authorities who perceived migration as a male preserve. As such, women's experiences of migration differed from men's and was primarily illegal, difficult and extremely dangerous. It was a reflection of their determination to migrate to Southern Rhodesia, that Nyasa women exercised their limited autonomy to subvert, to resist and circumvent the androcentric and seemingly panoptical lenses of state officials, African guardians, village and chieftom heads and their policemen.

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