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Individual Enterprise and Enterprising Individuals:
African Entrepreneurship in Blantyre and Limbe,
1907 - 1953

by

JOEY POWER

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Arts

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
February, 1990

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Abstract

The following pages tell the story of the development of African enterprise in Biantyre-Limbe from 1907 to 1953. African business in the Southern Province of colonial Malawi began with plantation agriculture which proved even more problematic for undercapitalised African planters than for European counterparts. Merchant commerce in towns was closed to Africans as well because of the racialist character of urban life. For many reasons, Africans were forced to the margins of the urban economy where they carved out a special economic niche for themselves in the service sector. The post-1945 construction boom provided greater opportunities for accumulation than ever before and entrepreneurs eagerly took advantage of this, rejecting state efforts to push them into a more "suitable" cooperative framework.

The strong individualism and male bias of urban African enterprise had important social repercussions. Firms were closely associated with their proprietors, the "big men". Matrilocality gave way to virilocal residence. Successful entrepreneurs took on increased responsibility for spouses and children and used their new found wealth to build extra-kin clientage networks. Socially recognized wealth reposed in the acquisition of retainers. Entrepreneurs valued material accumulation only in so far as it gained them access to clients. The dominance of lineage values meant the retention of partible inheritance, ensuring that few African firms outlasted the death of their founders. This had important implications for gender relations, but also served to curtail the accumulation of capital over generations.

The thesis examines not only the methods of material accumulation employed by entrepreneurs and the institutional obstacles they faced, but looks to the social tension and conflict this created. It argues that even though entrepreneurs followed a capitalist path, they did so in order to succeed in terms of "custom".

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Introduction

In 1982 John Iliffe opened the first of the Anstey Memorial lecture series with the following mandate: to determine "how far black capitalists have come into being and established their predominance" in Africa.¹ This study addresses this question with respect to urban Malawi from 1907 to 1953, the period of the Nyasaland Protectorate. After 1907, Nyasaland's boundaries were fixed and its colonial state assumed the protectorate model of administration. The Rhodesias, by contrast, were under British South Africa Company control until 1923.² This meant that Nyasaland differed from its Central African cousins in important ways; for example, its "native policy" was "softer" and it pursued a more liberal immigration policy with respect to non-African minorities. The need to preserve Nyasaland's "milder" form of colonialism was cited by those opposed to closer union between the Rhodesias and Nyasaland. While Nyasaland hardly constituted a colonial paradise for Central Africans, a smaller settler population, its lack of exploitable mineral deposits meant that Nyasaland Africans were spared some of the greater excesses of white supremacy which prevailed elsewhere in the region. It is no exaggeration to say that the issue of closer union was a source of political tension in Central Africa from the 1920s right up to federation in 1953.

Closer union was not only a political question. Even without union, Nyasaland's regional economic role was as a supplier of cheap

¹ John Iliffe, The Emergence of African Capitalism, (Minneapolis, 1983), p.3.

² In 1915 the Rhodesian administrations were merged.

labour for Rhodesian and South African mines and farms. In Samir Amin's typology, colonial Malawi formed part of the Africa of the "labour reserve".³ Consequently, one of the preoccupations of the colonial state was to minimize the social fall-out of labour migration while maximizing economic returns to administrative coffers. Concern over the economic and political future of the territory informed policy throughout the protectorate period and had implications for the nature and scope of African enterprise there right up to federation. Hence, while 1907 and 1953 are political dates, they have considerable economic relevance.

This is no less the case for Malawi's urban history. In 1907 Zomba became the protectorate capital, denying Blantyre (some sixty miles to the south) its dreams of political leadership. Thereafter, the futures of Blantyre and Limbe (gazetted as a township in 1907) were fixed. The pattern of urbanisation and the "speciality" of the various urban centres in southern province were established by 1907; Blantyre was to be the commercial centre for non-African business and Limbe, as a railhead, constituted the main import-export entrepôt. Zomba, on the slopes of the mountain from which it took its name, was the centre of territorial governance on the fringe of the European planters' domain.

What Blantyre, Limbe and Zomba all shared was their "Europeanness". In this respect they were not unlike other Central African towns. In spite of laws limiting African residence in townships,

³. Samir Amin, "Underdevelopment and dependence in black Africa -- origins and contemporary forms", Journal of Modern African Studies, 10,4 (1972).

peri-urban villages sprang up along municipal boundaries and it was in these spaces that African businesspeople began their work. The commercial focus of Blantyre-Limbe meant that many peri-urban Africans established enterprises there, servicing the permanent waged population of the towns, and the thousands of transients en route to and from work abroad. Not officially part of the municipalities, these people came under the nominal control of village headmen in gazetted "native authority" areas, but traditional authority was weak. Yao chiefs had to contend with an increasingly cosmopolitan constituency as the towns attracted people from as far as Dedza and Ntcheu. However, it was not until the years following the Second World War that the state made any attempt to rationalize urban development.

In part because of the increasing tension over federation after 1945, Blantyre and Limbe drew the attention of development planners and colonial social scientists. Urban planning was in vogue in London and after 1948, urban planning "experts" were dispatched to Nyasaland. Their mandate was to incorporate Africans into the urban milieu officially. The debate over federation had heated up again and it was imperative that Nyasaland be seen to be pursuing a liberal "native policy". For this reason, planners had to pay lip service to the principles of trustee-ship and multi-racialism, even though the delimitation of high, medium and low density housing areas masked de facto segregation. At the same time, former peri-urban settlements were earmarked for removal to be replaced by light industrial sites which, on paper at least, were to open to all, but which were in fact, denied to African applicants. The political

uncertainty of the years immediately preceding federation meant that urban policy stalled to some extent -- wholesale revamping of Blantyre-Limbe's town plans remained in limbo until it was clear whether Malawi would be "for the black man or the union".⁴ By 1952, it was clear which way the tide was moving and the removal of Africans to municipal margins and "high density" residential areas was commenced. Ndirande, one of the largest of Blantyre-Limbe's peri-urban villages, was greatly reduced in area, but the village itself survived. Chichiri, mid-way between Blantyre and Limbe was less fortunate. Hence, federation begins a rather new chapter in the story of urban business in Malawi in that it marks the beginning of a period in which African presence in town was officially sanctioned. Before this time, official neglect meant that Africans were compelled to create their own urban communities and social welfare networks beyond the purview of the state.

As Iliffe remarked, it is relatively easy to identify "capitalists" in Africa; it is quite another thing to argue that capitalism (outside South Africa) constitutes the dominant mode of production anywhere on the continent. Just as capital exists in precapitalist societies, capitalism may coexist with precapitalist modes without being dominant.⁵ This was arguably the case in colonial Blantyre-Limbe where Africans founded capitalist enterprises but failed to sustain them over generations. The reason for the failure for capitalist enterprises to be self-sustaining is one

⁴. Interview 6 Wales J. [Nyemba] Mbekeani, Mkulumadzi Bakery, Limbe, Blantyre District, 25 January 1987.

⁵ Iliffe, The Emergence of Capitalism, p.32-3.

of the central contributions of this dissertation.

Recent scholarship has provided a number of theoretical explanations of why capitalism in Africa has failed to "develop". In the 1970s, modernisation theory gave way to dependency theory and then articulation theory. Yet, attempts to generalise upon the relationship between capitalist and precapitalist modes of production has proven elusive. The relationship cannot be fully explained by the rather bizarre notion of "articulation", which is, in any case, an obfuscated version of the old Marxian thesis-antithesis paradigm.⁶ The concept, as "articulated" by Pierre-Phillipe Rey confines the link between capitalist and precapitalist modes of production to the international market, or point of exchange and suggests that capitalism will never transform precapitalist structures.⁷ In fact, it serves international capital to preserve precapitalist structures and extract relative rather than absolute surplus value. This presupposes that extra-economic means (enter the oppressive colonial state) must be used to draw peasants and workers into the cash economy, but in such a way so as not to transform precapitalist relations of production. This is to ensure the continued political and social control of

⁶ Iliffe cited Aiden Föster-Carter's famous quip regarding articulation such that "articulation" is a term which derives from anatomy (pertaining to joints) and the practice of articulation (manipulation of joints) as a "science whose demonstration requires that the subject be dead". Iliffe wrote that he still hoped for a recovery. Aiden Foster-Carter, "Can we articulate "articulation"?" in John Clammer (ed.), The New Economic Anthropology, (London, 1978), p. 243, cited in Iliffe, The Emergence of African Capitalism, p.33.

⁷ Pierre-Phillipe Rey, Les Alliances de classes, (Paris, 1973), pp. 215-6, cited in Iliffe, The Emergence of African Capitalism, p.34,

"collaborators" on the periphery (e.g. indirect rule chiefs) who have a vested interest in perpetuating the colonial relationship.

There are problems with this interpretation. First, it oversimplifies capital's motivation. Bjorn Beckman's work on neo-colonial Nigeria suggests that it is not in the medium or long term interests of international capital to frustrate the development of capitalism on the "periphery".⁸ On the contrary, it is in the long term interest of capital to do just the opposite. In the case of Malawi where the dominant form of foreign capital during the colonial period was merchant capital, it stands to reason that European companies should have endorsed the expansion of the cash economy in order to augment African purchasing power. From the perspective of the European planter, it was in his interest to keep wages low through the pernicious thangata system, but the planter sector was unable to compete with higher wages elsewhere in the region. From 1909 to 1937 when internal recruitment of labour for Southern Rhodesia and South Africa was banned, "Nyassas" continued to travel abroad as uncovenanted labourers demonstrating that "marginalised" actors on the "periphery" consistently made economic and social change at the

⁸ Bjorn Beckman, "Imperialism and the 'national' bourgeoisie", Review of African Political Economy, 22(1981), 5-19.

same time that they reacted to it.⁹ When the state did step in to regulate migrant labour in the 1930s, it was to ensure that it got its pound of flesh, not to protect the labour supply of the Shire Highlands plantocracy (see Chapter Four).¹⁰

Tony Woods' recent work on the colonial state in Malawi shows how primitive accumulation was sacrificed to short term economic exigency.¹¹ Given the importance of state support in late industrialising territories, the nature of state involvement in economic development is crucial. But colonial states differed significantly from nation states in that they were sovereign voids. Even while they had to mediate between various interest groups, they were far more autonomous in colonies where they were not directly responsible to an electorate domiciled in Africa.

The Malawian colonial state was a weak state. While it would be folly to suggest that state action had little impact on African enterprise, there is danger in exaggerating the effects of legislation on business activity in town. Kennedy argues that government restrictions were most markedly evident in the "Africa of the Labour Reserves". Citing the

⁹ There is an enormous scholarship which documents the survival strategies of African working and petit bourgeois classes. Gavin Kitching, Class and Economic Change in Kenya, The Making of an African Petite Bourgeoisie, 1905 - 1970, (New Haven, 1980); Sara Berry, Fathers Work for their Sons, Accumulation, Mobility and Class Formation in an Extended Yoruba Community, (Berkeley, 1985); and for a much older work which demonstrates the same thing, see, Polly Hill, The Migrant Cocoa-Farmers of Southern Ghana, (Cambridge, 1963).

¹⁰ Tony Woods has come to similar conclusions in his recent thesis, "Accumulation and order: state and society in colonial Malawi, 1891-1929", Michigan State University Ph.D., 1991.

¹¹ Woods, "Accumulation and order".

Northern Rhodesian example, Kennedy points to the fact that Africans were prohibited from operating stores outside of locations, they were compelled to pay licence fees, they were restricted in what commodities they might sell and they were forbidden to operate bars until 1961. Neither could Africans register companies on their own land.¹² While this may have been true for Northern Rhodesia, it was not the case in colonial Malawi, the quintessential labour reserve. Africans were not obliged to take out trade licenses until 1936,¹³ and after this date were permitted to establish shops almost anywhere in the protectorate (outside the townships until 1948). Africans were entitled to register companies and did so. There were no restrictions on the type of goods they might sell, except with regard to foodstuffs in times of dearth.¹⁴ As to the sale of alcohol, the first legal African bar (selling bottled beer) within Blantyre township did not open until 1952, but beer brewing and kachasu distillation were thriving businesses throughout the colonial period, even in areas where they were banned.

¹² Paul Kennedy, African Capitalism, the Struggle for Ascendancy, (Cambridge, 1988), p.28; Amin, "Underdevelopment and dependence".

¹³ And licence fees for Africans were considerably lower than for non-Africans. See Chapters Three and Four.

¹⁴ The state reserved the right to put a ban on the inter-district exchange of foodstuffs in the event of regional shortages under terms of the Native Foodstuffs Ordinance, No. 2 of 1912. Specifically, the Governor in Council could designate an area where food was short and declare illegal the purchase of foodstuffs there for purposes of "resale in or export from the district or area" without written permission of the District Resident. See, The Native Foodstuffs Ordinance, No. 2 of 1912, Section 3, The Nyasaland Government Gazette, Gazette Notice (hereafter GN) 72/12, 23 May 1912.

Neither did the settler population enjoy much in the way of direct government assistance as dependency scholars have argued was common in East and Central Africa.¹⁵ Nowhere in Africa were rail rates as high as in Malawi,¹⁶ and lorry transport was sternly regulated until 1948. Settlers received no government credit assistance (not even a land bank) and Africans were never banned from growing "European crops". The few gains made by planters were hard won as Tony Woods' recent work makes clear.¹⁷ In the view of one planter, all settlers might hope to expect from the government "was a D.B.S. [Distressed British Subject] passage".¹⁸ The assertion that the state was simply the mouthpiece of the

¹⁵ Kennedy, African Capitalism, pp. 31-32; Colin Leys, Underdevelopment in Kenya, (London, 1975); Mahmood Mamdani, Politics and Class Formation in Uganda, (London, 1977); E.A. Brett, Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa. The Politics of Economic Change, 1919-1939, (London, 1973).

¹⁶ Leroy Vail, "The making of an imperial slum: Nyasaland and its railways, 1895-1935", Journal of African History, 16 (1975).

¹⁷ Tony Woods, "The myth of the capitalist class: unofficial sources and political economy in colonial Malawi, 1895 - 1924", History in Africa, 16, (1989), 363 - 373.

¹⁸ Woods cites Eric Emtage, a tobacco planter who came to Malawi in the 1920s. Eric Emtage, "Reminiscences -- Nyasaland 1925-39", Society of Malawi Journal, 37,2(1984), 12-23; cited in Tony Woods, "Malawi's missing peasantry: planters and peasants in the Central Province, 1929 - 1940", paper presented to the African Studies Association Conference, Baltimore, 1990.

dominant race or class is inaccurate.¹⁹

It is clear that the colonial state in Malawi was simply unable to foster the development of one or another sector. It was unable to maintain real control over the economic activities of its constituents. As with credit, landholding and so on, people were able, through fair means or foul, to circumvent state restrictions. The state was unable to "capture the peasantry", keep Africans out of town, or balance its budget much of the time!

In addition to oversimplifying the role of the state and international capital, "articulation" theory ignores the actors on the "periphery". As Sara Berry, Gavin Kitching and others have pointed out, "marginals" played an important role in making economic and social change.²⁰ Capitalism modified "precapitalist" economies, but the nature of the latter had significance for the direction of capitalist development in any given time and place. Precapitalist values and behaviours shaped capitalist colonial economies in important ways. As seductive as general explanations are, those which assign human agency a back seat to the dynamics of an abstracted "world economy" or "autonomous state" miss much of the tale. It is essential to delineate the scope of entrepreneurial

¹⁹. Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale have done much to dispel this myth. See, "Coping with the contradictions: the development of the colonial state in Kenya, 1895 - 1914", Journal of African History, 20,4(1979); Crises of accumulation, coercion and the colonial state", Canadian Journal of African Studies, 14,1(1980). Tony Woods has made the explosion of this myth a major part of his recent dissertation, Woods, "Accumulation and order", see discussion in Chapter One.

²⁰ Kitching, Class and Economic Change; Berry, Fathers Work for their Sons.

activity itself and view businesspeople, "not simply as passive owners and managers, buffeted by external forces, but also as actual and potential agents of change whose decisions contributed to the gradual transformation of that same environment in which they struggle to survive".²¹ For urban Malawi where businesspeople focused on a domestic market, links to the international economy were indirect. Hence, while global context is important, it is more germane to explore the immediate political and social environment in which accumulators operated.

"Institutional" factors of greatest significance are situated at the level of the colonial state and urban society as created by African and European actors in combination. Such an approach throws up the question of how far colonialism fostered moral or political economies and to explore this, one needs to explore the ideological level.²²

Precolonial southern Malawi of the late nineteenth century can be characterized as a "lineage, clientelist, and slave owning" society. According to John Iliffe, such societies commonly "measured a man's wealth by the number of his kin or his dependants [and required] him to

²¹ Kennedy, African Capitalism, p. 158.

²² Elias Mandala has most recently "revived" the moral economy approach in his book on the Lower Tchiri. Moral economy is a term which Thompson coined in 1971 in an important article on the moral economy of the English crowd. In it, he argues, that the poor rioted to protest rising food prices and shortages in eighteenth century England, not simply as a knee-jerk response to dearth, but in part because they felt that their customary rights to food were being undercut by merchants, speculators and millers. Elias Mandala, Work and Control in a Peasant Economy, A History of the Lower Tchiri Valley in Malawi, 1859 - 1960, (Madison, 1990); E.P. Thompson, "The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century", Past and Present, No.50 (1971), 76-136.

be ever dispersing his capital through investment in people".²³ Megan Vaughan and Elias Mandala have probed the dynamics of Shire Valley societies of the nineteenth centuries and the importance of patronage and protection in estimations of "wealth".²⁴ With the cessation of the slave trade, ambitious young men lost an important avenue for social and material aggrandizement, but evidence uncovered in this research suggests that nineteenth century notions of "wealth" continued to have meaning into the twentieth. While education or wage labour provided new windows of opportunity and colonialism did impose a "pax" on Malawians, it was hardly a secure environment for people in the southern region. The slave trade was (for the most part) wiped out, but people had to confront a new host of evils -- hut tax, thangata, indirect rule chiefs, wartime conscription and forced labour. In such an unstable environment, it is not surprising that corporate responsibility and group consciousness remained strong. In the urban areas where Africans had no official status until after the Second World War, corporate duty was essential to creating a social welfare network appropriate to urban conditions. Hence, "wealth" continued to revolve around patronage and how beneficent a material accumulator was.

Ideology, then, is essential to understanding the development of

²³ Iliffe, The Emergence of African Capitalism, p.20.

²⁴ Megan Vaughan, "Social and economic change in southern Malawi: a study of rural communities in the Shire Highlands and upper Shire Valley from the mid-nineteenth century to 1915", Ph.D., University of London, 1981; Elias Mandala, "Capitalism, kinship and gender in the lower Tchiri (Shire) valley of Malawi, 1860 - 1960: an alternative theoretical framework", African Economic History, 13(1984), 137-170.

capitalism in Africa. Weber argued that Calvinism formed the bedrock of western capitalism, rejecting "the doctrine of the more naive historical materialism, that such ideas originate as a reflection or superstructure of economic situations".²⁵ Leaving aside the "chicken or egg" question which Weber raises, it is clear that work ethic is crucial to all kinds of production, be it capitalist or otherwise. Malawi, being one of the most heavily proselytized regions of the African continent, (with Protestant and sectarian churches most popular) would surely prove an important testing ground for Weber's thesis.

However, when one looks to the religious or ideological baggage of Blantyre-Limbe's businesspeople it is difficult to come to any firm conclusions. I was not able to ascertain a clear cut connection between Protestant asceticism and entrepreneurship in the Malawian case. Entrepreneurs were eclectic in their religious practices, and no one denominational association stood out.²⁶ One of the most successful business people in the south was a Muslim Yao, who had converted to Islam as an adult, having been raised Christian. In religious terms, entrepreneurs were united only by their diversity. What was clear from all accounts, however, was the high value placed upon mutual assistance

²⁵ Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, translated by Talcott Parsons, (New York, 1958), pp. 54-59; 55.

²⁶ Chester Katsonga undertook Catholic theological training before he moved into business; Lawrence Makata was a Christian Yao of the Scots Presbyterian Church; Lali Lubani, also a Yao, converted to Islam as an adult; James Mpunga blended Islamic and Christian beliefs. Interview 7, James L. Mpunga, Newlands Inn, Thyolo Road, T.A. Kapeni, Blantyre District, 29 January 1987.

and community responsibility.

What is most provocative about the Blantyre-Limbe case is that businesspeople strove to attain socially recognized wealth (wealth in people) by employing capitalist methods, but these methods, which often put material concerns for the enterprise before kin obligations, were regarded as anti-social. Participation in the colonial economy and successful businesses attracted followings for "big men" who were in a position to bestow material gifts and patronage on them. The accumulation of material wealth and the accumulation of socially recognized wealth were part and parcel of the same process. But it was a marriage fraught with contradiction; conflict over social and anti-social behaviour was rife. Accumulators struggled to reconcile new methods of self-aggrandizement with dominant cultural values. The contradictions between strategies and goals of accumulation have yet to be resolved.

*

The thesis falls into three parts. The first chapter establishes the social, political and economic climate of colonial Blantyre and Limbe; the relationships between people, space and race relations. It sets the stage for the bulk of the piece which is broadly chronological.

The single-most striking aspect of colonialism in urban Malawi was its stark racialism. In townships and trading centres (for which there was little coherent legislation before 1948) racial segregation was a central fact of life. It governed settlement patterns, access to resources, consumption patterns, dictated wage rates and other conditions of labour. Factors of production did not move freely in this environment. The discussion

focuses on the genesis of the townships as European enclaves, the theory and reality of segregation, and the effect of this on the urban economy.

The second section (chapters two through six) deals with the chronology of African business in the towns, highlighting the particular problems and pitfalls that determined the nature of African enterprise. The period up to 1915 focuses on the failure of African plantation agriculture and the frustration of the emerging "progressive" mission educated elite in their efforts to attain respectability in the eyes of the white establishment. Obstacles to economic advancement fostered a climate of frustration which led some petit bourgeois Africans to take up arms in the Chilembwe Uprising of 1915. This episode ended with Africans effectively blocked from plantation agriculture and left a legacy of distrust between educated Africans and the state.

Chapter Three shifts the focus from African to non-African business. It shows how non-Africans came to dominate merchant commerce and indicates why Africans moved into the enterprises they did in the interwar period. It has been suggested that colonial states often encouraged the immigration of "foreign middle-men" minorities to many African territories and that this worked against African interests. Paul Kennedy depicted "Asian" immigrant communities as "ethnic minority group[s] sharing certain cultural ties and bound together by the same experience of political and economic vulnerability that has always faced such marginal groups operating in alien environments" who hence, "had every reason to maintain a degree of internal group solidarity, closing

their ranks against outside interests".²⁷ The Malawian case was more complex than this. Racist double standards informed state policy, but class divisions mediated the effect of racism in important ways. In Malawi, non-African dominance in merchant exchange was a fact by 1918. However, Malawi's immigration laws were the most liberal of any of the Central African territories. Because of this, the Indian population of colonial Malawi was not a cultural monolith and it was profoundly divided along class lines. Much of the discriminatory trade licensing legislation of the 1930s was the result of successful lobbying by an alliance of Indian and European wholesale traders. The target of this legislation was the small Indian retailer and not African traders. In fact, big merchants were perfectly willing to play the African card (arguing that Indian retailers impaired African entry into trade) to squeeze out the small Indian trader. As transparent as their altruism may have been, Chapter Three clearly demonstrates that when money was on the line, traders acted as traders, not as members of an ethnic community.

Effectively barred from merchant commerce, Africans moved into urban service industries not monopolized by foreigners. State neglect of petit entrepreneurs during the interwar depression contributed to the intensely individualistic character of African urban business. Africans pursued activities with low start up costs such as tailoring and fish-trading and through keeping operating costs low, were able to weather the economic turmoil of the 1930s. The proceeds from labour migration

²⁷ Kennedy, African Capitalism, p.32.

provided an important source of start-up capital.

African and non-African enterprise benefited from the general economic upswing of the post war era. Some legislative restrictions were lifted (particularly important was the freeing up of motor transport licensing) and Africans enjoyed greatest success in sectors formerly neglected by foreign capital. An urban building boom encouraged African inroads into construction, brick making and transport. Many successful entrepreneurs extended their commercial repertoires to include hotels and bars, capitalizing on a growing African market. Chapter Five is the story of how the state attempted to hijack African production and distribution in Southern Province through the introduction of cooperatives. Cooperatives failed to take hold in Southern Province because of the individualistic nature of African enterprises and the unsuitability of the cooperative model for them.

Chapter Six identifies a group of African accumulators and explores the strategies which they favoured over the cooperative option. It shows how they were able to circumvent discriminatory legislation and other obstacles to accumulation.

The final portion of the thesis returns to the firm itself. In spite of a number of success stories, African firms did not usually survive the death of their founders. Chapters Seven and Eight ask why this was so. Many scholars have sought the "weaknesses" in African entrepreneurial activity, how African entrepreneurs failed because they were hide-bound by "tradition" and so on. I argue that retention of "traditional" values can only be understood as part of a complex process of social change. With

this in mind, Chapter Seven puts the internal dynamics of the African firm under the historian's microscope by concentrating on how accumulators sought to reconcile capitalist ambitions and methods with corporate values. It illustrates how entrepreneurs performed a delicate juggling act; they pursued personal economic autonomy through material accumulation, while balancing this with a redistributive function. This meant modifying economic behaviour so as not to alienate peers, clients and relatives.

Chapter Eight puts the firm back into the colonial economy and probes the various stresses and strains to which it was subjected in the post war era of planned development up to the eve of federation (Chapter Eight). It is here that we return to some of the questions raised in this introduction about the nature of the relationship between capitalism and ideology, focusing on the level of social and economic interactions in peri-urban communities. Specifically, the chapter explores the gender dimension of changing economic conditions and suggests that wives and children of male entrepreneurs experienced a decline in security as male proprietors experimented with new ways of increasing their own autonomy and prestige.

In order to reconstruct attitudes and tactics for African businesspeople, to gain insight into how they began businesses and why, it was necessary to exploit oral sources. Lists of potential informants were derived from archival research. I surveyed land registries, motor vehicle and trading licence lists, minutes and financial statements of African and non-African organisations for mention of individuals who

seemed to be self-employed business people. Court records and town council records were useful sources for this as well as the various protectorate newspapers. Several entrepreneurs advertised in the Nyasaland Times (the settler newspaper) and the vernacular press (Zoona, Msimbi and Nkhani za Nyasaland).

With a tentative list of informants, I moved to the field where I was able to track down some of the persons on the list. Many had passed away, but had family and friends still living. Where possible, these people were interviewed. After the first round of interviews, I was often directed to others who had not appeared in the official records, and while these "networks" of informants were often related by kinship, the documentary base of the original list helped to reduce problems of "feedback". For example, court records named both parties in a dispute, listed witnesses and the value of the property or amount of debt involved. Hence, it was possible to identify people who were likely to be at odds with each other and gain "conflicting" or divergent interpretations of the same event. This helped to ensure that I was not being passed from informant to informant and fed the same story. Informants were not all of the same family, ethnic group, community, religious affiliation, nor were they all "friendly" with each other.

Usually, I organised interviews in advance. This was done in person. Interviews were conducted either in English or in Chichewa (with the help of an interpreter) and were transcribed as soon as possible after the session. This was to ensure that in the event something was missed, a follow-up interview could be arranged. The routine for the second set

of interviews (those conducted in 1988) was much the same except that an additional research assistant was enlisted to double-check transcriptions for fidelity of translation. Information imparted during the interviews was cross-checked with documentary and oral sources wherever possible.

The period of transition does not end in 1953 as this study does. Blantyre-Limbe's urbanites continue to grapple with the contradictions between moral and political economy. When asked about his uncle's participation in the African Chamber of Commerce (formed in 1953) and his general view of corporate versus group effort in business, Whisky Lobeni gave me what seemed to be a contradictory response. He said:

... my uncle [Lali Lubani] was not an individual. He plays on association and means it.[If he joins an association, he sticks with it] When he's in a group he would not go out... He liked to be on his own sometimes. People don't know how to do things in a group. Once they join together, one goes to that side, one goes to that side; they start to confuse. His [Lali Lubani's] advice to me was work hard, not to play with money because money is very important, it's capital. When we wake up in the morning, just rush for that, for the business until dusk.²⁸

Blantyre-Limbe's entrepreneurs did "rush for the business" from sun-up to sun-down, but they did so as a means to an end. Like Mandala's peasants, theirs remained a "distinctly moral view of the economy".²⁹

²⁸ Lali Lubani was a successful brickmaker and transporter after 1945. He was also one of the founding members of the African Chamber of Commerce and a member of the Nyasaland Congress Party and the Malawi Congress Party. He had no children, but raised Whisky Lobeni, his sister's son as his own. He died of heart failure in 1966 at the age of sixty-two. Interview 20 Gerald Montfort (Whisky) Lobeni, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 7 March 1987.

²⁹ Mandala, Work and Control, p.xxi.

Chapter One

Blantyre - Limbe: The Urban Milieu

The Physical Setting

Blantyre is historic; Limbe, its neighbour is new. Blantyre is in a hollow; Limbe on a hill. There you have the main differences.¹

Urbanisation is a recent phenomenon in Malawi and a distinctly "foreign" invention. Before the arrival of Europeans in the mid-nineteenth century, people lived in relatively self-sufficient villages, deriving their livelihood from agriculture or cattle-keeping. There was local and regional trade, but no large scale production for the market. In the main, trade was characterised by regional complementarity and effected through itineration rather than exchange at permanent central market places.² There was no proliferation of large market towns inhabited by full-time merchants and artisans as existed in West Africa. The exceptions to this in Central and East Africa were Arab trading entrepôts along the Tanzanian and Mozambiquan coasts and several inland centres based on the long distance trade in slaves and ivory. In Malawi, such centres were Karonga, Nkhosakota and Nkhata Bay on the lake shore and Mponda's and Kachindamoto's capitals in the south. These settlements supported

¹ L.S. Norman, Nyasaland Without Prejudice, (London, 1934), p.34.

² For example see, Kings M. Phiri, "Precolonial economic change in Central Malawi: the development and expansion of trade systems, 1750 - 1875", Journal of Social Science, 5 (1976), 15-27; J. Vansina, "Long distance trade routes in Central Africa", Journal of African History, 3, 3(1962), 375-390; and more recently, Elias Mandala, Work and Control in a Peasant Economy, A History of the Lower Tchiri Valley in Malawi, 1859 - 1960, (Madison, 1990), pp. 36-50.

populations of up to 10,000 people each, but declined along with the East African slave trade. It was not until the 1930s that a Malawian town reached a size comparable to these precolonial sites.³ Bruce Fetter observed humorously that in 1945 there were only two Central African towns, apart from Blantyre and Limbe, which contained more than 10,000 Malawians -- Johannesburg and Salisbury!⁴ Fetter's observation indicates the overwhelmingly rural character of colonial Malawi. Yet, as centres of colonial commerce and government, towns sprang up during the twentieth century. To a large degree, the European origins of town "founders" have determined the physical and social landscape of urban Malawi.

Blantyre was established in the late nineteenth century through the combined efforts of Scots capitalism and Presbyterianism.⁵ The Free Church of Scotland set up a mission north of Ndirande Mountain in 1876 and named it Blantyre, after the birthplace of its inspiration -- David Livingstone. In 1878, the Livingstonia Central Africa Company, later the African Lakes Company (or "Mandala", as it is commonly known today) joined the missionaries in their "civilising efforts", ostensibly to provide a "legitimate" economic alternative to the slave trade. All rhetoric aside, the

³ Bruce Fetter, Colonial Rule and Regional Imbalance in Central Africa, (Boulder, 1983), pp.38-41. John McCracken estimates that Mponda's supported a population of 8,000 persons at the end of the nineteenth century. J. McCracken, Politics and Christianity in Malawi, 1875-1940, (Cambridge, 1978), pp.6;55.

⁴ Ibid., p.65.

⁵ Paul Cole-King, Blantyre Historical Guide, (Blantyre, 1973)

African Lakes Corporation (ALC) and Blantyre Mission did little to encourage "modern" commerce among the African population. The former focused on distribution and the latter on training Africans to be auxiliaries of European economic endeavours. This meant the tutoring of Africans in clerical and artisanal tasks to supplement the skeletal expatriot staffs of merchant firms, plantations and mission enterprises. An array of foreign firms (including several founded by Indians) followed the ALC to Nyasaland -- to name only a few, Kubula Stores (1889), Osman Adam (1894), the Blantyre and East Africa Company (1901) and the London and Blantyre Supply Company (1906). By the first decade of the twentieth century, European merchant capitalism had supplanted the older commerce based upon the trade in human beings.

A motley crew of settlers and adventurers followed in the wake of Christianity and commerce.⁶ The land on which the towns of Blantyre and Limbe grew was secured by Europeans through certificates of claim scrutinized and approved by that consummate imperialist, Harry Johnston, in the late 19th century.⁷ Two such claims embraced the area on which

⁶ For example, Alfred Sharpe was visiting British Central Africa to hunt big game when he was asked to sit in as Acting Consul. Sharpe stayed on after doing his bit for Imperialism and took up the governorship. Nyasaland also attracted a hodge-podge of artists, merchants and adventurers like W.B Thelwall of the Illustrated London News. McCracken has also pointed out the significant differences within the missionary community. He suggests that the Livingstonia contingent was drawn from the upper-working class or lower middle class and that those at Blantyre were largely upper middle class professionals. McCracken, Politics and Christianity, p.44-50.

⁷ Bridglal Pachai, Land and Politics in Malawi, 1875 - 1975, (Kingston, 1978).

Limbe township was to grow. A Polish count, Kasimir Stanislaus Steblecki owned the 2,700 acre Makungwa Estate which encompassed most of the southern part of Limbe. The Limbe Estate, owned by Englishman, James Lindsay, comprised the remaining central and northwestern portions of the township.

The land on which Blantyre township grew was similarly transformed into freehold estates. The territory was divided between a number of private plots owned by the Blantyre Mission, the ALC and several individuals; foremost among these were John Buchanan's Mudi and Michiru Estates and Harry Edwin Pettitt's Muqi Retreat. Ironically, the largest landholding in the area was secured by an African named Ntaja. An ivory hunter and trader, Ntaja was given permission to settle in Chief Kapeni's area before the European advent and paid tribute to him in return for supplies of arms and ammunition. Ntaja established friendly relations with the Scots missionaries and used this leverage to obtain 38,000 acres of land from Chiefs Kapeni and Chilobwe under certificate of claim number twenty-four.⁸ Much of this was sold to the Crown in 1892, subsequently subdivided and portions sold to sundry European and Indian settlers.⁹ In this manner, the lion's share of land on which Blantyre and Limbe sat was appropriated by non-Africans.

⁸ Land Register, Blantyre, Volumes 1-3, cited in Bridglal Pachai, Land and Politics in Malawi, 1875 - 1975, (Kingston, 1978), pp. 50-51.

⁹ W.H.J. Rangeley, "Early Blantyre", draft paper submitted to Journal of the Nyasaland Society, 18 January 1954, pp. 6-11, in Rangeley Papers in the Historical Society of Malawi Archives (hereafter HSMA), Chichiri, RP4/1/11.

Table 1.1
Population of Blantyre and Limbe Townships
1907 - 1987

Year	Blantyre Township			Limbe Township			Peri-Urban Area X ¹	
	E	A	African	E	A	African	African	
1907	192	90	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	
1921	194	130	1202	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	
1931	301	183	n/a	203	426	n/a	25,096	34%
1945	628	351	3594	(included in Blantyre figures)			n/a	
1947	379	409	3594	280	649	6179	n/a	
1949	533	599	5311	496	876	7497	54,859	50%
1952	558	370	8122	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	
1966 ²	—————			107,461			—————	
1977	—————			219,011			—————	
1987	—————			331,588			—————	

E = Europeans A = Asians/Indians

¹ Percentage of Blantyre District Africans living in town and peri-urban areas.

² For Blantyre and Limbe combined.

Sources: Unofficial Census taken by Blantyre Town Council as at 31 March, 1952, in MNA, URB/F/2/4870. Blantyre Town Clerk to District Commissioner, 28 December 1949, MNA, NSB3/11/1, F59; Government Printer, Nyasaland Protectorate Census, 1945, (Zomba, 1946); Memo from Chief Secretary to Blantyre Town Council, 21 January 1922, Blantyre Town Council Minutes, 28 March 1922, MNA, BL2/1/1/2; Blantyre District Annual Reports, 1931, 1942, 1946, 1947, 1948, MNA NS3/1 series; Government Printer, Nyasaland Protectorate Blue Books, selected years, (Zomba); A.B. Chilivumbo, "The ecology of social types in Blantyre", in Parkin, David (ed.), Town and Country in Central and Eastern Africa, (Oxford, 1975); National Statistics Office, Government Printer, Malawi Population and Housing Census, 1987 Preliminary Report, (Zomba, 1987), p.23.

Today, the "twin cities" of Blantyre and Limbe, situated in the Blantyre District of Malawi's Southern Region, represent the nation's largest urban area. The most recent census (1987) reports that Blantyre-Limbe is home to 331,588 people.¹⁰ Table 1.1 illustrates the rapid pace of urbanisation since 1945, and especially after 1956 when Blantyre and Limbe united to form a single municipality. These not-so-grand, not-so-old towns are products of a peculiar colonial experience and vestiges of this history survive today.

After the declaration of Blantyre and Limbe townships in 1895 and 1907, respectively, municipal and central government rules and regulations were enacted to preclude permanent African residence in the towns. Nonetheless, Africans constituted the numerical majority in the region and it was on the strength of their wages and labour that the viability of the local economy rested.¹¹ Urban spaces worked like population magnets since they offered special educational and economic opportunities

¹⁰ Department of National Statistics, Government of Malawi, Malawi Population and Housing Census, 1987, Preliminary Report, Government Printer, (Zomba, December 1987), p.23. This figure refers only to the municipality of Blantyre and Limbe itself which constituted 56% of the district's population.

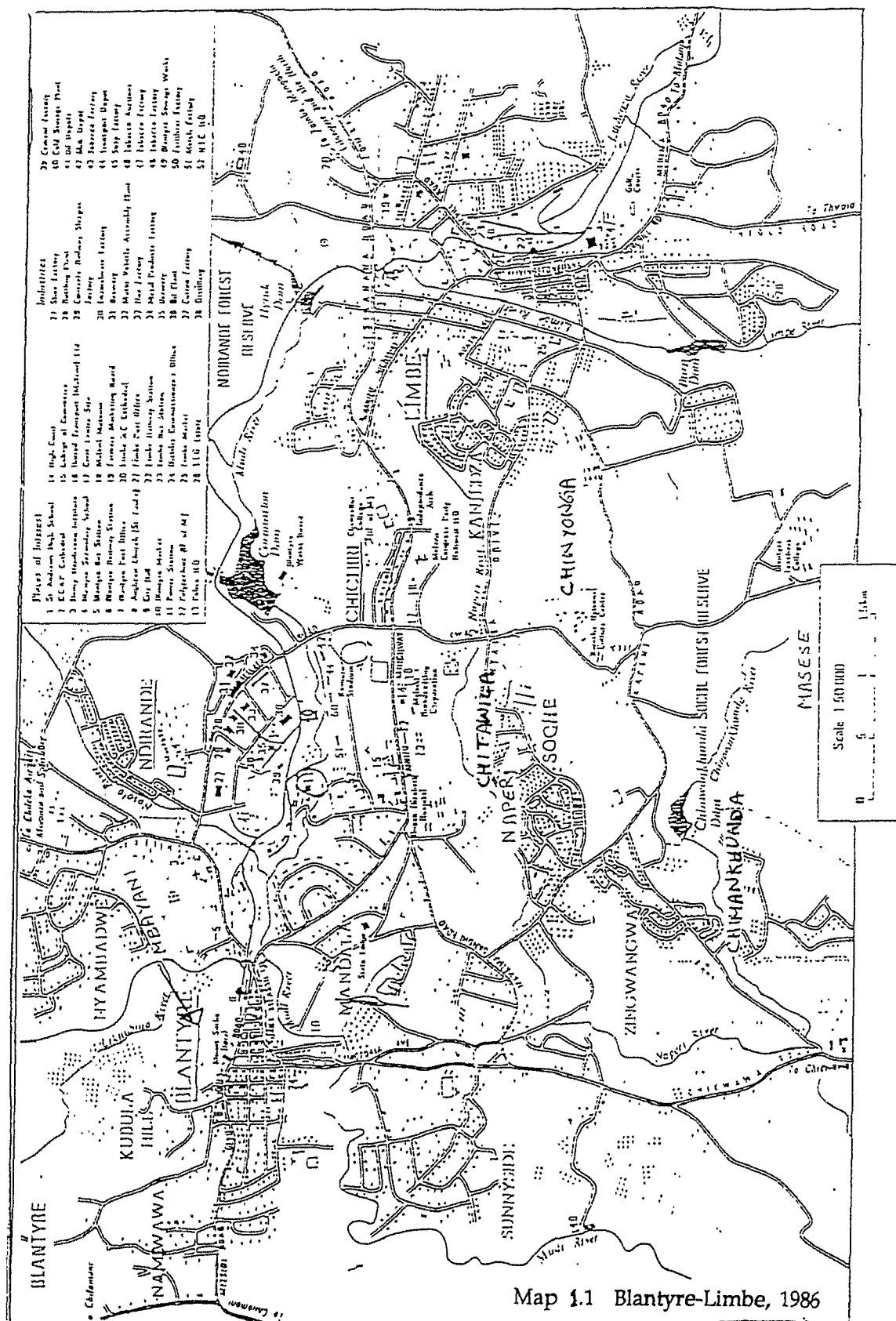
¹¹ Nyasaland African labour was the cheapest in British Central and Southern Africa. Outside of their own Protectorate "Nyasas" as they were called, were also regarded as being among the most efficient and sought after of workers. Unlike their African counterparts in the region, Malawians were able to get skilled and semi-skilled employment at home and were well suited to it by their access to mission education superior to that provided elsewhere. Nyasaland had little industry and a small white population and as a consequence had no industrial colour bar although informally, certain occupations were earmarked as "white", "coloured" or "black".

unavailable in the countryside. Segregation was the only way to maintain white hegemony and resulted in the creation of three distinct urban worlds -- that of the European, the Indian, and the African.

Blantyre, the elder of the two towns, is a typical "European" African city, similar to Harare or Lusaka in that it was established by and for the British colonizers.¹² A product of nineteenth and twentieth century imperialism, its layout was based upon strict racial segregation to the maximum convenience of the European community.¹³ Today, Blantyre and Limbe's residential areas are of three colour blind "grades" -- high, medium and low density housing. Originating during the colonial period (after 1948), these designations ostensibly based on economic position, corresponded to racial identity. This was because of institutional and other impediments to the economic advancement of peoples of colour; hence, in the colonial period, class distinctions tended to correspond to race. Whites, for example, were generally more affluent than Indians or Africans, and lived in low density areas, like Mpingwe, Sunnyside and Hynde. Indians, who occupied the economic middle ground as petty traders, resided in the commercial core of the towns. Africans, mainly a labouring group, either in clerical or unskilled work, lived in high density areas such as Chichiri, Ndirande or Zingwangwa. These settlements, or peri-urban villages, were outside the township boundaries. The only legal

¹² Anthony O'Connor, *The African City*, (London, 1983). O'Connor's typology includes other "species" of African town such as the indigenous, Islamic, colonial, dual and hybrid.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.35.



African residential areas within the town were government and corporate built native locations which were more congested than the peri-urban villages mentioned above.¹⁴ After independence, white collar African workers and managers moved into former European enclaves, but the general pattern of white and non-white residential areas still holds true.¹⁵ Map 1.1 is a street map of the municipalities.

Blantyre coalesces around a central business district consisting of medium rise buildings which house banking and commercial establishments, the "modern" Mount Soche Hotel and the older Ryall's Hotel (opened in 1922). Victoria Road was Blantyre's main street and Ponson's Bar, Blantyre and East Africa Company Headquarters and other European concerns had offices on it. At the corner of Victoria and Hailie Selassie Roads stands the old boma, the one time headquarters of the District administration. Its whitewash is peeling today, but the iron sheets which form the roof are in reasonably good repair. Kitty-corner to this is Victoria Hall, built in 1900. It was used as a cinema and after 1933, served as the Town Hall. The Blantyre Town Council worked out of the

¹⁴ The term "peri-urban" was used by David Bettison in a series of studies written between 1958 and 1961. He estimated the peri-urban area around Blantyre and Limbe to have a radius of 10 to 15 miles. Bettison counted the number of pedestrians and cyclists who regularly travelled along major arteries into both towns. He confined his count to urban employees. He was able to ascertain the maximum distance people would commonly travel to work and referred to the area which fell within this space as "peri-urban". David G. Bettison, "The demographic structure of seventeen villages, Blantyre-Limbe, Nyasaland", Rhodes-Livingstone Communication No. 11, (Lusaka, 1958).

¹⁵ A.B. Chilivumbo, "The ecology of social types in Blantyre" in D. Parkin (ed.), Town and Country in Central and East Africa, (Oxford, 1975), pp.310-311.

old Victoria Buildings on Victoria Road from 1926 to 1933. Built in 1922 for the Blantyre and East Africa Company by Inaccio Conforzi, a prominent Italian planter, the Victoria Buildings were the only two storey constructions on Victoria Road. They were demolished in 1978 and were replaced by Plantation House.¹⁶ Hall's Garage, now a subsidiary of Lonhro, still has its main facility here as does CATCO, the Central Africa Transport Company. West of Victoria Road are the low density housing areas of Namiwawa (ex-Hynde) and Sunnyside, which includes the old European "club". This area was exclusively for European residence, even if Thomas Mtemenyama's laundry, the product of a late nineteenth century freehold purchase, found itself incongruously surrounded by these stately homes sometime in the 1930s. Such was the small downtown core of Blantyre -- centre for municipal and district government, business, finance and European society.

Hailie Selassie Road forms the backbone of the old Indian quarter, Blantyre's "second city". The haphazard architecture and bright colour of the Indian quarter is contrasted with the white-washed austerity of the British residential wards. The physical differences are emblematic of a deeper distinction. Many of the town's oldest Indian families still retain offices and stores here where the ambience of vibrant competition, risk-taking and exchange is palpable.¹⁷ Two storey shops wrestle for pride of

¹⁶ John Lamport-Stokes, "Blantyre's early buildings", Society of Malawi, (1983), 33.

¹⁷ The first land purchased by an Indian in Malawi was a 1/4 acre plot which was part of the original Pettitt estate. Osman Adam bought this land in July of 1894 on which he erected a trading store. Other important traders who arrived later were Lalji Kurji and Lambat.

place along the crowded street and touts beckon to passers buy to "Come! Come! Very good, very cheap shoppings!" In the colonial period, many traders lived above their shops and even built small decks off front and back of the second storey. The stores all sported khondes or verandas occupied, during business hours, by African tailors who conjured up all manner of apparel, either from magazine cut-outs or the imaginations of their multi-racial clients. Tailors either rented khonde space or were paid salaries by Indian shop owners. To have adept tailors outside one's shop was a valuable thing, since they enticed customers and augmented the sale of imported cloth, one of the mainstays of retail stock and trade. In the Indian quarter, Africans could enter shops and haggle with storekeepers, an option denied them in most of the European shops.¹⁸

South of Hailie Selassie, down the hill and across the Mudi Stream is Blantyre's town market. The old market was situated around the junction of Hailie Selassie and Sclater Road where the bus stands are today. Both Blantyre and Limbe markets came under municipal control in 1938 and this meant the introduction of stall and market fees, sanitary rules and later, municipally controlled pricing.¹⁹ Non-Africans were prohibited from selling in the market, although Indian merchants

Rangeley, "Early Blantyre", p.11.

¹⁸ An informal colour bar banned Africans from entering many European stores. See, below.

¹⁹ A.A. Nyirenda, "The Blantyre-Limbe markets, Nyasaland: the adjustment of the individual to an urban cash economy", in R.J. Apthorpe (ed.), Present Interrelations in Central African Rural and Urban Life, Proceedings of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, (Lusaka, 1958), 119-120.

requested this right in 1920.²⁰ Government rejected Council's proposal stating that "government had permitted the use of this land, as an open air market place for sale and barter of native produce only ..."²¹ In any case, African market gardeners and other traders were only a few steps from these shops which sold the imported cloth and utensils so much in demand.

There is considerable descriptive writing of Blantyre and Limbe for the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, but most published materials offer the European view. Eric Emtage came out to Nyasaland in 1925 to join his ex-serviceman cousin in tobacco farming.²² From his account, it would seem that the basic street layouts of Blantyre and Limbe have changed little since the 1920s, although Makata Road did not exist and the Limbe end of present day Kamuzu highway was a dirt track called "the short

²⁰ It was in July of 1920 that Mr. Kadir Khan offered Blantyre Town Council £100 for the right to administer the African market. This was declined, but Mr. Hynde (councillor and owner of the Nyasaland Times) suggested a scheme whereby lock up stores might be erected in the market and leased yearly to traders. Council appears to have debated various proposals until January of 1921 when they sent plans and estimates to the central administration in Zomba for approval. Minutes of the Blantyre Town Council Meetings, 27 July, 28 December 1920 and 25 January and 22 February 1921 in Malawi National Archives, Zomba, (hereafter MNA), BL2/1/1/2.

²¹ Minutes of Blantyre Town Council, 31 May 1921, in Ibid.

²² Only 50 ex-servicemen came out to settle on British Central Africa Company land after the First World War. Emtage's cousin had 1000 acres in Bvumbwe, 10 kilometres east of Limbe. See J.E.R. Emtage, "Reminiscences -- Nyasaland, 1925 - 1939", Society of Malawi Journal, 37,2(1984), 13; Interview 5, Cynthia and Eric Emtage, Newlands, Limbe, Blantyre District, 23 January 1987.

cut".²³ Blantyre's boundaries ended at the Mudi Bridge on the Zomba Road where the old hospital was and its southern limit was the Catholic Church on the Chikwawa Road (the corner of Mahatma Gandhi and Chikwawa Road). In the 1920s Sunnyside was woodland except for the golf course. Forest covered the area westward past Ryall's Hotel to Sanjika Hill, Mitsidi Mission and a "trysting site" known as Sunset Corner.²⁴

In spite of its obviously rural nature, L.S. Norman described Blantyre in the early 1930s, as one of South Central Africa's "most 'up-to-date' settlements, complete with electricity, water and a rail link." It was a "jumble of races, aims and occupations" and its history was "written in its layout. There are none of the wide streets running at right angles typical of Bulawayo, Johannesburg, Nairobi, or other African towns. Like Topsy, it has just 'grewed'".²⁵ Norman deplored the "[n]ative shacks made of sacking or tin" associated with other African towns and applauded their absence in Blantyre.

Norman's praise might have been less lavish had he visited the ramshackle government lines of any of Nyasaland's towns. In Zomba Native Location, for example, two families might share a two room house, living in intolerably crowded conditions. Blantyre and Limbe's Town Councils were slow to construct native locations, but when they did, the

²³ Ibid., 15-16.

²⁴ Ibid., 17-18.

²⁵ Norman, Nyasaland Without Prejudice, pp. 32-33.

results were no better than those of Zomba. After submission of the Jackson Land Commission Report in 1922 Blantyre Town Council agreed, in principal, to the construction of a native location for district and municipal government employees. It was not until 1929 that Council and the Protectorate government found a suitable site, but funding was still at issue. Council felt that private employers should shoulder the cost of construction but this was vigorously opposed. The question was left in abeyance in 1932 from lack of funds and it was not before October 1934 that the lease of the Naperi Location Area was finally signed and sealed by Mayor J. Marshall and Councillor W. Tait-Bowie.²⁶ Town Council agreed to shoulder the cost of construction and in February of 1936, work was finally begun on 30 sun-dried brick houses at the paltry cost of £3.17.3 each.²⁷ Conditions in Naperi were grim. Single room dwellings with outdoor kitchens, sleeping areas of no more than 120 square feet were wholly inadequate for families with six or more children. Because of the shoddy construction and congested conditions of the locations the majority of Africans preferred to live outside the town in peri-urban villages.²⁸ It is doubtful that Norman would have visited any of these

²⁶ W. Tait-Bowie was General Manager of the Blantyre and East Africa Company and Marshall, the General Manager of the African Lakes Corporation. These were the two biggest non-African merchant firms in the Protectorate.

²⁷ Blantyre Town Council Meeting Minutes from selected meetings 1922 to 1936, in MNA, BL2/1/1/2-8. See also, Report of a Commission to Enquire Into and Report upon Certain Matters connected with the Occupation of Land in Nyasaland Protectorate, [Jackson Commission Report], (Zomba, 1921).

²⁸ Ibid., p.34.

since they were outside the townships, and locations like Naperi did not exist at the time of his visit in the early 1930s.

Segregation and "colour bar" were every day facts of life for Africans in urban Nyasaland and intensified as population grew. Nineteenth century knowledge of disease theory provided the justification for racially specific settlement. As Tom Pennant observed:

Partially as a result of nineteenth century theories about the aetiology of diseases such as malaria and cholera British colonial towns' designers sought to reserve higher ground for European occupation. A natural barrier (river or steep slope) or a created one (golf course, park, belt of trees -- all thought to be effective if well maintained -- against malaria) was used ideally to keep other groups at a distance. Other groups and land uses were in turn segregated from each other.²⁹

Health and safety of European inhabitants supplied the official rationale for segregation and a variety of rules, formal and informal, sought to enforce it. But health concerns underwrote a more profound anxiety --- the settler preoccupation with security. As in territories to the south, Africans were considered a potential criminal element and although this never resulted in white vigilante action as it did in South Africa, policing focused on controlling the African community.³⁰ Africans were obliged to transact business outside European shops, inspecting and buying goods pa

²⁹ Thomas Pennant, "Towards a history of urban housing in Malawi", Chancellor College History Department Seminar Paper No.5, 1982-83, p.7.

³⁰ See for example, the vigilante action as described by Murray for Orange Free State in the early twentieth century described in Martin J. Murray, "'The natives are always stealing': white vigilantes and the 'Reign of Terror' in the Orange Free State, 1918-24", Journal of African History, 30 (1989), 107-123.

window.³¹ Implicit in this was the notion that all Africans were born thieves and could not be trusted to circulate freely in European shops.

Whatever doubts Europeans might have had about Africans' "criminal tendencies", they did not seek to simply exclude them from the towns. African labour power was essential. Native Locations provided the solution to the problem of controlling urban workers. The clustering of Africans in these places eased surveillance. Access to location housing was contingent upon employment as were passes. Africans without passes signed by an employer were obliged to leave the township after nine in the evening when a bugle sounded to announce the curfew.³² In this way, vagrants and other riff-raff might be kept out of town. Geoffrey Morton, once a police commissioner in Nyasaland, felt the curfew to be a poor substitute for street lights and a larger constabulary. On the other hand, most crimes of property were perpetrated against Africans themselves in the peri-urban villages where policing was virtually non-

³¹ Buying pa window translates as literally "buying through the window". The phrase refers to the practice of African marketing at certain European shops which they could not enter. Instead, Africans were obliged to request items at the window and transact their business there. Apparently, Indian shops did not uphold this custom. Africans were encouraged to enter these stores and were often given credit should they be unable to pay full price for goods. G. Morton, Just the Job, Some Experiences of a Colonial Policeman, (London, 1957), p.234. Both of the banks operating in the territory insisted on separate queues for Africans and non-Africans and Africans were banned from European run hotels, clubs and bars at most times.

³² Interview 6, Wales J. [Nyemba] Mbekeani, Mkulumadzi Bakery, Limbe, Blantyre District, 25 January 1987.

existent.³³

Lack of funds on the municipal and central government levels meant that Blantyre and Limbe town councils could ill afford the civic luxuries desired by Morton. In 1949, Laurens van der Post described Blantyre as a drab, dreary town of "hunched, perfunctory buildings dumped by the side of a road full of dust".³⁴ Van der Post was visiting Nyasaland in the year of serious drought, and this is clear from his description, but it was not just climatic aridity which provoked him. He decried the town's pitiful attempts to achieve a modicum of "modernity"; he disdained its pitted roads, peeling whitewash, tin roofs, cluttered Goan and Scottish shop verandas, contrasting these with the incongruous European-style homes with their "inevitable" lawns and hedges. "Blantyre is a small, ugly, commercial town", he wrote,

It has not had much time, and no reserves of wealth, tradition or local pride out of which to shape itself. About sixty years ago the government dealt it an unkind blow by setting up the official capital on the side of the huge mountain of Zomba, forty miles away, and so robbed Blantyre of a sure source of dignity and self-respect. Ostentatiously, pointedly and rather disdainfully, it was left to get on with its business, and however well it may have done it, it looks to this day rather ashamed of itself.³⁵

Van der Post reserved his sharpest criticism for the towns' non-African inhabitants, remarking upon the "set, sallow, lifeless, disillusioned

³³ Morton, Just the Job, p.239; J. McCracken, "Coercion and control in Nyasaland: aspects of the history of a colonial police force", Journal of African History, 27(1986), 134.

³⁴ Laurens van der Post, Venture into the Interior, (New York, 1951), p.92.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 91-92.

faces" of the Europeans themselves, doubtless, overcome by the insupportable weight of the white man's burden! Indians, according to him, "had even less joy in them"! Africans, on the other hand, were depicted as an insanely merry lot who, in spite of their "rags and tatters", were very "gay and laughed continuously". Predictably, the educated African, divorced from his noble savage roots, stood in stark and negative contrast to these giddy primitives. It is worth citing Van der Post at length since his observations provide valuable insight into the myopathy of the liberal imperialist mind of the mid-twentieth century.

I was shown into it [District Commissioner MacBean's office] without delay by a black clerk who was extremely courteous but, unlike his raggle-taggle countrymen in the streets, was bowed down by melancholy. This learned, self-conscious gloom which higher education inflicts, almost without exception, on an instinctively happy people, is most noticeable.³⁶

If Van der Post disparaged the damage done by mission education and the influence of waged employment on Blantyre's African community, he would doubtless have had even less praise for the town of Limbe which found its sole *raison d'être* in commerce. Limbe, incorporated in 1907, was the child of colonial capitalism. The Imperial Tobacco Company (ITC) began operations in Limbe in 1908 after a rail link was put through and Limbe soon found its niche as a clearing house for the Protectorate's import-export trade.

Limbe was the centre of tobacco marketing in Nyasaland. Most tobacco was grown by African tenant producers in Central Province after

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.94

1920, but its distribution and sale was controlled from Limbe. The crop was transported by lorry to the main auction floors there where it was graded, packed and despatched to foreign markets.³⁷ ITC and Nyasaland Railways dominated the eastern side of Churchill Road, one of the town's main thoroughfares. Railway employee housing was situated here, the current housing estate being constructed only in the 1930s. Malawi Railways still has its main station here and just down the line are Lonhro Headquarters (ex-Kubula Stores Head Office), Limbe Leaf Tobacco, Tobacco Processors and further south, that bastion of white supremacy -- the Limbe Country Club.

North along the line of rail and east along Churchill Road, one passes the Shire Highlands Hotel, Grain and Milling Company, ADMARC, various car dealerships and Mpingwe, the ex-European residential area. The road joins with Kamuzu Highway at the Montfort Marist Brothers Press and the Limbe Catholic Cathedral and the Daughters of Wisdom Convent. The highway continues north to Zomba, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and, eventually, Chitipa and the Tanzanian border. In colonial days this road served as a dry season alternative to lake travel and linked commercial and administrative centres.

If the eastern side of Churchill Road was dominated by European commerce, the western side was indisputably an Indian domain.

³⁷ Only after the completion of the Chiromo Bridge in 1936 was Nyasaland directly linked to the coast by rail. McCracken, Politics and Christianity, p.114; "Planters, peasants and the colonial state: the impact of the Native Tobacco Board in the Central Province of Malawi", Journal of Southern African Studies 9,2(1983), 175-177.

Historically, the majority of Limbe's Indians are Muslims whereas Blantyre's are largely Hindu. The protectorate's first Indian school was opened in Blantyre in 1938, with initial funds provided by C.K. Dharap and Osman Adam. The second was the Muslim Indian Primary School at Songani, 10 miles from Zomba, which opened in 1940. It was not until 1943 that a comparable primary school was opened for Muslim Indians in Limbe. It was financed by Suliman Sacrani, Omar Hassam Janmahomed and funds from South African Indians.³⁸ Although mainly Gujarati speaking, the Indian community was culturally diverse, divided along lines of religion and territory of origin. Although the culture of racism did much to engender an Indian political consciousness, especially in the late 1940s and 1950s, in the market place, ethnicity and religion took a back seat to class interests as the main determinant of behaviour (See Chapter Three).³⁹

Critically examined, both Norman's and Van der Post's accounts reveal a society profoundly shaped by the imperatives of white hegemony. Norman commended the advances made under colonialism, while Van der

³⁸ M.A. Karolia, "A brief historical survey of the Indian community in Malawi", Chancellor College History Department Seminar Paper, 1968-69, pp. 10-12. There was no secondary school for Indian children until 1959.

³⁹ It is perhaps worth remarking that although there were Muslim Associations established in the 1920s, these did not figure prominently in commercial or trade disputes. Organs of protest seemed to coalesce around specific economic interest groups, for example retailers (Nyasaland Indian Retail Traders' Association) versus wholesalers (Nyasaland Indian Chamber of Commerce). The whole issue of the political and economic role played by non-Christian religious organisations is worthy of greater investigation. See Chapter Two.

Post saw these as retrograde and responsible for the destruction of natural man. This bias is perhaps clearer in his other writings, but permeates Venture into the Interior also.⁴⁰ Yet, neither Norman nor Van der Post were aware of the African worlds surrounding Blantyre and Limbe; worlds which were both product of and contributors to Malawi's urban culture during the colonial period.

Blantyre's downtown core may have been multi-racial during the day, with whites, Indians and Africans forced together in the pursuit of their respective livelihoods, but the dictates of segregation meant that denizens of each community withdrew to their own spheres after working hours. Indians retired to their ward, Europeans, to the sanctity of home or club. Africans, regardless of their status as clerks, pupils, day labourers, market gardeners or shoppers, began the journey home to locations or peri-urban villages. This daily exodus was undertaken on foot by most, but a fortunate few cycled homeward alongside the pedestrian throngs. In days before the Second World War, most commuters travelled no farther than five or six miles, but as population grew and matola became more common, people travelled greater distances.⁴¹

⁴⁰ See, for example, Van der Post's disillusionment with the destruction of the world of the San in The Lost World of the Kalahari, (Harmondsworth, 1972).

⁴¹ Matola refers to paid transportation in any manner of vehicle, usually lorries or private automobiles. Riders are charged a rate according to the distance to be covered and this is usually comparable to the charges applicable to public transport. The practice is illegal, but only seldom are drivers charged.

In 1947, the five miles of road connecting Blantyre and Limbe was the only stretch of tarmac in Nyasaland. Along this route the largest of the peri-urban villages sprang up. Ndirande, currently covers about 800 acres although it used to be much larger. Large sections of it were incorporated into Blantyre township in 1948 when Blantyre and Limbe's boundaries became coterminous and the cities embarked on a comprehensive town planning project.⁴² That portion of Ndirande not affected by town planning remained Native Trust Land and was administered by state sanctioned Native Authorities.⁴³ Because of its special status, Ndirande remained a living contradiction of old and new, rich and poor, which embodied and encapsulated the African urban experience in colonial Malawi.

Nestled between Blantyre Mission on the slopes of Nyambadwe Hill and Ndirande Mountain, Ndirande began as four large villages which

⁴² It is more accurate to say that Ndirande was brought into the municipal planning orbit. Its administration was still under the Native Authority Kapeni and his headmen. Ndirande's citizens paid no rates and received no services until after independence. Nyasaland Government Gazette, Gazette Notice (hereafter GN) 114/48, 15 June 1948.

⁴³ The Nyasaland (Native Trust Land) Order in Council, 1936 allowed for the designation of all land into three categories: "Reserved" land included all private land, land acquired by the government for public purposes such as forest reserves or Crown Lands located in townships or scheduled sanitary or trading areas. All other land acquired by government on behalf of the Crown was Crown Land. Everything else was Native Trust Land, reserved for the use of Africans only, except when the Governor, in consultation with the appropriate Native Authority, granted special rights of occupancy to non-Africans. See, Clement Ng'ong'ola, "The state, settlers, and indigenes in the evolution of land law and policy in colonial Malawi", The International Journal of African Historical Studies, 23,2 (1990), p.51.

became home to the African elite of the district. In addition to the traditional chiefly elite represented by Chiefs Kapeni, Lundu and headmen like Makata or Matenje, Ndirande, like Chichiri, was settled by colonialism's "new men" -- independent business people, clerks, teachers and so on. The wealthier built fine houses and sent their children to school at the nearby Blantyre Mission and Henry Henderson Institute. After 1945, many built rental properties, taking advantage of the post-war construction boom, giving Ndirande its ramshackle appearance. Large six-room brick houses with white washed exteriors, iron roofs, and wide verandas abutted on to rude wattle and daub shacks which served as dwellings for labouring transients. After the war, brickmaking became the dominant industry in Ndirande, and temporary grass shelters sprang up to accommodate large numbers of dry season labourers attracted by the income generating possibilities of the brick fields. The brickmaking industry and the inadequacy of authorized government and corporate housing gave rise to a settlement pattern in Ndirande which approximated villages within villages. Clusters of dwellings grew up around Ndirande's more affluent families; the Mbekeanis have their area, the Akimus theirs, the Sangalas theirs and so on. When Ndirande was incorporated into the broader municipality of Blantyre-Limbe in the 1950s, many of these older areas were left virtually intact, and seem to exaggerate the regimentation of planned Malawi Housing Corporation "lines", and the "Ndirande Flats" constructed after independence.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ The Ndirande Flats is an L-shaped three storey complex whose top two floors are residential and main floor house "bottle stores", groceries and a butchery. In a "bottle store" one can purchase small items

The Ndirande Ring Road, also a post-independence innovation, is paved and serves as the main artery for this bustling settlement. In addition to the potholes which unintentionally regulate traffic, speed bumps have been installed. Branching off the tarmac are all manner of streets, paths and lane ways. Some of Ndirande's main thoroughfares are wide dirt roads whose storm drains extend up to a metre from the dirt surface during the rainy season. Miraculously, all manner of vehicles find passage; city buses, bicycles, push carts, motorbikes, automobiles and even lorries are found in the most unlikely parts of Ndirande! More crucial to local communication are the myriad maize paths, well travelled pedestrian routes which serve to connect the plethora of houses and gardens.

Because Ndirande was Trust Land, non-Africans were forbidden to establish businesses there. African groceries sprang up to provision this community, supplementing Ndirande market where everything from rubber tyre strips to traditional medicines could be had. Not only was Ndirande market bigger than Blantyre's, it was considerably cheaper, owing to the lack of European custom and the inevitable upward pressure this placed on prices. Even today, everyone from the editor of the Malawi Daily Times to day labourers prefer to do their marketing here.

Ndirande and Chichiri, her brazen neighbour, formed the nucleus of African peri-urban settlement. Chichiri village, situated half-way between

such as cigarettes, soap, pencils, but its mainstay is bottled beer. People, usually males, purchase beer and drink it on the premises or just outside on the khonde (porch). Women who frequent bottle stores are thought to be somewhat "loose".

Blantyre and Limbe, lives on in the memory of many and its history forms a colourful chapter in African urban folklore.⁴⁵ The colonizers regarded it as a den of sin and iniquity and a haven for beer drinkers, prostitutes, thieves and brigands. Their fears were doubtless exaggerated. For Africans, it was the place to go for after-hours entertainment. Groups of people from villages on both the Limbe and Blantyre sides wended their way towards Chichiri each night to partake of its "disreputable pleasures". There, they might enjoy several cups of mowa, dance with local "bar girls", listen to the music of local musicians who, for a penny or two, would play the tune of their choice.⁴⁶

Chichiri, like Ndirande, was home to many Nyasaland African Congress members and it was in the houses of these individuals that political meetings were held after hours. In the colonial mind, Chichiri became linked to political sedition and in the 1950s, the police launched

⁴⁵ Chichiri in Chinyanja means "peg" and refers to a survey peg placed midway between Blantyre and Limbe. The village which grew up on this site took its name from this.

⁴⁶ At evening beer drinks, there was often music. Gramophones were popular and more common after 1940. Failing that, there was usually someone who played a guitar (usually home made) and on occasion, listeners bid against each other to have the tune of their choice played. The person who offered the largest sum of money chose the song. Beer drinks were not held at the same site each evening. Women in Chichiri and other settlements pooled their labour and resources to stagger the brewing schedule so that within a certain area, on each night of the week there was always beer available for consumption. Of course, some brewers were more popular than others. The brew-making prowess of Elsie Kahumbe was legend in Chichiri and her children remember the crowds of people who visited their house to partake of her wares. Interview 23 Alexander Mataka Bandawe, Chikwawa Road, Blantyre District, 15 March 1987. Interview 41 Dr. Charles Kahumbe and Elsie Kahumbe-Northern, Chirimba, T.A. Machinjiri, 14 June 1988.

periodic raids on the homes of NAC members who resided there.⁴⁷ It must have pleased many non-Africans when Chichiri was razed in the 1950s to make way for a light industrial park and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

After the Second World War, urbanisation accelerated dramatically and the peri-urban villages fell victim to the ravages of post-war planning mania. Peri-urban villages offered inexpensive housing and business premises, but an ambitious town planning programme changed all of this.⁴⁸ The Town and Country Planning Ordinance of 1948 brought Chichiri and parts of Ndirande into the planning area.⁴⁹ Ndirande was partly protected because of its Trust Land status, but Chichiri was not.

⁴⁷ Interview 41, Dr. C. Kahumbe and Elsie Kahumbe Northern, 14 June 1988.

⁴⁸ In the Annual Report for Blantyre District, 1931, District Commissioner Ion Ramsay noted that several native canteens had opened in that year. In addition, he describes a wide variety of urban Africans working on their own account -- tailors, butchers, market gardeners, milk vendors, poultry and egg dealers, cycle and gramophone repairers and laundry proprietors. In spite of Bylaw 52 of January 1932 which made native passes compulsory, it appears that some Africans resided in town. This is evidenced by a police report which is excerpted in Limbe Town Council Minutes for April 1933. It was complained that there "natives renting stores in the township as laundry, cycle shops etc., remaining on their premises at night without permits". Unfortunately, it is impossible to estimate the size of this illicit resident population. See, Annual Report, Blantyre District, 1931, pp.3-6 in MNA NSB7/1/2; Limbe Town Council Minutes, 15 December 1931, MNA BL2/1/2/2 and 18 April 1933, MNA BL2/1/2/3.

⁴⁹ Early figures probably underestimate the African population since peri-urban villages were not included in census data. Neither would illegal inhabitants have been counted such as relatives of domestic servants who resided in "boys' quarters" and African shop clerks who lived on the premises of Indian merchants. Nyasaland Protectorate Government Gazette, Government Notice (hereafter GN) 154/49, 4 July, 1949.

African residents were told to leave, but they did not go without a fight.

In 1952, it came to the attention of Limbe Town Council that several permanent African dwellings and business premises were being erected or renovated in Chichiri, which was earmarked for light industrial development. In May the relevant parties were instructed to cease construction pending the approval of the joint Blantyre Limbe Town and Country Planning Committee. Several Africans, among them, Hartwell Solomon and James Mpunga, ignored the order. Mpunga went so far as to say that he stepped up the construction of his brick store in protest against the town plan. In June of that year, the buildings of Mpunga and others were demolished.⁵⁰

In theory, Chichiri was to be a light industrial area open to all, regardless of colour. Mpunga decided to test this and after the destruction of his property, dutifully applied for a half-acre commercial leasehold plot in Chichiri, with the intention of building a trading store. He soon discovered that leasehold requirements precluded all but the most affluent from the site. Mpunga set the value of the proposed premises at £2,000 and at the time of his application, June 1952, he reported a capital base of £500 in merchandise.⁵¹ District Commissioner Pincott advised Mpunga that he should write to the Town Planning Secretary, and warned him that no decision could be taken on his

⁵⁰ Limbe Town Council Minutes, 15 August 1951, 14 May 1952 and 11 June 1952, MNA BL2/1/2/7.

⁵¹ James L. Mpunga to Pincott, 15 July 1952, MNA, LD/3A/134/518 F1.

application until Chichiri had been planned and surveyed. He said that this could take as long as two years.⁵² In August, Acting Chief Secretary Youens wrote Mpunga reaffirming the District Commissioner's transmission and added that rents and other costs were likely to be high in Chichiri. Specifically, there would be a £10,000 capital requirement for buildings and a plot rent of £30.55 per year. Since the African High Density Areas would be ready for development sooner and would involve a lower capital investment, Youens suggested that Mpunga lease a commercial plot there.⁵³ For Mpunga and others, the writing was on the wall. Chichiri, by far and away the most favourable location for brickmaking and carpentry, was to be reserved for "people of means", that is, whites and Indians. Although leasehold policy was colour blind, the financial requirements for access to Chichiri precluded all but a handful of African business people. These were to be relegated to more appropriate venues -- "high density" areas, which, of course, meant African areas, which would not enjoy the same services and facilities as those delineated for Chichiri. Mpunga chose to move to Newlands three miles along the Thyolo Road where he opened a bar and grocery. At Newlands he was able to acquire land free of charge and avoid rates.⁵⁴ Others like him moved to Chirimba, Chigamula, Ndirande and Soche or up-country to

⁵² Pincott to Mpunga, 25 July 1952, in Ibid. F3.

⁵³ Youens to Mpunga, 20 August 1952, in Ibid., F5.

⁵⁴ Interview #7, James L. Mpunga, Newlands Inn, Thyolo Road, TA Kapeni, Blantyre District, 29 January 1987.

Lunzu, Lirangwe and Luchenza.⁵⁵ In keeping with the segregationist impulse African entrepreneurs were forced to the physical and economic margins of the towns.

By January of 1952, the government had decided the fate of Chichiri's African population, and set aside £30,400 for land acquisition and £3,600 for compensation payable to Africans moved in 1953 (£20 per building, including gardens).⁵⁶ The Chief Secretary outlined the official view of resettlement in a letter to District Commissioner Eric Barnes:

You will agree that it is essential that land in the Blantyre-Limbe area be made available at the earliest opportunity and that the appropriate place [for Africans] is within the high density area itself, either within the layout shortly to be prepared [west of Limbe] or on African Trust Land to the southwest of it.⁵⁷

From 1953 to 1964, 992 dwellings were to be destroyed to accommodate the development scheme. This included only those buildings erected before the declaration of the planning area in 1948. Those built after this time represented "unlawful use of Public Land according to Section 21 of the Public Lands Ordinance, 1951", and their

⁵⁵ Those who could afford it, opted to move far from the planning area. Pockets of coloured and African settlement existed along roads feeding into Blantyre and Limbe. Often, these plots were owned freehold. Joseph Bismark's Namwili Estate is one of these early African owned farms and several more existed along the Zomba Road past Maone and the ITC lines. Chileka and Chikwawa Roads were also dotted by farms owned by affluent coloureds and Africans. Henry Ascroft, spokesman for the "Eur-african" coloured community for many years, had his home and business at "The Triangle" in Chirimba, four miles along the Chileka Road.

⁵⁶ J.P. Feeny, Lands Officer to Barnes, 12 January 1952, MNA, URB/TN/1/5329 F4.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

owners were ineligible for compensation.⁵⁸ The expulsion of Africans from valuable sites between Blantyre and Limbe led to the burgeoning of other peri-urban settlements, thenceforth designated "high density" residential areas. Zingwangwa, traditionally home to many of the towns butchers, was one such village. Others included parts of Namiwawa, Mbayani, Michiru and Chilomoni. The planned housing areas south of Naperi Stream like Chitawira, Soche/Chinyonga, Kapeni, Kanjedza Chimwankhunda also took their names from villages which grew up during the colonial period.

But town planning and the delineation of high density housing areas presented municipal governments with serious financial and political problems. While they yearned for orderly urban growth, councils were loath to accept responsibility for the urban African population. The essence of councils' concerns was succinctly expressed by Limbe's Mayor Stevens in November 1952.

... the ground [High Density Area] was in the normal course going to be occupied by Africans who may or may not be in a position to pay rates covering the services which are required, and again, if Africans do pay rates, there might be difficulties with their representation on council.⁵⁹

In other words, recognition of a permanent urban African presence raised the question of service and maintenance. More importantly, were Africans to pay rates for such services, were they not also entitled to political representation on Town Councils? Neither Blantyre nor Limbe

⁵⁸ Footman to Barnes, January 1952, URB/TN/1/5329/8.

⁵⁹ Limbe Town Council Minutes, 12 November 1952, MNA BL2/1/2/7.

Town Councils could countenance this possibility and so they thrust the burden of African areas onto the Protectorate government.

In December 1952, Limbe Town Council voted unanimously that African high density areas be placed under government jurisdiction and administration. Africans gained representation on Urban Advisory Boards but these had no real political power. Town Councils provided essential services for high density areas, but on a contract basis only.⁶⁰ In this way, councils avoided the economic strain of subsidized public services, but more importantly, the tactic blocked African political representation at the municipal level.

The Social Setting

The physical layout and administrative wranglings over town planning after 1949 are indicative of the segregationist impulse of Central African colonialism. But there were exceptions to the rules of social separation. The most obvious realm of interracial conjunction was that of sport. Each community had its own sports club -- the Europeans and Africans in Blantyre, the Indians in Limbe. The African Ndirande Welfare Club also had a sports component. Similarly, companies, estates, government offices and even Blantyre Mission sponsored football teams. On the pitch, occupation and colour were of secondary importance to pedal dexterity!⁶¹ In the 1940s, football games began to be written up in

⁶⁰ Limbe Town Council Minutes, 10 December 1952, in Ibid.

⁶¹ Interview #44, James Magola and son, Mpingwe, Blantyre District, 18 June 1988. Mr Magola explained how in 1944 at the age of 23, he left work with Imperial Tobacco Company (ITC) for Nyasaland Railways and

the Nyasaland Times.⁶² Football was the only ritual in which all three communities participated.⁶³ The ability to compete equally within the structure of a game served to diffuse tension, providing a safety valve for the unavoidable frustrations of everyday life in a segregated society. Winning for the company team contributed to a feeling of worker solidarity and loyalty, while competing for one's "racial" community engendered the same kind of good feeling.⁶⁴ On the pitch, the underdog had the opportunity to become victor, to turn the racial hierarchy upside down. On one level, this controlled form of social intercourse provided an acceptable point of contact between communities, in keeping with the liberal vision of multi-racialism. But this form of congress was temporary, and to a great degree, illusory, serving as a thin gloss over what was in reality, a pernicious system of racial inequality.

stayed there for three years. He then left and went to Thondwe Tobacco Company. When asked why he switched companies and even occupations so many times, he said that it was because of a conflict over football. ITC wanted him back because since the loss of Magola's excellent goalkeeping skills, their team had been losing. Magola said that ITC was not prepared to pay him enough and he tired of the bickering between the company and the railways, so he left for Thondwe Tobacco who also had a team! Information on Magola's position and prowess are confirmed by, Nyasaland Times, 10 September 1942.

⁶² The Shire Highlands League Final of 1943 was to be held at the European Country Club in Limbe and matched Imperial Tobacco Company with the Ndirande Welfare Club team. The Reverend Hardman was to act as referee. Unfortunately, I did not note down who won the game. Nyasaland Times, 2 September 1943.

⁶³ Race day at Zomba was frequented by Indians and Europeans, but not Africans. Field hockey seems to have been confined to non-African participants as well. To my knowledge, cricket was not popular.

⁶⁴ The Blantyre Mission "Blue Bombers" and the Ndirande Welfare Club team were only two of these community oriented clubs.

The gaiety and comradeship which surrounded sporting events was abandoned in the market place and after hours. The sound of drumming, singing and laughter emanating from nightly beer drinks in Blantyre's peri-urban villages disturbed the non-African community in town. Daytime condescension and indifference were replaced by anxiety and consternation after nightfall, as non-Africans feared for the safety of their property and persons.⁶⁵ This apprehension was most pronounced in the late 1950s and emanated from protests and some violent demonstrations which caused the white community to petition for increased policing.⁶⁶ A State of Emergency was eventually declared in March 1959. In the Commission Report submitted after an investigation of the troubles, a District Commissioner was paraphrased as saying that crowds in Lilongwe should be dispersed before dark since, "it must be remembered that nightfall in a place like Lilongwe is very different from nightfall in a well lighted city -- they [the African protesters] might have run amok and

⁶⁵ According to John McCracken, local pass laws were successfully enforced up to the time of their abolition in the 1950s. However, crimes against European property increased in the late 1920s. As a result of increased policing, robbers began to turn their attention to the African settlements. McCracken has calculated that from January 1930 to December 1933, 41 Cases of theft and housebreaking were reported in Blantyre, Limbe and Zomba versus approximately 2000 in their surrounding villages. Clearly, the peri-urban villager had more to worry about with respect to theft than the town dweller. One cannot take the increase in policing as an accurate gauge of anxiety level. The threat of violence or assault is as potent as its incidence. John McCracken, "Coercion and control", 133-134.

⁶⁶ The upsurge in urban protest was connected to the redoubled efforts of Congress to oppose and break the Central African Federation begun in 1953. The anti-Federation movement was a crucial component of the development of mass nationalism in colonial Malawi during the federal period.

done damage".⁶⁷ Fears of a "massacre plot" clearly point to a consciousness of non-African numerical minority and their real vulnerability in the face of the African masses should they be galvanized. It is not surprising that the name of John Chilembwe, the leader of the 1915 uprising, commonly arose during the investigation of the 1959 Emergency.

But there were reasons other than the intermittent fear of physical and material harm which explain Europeans' staunch resistance to permanent African residence in town before 1948. Segregation kept an all important social and psychological distance between Europeans and their colonial charges. Robert Rotberg contrasts the tacit acceptance of mixed common-law marriages between white and black in the early years of colonialism with the less tolerant racism of later years. He links the rise of racism in this sphere to the arrival of European women and "the strength of Edwardian and Victorian mores."⁶⁸ Yet, scientific racism was common currency in the 1880s when mixed marriages were most common. The need to segregate and separate in all walks of life became more acute when Europeans adopted official colonialism. White domination and colonial rule were part and parcel of the colonial

⁶⁷ Colonial Office, Report of the Nyasaland Commission of Inquiry, Cmd. 814, presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Colonies by Command of Her Majesty July 1959, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, (London, 1959), p.65.

⁶⁸ George Simeon Mwase, Strike a Blow and Die, A Narrative of Race Relations in Colonial Africa by George Simeon Mwase, edited and introduced by Robert Rotberg, (Cambridge, U.S., 1967), Rotberg's introduction p.xxxi.

experience in Central Africa. An image of white superiority became indispensable to the maintenance of the principle of imperial tutelage. White superiority underwrote and justified white political and economic domination. Judge Nunan underlined this as early as 1903, when he ruled against a mixed marriage between a white English male and a black African woman. He stated that "the only possibility ... of any European race preserving its supremacy in the midst of African races appears to be by ... keeping socially aloof and by refusing to admit those of mixed race on terms of social equality".⁶⁹ Yet, the existence of a significant "coloured" population served as a potent reminder of the limitations of segregation in maintaining social distance.

The incompleteness of segregation is perhaps best illustrated by Indian-African relations. Indians, long criticised for their exclusive behaviour, probably had more day-to-day contact with Africans than did the majority of whites (with the exception of dealings with domestic servants). "Colour bar", or what in South Africa is called "petty apartheid", prevented Africans from shopping in Nyasaland Pharmacies or drinking in Ryall's Hotel, but these informal sanctions were not enforced by Indian merchants.⁷⁰ The reliance on "native trade" meant that Indian -

⁶⁹ Pearce to Lansdowne, 7 October 1903, Public Records Office, London (hereafter PRO), FO2/749, encl. Judgement by Judge Nunan in High Court of British Central Africa, 6 October 1903, cited in Sean Morrow, "War came from the boma': military and police disturbances in Blantyre, 1902", Chancellor College History Department Seminar Paper, No.11, 1985/86, p.15.

⁷⁰ When informants referred to "colour bar" they meant "racism", and not necessarily the practice of job reservation. Quite literally, it is applied to any instance where action is restricted because of race.

African relations were rather different.⁷¹ It was common (although illegal) for African shop clerks to sleep on the same premises as Indian traders, although never in the same room. Africans were actively encouraged to browse in Indian shops and were even given credit should they fall short of the price of an item. Indian traders also provided African grocers with stock, often on credit. And, of course, both Indians and Africans experienced the disdain of the white community.

Given the reality of these commonalities and the relatively free-wheeling nature of Indian-African relations, it is at first ironic that there should be such overt racism between the two communities. Indians were stereotyped as dirty, gouging and dishonest. I am reminded of a remark made to me by an African friend to the effect that he did not know how Indians, living in such crowded quarters were able to make love. Other discrimination is based upon the middleman role which many Indians occupy. Because they have long occupied the role of trader whose character it is to buy cheap and sell dear, and have been successful in this capacity, there is a real belief that their success must reside in dishonest business practices.⁷² Likewise, Africans are stereotyped by non-Africans as being "lazy and indolent". One has only to observe the vicious treatment

⁷¹ "Native trade" was the term used by the colonial authorities to describe the trade in goods consumed mainly by Africans.

⁷² Another contemporary example of racial stereotyping occurred when I was trying to have a telephone hooked up. I had been waiting for service for months, when I was contacted by a telephone company official who was very apologetic. After a brief discussion, he assured me that I would receive service that day. His concern, he said, was to "make sure that you were not an Indian", presumably, because Indians were believed to be dishonest.

of African shop clerks by their employers to get some sense of the virulence of racist invective. I would suggest that this overt racism between Africans and Indians originates in the economic positions of merchants, employees and customers. The extension of the negative traits of occupational categories (merchant or employee) to racial categories perpetuated social intercourse based upon half-truths and maintained social distance between peoples of colour.

Social distance was maintained even in matters of spirituality. Muslim Indians and Africans had the Koran in common, yet they worshipped at separate mosques, a practice alien to the "brotherhood of Islam".⁷³ Except for a few Goan and Magolorian Christians, Indians shared no common spiritual ground with whites. Africans and Europeans had more in common in this regard. Because of the missionary effort, Africans and Europeans shared the same religion, initially in the context of white mission tutelage. Stella Maris, Montfort Brothers, Scots Free Church Mission, the Universities Mission to Central Africa, the Roman Catholic church and the Seventh Day Adventist church all worked diligently to spread their version of the gospel. Churches were not segregated, as they were in the American south, but this did not mean that Africans were co-equals with Europeans within the church hierarchy.

⁷³ It has been commented that this practice of establishing separate mosques is quite foreign to Islam elsewhere which stresses religious community irrespective of colour. Apparently it is common practice for those entering a mosque for prayer, not to sit where they wished, but next to persons already there (from the front row backwards) and to physically touch neighbouring worshippers when sitting down by slight pressure of the shoulders. In colonial Malawi, physical contact of this nature was avoided through establishing separate places of worship.

Changes in the local economy brought about by the overt twinning of Christianity and commerce produced a group of men and women who scholars have described as "marginal". They were people caught between two different and antagonistic cultures -- the traditional and the modern.⁷⁴ Since education was entirely controlled by the missions until 1925, it was from them that the first "marginal" men and women emerged. This was true of other parts of Africa, notably Sierra Leone, where liberated captives in the nineteenth century were released and came to form a distinct Creole community. While there were Muslim Creoles, the majority adopted Christianity and many acquired European style education and became doctors, lawyers, journalists, clerics and traders.

Christianity in Nyasaland played an important role in the creation of a "marginal" class. It did not produce doctors and lawyers as it did in West Africa, although in 1911, the first African ministers were ordained at the Church of Scotland Mission in Blantyre. The mainly Protestant missions stressed the importance of practical and technical education over academic training. Even those which did not call themselves "industrial" missions, such as the Universities Mission to Central Africa at Bandawe

⁷⁴ McCracken cites Park's definition of "marginal man" as "one whom fate has condemned to live in two societies and in two, not merely different but antagonistic cultures" and suggests it is too restrictive. He envisions the African on the make as being more capable of manipulating competing institutions for his own benefit than being stymied by the personal contradictions they pose. Manipulation applies to the "traditional" as well as the new. In this McCracken sees another version or dimension of Cowen's "straddling" notion. Robert E. Park, "Introduction" to E.V. Stonequist, The Marginal Man, (New York, 1937), p.xv, cited in J. McCracken, "Marginal men: the colonial experience in Malawi", Chancellor College History Department Seminar Paper, January 1989.

and the Church of Scotland Mission at Blantyre aspired to be completely self-supporting and provided African pupils with elementary education and apprenticeship in various trades and vocations.⁷⁵ They established cash crop farms, market gardens which serviced the immediate community, ran dairy facilities, carpentry shops and so on. In 1907, F.B. Pearce, the Acting Commissioner in charge of Nyasaland's administration observed that "the dividing line between ordinary and Industrial Mission work is not very clearly defined".⁷⁶

Given the heavy involvement of missions in artisanal training, it is not surprising that many of the territory's independent African artisans and business people should have sprung from this source. Hence, early African entrepreneurs and white collar government and corporation employees (the direct offspring of colonial capitalism) were often mission

⁷⁵ The Universities Mission to Central Africa failed to establish a viable presence at Magomero and this was abandoned in 1864 after fever and warfare combined to drive missionaries from the area. Later the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) set up at Bandawe on Lake Malawi and also on Likoma Island (1896). The Free Church of Scotland set up permanent missions at Livingstonia (1875) and Blantyre (1876). The UMCA and the Church of Scotland missions were the most successful and largest, but they were joined by a plethora of others: the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (1889), and the Zambezi Industrial Mission and Nyasa Baptist Industrial Mission (1892). The Catholic White Fathers established a mission at Mponda's on the banks of the Tchiri River between Lakes Malawi and Malombe. They were followed by the Montfort Marist Brothers at Nguludi and Limbe. See, Ian Linden, Catholics, Peasants and Chewa Resistance in Nyasaland, (London, 1974); John McCracken, Politics and Christianity; George Shepperson and Thomas Price, Independent African. John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915, (Edinburgh, 1958); Landeg White, Magomero, Portrait of a Village, (Cambridge, 1987).

⁷⁶ Pearce to Elgin, 25 April 1907, PRO, CO525/17.

products and consequently, had some first-hand experience of Europeans. They were exposed to Protestant Christianity and were taught the importance of performing good for the glory of God, before whom all people were equal.

The reality, however, was that European political hegemony was based upon separate and unequal relations between the races. The creation and maintenance of an aura of pristine white exclusivity and superiority was essential to legitimizing the exalted position of the guardians of the sacred trust. Hence, white political and white Christian teachings stood in contradiction to each other. The emergence of African independent churches in South Africa in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and their spread to Central Africa in subsequent years was clearly a reaction to this. It has led some scholars to regard the independent African church movement as a form of resistance to colonial rule; the creation of an alternative authority structures through which the dispossessed are empowered politically. Independent churches offered spiritual sustenance to people faced with problems arising from an economy and society undergoing rapid and, often incomprehensible, change.⁷⁷ Christianity, of one form or another, was the ideological epoxy

⁷⁷ Wallace G. Mills, "The Taylor revival of 1866 and the roots of African nationalism in the Cape Colony", Journal of Religion in Africa, Volume 8,(1978); "The Fork in the Road", Journal of Religion in Africa, Volume 9(1979); Harry Langworthy, "Joseph Booth, prophet of radical change in Central and South Africa, 1891 - 1915", Journal of Religion in Africa, Volume 16, (1986). J. Chaphadzika Chakanza, "Sectarianism in Joseph Booth's mission foundations, 1925-1975: the search for causative factors", Chancellor College History Department Seminar Paper No. 15, 1985/86.

which held metamorphic communities together. However, the economy thrust Africans, Indians and Europeans together and produced all manner of tensions and conflicts. At least in one instance, religion provided the ideological rationale for revolutionary change.⁷⁸

Economic interdependence had ramifications for social exchange as well. All manner of rules, formal and informal, contrived to maintain separation of the races. Elaborate zoning bylaws, curfews, pass laws and sanitation rules reinforced racial distinction and were designed to mediate and control the physical activities of everyone on a daily basis. On a psychological level, as in other settler colonies and the southern United States, language was a potent medium through which the culture of racism was reproduced. Domestic servants who had access to their employers' private lives were, through language, reduced to child-like status: they lived in "boys'" quarters; one sent one's "girl" to fetch the children; wages were paid out piecemeal (in the form of poso, a weekly food allowance) since Africans could not be trusted to manage money wisely. Educated Africans who addressed Europeans in English were often thought "cheeky", their western dress scorned and mocked by white society.⁷⁹ The reduction of Africans to the level of children permitted a sense of intimacy, but one based upon a parent-child relationship rather than one founded on adult equality. The patrimonial tradition shot

⁷⁸ See Chapter Two.

⁷⁹ Dane Kennedy has devoted several chapters to this topic in his book, Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, (Durham, North Carolina, 1989).

through the whole fabric of the imperial experience and underwrote the philosophy of colonial tutelage.

Independent churches constituted an overt response to the obvious contradictions and hypocrisy of European Christianity in a racist colonial society. But there were other more subtle occult reactions which emanated from the racism encountered in daily social intercourse. Evidence suggests that Africans held deep-seated reservations about the morality and worthiness of their colonial "superiors" and these qualms found expression in folklore.

One of the most common expressions of this distrust can be found in the mythology of uchifwamba, the belief in white cannibalism and hooliganism.⁸⁰ The origins of uchifwamba are obscure. Shepperson and Price discussed this fear in the context of the abolition of the slave trade in Central Africa when it was alleged that Arab slavers from Tanganyika territory and the north end of Lake Malawi spread rumours that the white man's desire to stop the trade in slaves was a deception. For hundreds of years, they said, Europeans had been transporting ship-loads of Africans to the New World, not to use their labour, but to eat them.⁸¹ Consequently, whites should not be trusted and Africans north of the Zambezi should rise up and expel them from the territory. Uchifwamba,

⁸⁰ Mandala states that uchifwamba means "kidnapping", but this seems to have been only part of its meaning. The informants I spoke to made a direct and clear connection between uchifwamba and white cannibalism. Mandala, Work and Control, p.396.

⁸¹ Shepperson and Price, Independent African, chapter one and p. 87.

I was told by one informant, is a synonym for "cannibalism", others insisted that it was a general term for hooliganism or an explanation for unseen violent crime. One other informant connected uchifwamba indirectly to both slaving and cannibalism by asserting that it was associated with marauding bands of horsemen who, under cover of darkness, used to kidnap people in Blantyre and Thyolo District for imprisonment and eventual consumption by white planters.⁸² The horsemen were African, I was told, and although one person insisted on having been chased by uchifwamba, and heard the beat of the horses' hoofs, he admitted that he had not actually seen them.⁸³ Megan Vaughan recorded rumours of European cannibalism as it was alleged to have occurred during the 1949 famine. This involved the selling of children by Indian traders to whites for food and medicinal purposes!⁸⁴ Even today, mothers threaten troublesome children with "giving them to the mzungu (white person)" if they do not behave. These "old wives' tales", engendered a fear of white skinned persons and inculcated a sense of distrust of Europeans, who had, after all, dispossessed the African majority. They buttressed the fear of nocturnal marauders and

⁸² Mandala mentions that in the Lower Tchiri, uzungu, was the term used to describe "wage slavery", particularly the practice of working for whites. He contrasts this institution with ukapolo, the indigenous form of servitude practised in the region before the 1860s. Uzungu comes from the word European -- mzungu. Mandala, Work and Control, p. 113.

⁸³ Mr. and Mrs. F. Sangala, Kings Phiri, Owen Kalinga and Nyemba Mbekeani, 1988; Interview #47 E.B. Akimu, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 22 June 1988.

⁸⁴ See, Megan Vaughan, Portrait of an African Famine, Gender and Famine in Twentieth Century Malawi, (Cambridge, 1987), p.41.

encouraged people to travel in large groups after dark. As a social control mechanism, uchifwamba made a profound impression on African consciousness. It perpetuated social distance and was a powerful reaction to and reminder of white hegemony.

In addition to dealing with the stresses and strains inherent to a racist culture, Africans were compelled to cope with the complexities born of urban society. Most urbanites retained links with their home villages, but in town, they were obliged to come to grips with a plethora of new social problems. Marriages between people of different cultural and linguistic groups became more common and produced conflicts over inheritance and child custody practices. The dominance of male wage labour and reliance on the cash economy which stressed male participation threw up a need for ideological rationales and strained gender and kinship relations. The adoption of Christianity with its strong patriarchal tradition offered some psychological relief, but it was not fully appropriate to local conditions and conflicted with custom in crucial areas, most notably over marriage and divorce laws and the question of polygamy (which Islam condoned). Marriage law of course had ramifications in terms of inheritance, and to date these issues remain unresolved.

Tensions within the family were mirrored in the wider society and challenged existing authority patterns. In 1959, Bettison and Apthorpe undertook a sociological survey of Ndirande and wrote at some length about the tensions they saw emerging between different power groups. They estimated its population at about 3,000 persons, but this figure is

probably low. (See Table 1.1)⁸⁵ Most of the families enumerated in this study were allegedly local Yao or Mang'anja. There were significant numbers of non-indigenous inhabitants, mainly Angoni and Alomwe. These people came from Dedza, Ntcheu, Nsanje or Mozambique, and soon married into the local population. Bettison and Apthorpe found evidence of tension between recent arrivals and traditional chiefly elites emanating from the wealth and independence of the former. They commented at length upon the ambiguous social status of territorial "outsiders" and the challenge they posed to authority structures in the peri-urban milieu.

The authority of the headmen in Ndirande is also influenced by the presence in Ndirande of a number of wealthy Africans, but largely in a contrary way. Some of these rich people are members of founding lineages, but our evidence suggests the majority are persons who have bought or built properties as non-rent paying tenants. Certain of them have direct commercial interests in Ndirande: others have or have had similar interests elsewhere. They are frequently vocal in politics. Circumstances did not allow us to make a detailed enquiry into the activities of this most important group ... On the one hand, under African Trust land tenure, they have the advantage of no *thangata* and an unusual freedom to carry on business under relatively favourable conditions in so far as there are no Indian or European traders in Ndirande for example. The headmen represent authority under this type of tenure and hence cannot be ignored even by the most independent and

⁸⁵ In two areas surveyed, between 70% and 85% of houses were inhabited by lineage founders or their relatives. Only 15% of houses were rented. Bettison and Apthorpe took this as evidence of a stable population. It is not clear if their figures accounted for lodgers, friends or distant relatives who may have resided at different dwellings on any given evening. Were these persons not counted, then their figures would be significantly underestimated. Moreover, failure to include transients would mean the portrayal of a much more stable community than was the case. See Table 1.1. D.G. Bettison and R.J. Apthorpe, "Authority and residence in a peri-urban social structure -- Ndirande, Nyasaland", *The Nyasaland Journal*, 14,1(1961), 33.

individualistic businessman.⁸⁶

Trust Land status meant that local government was under the control of the chiefs, yet proximity to Blantyre and Limbe meant a local population increasingly divorced from village life. The colonial economy offered the opportunity for individuals to accumulate wealth and status through wage labour or self employment and this threw up a class of people whose livelihood and social standing were intimately linked to the urban economy. Nevertheless, because of birth, they were strangers in the peri-urban environment and no matter how much their new found wealth enabled them to garner the support of clients and customers, they had no voice in the traditional authority structures.

Not having a voice within the traditional or Indirect Rule system, the new urban elite created alternative political and social structures; before the Second World War, Native Associations, welfare societies and, to a limited degree, tribal associations, were the arenas in which outsiders aired their views and distributed patronage and assistance. In 1944, a number of Blantyre's African entrepreneurs and white collar clerical workers formed the Nyasaland African Congress which was an organisation founded by and for new elite interests, even though it developed a mass character in the 1950s. The issues discussed by the NAC in the early years reflect this. They were extremely concerned to improve African education; they agitated for new marriage laws; they protested against government restrictions of credit facilities available to

⁸⁶ Ibid., 36.

Africans and lamented the Indian monopoly of retail trade.⁸⁷ In short, their grievances were political, but narrowly self-interested, and were geared towards gaining a greater share in the colonial system, not its dissolution.

The Entrepreneur in Chronological Context

Urban African entrepreneurs faced a volatile and hostile economic and political environment. District, central and municipal governments bent upon maintaining a racial hierarchy in which Africans were to be "hewers of wood and drawers of water" blocked African enterprise in the towns, sometimes by accident, sometimes by design. A commitment to big business in the form of highly capitalized, non-African firms and the political imperative of segregation meant that African commerce was channelled into "appropriate" physical venues: the peri-urban villages and, later, high density housing areas. Just as the organisation of urban spaces determined the physical parameters of African urban entrepreneurship, the culture of racism served to dictate the economic niches into which African business fell. African businesses came to fill the gaps left by non-African firms: hence, they dominated service industries linked to the urban African market.

Africans operated on the geographic and commercial margins of Blantyre-Limbe, pushed there by foreign planners, developers and commercial interests. Nevertheless, marginalism did pay in some cases.

⁸⁷ See, Chapter Three.

What follows is an account of how the self-employed African entrepreneur came to make it pay. Entrepreneur is defined as someone who not only runs an enterprise by ploughing profits back into a firm, but one who innovates. This definition distinguishes entrepreneurs from other African business people such as market gardeners, or beer brewers who, although they engaged in productive enterprises, did not seek to establish an autonomous business entity or existential firm. Emphasis is placed upon those who sought not simply to keep afloat in a foreign dominated economy, but to swim successfully against its current and to reorder it in their sector.

The narrative begins by explaining how and why Africans came to live in and around towns when their economic future there seemed so unpropitious. It is easiest to trace the development of urban business in three chronological periods. First, from 1907 to 1915, African enterprise in Southern Province was characterized by growing tension between African and European agriculture. In the Shire Highlands⁸⁸, the area of heaviest European settlement, this manifested itself on two levels: within the "thangata" system, where European planters and African peasant producers competed for African labour time; and secondly, where a "modernizing" African planting elite and their European counterparts

⁸⁸ I have used the spelling "Shire" in all cases where it applies to European place names. Elias Mandala employs the more proper chinyanja spelling "Tchiri" when referring to "Malawian" place names. I follow his lead and have used the vernacular renderings of place names except when to do so would be anachronistic.

competed for labour, status and scarce resources.⁸⁹ This tension, rooted in economic grievances, came increasingly to manifest itself in a racist idiom.

Many aspiring African "planters" endorsed the spirit, if not the methods of John Chilembwe's rebellion of January 1915. The rebellion failed, but subsequent investigations exposed the injustices perpetrated in the name of thangata up to that time. Much of the popular support for the rebellion came from workers on the A.L. Bruce estates, but the nucleus of the conspiracy was formed by independent African business people, religious leaders and land owners who found their efforts to win respect and equality in the colonial world repeatedly blocked by a hostile European state and society. Entrepreneurs like Duncan Njilima and John Gray Kufa participated in the uprising and lost both life and property as a result. Other men like Peters Mlelemba, although they endorsed the early activities of John Chilembwe, did not involve themselves in the rising, perhaps because they recognized the slim chance it had of success. Even though individual motives remain elusive, the aims of the rebellion itself seem to have emanated from a desire to recast Nyasaland in a new mould in which the emerging "independent African" would play an indispensable role.

Far from rejecting all things European, Chilembwe's world view embodied those elements of European culture and economy which

⁸⁹ In this context, thangata refers to the system of forced labour prevalent in the Shire Highlands throughout the colonial period. It comes from the chinyanja verb "kuthangata" which means "to help" and signified in precolonial days the tributary labour accorded a chief in return for religious and secular leadership and protection. More will be said of thangata during the colonial period below.

promised benefits as long as these were shared out among the people who produced them. In that sense, "Africa for the Africans" was a cry for change, not a plea for reversion to the old order of chaos and anarchy. Chilembwe's Africa, and the Africa of his bourgeois coterie, was to be an Africa firmly rooted in Western notions of progress, buttressed by an Africanised Christianity which emphasised self-reliance, good conduct and good works for the betterment of society and the glory of God. It was a utopian aim, born of the frustration of a new middle class, a class of social and economic marginals who found themselves blocked from equal participation in colonial society by virtue of their colour. In the aftermath of the rebellion, little doubt remained that the guardians of the sacred trust would remain European. Of course, "traditional" rulers would assisted them in their mission.⁹⁰ African "modernisers" would take a back seat to traditional rulers until the post 1945 period.⁹¹

From 1915 to 1937, the principal economic roles to be played by Africans in Nyasaland solidified and revolved around three central developments: the introduction of Indirect Rule; the consolidation of

⁹⁰ Vail and White hold that the Chilembwe uprising was one of the main reasons the colonial state sought to buttress the authority of the Yao chiefs in the south. They argue that through strengthening these loyal chiefs the authorities sought to control the fractious Lomwe (Anguru) who formed the main rank and file support for Chilembwe. Leroy Vail and Landeg White, "Tribalism in the political history of Malawi", in Leroy Vail (ed.), The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa, (London, 1989).

⁹¹ The educated elite coalesced in Native Associations (the first being the North Nyasa Native Association formed in 1912). Many served as advisers to Native Authorities after the introduction of indirect rule in 1933. They were also given representation on the District and Provincial Native Councils after the Second World War.

tobacco and tea as the agricultural mainstays of the formal colonial economy; and finally, the rationalization of the migrant labour system culminating in the Salisbury Agreement of 1937. During the depression years, plantation produced tea and tenant and peasant grown tobacco emerged as the main generators of export revenues. While Africans in Central Province might earn income through tobacco production, for the people of Southern Province, the road to economic success lay elsewhere. For some, security and a cachet of "respectability" lay in the acquisition of education, a white collar job and eventually a small pension. For others, opportunity lay in employment outside the Protectorate, in South Africa, Southern Rhodesia and later, in Northern Rhodesia. After 1938, more and more "Nyasas" travelled abroad to work. The cities of south central Africa were larger, more cosmopolitan, more dangerous than Blantyre-Limbe. They were more stringently regulated and policed, but at the same time offered higher wages and a broader range of entertainments on which to spend them.

During the 1930s there was some movement to urban areas as Africans sought positions in government and private employ, but the towns remained small. Because of a commitment to racial segregation and a lack of funds local and protectorate administrative levels, little provision was made to accommodate this urban influx. Official neglect was greeted by African initiative and the burgeoning of a small tertiary sector reliant on African demand for housing, transport and foodstuffs.

But this was a small and silent revolution. More generally, the 1920s and 1930s were years of economic retrenchment and it was not until

after the Second World War that the economy experienced a favourable turn of fortune. Like all British colonial wartime economies, Nyasaland's experience was one of import quotas, rationing and increased governmental control. Only after 1948 did optimism return, founded upon high primary product prices. In Blantyre and Limbe this sparked a small building boom. Assisted by experience gained abroad, African urban business, especially sectors linked to the construction industry, took off. With a market finally vibrant enough to demand and absorb new enterprises, Africans branched out into new service industries and expanded their roles in productive enterprise to include those of managers and owners.

The economy was sufficiently buoyant to support "moonlighters", too: white collar workers who engaged in small business on a part-time basis in order to supplement their salaries and more and more of these part-time business people shifted to complete self-employment as nationalist politics gained momentum after 1944. Self-employment encouraged autonomous political action and was increasingly taken up by those involved in nationalist politics.⁹² The struggle from the margins waged by independent business people, once a purely economic fight, came to form part and parcel of a wider political agenda. Entrepreneurs contributed money and time to NAC activities and their contribution to nationalist politics was based on calculated self-interest. As in 1915,

⁹² Many employees vocal in politics retire or were sacked and moved into self employment. For some this was a temporary move, for others, permanent.

political action was in large part spawned by a desire to win a place in the new order.

The official sanctioning of a permanent urban African presence in the post-1945 era was a landmark in the history of Blantyre and Limbe, but it did not represent a break with the racialism of the preceding sixty years. The state sanctioned urban residence for an African labour force. Business people were squeezed to the margins by the new urban plan in which they had no place. The following narrative clearly documents the problems and pitfalls faced by Africans seeking to carve out an independent living for themselves in the Protectorate's towns which began as, and continued to be, the preserve of the white hegemon.

Chapter Two

Small Beginnings -- the Plantation Economy and the Development of African Enterprise, 1907 - 1915

"The Village Blacksmith in Central Africa"

Under a Eucalyptus tree
The village blacksmith sits,
Before him is a cheap light car,
And a motorbike in bits,
And the Owner and the Chauffeur, too,
Want repairs done in two ticks.

The village blacksmith scowls at them
As he lights a cigarette
He tells the boys what they're to do,
Goes out and has a wet;
The Owner and the Chauffeur, too,
Wait weeks for what they get.

The natives coming home from work
Look in at the open door,
They like to see him make his bills
And hear the Owners roar,
And the Chauffeurs swear, as they declare,
They ne'er paid like that before.

He goes each morning to his box
And packs away his chits,
He thinks one day he'll realize,
Upon such little bits.
And the Owner and the Chauffeur, too,
By such things think they're quits.

The chestnut tree long since is dead,
For chestnuts do grow old.
The smith's shed has grown into
A building big and bold.
It bears "Garage" above the door,
If it's not "To be Sold".

-- Plagiarized.

Nyasaland Times, 9 April 1914

This piece of doggerel poetry is one of the earliest European characterizations of African business in Central Africa before World War One. It suggests several things. Most self-employed Africans were tailors, market gardeners and washer people, who like the village blacksmith had shifted their activities to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the colonial economy. The blacksmith/mechanic exemplifies the person who innovates, who builds on a skill and adapts it to new economic circumstances: the forger of iron and maker of hoes and spears becomes the creator of automobile parts and services the "motors" of European owners. Like the market gardeners, dairy people, tailors and cycle repairers, his business is a marginal affair. Nonetheless, he is prosperous enough to employ "boys" to whom he delegates certain tasks while he himself is free to smoke and have a drink. He works at his own speed and extracts, according to the anonymous bard, an extortionate fee. He practices a rudimentary form of accounting, keeping his "chits" or invoices in a box in his garage. His African neighbours "coming home from work" for the European, take pride in the mechanic's ability to irritate and exploit the helplessness of the European car owner. The latter seems to have no choice but to patronize the African mechanic, perhaps because he has haplessly been stranded close to the village shop. In any case, the blacksmith-mechanic benefits from the motorist's misfortune. He does eventually "realize" upon such "little bits", to the extent that he can erect a new building, or perhaps sell his business after several years of gouging marooned Europeans. No mention is made of his handing the business down to his children. The tone of the poem is

smug. The European writer could confidently poke fun at his own temporary impotence, firm in the knowledge that in 1914, his was the incontestable power in Central Africa.

In 1915 something happened in the Southern Province of Nyasaland which called white supremacy into question. In January of that year an abortive uprising, led by a western educated African Baptist Minister, John Chilembwe, shook the foundations of European settler society. In spite of its failure to bring about an "Africa for the African" in Nyasaland, the Chilembwe uprising led Europeans to reevaluate the security of their position in the Protectorate and prompted a heightened concern over the political volatility of Ethiopianism and Mohammedanism.¹ Even though the official explanation of the rising was that it was simply the product of a religious fanatic, subsequent investigation exposed some of the graver injustices perpetrated against workers on several European estates in the Shire Highlands which Government made some efforts to address. The result was legislative changes to the terms of labour tenancy and closer regulation of workers' pay. Government also recognized the need to bring educated Africans

¹ What officials in Nyasaland were worried about was a coming together of Islamic and Independent African Church movements. In a secret despatch to the Secretary of State, Governor Smith stated that "experience during the rising of 1915 indicated rather the possibility of a fusion where the result might be the overthrow of white rule. Some Mahomedan [sic] Yaos were undoubtedly sitting on the fence, if they had not lent more active support to John Chilembwe's revolt." Smith went on to remark that the only way to combat the political "guiding principles" present in both Mohammedanism and Ethiopianism was through secular education which would develop "a higher sense of political and commercial development as opposed to religious concentration". Smith to Milne, 18 February 1918, PRO, CO525/78.

into the fold, especially those who had travelled abroad and picked up dangerous ideas in the process. These individuals, according to one report,

... return [from U.S.A. and South Africa] to take up trading or planting, but the majority enter on religion and preaching as a business, the ease of the life and power and influence over their fellows appealing to them strongly ...²

In Governor Smith's view, a "more individual property in the soil and vested interests in trade and industry" for Africans might "go far in repressing predatory instincts and overt rebellious acts..." and that "there should be a gradual but extending participation by the more enlightened and progressive natives in their own administration" at the local level.³ These changes designed to create a vested interest in the colonial system were born, not out of any humanitarian impulse, but so that a Chilembwe-type revolt might be avoided in future.

For many years, the official interpretation of the uprising went unquestioned in written accounts. Chilembwe, a mission educated Baptist preacher who had been ordained in absentia by an American Theological College in Lynchburg, Virginia was regarded as a man who would be king; a man who sought through "a wide and well-organized movement to attack and massacre the whites".⁴ Chilembwe's objective was the

² Memorandum of 17 December 1917, initialled by Executive Council Member "W.W." sent to the Secretary of State, CO525/78.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Governor Smith, cited in , R.I. Rotberg, "Psychological stress and the question of identity: Chilembwe's revolt reconsidered", in Rotberg (ed.), Rebellion in Black Africa, (London, 1971), p.138.

creation of a theocratic state reminiscent of that envisioned by the fictional Prester John.⁵ The findings of the 1916 Commission of Inquiry into the causes of the uprising broadly concurred with this view but, as Robert Rotberg has pointed out, the Commission failed to "demonstrate the nature of the information which indicated such unequivocal conclusions."⁶

In later years, the causes of the uprising and motivations of Chilembwe and his followers captured the curiosity of a number of scholars and amateur historians, not least because much of the documentation pertaining to these events was destroyed in a fire at the Secretariat at Zomba in 1919.⁷ The debate has pivoted around the personality and motivations of Chilembwe himself. Shepperson and Price, in their landmark study, Independent African, conclude that the objective can be explained in one of two ways: in the event of a successful revolution, Chilembwe wished to establish an African theocratic state, "with selective European guidance", but one run by and for Africans. He did not pursue the restoration of the old tribal order, "but sought to break the European monopoly of the power, wealth, and dignity which their

⁵ John Buchan, Prester John, (London, 1956), first published 1910.

⁶ An internal Commission of Enquiry was struck in April of 1915 and submitted its report in 1916. GN69/15, 28 April 1915; Government Printer, Report of the Commission appointed by His Excellency the Governor to inquire into Various Matters and Questions concerned with the Native Rising within the Nyasaland Protectorate, (Zomba, 1916).

⁷ Fire broke out on the night of February 17 and 18 and destroyed offices of the Secretariat, Council Chamber, the Treasury, Audit, Post and Public Works. The Attorney General's office and auxiliary Treasury and Audit offices were saved. Since "nearly all the archives and records" were in the Secretariat, they were destroyed. Duff to Milne, 24 February 1919, PRO, CO525/82.

culture conferred, not to reject that way of life". If unsuccessful, the rebellion would serve as a gesture of protest against European rule.⁸ Rotberg avers that Chilembwe desired martyrdom and that this assertion is backed up by assessments of his psychological state in 1915.⁹ George Simeon Mwase, an amateur historian writing in the 1930s, believed that Chilembwe was almost completely concerned to make a symbolic gesture; to "strike a blow and die". He argued that Chilembwe did not really take the decision to rebel until after the government censor refused to allow publication of a letter Chilembwe sent to the Nyasaland Times in November 1914 protesting against the use of African porters in the Europeans' war.¹⁰ It was only after this that the frustration Chilembwe felt over conditions on the A.L. Bruce Estates and the personal enmity between himself and W.J. Livingstone, the estate manager, the indignities suffered by Africans in a racist culture culminated in recourse to violent action. In Mwase's view, this led to a series of meetings in December

⁸ George Shepperson and Thomas Price, Independent African. John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915, (Edinburgh, 1958), pp.255; 429; 435.

⁹ Rotberg, "Psychological stress".

¹⁰ "...In time of peace everything [is] for Europeans only. And instead of honour we suffer humiliation with names contemptible. But in time of war it has been found that we are needed to share hardships and shed our blood in equality ... Instead the poor Africans who have nothing to own in this present world, who in death, leave only a long line of widows and orphans in utter want and dire distress are invited to die for a cause which is not theirs". Chilembwe's letter to the Nyasaland Times which was excised by the Government censor. Mrs. K. Livingstone allowed Shepperson and Price to examine copy of the letter printed on an inset for the 26 November 1914 issue, but which was later withdrawn. See Shepperson and Price, Independent African, p.235

1914 at which:

all the chiefs etc. gathered up again, and begun to suggest their ideas. They all came to conclusion, that by not answering us on our request, means death on us. They all said that 'It was better for all of us to die, than to live and see all these troubles, especially, to our women and children, whenever the husband is killed, leaving wife and children nothing in the kind of help such as pension or gratuity is given them, and after all they look very poor and useless.'¹¹

It was after a last meeting in December that Chilembwe resolved to "do the dead [deed]" and at a meeting in early January when he announced the decision to "strike a blow and die", he allegedly made continual references to "John Brown of America" who had died so courageously in the cause of freedom.¹² It was the discovery of this source and letters from Chilembwe to one Haya Edward Peters Mlelemba which disclosed the former's financial difficulties which led Rotberg to conclude that Chilembwe's uprising was really the function of a man bent upon self-destruction; a man who saw his role as that of African martyr.¹³

There are two main problems with these interpretations. First, scholars assume that the uprising was doomed from the start and transfer this assumption back in time into the minds of all involved. Consequently, they are preoccupied with trying to puzzle out what it was that spurred Chilembwe on this disastrous course, and what it was he hoped to gain from it. They look to the man's preaching and even try to

¹¹ George Simeon Mwase, Strike a Blow and Die, A Narrative of Race Relations in Colonial Africa By George Simeon Mwase, edited and introduced by Robert Rotberg, (Cambridge, U.S., 1967), p.35.

¹² Ibid., p.36.

¹³ Rotberg, "Psychological stress".

decipher his psychological make-up for guidance in this. Leys refers to Chilembwe's impassioned speeches pertaining to the Old Testament struggle of the Jews with the Egyptians and the Philistines and puts this forward as evidence of his resolution to set himself up as a latter day Moses, the leader of a twentieth century righteous rebellion.¹⁴ Rotberg, on the other hand, cites Chilembwe's use of the New Testament, Acts 20:32 to prove that Chilembwe was launched on a course of martyrdom after November 1914:

And now brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

Clearly, one can find evidence of diverse motivations in the second-hand recordings of his sermons and speeches. It is equally possible to interpret these monologues as fiery rhetoric designed to inflame the passions of an audience and inspire them to action.

Rotberg's attempt to analyze the psyche of Chilembwe is rife with methodological problems. It is difficult enough to assess the character of an individual and establishing motivation for discreet actions is even more impregnable under the best of conditions; that is, regular psycho-therapy sessions over a course of years with a more or less willing subject. The difficulties of doing this armed only with the scantiest of documentary and second-hand oral evidence are sufficient to call into serious question any conclusions drawn from the resultant personality sketch, no matter how interesting and compelling the construction of this might be as an

¹⁴ Norman Leys, Kenya, (London, 1924), p. 328.

academic exercise.

Recourse to psycho-historical endeavours based upon fragmentary evidence are symptomatic of the second problem which plagues analysis of this historical event and that is the preoccupation with the personality and action of Chilembwe, the man. Whatever they tell us about Chilembwe's feelings about the prospects of a successful rising, his speeches provide no insight into the minds of his followers. Did they also see the rebellion as a symbolic act, or a viable bid for power? Doubtless, as the uprising's leader, Chilembwe was important, but emphasising his role obscure the motivations and actions of his followers. There were concrete economic and social grievances which prompted people to follow him which are directly or indirectly mentioned by most writers. Landeg White has most recently described the brutal conditions under which workers lived on the A.L. Bruce Estates which would have attracted them to Chilembwe's call.¹⁵ Twenty years earlier, Shepperson and Price also give considerable weight to land and labour issues, but decried the emphasis on economic causes, since these overshadowed "other aspects of the movement, of which its reaction to the whole complicated change of scene that the Great War brought to central Africa is an important part."¹⁶ They did so because they were concerned to answer questions regarding the place Chilembwe's movement should be given in the context of the history of early African nationalism and the

¹⁵ Landeg White, Magomero, Portrait of an African Village, (Cambridge, 1987).

¹⁶ Shepperson and Price, Independent African, p.431.

history of the African diaspora.¹⁷ So while admitting the importance of economic factors, Shepperson and Price were more concerned to explain the socio-religious underpinnings of the uprising and how it was similar to and differed from other early responses by Africans to colonialism.

In spite of their different agenda, Shepperson and Price acknowledged the economic reasons underlying "petit bourgeois" participation in the uprising. The cabal of independent business people and white collar workers which surrounded Chilembwe had little in common with the Lomwe workers who formed the rank and file support for the uprising. Neither were they all members of Chilembwe's congregation, so it is questionable that they would have embraced his notion of martyrdom. These were independent business people and mission-educated white collar government and private sector employees. Without their support, it is difficult to conceive how Chilembwe's assault, however flawed, would have succeeded even to the limited extent that it did. Men like Duncan Njilima, James Gray Kufa Mapantha, Hugh Mathaka, Thomas Lulanga, A.M. Chisuse and Whiskers Matengo were significant property owners who had much to lose from participation in a failed rebellion. Several of them were Chilembwe's "generals" and there is evidence which suggests that for them, rebellion was neither a belated nor spontaneous act as Mwase suggests, but a calculated gamble to change the existing order.

¹⁷ Ibid., Chapter IX seeks to do this explicitly.

If, as Rotberg suggests, the uprising was merely an act of martyrdom and was conceived as such, how do we explain the participation of Chilembwe's followers? Were they all, as a group, bent upon martyrdom? Was Chilembwe such a powerful force that he was able to inspire, like Reverend Jones in Guyana, such loyalty and blind faith in an obviously doomed project? Were the factors which "deepened Chilembwe's disenchantment and warped his view of the future" as potent for his coterie of co-conspirators?¹⁸ Logic suggests otherwise. While officials may have needed to set up Chilembwe as a megalomaniac in order to expunge themselves of any responsibility for the conditions which engendered rebellious behaviour, they were probably correct in their assessment that this was a premeditated, if not well planned or executed, plot.

In December of 1914, Nyasaland's European population was distracted by the German campaign in East Africa. Moreover, it was a small European population which controlled in excess of one million Africans. The population figures reported in the Protectorate Blue Books reveal this. In 1914-15, there were 831 Europeans in Nyasaland: 587 males and 244 females. Of these, 543 (or 65% of the total) lived in Blantyre, Mlanje, Zomba and the Upper Shire Districts. The Indian

¹⁸ Rotberg pointed to Chilembwe's indebtedness, his susceptibility to asthma attacks, the death of his daughter and a "host of personal difficulties" which combined to create a psychological state which readied him for rebellion. Robert Rotberg, "Resistance and rebellion in British Nyasaland and German East Africa, 1888-1915: a tentative comparison", Prosser Gifford and William Roger Louis (eds.) with the assistance of Alison Smith, Britain and Germany in Africa, Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule, (London, 1967), pp.684-685.

population was also small, only 410 people divided between 385 males and 25 females. Sixty-two percent of these lived in the same aforementioned districts.¹⁹ These four administrative areas were included in the operational area of the rebellion. The puny size of the non-African population alone suggests that the rebellion, in theory, stood considerable chance of success. Premeditation is also the most logical explanation for the letter soliciting assistance for the revolt sent to the German command in Tunduru in German East Africa and also explains the severing of telegraph lines between Blantyre and Zomba and the planning of an escape route into Portuguese East Africa.²⁰ Lewis Bandawe, in his Memoirs argues that his uncle, Joseph Bismarck, was asked to take part in plans for the uprising before November 1914, but he avoided Chilembwe thereafter. Similar requests were made of Reverend Matecheta and Mr. Chisuse, the mission printer. They reported this to Reverend Hetherwick at Blantyre Mission, who discounted their warnings.²¹ However poorly Chilembwe and his coterie of "independent Africans" plotted, plot they did.

¹⁹ Government Printer, Nyasaland Protectorate Blue Books 1914-15, (Zomba, 1915).

²⁰ The letter sent to the Germans has never been found, but the German official at Tunduru's response is cited in full in Shepperson and Price, Independent African, p.256.

²¹ Lewis Mataka Bandawe, (edited and introduced by B. Pachai), Memoirs of a Malawian, The life and reminiscences of Lewis Mataka Bandawe, M.B.E., (Blantyre, 1971), p.62.

While the attraction of a rebellion to landless estate workers is obvious, and while most adopted a "wait and see" approach to the rising, it remains to explain the active involvement of the petit bourgeois rebels. Shepperson and Price suggest that in general, European society scorned the "small native capitalists, who seemed so insignificant in comparison with European enterprises that they were often regarded as silly upstarts" and suggest that this attitude may have compelled some of these people to throw in their lot with Chilembwe. However, they argue, "[f]or their motives in this, there is little direct evidence".²² Shepperson and Price, in fact, sum up the position of these "small property-owners":

... His lot was not an easy one, for he faced the competition of the Indian storekeeper and trader on his own level; and, should he aspire to higher forms of production and trade, he found that not only did his own lack of training and tradition hamper him but, in an economy like Nyasaland's, though labour was cheap, amounts of capital beyond his command were needed to maintain and increase production because of the natural and artificial hazards to which the economy was subjected.²³

While the factors cited above -- lack of capital and familiarity with plantation style production -- presented difficulties for African planters in the Shire Highlands they were common to non-African planters as well. They, too, had to grapple with problems of labour supply, transport costs and devising efficient ways of producing cash crops in a tropical environment.²⁴ There were, however, obstacles which Africans faced

²² Shepperson and Price, Independent African, p.247.

²³ Ibid., p.246.

²⁴ Getting crops to market was a serious problem for Nyasaland's planters. They were reliant on tenga tenga (porterage) and the Tchiri River for the first leg of the journey to the railhead at the Zambezi and

which non-Africans did not and these placed African planters and traders at a greater disadvantage. These impediments combined with racial prejudice were the potent sources of discontent which launched this small, but important group, along the road to violent rebellion.

To understand the climate of frustration in Southern Province in 1915, one must begin with a discussion of land. The expropriation of African lands by European settlers was effected swiftly and smoothly. Soon after the establishment of the British Central African Protectorate in 1891, its first Commissioner, Sir Harry Johnston, investigated the validity of European land claims in Central Africa. Where landholdings were deemed to have been acquired in the appropriate fashion, Johnston issued a certificate of claim, a document which conveyed the holder freehold rights to the designated area. Up to 1894, this constituted 3,705,255 acres out of a Protectorate total of 25,161,924.²⁵ Over 194,464 acres of this were in Blantyre District and constituted over half of the total district area. Land alienation was most severe in the Shire Highlands and despite a

on to Beira. An estimate for 1906 stated that for export to be profitable, crops had to sell at £12 per ton. Coffee, cotton and tobacco cost considerably more to produce and transport in these early years, and it was for this reason that settlers were so eager for a rail link between Blantyre and the Zambezi. A line between Blantyre and Chiromo on the Tchiri River was under construction which would link the plantations to the Zambezi by water. Unfortunately, the Tchiri's water level was dropping at this time and so the line was extended further south to Port Herald (Nsanje) which was open to river craft at all times. This line was completed in 1908 and gave a real push to the cultivation of cotton. Nyasaland Report for the Year 1906 - 7, 20 June 1917, CO525/18; Leroy Vail, "The making of an imperial slum: Nyasaland and its railways, 1895 - 1935", Journal of African History, XVI,1(1975), 92-93.

²⁵ Ibid., p.37.

ruling by Judge Nunan in 1903 that chiefs in that region had illegally "sold" or disposed of their lands, over half of the arable land in the area remained in white hands.²⁶ All land which was not held under certificates of claim reverted to Crown control and its disposal was administered through its agent, the Protectorate government. According to Pachai's calculations, by March 1920, a further 193,472 freehold acres and 118,504 leasehold acres were alienated under the terms of the Crown Lands Ordinance 1912.²⁷

European settlers were intent upon establishing viable estate cash crop production, and the establishment of labour intensive plantation production was the single most important economic change affecting the Shire Highlands of colonial Malawi before the First World War. Initially, European planters experimented with coffee and then with cotton. Neither crop reaped impressive returns. Tea production proved to be the salvation of estate agriculture in the 1930s and 1940s, and marked the rise to prominence of large, highly capitalized companies like Conforzi and the

²⁶ Judge John Joseph Nunan, judgment in *Supervisor of Native Affairs versus Blantyre and East Africa Company*, Blantyre, High Court of British Central Africa, 28 April 1903, MNA, LAN1/1/7.

²⁷ Pachai, Land and Politics in Malawi, 1875 - 1975, (Kingston, 1978), p.50. The Crown Lands Ordinance 1912, No. 18 of 1912, 8 November 1912; in Ordinances of the Nyasaland Protectorate in force on the 31 March 1913, (London, 1913), pp. 425 - 436. The dominant type of tenure from 1895 to 1905 was freehold. After 1907 up to 1912, government preference was to award leaseholds with options to purchase. After the 1912 ordinance, no further Crown Land freehold grants were awarded except those which had an option granted before 1912. One could also be granted Yearly Tenancy Agreements by the Governor in Council. These leasehold plots were subject to yearly review and rent was determined case by case and paid bi-annually.

Cholo Highlands Tea Estates Ltd. Tea was profitable in Nyasaland because of a powerful international cartel which was able to influence world tea prices, but also because labour costs were kept low.²⁸ In Central Province, estate agriculture was less successful and European land owners resorted, in the 1930s, to the marketing of tenant and small holder produced tobacco, since control of distribution of this crop proved more profitable than producing and marketing it. African production methods were more efficient than the large European estates in the Central Province.

The ascendancy of European estate production and European controlled tenant production meant that African enterprise in southern Nyasaland was to be intimately linked to the production and distribution of economic crops, but in first years of settlement, European ascendancy was far from a foregone conclusion. The protectorate was not linked by rail to the coast until 1935, and river transport and portage made Nyasaland's crops relatively expensive. European planters struggled to find a viable crop and to keep labour costs low in order to secure a profit. They were compelled to cope with an "uncaptured" African peasantry, loath to work the long hours necessary to bring in the harvest, especially since estate harvest seasons coincided with that of African food crops. They were, to some extent, saved by the excesses of Portuguese colonialism which involved in 1895, the introduction of an oppressive

²⁸ Palmer, Robin, "The Nyasaland Tea Industry in the era of international tea restrictions, 1933-1950", Journal of African History, 26(1985), 215-239.

forced labour system in neighbouring Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique). Forced labour led to an influx of Lomwe peoples from the border regions of Portuguese territory, and it was source of labour that Shire Highland planters tapped for their agricultural requirements.²⁹ Famine and disease also contributed to a Lomwe exodus from the territory in the first decade of the twentieth century.³⁰ John Chilembwe rose to the challenge of spreading the gospel to these immigrants.

Table 2.1
List of African Landholders in Nyasaland as at 1909

Name	Area	(freehold)	Year	Place
John Chilembwe	93 acres		1901	Chiradzulu
Joseph Bismark	100 "		1901	--
Thomas Lulanga	20 "		1901	Mulanje
Chitambali	40 "		1902	
Nacho	60 "		1901	
H.C. Kapito	50 "		1903	
John Gray Kufa <u>et.al.</u>	140 "		1905	Chiradzulu (Nsoni)
Hassan Roper	10 "		1905	
Mwamadi	--		1905	Zomba township
Peter Kambona	50 acres		1905	
Johnstone Sasuze	30 "		1907	
Joseph Bismark and Paton Somanje	1/4 "		1909	Indian ward, Blantyre
David Livingstone	100 "		1895	Mbame (Near Blantyre)
George Chokabwino	100 "		1895	Mpemba
Donald Malotta	100 "		1895	Chiradzulu
Joseph Bismark	50 "		1895	Chikwawa Road
Duncan and Gordon	100 "		1896	Blantyre Dist.
Mataka	150 "		1898	"
Thomas Lulanga	100 "		1897	Chiradzulu
Peter Kambona	100 "		1897	Zomba Dist.
Peter Somanje	100 "		1897	"
Sam Sambani	100 "		1899	Blantyre Dist.
Chief Kuntaja	37,947 "		Cert. No. 24	Chilingani

Source: Land Register, Blantyre, Volumes 1-3, cited in Bridglal Pachai, Land and Politics, pp.50-51.

²⁹ See below, for Lomwe involvement in the Chilembwe uprising.

³⁰ Shepperson and Price, Independent African, p.138.

In addition to white planters, there were a handful of Africans who acquired land under freehold and leasehold tenure, but as Table 2.1 demonstrates, their share was paltry. This landed few formed the core of what might be called a westernising African plantocracy. Almost all adopted European names, and several, like John Chilembwe, and Joseph Bismarck travelled extensively and lived side by side with Europeans, and Americans (including black Americans). They were receptive to the advantages potentiated by western commerce and production methods and were eager to participate fully in the brave new world emerging around them.

These aspiring African cash-croppers were attracted by the enhanced security provided by freehold and leasehold tenure. The dominant form of land tenure in the Shire Highlands at the turn of the century was matrilineally transferred rights of usufruct. The Yao and the Nyanja represented the dominant ethnic groups of the region. Both followed matrilineal residence patterns and marriage was exogamous. Villages were organized around several sorority groups into which young men from outside matrilineages married. This meant that husbands resided in wives' villages and had access to land there only through the marriage relationship. Land allocation was in the hands of senior uncle of the wife's matrilineage. Upon death, land and property of both partners reverted to their respective matrilineages. In the event of divorce, the ex-husband forfeited the land allotted him in his wife's village and had no claim to any children from that union. Within their own matrilineage then, men were controlled by brothers or uncles until they married

whereupon they relied on their wife's brothers or uncles for access to productive resources. When men achieved seniority in their own matrilineage, they enjoyed power over junior men and women, but this was often after a long wait!

Not surprisingly, this imbalance in power of older and younger men bred tension and the former had long sought ways to circumvent the rule of the gerontocrats. In the nineteenth century, for example, Yao men took advantage of their involvement in the slave trade to increase personal autonomy. They did so by gaining access to material wealth through trade, which they used to attract retainers and clients. They safeguarded material gain by marrying female captives and establishing new lineages independent of their natal kin.³¹ The introduction of leasehold and freehold tenure offered similar possibilities for young men to break the hold of the elders, their in-laws and senior consanguineous male relations, and for this reason, the new system grew in popularity.

In a letter to Lord Elgin in 1908, Governor Sharpe remarked upon the increased interest among African men for non-traditional forms of land tenure.

The native in question was a "capitao" and Interpreter at the Government Station at Chikala for 10 years, and has rendered conspicuously good service on several occasions.

³¹ John Chilembwe is said to have been the product of such a union. His mother, Nyangu, was allegedly a Mang'anja woman captured by his Yao father in a slave raiding expedition. Shepperson and Price, Independent African, p.89. On the accumulation of slave wives and the establishment of pseudo patrilineages, see, E.A. Alpers, "Trade, state and society among the Yao in the nineteenth century", Journal of African History, 10,3 (1969), 409-411; Clyde Mitchell, The Yao Village: A study in the Social Structure of a Malawian People, (Manchester, 1971), first edition 1956, pp.195-197.

He has been allowed to lease 15 acres for life at a total nominal rent of 1/-. He cannot dispose of the land. As a native of the country, he could have occupied land for planting and residential purposes without the formality of a lease and free of all rent, but preferred the security of tenure by lease of a small defined block.³²

The introduction of private property rights in land had social as well as economic effects. Inheritance practices, for example, began to change. Freehold or leasehold tenure vested the right of disposal in the individual landholder, not in the corporate kin group represented by matrilineage elders. Having broken from control of the lineage vis a vis land access, marriage no longer held the same meaning. Couples began to reside virilocally and it seems this new residence pattern was attended by tension over child custody rights and inheritance procedures. Formerly, slave or captive wives had no rights in children since they were "kinless"; children took the identity of their fathers' matrilineage. Fissiparous tendencies inherent in matrilineal systems of inheritance led to the creation of quasi-patrilineages, founded by men who had taken captive wives.

Islam provided Yao slavers with the ideological rationale for the shift to patriliney and Christianity served the same purpose for the emerging landed African elite. But Christianity was an ethic which threw up radically different marriage relationships and gender roles for men and women. Christian marriage practice rejected polygyny (unlike Islam) and made divorce more difficult to obtain. However, through its emphasis on patrilineal inheritance it provided male accumulators with a way around

³² Sharpe to Elgin, 24 November 1908, PRO CO525/25.

matrilineal constraints to material aggrandizement. For women, the Christian ethic demanded participation in the "domestic sphere", but a domestic sphere quite different from the autonomous world of Nyanja and Yao agriculturalists. In 1912, John Chilembwe conveyed some of the flavour of this new ethos and its significance for women in a passage he wrote about the trials facing his "little wife".

She is teaching day school and taking the sewing department and also visiting her sisters in her surroundings with her Bible in hand. She is seeking to prevent early marriage among our girls ... The world will not go forwards as it should till women have been taught and have learned to take the place God has ordained for them as man's helpmeet -- his equal, not his slave.³³

The Yao or Nyanja woman might have been subordinate to her brother, but she exercised considerable influence over her husband by virtue of his reliance upon her for access to land. With the change to patriarchal attitudes (divinely sanctioned ones at that!), women lost the power they formerly held under custom. Virilocal residence further reduced her influence by physically distancing her from her kin. Her importance as controller of labour (i.e. control over children) declined as wage labour eclipsed that of the family. Christianity provided some support during the transition from corporate to a more individual identity and action through the provision of alternative social roles for its male and female converts.

³³ Chilembwe to Foreign Mission Board secretary of the National Baptist Convention, 1912, cited in Shepperson and Price, *Independent African*, pp. 174-175.

But the new ideology was powerless to change the objective material conditions which conspired against the advancement of its new adherents. African might stand equal to Europeans before God, but this was not the case in earthly existence. Discriminatory legislation worked against African access to land, labour and credit. First, Africans, and less well-to-do non-Africans, were adversely affected by the stringent conditions governing the purchase of Crown leaseholds set out in the 1912 ordinance. Crown Lands might be obtained by public auction only. The intending purchaser bore the cost of demarcating the land and surveying it. Subsequent to approval of the Governor and chief surveyor, the land was then auctioned off to the highest bidder. The process involved considerable expense and there was no guarantee the intending purchaser would acquire the plot at auction. There was provision for the direct sale of land in special cases, but "this power was sparingly used in favour of African purchasers or individual settlers".³⁴ Most commonly, Africans were priced out of the market.

Africans did not have to compete with more highly capitalized non-Africans at land auctions for Yearly Tenancy plots. These leaseholds were for plots of less than ten acres and were most commonly sought for trading purposes. These were not auctioned off, but were solicited directly through application to the Lands Officer, at which time the applicant paid a deposit of £4. Were the application rejected, this was

³⁴ Clement Ng'ong'ola, "The state, settlers, and indigenes in the evolution of land law and policy in colonial Malawi", The International Journal of African Historical Studies, 23,2 (1990), 41.

returned in full. If approved by the Lands Officer the deposit went toward payment of drawing and registration fees, stamp duties and rent. Final approval of Yearly Tenancy leases rested with the Governor in Council.³⁵ Seemingly a fair system, Yearly Tenancy Leases were seldom granted to Africans in trading centres. In the interests of segregation, government was loath to encourage African settlement in areas which might eventually become townships.³⁶ Consequently, African traders were discouraged from establishing shops in commercial centres.

Africans were also relatively disadvantaged as employers. In the competition for labour they like European planters faced a peasantry which was largely unwilling to abandon its farms to work for wages. To begin the transformation of Nyasaland to a cash economy the state introduced a system of taxation. In August 1894 Harry Johnstone imposed an annual hut tax of 3 shillings payable on the thirty-first of December each year.³⁷ While the hut tax succeeded in monetizing the

³⁵ GN2/14, 1 June 1914, Crown Lands Ordinance 1912, Rules.

³⁶ Under Section 10(j) of the Crown Lands Ordinance, "freehold owners of township lands may not sell or lease to a non-European without the Governor's consent," and under Section 10(k) "no Crown lease may be assigned or sub-demised without the like consent, to maintain such segregation by Government action when necessary". Crown Lands Ordinance, No. 18 of 1912, 8 November 1912. African residence in Blantyre and Limbe townships was restricted to domestic quarters as early as 1910. GN2/10, Blantyre Town Council Rules, 18 January 1910. In 1911, this was amended such that Africans were not to "settle, carry on trade, or acquire any real or leasehold interest in the Township except in the Asiatic ward". Generally, however, Africans found rents in town high and since they were not permitted to live there, township shops were not viable. GN5/11, 17 January 1911.

³⁷ Rotberg explained that the hut tax varied according to the number of huts a man "owned"; that is, it related to the number of wives he had since he was obliged to build a hut for each one. In matrilineal areas,

colonial economy and often encouraged people to work for cash, it was insufficient inducement to create a large estate labour force. Africans frequently found other means than wage labour to raise the few shillings needed to pay tax.³⁸

To assist planters in attracting a labour force, Labour Certificates were introduced in 1901. These began a system of differential taxation. A duly endorsed certificate entitled the bearer to a reduced rate of tax.³⁹ In 1910, legislation expanded this principle. The bill stipulated that estate Africans would pay six shillings per hut, unless they opted to perform one month's work for a European planter. In this case they would pay only three shillings. Africans who resided off estate land were to pay twelve shillings per hut. If they worked one month, they would pay only six shillings.⁴⁰ The official rationale for the bill was "to provide for an

polygyny was permissible but few men had more than one wife since they resided in her village and were obliged to work for her and her in-laws. The hut tax would have most adversely affected nkhoswe or senior males in charge of their sorority group since they resided in the village of female relatives who were under their jurisdiction until marriage or in the event that they lost their husbands through death or divorce. Hut tax was probably a greater burden in Ngoniland where wives resided virilocally and polygyny was more common. Mwase, Strike a Blow and Die, p.xvii.

³⁸ The Tonga and the Ngoni from the north, initially, were eager to perform estate labour, but such a labour force was expensive. They needed to be housed and fed and indirectly "undermined the local labour supply by expanding the market for African grown foodstuffs". Landeg White, Magomero, Portrait of an African Village, (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 85-87.

³⁹ Ibid., p.87.

⁴⁰ Draft Ordinance, "The Native Hut Tax Ordinance 1910", 24 September 1910, in PRO CO525/33.

increase in the taxation of independent natives who reside outside village communities" but it had the effect of a double penalty for such folk.⁴¹

First, African planters had to pay a higher rate of tax themselves. The administration noted the existence of "an increasing class which is inclined to break away from ordinary village life and which can afford to pay tax at a higher grade".⁴² Included in this class were specifically, "domestic servant, captao, clerk and artisan classes -- also those who work outside the Protectorate". In addition, "a considerable number of people living round about Port Herald, Chiromo, Blantyre and Zomba who earn good wages and are able to sell their produce at good prices could also pay more than they do".⁴³

Second, the law directly encouraged workers to reside on European estates since the Labour Certificate could only be endorsed by a European employer. African employers were not permitted to endorse Certificates because it was alleged that Africans would be predisposed to abuse the rebate system by endorsing the tax receipts of relatives and friends, whether they had provided the planter with labour or not. Hence, Africans could not offer tax incentives to attract workers. Tax was due at the end of the calendar year and coincided with the first rains and initial planting. Were some Africans compelled to work at the last minute to

⁴¹ Acting Governor Wallis to Secretary of State Harcourt, 24 September 1910, in Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Memorandum, Treasurer to Acting Governor, 23 April 1909, in PRO CO525/28.

cobble together their tax money, they would be least likely to go to an employer who could not offer them a rebate, especially at a time of year when labour was so precious.

African employers were not silent on this issue. According to Lewis Bandawe, Joseph Bismarck, an independent planter and carpenter, petitioned the government sometime between 1913 and 1915, requesting the right for African employers to endorse tax receipts.⁴⁴ He allegedly managed to get the signatures of some fifty African employers, but the petition fell on deaf ears. 1913 was also a year of crop failure and famine conditions which placed even greater strains on the labour supply.⁴⁵ The petition indicates the rising concern of planters with the labour situation in the years preceding the rising.

By encouraging labour to live on European estates, this tax legislation buttressed a pernicious labour rent system known as thangata.⁴⁶ When Europeans bought up lands in the Shire Highlands, they did not find them vacant. After a landmark ruling by Judge Nunan in 1903, African residents on estates were protected by a non-disturbance clause.

⁴⁴ According to Bandawe, the petition was sent to the same Governor who fell out with Chilembwe, Governor Smith. Since Smith's term of office stretched from 1913 to 1923, the petition must have been sent between 1913 and 1915. Bandawe, Memoirs, p.62

⁴⁵ Shepperson and Price, Independent African, p.224.

⁴⁶ Pachai, Land and Politics; Ng'ong'ola, "The state, settlers, and indigenes", 27-58. Plantation production was founded upon cheap labour drawn from African residents on estate lands. Under the a modified thangata system of labour rent, workers were not paid a wage, but given the opportunity to perform labour in lieu of rent. In this way, labour time came to be commoditised.

This meant that they were neither obliged to pay rent, nor to leave their villages. Simply stated, the non-disturbance clause became a dead letter since it became well nigh impossible to determine who was an "original resident" on a given piece of land. Thousands of Lomwe migrants entered the region in the final decades of the nineteenth century and the first few years of the twentieth and settled on estate lands. Since only the most primitive records were kept (if any) of residents, it was impossible to tell who was a recent immigrant and who was exempt from rent payments. Shifting cultivation further complicated the issue of rent exemption as African villages tended to change locations according to soil conditions.

In the end, all Africans on estates were assessed labour rent. Thangata as this system came to be called, was originally the labour services awarded to Yao and Nyanja chiefs in return for their services as spiritual and judicial leaders. Usually, this involved several days of work in the chief's gardens after which, the workers were feted and feasted. Under the European settler regime, this obligation was transferred from the chief to the planter. In lieu of rent, Africans worked for the planter on whose land their village was situated for one or two months each year. In addition they might opt to work a further month to pay off their hut tax. The planter would sign the tax certificate and pay the government on behalf of his tenants. Exactions under the modified thangata system varied enormously from estate to estate, but there is ample evidence to suggest serious abuse in some areas.

The introduction of cotton as a cash crop by W. Jervis Livingstone

on the A.L. Bruce Estates of Magomero and Lukelezi intensified the demand for labour on those estates. As cotton production expanded, so did thangata obligations, such that by 1914, a full six months of labour was being demanded of African residents. Labour obligations were exacted with the assistance of local Yao chiefs and their rangers "whose methods were crudely simple. Defaulters were beaten with truncheons or a rhinoceros-hide whip and their huts were burned. No one, as the law then required, was simply evicted".⁴⁷

The excesses of government askari (African troops) came to the attention of John Chilembwe who "often spoke to the brutes that the way they do was terrible." According to George Simeon Mwase:

He often said he was very much sorry to see woman -- does not matter pregnant, old woman, and the like -- tied up round their stomach with a rope or a string in a now [knot] by the native Askari; as that was the system done in those days by the Boma Askari to arrest women for not paying hut tax. The native Askari or police whatsoever they were called were doing this in a very tremendous way. The Askari being pure brutes, who did not realize the value of their own women in the country. Shook the villages and villagers terribly. So that they did not believe that the Boma did not tell these brute Askaris to worry people in the villages.⁴⁸

Either through terror tactics, rent obligations or more positive tax incentives, Africans in the estate areas were compelled or encouraged to participate in the cash economy as labourers and in the immediate vicinity of Chilembwe's Providence Industrial Mission, compulsion seemed to be the order of the day. This must have goaded African planters who could

⁴⁷ White, Magomero, p.114.

⁴⁸ Mwase, Strike a Blow and Die, pp. 27-28.

not offer the same incentives to attract workers to their farms. Was it not enough that people could not get tax rebates by working on African farms? Why then did white society, personified by William Jervis Livingstone and his agents, use compulsion and brutality to raise a workforce?

All employers of labour in Nyasaland had also to compete with the higher wages offered to workers outside the territory. Long before the imposition of colonial rule, Nyasaland Africans travelled abroad to work.⁴⁹ The government position on migration vacillated between cautious acceptance and reluctant opposition. On the one hand, the European planting community wished to retain as much labour as possible in the territory. On the other, labour migration meant increased revenues to government, provided it could be properly controlled. In 1907, the Acting Governor, Major Pearce, informed the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Elgin that the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) did not intend to recruit in Nyasaland that year and that he feared this would lead to much uncovenanted and uncontrolled emigration.⁵⁰ Already, 4,000

⁴⁹ It was a dangerous business to travel outside the territory. Much of the recruitment was effected by shady types, one journeyed through wild country and employment at journey's end was not guaranteed. See, G. Coleman, "International labour migration from Malawi, 1875 - 1966", *Journal of Social Science*, 2(1973); E.P. Makambe, "The Nyasaland labour 'ulendos' to Southern Rhodesia and the problem of the African 'highwaymen', 1903-1923: a study in the limitations of early independent labour migration", *African Affairs*, 79, 317(1980).

⁵⁰ The real concern of government was not the fact of labour migration in itself, but how to control it. Health concerns were very real both for humanitarian reasons but also financial ones. Who was responsible for the upkeep of returnees suffering from tuberculosis or venereal disease? Similarly, who was to care for families abandoned by workers who failed to return? Lastly, who was to ensure that migrants

Angoni had applied to work abroad and after the completion of the rail link to Limbe, Pearce feared even higher levels of unemployment and increased numbers of tax defaulters. With this in mind, he suggested opening up regularised recruitment with the Southern Rhodesian government.⁵¹ When, two years later, working conditions abroad and travel safety had not improved, the government banned internal labour recruitment. This did not halt emigration, but simply deregulated and augmented the problems of government control. Recruiters simply moved to the Protectorate borders and met bands of eager migrants there.⁵² Concern over this increased and it was subsequently admitted that at least under the regularised system in place up to 1909, it was easier to keep track of labourers; easier to know who had not returned and who had paid tax. By 1913, more men were actually going abroad and less was known about their welfare or whereabouts.⁵³

Ngoni, Tonga and Nyanja labour continued to move beyond Protectorate boundaries and the Lomwe remained the mainstay of estate

repatriated wages and paid hut and poll tax as applicable during their absence? When internal recruiting was banned in 1909, it was in direct response to these concerns. The Salisbury Agreement of 1937 which opened up internal recruiting addressed these issues directly. See Chapter Four.

⁵¹ Pearce estimated that 10,000 Africans could be spared and that in return for the assistance of the Nyasaland government, the Southern Rhodesian administration would pay 10 shillings per head of those recruited; 6 shillings for tax and 4 shillings for "expenses" connected with recruitment. Pearce to Elgin, 9 October 1907, in PRO CO525/19.

⁵² Manning to Secretary of State Harcourt, 11 March 1911, PRO CO525/36.

⁵³ Acting Governor Pearce to Harcourt, 3 May 1913, PRO CO525/49.

labour in the Shire Highlands. By the end of 1911, the Protectorate government was openly lamenting the scarcity of labour in the southern region to the Colonial Office. Because of "the very considerable increase in agricultural operations within the past two years", wrote Manning, rainy season labour shortages "resulted in the curtailment, even if not the actual abandonment of a portion of the acreage under cultivation by Europeans".⁵⁴ African planters, too, lamented the loss of labour south. In 1911, Duncan Njilima an African planter at Nsoni said that it was wrong for "people to go to South Africa in search of employment when work could be got in this country".⁵⁵ Nevertheless, because of high transport costs, Nyasaland planters could not compete with Southern Rhodesian agricultural wages, let alone those paid to miners.⁵⁶

If the ability of indigenous planters to attract labour and secure land was adversely affected by discriminatory legislation, they were also denied access to credit. In 1903, the Credit Trade With Natives Ordinance was passed. Ostensibly to protect Africans from unscrupulous money lenders, this legislation limited the amount of money recoverable by a non-African lender from an African debtor to 10 shillings, unless the debt

⁵⁴ Manning to Harcourt, 22 December 1911, PRO CO525/38.

⁵⁵ From leaflet entitled "African Industrial Society" with marginal notes by Joseph Booth. Record of Meeting of the African Industrial Society, 30 July 1911, cited in Shepperson and Price, Independent African, p.167 and note 126.

⁵⁶ The rate of pay for farm labourers in Southern Rhodesia in 1907 was on average 22 shillings 6 pence per month as compared to 3 to 4 shillings per month in Nyasaland. In mining, the wages ranged from 20 to 40 shillings per month. Report on the British Central Africa (Nyasaland) Protectorate, 1906 - 1907, 20 June 1907, CO525/18.

was confirmed by a written note attested by a Provincial Commissioner. This limit was raised in 1926 to 20 shillings, in 1936 to £10 and to £30 in 1950.⁵⁷ Lack of credit meant a reliance on cash for all transactions and limited the flexibility and scale of all African businesses, not to mention farming.

Non-Africans protested against the law since it hindered their ability to collect bad debts. The Nyasaland Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, and later, the Nyasaland Merchant's Association bemoaned the fact that they could only sue for the amount prescribed under the law.⁵⁸ They argued that 10 shillings was a trifling amount and that limiting credit slowed the pace of African economic advancement. They stated that Africans could afford to buy bicycles and other consumer durables and so they were also at a stage where they might be held responsible for debts in excess of 10 shillings!

There is some evidence, however, that there was considerable lending of funds to Africans by non-Africans in spite of the Credit-Trade Ordinance. In his book, Mwase refers to this in his discussion of Indians in the Protectorate in the 1930s. Ironically, he comes out in partial defense of Indian traders (in contrast to the position of his Central

⁵⁷ The Credit Trade with Natives Ordinance, Chap. 28, 1903 and subsequent amendment ordinances, No. 15 of 1926, No. 27 of 1936 and No.23 of 1950.

⁵⁸ Minutes of the Nyasaland Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, 22 February 1910, MNA NY3/2/1; Minutes of the Nyasaland Merchants' Association, 14 September 1925, MNA NY6/1/1.

Province Native Association line)⁵⁹ stating that while the European "deals no 'kunyenga' [misrepresentation] in his dealings ... he is too rigid. He has no defective memory towards the regulation relating to credit trade with natives".⁶⁰ Mwase implied that Indians were willing to risk lending amounts over ten shillings to Africans on trust. And Mwase, more than anyone else, should be believed on this count. In 1925, Ibrahim Abdul Karim took the same George Simeon Mwase to court to recover a debt of £578. Mwase had signed promissory notes for that amount, but these had not been attested by a District Commissioner as was necessary under the ordinance to make the debt good. It was held that the ordinance supplied a complete defense and Karim lost his case and his money!⁶¹ This event took place ten years after the uprising, and we have no way of knowing how often Indians lent sums over the recoverable limit to African business people in these years. However, the urgency of non-African petitions to have the ordinance repealed suggests that there may have been significant lending. In any case, this informal credit created patterns of dependency which African borrowers appreciated and disliked.

Dependency on Indian traders was cited as one of the reasons for

⁵⁹ George Simeon Mwase founded the Central Province (Universal) Native Association in 1927. One of the points of grievance for this organisation was the Credit Trades with Natives Ordinance which it felt should be abolished since it hindered the advance of African business. L.J.C. Ndalama, "Native Authorities, Native Associations, and the peasant economy: a case study of Lilongwe District, 1925 - 1945", Chancellor College History Department Seminar Paper No. 4, 1987/88.

⁶⁰ Mwase, Strike a Blow and Die, p. 91.

⁶¹ Ibrahim Abdul Karim versus George S. Mwase, Cause No.159 of 1925, Nyasaland Law Reports, Volume II (1923-26), p.25.

the formation of an African cooperative lending society in 1909. A meeting to discuss the formation of a Native Industrial Union (NIU) was called by Joseph Bismarck and Haya Peters Mlelemba in April 1909.⁶² It was a response to the legal and informal impediments faced by African planters and shop-keepers. The idea behind the organisation was to provide an institutional framework for the merging of African savings and expertise in the interests of forming an independent source of capital for African commercial ventures. The impetus, for the Union came not from John Chilembwe, who only attended the second meeting of the organisation, but from interested planters and businesspeople such as Joseph Bismarck, A.M. Chisuse (a photographer) James G. Kuuji Mlangi, Justin K. Somanje and Peters Mlelemba. They were joined at the second meeting in May by Cedric Massangano (the headmaster of Blantyre Mission), Thomas M. Massea (a businessman and member of the Church of Scotland), Harry K. Matecheta (later an ordained minister of the Church of Scotland Mission), Asher M. Matipwile, Moses Matache, Nelson Kabweza, John Gray Kufa Mpantha (a planter and shop-owner), Morris Chilembwe, John Wesley Mlangi, Ardwell Mlenga (Church of Scotland), Ruben N. Funsani (a shop-keeper), David Livingstone (owner of a sawyering business), Kalindi Morrison Malinki (Seventh Day Adventist), D.B.O. Chinyama (also Seventh Day Adventist), Charles Scott Kwikanda and Stephen Nsomo.

All of these men had been educated at various missions in the

⁶² The details of reported in this paragraph are taken from Rotberg, "Psychological stress", pp. 152-153.

Protectorate. In fact, the connection between mission education and business in these early years was very strong. Education was entirely in the hands of missionaries, and the missionary impulse was dominated by Protestant churches who advocated industrial training over the humanities. Hence, it was through the missions that many Africans gained crucial skills which some later parleyed into independent businesses. So it is not surprising that this early collection of entrepreneurs should have had literacy and Christianity in common and helps to explain the aims and objective of the Union: "the promotion and protection of Negroes Christian work in the Country, the collecting and recording of commercial information and ... the establishment of a Court of Arbitration. Communication with the public Authorities on subjects affecting the Commercial and Planting Community, or such other things as occasion may require".⁶³ In a sense, the Union was to constitute the African counterpart to the settler's Nyasaland Associated Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, formed in 1907, but it seems not to have done much in the way of lobbying the government or acting as a capital source for members.⁶⁴

The NIU seems to have been reincarnated as the African Industrial

⁶³ Ibid., p.152.

⁶⁴ Two organisations were formed to represent European planting interests as early as 1892, the Shire Highlands Planter's Association and the Nyasaland Planters' Association. These were replaced by the British Central Africa Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce in 1895, and the Nyasaland Planters' Association formed in 1903. The two organisations merged in 1907 to form the Associated Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce. Notes on the Nyasaland Associated Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, NY3/2/1.

Society (AIS) two years later, and this time, the impulse for organisation seems to have come from Chilembwe and Duncan Njilima. A leaflet printed on the Blantyre Mission press describing the aims and objectives of the AIS was distributed to some fifty prospective members who met at Chilembwe's Providence Industrial Mission in July of 1911. The AIS structure was based on a blueprint for an African Christian Union put forward by Joseph Booth as early as 1897. Booth, a peripatetic and theologically eclectic missionary, had considerable influence on the early life of John Chilembwe and it was with him that Chilembwe had travelled to America at the turn of the century. Booth's African Christian Union hinged on the principle of African economic self-sufficiency and political self-determination. These radical views were responsible for his periodic deportations from Nyasaland and South Africa. The AIS "charter" was consistent with the schedule for the objectives of an African Christian Union written by Booth some twenty years earlier.⁶⁵

At its first meeting, after opening prayers, Duncan Njilima, a well-known planter and store owner, led a freewheeling discussion which raised issues such as the lack of thrift among Africans, the scarcity of labour, the need to create "an independent native capital" and the competition posed by Indian traders and the need to reduce dependence

⁶⁵ Signatures of John Chilembwe and Morrison Malinka[i?] are appended to the schedule. Both men were later involved in the AIS and one was directly involved in the uprising. African Christian Union Schedule, 14 January 1897, from Joseph Booth, Africa for the African, (Baltimore, Md., 1897), pp.49-51 cited in Shepperson and Price, Independent African, pp. Appendix 1, p. 541.

on them.⁶⁶ While both Rotberg and Shepperson and Price have observed that "many of these men were involved in the uprising of 1915, and the most prominent among them formed the innermost circle of the cabal," many more of the participants did not take part in the rising.⁶⁷ Rotberg argues that while rebellion had "immediate appeal to upwardly mobile Africans of the emergent middle class" and Lomwe labourers, "as an instrument of protest, [rebellion] could not have appeared to these different groups as either the only or the most promising of solutions to their collective dilemma". They needed a charismatic leader to launch them on the road to armed insurrection.⁶⁸

As far as can be discerned, only eight out of twenty-six identifiable participants in meetings of the African Industrial Union were involved in the uprising, and they had close connections to John Chilembwe. All of the Africans listed as holding land in Chiradzulu district in 1915 participated.⁶⁹ For them, a "more promising solution" to their difficulties

⁶⁶ Shepperson and Price, Independent African, p.167.

⁶⁷ Shepperson and Price, Independent African, p. 166; Rotberg, "Psychological stress", pp.153-4

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.162.

⁶⁹ Comparison of names listed in Rotberg, "Psychological stress", Shepperson and Price, Independent African, Mwase, Strike a Blow and Die, and Government Notices "Wanted Lists" for January and March, 1915. The men were John Chilembwe (landowner), John Gray Kufa Mapantha (landowner and shop-keeper), Thomas Lulanga (land owner), Donald Malota (land owner and possibly relative of wealthy Ntcheu businessman Malota?), Morris Chilembwe, D.B.O. Chinyama (relative of Filipo Chinyama, leader of Ntcheu arm of rising?), A.M. Chisuse (photographer from Blantyre), Duncan Njilima (land owner and shop-keeper), Ilugh Mataka (land owner), Whiskers Matengo (store owner, not listed as member of AIS).

proved elusive. But what were these more promising solutions? Joseph Bismarck had petitioned the government to change the tax receipt endorsement policy in the early 1910s, but his efforts proved futile. In 1909 and again in 1911, businesspeople had attempted a self-help scheme to solve the problem of capital and credit and this failed. Pleas for the repeal of the Credit Trades Ordinance had failed even when they emanated from the non-African business community. It is not surprising that many of them saw European rule as constituting the root of their problems and only through its eradication might Africans look toward a more promising economic future. The close proximity to the A.L. Bruce Estates might have lent urgency to their predicament.⁷⁰

Yet, the petit-bourgeois rebels constituted only a handful of the African entrepreneurs in Nyasaland at the time. What solutions did these people find which were more promising than open rebellion? One businessman who was suspected of participation in the uprising, but who was outside the territory when it broke out was Peter Haya Mlelemba.

⁷⁰ Shepperson and Price cite an interesting incident which may have heightened enmity between William Jervis Livingstone and African planters near the Bruce Estate at Magomero. In August 1900, Livingstone petitioned the Governor, Alfred Sharpe, government for a land grant in consideration of his dubious genetic connection to the missionary explorer David Livingstone. Sharpe forwarded the request advising that it be granted, but Whitehall quashed it. Presumably, the Colonial Office did not wish to set a precedent which might be followed up by a host of Livingstone's "relatives" claiming the same privilege. Shepperson and Price admit that it is impossible to say how Livingstone greeted the refusal, but point out that at the same time that the white planter's request was denied, ambitious African planters were purchasing land around Magomero. They imply that Livingstone may have harboured a grudge against these people. Livingstone, after all, was only an estate manager. *Independent African*, p.131-132.

His story is worth recounting in some detail, since he was, like Duncan Njilima, Hugh Mathaka, Thomas Lulanga and others, an independent businessman, yet he did not resort to violence. He, like the others, had a long-standing and close relationship with Chilembwe.

Lewis Bandawe remembers Peter Mlelemba as a prosperous African "jack of all trades". Mlelemba was an ivory hunter, grew cash crops, dug mica in Ngoni country, and had a timber business with John Gray Kufa and Thomas Maseah (hanged for his part in the rising) which they called "P.T.K." Industries.⁷¹ Further information pertaining to Mlelemba is found in a security report sent to the Superintendent of Native Affairs in 1918. This report was likely compiled because officials knew of his close relationship to Chilembwe and suspected that Mlelemba was a conspirator. The Resident's report concluded that Peters was uncommonly talented in commerce and literacy, "arrogant" but not "subversive".⁷² It also stated that Edward H. Peters Mlelemba, known as "Peters" was a Yao, born along the Tchiri above Chikwawa. He moved to Chilingani while still a boy.⁷³ He was first educated at the Zambezi Industrial Mission (Z.I.M.) and later transferred to the Blantyre Mission (where he probably first met Chilembwe who also was schooled there in the late nineteenth century). He worked as a table boy at Keillers Hotel, as an

⁷¹ Bandawe, Memoirs of a Malawian, p.60.

⁷² The following information is extracted from the Security Report. Acting Resident Blantyre to Superintendent of Native Affairs, 15 November 1918, MNA NSB3/12/2.

⁷³ Chief Kuntaja's estate was called "Chilingani" but the connection between him and Mlelemba has not been made to date.

office boy at the Z.I.M. and in 1906 did clerical work for the Blantyre Building Company. In 1909 he began work with Bartlett, Ryan and Ryall as a mineral prospector until they formed the Liwadzi Syndicate. Sometime before 1913, Peters returned to Blantyre and began market gardening on land at Nangafuwe which he rented from the Blantyre and East Africa Company.

Mlelemba's biography thus far has much in common with others who were implicated in the 1915 rising. Like Njilima, Kufa and Mataka, he had a mission education and from there moved into skilled employment. He preferred his English to his African name, had adopted western dress, had travelled abroad and worked extensively with Europeans. Through this he accumulated sufficient capital to move into farming on his own account, although still lacked the funds to purchase land outright.

In 1913, Mlelemba's career path took a more aggressive turn. The security report mentions that in that year he initiated legal proceedings against Martin and Ryall. He sued them for £700, won his suit, but received a settlement of only £47. The report does not disclose details of the disagreement and the case does not appear in the Law Reports for 1913. Mlelemba probably settled out of court. Oral testimony provides further insight into the dispute between Ryall and Mlelemba.

Quite by accident, during an interview, the name of Peter Mlelemba came up. My informant related, with humour and relish, a story concerning a conflict between Mlelemba, who he knew only through reputation, and Ryall. According to this "urban folk tale", Mlelemba lent

Ryall some money for the construction of the Ryall's Hotel.⁴ Ryall was to repay the full sum with interest and in addition, had promised to give his daughter in marriage to Mlelemba. Mlelemba then went off to German East Africa to hunt elephants.⁷⁵ While he was away, Ryall refused to repay the loan or give up his daughter and Mlelemba was incarcerated in Tanganyika on some charge connected to the Chilembwe uprising. He returned to Nyasaland after some time and was employed as an interpreter for Magistrate W.J.C. Jennings at Blantyre boma.⁷⁶

While the story may be somewhat embellished (it is hard to imagine a European in 1913 promising his daughter to an African) the essential elements are confirmed by the Resident's report of 1918. Both accounts agree that the dispute was over money, specifically an amount owed Mlelemba by Ryall. Both accounts agree that Mlelemba left the country to hunt elephants some time after the dispute was settled in his favour. Significantly, Mlelemba used the European legal system to settle his grievance. Further, the incident suggests that he was perhaps sufficiently flush to have loaned a significant sum of money. On the other hand, he may have been suing for wages outstanding from his work for Ryall several years before. The evidence on this point is inconclusive.

⁷⁴ This was impossible since the hotel was opened only in 1925.

⁷⁵ The security report relates that Mlelemba departed for Portuguese East Africa to hunt elephants after his court case with Martin and Ryall. He was there in January 1915 when rebellion broke out in Nyasaland.

⁷⁶ Personal communication, N. Mbekeani, Limbe, 8 June 1988.

There is, however, firm evidence which places Mlelemba in the role of creditor and demonstrates his commitment to the threat of legal action to encourage repayment. Another loan was made to John Chilembwe on terms indicating that, where money was concerned, Mlelemba made no special concessions to friends. In 1908 Chilembwe borrowed £50 from him to set up a retail trading store. He signed a promissory note to this effect, and agreed to interest payments which amounted to one shilling on the pound per month! The store went bankrupt and Chilembwe seems to have had difficulty paying back his loan. Despite the long and close friendship between the two men, in 1913, Mlelemba threatened to take Chilembwe to court. In 1914, Chilembwe finally settled his debt but not before paying out £42 in interest!⁷⁷ For the average African worker, this sum represented a king's ransom at the time.⁷⁸

Such evidence shows that in the early days of the Protectorate there were Africans with sufficient savings to make sizeable loans and Christian charity seems not to have interfered with collection. The mechanism used to collect these debts was the District Court and a cursory glance through the Court Records shows that increasingly, Africans were using this forum

⁷⁷ Rotberg, "Psychological stress", p.157.

⁷⁸ In 1912, African government clerical staff earned between £6 and £60 per year! Manning to Secretary of State, 13 April 1912, PRO CO525/42. Figures for skilled agricultural workers in 1914 would not have exceeded £4 per year. In 1921, for example, builders and carpenters on estates received, on average, 12 to 30 shillings per month and unskilled wet season workers received 8 shillings per month. Annual income would, of course, depend on whether or not they worked year round. Nyasaland Protectorate Blue Book, 1921, (Zomba, 1922), p. W1.

for the settling of civil disputes.⁷⁹ The 1925 case concerning George Simeon Mwase illustrates the peculiar devotion to rules and regulations which characterized many colonial officials. Were there no legislation in place which dictated explicitly what was to be done, they were often willing to act in the interests of the non-African majority by turning a blind eye, as they did with labour conditions on Bruce Estates. However, where a regulation was clear, they generally adhered to the letter of the law. Just as the Resident of Blantyre was bound to admit that Mlelemba was free from subversion, even if he was "arrogant", Ryall was compelled to pay him £47, firm in the knowledge that his case was just and that he would be held liable by the court.

Over minor day to day issues in which Residents and other officials were directly and personally involved, Africans might receive some redress. The big issues, land, labour and capital were something else again and on these issues, the state formed policy on the basis of costs and benefits to its treasury. In the years up to 1915, this meant that little attention was paid to the needs of the African business person who, after all, did not seem to offer the same revenue potential as did the larger plantations. Moreover, there was a general contempt at all levels of European society for this "trousered African" class. As the Resident for Blantyre reported of Mlelemba, most of them were regarded as "arrogant" but not "subversive". At least a few did more than irritate state officials

⁷⁹ The number of cases brought by Africans against other Africans and Europeans in Blantyre District number was in the scores by the late 1910s and most of them concern small debts. See, MNA, BA1/2/1 to BA1/2/4, Blantyre District Native Court - Civil Cases, 1911-1919.

in 1915, even if the majority declined to take up arms.

It is still open to question how far the petit-bourgeois element in the Chilembwe uprising was motivated by religious fervour, the charisma of Chilembwe or concrete economic grievances. It was likely a combination of all factors. Certainly, they were a frustrated lot. It cannot be ignored that the majority of persons who eventually rallied to Chilembwe's side were estate labourers, an occupational category nascent with the colonial economy.⁸⁰ The rising's leaders were drawn from another new group -- the mission-educated, upwardly mobile African elite. By 1915, it was clear to men like Njilima, Kufa and Mathaka that they would never achieve equal economic footing with the European under colonialism. For them, the small things were not enough. Only through the eradication of white rule might they gain on earth the equal status with whites which they were promised before God. It is stating too much to say that the disaffection of the entrepreneurial elite was at the root of the Chilembwe Uprising of 1915, but it was undeniably, an important part of it.

In Blantyre and Chiradzulu Districts, African plantation production never came to much. Those involved in the rising had their moveable property and land confiscated, and even those African entrepreneurs who were not involved in the rising fell under suspicion. In the aftermath, government reviewed its position on land matters and also African education which was completely in the hands of the missions. The

⁸⁰ GN9/15 "List of Natives Still Wanted", Nyasaland Times, 4 March 1915.

significant involvement of "mission boys" and "trouserred Africans" in the rebellion intensified official distrust of évolués. Thereafter, government kept a close watch on mission schools and some denominations were banned, their leaders deported.⁸¹

It was the frustration and despair produced by a hostile colonial economy and society which drove many of these aspiring planters to throw in their lot with John Chilembwe in his abortive bid for African power in 1915. These men acted not out of some collective psychological dysfunction, but because they truly believed that violent political transformation was the only way they could improve their position within the territory. And what better time to launch such a strike than when the colonial government was preoccupied with the German campaign, and what better place to attack than the core region of European settlement? Only in a new society -- an Africa for the Africans -- would independent, "progressive" Nyasalanders find a place. Their involvement in the uprising was no martyred attempt to "strike a blow and die", but was a

⁸¹ The Seventh Day Adventists came under attack and some of their schools were closed in the immediate aftermath of the rebellion, but eventually, the sect was absolved of all complicity in the rising. The Seventh Day Baptists and the Churches of Christ Mission followers were made scapegoats. The Seventh Day Baptist leader, William Cockerill, was asked to leave the Protectorate and several of the mission's adherents were arrested and a few, implicated in the rising. Fearing "guilt by association", his flock dwindled. The second European missionary to be deported was the Church of Christ Mission adherent, George Hubert Hollis, an Australian. As with the Seventh Day Baptist Africans, many of Church of Christ followers were questioned or arrested. The Church of Scotland Mission in Blantyre was also targeted, but its leaders responded with a stinging condemnation of land and labour policies which they argued had done much to encourage rebellion. See Shepperson and Price, Independent African, pp. 323 - 380.

calculated gamble to overthrow the existing order. It was the last ditch attempt of a disenfranchised group to restructure political and economic conditions in its favour.

The failure of the uprising marked the beginning of a forty year lull in revolutionary African politics, and it also marked the end of African attempts to compete with Europeans in the agricultural economy of the south. African planters were marginal before the Chilembwe uprising, and this did not change after 1915. In fact, estate agriculture witnessed a move toward large corporate plantations based on wage labour in the south and tenant production in the central province. This had the effect of squeezing out many European small fry as well. Viable estate agriculture was dependent upon access to enormous capital sums and a number of protective measures.

The consolidation of European dominance in the plantation economy pushed Africans abroad to work and at home, into the tertiary sector, into ventures like that of the village blacksmith cum mechanic. The size of the tertiary sector pivoted on the fortunes of the primary sector, in this case the production of coffee and cotton. The years from 1915 to 1928 witnessed the decline of these two crops and the rise to prominence of tea and tobacco. The general slump of the 1930s contributed to the maintenance of a small service sector. While some entrepreneurs like Peter Mlelemba were able to parlay their skills and knowledge of the colonial system into a reasonable living, in general, Africans faced limited economic options: they could engage in tenant production, "subsistence" agriculture, migrate to the south, or, if they had

the education, could seek private and public sector employment at home.

Nonetheless, some Africans did take up self-employment in the inter-war years. These depression era business people were most commonly tradespeople. They faced the same problems as their predecessors -- limited capital and credit -- and their labour forces were small. They also tended to focus on service industries, with one important exception; Africans were under-represented in merchant commerce. The inter-war years were marked by the consolidation of a non-African monopoly of wholesale and retail trade, the main actors being large European and Indian trading houses. One of the main grievances of the African petit-bourgeoisie during the colonial period (and after) was the Indian stranglehold on retail trade. This is not surprising. Independent Indian retailers were easily identifiable and more numerous than white traders, who were, in any case, most commonly employed by the big European firms. The latter, closely associated with the white state and colonial authority, were not openly opposed by Africans although their enforcement of colour bar engendered considerable resentment.

The Indian immigrant presented an easy target. Cast in the role of the quintessential middle-man minority, Indians were held up as transient merchant capitalists who because of their temporary residence, conducted business in an irresponsible and unscrupulous manner. They were accused of repatriating profits and contributing little to the protectorate economy. While most Indians were in trade, trade was not controlled by Indians. The story is more complex than this and some of its most important episodes were played out during the lean years of the 1930s.

As traders, Indians are central to the economic history of Malawi, particularly its urban history. Their activities and those of the European merchants impinged upon African enterprise indirectly but in no small way. The evolution of inter-war merchant commerce was an important factor affecting the development of African enterprise after 1919.

Chapter Three

Anglo - Indian Trade Rivalry in Colonial Malawi, 1910 - 1945

The structure of "native trade"¹ in Nyasaland throughout the colonial period mirrored the same crude racial hierarchy depicted in social relations: the "white" European firms sat at the pinnacle of the commercial pyramid and Africans, who constituted the majority of "bush" traders by 1945, sat at the bottom. Indian traders occupied the ambiguous middle level. Like all stereotypes, this depiction has some merit but is a gross oversimplification. From the inception of colonial rule to the Second World War, trade in Nyasaland was marked by intense competition for scarce resources and markets. This led merchants to align themselves along class or ethnic lines, depending upon the issue and which type of alliance best served their interests at the time. Battle lines were frequently drawn across those of colour. From the 1910s, Indian traders moved into wholesale activities and established a competing trade network to that of the large European firms. Competition intensified at the end of the 1920s and into the 1930s when the international slump produced market contraction and shrinking profits. During this period, Indian and European wholesalers allied to squeeze out small retailers, most of them Indians. These either became agents of large firms or simply left the country. Indian commercial power prevented unbridled European

¹ "Native trade" was the term used by the colonial authorities to describe the trade in goods consumed mainly by Africans. For example, a native store is one whose clientele is African, not necessarily its owner or manager.

dominance in trade, but the non-African firms still held a stranglehold on the distributive sector. This precluded African entry into wholesale activities. They were the victims, if you will, of oligopoly. They could not hope to compete with firms which had established themselves early and grown quickly. This was no less true of Indian retailers. They and African shop-keepers were confined to the bush or to premises on the periphery of trading centres and townships.

On the other hand, the following discussion explains why it is that Indians and Africans have cooperated to a greater extent than has commonly been supposed. As the preceding chapter has implied, Indian traders were one of the few sources of credit open to African business people, even though this was not officially sanctioned. The story of Anglo-Indian trade rivalry explains why urban trade was almost completely controlled by the big merchant houses and of them, only a few major players. It also illuminates the social and economic divisions within non-African society and helps to dispel some of the myths surrounding the Indian community which is to this day held to be a racial and ethnic monolith, an endogamous racial grouping which "closes ranks" in times of economic adversity or political threat.²

² While ethnic solidarity over certain political issues is not unknown in the history of Malawi, it has almost always happened when the "opposition" attacks "Indians" as if they were a monolith. For example, the Nyasaland Indian Association was formed to ensure that Indians, as a racial group had a say in the federation debate in the post-1945 period. Similarly, the Indian community today responds monolithically to government attempts to control them as a group, through new immigration regulations which require all non-Malawians to either take up Malawian citizenship or disclose all assets. While the legislation is "colour-blind" its implementation is not. White farmers and corporation employees, missionaries and teachers have little difficulty getting their

In 1976, Judith Nagato astutely observed that "ethnicity and social class are independent in origin and analytically distinct in character, but are by no means independent in operation".³ People align themselves in one or the other category depending on the issue at hand. Issues of class and ethnicity are often confused in the analysis of distinct "middlemen" minorities: for example, the Jews in Europe, the Lebanese in West Africa, the Chinese in Southeast Asia and more recently, the Koreans in Flatbush, New York.⁴ Malawi's Indian trading community provides yet another case. Historically, Indians have dominated retail trade. This occupational specialisation led Indians to be associated with the more exploitative characteristics of merchant capital. The Indian has been stereotyped as a trader who does not invest in the country, sends profits abroad and engages in reckless business dealings -- particularly, usurious lending practices -- which jeopardize orderly commerce. Stereotyped images of Indian society in the colonial period assumed a high degree of solidarity and homogeneity among Indians. These views have held in spite of the fact that the Indian community in colonial Malawi was more heterogeneous than those in neighbouring Northern and Southern Rhodesia. While racial typing had a basis in reality and even, from time to time, promoted a racial or group consciousness among Indians of

residence permits renewed and have not lost the right to remit home a percentage of their income earned in Malawi.

³ J. Nagato, "The status of ethnicity and the ethnicity of status", International Journal of Comparative Sociology, 17, 3-4(1976), 242-43.

⁴ "Growing Tension in New York turns local spat into racial feud", Globe and Mail, (Toronto), 23 May 1990, p.A3.

different backgrounds, the history of trade in the Nyasaland Protectorate demonstrates a rather different and altogether less cohesive picture of Malawi's Indian community than such stereotyping would suggest. Malawi's Indian community, although it represented a "racial" group distinct from white and black, was most meaningfully differentiated along economic lines. The actions of its members can only be fully understood in the context of economic or class stratification.

In the early days of settlement, there was no great economic distinction between Indian traders, but by the 1910s this had changed. A clear division between Indian wholesaling and retailing interests emerged after the First World War, a division so acute that the former allied with their European counterparts in the 1930s to squeeze out the small retailer. By pushing for licensing legislation which they hoped would favour all large firms, Indian wholesalers "broke ranks" with their retail "brothers", exposing the myth of pan-Indian solidarity. Wholesalers won the battle for a licensing policy which exposed smaller traders to closer scrutiny of their affairs. But this policy was implemented in a racist fashion to the detriment of all Indian firms, large or small. European firms enjoyed preferential access to trade licenses and trading plots. In response to this, Indian wholesalers and retailers joined forces in the late 1930s to block legislation which they felt would allow even greater abuses. But this alliance was based on a temporary conjunction of interest as the actions of wholesalers throughout the period illustrate.

The official attitude toward Indian immigration to the Protectorate was always ambivalent. In the earliest days of the British Central African

Protectorate, Consul Harry Johnstone envisioned Central Africa as a region to be "ruled by whites, developed by Indians and worked by blacks".⁵ After Johnstone, no colonial official conceived of as sanguine a role for Indians in Nyasaland. In 1909, Governor Alfred Sharpe stated that there was "practically no opening nor demand in Nyasaland for either indentured or unindentured Indians", since there was a "superabundance of cheap local native labour skilled and unskilled which overflows to South African colonies in search of employment". He further contended that the "conditions of the Protectorate are unsuitable for the employment or settlement of Indians".⁶ The Protectorate administration experimented with a few Indian civil servants but abandoned this since they were more costly than African clerks and were found "incapable of maintaining discipline among the members of the Native Subordinate Staff". Governor Manning attributed the failure of the experiment to a the kind of Indians the Protectorate attracted -- in his words, "low-class Indian traders".⁷

Central African Indians differed from those who emigrated to East and South Africa in a number of ways. First, they were overwhelmingly "passenger Indians" -- that is, "free" immigrants who paid their own way

⁵ Harry Johnstone, British Foreign Office (London), Item 6337, No. 145, Inclosure 5 courtesy of Raymond Apthorpe cited in Floyd and Lillian O. Dotson, The Indian Minority in Zambia, Rhodesia and Malawi, (London, 1968), p.44.

⁶ Sharpe to Crewe, 10 March 1909, PRO, CO525/28.

⁷ Manning stated that lower level clerical staff in Nyasaland were mostly African and numbered approximately 150 persons. Africans were paid between £6 and £60 per annum and Indians between £60 and £160 per annum plus passage, housing, etc. Manning to Colonial Office, 13 April, 1912, PRO, CO525/42.

to the continent, unlike the indentured Indian servants who were obliged to work several years to pay for their passage. Indentured labourers were of more modest means than free immigrants and first arrived in significant numbers after the introduction of sugar plantations to Natal around 1860. Central Africa doubtless was affected by the spill over of Indian population after immigration regulations stiffened in South Africa after Union in 1910.⁸ Another commonality among Central African Indians was that they were almost all Gujarati-speakers from a narrow strip of Western India between Bombay and Ahmadabad. According to Dotson and Dotson, these emigrés were drawn from a middle and "fairly narrow sector of the total spectrum of class and caste" represented in the region of origin.⁹ There were, however, important differences between those Indians who settled in Nyasaland and those who established themselves in Southern and Northern Rhodesia. These differences are rooted in the immigration policies of the three territories.

The Nyasaland administration did not go to the same lengths to restrict Indian immigration as did Rhodesian governments. After 1904, it was necessary to prove literacy in a European language in order to immigrate to Southern Rhodesia. This ruled out many poorer, less educated Indians and favoured the urban professionals: lawyers, doctors, clerks. After the combination of Rhodesian administrations in 1915,

⁸ Immigration of indentured labour ceased in 1911 and all Indian immigration was prohibited. Pushpa Hargovan, "Apartheid and the Indian community in South Africa", Journal of African and Asian Affairs, 1,2, (1989), 157.

⁹ Dotson and Dotson, The Indian Minority, p. 33.

Northern Rhodesia adopted the same immigration criteria. After achieving self-governing status in 1923, Southern Rhodesia prohibited the immigration of all adult male Indians.¹⁰ The demographic outcome was a more stable, educated and urbanized Indian population in the Rhodesias.

Nyasaland offered a haven for Indians barred from the Rhodesias and South Africa and this led to a larger Indian population and greater cultural variety. (See Table 3.1) For example, Nyasaland became home to more Muslim Indians than its neighbours. Dotson and Dotson link this to the lower average level of western education among Muslim Indians and their subsequent inability to fulfil Rhodesian literacy requirements.¹¹ In 1956, 63% of Nyasaland's Indians were Muslim as compared to only 37% for Southern Rhodesia. Moreover, while most of the territory's Indians were Gujarati speakers, it had the largest non-Gujarati population in Central Africa with significant numbers of Sikhs, Goans, Magalorian Christians, Punjabis, Sindis and Konkanis. Finally, Nyasaland's Indians tended to be more rural than those in Southern and Northern Rhodesia. In 1961, 50% of them lived outside the main towns of Blantyre, Limbe, Zomba and Lilongwe.¹² This reflected the modest means and petty trade orientation of the majority of Indian immigrants.

¹⁰ Dotson and Dotson, *The Indian Minority*, pp. 40; 50. This colour blind legislation was passed in 1904 and stipulated that no person should be admitted to Southern Rhodesia who was unable "to write out and sign with his own hand in the character of any European language an application to the satisfaction of the Administrator."

¹¹ The Southern Rhodesian legislation of 1904 continued to be in force in Northern Rhodesia after 1923.

¹² Dotson and Dotson, *The Indian Minority*, pp.53-54.

Table 3.1
Non-African Population of Central African Territories
for Selected Years

Year	Zambia		Malawi		Zimbabwe	
	Europeans	Indians	Europeans	Indians	Europeans	Indians
1901	—	—	314	115	—	—
1911	1497	39	766	481	23606	870
1921	3634	56	1975	1591	33620	1250
1945	2190	1117	1948	2804	82386	2911
1961	7454	7790	7046*	10880*	221504	7253

Source: Dotson and Dotson, The Indian Minority.

Note: * Indicates figures for 1966.

Given that they were unwanted for clerical or manual labour, Nyasaland's Indian community directed its energies toward "native trade". In 1902, the Acting Commissioner for the British Central African Protectorate, Major F.B. Pearce, stated that Indians provided an important service to the Protectorate through supplying goods to African consumers and since they purchased most of their stock from the big European firms "there [was] profit to both parties".¹³ But this happy situation was short-lived. By 1910 Indians had established wholesale firms.¹⁴ The appearance

¹³ F.B. Pearce, "Report on the trade and general conditions of the British Central African Protectorate, 1902-1903", cited in Dotson and Dotson, The Indian Minority, pp. 45 - 46.

¹⁴ From the names provided for larger firms, it seems that most, but not all, were run by Muslim proprietors. Some of the larger Indian firms were Osman Adam, Hassam Kassam, Hassam Juma, Nurmahomed Hassam and Co., Musa Mahomed and Tayub Mahomed and Amarsi Kanji. It has been suggested that four of the Muslim names cited are

of Indian wholesalers was symptomatic of the emergence of an Indian commercial network. Through an efficient clientage system, apprentice traders were brought from India by wholesaling patrons to serve as clerks and shop assistants. Patrons posted immigration bonds for apprentices.¹⁵ That is, they provided the financial guarantee that these immigrants would not become charges on the state during the tenure of their stay. This gave patrons considerable influence over their charges. Many of these apprentices were loosely related to patrons as well and this might have given patrons psychological leverage. So, from the outset, apprentice traders were intimately connected to their patrons through economic and legal ties and possibly through kinship. For apprentices, the ultimate objective of immigration was to establish shops of their own and for aid in this, they looked to their patrons. Commonly, patrons deferred payment of wages to apprentices, who thus accumulated capital to begin their own shops. At the end of the apprenticeship, deferred wages were paid out in cash and stock, less amounts deducted for shortages,

common to Shia Muslims and three to Sunni Muslims, but identification through nomenclature is a very unreliable way of ascertaining religious affiliation and should not be regarded as conclusive. Blantyre District Notebook, 1910-1913, MNA, NSB3/13/2, 89-100; Blantyre District Notebook, 1913-1921, NSB3/13/3, 171-191.

¹⁵ Under Section (7) of the Immigration Restriction Ordinance Rules, an immigrant was required to have £50, evidence of its immediate availability, or proof of six months guaranteed employment to gain entry to the Protectorate. In the case of a temporary visitor, he had to produce evidence of employment elsewhere, the intent to return and £50. Were he a dependent, the immigration officer could demand a guarantee for this maintenance from a relative, friend or employer. Immigration Restriction Ordinance, No. 18 of 1922, 18 October 1922; Nyasaland Government Gazette Supplement, Government Notice (hereafter GN) 12, 10 March 1930, PRO, CO525/138/33501/30.

accommodation, board and other sundry expenses. There may have been some abuse of apprentices under this system but they had little choice in the matter. Such practices bolstered dependent relationships between wholesale patrons and retail clients and it was this that European firms condemned.¹⁶

The trade clientage system shifted lines of dependence away from the large European commercial firms towards Indian wholesalers and created a competing trade network. Apprehension among white merchants manifested itself in growing criticism of Indian business practices, specifically those pertaining to the apprenticeship system, and the terms of retail lending.¹⁷ As early as 1909, the Nyasaland Associated Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce (NACAC) sent a petition to the Legislative Council demanding thorough investigation of suspected fraud in Indian bankruptcies. It demanded that trade licenses be issued only to those who could prove a minimum capital of £200 and called for regulations to ensure the regular payment of wages to apprentice traders.¹⁸ The last grievance struck at the heart of the apprenticeship system since

¹⁶ L.S. Norman, Nyasaland without Prejudice, (London, 1934), pp.145-46.

¹⁷ A lengthy critique of Indian moneylending was printed in the Nyasaland Times in 1934 by the Nyasaland Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber alleged that interest rates charged on loans often approached 60%. "Moneylending In Nyasaland", Nyasaland Times, February 20, 1934. Of course, this is the same rate that Peters Mlelemba seems to have been charging John Chilembwe in 1913 -- 5% per month!

¹⁸ This protest was prompted by two Indian traders absconding to India having exported all their profits and then declaring bankruptcy in Nyasaland! Nyasaland Associated Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce Meeting Minutes, 20 April 1909, MNA, NY3/2/1.

deferred wages were the most common way of accumulating capital and perpetuating lines of dependency between patron and client.

Europeans disdained the patronage and nepotism they perceived in Indian business practices. They viewed the practice of wholesale patrons setting up ex-shop assistants on marginal funds as a form of commercial coercion which thwarted the free working of market forces. More cogently, this system threatened to keep retail clients within the Indian trade nexus. Although European discontent had firm economic roots, criticism of Indian trade was often couched within a moralistic rhetoric of colonial paternalism and self-sufficiency. This led to a stereotype of the Indian community as a sort of endogamous commercial syndicate. "The Indian" was portrayed as a dishonest, manipulative and grasping opportunist. Linked by ties of kin and clientage to his distant homeland, he ploughed nothing back into the colonial economy. A leader in the Nyasaland Times of February 1914, reflected this common sentiment. It remarked upon £5,819 which was remitted to India in 1913 and alleged that "very little money comes from India to Indians here but a very large amount is remitted to India which bears out the statement so often made that the Indian is a bad colonist as he remits his money to his homeland and spends very little in the country where he makes it".¹⁹

¹⁹ Nyasaland Times, 19 February 1914. It was also remarked that £1,666-19-6 was received from abroad, especially South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. £302 came from the United Kingdom and £908 went there, but it was said that this was mostly in the form of parcel and book post!

Africans, too, supported this stereotyping. In 1927, the Blantyre Native Association (BNA), a group of elite Africans, pleaded for a loosening of credit legislation.²⁰ They argued that government should support African business ventures over Indian since the "money earned by ... natives will not go away from the country as is done in the case of Indian traders".²¹ The BNA further complained that Africans could not compete with the Indian trader because he indulged in price-cutting and attracted custom through discounts and presents, tactics which undercapitalized African traders could not utilize.²²

Misgivings were not confined to Indian business practices. The distaste with which non-Indians regarded Indian social and cultural practices also fed into racial stereotyping. The Indian communities of Blantyre and Limbe, for example, tended to keep to themselves. Periodically, the wealthy of all groups met at social events such as inter-club socials or football matches, but, in the main, their social worlds were

²⁰ Legislation limited the amount of debt recoverable from an African by a non-African creditor to 10 shillings. The amount was raised to 20 shillings in 1926, £10 in 1936 and £30 in 1950. It was consistently argued that this impeded the advancement of African traders. The accuracy of this assertion is questionable, since extra-legal sanctions could be used to ensure payback. For example, a known defaulter would be unlikely to get credit from other traders. Although no lists of defaulters have been found, the European Nyasaland Merchants Association and the Nyasaland Indian Traders Association made reference to such lists. See footnote 42 below. The Credit Trades with Natives Ordinance 1903, No. 5 of 1903, 9 October 1903; and amendment ordinances, No.15 of 1926, 28 April 1926; No. 27 of 1936, 31 October 1936; No. 23 of 1950, 9 May 1950.

²¹ Blantyre Native Association (BNA) Minutes, 5 February 1927, MNA, S1/1343/30, F3b.

²² BNA Petition to Governor, 26 November 1930, Ibid., F3c.

separate. Women, in particular, were segregated and their actions closely watched. Intermarriage was strongly discouraged and mixed race children were shunned by "proper" society -- Indian, European and African.

Undoubtedly, the enigmatic Hindu caste system with its rigid codes of separation contributed to a sense of cultural distance and Muslim Indians, too, retained a modified form of caste. The brotherhood of Islam does not seem to have done much to integrate racial communities either. In Blantyre-Limbe, for example, Indian and African Muslims worshipped at separate mosques and even today celebrate the end of Ramadan with separate feasts and processions.²³

Perceived and actual differences separated Indians from Africans and Europeans, but the Indian community was divided within itself along lines of religion, caste and lineage as well as geographic origin. These divisions were reinforced by the trade apprenticeship system which frequently used such affinities for recruitment. Religious distinction, perhaps the most obvious cultural difference, was, to some extent, reflected in residence patterns. To this day, Zomba is regarded as a mainly Muslim enclave. Blantyre is dominated by Hindu believers and Limbe has rather more Muslims. The emergence of culturally specific spaces, especially in the urban areas reflected the tendency for new arrivals to congregate around patrons.

In the broader society, however, colour distinctions and occupational orientation obfuscated more subtle differences. To Africans and

²³ Personal observation of Id celebrations in Zomba, May 1988.

Europeans, "Indians" lived in isolation from the rest of the township, distinguished by a cluster of ascribed and attributive characteristics: religion, dress, occupation, physique, language and style of habitation. Less was made of the differences in language, dress and so on, than the common foreignness of the Indian, or in the parlance of the day the "Asiatic". He was most commonly encountered over the shop counter, and consequently the term "Indian" became almost synonymous with "trader".

The most common criticism levelled by Africans and Europeans against Indians was the congested and unsanitary conditions in which they lived.²⁴ Town council minutes for Blantyre, Limbe and Zomba throughout the colonial period reflect the almost palpable disgust with the tendency of Indian shopkeepers to live in cramped quarters above their

²⁴ Africans did not escape the scrutiny of microbe-conscious colonials, but their residence in town was more stringently regulated than was Indian residence. In town, Africans were confined to servants' quarters and company or government lines. These official areas of African occupation were congested, but at least Africans had the option of settling in peri-urban villages where conditions were often more congenial than those which prevailed in authorized township locations. Officials expressed an almost comic concern with the threat of contagion by living in close proximity to Africans whom they considered a "constant source of danger to the health of the European community". This absurd obsession with Africans as vectors of disease was exemplified by Willox in 1935 when he reported that "defecation in sanitary lanes and behind native quarters [was] of frequent occurrence in the township" where "under cover of darkness it [was] easy for natives to commit this offence without detection". The remedy for the problem was the "native location" where night soil removal would be provided and the authorities might regularly inspect conditions. Officials seemed happy as long as they could legislate Africans out of the towns or confine them to locations where they were "out of sight" and hence, "out of mind". Sanitation Report December 1935, 8 January 1936, MNA, M3/3/2.

stores.²⁵ Reflecting to a large degree the white settler "sanitation syndrome" described so well by Dane Kennedy, Indian living conditions certainly did stand in stark contrast to the white areas of Zomba, Blantyre and Limbe, replete with white bungalows, verdant lawns and flourishing rose gardens.²⁶ On the other hand, Indian living conditions were as much a product of segregation as a reason for it.

From the beginning, townships were divided in to Asian and European "wards" or areas. This was given legal expression in 1912.²⁷ Ward boundaries shifted very little. In Blantyre there was some expansion of the Indian ward in 1913, but this was a trade-off. After the extension of the Asian ward, it was agreed at a ratepayers' meeting that

²⁵ For example in 1931 bylaws were suggested which would prevent Indians sleeping on store premises since this was considered unsanitary. Town Clerk Blantyre to Dr. Follitt, Senior Health Officer, Zomba, 11 January 1932, MNA, M2/22/2, F23. See also numerous reports regarding the unsanitary conditions in which Limbe's Indians lived in 1930. MNA, M2/22/11, F4-11. Both Limbe and Blantyre Town Councils recited litanies of complaint about Indian living conditions throughout the colonial period. See, MNA, BL2 series for Limbe Town Council and Blantyre Town Council Minutes 1907 - 1959.

²⁶ P.C. Garlick made the same observation with respect to African attitudes to foreign middle-men traders' living conditions in Ghana. See, P.C. Garlick, African Traders and Economic Development in Ghana, (London, 1971), pp.85-86; Dane Kennedy, Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, (Durham, North Carolina, 1989).

²⁷ After the enactment of the 1912 Townships Ordinance, Blantyre and Zomba town councils passed bylaws which prohibited Asians and Africans from acquiring or inhabiting land within township boundaries except in designated Asian wards or servants' quarters. This ruling applied equally to leasehold and freehold land. The Townships Ordinance of 1912, Blantyre Town Council Bylaws, and Zomba Town Council Bylaws, Government Gazette Notice No.49 of 1913, 28 February 1913, PRO, CO525/47.

thenceforth, no Indian could buy freehold land in a European ward or vice versa.²⁸ The same people then agreed that no African should be allowed to purchase land within either European or Asian wards.²⁹

The Jackson Land Commission Report of 1921 recommended no change to the extant ward system, but suggested that room be left for the expansion of Asian wards.³⁰ Governor Smith seemed content with the Commission's findings, saying that the Asiatic population was "fluid" (in others words, Indians were not really permanent residents of the Protectorate) and so

the question of their segregation does not arise; and we have no desire to bring on an acute situation as has arisen in Kenya. It is probable that by allocation of trading areas in the townships and by Government in respect of towns not under Municipal government the position will be adequately met for the present".³¹

²⁸ In September 1913, an editorial appeared in the Nyasaland Times in response to the case of Blantyre Town Council vs. Hassam Kassam. It appears that Kassam was renting a store outside the Asian ward in Blantyre township and that he won the right to remain on these premises. "Indian Settlers", Nyasaland Times, 11 September 1913. The incident did not end there, however, and a ratepayers' meeting was convened on October 24th to discuss the implementation of a new ward system. It was recommended that a new, more favourably situated, and exclusively Asian outer ward be designated in addition to a native location for the employees of "Asiatics" and Europeans. The rest of the township would be reserved for European residence and trade with provision made for the quartering of African domestics.

²⁹ Nyasaland Times, 30 October 1913. Seven out of thirty registered European and nineteen out of twenty-two Asian ratepayers attended.

³⁰ Jackson Land Commission Report, 25 April 1921, PRO, CO525/97.

³¹ Minute: Smith, Notes on the Land Commission Report, 9 September 1921, PRO, CO525/98.

Most of Blantyre's Indians were shopkeepers and were compelled, by law, to live in the Asiatic Quarter. These wards were not extended as population grew. Proprietors lived on the floors above their shops and so had little room for expansion. To accommodate a growing number of kin and retainers, shopkeepers subdivided already small commercial plots and this led to the congested living conditions so passionately decried by health inspectors.³²

The designation of racially specific living spaces spread beyond the townships to Crown Land and for a time, this threatened to "light the Indian fire".³³ In emergent trading centres, legislation enabled the

³² For example, in September of 1930 William Willox, the Sanitary Superintendent in Zomba wrote the Limbe Town Clerk about the deplorable condition of Limbe's Indian shops and dwellings. He said that they were a health risk since these plots were "overbuilt" and this contravened Section 6 of the Limbe bylaws where it was stated that "no building which is used as a dwelling shall be erected on a plot on which the combined areas of the existing and proposed buildings shall exceed half of the area of such a plot". Willox urged Limbe Town Council to stricter enforcement of the bylaw and to reject plans which did not conform to the same. Willox to Town Clerk Limbe, 9 September 1930, MNA, M2/22/11, F14.

³³ Legislation relating to Indian matters became particularly sensitive after 1920 in light of the problems over political representation of non-Africans elsewhere in British East Africa. Kenyans developments had a profound impact on Nyasaland and officials were concerned about the disruptive potential of East African white settler agitation on Nyasaland. For example, Nyasaland was visited by a Messrs. Cobb and Anderson of the Kenyan Convention of Associations in October 1921. They were investigating the Nyasaland government's treatment of the "Indian problem" and the question of political representation for expatriates generally. Governor Smith met with them informally on October 10th and told the gentlemen that he feared their visit might "be attended with mischievous consequences". He had heard rumours of a meeting called to establish a Nyasaland Indian Association. Officials at the Colonial Office viewed this development with some consternation as well. They believed Nyasaland to be "entirely without an Indian question" and felt the Kenyans' visit to have been "most unfortunate", since they "had just hung up the question of elective representation in Nyasaland ... to avoid

exclusion of non-Europeans through racially restrictive leasehold covenants.³⁴ These covenants were explicitly directed against Indian habitation, stipulating that certain leaseholds could not be assumed by "Asiatics". Such covenants were prohibited after 1925 since Colonial Secretary Devonshire was deeply concerned to quash any suggestion of racial segregation in East African colonies having just resolved the issue of Indian and settler representation in Kenya. In 1924, Devonshire instructed Acting Governor Rankine to bring Nyasaland's Crown Land policy into line with the principle of desegregation.³⁵ A Government Notice in March of 1925 seemed to do just this, stating that the Governor would thenceforth not "refuse his consent to the sale, lease, assignment, or sub-lease of land on the ground that the proposed purchaser, lessee, assignee

lighting the Indian fire". Nyasaland had no elected unofficial members on the Legislative Council at this time. Confidential despatch, Smith to Churchill, 17 October 1921; Minute, Parkinson, 26 October 1921; Minute, Bottomley, 27 October 1921 in PRO, CO525/18.

³⁴ From 14 May 1891, the Crown assumed responsibility for the disposal of land in British Central Africa. Between 1895 and 1912, the rules under which this was done were set out under the Queen's Regulations of 1895 and the British Government Order in Council of 1902. It was according to these rules that Harry Johnstone reviewed the certificates of claim signed before the declaration of the protectorate. The Crown Lands Ordinance 1912 set out the rules governing the disposal of all unalienated land in Nyasaland after that point. Between 1895 and 1905, the tendency was toward the freehold granting of land and from 1906 to 1912, leaseholds with option to purchase was the most common form of tenure. After 1912, leasehold tenure only was permitted for new Crown Land plots. See, Bridglal Pachai, Land and Politics in Malawi, 1875 - 1975, (Kingston, 1978), pp. 35-51 for details of this system. Crown Lands Ordinance, No. 18 of 1912, 8 November 1912, Section 10 (j) was the clause which allowed for racial leasehold covenants. These covenants stated explicitly that certain Crown Land leases might not be transferred to "Asiatics".

³⁵ Devonshire to Rankine 16 January 1924, MNA, S1/608/24, F2.

or sub-lessee [was] an Asiatic".³⁶ However, District Commissioners had been advised almost a year earlier that, legislation notwithstanding, "the Governor still retains the power to refuse sanction to assign land leased from the Crown to undesirable tenants".³⁷ This advisement gave officials licence to continue segregation, provided the grounds used were colour-blind.³⁸

For example, in 1933, a case arose in Dowa where the District Commissioner proposed to allot certain plots in Domira Bay trading centre to Indians, and certain plots to Europeans. He was referred to the 1925 legislation which dispensed with "any suggestion of segregation on racial grounds".³⁹ On the other hand, to segregate "for reasons of health and sanitation generally" would be sound.⁴⁰ In spite of the 1925 enactment, then, the state had sufficient leeway to proscribe de facto racial segregation on Crown Land sites by using other criteria for the allotment of space.

³⁶ GN67/25, 4 March 1925.

³⁷ Minute: Lands Officer, P.E. Alexander, 23 February 1924, MNA, S1/608/24.

³⁸ Government was very sensitive that there should be no hint of racism in legislation regarding Indians after 1920. When the schedule for a non-African income tax was drafted in 1921, all income was to be taxed. Those earning between £1 and £300 were assessed £1 per £100. Smith stated outright that this was to "to bring the small Indian trader within its [the Tax Ordinance's] operation without making racial distinctions. Smith to Churchill, 13 June 1921, PRO, CO525/96.

³⁹ Acting Lands Officer to the Acting Director of Medical and Sanitary Services, 19 December 1933, MNA, LAN1/8/27, F33.

⁴⁰ Minute: Acting Director of Medical and Sanitary Services, to Chief Secretary, 20 December 1933, in Ibid., F34.

In sum, while government appeared to pursue a non-segregationist policy on Crown Land, it left the townships alone.⁴¹ The elimination of racial covenants had little effect in Blantyre, Limbe or Zomba where segregation could be enforced through township bylaws.⁴² This effectively precluded any African settlement in urban areas and, because of spatial constraints, imposed a ceiling on the number of new Indian trading premises in town. This meant that new African and Indian traders were compelled to begin operations in less crowded and less developed areas. This encouraged the rapid expansion of trade and commerce to rural areas, but this was to have economic repercussions during the 1930s slump.

In spite of constraints, Indians continued to immigrate to Nyasaland. Their numbers more than doubled between 1909 and 1928, from 457 to 1,085.⁴³ Initially, the majority settled in Blantyre and Zomba Districts, close to the Protectorate's commercial and administrative

⁴¹ In late 1933, early 1934, there was some discussion of allotting certain plots to Asians and Europeans at Domira Bay in the interests of "health and sanitation". It was decided that "for political reasons the arrangement [was] out of the question". Minute: H.S. Folliot, Chairman Town Planning Committee, 20 December 1933, MNA, LAN1/8/27, F34, and Minute: G.F. Sayers, 2 January 1934, in *Ibid.*, F35.

⁴² In 1912, the Townships Ordinance empowered Town Councils to enact byelaws. Both Blantyre and Zomba included in their byelaws provisions that Asians and Africans should be prohibited from acquiring or inhabiting land within township boundaries except within designated Asian wards or servants' quarters. The Townships Ordinance of 1912, Blantyre Town Council Byelaws, and Zomba Town Council Byelaws, GN49/1913, 28 February 1913, PRO, CO525/47. This ruling applied equally to leasehold and freehold land.

⁴³ Nyasaland Protectorate Bluebooks, 1908-1909 and 1928, Government Printer, Zomba.

centres.⁴⁴ They were drawn to areas of dense population because of the commercial opportunities they offered and it was not long before the state stepped in to regulate Protectorate trade. (See Table 3.2)

Table 3.2

Non-African Population for Blantyre District,
Blantyre and Limbe Townships and the Nyasaland Protectorate

Year	Blantyre-Limbe		Blantyre District		Protectorate Total	
	Europeans	Indians	Europeans	Indians	Europeans	Indians
1906	192	90	192	90	583	515
1921	194	130	561	289	1431	550
1931	504	609	666	645	1975	1591
1945	628	951	693	1128	1948	2804

Source: Nyasaland Protectorate Blue Books, selected years; Nyasaland Protectorate Census, 1921, 1931; Blantyre District Annual Notebooks.

Note: The boundaries of Blantyre District changed several times. In 1921, they were reduced from 1635 to 1334 square miles and from 1923 to 1941, they included 860 square miles. After May 1941, Chikwawa, Chiradzulu and Neno Districts were administered along with the former Blantyre District as Blantyre Administrative Unit.

Legislation in 1910 set up the conditions for wholesale and retail trade licensing.⁴⁵ Africans were not obliged to take out trade licenses, but very few were actually engaged in this kind of commerce. All non-African traders were required to purchase annual licenses: one type conveyed the right to engage in general trading (the right to engage in

⁴⁴ Ibid. There were 190 Indians living in Blantyre District and 113 in Zomba District in 1908-1909. This had risen to 368 in Blantyre District in 1928. In Zomba District the numbers fell to 90 in 1928 but the Lower Tchiri cotton-growing area hosted 149 Indians, and Mlanje District with its tea plantations, 118.

⁴⁵ The Licensing Ordinance, No.1 of 1910, 1 October 1910.

both wholesale and retail trade) and the other allowed retail trade only. The annual fee for the former was set at £25 per annum for the first set of premises and £2 for each additional. Retail licensees paid £5 for the first and £2 for each additional shop.⁴⁶ Obviously, the general trading licence was more desirable since such a store could sell wholesale stock to retailers and also could sell direct to consumers.

Because of the poor licensing statistics available for the Protectorate, it is possible to acquire only a rough appreciation of the geographic distribution of trading outlets for the period 1910 to 1928. Table 3.3 gives some indication of the distribution of trading outlets in the Protectorate and the importance of Blantyre District as a commercial centre. In 1911, Indian and European general trade was evenly split between eight Indian and 9 European firms. European firms, however, had considerably more additional outlets, 223 as compared to 94 Indian shops protectorate wide. Moreover, of Indian additional general trading outlets, 31% of these were found in Blantyre District. European general trade was more dispersed with only 15% of additional outlets in Blantyre District. The same pattern was evident in 1928, that is, Indian general trade continued to be concentrated in Blantyre District. The number of Indian general trading firms in that year had grown to 38 and on the European side, there were

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Schedule I. Fees were raised in 1920 to £50 and £5 for each additional general licence and £10 and £5 for retail. In 1931, these fees were again raised to £50 and £10 for general and £10 for all retail outlets. GN44/20, 12 March 1920; GN102/31, 12 December 1931. Africans were not brought under licensing until 1937 and their fees were lower: 10 shillings for the first establishment and 5 shillings for each subsequent, GN32/37, 30 April 1937. These were not raised until 1953 when they went up to £1 and 10 shillings.

Table 3.3
Nyasaland Protectorate Trading Licenses
Issued to Europeans and Indians in
Selected Years and Blantyre District's
Share of Trade

Year	1911			1916			1921			1928		
General Trade	%	BTn	PRn	%	BTn	PRn	%	BTn	PRn	%	BTn	PRn
First Licence												
European	78	7	9	88	6	8	100	11	11	71	12	17
Indian	50	3	8	67	10	12	75	15	20	74	28	38
Total		10	17		16	20		26	31		40	55
Additional Licenses												
Europeans	15	34	223	20	27	137	26	64	248	8	8	101
Indians	31	29	94	32	23	77	38	46	122	24	42	174
Total		63	317		50	214	64	110	370		50	275
Retail Trade												
First Licence												
Europeans	41	11	29	30	6	20	36	16	44	38	17	45
Indians	48	20	40	32	21	65	47	42	90	31	58	172
Total		31	69		27	85		58	134		75	217
Additional Licenses												
Europeans	14	5	38	16	8	49	12	5	71	25	38	154
Indians	48	56	117	32	64	200	30	72	242	17	75	446
Total		61	155		72	249		77	313		113	600

Source: Nyasaland Government Gazettes, Selected Years; Blantyre District Notebooks

Note: BTn = Number of Licenses issued in Blantyre District
PRn = Number of Licenses issued in Nyasaland Protectorate
% = Percentage of Total Licenses issued in Blantyre District

only 17 general trading firms in operation. But this did not mean that the Indian presence was stronger. What the figures do not convey is the rise to prominence of two large trading companies, The ALC and Kubula Stores. In 1928, the ALC took out 66% of all general trade licenses issued to European firms.⁴⁷ So, by 1928, to refer to the state of European general trade is the same as pointing to the position of the ALC and Kubula Stores.

In retail trade, the pattern was reversed. Indian shops outnumbered those of Europeans and although initially clustered in Blantyre District, only 17% of additional Indian retail shops were found there in 1928. The paucity of European retailers reflects the shift from pure wholesale to general trade by the ALC and Kubula Stores. Indian retailers retained their "individuality" (that is, they took out licenses in their own names) even though they were linked through ties of dependence to Indian general traders. It is not coincidental that the ALC, in particular, enlarged the retail side of its activities between 1911 and 1928. It did so probably in response to the loss of retail trading clients to the growing Indian trade network dominated by general trading patrons.

Indian general trade was distributed between 38 firms by 1928 and

⁴⁷ In 1911, 203 out of 223 "additional" trading licences issued to European firms were taken out by the ALC, Kubula Stores, H.C. Michahelles and L. Deuss and Co. The latter two were closed during the war which left the field open for Kubula and the ALC. In 1916, the ALC and Kubula Stores together accounted for 82 and 38 additional licenses respectively out of a total 137 issued to European firms. In 1928, the ALC alone held 67 out of 101 additional licenses issued to European firms. The remaining 34 licences were divided between the remaining 16 firms. Nyasaland Protectorate Government Gazettes, 1911, 1916, 1921, 1926, 1928.

this precipitated considerable rivalry among them, but competition was not always the dominant mode of behaviour. From time to time, Indian general traders cooperated to exert pressure on their European trade rivals. An early example of such action occurred soon after the formation of the exclusively white Nyasaland Merchants' Association (NMA) in January 1925. Hived off from the Nyasaland Associated Chamber Agriculture and Commerce (NACAC), the NMA was formed to address problems specific to traders, who felt their concerns were not adequately dealt with by the NACAC which was primarily a mouthpiece for planting interests.⁴⁸

At its first meeting, the NMA met to discuss terms of credit extended to Indian retail traders. A.J. Storey reported that he had been asked by some Indian general traders, and members of the Nyasaland Indian Traders' Association, if they might join the NMA since their interests were similar.⁴⁹ Storey related that he had explained to these

⁴⁸ Nyasaland Merchants' Association (NMA) Meeting Minutes, 12 January 1925, MNA, NY6/1/1. The NMA's existence was short-lived. It disbanded in 1928 when it merged with the newly formed Nyasaland Chamber of Commerce, but for three years it was the organ of large trading interests. Among its membership were the African Lakes Company, Consolidated Plantation Supplies, Kubula Stores (Nyasaland) Ltd., Limbe Trading Company (Nyasaland) Ltd., London and Blantyre Supply Company Ltd., A.J. Storey, T.M. Partridge, the Zambezi Industrial Mission, Ryall's Hotel, Central African Transport Company, and P.W. Skerret.

⁴⁹ The first documentary record of the Nyasaland Indian Traders' Association (NITA) is dated August 1923. NITA members were both general and retail traders but the executive committee was made up entirely of general traders, all of whom were based in Blantyre-Limbe. Osman Adam, the first Indian trader to set up in the Protectorate, was its president, Ismail Nurmahomed was the treasurer and M.G. Dharap, the secretary. Although dominated by Muslims, three out of the nine executive members were Hindu. It had a reported general membership of

merchants that the NMA was an exclusively European organisation. In response to the slight, Indian merchants threatened to stymie NMA efforts to control lending terms in the protectorate. Without the cooperation of the large Indian merchants, who had intimate knowledge of the Indian retail environment, attempts to regulate credit terms or monitor defaulters without their assistance was doomed to failure. This was brought home to the NMA the following month.

The NMA was forced to meet with representative of NITA at the Oriental Club Hall in Blantyre in February. All Indian delegates were wholesalers and M.G. Dharap (also a wholesaler) served as interpreter. It was surely a humbling experience for the European participants. There was much discussion and each side offered persuasive arguments for its position, but the Indian contingent won the day. The NMA caved in to longer credit terms than they had initially proposed.⁵⁰ They had little choice, since it was pointed out that if the Europeans insisted on a short payback period, business would pass to Commercial Travellers -- often

150. NITA Meeting Minutes, 26 August 1923, MNA, S/2444/23, F1.

⁵⁰ Indian wholesalers were not in favour of a 60 day credit term and intended to continue to extend 90 day terms. At the January 1925 meeting it was resolved that from February 1, wholesalers would extend credit for only 60 days with a 7 day grace period. There would be a 2 1/2% discount for payback in less than 30 days. Defaulters were to be reported to the NMA and placed on a black list. No member was to trade with that individual or firm until the debt was repaid. In the event that an Indian requested a temporary extension of the payback period, this was to be approved by the NMA. NMA Minutes, 9 February 1925, MNA, NY6/1/1.

Indian agents of firms based outside the Protectorate.⁵¹ NITA also won the right to review the position of new applicants for credit. Without a reference from NITA, no one could get a line of credit. Hence, big European firms acknowledged the economic importance of Indian wholesalers and entered into a tacit, albeit uneasy, alliance with them. Because of the oligopolistic structure of general trade, battles for the African market were to be waged over wholesalers' access to and control over retail trade customers.

Even though forced to deal with Indian wholesalers, the NMA continued to press for legislative controls over trade. As in South Africa, the NMA complained that the government recognized Hindi and Gujarati as acceptable languages of account.⁵² In 1925, the NMA asked that English be declared the only language of account. European firms were concerned about the losses they were incurring from "their [retail clients] becoming bankrupt or getting into financial difficulties". Because accounts were not kept in English, European wholesalers could not decipher what had gone awry. The Colonial Office refused to amend the trade

⁵¹ *Ibid.* Commercial Travellers were agents of firms dealing out of neighbouring territories like Mozambique, Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. The controversy over these "travelling salesmen" arose with the differential retail and general trading licence fees. Commercial travellers did not have to take out a licence since they did not actually sell goods in the territory; rather, they took orders for delivery. Wholesalers in Nyasaland demanded that these agents be required to pay something for the privilege of doing business in the Protectorate.

⁵² Hargovan, "Apartheid and the Indian community of South Africa"; Under the terms of the Licensing Ordinance of 1910, commercial records might be kept in English, Hindi or Gujarati. Nyasaland Protectorate Gazette, Licensing Ordinance of 1910, No. 1 of 1910, 25 May 1910.

legislation, arguing that if Europeans chose to lend money or give goods on credit to Indians, they should take appropriate measures to ensure repayment. Specifically, they might employ translators and recover this cost through charging higher rates of interest.⁵³

Indian wholesalers did not have the same concerns over language since their customers were often connected to them through the clientage system and as in Uganda, "the agent was tied to the wholesaler not as an employee but by chains of credit. More often than not he was a caste fellow who had been encouraged to migrate from India ... "⁵⁴ Hence, patron and client usually spoke the same language.

This clientage system worked very efficiently most of the time, but increased competition and primary product market fluctuations produced periodic rashes of retail insolvency. Larger firms were able to withstand short term reductions in sales, but with the general economic downturn after 1928, even they began to take steps to gain greater control over retail trade.⁵⁵ Poor tobacco prices in 1928 precipitated a spate of estate

⁵³ Amery advised against altering language requirements for book-keeping laid out under the existing ordinance. Minute: Donne, 27 June 1925, PRO, CO525/111; Bowring to Amery, 27 May 1925, PRO, CO525/111; and Amery to Bowring, 6 July 1925, PRO, CO525/111.

⁵⁴ Mahmood Mamdani, Politics and Class Formation in Uganda, (London, 1977), p.80.

⁵⁵ "Indian Traders Too Optimistic, Many Bankruptcies, Effort to Restrict their Credit", Nyasaland Times, 4 October, 1927. It was reported that British and Continental firms were extending credit for 90 to 120 days. Retailers had purchased large stocks in anticipation of a good tobacco crop which proved less profitable than anticipated. As a result, traders were left with large goods surpluses. Price-cutting and bankruptcy were the result.

bankruptcies. By May 1929, "everyone was in the throes of depression, living on credit and overdraft -- taking in each other's washing as it were".⁵⁶ Tobacco failure spelled disaster for Indian retail traders. (See Table 3.4)

Table 3.4
Bankruptcies in Nyasaland, 1928 to 1953

Year	European	Indian	Year	European	Indian
1928	6	7	1941	1	.
1929	2	7	1942	1	-
1930	2	9	1943	1	1
1931	1	10	1944	-	.
1932	1	9	1945	-	1
1933	3	13	1946	2	-
1934	2	3	1947	1	-
1935	1	2	1948	-	-
1936	-	-	1949	n/a	n/a
1937	-	1	1950	-	2
1938	1	2	1951	1	2
1939	1	10	1952	1	2
1940	-	2	1953	-	n

Source: Nyasaland Protectorate Government Gazettes, selected years and Minute Haythorne Reed, 6 January 1931, MNA, S1/1343/30.

October and November of 1929. were bleaker still and Indian bankruptcies stimulated a "battle of the pens" in the Nyasaland Times which clearly delineated the divisions between wholesale and retail interests which were to characterise the trade wars of the 1930s. The debate was touched off by a writer, under the nom de plume, "Fair Play", laying the blame for retail insolvency at the feet of the wholesale firms.

⁵⁶ "Life in Nyasaland, Impressions of a Visitor", Mrs. Stansfield, a South African journalist for the Sunday Times, in the Nyasaland Times, 11 May 1929.

This writer alleged that large firms had given too much credit to retailers who were unable to cut a profit when consumer spending declined. Moreover, creditors themselves engaged in retail trade and were able to charge lower prices than their purely retail debtors. The latter were, therefore, undersold and eventually, went bankrupt. The general trader was not always adversely affected by these retail failures since he saw "to it that his eventual bad debts [were] covered by the aggregate rate at which he [sold] his goods."⁵⁷ In other words, because the general trader operated many outlets, he could absorb the losses made by one shop through the profits made by another.

The sentiments expressed by "Fair Play" echoed those of the Limbe Indian Retail Traders' Association, an organisation formed as a counterpoise to Indian wholesale interests.⁵⁸ The latter also had an anonymous champion called "Play Fair". The general traders argued that all the successful Indian merchants in Nyasaland of the 1930s had all begun as humble retailers. They had pulled themselves up by their bootstraps through hard work and honest business dealings. The spate of bankruptcies, they contended, was due to the ineptitude and under-capitalization "of a class that has been deservedly stigmatised as dishonest." "Play Fair" insisted that bankrupts should receive no further assistance from government than a passage to India and advised that the

⁵⁷ Letter to the editor from "Fair Play", Nyasaland Times, 31 December 1929.

⁵⁸ Letter to editor from Limbe Retail Traders' Association, Nyasaland Times, 17 January 1930.

administration should stop issuing licenses to unstable beginners.⁵⁹

As this paper debate raged on, European and Indian wholesalers launched a frontal attack on the retail trade "problem". The assault was waged on two fronts. First, the ALC and London and Blantyre Supply Co. Ltd. moved to tighten immigration restrictions to control the number of Indian immigrants. Second, more stringent licensing regulations were called for which would assess the viability of a trader's financial prospects. The first line of attack was to provide immediate relief to the problem of Indian unemployment, but it proved politically impossible. The second strategy, the development of closer licensing regulation, was more successful, but was derailed by the outbreak of World War Two.⁶⁰

A rare fit of wider imperial conscience thwarted the immigration solution. Under the terms of the Immigration Restriction Ordinance of 1922 and the Immigration Restriction Rules, 1930, an immigration officer was empowered to bar entry to persons likely to become a charge on the state.⁶¹ In May of 1931, F.T. Stephens, the Principle Immigration Officer and Commissioner of Police wrote to the Chief Secretary in Zomba, pointing out the high rate of Indian unemployment. He suggested that immigration regulations be tightened to impede the influx of Indians to

⁵⁹ Letter to editor from "Play Fair", Nyasaland Times, 17 January 1930.

⁶⁰ Hargovan points out that anti-Indian legislation in South Africa pivoted around the same two issues: trade and immigration. See, Hargovan, "Apartheid and the Indian community", 158.

⁶¹ Immigration Restriction Ordinance, No. 18 of 1922, 18 October 1922; Nyasaland Government Gazette Supplement, GN12/30, 10 March 1930, PRO, CO525/138/33501/30.

the territory.⁶² Attorney General Harragin pointed out that sufficient control could be exerted through the existing ordinance. Its regulations might simply be more stringently enforced.⁶³ Nevertheless, Immigration Officers were advised to use "their discretion in the case of employees arriving for the old established European firms, banks and missionary societies". There was little risk that these individuals would become a public charge and nothing to be gained by inconveniencing them.⁶⁴

The trade crisis in Nyasaland came hot on the heels of the East African "Indian Question" and its resolution through the declaration of African paramountcy in 1923. Moreover, Nyasaland's administration felt that it did not have an "Indian Problem" as did East Africa, but that any hint of official racial discrimination might produce one. Perhaps more important were the delicate negotiations with the Indian National Congress underway in London. Haythorne Reed cautioned against racist immigration policies such as those pursued by Southern and Northern Rhodesia. "Whatever [was] decided upon", he said, "there must be no racial discrimination", since "if it became public that this Government was even considering it, the news would probably be cabled to the Indian representatives at the Round Table Conference to the extreme annoyance of the Imperial Government, which would probably quash it".⁶⁵

⁶² Stephens to Chief Secretary, 29 May 1931, MNA, S1/757/31, F1.

⁶³ Minute Harragin, 12 June 1931, in Ibid., F4.

⁶⁴ Immigration Circular No. 1, 1932, 17 February 1932, in Ibid., F39.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

The reluctance of the state to manipulate influx control mechanisms against Indian immigrants prompted wholesalers to concentrate on their second strategy. As early as 1930, a Nyasaland Chamber of Commerce (NCC) sub-committee contended that indiscriminate issuing of licenses had resulted in "entirely unsound competition". The term used to describe this unhealthy situation was "overtrading". This rather nebulous term described a situation where certain areas -- townships and trading centres -- had "too many" shops. It was argued that this led to intense competition, price cutting, and eventually resulted in insolvency for the smaller traders. Retail bankruptcy, of course, adversely affected the creditors of these traders. What was not mentioned was that, in many cases, it was the creditor who was in direct competition with the debtor. Not surprisingly, the benefits of competition to consumers in the form of lower prices went unremarked by the Chamber.

The NCC and its allies argued that "overtrading" had a negative effect on standards of European commerce, the commerce of "better class Indians" and "the efforts of Native Traders ... just starting to become a factor in the retail trade of the country".⁶⁶ The connection between "overtrading" and African commercial opportunity was never enunciated explicitly. Presumably, the NCC meant that price cutting reduced established traders' profits in the short and medium term and made it

⁶⁶ The NCC took over as the major mouthpiece for European merchant interests after the NMA was dissolved in 1928. See footnote 46. Nyasaland Chamber of Commerce (NCC), Report of the sub-committee to consider the question of trading licenses, 29 November 1930, MNA, S1/1343/30, F3a.

impossible for new African traders to make inroads since they would be consistently undercut. The big merchants argued that to reduce competition in trading centres and townships, traders should be required to undergo more stringent scrutiny of their economic standing and submit financial guarantees to Licensing Officers.

The NCC linked its demands to the welfare of emerging African retail traders when a delegation met with the Governor in late 1930. This was an astute and timely tactic given the reiteration of African paramountcy for East Africa in the Passfield Memorandum of 1930. Presumably, it was believed that government might view NCC demands more favourably were they situated within the discourse of African development and welfare. This line of argument had been profitably employed elsewhere, but the strategy was less successful in Nyasaland.⁶⁷ The rationale was weak because African traders tended to shy away from gazetted trading centres, in part because of competition, but more because

⁶⁷ The Passfield Memorandum which reaffirmed the paramountcy of African interests over those of non-Africans echoed the sentiments of the 1923 White Paper, Indians in Kenya. This document declared that if the interest of the Africans "and the interests of the immigrant races should conflict the former should prevail". Cmd. 1922 of 1923, Indians in Kenya, cited in E.A. Brett, Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa, The Politics of Economic Change, 1919-1939, (London, 1981), p.180. According to Brett, white settlers in Kenya insisted that their and African interests were "complementary". The Indian community was merely out to swindle the African. Ibid., p.197. This gave rise to the oft touted "dual policy" which recent scholarship suggests may have been more myth than conscious economic strategy. See Chris Youé, "The origins and significance of the 'dual policy' in inter-war Kenya", paper presented to the Canadian African Studies Association Conference, Halifax, Nova Scotia, May 1990.

they wished to avoid paying plot rentals (and rates in municipalities).⁶⁸ Most frequently, Africans used trading centre shops as places to purchase stock for their "bush" or village canteens.

High Court Judge Haythorne Reed concurred that the African content of the petition was a smoke-screen. Further, he believed that once Africans were "fit" to run stores, the heavy competition among wholesalers would act in their favour supposedly through keeping prices down.⁶⁹ Hence, one should not legislate away competition. In any case, he saw "much unconscious humour in a deputation headed by the leaders of the two largest European firms asking for the issue of trading licenses to be controlled. Naturally, they would like to stop competition and have a free field for themselves".⁷⁰ Attorney General Harragin, too, was sceptical of the motives of the large firms. He felt Indian retailers were good for the Protectorate and the relationship between them and the African consumer was mutually beneficial -- Indians kept prices down and opened up stores in less populous areas. He drew attention to M.G. Dharap's presence in the delegation, warning against this man as indicating Indian support for the legislation. Although Dharap was an Indian, his interest in tightening controls over retail traders was not surprising. He was also a wholesaler of considerable standing who had been involved in the

⁶⁸ Until the 1920s, Africans had been banned from trading centres and sanitary areas by law.

⁶⁹ In the meanwhile, many African bush traders bought their stock from Indian retailers at trading centres and often paid retail prices for the convenience!

⁷⁰ Minute: Haythorne Reed, 6 January 1931, in MNA, S1/1343/30.

formation of NITA and was its secretary for some years. Harragin suspected that Dharap had "no doubt suffered to some small degree in recent bankruptcies," and "would thus be inclined to support any form of restriction".⁷¹

Colonial officialdom, then, recognized the different commercial interests within the Indian community. Men like Harragin and Reed felt well disposed towards the small Indian trader since it was through their agency that prices were kept down and goods and services were extended to the countryside. On the other hand, they did recognize the problem of rising Indian unemployment and linked this to retail bankruptcies. It was perhaps in response to this concern that the state supported some modification of licensing legislation.

After refusing to amend the ordinance in early 1931, the Governor and his Executive officers stated that they would welcome constructive suggestions to alleviate the problem of "overtrading".⁷² In light of this, the NCC submitted a draft proposal to amend the Trade Licensing Ordinance in May of 1931. The document included plans for a licensing board consisting of a District Commissioner and two nominated unofficals. It also gave this body the vaguest of grounds on which it might refuse licenses.⁷³ Government was not persuaded by the document and the

⁷¹ Minute: Harragin, 8 January 1931, in Ibid.

⁷² Minute 14: Official Note of Meeting with Chamber of Commerce deputation, 9 January 1931, in Ibid.

⁷³ A licence could be refused almost arbitrarily. For example if the locality of the premises considered undesirable for that business, granting the licence was deemed "contrary to the public interest". A licence could be refused if the applicant or manager were deemed to be "not of good

Attorney General rebutted it article by article.⁷⁴ Bowed but not beaten, the Chamber continued to harp on about "the "alarming increase in the Indian immigration figures and that since immigration legislation could not be changed, licensing boards were essential were Nyasaland to avoid becoming the site of a retail trade free for all."⁷⁵ A board of informed, experienced specialists in native trade "could decide whether there was any necessity for another store in the area contemplated" (italics in text), and would go a long way toward solving the immigration problem.⁷⁶ If people knew they would not be given licenses on demand, they would be less eager to come to the Protectorate.

Over the next eleven months several interest groups crystallised. "Prominent" Indian traders fell in with the NCC line in favour of a board and lesser Indian and European traders opposed it. In spite of the fact that NITA unanimously rejected licensing boards in October, W.G. Milne of the London and Blantyre Supply Co. informed Chief Secretary Ken Hall that he had spoken to "prominent" Indian traders and that the majority

character", if granting of the licence would result in a decline in the value of adjacent properties, if the applicant had insufficient capital, or if the applicant were an undischarged bankrupt or a minor. These criteria were open to the broadest interpretation, especially those relating to character assessment or "overtrading". When did an area become "overtraded"? Chamber of Commerce Draft Proposal for Licensing Board, 5 May 1931, in *Ibid.*, F13a.

⁷⁴ Minute: Attorney General Harragin, 18 May 1931, in *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ "A Licensing Board", *Nyasaland Times*, 26 August 1931. The total number of Asiatics enumerated in 1929 was 1117. This had risen to 1599 in 1930. See *Nyasaland Protectorate Blue Books*, 1929, 1930, pp. 02;02.

⁷⁶ "A Licensing Board", *Nyasaland Times*, 26 August 1931.

were in favour of such a body.⁷⁷ The story he related several days later at a meeting between Chamber delegates and officials suggests that he did indeed have the support of large Indian traders. Milne cited an incident where Osman Adam, a very influential Blantyre merchant, had lost considerable money because of the inadequacy of the licence granting system. According to Milne:

... a man by the name Tayub Adam had a shortage and consequent trouble with Osman Adam and Osman Adam discharged him. This man then started business in the name of Daud Tayub Adam who is merely a boy. The reason was to prevent Osman Adam taking proceedings against him for recovery of his shortage.⁷⁸

Both European and Indian wholesalers, then, suffered from the laxity of extant licensing regulations and stood to gain from closer regulation.

Under pressure for reform government produced a draft bill in October of 1932. This "compromise" legislation gave broader grounds for refusal of licenses, but vested the decision in the office of a Licensing Officer and not a board. There was also to be a 10/- application fee, all applications would be Gazetted and a two week period would lapse before applications were considered. The delay was to give interested parties time to lodge objections.⁷⁹ Purportedly this would reduce the

⁷⁷ Secretary of Nyasaland Chamber of Commerce to Chief Secretary Hall, 17 October 1932, MNA, S1/1343/30, F42; Nyasaland Indian Traders' Association to Secretary Nyasaland Chamber of Commerce, October 25, 1932, *Ibid.*, F47a.

⁷⁸ Minutes of a Meeting of Government and a Deputation from the Chamber of Commerce to discuss the possibility of establishing a licensing board, 28 October 1932, *Ibid.*, F55a.

⁷⁹ An Ordinance to Amend the Licensing Ordinance 1910, Draft Bill, (n.d.), in *Ibid.*, F51a.

incidence of trading through minors and women and would enhance stability. When the bill was discussed with a NCC delegation, W.G. Milne and J. Marshall of the African Lakes Company agreed that "there was no reason why a Licensing Officer should not be legally as effective as a board".⁸⁰ The Bill became law on November 5, 1932.⁸¹

The European and Indian wholesalers gained an ordinance which would give greater grounds for refusal. Although the merchants did not win the right to participate directly in the licence granting process they must have had some confidence that the widening of Licensing Officers' powers would work to their advantage. As to the Indian wholesalers, it seems that they too had confidence that Licensing Officers would be sympathetic to their concerns. Their solvency was not in question and so they also stood to gain from a crackdown on retailers of meagre means. Their counterparts, merchants like Milne and Marshall, had supported them during the battle for boards and had outlined to the state the degree to which "respectable" Indian traders had suffered from lack of surveillance and control. At the end of 1932, it seemed that Indian and European general traders had won an important victory.

The glow of success did not last long. Implementation of the new legislation seems to have worked in favour of the large European firms, but not those of Indian general traders. The NCC was very diligent in

⁸⁰ Minutes of a Meeting between Chamber of Commerce Deputation and Government Officials, 28 October 1932, in *Ibid.*, F55a.

⁸¹ Nyasaland Protectorate No. 32 of 1932, The Licensing (Amdt) Ordinance 1932, 15 November 1932, in *Ibid.*, F56a.

forwarding its objections to certain applications to the authorities and at first even did so in defense of Indian wholesalers.⁸² In April of 1937 a specific "congestion clause" was added to the Ordinance to expand and clarify criteria for refusal of licenses,⁸³ although it was still the decision of the Licensing Officer which determined whether or not an area was "congested" or "overtraded". Throughout the 1930s, many applications for trading licenses were refused because of "overtrading" or when Licensing Officers deemed the opening of a shop "contrary to the public interest".

The practice, not the principle, of the legislation drove a wedge between Indian and European general traders. The African Lakes Corporation and the London and Blantyre Supply Co. appear to have enjoyed preferential access to trading licenses. The Indian Chamber of Commerce, formed in 1936, cited incidents where District Commissioners (who were the designated Licensing Officers under the Licensing Ordinance) granted the ALC and London and Blantyre Supply Co. trading licenses for plots previously denied to Indians on grounds of overtrading and alleged that such collusion between European officials and trading companies was commonplace.⁸⁴ And so, in March 1938 when, on the

⁸² In a NCC transmission to the Chief Secretary in 1933, objections to the licensing of eight Indian traders were submitted on grounds ranging from trading through minors and wives to escape debt, trading under assumed names, price cutting, indebtedness, and undischarged bankruptcy. NCC to Hall, 29 March 1933, MNA, NS1/30/1, F18b.

⁸³ Licensing (Amendment) Ordinance, No. 4 of 1937, ss.4, S11 (f), 30 April 1937, PRO, CO 525/170/44187.

⁸⁴ The Indian Chamber of Commerce was formed in August 1936 and seems to have had a strong wholesale trading membership. Secretary Indian Chamber of Commerce to Senior Provincial Commissioner, 28 June 1939, MNA, S1/2444/23, F10-12. "Objections by the Indian Chamber of

urging of the ALC and the London and Blantyre Supply Co., government presented a bill for to establish Licensing Boards, the Indian community unanimously opposed it. The legislation provided for the establishment of joint official/unofficial licensing boards and included new criteria for refusal, renewal and transfer of licenses. The objective of the bill was to ensure uniformity of policy in granting licenses and to prevent overtrading.⁸⁵

NITA, (by this time an organisation mainly representative of retail interests) feared boards since the ALC and the London and Blantyre Supply had consistently increased their retail activities during the 1930s and this had brought them up against the Indian retailer as never before.⁸⁶ These companies were even more eager to sew up "native trade" for themselves and a loaded Licensing Board would be an effective mechanism through which to do this. The Indian Chamber of Commerce supported NITA when in September of 1938 it petitioned the Governor asking that the Bill be withdrawn. It argued that the problem with a licensing board was not so much the function of such a body as the inevitable problems which would attend constituting it. The Indian

Commerce on behalf of all Indian traders to the Proposed Amendment of the Licensing Ordinance", prepared by B.E. Lilley, Solicitor, 2 September 1938, MNA, S1/1343II/30, F205-215.

⁸⁵ The principle of Provincial Licensing Boards was first accepted by the Legislative Council in March of 1938. See, Proceedings of a Meeting of the 53rd Session of the Legislative Council, 22 March 1938, Ibid., F 140-143. The Draft Bill to amend the Licensing Ordinance was considered in Executive Council on 2 June 1938 and is found in Ibid., F177.

⁸⁶ NITA to Chief Secretary, 21 May 1938, MNA, S1/1343II/30, F179-181.

Chamber feared that European un-official members would be biased against Indian traders and that Indian members would use the board to squash their rival countrymen. Indian traders constituted 94% of firms engaged in "native trade" versus only five or six European firms, only one of which catered almost exclusively to the African market -- the ALC. Consequently, the ALC, would almost always have a representative on the board, and this would not be the case for any given Indian firm, since there were more of them from which to choose. On the other hand, were unofficial representation to be drawn from disinterested parties within the commercial community, government would be hard-pressed to find any since only two firms, the Limbe Trading Company and Nyasaland Pharmacies, were not engaged in "native trade" at all.⁸⁷

Doubtless, the furore over the Licensing Board issue expedited the formation of the Nyasaland Indian Association in 1938.⁸⁸ This was the

⁸⁷ "Objections by the Indian Chamber of Commerce on Behalf of All Indian Traders to the Proposed Amendment of the Licensing Ordinance", prepared by B.E. Lilley, 2 September 1938, MNA, S1/1343II/30, F205-215.

⁸⁸ The Nyasaland Indian Association was formed to serve the interests of the "Indian community" in general. The 1930s also saw the reemergence of the amalgamation question which was probably the main reason for the formation of such an organisation -- to ensure that the Indian community was represented as a bloc when the Royal Commission to investigate the possibility of closer union between Nyasaland and the Rhodesias under the leadership of Viscount Bledisloe visited Central Africa in 1938. One of the main concerns of both Indian and African communities was Southern Rhodesia's "parallel development" policies might be extended to Nyasaland. The culture of racism did much to engender an Indian political consciousness, especially in the late 1940s and 1950s, but even so, it was the wealthy within the Indian community who were most sensitive to this. The protectorate's first Indian school was opened in Blantyre in 1938, with initial funds provided by C.K. Dharap, a prominent Hindu Indian and Osman Adam, a wealthy Muslim. In 1943 a primary school for Muslim Indians was opened in Limbe, financed by Suliman Sacrani, Omar Hassam Janmahomed (both wealthy wholesalers)

first pan-Indian Association of its kind in the Protectorate and the timing of its emergence suggests it was a response to anti-Indian sentiment.⁸⁹ While it is true that District Commissioners who served as Licensing Officers under the old ordinance had no direct commercial interest in supporting European firms, they did frequent the same clubs, attend the same social functions, and often married into the white commercial and missionary community. It is virtually impossible to document deliberate racial discrimination, but the Indian merchant community definitely perceived racism to be at the root of the differential awarding of licenses. The strong conviction of general racial discrimination based upon highly suggestive examples of the same prompted all members of the Indian community to anticipate continued and perhaps, worsening, discrimination under an ALC - white dominated Licensing Board.

Heightened racial and political tension created by the debate over closer union between Nyasaland and the Rhodesias led to a cautious

and money from South African Indians. M.A. Karolia, "A brief historical survey of the Indian community in Malawi", Chancellor College History Department Seminar Paper, 1968-69, pp. 10-12. There was no secondary school for Indian children until 1959.

⁸⁹ The meeting to form a Nyasaland Indian Association was endorsed by the Indian Chamber of Commerce, the Nyasaland Indian Traders' Association, the Indian Sports Club, the Goan Social Club and the Oriental Club. Ninety-four persons attended and M.G. Dharap chaired the meeting. A working committee was struck to work out details for the running of the association. The list of people elected to sit on this committee reflects the multi-cultural nature of the association. They were M.G. Dharap (probably Hindu), C.K. Raman, A.M. Ravel, N.M. Suvarna, Hussein Ahmed (Muslim), S.O. Sacrani, M.G. Menon, H.S. Dias (common Goan name), K.G. Menon, Haridas Amarsi, P. Dayaram, Dr. Hazur Singh (probably Sikh). Minutes of the Public Meeting of the Indian Community of Nyasaland, 23 July 1938, MNA, S1/195/38, F2-4.

official response. The bill was sent to the Legislative Council but its enforcement was suspended pending Colonial Office approval. The Indians' petition was to be sent to the Colonial Secretary in London.⁹⁰ Governor Kittermaster apprised Malcolm MacDonald of the situation in October, writing that he felt "reasonably certain that the fears expressed [by Indian petitioners would] be found to be without foundation."⁹¹ It was not until April of 1939 that the Indians' petition actually reached the Colonial Office, accompanied by a petition signed by like-minded European traders.⁹² In his covering letter, Governor Mackenzie-Kennedy said he was generally in favour of the bill, but was less confident than his predecessor that Indian fears were unfounded. He "confessed to considerable doubt as to the probability of being able to find a number of disinterested persons competent to perform the functions of a licensing authority". Until he did, he would not bring Ordinance No. 15 into force.⁹³

Colonial Office officials in London continued to view the Nyasaland government's appeal for greater control on "overtrading" with scepticism. E. Melville pointed to the colonial government's preoccupation with the

⁹⁰ Minute: Fox-Strangways, Executive Council Clerk, 8 September 1938, in *Ibid.*, F217

⁹¹ Kittermaster to MacDonald, 6 October 1938, in *Ibid.*, F219. The ordinance was passed by the Legislative Council on 14 September 1938.

⁹² European traders' petition signed by G.F. Ponson, Vassilatos Brothers, R.H. Kirkhaldy (for Nyasaland Cooperative Society), J. Abegg and H. Schakert, 29 April 1939, PRO, CO525/182/44187.

⁹³ Donald Mackenzie-Kennedy to MacDonald, 29 April 1939, in *Ibid.*

"nuisance of underselling" in the protectorate and quipped that he "should like to see a great deal more of this nuisance in West Africa".⁹⁴ Others described the trade dispute as another familiar story "of the Big Firms 'eating up' the small traders, and a concerted attempt on the part of the latter to check the growing power and influence of the former".⁹⁵ J.A. Calder said that it was "curious to find an [sic] British African Government accused of cooperating so closely with big business. Lord Trenchard," he added, "would be amazed" (and perhaps, envious!).⁹⁶ MacDonald agreed to defer disallowance of the ordinance until the situation had been reviewed in light of Kenyan and Ugandan legislation.⁹⁷ The ordinance was never brought into force, although the Nyasaland government took steps to formulate "shadow boards"; licensing boards composed of exclusively official membership. After the war, the ordinance was shelved. By closing ranks, Nyasaland's Indian traders successfully held up hostile legislation.

It must be stressed, however, that this alliance was issue oriented and brief. At the same time that Indians were presenting a united front to the European wholesalers over Licensing Boards, wealthier Indians were profiting at the expense of the less advantaged. This they were able to do through a legal loophole in the Crown Lands Ordinance. Under the

⁹⁴ Minute E. Melville, 16 June 1939, in Ibid.

⁹⁵ Minute: T.A. Brown, 6 July 1939, PRO, CO525/182/44187, I4a.

⁹⁶ Lord Trenchard was Chairman of the United Africa Company, a subsidiary of Unilever. Minute, J.A. Calder, 26 July 1939, in Ibid.

⁹⁷ MacDonald to Mackenzie-Kennedy, 7 September 1939, in Ibid., I5.

terms of the Crown Lands Ordinance 1931 which replaced the 1912 legislation, small Crown Land plots (less than 10 acres) might be leased on a yearly basis under what were called Yearly Tenancy Agreements. Unlike other Crown Land leaseholds, which were secured through public auction only, Yearly Tenancy leaseholds could be obtained through application to the District Commissioner in charge of the area.⁹⁸ District Commissioners, subject to the Governor's veto, were in charge of assigning Yearly Tenancy plots and acted as Licensing Officers for their Districts. The juxtaposition of functions and periodic confusion which emanated from this probably contributed as much to inconsistent policy implementation as did racial discrimination.

To set up a shop on Crown Land involved leasing a plot and purchasing a trade licence. Logically, one was not much good without the other. However, in 1937, Senior Provincial Commissioner Abrahams wrote the Lands Officer a revealing letter. In it, he related the story of how one M.G. Dharap, a prominent Indian general trader, had applied for a Yearly Tenancy lease for a plot in Fort Johnstone District. Abrahams, deciding that the area was "overtraded" intended to refuse Dharap the lease, but the Governor overruled him, stating that Dharap should be allowed to obtain a leasehold in anticipation of improved economic conditions. There was no legal justification for refusing to grant Dharap a leasehold site, but that he should not expect automatically to receive a trading licence in respect of that site. Copies of this letter were circulated to all District

⁹⁸ Crown Lands Ordinance, No. 1 of 1931, 7 May 1931.

Commissioners, informing them of the policy decision.⁹⁹

Throughout the 1930s as retailers were refused licenses on grounds of "congestion", or went bankrupt, monied Indian traders bought up the yearly tenancy leases on unlicensed plots. Extant plots had priority for licensing over those never licensed. As the economy improved traders in search of premises were forced to go to these "landlords" who controlled all the best trading sites to sub-let plots, often at exorbitant rents. There was no legal proscription to sub-letting Yearly Tenancy plots, neither was there a limit set to the amount of rent chargeable for sub-lets. It seemed that a number of merchants were getting rich at the expense of small traders by taking advantage of Crown land!

In 1941, the District Commissioner for Ncheu raised "the question of profiteering in store plots as a business". According to him, many of the plots which had belonged to traders ruined in the 1930s slump had fallen to "wealthier Indian traders. As trading conditions improved application was made for licenses for these stores, either in their own names, or in the names of traders to whom the stores had been leased [former lessees]". Sometimes, these "Merchant Princes" insisted on "package" rental arrangements in which landlords could secure income from unprofitable sites. The District Commissioner for Ncheu cited one case where a trader was compelled to take up two remote stores in order to get the one he desired at Dedza trading centre. For these three stores he paid an inclusive rent of £156 per year to the owner, a Mr. Dharap (possibly the

⁹⁹ Abrahams to Lands Officer, 15 March 1938, MNA, NS1/30/1.

same man who had secured the leasehold in Fort Johnstone). The rent remained the same even after he was forced to close one of the bush stores for lack of business!¹⁰⁰

The District Commissioner for Ncheu suggested that trading plots were not to be granted for the purpose of profiteering and that those traders who held licenses in their own names should be granted leases for their plots. It was felt that a rent of £49 to £70 per annum was unreasonable when one could obtain trading facilities from government for a £4 fee and a rent of £5 per annum on Crown land.¹⁰¹ This, of course, raised the whole issue of overtrading yet again. How could government countenance licensing new yearly tenancy plots and refuse to issue licenses for the ones presently held, but unlicensed?¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ District Commissioner Ncheu to Provincial Commissioner Northern Province, 12 August 1941, MNA, LAN1/11/22, F114.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. It is difficult to ascertain how common was this practice of subletting leaseholds at extortionate rents, but references to profiteering of this nature abound. See for example the case of Ibrahim Ismael Sabadia of Ncheu District, who related how he had been seeking rental trading premises, but that the rents charged were prohibitive. He mentioned one trader who paid £80 per annum for a store near Ncheu boma and another trader who paid Osman Adam a graduated rent of £7 per month for the first year, £8 per month for the second, and £9 per month for the third year of tenancy! Sabadia to District Commissioner Ncheu, 1 January 1944, in Ibid., F131.

¹⁰² It was not until 1944 that Lands Officer W.G. Alcock proposed a solution to the problem of store plot profiteering. He advised that government should not terminate yearly tenancy agreements where sublets were being charged extortionate rents, but that it might do so in cases where a plot had been subdivided since this contravened the ordinance. Undeveloped leaseholds, held without intention of immediate use, might also be terminated. Alcock to Chief Secretary, 10 May 1944, in Ibid., F134.

The vulnerability of the small trader was further exacerbated by war-time shortages when Indian wholesalers used scarce imports to supply their own general trading outlets.¹⁰³ In 1939, wholesalers generally tightened their credit and limited the sale of stock to retailers and this sparked a rash of retail bankruptcies in Southern Province (See Table 3.4).¹⁰⁴ Eric Barnes, District Commissioner for Blantyre remarked upon the shift in Indian trade from an almost purely retail business to general trade.¹⁰⁵ It may be recalled that an identical tendency (the shift by European merchant firms toward wholesale-retail trade) had been cited by NITA as grounds for opposing Licensing Boards. Wholesalers, regardless of ethnic background, took the same route towards securing their trade position in times of adversity. Yet again, class interests overshadowed ethnic solidarity.

By the war's end, the structure of protectorate trade was set. From 1910 on general trade was increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few firms. The African Lakes Company emerged as the single largest of these. At the same time, the Indian merchant community was becoming more and more stratified, separating into general and retail trade blocs. The interests of these groups diverged and during the slump Indian general traders allied with their European counterparts to squeeze out smaller

¹⁰³ Annual Report, Blantyre District, 1942, NSB7/1/6.

¹⁰⁴ Nyasaland Protectorate Annual Reports of the Provincial Commissioners for the year ending 31 December 1939, Government Print, (Zomba, 1940), p.8.

¹⁰⁵ Annual Report, Blantyre District, 1943, NSB7/1/6.

traders and safeguard their piece of a shrinking market. Prosperous and less prosperous Indians came together briefly in the late 1930s to hold up legislation. They did so for different reasons, but these were fundamentally economic in nature. Indian retailers resisted Licensing Boards since these would have the power to review their finances. Indian general traders objected to them since they feared discrimination on racial grounds which compromised their economic position. It was not the notion of Licensing Boards per se to which they objected, but the near certainty of a European unofficial dominance on the boards. They preferred, it seems, to take their chances with a single Licensing Officer with whom they might cultivate a special personal relationship, rather than fall under the jurisdiction of a Licensing Board inevitably dominated by the ALC. Hence, the Indian united front against Licensing Boards erected in the late 1930s did not signal a change from class to ethnic solidarity even though on one level it constituted a response to racist policy implementation. Objection to the introduction of boards emanated from the concrete economic interests of big and small Indian merchants. The absence of a clearly defined ethnic solidarity was further evidenced by the speculation in leasehold properties which went on throughout the 1930s and during the war and the subsequent rack-renting of small traders.

In the period up to 1945, the Indians of Malawi represented anything but a united ethnic or racial monolith. Indian traders may have been self-serving, but no more so than their European counterparts. Their actions were fully consistent with their class position and it is only in

class terms that the evolution of the trading economy of colonial Malawi can be understood. Racial stereotyping did exist in the broad culture, sometimes dominated professional and commercial organisations, and often directly informed public policy. At rare moments, and usually in response to racially informed policy implementation, the entire Indian community acted in concert. Yet a careful examination of the actions of various elements within the Indian community reveals that individual action was always rooted in economic self-interest. More generally, wealthier Indians exploited less advantaged Indians and in no other area was this more starkly evident than in the leasehold speculation and subsequent rack renting of plots in the late 1930s and 1940s. Indian actions in the trade disputes of the 1930s were completely consistent with their class positions. They behaved more as merchant capitalists than as "Indians", and their positions on government policy were consistent with their identities as retail or general traders. Stereotypes are nearly always based upon a few observable characteristics, but these are often twisted into general principles which obscure the true motives and natures of individual and group action. This episode in Malawi's economic history serves as a reminder of the great power of racial assumptions to substitute ethnocentric myths for carefully measured, empirically verifiable truths.

Chapter Four

"At Your Service":

African Enterprise 1915 to 1945

On August 3, 1922, the following advertisement appeared in the Nyasaland Times:

Laundry

Charles Thomas Mtemenyama will open a Laundry in the Blantyre Township, at Ryall's Hotel, by permission of the Proprietress, on 12 August 1922. Washing and ironing, ladies' and gents' clothing and suits cleaned at moderate prices. Enquiries to be addressed to C.T. Mtemenyama, c/o Ryall's Blantyre Hotel.

Charles Mtemenyama and his wife, Bela, returned to Nyasaland in the 1920s having worked in East Africa for a number of years. Family members believe them to have learned the laundry trade there. Bela was the daughter of Church of Scotland elder, Joseph Bismarck, by his third wife, a daughter of Chief Kapeni. Both she and Charles were educated, well-travelled, and churched people, typical of the emerging African middle class. Mtemenyama operated his laundry under the auspices of Ryall's Hotel for two years before buying a freehold plot at Michiru from R.S. Hynde, editor of the Nyasaland Times and well-known spokesperson for settler interests.¹ Since his premises were about two miles from downtown, Mtemenyama used Blantyre Print and Publishing as his

¹ Interview 23, Alexander Mataka Bandawe, Chikwawa Road, Blantyre District, 15 March 1987; Interview 8 Sidney Benson Somanje, Chichiri, Malawi Congress Party Headquarters, Blantyre District, 2 February 1987; Interview 29 Elwin Mothello, T.A. Chikowi, Zomba District, 21 April 1987.

contact address.² A relative who worked there collected messages and orders for him.

By 1931, there were only four African-owned laundries in Blantyre District, with one regularly patronised by Europeans. This was Charles Mtemenyama's. In 1931, District Commissioner Ramsay reported that Mtemenyama employed a staff of 14 persons at wages of between 10 and 28 shillings per month. According to him, the laundry netted profits of £90 per year.³ These wage rates were certainly comparable to those obtainable in other unskilled or semi-skilled positions and the reported profits of the business were much higher than the average clerical wage. If Ramsay's figures were accurate, Mtemenyama appears to have been making a very respectable living as an independent businessman. In fact, Mtemenyama did so well that he opened a second laundry in Zomba in 1933.⁴ Expansion proved ill-timed, however, and Mtemenyama closed the Zomba facility after only two years.

It is difficult to tell from remaining sources exactly when or why Mtemenyama's luck turned. He was taken to court by one Gyan Singh in 1938. Singh was an Indian trader in Blantyre from whom Mtemenyama rented a small shop which he used as a drop-off and pick-up point for laundry. He failed to meet his rent payments from September 1937 to

² Nyasaland Times, 15 January 1924; Interview 8, Sidney Somanje, Chichiri, Malawi Congress Party Headquarters, Blantyre District, 2 February 1987.

³ Annual Report 1931, Blantyre District, MNA, NSB7/1/2.

⁴ Mtemenyama announced that he would be opening a branch in Zomba in February, 1933. Nyasaland Times, 7 February 1933.

January 1938.⁵ This was not the end of his financial difficulties. In December 1938, the African Lakes Corporation took him to court claiming £24.6.0 for goods advanced on credit. Mtemenyama admitted the debt but explained that he was unable to repay in full. He produced financial statements to illustrate his predicament. These are replicated in Figure 4.1.⁶

The statement covers a five month period from January to May 1938.⁷ The record shows that most revenue accrued from a regular non-African clientele. Ryall's Hotel accounted for 40% of the money value of custom and other regular European clients constituted an additional 30%. Debits show that Mtemenyama employed nine workers, all male, which was in-keeping with the colonial preference for masculine domestics. Bela Mtemenyama also worked in the laundry, but the tasks she performed were managerial.⁸ It is doubtful that she received a formal wage. Mtemenyama's wage bill was significant in spite of the low rates of pay. These ranged from 6 to 11 shillings per month plus poso (weekly food

⁵ Second Class Subordinate Court, Blantyre District, Cause 83 of 1938, 1 September 1938, in MNA, BA4/1/13. Singh charged a monthly rental of £1 and was claiming £4.10.0 in outstanding rent.

⁶ Second Class Subordinate Court, Blantyre District, Cause No. 150 of 1938, African Lakes Corporation versus C. Thomas Mtemenyama, 14 December 1938, MNA, BA4/1/14.

⁷ The credits side of the statement appears to contain an adding error: credits as set out in the accounting total to £69.3.5 and not £49.3.5. Court proceedings include no comment on this.

⁸ Interview 23 Alexander Mataka Bandawe; Interview 6 Wales J. [Nyemba] Mbekeani, Mkulumadzi Bakery, Limbe, Blantyre District, 25 January 1987.

Washing Account
January to May 1938

Source: Clause 15^o of 1938, African Lakes Corporation, versus Mlomenyama, MNA, BA1/1/14

allowance) of 6 pence per week and came to a monthly wage bill of £4.4.0. Charcoal, cleaning supplies and other expenses amounted to £4.10.0 per month. Monthly profits were just over £5 or, £60 per year. This was a modest, but respectable, middle-class African income, even if the figure falls some £30 short of Ramsay's estimate for 1931. Mtemenyama may have "massaged" his accounts to demonstrate inability to pay the ALC immediately, but the records probably provide a more accurate reckoning of the state of the business than Ramsay's laudatory description.

The accounting does not reflect other factors which were working against Mtemenyama. The laundry premises were absorbed by the township in 1932, hence, they became ratable.⁹ Mtemenyama's premises were assessed £3.8.1 per quarter. A notice issued by the Blantyre Water Board and dated June 1939 show Mtemenyama to have been in arrears since mid-1937. The total amount outstanding was £25.5.2., but arrears as at 31 December 1938 were £19.19.0.¹⁰ Add to this the rent charged by Gyan Singh and the laundry's net profit would have been closer to £2.17.0 per month. Finally, it seems that Mtemenyama faced significant competition at this time. In 1936, District Commissioner Ramsay observed that "township laundries ... subject to rates and taxes are feeling the affect of laundries being opened up in the suburbs".¹¹ Peri-urban businesses

⁹ Proclamation No. 5 of 1932, Blantyre Township Boundaries, Nyasaland Government Gazette, 25 May 1932.

¹⁰ Notice included in Court Proceedings.

¹¹ Annual Report Blantyre District, 1936, MNA, S1/66H/37.

premises were not ratable, there were no rents, neither were they to conform to any municipal health or zoning regulations. Reduced overhead made it possible for such concerns to undercut the prices charged by township laundries.¹²

In spite of demonstrated financial hardship, the court ruled for the ALC on 14 December 1938 and ordered Mtemenyama to begin immediate repayment of his debt. Scarcely one week after the judgement, the case was reopened in light of "new evidence". Mtemenyama argued that his debt with the African Lakes Corporation had not been attested by a District Commissioner, neither did he hold a special permit to contract debts in excess of the £10 limit as set out in the Credit Trade with Natives Ordinance.¹³ The judge ruled that ordinance supplied a complete defence and revised the decision so that Mtemenyama was obliged to repay only £10 to the ALC.¹⁴

In this case, the Credit Trade Ordinance worked in favour of an African debtor, but more generally it was a source of discontent. The

¹² Only one other African laundryman, J. Rute Ngalawesa at the British Central Africa Company premises in Limbe, advertised his services in the Nyasaland Times and that was only once in 1932. See, Nyasaland Times, 25 March 1932.

¹³ Under the terms of the revised ordinance of 1926, no debt for money or goods lent exceeding 20 shillings was recoverable unless the contract creating the debt was in written form and attested by a District Resident or the African borrower held a written permit, signed by the Governor which allowed the holder to contract debts in excess of 20 shillings without approval of the District Resident. Credit Trade With Natives (Amendment) Ordinance, No.15 of 1926, 28 April 1926. The limit was raised to £10 in 1936.

¹⁴ Cause No. 150 of 1938, 21 December 1938.

government position was that the ordinance should be maintained for the protection of Africans and that the terms of the law gave ample room for the advancement of the African trader. According to the Provincial Commissioner for Southern Province, if a "native of good character can satisfy the government that he has ability and a fair knowledge of the principles of trading it is possible for him to obtain credit [in excess of £1] under the existing law".¹⁵ Section 3 of the principle ordinance enabled the free extension of credit to an African subject to approval of a written debt contract by the District Commissioner, or the issue of a permit, sanctioned by the Governor, to contract debts without the approval of the District Commissioner.¹⁶

But it is likely that only a few people knew about this provision. Also, it was unclear what kind of debt the ordinance covered. For example, it did not apply to arrears of rent or rates.¹⁷ Mtemenyama was probably better placed to know of the ordinance's finer points than were most his contemporaries. He was the brother-in-law of Lewis Mathaka Bandawe, who had worked for the High Court as a clerk since 1930 and

¹⁵ Anderson to Blantyre Native Association (BNA), 5 May 1933, *Ibid.*, F31-32.

¹⁶ The Credit Trade with Natives Ordinance, 1903, No.5 of 1903, 9 October 1903, and the Credit Trade With Natives (Amendment) Ordinance, No. 15 of 1926, Chap. 28, Section 3.

¹⁷ A test case for this was *Ismael versus Makalani*. The judge ruled that the Credit Trade Ordinance did not apply to arrears of rent. Cause 13 of 1935, Third Class Subordinate Court, Blantyre District, 14 February 1935, MNA, BA5/1/3.

was promoted to head clerk in 1934.¹⁸ The week delay between the initial judgement and his appeal indicate that Mtemenyama was not aware of the protection afforded him under the ordinance at the time of his trial. It is unclear how he came to know of this, but it seems likely that Bandawe told him.

Most businesspeople and elite Africans viewed the law as an insulting impediment. The paternalism implicit in such legislation mirrored the overt condescension of white colonial society. Chief Secretary Rankine defended the ordinance and went on record in 1926 saying,

... we must remember that still the native is uneducated and that he is improvident. If he is allowed to contract debts he will do so, and I am afraid that he will also be persuaded to do so ... They [Africans] must be protected against themselves as well as those who offer undue credit.¹⁹

The Blantyre Native Association (BNA) whose members were drawn from the educated elite stratum of African society were incensed by the letter and spirit of a law which tacitly denied their existence. They petitioned for its repeal and declared that such legislation blocked access to credit and thereby slowed the pace of African economic advancement. Further, it was an indictment of African honesty, since it presupposed that

¹⁸ Lewis Mathaka Bandawe, (edited and introduced by B.Pachai), Memoirs of a Malawian, The life and reminiscences of Lewis Mataka Bandawe, M.B.E., (Blantyre, 1971), p. 106.

¹⁹ Rankine in Legislative Council, Summary of 32nd Session of Legislative Council, 19 April 1926, Nyasaland Government Gazette Supplement, 30 April 1926.

Africans were not responsible enough to repay debts.²⁰ In fact, the ordinance did not stop Africans from finding non-African lenders; people devised other strategies to accumulate capital and gain access to credit.²¹ What it did ensure was that credit arrangements would be informal and that disputes normally would be settled beyond state purview.

Numerous African business people reported receiving credit from non-African sources.²² There is only the occasional reference to this in the written record. In 1932, for example, H.B. Wilson, a prominent Blantyre barrister complained that in Chiromo there were Indian retailers who were acting as wholesalers, supplying African traders with stock. Wilson's

²⁰ The first time the Credit Trade with Natives Ordinance was raised by the Blantyre Native Association (BNA) was during a meeting in early 1927. It was roundly condemned. The BNA sent a deputation to Zomba in November of 1930 to protest against the ordinance and petitioned for its revocation again in 1933. Minutes of a General Meeting of the Blantyre Native Association, 8 April 1933, MNA, NS1/3/4, F31A.

²¹ The Southern Province Native Association with its headquarters in Zomba was formed in 1923, more than a decade after the foundation of the first native association. This was the North Nyasa Native Association, founded in 1912. The Blantyre Native Association was formed in 1928. These organisations represented concerns of their white collar membership. Blantyre Native Association Minutes, 8 April 1933, NS1/3/4 F31A. The Central Province Native Association objected to the ordinance as well. See, Central Province Native Association Minutes, 30 March 1929, MNA, NC1/3/2, cited in L.J.C. Ndalama, "Native Authorities, native associations and the peasant economy: a case study of Lilongwe District, 1925-1945", Chancellor College History Department Seminar Paper No. 4, 1987/88.

²² Interview with Grant M. Mkandawire, Bolero Rumphi District, 29 March 1987, conducted by graduating student Mr. Chiwambo; Int.39 Jason G. Kachale, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 13 June 1988; Int. 35, Dilly G. Chimalizeni, Mandala, Blantyre, Blantyre District, 9 June 1988; Int. 27 Moses Takomana, Blantyre, 19 March 1987; Int.26, Hedges Bwanamakowa, Chikwawa Road, Blantyre District, 17 March 1987. These are only a few people who described informal credit services extended by non-African traders in the form of both cash loans, stock or other goods and services.

concern was not that they were extending between £10 and £20 worth of stock on credit, but that they were not licensed to do so. In passing, he said that 35 or 40 African traders were taking advantage of this opportunity.²³ Wilson did not mention whether or not these traders were supplying goods at wholesale or retail prices, but the complaint demonstrates that there were non-Africans willing to risk contracting debts over and above amounts recoverable under the law.

Lending sums over and above the limit was not illegal, but since defaulters could not be brought to law successfully, only a few cases like those involving Mtemenyama and George S. Mwase (See Chapter Two) appear in the official record. Even though documentary evidence on credit arrangements is thin, it is highly suggestive. Court records provide valuable information on the way in which Africans and non-Africans strove to circumvent legislation. For example, one of the ways non-African lenders safeguarded their interests was by using African store clerks as guarantors for loans. African retailers could get stock advanced on credit if they were introduced to the "wholesaler" by an African shop clerk with whom they had some personal connection; often they were relatives or friends. That clerk then guaranteed the debt. In the event of default, the clerk covered the shortage. Failure to do so could mean dismissal. Evidence for this kind of arrangement is quite plentiful. In 1937, Frank Chapotila, a store clerk for Nurmahomed Omar in Lunzu, sued Ellerton Thumba for recovery of 11 shillings. Thumba had received

²³ Wilson to Chief Secretary, 5 September 1932, MNA, S1/1343II/30, F24-25.

credit for this amount by Chapotila from Nurmahomed's shop. When Thumba failed to pay his account, Chapotila covered the debt from his own pocket and then sued Thumba. He won his case.²⁴ In Clement B. Msuja of Blantyre versus Robert Wesley Mlanga of Zomba, the result was the same. Msuja worked as store manager for J. Abegg in Blantyre. He extended credit for goods valued at just over 19 shillings. When Mlanga defaulted, he covered the debt himself and then successfully sued Mlanga.²⁵

On the other hand, it was less likely that the non-African lender would have as much success in proving verbal agreements in court. In the matter of Aziz Omar of Blantyre versus Wilson of Matindi, the plaintiff charged that Wilson, his store clerk, gave out goods in the amount of £2.10.1. Wilson said that the value of goods he guaranteed was only 8 shillings. Omar did not produce witnesses who would attest to his claim and there was no written contract of debt. Because of this, Omar lost his case. H.F. Bingham, the Magistrate, commented on the practice of Indian traders using African employees as buffers against default stating:

... It is true that it is the practice of Indian Traders to sell goods on credit to Natives introduced to their store by

²⁴ Second Class Subordinate Court, Blantyre District, Cause No. 19 of 1937, 24 March 1937, MNA, BA4/1/10.

²⁵ Clement B. Msuja versus Robert Wesley Mlanga of Zomba, Second Class Subordinate Court, Blantyre District, Cause No. 137 of 1938, 9 November 1938, MNA, BA4/1/14. For similar cases where guarantors made claims See, Dailo versus Asima, Cause 117 of 1937, Second Class Subordinate Court, Blantyre District, 24 November 1937, MNA, BA4/1/11; Raston Manyowa versus Wyte Yalunga, Cause No. 109 of 1933, Third Class Subordinate Court, Blantyre District, n.d., MNA, BA5/1/3.

Natives whom they know, and to hold the latter responsible for payment ... I hold that it is the duty of the Trader to use proper business methods. His books must be capable of being understood and there must be some direct evidence that ... goods have been sold on credit to a particular person.²⁶

African clerks who guaranteed debts seem to have received redress in the courts, but the non-African shop-keeper was unlikely to win unless he could supply written proof and witnesses to the transaction. In fact, prejudice against Indians and their business practices may have worked against them. Consequently, the Indian trader was less likely to take such a case to court. But he could withhold a clerk's wages until the debt was settled or threaten him with dismissal.

Good faith between African guarantor and borrower, then, was extremely important. The former put his job on the line to help a relative or friend, and social pressure probably helped to reduce the incidence of default. Where this was insufficient inducement to repay, the courts seemed ready to honour verbal agreements between Africans, providing there were witnesses to the transaction. At least, in Blantyre District they were more likely to rule in favour of an African guarantor than an Indian shopkeeper who lent goods to a third party through a clerk. So, Africans were able to help each other in small ways by extending credit on goods which were not actually their own. This was one of the "hidden" ways that non-African credit reached African borrowers, at least

²⁶ Aziz Omar of Blantyre versus Wilson of Matindi, Second Class Subordinate Court, Cause No. 134 of 1938, 26 October 1938, MNA, BA4/1/14. Bingham later became the officer in charge of introducing cooperatives to Southern Province Africans.

in small amounts.²⁷ Because of the informality of such arrangements, it is impossible to ascertain the value of these transactions.

For businesses like Mtemenyama's where the bulk of revenue was paid in at month end, cash flow problems were chronic. Those businesses which involved contract work faced the same difficulty; how to cover operating expenses until receipts were collected. Carpenters, builders and brickmakers, had to cover fixed costs from their own resources until orders were completed and paid up. This was most problematic in the critical first years of operation since most of the enterprises were undercapitalized. Labour costs were one of these fixed expenses which had to be met. While materials might be acquired through barter or credit, wages, or at least poso obligations had to be met. Employers might rely on the good will of workers for a week or so, and deferred payment of wages for a short time, but this was no solution. If worker patience grew thin, employers could find themselves in court.²⁸

Lack of credit meant slow and precarious growth. One common solution to cash flow problems was to negotiate advance payments from clients to meet labour costs.²⁹ Carpenters, brickmakers and other

²⁷ In the cases cited, they approached the value of as much as 50% of a month's salary.

²⁸ Laine versus Nathany Butchers of Limbe, Second Class Subordinate Court, Blantyre District, Cause 125 of 1936, 4 September 1936, MNA, BA4/1/9. Laine worked for Nathany Butchers as a hawker agent and claimed wages outstanding for June and July 1936.

²⁹ David Livingstone, an African sawyer operating out of Chiradzulu, made this kind of arrangement with a client in 1921. Native District Court, Blantyre District, E. Carr versus David Livingstone, Cause 172 of 1921, 16 September 1921, MNA BA1/2/6. See also Tansi of Somba versus Naval Shankar of Limbe, Blantyre District Court, Civil Cases involving

contractors might do this. Brickmakers commonly began the season by quickly building and selling a small kiln.³⁰ In this way they covered labour and other costs for the month and were able to accumulate a small profit which they then ploughed into the construction of a larger kiln. Lack of credit meant that contractors could not enjoy economies of scale. They were generally compelled to work from order to order, accumulating profits slowly. Because of the slim profit margins in the initial stage of operation, such businesses were extremely vulnerable to the slightest downturn in market conditions and were unable to respond quickly to take advantage of positive changes. Moreover, factors external to the market could spell disaster. If, for example, a chiperoni blew in from the east, bringing with it several days of rainy cold weather, brickmakers could lose a month's worth of green bricks. At best this might set back his work schedule for weeks, at worst, he might be unable to meet his salary obligations and lose his workforce.³¹

Europeans and Asians, 26 November 1924 to 8 December 1924, MNA, BA1/1/2. Tansi was a brickmaker and received a £5 advance to pay poso for 64 workers. Harcourt Mlanga, son of Charles Mlanga, said that Mrs. Smythe commissioned bricks from his father and paid for them in advance. In the 1930s, only two Africans, Mlanga and Billiat Akimu, were making bricks in large quantities. Interview 13 Harcourt Charles Mlanga, Cholo Road, Blantyre District, 10 February 1987.

³⁰ Interview 6 Wales J. [Nyemba] Mbekeani, Mkulumadzi Bakery, Limbe, Blantyre District, 25 January 1987.

³¹ Chiperoni is a dry season phenomenon. It refers to the wet winds blowing in from Mozambique between June and August. It can mean rainy weather for several days, and if "green" or unfired bricks are not protected from the moisture, they will be ruined.

Capital and credit were scarce at the best of times, but in the 1930s this was especially so (see Chapter Three). For this reason, most self-employed Africans shied away from businesses with high start-up costs and labour requirements. Tailoring, cycle repair, gramophone repair, cobbling and carpentry work could be undertaken by an individual working alone or with one or two employees. In many cases, self-employment was twinned with or grew out of waged employment. Tailors, for example, learned their craft as apprentice-assistants. If they were adept, they might accumulate sufficient savings to rent a sewing machine and later, buy one. In town, tailors established themselves on the khondes or verandas of trading stores. Arrangements varied, but most often tailors rented space from shop-owners. If the tailor was skilled, he would attract custom for the trader.

The major capital expenditure for tailors was a sewing machine. The price of a used Singer hovered around £5 in the 1930s and could run as high as £10. Sewing machines were at the root of many disputes. They could be "leased" by tailors who were not yet flush enough to purchase one outright. A 1922 court case illustrates what could be involved in such rental agreements. A man called Wilson, an Ngoni from Ncheu allowed a tailor, Ndeza, the use of a sewing machine for four months. Wilson said that he was to have received 6 shillings per month from Ndeza for the rental of the machine. Ndeza failed to pay him and so Wilson took him to court. He produced a witness, a Yao tailor from Lundu called Chinoya, who testified that it was common practice "for the tailor and the owner of the sewing machine to [take] half shares in

anything that is made". The judge ruled in favour of Wilson and awarded him half the profits from Ndeza's work. This came to £3.5.0, not a bad return on his investment.³² On the other hand, Ndeza managed to clear the same amount without the expense of purchasing a machine.

Because of the obvious investment value of sewing machines, they soon became a popular purchase item for labour migrants.³³ In 1921, a case was brought before the courts which gives insight into the complexity of lending arrangements. A Yao tailor called Inges testified that he had borrowed £5.10.0 from another Yao called Taibu in order to purchase a sewing machine. He said that Taibu had repossessed the machine and sold it. Inges produced a witness called Allen who testified that Taibu had indeed lent Inges the money about a year before. It transpired that although it was Taibu's money which was lent, he was in South Africa at the time. The loan was negotiated by Taibu's father, Songoli, who was in charge of Taibu's affairs while he was away. Songoli said that he lent Inges £5.10.0 and received a £1 "commission" for his trouble. He added that the understanding was that the machine belonged to Taibu. Taibu then admitted to having received £6 profit from Inges! The judge ruled that Taibu was to repay Inges the £6. So, in the end,

³² Blantyre District Native Court, Wilson versus Ndeza, Case No. 94 of 1922, 25 May 1922, MNA, BA1/2/6.

³³ See below and also, Mwenyetawa versus Gokaldas, Case No. 3 of 1927, Blantyre District Court -- Civil Cases involving Europeans and Asians, 31 December 1927, MNA, BA1/1/2. The machine was bought in Nairobi in 1914 for £8. James versus Mali, Case No. 194, Blantyre Native Court - Civil Cases, 11 December 1919, MNA, BA1/2/3. The machine, in this instance, was sent from South Africa by the plaintiff's brother.

while Inges did not get the machine, he benefited from the loan in that he made sufficient money during Taibu's absence to purchase another.³⁴ Taibu got money from the sale of the machine, but lost 10 shillings in the transactions (i.e. the difference between the £5.10.0 loan and the £6 he was to pay back to Inges). The only person who got "something for nothing" was Taibu's father!

Loans of this sort were usually small and the contracts verbal, but this was not always so. One may recall the rather large loan given to John Chilembwe by Haya Peters Mlelemba already mentioned in Chapter Two. Blantyre District Court Records include a 1917 case in which a man claimed the balance outstanding on a £27.19.0 loan. The defendant had borrowed this so that he might open a trading store. He professed to have paid back more of the loan than the plaintiff allowed. The plaintiff produced receipts to substantiate his assertion. The judge honoured these and ruled in his favour.³⁵ In 1932, Walter Kim[u?], a Blantyre Yao, lent over £25 to a fish trader so that he might repair and run his lorry. Kim[u?] referred to a notebook in which the defendant signed for sums advanced.³⁶ So there is at least some evidence of large sums being lent among Africans.

Court records are limited in that they supply information

³⁴ Blantyre District Native Court, Case No. 245, 14 December 1921, MNA, BA1/2/6.

³⁵ Blantyre Native Court, Paulo versus Tom, Case 129 of 1917, 17 November 1917, MNA, BA1/2/1.

³⁶ Walter Kim[u?] versus Ayami, Case 29 of 1932, First Class Subordinate Court, Blantyre District, 26 April 1932, MNA, BA3/1/1.

concerning only a small number of financial transactions and business arrangements; and they only disclose particulars of failed agreements. We have no way of knowing how many loans were quietly given and promptly repaid or how many sewing machines, bicycles and other important pieces of equipment were lent or rented without recourse to legal action.³⁷

While verbal agreements and informal book-keeping was the norm, the keeping of written records was not uncommon. This is an important point, since one of the explanations for the failure of small businesses in Malawi is that books and records are not kept. Mlelemba and Kim[u] produced written contracts as did a few of the other disputants mentioned above. Charles Wesley Mlanga produced a written agreement for a brick contract as evidence in a 1938 court case.³⁸ Mtemenyama's also kept books and issued invoices. However, written record keeping meant that proprietors had either to be literate (not only numerate, which most were) or to employ people to keep books for them.³⁹ But in general, the

³⁷ Africans used the European legal system to settle disputes over business conflicts. And as the cash economy grew, so did the number of court cases concerning wage claims, breaches of contract and bad debts. Moreover, the district courts were the arena in which inter-racial disputes were handled; after 1933 and the introduction of the Native Court system under indirect rule, most civil cases were handled by African chiefs and their councils. But Blantyre and Limbe did not fall under the same system of Native Authorities and Native Courts, and so there, recourse was to the boma.

³⁸ Wesley Mlanga versus R.T. Patel, Cause No. 138 of 1938, Second Class Subordinate Court, Blantyre District, n.d., MNA, BA4/1/4.

³⁹ Lawrence Makata, a prominent businessman in the post-1945 period could barely sign his own name. He hired friends to keep accounts. When his business grew, he employed a full-time accountant, a Mr. Chimanya, and Sacrani and Gow looked after his legal affairs. This

majority of self-employed persons had little or no education and so bookkeeping was the exception rather than the rule.

Thomas Mtemenyama relied almost entirely upon a European clientele. European transients, hotels and businesses used Mtemenyama's service. In this respect, the laundry business was unusual. People like Joseph Phambala, Grant Sekeyani, Joseph, Andrew and Alexander Bismark and Charles Mlanga (editor of the African news sheet Zoona)⁴⁰, looked to a wider, multi-racial market. While advertising of African business was generally by word of mouth, these men advertised in the Nyasaland Times, the territory's "European" newspaper.⁴¹ Joseph Phambala was a photographer based in Michiru. He both developed and shot film.⁴² Joseph Bismark, sold foodstuffs, timber and furniture from his Namwili

was not until the 1950s. Interview 6 Wales J. [Nyemba] Mbekeani, 25 January 1987; Interview 9 Lancy Makata, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 3 February 1987.

⁴⁰ Zoona, the first vernacular African news sheet in Nyasaland was begun in 1924. Most articles were printed in Chinyanja, and its editor was Charles Mlanga. Its circulation was about 1200 with 235 sent to Southern and Northern Rhodesia. In the 1930s, Zoona was replaced by Nkani za Nyasaland and in the 1950s, Msimbi. The latter printed in other languages spoken in the territory such as Tumbuka and Yao. But these were poor quality papers, scrutinised by the government.

⁴¹ Those with money to buy or things to sell to Europeans used the Nyasaland Times. In 1924, an advertisement cost a penny a word with a minimum charge of one shilling. This was increased in 1925 to a minimum charge of three shillings. The newspaper cost a penny a copy or a penny and a half if by post. It circulated from Port Herald to Karonga. See, Nyasaland Times, 15 January 1924 and 4 August 1925.

⁴² Nyasaland Times, 26 December 1922. Phambala was an Ngoni from Ncheu and his son, Harry Phambala, was a mechanic. Interview 23, Alexander Ma'taka Bandawe.

Estate on Chikwawa Road.⁴³ Grant Sekeyani was a hide and skin curer with premises next to the Blantyre Mission Church, possibly in Ndirande.⁴⁴ George Chitunga, also situated near Blantyre Mission, supplied firewood and blue gum poles for building.⁴⁵ Alexander Bismark, son of Joseph Bismark, had a tailoring shop near the Indian Club in Blantyre and his brother, Andrew, ran a carpentry shop from Namwili.⁴⁶ In 1935, Charles Mlanga began to advertise bricks for sale and by 1937, he was offering to deliver them to Blantyre or Limbe at 25 shillings per thousand.⁴⁷ Billiat Akimu, while he did not advertise in the Nyasaland Times, was a contemporary of Mlanga and was his main competition in the brick making business.⁴⁸ By the end of the 1930s, African-produced lime from

⁴³ Nyasaland Times, 23 September 1924.

⁴⁴ Nyasaland Times, 2 October 1925.

⁴⁵ Nyasaland Times, 24 October 1924. Firewood supply was a lucrative business since all cooking and heating of water was fuelled by it. By 1938, local supplies had been depleted and it was being brought in from as far as Mikolongwe, 14 miles on the Mlanje Road from Limbe. Nyasaland Times, 8 August 1938.

⁴⁶ Alexander worked for a Goan tailor until 1922 when he opened his own shop in town. He was forced to abandon this after thieves robbed his store stealing his sewing machine and material. He worked from Namwili for a time, but moved south sometime in the early 1930s to work as a tailor for the Trans-Zambezi Railway Company at Muracca in Portuguese East Africa. Nyasaland Times, 23 March 1926; Interview 23 Alexander Mataka Bandawe; Blantyre District Native Court - Civil Cases, Cause 149 of 1922, B. Gray versus Alexander Bismarck, 13 September 1922, MNA, BA1/2/6.

⁴⁷ Nyasaland Times, 19 March 1935; 14 June 1937.

⁴⁸ Interview 47 E.B. Akimu, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 22 June 1988; Interview 13 Harcourt Charles Mlanga, Cholo Road, Blantyre District, 10 February 1987.

Lirangwe was being sold to the European estates and Public Works Department on a large scale.⁴⁹ However, most lime producers were obliged to use non-African transporters until after 1945.

Only a small number of African business people advertised in the pages of the Nyasaland Times. While the paper was geared toward a non-African readership, some of its advertisements and notices were directed at elite Africans. The Henry Henderson Institute -- the Blantyre Mission School for African primary and vocational instruction -- posted its sessions and fees in the Times.⁵⁰ The Times posted job vacancies for African domestics and white collar clerical workers. In 1934, the paper informed consumers that "Columbia Records in Chinyanja Language, songs and marches" were available at Mandala Stores!⁵¹

While the Times reached one stratum of colonial society, a much bigger market was emerging and this was directly connected to the growth of peri-urban villages between and around the townships of Blantyre and Limbe. Cities attract work-seekers. By 1928, Blantyre district had a "very large floating population ... owing to the existence of the two towns of Blantyre and Limbe".⁵² This created a demand for shelter, food,

⁴⁹ James Berto Tepeka offered lime at £2.8.6 per ton delivered to Blantyre. Nyasaland Times, 18 August 1938. Lirangwe is situated fifty kilometres north of Blantyre along the Matope Road which linked Blantyre and Lilongwe.

⁵⁰ Inclusive fees for boarders was £5 per term, payable on admission. Nyasaland Times, 6 October 1933.

⁵¹ Nyasaland Times, 23 January 1934.

⁵² Blantyre District Annual Report 1928, MNA, NSB7/1/1.

entertainment and other services for Africans, none of which the municipality was eager to provide. On the one hand, companies and government wanted to maintain a labour force, on the other, they did not want to create a permanent African urban population.

Urban housing presented officials with a particularly thorny problem. The Jackson Land Commission Report of 1921 was first and foremost, concerned with rural land questions; in southern province, its focus was the conditions affecting Africans and Europeans on estate lands. Nevertheless, the Commission did make recommendations on urban settlement, and their comments were informed by the Rhodesian and South African experience. In those territories, African urbanites were accommodated in native locations -- high density housing developments near, but not inside the towns. The locations served as labour reservoirs for urban industry and the concentration of population facilitated policing. The Jackson Commission suggested that Blantyre and Limbe take steps to build locations for government and company employees. The locations themselves might be segregated according to the class position of inhabitants. With this in mind, the report also proposed that freehold plots would likely prove very popular among "skilled natives" and that provision for these might be a good idea.⁵³

The commission's recommendations resulted in little development. Central and municipal governments disagreed over who was to pay for location construction and this held up development for over a decade and

⁵³ Jackson Land Commission Report, 25 April 1921, PRO, CO525/97, p.29.

a half.⁵⁴ While officials quibbled over shillings, people needed a place to live and government tardiness produced the exact phenomenon officials had hoped to avoid: the emergence of cosmopolitan, unregulated peri-urban villages. "Unauthorized settlements" constituted an African response to the housing crisis.

Peri-urban villages became home to the district's "floating" population of seasonal workers and other transients. In 1929, District Commissioner Fairfax-Franklin made a quick survey of the "overspill population" on the right bank of Limbe Stream opposite the municipal location. Closest to the water, he counted 315 temporary and 70 permanent inhabitants. Of the transients, 238 were Ngoni, 50 were Yao and the rest were Nyanja and other groups. Only 94 claimed to have their homes in Blantyre District. Farther away from the stream, the population was thinner but more stable. Fairfax-Franklin counted 127 persons in all, only thirteen of whom were transients. Again, the majority were Ngoni (84), followed by Yao(40), but 119 listed their home district as Blantyre."

Settlement of this type was most dense along the six mile track which joined Blantyre and Limbe townships. Here a string of villages grew up and even after location accommodation became available, many people preferred to reside in peri-urban villages where they were not liable to pay rent, could build the size and style of house they chose,

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.114.

⁵⁵ Fairfax-Franklin to Provincial Commissioner Southern Province, 7 February 1929, MNA, S37/1/1/4, F5

keep small gardens and a few animals.⁵⁶ Ndirande, close to Blantyre Mission, was designated Native Trust Land after 1936. Like Soche Reserve, (the bulk of which fell to the south of the Blantyre-Limbe Road) Ndirande fell within the jurisdiction of village headmen and Chief Kapeni. Hence, these settlements were not under municipal control. They were administered by the central government through Native Authorities.⁵⁷ Distance from the townships also meant that they were farther from policing, were not obliged to observe curfews and generally, could live life in a less regulated way. The emergence of unauthorized settlements coincided with the growth of an African market in house construction, carpentry and other complementary industries. There is some evidence of a modest rentals industry which grew in leaps and bounds after the Second World War.

⁵⁶ In Blantyre, the Naperi location for government employees was not begun until 1935. Limbe was slightly quicker to construct accommodation for its African workers. The Limbe Native Location was defined in 1932. The prospective tenant had to apply to the Town Council and was liable for three months rent in advance. Moreover, tenants had to erect their own houses on a 40' by 60' lot and the houses had to conform to Town Council design specifications. Tenants were not permitted to keep animals other than dogs, cats or fowls without Council's consent. It is not surprising that people preferred peri-urban village living to the locations. See, GN68/34, Limbe Native Location Bylaws, 1934, 18 June 1934.

⁵⁷ Under the Native Trust Land Order in Council, 87% of the protectorate's land became Native Trust Land, with powers of administration vested in the office of the Secretary of State for the Colonies. On a day to day basis, it was administered through Native Authorities, government approved chiefs. It could be leased to Africans and non-Africans for 99 years, but only after consultation with the appropriate Native Authority and, of course, the District Commissioner. See Bridglal Pachai, Land and Politics in Malawi, 1875 - 1975, (Kingston, 1978), pp. 182-183.

Table 4.1

Monthly Income through Self-employment in Blantyre District 1931
for Select Occupational Categories

Tailors (with own machine)	£1.10.0 to £2.10.0
Tailors (using employer's machine)	10.0
Butchers	2.0.0
Market Gardeners	2.0.0 to 3.0.0
Milk Vendors	2.0.0
Poultry Dealers	8.0
Bicycle and Gramophone Repairmen	2.0.0
Blacksmiths	1.0.0
Shoe Repairers	1.0.0
Sawyers	1.0.0
Carpenters	1.0.0

Source: Annual Report Blantyre District 1931, MNA, NSB7/1/2.

The figures for tailors with their own machines for 1930 were £2.0.0 to £3.0.0 and for those without, 15 shillings per month.

Table 4.2

Average Monthly Wages Earned in Southern Province through
Wage Employment, 1937 - 1938

	Factories		Estates	
	Skilled	Unskilled	Skilled	Unskilled
Tea	12.0	6.0	9.0	6.0
Tobacco	12.0	6.0	9.0	6.0
Cotton	12.0	6.0	—	6.0
Rubber	12.0	6.0	8.0	6.0
Sisal	12.0	6.0	—	7.0
Soap	10.0	6.0	—	—

Non-Agricultural Wages:

Railways	28.0
Domestics:	
Cooks and Head Boys	20.0
Others	8.0
Native Civil Service	55.0
District Administration	
Census Clerks	20.0
Court Messengers	14.0

Excluding poso (monthly food allowance).

Source: Bell Commission Report, 1937-1938, MNA, COM2/14, p.1.

The full and part time residents of the peri-urban area contributed to a demand for entertainment of all kinds and since beer brewing was illegal in the township, the peri-urban villages became the sites of dance parties and beer drinks.⁵⁸ Beer brewing, always a feature of village life, became a business for some women who used the income derived from this to pay school fees, purchase food, cloth and other consumer durables. Beer drinks were usually held at the brewer's house and which a canny woman would transform into a entertainment centre, complete with musicians (or a gramophone) and "bar girls" to draw custom.

Curiosity prompted the Commissioner for Southern Province to enquire into the profitability of beer brewing in 1931. The Blantyre Native Association furnished him with some figures which suggested a yearly profit of between £8 and £10 based on four to six brews of 120 gallons each.⁵⁹ This compared favourably with self-employment incomes

⁵⁸ On efforts to control brewing and distillation, see Chapter Eight. Jane Parpart has reported similar efforts to control brewing on the Zambian Copperbelt. In the 1930s, government prohibited the brewing of beer in Zambian towns and established government controlled beer halls instead. Profits allegedly went to welfare schemes. It would have been easier to regulate brewing in the compounds than in peri-urban villages since there was no easy way to monitor movements in and between villages. Jane Parpart, "Class and gender on the Copperbelt, Women in Northern Rhodesian Copper Mining Communities, 1926 - 1964", Claire Robertson and Iris Berger (eds.), *Women and Class in Africa*, (New York, 1986), p.144. See, GN94/09, Limbe Town Council Rules, 6 July 1909; GN2/10, Blantyre Town Council Rules, 18 January 1910; Blantyre District Notebook 1913, p.225, MNA, NSB3/13/1; Blantyre Town Council Minutes, 10 November 1930, MNA, BL2/1/1/4; Blantyre Town Council Minutes, 13 October 1931, MNA, BL2/1/1/5; Blantyre Town Council Minutes, 19 August 1940, MNA, BL2/1/1/10.

⁵⁹ The income may be an overestimate, since the women I spoke to said that they brewed only about three or four times a year. On the other hand, these women were married and so had access to their spouse's income. Single women may have brewed more frequently, or

and waged employment (See Tables 4.1 and 4.2.), but profits depended upon a woman's ability to brew well and sell her product quickly. As in all occupations, skill levels in beer brewing varied. A woman with a reputation for selling "sour" beer, obviously could not look forward to high returns.⁶⁰

Beer brewing is labour intensive work. It involves five days of preparation and requires a great deal of water to be fetched. Because of

have distilled kachasu (corn liquor) instead. While kachasu production was illegal, its production cost less and so it was attractive to women with little capital. H.D. Ng'wane, "Economics of kachasu distilling and brewing of African beer in Blantyre-Limbe villages", in R.J. Apthorpe (ed.), Present Interrelations in Central African Rural and Urban Life, proceedings of the Eleventh Conference of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, (Lusaka, 1958), 133-148. Interview 13 Harcourt Charles Mlangi, Cholo Road, Blantyre District, 10 February 1987; Interview 26 Hedges Bwanamakowa, Chikwawa Road, Blantyre District, 17 March 1987 (also informally talked to his wife and this is recorded on tape); Interview 41 Dr. Charles Kahumbe and Elsie Kahumbe-Northern, Chirimba, T.A. Machinjiri, 14 June 1988.

Also three interviews conducted by Dudley Chiwala in Zomba District, Interview 1 Mai E. Mwaona, Chilimire Village, T.A. Chikowi, Zomba, 31 March 1987; Interview 2 Mai Chikani, Chikanda Village, T.A. Chikowi, Zomba, n.d.; Interview 3 (group interview) Mai E. Chikanda, Mai H. Kalima, Bambo A. Chango, Mai Zinkambani, Mai Chasoma, Chikanda Village, T.A. Chikowi, Zomba, n.d.

⁶⁰ The Blantyre Native Association reported that a woman might brew six times a year. She might produce 6 twenty gallon barrels at a time. The cost for the production of 120 gallons of beer was 3 shillings for firewood, 3 shillings for millet, 4 shillings 6 pence for yeast, and 3 shillings 6 pence for maize flour. Should she need to borrow a neighbour's pots, this might cost 6 or 7 pence. Out of the 120 gallons, 20 would be given away free of charge to certain individuals, for example, the chief or headman and his officials. The beer was sold in basket cups which held about 3/4 to one pint. Therefore, she would sell 800 pints of beer at a penny each. Hence her gross taking was 67 shillings per brew. After subtracting 14 shillings for materials and maybe another shilling for equipment, her net profit was about 52 or 53 shillings or £2 13/-. Snowden Thomas, Secretary for the BNA to Provincial Commissioner Southern Province, 21 April 1931, MNA, NS1/3/4, F20-21.

this, brewers often helped each other and staggered production periods so that on any given night, beer could be found somewhere in the peri-urban area. This solved labour problems and since the work was "unpaid" reduced the need for cash. Women were compensated for their labour through the assistance of other women when it came time for them to brew.

But the materials needed to brew cost money; in 1931, an estimated 14 shillings was required to buy finger millet and sufficient maize meal.⁶¹ Of course, women might have their own reserves from home villages outside the towns, but it seems that more and more, women purchased maize and other essentials. Kachasu, a spirit similar to "white lightening", was less expensive to make and took less time. Since it required the husks of the maize, it did not eat into food supplies as much either. Kachasu was valued for its power as an intoxicant; it was much more potent than beer. Kachasu distilling was illegal, but this did not stop women from producing and selling it. Stills were situated in remote places. In Zomba, women kept their kachasu stills on the slopes of Zomba mountain. In Blantyre, they were even hidden in cemeteries. Both African and colonial authorities objected to kachasu production. Native Authorities and white collar Africans were concerned that it contributed to unruliness and social decrepitude. The state believed it responsible for violent crime and connected its sale and consumption to other social vices, particularly prostitution and thievery.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Authorities drew a connection between prostitution and venereal disease and beer and kachasu drinking. "Loose" women attended beer drinks and some of them engaged in petty prostitution. Unlike the prostitutes of Nairobi about whom Luise White has so capably written, Blantyre and Limbe's prostitutes do not seem to have made much money.⁶² But it is indisputable that authorities drew a connection between the consumption and sale of alcohol, prostitution and more serious crimes against property. Since most Blantyre-Limbe Africans lived in peri-urban villages, these areas naturally became the focal point of government concern. Nevertheless, government at all levels demonstrated no commitment to providing alternative accommodation for African urbanites, the desire for social control notwithstanding.

Municipal governments worried about the general threat to security that unregulated peri-urban populations posed. Prostitution and beer brewing were symptoms of a more serious condition. In 1929, Limbe Town Council singled out a particularly "bad patch" across Limbe Stream near the Soche Reserve where "large numbers of uncontrolled and idle natives" lived.⁶³ These people, it was alleged, were responsible for the rash of burglaries which had plagued the town in the previous 18 months.⁶⁴ The district government concurred and held that overcrowded

⁶² Luise, White, "Prostitution, identity, and class in Nairobi during World War II", Signs, Vol. 11, 2 (1986).

⁶³ Soche Reserve was demarcated and gazetted in 1908. GN85/08, 30 June 1908.

⁶⁴ Limbe Town Council Minutes of a Meeting, 27 May 1929, MNA, BL2/1/2/2.

conditions at Soche had created the problem and argued that prostitution and beer brewing were byproducts of congestion. These vices, it was asserted, constituted "a very grave danger to the whole district".⁶⁵ In spite of this, the authorities were very slow to provide decent housing for urban Africans. In fact, it was not until 1945 that they acknowledged the legitimacy of permanent African residence in town. The tacit acceptance of a permanent urban African population coincided with the first full frontal assault on peri-urban villages in the 1950s. (See Chapter Six) But by that time, these villages had grown into large communities each with its own distinct flavour and character.

... Ndirande was very gentle. It's only now that Ndirande has gone rough ... Chichiri was a bit rough ... The people always claim that it was because they moved people from Chichiri and people from Chichiri went to Ndirande and that made it very rough.⁶⁶

Chichiri acquired the same reputation for vice as had Soche on the Limbe side. Ndirande did not. It was home to "respectable African society". Its close proximity to, and long association with, Blantyre Mission may have had something to do with this. It was in Ndirande that the Mission set up its first pre- and post- natal clinic, and helped to establish the Ndirande Welfare Club, a social centre which took on a political function in the post-45 period.

In all peri-urban villages "traditional" authority (that is those chiefs

⁶⁵ Fairfax-Franklin to Provincial Commissioner Southern Province, 7 February 1929, MNA, S37/1/1/4, F5.

⁶⁶ Int. 6, Wales J. Mbekeani, Limbe, Blantyre District, 25 January 1987.

and headman sanctioned by the colonial administration) was almost nil by the 1930s. For this reason, in 1939, government began an experiment with suburban sub-councils. These bodies were to act as the local arm of the administration but in contrast to the "native authority" in the rural areas, suburban councils shared responsibility among the educated or commercial elite, headmen and chiefs. This was done because the "heterogeneous nature of the suburban population and its preoccupation with the affairs of the town" made the imposition of "orthodox" indirect rule based on ethnically discrete communities, impracticable.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, this power sharing was not without its complications.

If peri-urban settlements were less susceptible to colonial government control than rural villages, they were relatively more vulnerable to shifts in the colonial economy. The peri-urban community relied on purchasing power generated by the colonial economy and so the slump of the 1930s affected it adversely. It was mainly in estate employment that wages fell, but in other sectors, numbers employed declined sharply to greater disadvantage of workers since they were dependent upon wages for their subsistence. In 1931, the British Central African Company employed only 500 labourers as compared to 3700 in 1937.⁶⁸ The Nyasaland Railways, one of the biggest urban employers,

⁶⁷ Government Printer, Nyasaland Protectorate Annual Reports of the Provincial Commissioners for the year ended 31st December, 1939, (Zomba, 1940), p.17.

⁶⁸ Bell Commission Report 1937-8, No. 18 on "Paid Employment", 22 September 1937, p.2, MNA, COM2/13.

recorded 1380 employees in 1931 and by 1937, this had risen to 3484.⁶⁹

Unemployment had a negative impact on self-employment since most independent business people operated in the service sector. In 1931 District Commissioner Ion Ramsay reported on the state of African enterprise in Blantyre District. Of the occupations he listed, those most seriously affected were those in the tertiary or service sector. The most numerous occupational category was tailoring --there were approximately 180 tailors in the district in that year. There were about 42 butchers, 30 milk vendors, 50 poultry dealers, 20 egg dealers, 12 bicycle and gramophone repairers, and various canteen operators, market gardeners, beer brewers, fish mongers, and 15 maize retailers.⁷⁰ All these businesses catered mainly to the African population.

Blantyre District showed moderate signs of economic recovery in 1935 but this was uneven across occupational categories.⁷¹ The number of tailors declined with the slump, many having moved to the larger Southern Rhodesian market. Carpenters fared better having "turned their attention to catering for the increasing native demand for chairs, tables, doors, window frames etc."⁷² In that year, the Blantyre Mission Council decided to curtail its retail trade in foodstuffs in the interest of

⁶⁹ Nyasaland Protectorate Blue Books, 1931, 1937.

⁷⁰ Blantyre District Annual Report 1931, MNA, NSB7/1/2.

⁷¹ Bell Commission Report, No.16, p.12. The market for blankets, cotton piece goods and salt, three major imported African consumer goods, hit rock bottom in 1934 and began to climb again in 1935.

⁷² Annual Report Blantyre District 1936, MNA S1/66.H/37.

encouraging "the extensive native market gardening industry, now established locally."⁷³ The timber industry also grew dramatically in response to increased African demand for European style houses.⁷⁴

Another indication of growing prosperity within the African community was the 1937 decision to bring Africans under the Licensing Ordinance.⁷⁵ Africans were thenceforth compelled to submit licence applications which were evaluated according to the same criteria as all other trading licences. This included the problematic "congestion clause" under which licences might be refused if the Licensing Officer considered an area overtraded.⁷⁶ However, officials in Blantyre adopted a paternalistic stance on the application of the congestion clause vis a vis African traders. In 1938, for example, the District Commissioner for Blantyre reported that the district was saturated with retail traders, especially in the townships. Hence, he did not intend to grant any more licences.⁷⁷ He made good his intent the following year.⁷⁸ Ramsay's report

⁷³ Blantyre Mission Council Minutes, 21-23 July 1937, para. 259, MNA, BMC1/1/6

⁷⁴ Annual Report Blantyre District 1937, MNA, NSB7/1/4.

⁷⁵ Successful applicants were compelled to pay licence fees, albeit at a lower rate than non-Africans. GN32/37, 30 April 1937 set the licence fees at 10 shillings for the initial retail shop and 5 shillings for each additional. Licensing (Amendment) Ordinance, No. 4 of 1937, 30 April 1937.

⁷⁶ Licensing (Amdt) Ordinance of 1937, ss.4, (S11).

⁷⁷ Ion Ramsay served as District Commissioner and Licensing Officer. Annual Report Blantyre District 1938, p.9, MNA, NSB7/1/4.

⁷⁸ In 1938, 85 General and 125 Retail licences were issued. In 1939, Ramsay issued 90 General and 124 Retail licences. See, Annual Report Blantyre District 1938 and Annual Report Blantyre District 1939, p.7,

does not include a break down of licences by racial designation, hence we cannot be sure that his restriction applied equally to all traders.⁷⁹ In his draft report for 1939, however, Ramsay plainly stated that the congestion clause should not be invoked to the detriment of African retailers. In view of "rapidly awakening interest on the part of local Africans in trading syndicates", he stated, he would only invoke the congestion clause to protect non-African traders from non-African competition, but not from Africans. Eric Barnes, the Provincial Commissioner for Southern Province concurred with this and noted in the report's margins that he had "instructed the DC that he could act on this conclusion".⁸⁰ In other words, if an African trader applied for a licence in a "non-African" trading centre or in, for example, a township, his application would not be refused on the grounds of congestion. Non-African firms like the ALC and London and Blantyre Supply Company supported this practice, principally because they did not fear African competition. Moreover, to support the cause of the African trader meant that Indian retailers could be squeezed out. By playing the African card, Indian licence applications could be refused ostensibly in the interest of African development and welfare.

It was a clever tactic, but one which backfired. Indian traders, finding their applications denied, simply got African agents to apply for licences in their names! Government tried to prevent this by further

MNA, NSB7/1/5.

⁷⁹ Licence counterfoils or lists of traders are missing for these years.

⁸⁰ Annual Report Blantyre District 1939, p.8.

amending legislation in 1939. Applicants had to state whether they intended to trade on their own account or as an agent for another trader.⁸¹ But the ordinance proved hard to enforce. In 1943, an editorial in the Nyasaland Times insisted that the use of African agents by Indian traders should be stopped in the interest of African "development". The writer contended that of the 80 licence applications gazetted in June, over half were for African traders. However, the editor asserted, the majority of these were agents who bought from Indian retailers and resold at a very small profit.⁸²

It was also in 1937 that the Colonial Office quashed a bill for the protection of infant industries. The move for protection was spearheaded by a handful of white settlers who managed to convince the Legislative Council that for certain local manufacturing concerns, monopoly rights were essential for their development in the early stages of production. A bill was forwarded to the Colonial Secretary in April 1937.⁸³ The Colonial Office rejected the bill in the interests of "commercial equality and freedom of trade".⁸⁴

But one should not be misled into thinking that government was adverse to protectionism on principle. For industries which required considerable capital investment, like mining, some protection was in order.

⁸¹ Licensing (Amendment) Ordinance, No. 2 of 1939, 4 April 1939.

⁸² "The African in Trade", Nyasaland Times, 15 July 1943.

⁸³ Acting Governor Hall to Ormsby-Gore, 9 April 1937, MNA, S1/186/35, F36.

⁸⁴ Ormsby-Gore to Governor, 20 July 1937, in Ibid., F38.

Leroy Vail has narrated the tragi-comic story of the Nyasaland Railways fiasco.⁸⁵ One of the sub-plots in this tale was the restriction of motor transport to encourage use of the rail. In 1934, a Motor Traffic Licensing Board was created. Only a limited number of lorries were permitted to service certain routes, and pains were taken to curtail motor service along routes already served by the railway. The board's mandate was to grant licenses but only for vehicles "owned by persons who were primarily engaged in the road transport business in April, 1933". It was extremely difficult to get new vehicles licensed, although replacement vehicles were acceptable. Chief Secretary Tucker stated categorically that this was policy designed to protect the railway and extant transporters.⁸⁶ Whitehall was one hundred percent behind the Nyasaland government's decision to restrict motor vehicle licensing.⁸⁷ Almost any measure which would make the railway pay was acceptable since the Treasury was unwilling to assist Nyasaland in its financial difficulties.

In 1929, there were only three lorries and 61 motorcycles registered by Africans for the entire protectorate. Hence, motor vehicle licensing restrictions did not greatly impinge upon existing African transporters, but

⁸⁵ Leroy Vail, "The making of an imperial slum: Nyasaland and its railways, 1895-1935", Journal of African History, 16 (1975).

⁸⁶ Motor Traffic Licensing Board Minutes, 26 August 1935, 8 June 1938, 23 August 1938, 19 October 1940; and Note by Chairman Motor Vehicle Licensing Board, April/May 1936, MNA, R2/1/1/

⁸⁷ A Colonial Office Principal Secretary commented that while he was personally opposed to restrictions on trade licensing, in some "spheres of business activity ... the introduction of monopolies or quasi-monopolies [was] in the public interest". Minute: F.G. Lee, 16 June 1937, CO525/170/44187.

it certainly barred the entry of new transporters into this sector.⁸⁸ Up to 1940 only four African transporters were granted licenses to carry passengers and goods.⁸⁹ Licensing restrictions softened somewhat during the war, however, war-time rationing of petrol and spare parts made transport a precarious business. After the war, transport was one of the most important spheres of African enterprise.

In or around town, African participation in the economy was bringing about considerable social change. In 1939 one official lamented the lack of interest Ndirande residents showed in garden plots. He observed that "[t]hese folk are losing their agricultural background, becoming ordinary town dwellers".⁹⁰ Many peri-urban dwellers found it more convenient to shop in the town markets or to purchase a certain amount of their food from hawkers. By the late 1930s, there was little alternative since population density was about 400 persons per square mile around the towns. The Bell Commission reported a considerable trade in maize, groundnuts and fruits in the area as well as a fish trade valued at £10,000 per annum.⁹¹ Where peri-urban Africans still exhibited an interest in agriculture, they did so in the context of freehold and leasehold tenure. In 1939, four Africans purchased freehold land in

⁸⁸ See, Motor Vehicle Licence Census 1929, in MNA, R1/1/1

⁸⁹ Motor Traffic Licensing Board and Motor Traffic Control Board [name changed January 1947] October 1942 - October 1950, MNA, R2/1/4, R2/2/1.

⁹⁰ Marginal note by M.E. Leslie, Annual Report Blantyre District 1939, MNA, NSB7/1/5.

⁹¹ Bell Commission Report, No. 16, p.5

Chirimba. Ernest Chisuse, Andrew Mponda, Chokani and Njirigoma sought agricultural advice relating to the latest techniques in cropping and soil conservation.⁹² More Africans were to buy land there after the war.

Table 4.3
Number of Passes Issued to Africans Departing
from Blantyre District, 1923 to 1939

Year	No. Passes	Year	No. Passes
1923/24	525	1931	774
1924/25	235	1932	391
1925/26	294	1933	565
1926/27	220	1934	525
1927	170	1935	576
1928	302	1936	683
1929	354	1937	---
1930	479	1938	1477
		1939	1334*

Source: Annual Reports Blantyre District 1923-1939.
*Issue stopped with outbreak of war.

But for agriculturalists in general, land hunger grew and estate labour promised meagre incomes compared to the wages obtainable outside the Protectorate. Table 4.3 shows the number of passes (exit visas) issued to Africans in Blantyre District from 1923 to 1939. The figures reflect a gradual increase and because they do not include those persons who left without passes, should be treated as underestimates. Vail and White noted this change in regional migration levels and attribute it to growing landlessness in Southern Province. Whereas before 1945, Northern Province contributed over 50% of the total number of

⁹² Annual Report Blantyre District, 1939, MNA, NSB7/1/5.

migrants, by 1945, this figure had declined to 28%. People faced with eviction from overcrowded European estates and the scarcity of Crown Land had little alternative but to seek work abroad.⁹³

But it was not only the regional distribution of emigration which changed during the 1920s and 1930s. Leroy Vail and Landeg White suggest that character of migration also began to change in profound ways. In the years before the First World War, migrants "worked out strategies to sustain village life". Young men took turns migrating and staying at home to perform agricultural labour. In this way, cash needs could be met with minimal disruption to the home region.⁹⁴ Vail and White noted that the introduction of the District Administration (Native) Ordinance and an amended version of it passed in 1924 "strengthened the African role in controlling village society". While this legislation did not give chiefs the authority they later gained under the Native Courts and Native Treasuries Ordinances of 1933, it did designate Principal and Subordinate village headmen.⁹⁵ These government appointed chiefs played a custodial role in village life, overseeing tax collection for the state, and

⁹³ Migration from Central Province increased too. They suggest that this was because of declining tobacco prices after 1937. Leroy Vail and Landeg White, "Tribalism in the political history of Malawi", in Leroy Vail (ed.), The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa, (London, 1989), p.177.

⁹⁴ Vail and White, "Tribalism in the political history of Malawi", p.158; E.P. Makambe, "The Nyasaland labour 'ulendos' to Southern Rhodesia and the problem of African highwaymen', 1903 - 1923: a study in the limitations of early independent labour migration", African Affairs, 317 (1980), 548-66.

⁹⁵ Native Authorities Courts Ordinance and Native Authorities Treasuries Ordinance, Chief Secretary's circular, 18 March 1935 in MNA, NS1/21/10.

after 1924, meting out justice.⁹⁶ Vail and White suggest that the strengthening of chiefly power was welcomed by labour migrants since it assured supervision of their wives and property while they were abroad. Migrants expressed their appreciation by giving chiefs presents on their return home which "reinforced the chiefs' natural desires to maintain social order in their areas."⁹⁷ But it was not long before this "communal" migration broke down and young men undertook the journey south for their own personal gain. Some failed to return at all, reducing the labour pool in home areas and putting disproportionate stress on women to perform agricultural tasks.

In 1935, A. Travers Lacey was charged with the task of investigating the short and long-term effects of uncontrolled labour migration on village life and the Protectorate economy in general.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Nyasaland Protectorate, Orders in Council, Ordinances, Proclamations, Rules and Orders, etc., Promulgated in the Nyasaland Protectorate 1912 (Zomba, n.d.), Ordinance No. 13 of 1912, District Administration (Native) Ordinance, 1912; Nyasaland Protectorate, Ordinances of the Nyasaland Protectorate for the Year Ended 31/12/1924 (Zomba, n.d.), The District Administration (Native) Ordinance -- 1924, Cited in Vail and White, notes 46 and 47.

⁹⁷ Vail and White, "Tribalism in the political history of Malawi", pp. 158-9; 163.

⁹⁸ See, "Report of the Committee to Enquire into Emigrant Labour 1935", (Travers Lacey Report), MNA, COM8/1. Labour recruiters were barred from Nyasaland in 1909, but labour touts commonly set up on the borders of the Protectorate. The Travers Lacey Commission of 1935 was set up to evaluate the effects of labour migration on Nyasaland, and to make recommendations. The Commission's findings were almost completely negative, nevertheless, they advocated the return to controlled internal recruitment and the provision of economic alternatives to migration. In other words, despite of the adverse effects of migration, the Commission felt it impractical to attempt to halt it. Arguably, the Commission was informed by the state's hidden agenda, that migration, while disruptive to "social life", was an income generator. The problem of

Criticism of labour migration came from two main perspectives. First, settlers in Nyasaland objected to it because of its disruptive impact on the domestic labour supply.⁹⁹ Humanitarian concerns revolved around the unsavoury and anti-social tendencies which migration engendered. Prolonged absence of males detracted from the efficiency of home farms and put considerable social stress on the family and tribe.

While this view is most commonly associated with missionaries and indirect rulers, the Travers Lacey Commission stole the clothes of these critics. The committee had only two unofficial members - one settler and one missionary representative -- but seems to have come down on the side of the "humanitarians". It reported that "six months ago, there was not one of us who realized the seriousness of the situation ... the misery and poverty [of] hundreds and thousands of families and ... the waste of

migration for the state, was not so much one of mediating the adverse effects of migration, but how to tap migrants' savings for government coffers. The recommendations of Travers Lacey were used to hammer out the 1937 Salisbury Agreement. The next major report on labour migration is found in Margaret Read's study carried out in 1939. See, Read to MacKenzie-Kennedy, 4 May 1939 in MNA, S36/1/4/2, F1 and "Preliminary Report", 22 June 1939, in MNA, M2/3/10.

⁹⁹ Settler complaints about labour supply were constant throughout the period. At the root of them were the poor wages they offered to plantation workers which made them less attractive as employers than their counterparts elsewhere in the region. See, for example, a leader in the Central African Times, (Blantyre), 7 June 1908. The leader condemned any form of migration as detrimental to labour supply. In truth, the loss of male labour power was unevenly felt. In Mzimba District, 65% of the adult male population was absent in 1934, whereas in Blantyre District only 2% were absent. By far, the greatest number of participants in this activity came from the northern districts, but this was balanced out during the war when a full 70% of military recruits were drawn from Southern Province and served as far away as Ceylon and Burma. Travers Lacey Report, p.87. Minutes Central Labour Advisory Board, 14 September 1943, in MNA, LB3/3/1, F249-253.

life, happiness, health and wealth was colossal".¹⁰⁰

The commissions painted a gloomy picture of the future of districts with heavy emigration. Abandoned wives were deprived of "the highest fulfilment in life", motherhood. For them, "sexual intercourse plays little part except as the means for attaining motherhood". One wonders how the commission gathered evidence for such a surprising conclusion. Its own forecast of the consequences of uncontrolled migration contradict this depiction of Malawian womanhood. They warned that "home life will cease to exist; al belief in the sanctity of marriage will disappear. Immorality will be the rule". Decay would manifest itself in high rates of venereal disease infection and falling birth rates.¹⁰¹ It is hard to reconcile such predictions with a passive female population content to lapse into a state of lethargic infertility. In fact, women in regions of out-migration were becoming more independent and many took new lovers in their husband's absence.

Lack of control over women and migrants was the central concern of Native Authorities in regions of intense emigration. Northern Tonga Native Authorities, for example, complained to the Travers Lacey Commission that "emigration is beginning to lose its communal aspect and is becoming more and more a menace". In southern regions, the Commission found, "communal obligations" played even less of a role in

¹⁰⁰ Travers Lacey Report, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp.74-92.

the decision to migrate.¹⁰²

The state regarded African economic individualism as a deplorable aberration. Migration encouraged such unhealthy tendencies.

The individualistic outlook begins to take the place of that feeling of communal responsibility which experiences imposed on so many African tribes in their primitive states. Selfishness, man's lower nature, fights a battle against nurture, and as the old sanctions are absent, only too often wins.¹⁰³

In spite of the colonial impulse to protect African innocence from the evils of capitalism, migrant labourers managed to garner a considerable share of the trappings of that pernicious system as a result of their travels!¹⁰⁴ For example, one Manuel Morton Chirwa Nyasaland fell ill on a visit to Zomba from his work place in Salisbury in 1940. While abroad he left his affairs in the competent hands of a friend, Tymon Manda, who worked in the Salisbury Labour Office. Given the seriousness of his illness (leprosy) and the duration of the cure, Chirwa decided to remain in Zomba. He sent instructions to Manda regarding the disposal of his property. The list is impressive. Included in a list of Chirwa's household effects were two sewing machines, a gramophone and box of records, assorted furniture and a silver tea kettle. Chirwa also mentioned that Manda was to collect rent of 25 shillings per month from one Willie Abda from June 1940 for the use of a sewing machine. He

¹⁰² Travers Lacey Report, pp. 44; 46.

¹⁰³ Travers Lacey Report, p.70.

¹⁰⁴ Blantyre District Court - Civil Cases, Isaac versus Simon, Case No. 51 of 1922, 29 March 1922 concerned a dispute over inheritance of £21.15.6 sent from South Africa.

should also collect various debts owed to Chirwa from five other Nyasalanders working abroad and finally should settle Chirwa's bill to the Singer Sewing Machine Company of £3.¹⁰⁵

Migrants brought home more than material possessions. Travel changed people. Exposed to wealthier societies and a greater range of economic and social opportunities, migrants returned home with a surfeit of new tastes, desires, expectations and ideas. This frequently created tension at home. Material gain could mean social loss. In Malawi today, the expression "been-to" refers to those who have been abroad (usually overseas now) and have returned. Their old friends somehow feel that they are "putting on airs" as a result of their experience. In 1939, anthropologist Margaret Read observed the same phenomenon. She said that often, when migrants returned to their old village and tried to improve their lots through building a better house or buying more cattle, "their neighbours suspect them of aiming to unauthorized leadership".¹⁰⁶ Jealousy and lack of social acceptance in the village meant that many returnees felt alienated from their families and friends. Many brought back foreign wives and this added to their isolation. Not surprisingly, many migrants preferred to relocate to a cosmopolitan urban environment where a hybrid culture was forming.

¹⁰⁵ Labour Commissioner, Zomba to Nyasaland Labour Office, Salisbury, 30 October 1941, MNA, LB4/1/2.

¹⁰⁶ "Emigration from Nyasaland: its effects on village life", Preliminary Report, Margaret Read, 22 June 1939, MNA, M2/3/10.

By the mid-1930s, labour migration became a significant source of social stress. Among the Yao and Chewa, for example, Read observed that matrilocality was being replaced by utengwa or chitengwa, a modified form of patrilocal residence. The wife resided in her husband's village during his absence, but her children stayed in her village. In this way, the husband's family received the benefit of the wife's labour and were able to monitor her behaviour. The fact that the wife's family would consent to this indicates the increasing importance placed upon the male as a cash earner. Read herself speculated that the next step in this process of social change would be towards patrilineal inheritance and paternal child custody.¹⁰⁷ These were the exact issues raised by Blantyre's self-employed and white collar elites after 1945 (See Chapter Seven). The post-script to Mtemenyama's life history illustrates why.

Charles and Bela Mtemenyama weathered the inclement economy of the 1930s through "stick-with-it-ness" and hard work. By 1943, he expanded his activities and ensured his economic security by offering a dry-cleaning service. He was the only laundry owner to do so up to 1953.¹⁰⁸ So, through innovation, Mtemenyama survived and prospered. Charles and Bela had no children. After his death, Mtemenyama's maternal nephews moved in and appropriated everything -- from cleaning supplies to irons.¹⁰⁹ Because the land was owned freehold, they could not

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp.4-5.

¹⁰⁸ Nyasaland Times, 25 February 1943.

¹⁰⁹ Interview 6 Wales J. [Nyemba] Mbekeani, Mkulumadzi Bakery, Limbe, Blantyre District, 25 January 1987.

take this. Bela tried to carry on with the laundry that she and her husband had worked so hard to build, but in the end, she sold the plot and the business folded.¹¹⁰

Individual versus collective rights and responsibilities was a contradiction which permeates the history of African business in colonial Malawi and it is this theme which emerges again and again in succeeding chapters. It impinged upon government administrative and economic policy decisions and was a constant source of friction in the day-to-day functioning of African firms affecting their immediate and long-term viability.

The 1930s was a decade of economic stagnation, but also one of wide-sweeping and significant social change; change that placed more and more emphasis on the cash economy and the importance of the individual male worker. Self-employment in the urban milieu hinged upon servicing town populations. Economic contraction meant a small market and this limited the number of firms which could survive. Nevertheless, a peri-urban community with interests and attributes distinct from its village life continued to take shape. Migrant labour contributed much to social change within and without the towns by introducing new ideas and expectations. To some extent it provided capital, but mostly, expertise and a heightened sense of individual property rights as the court records illustrate. If travel gave Nyasalanders new ideas, the post-war economy gave them the opportunity to put these into practice.

¹¹⁰ Interview 23 Alexander Mataka Bandawe.

But the form that African enterprise and development had already taken by 1945 differed radically from that envisioned by policy makers, at least in the urban areas. Africans had begun to establish businesses based upon private property and individual ownership. They were using family labour for these enterprises in some cases, but they were also hiring labour, part time and full time. They were contracting debts and lending money on an individual basis. Fathers from matrilineal ethnic groups such as the Yao, Chewa and Lomwe were beginning to assume the financial responsibility for their children and to chafe at the bonds of kinship which drained resources from the firm and threatened to dissolve it after the death of the founder. The shift to individual ownership and responsibility strained marriages and put the wives and daughters of urban husbands increasingly under the control of men outside their kin group. In short, social and economic norms were changing at a rapid rate.

Nevertheless, colonial officials were convinced of the intrinsic communalism of Africa and sought to foster it. In one sense, this is not surprising, since the majority of the population lived in rural villages and still adhered to "traditional" customs. However, custom changes, and officials were informed by a mythical conception of Africa and Africans which had altered little since the nineteenth century. During the 1930s, the conviction that "tradition" was good, and that it might be slipping, led to the introduction of indirect rule structures. This was followed by the initiation of a cooperative movement which was to complement Indirect Rule and not least important, to increase production of economic crops.

Cooperatives, like Indirect Rule, were also attractive to officials because of their self-reliant nature. They would be effective mechanisms for concentrating capital and generating revenues at minimal state expense.

Perhaps it was because cooperative seemed to offer a cheap solution to increased production, officials held to the belief in the essential communalism of Africans. They did so in spite of (and arguably because of) strong evidence to the contrary. Mission education and the patriarchal cash economy reinforced the trend toward male-centric individualism wherever it was found.

Early colonialism did much create the very tendencies that administrations in the inter-war period strove unsuccessfully to remove. The next chapter deals with the relationship between indirect rule and cooperative development in Southern Province. The cooperative movement failed there and the story of its failure shows how far Africans had already "strayed" down an individualistic path.

Chapter Five

"Individualism is the antithesis of indirect rule":

Cooperative Development and Indirect Rule

in Colonial Malawi, 1936 to 1953

In July of 1952, Cooperative Officer, H.F. Bingham lamented that he had never "come across, anywhere in the Southern Province [of Nyasaland], a group of people who [had] shown the slightest managerial ability".¹ Cooperatives never became a popular form of economic organisation in the Southern Province of colonial Malawi. As at 10 March 1949, only seven were in operation and total membership stood at only 274 persons.² Yet, Bingham's explanation for this was all too pat. Far from misunderstanding what cooperatives were about, and far from being unable to operate them successfully, early cooperative participants lacked the will to organise along cooperative lines. Many of Blantyre and Zomba Districts' early "cooperators" were educated government clerical workers or company employees and many were, or became, private business people. As employees, as proprietors of their own shops or firms, as consumers or taxpayers, these people were exposed to non-African society. They understood government directives and non-African business practices. In fact, Africans' familiarity with the colonial economic system and their

¹ "Order for Dissolution" -- 16 April 1951, in MNA, AS/6/5507.

² Bingham to Fox-Strangways, Secretary of State for African Affairs, 10 March 1949, MNA, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Native Cooperatives, File No. 14019/7883, F26.

desire to compete effectively in it conflicted with the ideals underpinning the cooperative movement and eventually led to its demise.

In this chapter, it is suggested that cooperation was taken up as the logical economic partner of indirect rule. Like indirect rule, cooperation was considered eminently appropriate to African conditions because like "native populations", it was communally oriented. Also like indirect rule, self-help projects were inexpensive, and this was always attractive to penny-pinching colonial administrations. Finally, officials hoped for political benefits, i.e. that cooperation would work against pernicious individualism inherent in capitalist development. Cooperation offered a model of economic advancement which did not encourage the divisive and disruptive formation of classes, particularly those which might start to agitate for political rights. This, too, fitted in masterfully with the objectives of indirect rule; "traditional" compradores were desirable, but not a comprador bourgeoisie.

What officials failed to grasp was the extent to which class formation had already transformed Nyasaland by the 1930s. Much of this transformation occurred through exposure to the cash economy. Although not completely dominated by capitalist relations of production, the economy increasingly emphasised individual versus corporate participation, especially that of single male wage labourers.³ In the

³ While workers on the southern estates received monthly wages in some cases, they were also obliged to pay a labour rent under the modified thangata system. Central region tobacco was produced through family labour, either by share-cropping or on small holder plots. Nevertheless, in both regions, it was not unusual for farmers to hire casual (ganyao) day-labourers during planting and harvest periods.

south, land ownership, too, was shifting away from corporate usufruct toward independent leasehold and freehold tenure. Even in areas where matriliney was allegedly most tenacious, some people were beginning to accumulate large holdings under terms approaching individual tenure. According to Vaughan, "Mitchell's focus on the centrality of the matrilineage had to some extent obscured this evidence of economic differentiation within the village".⁴ The history of cooperation in Southern Province and particularly in Blantyre District is one which reveals the emergence of strong class divisions which successfully preempted the development of a viable cooperative movement.

The colonial economy was a hostile environment for large scale African productive and distributive enterprises. By the mid-1930s, wholesale and retail trade was firmly in the hands of large European and Indian firms. European planters controlled the tea and cotton plantations of the south which ran on cheap African labour. Non-Africans also controlled the distribution of the other main cash crop, tobacco, grown mostly in the central region by African tenants and small-holders.

⁴ I owe this observation to Megan Vaughan's close reading of Clyde Mitchell's 1949 survey carried out in Domasi District. He argued that matriliney was still alive and well in this area. But the land survey revealed that in spite of the fragmentary nature of holdings, typical of corporate inheritance, usufruct tenure and high population growth, this had not stopped the consolidation of very large holdings by a few. The survey Vaughan discusses is contained in MNA, MP 12036, and cited in Megan Vaughan, "'Better, happier and healthier citizens': the Domasi Community Development Scheme, 1949-54", Chancellor College History Department Seminar Paper No. 4, 1983, pp. 7-8.

In the early years of Protectorate rule, the state relied heavily on the cash earnings of labour migrants and peasant farmers for its upkeep.⁵ In 1914-15, for example, African direct taxation represented 60% of total government revenues. This percentage share declined in the 1920s and 1930s, while the absolute value of taxes collected continued to rise.⁶ Indirect taxation or duties levelled on imported goods came to be the biggest revenue generator, but again, Africans were the single most important consumers of imported goods, particularly, cloth.⁷ For the entire Protectorate period, the aggregate non-African contribution to government revenues was consistently less than the aggregate African contribution via direct and indirect taxation.⁸ It was only in 1942 that

⁵ Data for this paragraph is taken from a number of published government sources. See, Nyasaland Protectorate Blue Books for the years 1905-6 to 1938; Nyasaland Protectorate Draft Estimates, 1941, 1942, 1944, 1945; Nyasaland Protectorate Financial Reports, 1943 and 1944; Nyasaland Protectorate Annual Reports, 1947 to 1953. In 1942, the share of total revenues accruing from African taxation was 25% (£181,128) and from non-African Income Tax, 30% (£204,457). For the period from 1940 to 1953, the percentage contribution to government revenues accruing from African taxation averaged 16%.

⁶ The upward trend in absolute value of taxes collected holds for all years except 1931 to 1933. In 1934, the value of taxes collected rose 16% over 1933 levels. Thereafter, the percentage increase hovered around 2% per annum.

⁷ In 1906-7, customs duties represented 26% of internal revenue; in 1919-20, they accounted for 53% of internally generated revenues, surpassing direct taxation which accounted for 42%. See, Nyasaland Protectorate Blue Books, 1906-7, 1920; The Statesman's Yearbook, 1922, (London, 1922), pp. 200-201

⁸ In 1943, customs revenues and African direct taxation contributed £357,497 to internal revenues whereas non-African poll tax and income tax generated only £242,335 out of a total internal revenue figure of £750,919. Statesman's Year-book 1945, (London, 1945), pp. 222-224.

non-African income tax receipts exceeded African direct taxation in value and as a proportion of revenue.

Government had long suspected Africans of hoarding significant cash savings, but devised no effective way to tap these. It was estimated that in March 1916, the African population held £243,243 out of a total £388,641 in circulation.⁹ Government suspected much of this money to be buried in the floors of mud huts! In 1925, government estimated the African contribution to Gross Domestic Product in order to assess the magnitude of African savings. Expenditure for 1924 was estimated at £550,000, but recorded earnings were calculated as only £325,000.¹⁰ Even allowing for additional earnings of £50,000 from cotton and tobacco sales, it seemed that Africans had spent £175,000 from undetermined sources.

...It was shown ... that the total native income, after allowing for taxation, was increased from about £120,000 in 1914 to about £400,000 at present. Although native wages have not risen greatly since 1914, it would appear either that large[r] numbers are now employed or that natives work for longer

⁹ Currency Report 31 March 1916, 22 January 1917 in PRO CO525/72, p.7.

¹⁰ Expenditure was calculated by estimating the value of cotton cloth imported for that year (£400,000), the amount of hut tax paid (£110,000) and miscellaneous imports (£20,000). See, "Report of a Committee to enquire into Native Taxation", 10 June 1925, PRO CO525/111, p.11; 2. The breakdown of African earnings was as follows:

Agricultural earnings	£ 100,000
Government payments	50,000
Private employment	50,000
Domestic employment	25,000
Rhodesian remittances	<u>100,000</u>
(assumes 20,000 labourers @ £5 each)	
Total	<u>£ 325,000</u> -----

periods, and that the disbursements by Government and others to native employees and the amounts brought into the Protectorate from outside have very greatly increased during the last ten years, as also has the amount received from the production of economic crops for sale...¹¹

In addition to cash crop and migrant earnings, by the early 1920s there were many white collar and self-employed Africans whose yearly incomes exceeded £50.¹² An African income tax was debated in 1925, but was discarded when it promised to be too costly to administer.¹³ By the late 1920s, government had bigger crises to manage.

Nyasaland had long been the victim of competing corporate and imperial interests and had a long history of reliance on large corporations for its sustenance. This involvement saddled the Protectorate with a crippling railway debt after 1919 which, Leroy Vail has argued, retarded the development of African cash crop production and undercut the profitability of settler agriculture.¹⁴ Fiscal difficulties worsened with flagging export crop prices in the 1922-23 and 1928 seasons and the onset of the international slump. While always run on a shoe-string, never had the colony's economic position been weaker than in the 1930s.

Economic exigency dominated policy-making in the decade before the Second World War. Motor vehicle licensing restriction was invoked to

¹¹ Ibid., p.5.

¹² Bowring to Secretary of State J.H. Thomas, 23 July 1924, PRO CO525/108.

¹³ "Report of a Committee to enquire into Native Taxation", p.9.

¹⁴ Leroy Vail, "The making of an imperial slum: Nyasaland and its railways, 1895 - 1935", Journal of African History, 16,1(1975), 89-112.

prop up the railway white elephant and trade licensing legislation was altered to favour larger retail and wholesale merchants. But these were ad hoc adoptions, designed to give immediate relief from specific economic problems. Dire straits called for speedy and comprehensive action and led to policies designed to effect profound structural change. The overhaul of local administration was the first policy innovation aimed at this.

On one level, indirect rule was an administrative innovation. It meant the limited devolution of fiscal and judicial authority to designated chiefs and headmen. The function of Native Authorities (as government approved territorial chiefs were called) was to assist government by explaining policies and directives to the people and to administer justice at a local level. A series of ordinances passed in 1933 and 1934 set up the organisational framework for this.¹⁵ Headmen and chiefs drew salaries from Native Treasuries. A proportion of each hut tax payment was reserved for the treasury as were monies collected from court fines and fees, market fees, beer and fishing permits.¹⁶ After 1936, Native Treasuries

¹⁵ The Native Authorities Courts Ordinance and the Native Authorities Treasuries Ordinance outlined the rights and responsibilities of Native Authorities or chiefs appointed to administer on the behalf of the Protectorate government. Chief Secretary's circular, 18 March 1935 in MNA, NS1/21/10.

¹⁶ The amount fed into Native Treasuries was six pence for each hut tax collected. The rate of tax was set at six shillings per adult male in 1891 and chiefs received 10% of taxes collected in lieu of tribute. In 1893, the poll tax was changed to a hut tax of three shillings per hut and chiefs lost their "cut". In 1901, the hut tax was raised to twelve shillings per hut with a rebate of six shillings for those who worked for a European planter at a rate of three shillings per month. In 1912, the rate was lowered to eight shillings and in 1921, the rebate system was abolished and tax set at a flat rate of six shillings per hut. B. Pachai, Malawi. A

received 25% of rents paid for leaseholds on Native Trust lands which fell within the jurisdiction of the Native Authority.¹⁷

But indirect rule did much to accelerate the spread of the cash economy. Because Native Authorities and their officials depended on hut tax revenues for their cash incomes, they were eager to foster "tax mindedness" at the local level. Economic self-interest did much to enhance the efficiency and scope of tax collection and this drew more and more people into the market economy. It facilitated the collection of taxes over a wider area and by using local leadership personnel, the cost of administration was kept low.

Uncovenanted labour migration was considered to have had deleterious affects on the African community, but until the 1930s was tolerated as an unavoidable evil.¹⁸ The Travers-Lacey Report of 1935 advised a return to government regulated recruiting, but emphasised that the long term solution to problems attending labour migration would be economic, not administrative. The only way to discourage people from

History of the Nation, (London, 1973), p.84.

¹⁷ Native Trust Lands were created in 1936 under the terms of the Native Trust Land Ordinance. See note 56, Chapter Four. The remaining 75% of rents on Native Trust Land went to a Central Fund which was used to top up the Treasuries of those districts in a deficit position. Bell Commission Report, 1937-8, No. 14, "A note on Native Administration", by J.C. Abraham, Senior Provincial Commissioner, 22 September 1937, pp. 4-9, MNA, COM2/10.

¹⁸ See for example, "Report and suggestions relating to Nyasaland Natives at work in and proceeding to Southern Rhodesia", J.C. Casson, Superintendent for Native Affairs, 23 November 1907, in PRO CO525/22. Casson did not feel that migration in itself was bad; rather it required regulation and control.

seeking work abroad was to create viable economic alternatives at home.¹⁹ As destructive of custom as it was, labour migration was potentially an important source of revenue for government. Moral concerns took a back seat to economic imperatives and government paid greater attention to regulation than to the provision of economic alternatives.

In 1937, the Nyasaland and Rhodesian governments signed an agreement which permitted the Rhodesian Native Labour Association (RNLA) and others to reopen recruiting offices in Nyasaland. The Salisbury Agreement set out the terms and conditions under which labour migrants worked, travelled and were paid.²⁰ In part, the agreement addressed contemporary criticisms of the migrant labour system.²¹ While the satisfaction of humanitarian concerns served as a useful rationale for the agreement, its economic base was perhaps more germane to policy makers. The agreement guaranteed the Rhodesian employers a steady

¹⁹ Report of the commission to enquire into emigrant labour, 1935 [Travers Lacey Report], MNA, COM8/1, pp.44; 46.

²⁰ The Salisbury Agreement was signed by representatives of Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1937. It received sanction of the Colonial Secretary in June of that year. In July, an inter-territorial Standing Committee on Migrant Labour was struck to oversee implementation of the agreement which did not come into effect until 1 March 1938. See, Memorandum of proceedings at a conference on the Labour Agreement held at Salisbury on 7th, 8th, and 9th July 1937, MNA, LB1/4/1, F1; and another meeting on the 3rd and 4th December 1937 in MNA, LB1/4/1/, F3.

²¹ Eric Smith was Nyasaland's first representative on the Inter-territorial Standing Committee on Migrant Labour and in an undated memorandum (probably written sometime in 1939) submitted to same stated that the agreement was designed to "preserve village life and morals", but also would ensure the repatriation of earnings to Nyasaland. This would have the effect of increasing the level of imports and reviving internal trade. Eric Smith, Memorandum, n.d, MNA, LB1/4/2, F1.

supply of workers and assured the Nyasaland administration a share in the fruits of that labour. The agreement specified that all contracted workers would have tax withheld at source and had to comply with a system of deferred pay and compulsory family remittances home. In addition, contracts were limited to eighteen months and employers had to pay for transport of workers to and from the work site. In this way, government ensured tax revenues, but also that a certain portion of migrant wages would find its way back to the Nyasaland economy. In theory, this would make more funds available for domestic consumption and investment. Limiting work contracts to eighteen months and charging employers with the responsibility of repatriation would reduce the number of machona ("lost ones" or those who never returned) and preserve male labour power at home.

In the same year that Travers Lacey submitted his report, the Nyasaland government began to discuss cooperatives. Cooperatives can be linked to the migrant labour issue as an "alternative" to emigration, but they were also, the economic flip side of the indirect rule coin. Both projects were informed by a utopian, nineteenth century perspective of African society. Officials firmly believed that, although under attack, African societies were founded upon communal and egalitarian values.

In a brief discussion of the "peoples of British Tropical Africa", Lugard describes Southern Africans "of the Bantu type" as still being in "the tribal stage". His depiction of Bantu-speakers, generally, captures the stereotyped colonial image of Africans:

In character and temperament the typical African of this race-type is a happy, thriftless, excitable person, lacking

in self-control, discipline, and foresight, naturally courageous, and naturally courteous and polite, full of personal vanity, with little sense of veracity, fond of music, and "loving weapons as an oriental loves jewellery." His thoughts are concentrated on the events and feelings of the moment, and he suffers little from apprehension for the future, or grief for the past...

He lacks power of organisation, and is conspicuously deficient in the management and control alike of men or of business. He loves the display of power, but fails to realise its responsibility. His most universal natural ability lies in eloquence and oratory. He is by no means lacking in industry, and will work hard with a less incentive than most races. He has the courage of the fighting animal -- an instinct rather than a moral virtue. He is very prone to imitate anything new in dress or custom, whether it be the turban and flowing gown of the Moslem, or the straw hat and trousers of the European, however unsuited to his environment and conditions of life. He is an apt pupil, and a faithful and devoted friend.²²

Lugard divided African societies into three general types: "the primitive tribes, the advanced communities, and the Europeanized Africans." He distinguished between the first two categories by their adoption of monotheistic religions and the degree of centralisation of their state structures. The more "advanced" societies were most centralized and many, but not all, practised monotheism. Leaders of centralized societies, were usually the best "indirect rulers". The Europeanized Africans, those exposed to Western education and religion, inhabited a special place in imperial history; Lugard discussed them as a separate "race". While their "progress" was laudable, their claim to political responsibility, in his view, was not credible because they could not claim represent the illiterate

²² Sir Frederick Lugard, The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa, (London, 1923), pp.65; 69-70.

masses, so divorced were they from their culture.²³ Were Africa to develop "along its own lines" the focus of political change would reside with the traditional elite. The role that "progressive" Africans were to play in indirect rule was ambiguous.

The presence of "Educated Africans" was living testament to the fact that "traditional" Nyasaland was changing. Government was eager to guide the economic development of the "progressive classes" since "experience in other countries, including West Africa, teaches that individual as opposed to collective trading creates a class of men divorced from tribal influences, who become produce brokers and money lenders extending cash on the security of crops".²⁴ Cooperatives, like indirect rule structures, would flourish in Nyasaland since they emphasized corporate spirit and group effort, values and methods which they believed (or hoped) were still firmly rooted in the African psyche. They simply required an appropriate structure to bring them out. Indirect rule would recreate "traditional" authority patterns, and cooperatives would provide an appropriate mechanism for corporate economic "progress".

While some process of economic advancement was desired, trusteeship demanded protection of imperial wards from the destructive byproducts of "progress".²⁵ Lord Lugard, the architect of indirect rule for

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 72; 84.

²⁴ Bingham, Memo on Cooperative Consumer Societies, 29 May 1939, in MNA, S1/185/39, F 2-4.

²⁵ According to League of Nations Convention I of 10 September 1919, Mandatory powers undertook to "exercise sovereign rights or authority in African territories, to continue to watch over the preservation of the native populations, and to supervise the improvement of the

British Africa, articulated the "dual mandate" of imperial government in 1923. These encompassed the moral and material responsibilities of all imperial powers toward their "possessions" (including mandatory territories) and other nations of the world:

... The moral obligations to the subject races include such matters as the training of native rulers; the delegation to them of such responsibility as they are fit to exercise; the constitution of Courts of Justice free from corruption and accessible to all; the adoption of a system of education which will assist progress without creating false ideals; the institution of free labour and of a just system of taxation; the protection of the peasantry from oppression, and the preservation of their rights in land, &c.

The material obligations, on the other hand, are concerned with development of natural resources for the mutual benefit of the people and of mankind in general. They involve the examination of such questions as "equal opportunity" and "Imperial Preference," and other problems of economic policy. To these dual aspects of the Mandate of civilisation in Africa the following chapters are devoted.²⁶

Community coherence, ethnic identity and "tradition" were the essential buffers for societies under stress. In the view of Lugard and others, only through indirect rule could the civilizing mission be fulfilled. "Traditional" structures provided an essential security for peoples undergoing the transition from "primitive" to "modern" life. And the transition to "civilisation" was to be gradual.

The task of the administrative officer is to clothe his principles in the garb of evolution, not of revolution; to make it apparent alike to the educated native, the conservative Moslem, and the primitive pagan, each in his own degree,

conditions of their moral and material wellbeing". League Conventions of 10 September 1919, Cmd. 477 and 478 of 1919 cited in Lugard, *The Dual Mandate*, p.50. "Improvement" was negatively defined. That is, it should be "something higher than the aims and methods of the development syndicate or the assiduous cultivation of new wants". *Ibid.* p.58.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

that the policy of the Government is not antagonistic but progressive -- sympathetic to his aspirations and the guardian of his natural rights. The Governor looks to the administrative staff to keep in touch with native thought and feeling, and to report fully to himself, in order that he in turn may be able to support them and recognise their work.²⁷

The "traditional" trappings of indirect rule notwithstanding, both it and cooperative development were essentially interventionist. In this sense, there was little "traditional" or "evolutionary" about either. The cornerstone of indirect rule was the Native Authority, the "traditional" leader through whom the colonial state governed. Believing that problems of administration were founded in miscommunication rather than concrete conflicts of interest, government sought to educate chiefs so that they and District Commissioners would be speaking the same language. With this in mind, a training programme for chiefs was begun at the Jeanes Training Centre at Domasi in 1934. Provincial Commissioner Leslie explained the necessity for training in his welcoming speeches to incoming Native Authorities:

... government knows that it is not easy to be a chief and so the government wishes to help the chiefs as much as it can to learn about new ways to aid their people to progress; to understand the reasons for changing old ways; and so to fit them for the task they must do as chiefs. This task is to be the leaders of their people.²⁸

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.194.

²⁸ Provincial Commissioner Southern Province, "The Importance of Understanding", chapter for a book to be used in talks to chiefs at Jeanes Training Centre, n.d., in MNA, NS1/8/4. The chiefs' programme ran from April 1934 to 1949. See Barbara Morrow, "...it is not easy to be a chief: training for Native Authorities in the 1930s in Nyasaland -- colonial ideals and grass-roots realities", Chancellor College History Department Seminar Paper No. 2, 1986. It is perhaps no surprise that the Jeanes slogan was "Better, happier and healthier citizens, and cooperation for social improvement". Memo, Director of Education to Provincial and

The chiefs' school sought to blend old and new and like other programmes launched at Domasi, instruction emphasized collective responsibility and self-help. Chiefs received instruction in civics, arithmetic and book-keeping, hygiene and sanitation and historical geography. They were also taught simple economics related to raw materials and local manufactures and how Nyasaland fitted into the imperial scheme. All this instruction was with an eye toward creating efficient bureaucrats, but as Barbara Morrow has shown, chiefs had their own ideas about the role they should play in indirect rule. While the authorities aimed to create better administrators through training in literacy and numeracy, chiefs were more interested in political power. Two years after the first "chiefs' course" Native Authority Chikulumaembe suggested a parliament of chiefs; one which would assist in the formation of policy.²⁹ Not surprisingly, his suggestion was rejected.

While chiefs were to be taught how to be chiefly, the rest of the African population was to be taught thrift, prudence and honesty through cooperation. Cooperative development was first discussed in 1936 after the introduction of indirect rule and submission of the Travers Lacey Report.³⁰

District Commissioners, January 1935, cited in Megan Vaughan, "Better, happier and healthier citizens': the Domasi Community Development Scheme, 1949-54", Chancellor College History Department Seminar Paper No. 4, 1983, p.1.

²⁹ Morrow, "'...it is not easy to be a chief'", 3.

³⁰ Serious discussion of cooperatives did not take place until 1936, however, the cooperative ideal for the urban environment was in the minds of administrators before this. The Ndirande Welfare Centre opened in August 1933 and was to function as a weekly clinic for women and infants. This joint African Church of Scotland Mission effort was followed up in September with the formation of the Ndirande Welfare Club -- an

Significantly, the first forum for discussion was the Nyasaland Protectorate Native Welfare Committee. The Committee was formed in 1936 to oversee "development" projects and its financial base was derived from the capitation fees paid out by employers of labour and labour recruiters.³¹ Because officials reckoned that "tribal authority" in the protectorate was weak (after all, "traditional" chiefs had only had the legitimizing force of indirect rule behind them for three years!) participation in cooperative endeavours would have to be on a strictly voluntary basis. In these early days, officials had only a vague notion of what shape the cooperative movement would take in Nyasaland, but documentation suggests that they hoped it would focus on the production and distribution of economic crops. The Chairman of the Native Welfare Committee expressed as much when he said that cooperative marketing would probably be more

athletic and social club composed of educated clerks, civil servants and their families. In the following year, the Provincial Commissioner Southern Province J.C. Abrahams minuted of the Ndirande Welfare Club "This enterprise contains the nucleus of a cooperative society for wider purposes". Blantyre District Annual Report 1933, G.F. Phillip, MNA, NSB7/1/3, F126 and Senior Provincial Commissioner Abrahams marginal note, Annual Report Blantyre and Neno Districts 1933, p.8, MNA, S1/247.H/34.

³¹ It was the Travers Lacey Report which recommended that labour recruiters and employers should pay a capitation fee, or a levy on each worker hired or recruited. This money should then be put in a fund which would be used for the betterment of Africans generally. This was first done in April of 1937 when the Tanganyika Forests and Lumber Company was levied a £1 fee for each recruit. After January 1938, Southern Rhodesian recruiters were assessed a 10 shilling fee per worker and after February 1939, all recruiters were assessed. The Witwatersrand Native Labour Association was charged a lower fee of only six pence per head in return for a guarantee that it would shoulder the expense of travel and food for workers while en route to and from the south. Eric Smith, Memorandum on Migrant Labour, n.d., MNA, LB1/4/2, F1.

useful in Nyasaland than credit societies.³² By extension, the assumption was that cooperatives would have a rural focus. Men like Governor Kittermaster had little doubt that were cooperatives a sound idea, only slight encouragement would be needed to garner the support of Nyasaland's Africans who were "unusually intelligent especially where making money is concerned". He was sure that "if a profit [could] be shown ... natives [would] accept the scheme".³³

In an effort to gather more information, Kittermaster petitioned the Colonial Office in July of 1936. He asked that they send out a cooperative expert. The Colonial Office suggested that the Nyasaland government send one of its own administrative officers for three to four months training in Ceylon where interesting work on cooperatives was already taking place. This gave their operative "hands on" experience and saved the Colonial Office the expense of funding such training. This would be provided by the Carnegie Foundation, an American philanthropic organisation with close ties to the Jeanes schools.³⁴

The man chosen for the job, District Commissioner H.F. Bingham, returned from a seven month fact-finding mission to Europe, West Africa

³² A.D.J.B. Williams to Chief Secretary, 9 October 1936, S1/1566II/26, F 17-18.

³³ Kittermaster to J.H. Thomas, 7 May 1936, *Ibid.*, F3.

³⁴ Ormsby-Gore to Kittermaster 23 July 1936, *Ibid.*, F10-13. The Colonial Office felt that an expert visit would cost in excess of £2000.

and Ceylon in March 1938.³⁵ He delivered an enthusiastic report to the Native Welfare Committee outlined a cooperative plan for Nyasaland.³⁶ The cooperative movement was to begin with the establishment of credit societies to "instil the idea of thrift among the people" and provide "a foundation of business knowledge". It would also foster "the creation of the cooperative spirit where everyone works for one common interest".³⁷

The target group for initial experiments with thrift and loan societies was not, however, the village dwelling farmer, but the mainly urban educated "detribalized" Africans.³⁸ Bingham's colleagues were sceptical. The main attraction of cooperatives to them was to increase production of cash crops.³⁹ Was not one of the biggest attractions of cooperation its compatibility with "traditional" African society? Why

³⁵ A.D.J.B. Williams, Chairman of the Native Welfare Committee to Chief Secretary, 9 October 1936, in *Ibid.*, F17-18. Minutes of 12th Meeting of the Native Welfare Committee, 2 September 1936, in *Ibid.*, F15.

³⁶ Report on a Tour undertaken to Study Cooperatives in Europe, West Africa and Ceylon. H.F. Bingham, 14 May 1938, MNA, NS1/3/6, F50-89. From 15 September to 11 October, Bingham visited Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia and the Baltic. From 20 October to 23 December, he visited Nigeria (mostly the major towns) and Gold Coast. He was in Ceylon from January 15 to March 1938.

³⁷ Minutes of A Special Meeting of the Native Welfare Committee, 11 April 1938, MNA, M2/3/10, F13.

³⁸ Morrow has pointed out that educated chiefs were the preferred candidates for the chiefs' school at Jeanes. Morrow, "... it is not easy to be a chief", p.2.

³⁹ The Native Welfare Committee discussed this at some length since members believed that cooperatives had an important role to play in production. Already enterprises were established which might have been turned into cooperatives, for example, ghee production at Mzimba and rice at Nkhotakota. *Ibid.*, F13b.

should cooperatives start with ventures like thrift and loan societies, especially those focused around African white collar workers?

Bingham insisted on beginning with the educated elite for two reasons; one was practical, the other, political. He contended that illiteracy and lack of business knowledge were the main stumbling blocks for cooperative development. Hence, educated Africans had the requisite skills to make a go of it. Educated Africans were more or less concentrated in the administrative and economic centres which would ease supervision. Moreover, "thrift and loan" societies were a crucial first step in establishing a cooperative movement. They concentrated investment capital which was crucial for the growth of other kinds of cooperatives. Marketing and producer cooperatives, he argued, were the "ultimate development of cooperation", for which the average Nyasaland tribesman of 1938 was unprepared.⁴⁰

Second, the educated elite would benefit from credit societies "morally" as well as materially. To wit, cooperatives might serve to forestall the emergence of unsavoury political and economic tendencies among this group:

...if a handful of educated Africans can get command in the economic sphere without proper guidance, they will develop on individualist and capitalist lines (in imitation of the European) and will grow out of sympathy with the troubles and difficulties of their own people.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid., F13a.

⁴¹ Annual Report, Cooperative Movement, H.F. Bingham, 25 January 1939, MNA, NS1/3/6, F111-123.

Hence, the cooperative impulse could launch a preemptive strike against the emergence of pernicious individualism and capitalism. Individualism, closely associated with capitalism, was the "antithesis of indirect rule".⁴² It had to be ferreted out for the greater political and economic good. The cooperative model would divert the ambitious African capitalist from his anti-social path. An individualistic, economically empowered and politicised African class was to have no place within the new indirect rule system.

Bingham went on to say that educated Africans were keen on the project. A preliminary survey conducted in May 1938 revealed a "general admission of indebtedness" among white collar Africans. He also cited two cases where lack of capital and credit hampered artisans in their attempts to start up business. The first was a carpenter, who, having no money with which to buy his own tools, went to South Africa to earn money to buy them. The second was a brickmaker who was forced to abandon a contract for lack of funds to pay his workers.⁴³ Thrift and loan societies could do much to help such people.

Just as Megan Vaughan discovered in her study of community development projects at the Jeanes Centre, it was the educated elite who found "modern" schemes most appealing, but not for the reasons the authorities hoped. Bingham was convinced that cooperatives were good

⁴² Minute: Chief Secretary Ken Hall, 11 July 1931, MNA, NS1/3/12, 197.

⁴³ Cooperation Interim Report, 23 May 1938 by H.F. Bingham, NS1/3/6, F.47-49.

and if they were explained carefully their adoption would be automatic. As with community development and chiefs' programmes, communication was considered to be the key. This blinkered view, rooted in a fundamental paternalism, denied the autonomous decision-making power of incipient "cooperators". It further revealed the manifest confusion of colonial authorities over the role of the individual in communal projects. The ideals of community development and cooperatives assumed the paramountcy of corporate interests over those of the individual, but the success of such schemes rested upon the combined efforts of individuals. This was more than an academic point, since the enthusiasm of scheme followers was usually based on self-interest. In Vaughan's words:

... the community development enthusiasts who sat around in conferences in Britain and advised the Colonial Office, professed to see "individualism" as a creeping danger to African societies, but in Domasi it became clear that those who responded to the innovations and requirements of the scheme were precisely those people who showed the clearest signs of individualism, in the Western sense. Not surprisingly, "self-help" appealed to those with education and skills, frequently those employed by the scheme itself or by the Jeanes Training Centre, and often those from outside the district.⁴⁴

The role of the ambitious individual in cooperative ventures posed the same dilemma. However, Bingham believed that these people should be involved in the cooperative project and that the experience would bring out their cooperative spirit and save them from the evils of capitalism. He could not have been more incorrect.

⁴⁴ Vaughan, "Better, happier and healthier citizens", p.15.

By January 1939, there were three "thrift and loan" societies in Southern Province and by May, there were others in Lilongwe, Kasungu, Mzimba, Dowa and Nkhotakota.⁴⁵ They were dismal failures. The Mzimba, Nkhotakota and Dedza societies were wound up within the year.⁴⁶ Others struggled on after a fashion but had folded by 1942-43.⁴⁷ Among them were the Blantyre Native Civil Servants Thrift and Loan (BNCSTL) and the Blantyre Commercial Clerks Thrift and Loan (BNCCTL). As at February 1943, the latter had a membership of fourteen, £47.17.5 on account and £29.19.4 in loans outstanding.⁴⁸

The long term objective of such societies was to provide a source of capital for investment in consumer and producer cooperatives. But members were impatient. Cooperative meeting minutes reveal the chronic problem of bad debts and members who failed to keep up their subscriptions.⁴⁹ Subscriptions fell off because members saw little immediate benefit from the societies. They favoured the idea of a

⁴⁵ The Native Civil Servants (Blantyre) Thrift and Loan, the Zomba Cooperative Thrift and Loan and the Commercial Clerks (Blantyre) Thrift and Loan. The Native Civil Servants (Blantyre) Cooperative was formed on 30 June 1938 and the other two on 1 October 1938. Original memberships stood at fifteen, twelve and fifteen respectively. Minute, Bingham, 24 June 1939, MNA, S11/1/2/4, F23d.

⁴⁶ Bingham to Chief Secretary, 27 August 1940, in *Ibid.*, F69.

⁴⁷ District Commissioner R.H. Garvey to Provincial Commissioner Southern Province, 3 February 1943, MNA, NSB3/3/6, F13.

⁴⁸ Garvey to Provincial Commissioner Southern Province 3 February 1943, in *Ibid.*, F12.

⁴⁹ Blantyre Native Civil Servants Thrift and Loan Society Minute Book, 20 May 1938 to 7 May 1941, MNA, NA1/1/1.

consumers' cooperative -- something which would give immediate returns in the form of lower prices for consumer goods. The BNCCTL, for example, attempted to function like a consumer society in 1941 when its Vice President received authorization to buy three tons of maize for resale to members at reduced prices.⁵⁰ But this was an isolated incident and members lost interest in the project.

In order to salvage the movement, Bingham decided to force the pace and conceded that other types of cooperative ventures might be tried. In a 1939 memorandum he reiterated the benefits of cooperation in terms of raising general prosperity rather than the enrichment of a few and added, significantly, that cooperative trading "provides a direct and comprehensible outlet for the Native's surplus capital". He pointed to the increase in postal money orders paid out (in Northern Province especially) and lamented that in many districts, these funds were invested in cattle. Trading cooperatives might provide an attractive alternative to what was, in his mind, "unproductive" investment. Again he stressed the value of cooperatives to counteract the "evils inherent in individual Native Trading".⁵¹

In 1939, a consumers' cooperative store was set up at the Jeanes Centre at Domasi in Zomba District. In August 1939, another one was proposed for Blantyre Mission where several enthusiasts had begun to

⁵⁰ Ngolleka bought maize from Henry Ascroft, a coloured transporter and produce dealer. Blantyre Native Civil Servants Thrift and Loan Society Minute Book, 7 May 1941 in *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Memorandum on Cooperative Consumers' Societies, 29 May 1939, MNA, S1/185/39, F2-4.

pool resources for the project.⁵² In order to train incipient cooperators, a programme was set up at the Jeanes Training Centre in Domasi, the same venue for the training of indirect rulers. There, Southern Province Africans enjoyed the benefit of a lecture series on the subject.

"Cooperators-in-training" attended lectures on the theory of cooperative development and the relationship of cooperative stores to the movement as a whole. People were told that consumer cooperatives were to be totally self reliant. They must raise their own capital through subscriptions and investments. All transactions would be on a cash basis only and credit could be extended only in very special circumstances.⁵³

Jeanes trainees went away and adapted what they had learned to suit their own objectives. Blantyre District Commissioner Ion Ramsay reported a "definite indication in several areas, of movements with the object of forming African trading syndicates". The impetus for these came from several Jeanes trainees.⁵⁴ It was not the egalitarian, profit sharing message which attracted Jeanes graduates. Rather, they were attracted by notion of pooling resources to further individual business aims. Cooperation had become little more than a smoke-screen for private trading.

⁵² Minute: G.H. Adams, Financial Secretary, 15 August 1939; and Minute: Chief Secretary Hall, 17 August 1939, *Ibid.*

⁵³ Memorandum on Cooperative Consumers' Societies, 29 May 1939, *Ibid.*, F2-4.

⁵⁴ Annual Report Blantyre District 1939, p. 7, in MNA, NSB7/1/5.

Africans were more interested in forming companies and syndicates than cooperatives, but received no assistance for this. On the contrary, the formation of syndicates like the Ndirande Trading Company (NTC) at Nsoni, was discouraged. The NTC was formed in 1938. It had ten shareholders, all of whom belonged to the educated elite. Jason Kachale, brother of one of the founders, recalled nine of the ten. They were: John Kachale (a Town Council clerk), Samuel Nankhuni (a teacher), Sidney Somanje* (a teacher at Henry Henderson Institute), Willie Gray Kufa* (an African landowner), Norman Mambelela* (a printer at Blantyre Mission), William Bruce Matenje* (a teacher at Blantyre Mission), Reverend J.D. Sangaya*, William Harrison Pembereka*, and Grant Kamlangira.⁵⁵ The NTC sold clothes and was located outside Blantyre township at Nsoni on Willie Gray Kufa's estate.

Bingham predicted that the company would probably not fly, but even if it did, such an entity ran counter to the greater good of the Protectorate's African population and should probably be discouraged. In Bingham's words,

There is a decided tendency among educated natives to copy the purely capitalist methods of Europeans. Every man who can command a small capital wishes to plunge into business. With lack of capital and above all lack of business experience this is likely to lead to disaster. The Ndirande Trading Company, recently registered, is an example. It is probably undesirable to stand by and watch the creation of a capitalist class rather than to encourage development on

⁵⁵ Interview 39 Jason Gray Kachale, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 13 June 1988. Sangala to District Commissioner, 5 August 1941, MNA, NSB3/3/5, F9. Confirmed by Interview 31, Mokrin Sangala, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 7 May 1987.

* These people were all members of the Ndirande Welfare Club in 1941.

communal lines. I have thought it worth while to mention this tendency for cooperation can do much to act as a brake upon purely selfish effort and may help to educate more advanced natives in their responsibilities towards their more backward brothers.⁵⁶

Jason Kachale said that government officials tried to convince NTC owners that a cooperative structure would be better for them, but they resisted this:

It wasn't a cooperative, but the government was advising these people to make a cooperative, but they say they preferred a trading company. And they [the government?] said that it was difficult, because you know, to run a company of that nature ... The government was ... doing something ... encouraging people to create cooperatives. But these people did not involve themselves in cooperatives.⁵⁷

According to Kachale, NTC members resisted cooperation because they feared this would result in a government takeover. The NTC dissolved in 1946 because of "misunderstandings" between members.⁵⁸ Kachale did not supply details of the break up, but implied that NTC failed from lack of small "c" cooperation. In Kachale's view, the way to avoid disagreement was to do business on one's own; too many cooks

⁵⁶ Bingham to Abraham, 3 September 1938, MNA, NS1/3/6, F97-100. It is noteworthy that the Ndirande Trading Company "disaster" lasted from 1938 to 1946, far longer than most cooperative ventures commenced at the same time. Interview 39, Jason G. Kachale.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Mr Kachale was hesitant to give details surrounding the dissolution of the NTC, but implied that personality conflicts were at the root of it. Like many informants, he expressed a clear preference for individual enterprises rather than joint efforts, since in the former case, managerial decision making was vested in a single person. The NTC had an unclaimed balance of £61.10.4 in its account at Barclay's Bank as at December 31, 1946. The account's penultimate transaction was dated September 25, 1944. GN41/47, 31 January 1947.

spoiled the broth. When asked to compare the Ndirande Trading Company with the business of a prominent Ndirande grocer, Mr. Kachale volunteered that he thought Mr. P. "was better because he was doing by himself, by his own personal courage and efforts".⁵⁹ It seems that many potential cooperators held the same opinion and were hesitant to cast in their lot with a large number of people in a cooperative venture.

Most cooperatives in the Southern Province which functioned in the period up to 1945 did so marginally or not strictly speaking as cooperatives. Cooperatives like that proposed for Matowa or the Lauderdale African Coop in Mlanje District resembled companies more than cooperatives.⁶⁰ That is, their membership was not always open. In April of 1939, Ramsay was approached by two representatives of a new syndicate who wanted to apply for a trading licence. Thinking that these fellows were actually part of a cooperative enterprise and so did not require a licence, Ramsay referred them to Bingham. Bingham advised that this was indeed not a coop but more closely resembled a limited company. Consequently, he suggested that a retail licence was indeed

⁵⁹ Interview 39 Jason Gray Kachale.

⁶⁰ District Commissioner for Mlanje Rangeley to Bingham, 27 July 1944, MNA, S11/2/5, F12. The Lauderdale African Cooperative was formed by Joseph Chingwalu, a Clerk-typist who worked on the Mini Mini Tea Estate. The society had 38 members whose aim was to contribute £10 each. By July 1944, they had managed to collect £52.18.0. Rangeley remarked that these Africans had formed more of a company than a cooperative, and that the "leaders are among the better and more progressive class of African and their effort at cooperation is probably worth direction into better channels and encouragement".

required.⁶¹

After 1945, concerted efforts were made to "rationalize" the cooperative movement in Nyasaland. The decision to do so came out of a report submitted by a Cooperative expert, W.K.H. Campbell from Nairobi. Campbell toured the Protectorate for twelve days in August and visited a number of "co-operative or semi-co-operative organisations". What he found demonstrates the degree to which cooperatives had failed to adhere to ideal type. The Nkhotakota Rice Scheme was running like a limited company with 400 shareholders and the majority of the 4,000 people actually producing rice did not share in the profits. He found similar developments at two ghee production centres at Zomba and Chitara. Ghee producers were

merely capitalists who have had the enterprise and business acumen to purchase separators and churns and erect the simple buildings required. They are usually school-masters, butchers etc., with no other interest in the ghee industry, and they appear to be battenning on it to the detriment of the actual milk producers.⁶²

Campbell was concerned to preempt the further development of such inequitable arrangements and he believed, like Bingham, that cooperatives might do much to ameliorate the situation. In light of this, and pushing from Bingham, a permanent Cooperative Division was

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8. The shop was at Matowa, 10 miles south of Blantyre township and 2 miles from the nearest non-African shops.

⁶² W.K.H. Campbell, Cooperative Adviser, "Report on a visit to Nyasaland", 1 September 1945, MNA, S11/1/2/2.

created in 1946 and Bingham became its first Registrar in 1947.⁶³

Cooperation was broadened to include producer and marketing cooperatives, but these initiatives did little to enhance cooperative popularity in the south.

The last effort to form a cooperative in Southern Province was initiated by a court clerk, James Frederick Sangala. In September 1943, Sangala had already begun to organize Blantyre Africans to form a "Nyasaland African Company" which was to serve as a mouthpiece for African interests.⁶⁴ This company or "Nyasaland African Association" would concern itself with general Protectorate matters and "cooperate with the Government, Commercial, Planter and Missionary bodies and the Native Authorities in any matters necessary to speed up the progress of Nyasaland".⁶⁵ Its mandate echoed much of the rhetoric of Bismarck's Native Industrial Union of 30 years before, and it had a strong economic

⁶³ The Cooperative Societies Ordinance No. 20 of 1946, 31 August 1946; Annual Report of Registrar of Cooperative Societies, 1947, March 1948, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Coop Division, File No. 14019, F20a.

⁶⁴ J.F. Sangala was an educated, highly politicised individual of considerable drive and vision. He was a respected member of Blantyre's African community, Chairman of the Ndirande Welfare Club, a founder of the Nyasaland African Congress, with a long and respectable employment record in both public and private sectors. Minutes of General Meeting, Ndirande Welfare Club, 15 June 1941, MNA, NSB3/3/5, F9; "A Brief History of James Frederick Sangala s/o Sangala", District Commissioner Dedza, June 1949 (autobiography) MNA, SA/1/1/1 and Interview No.31, Mokrin Sangala s/o J.F. Sangala, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 7 May 1987. Sangala to Senior Provincial Commissioner, 3 September 1943, MNA, NSB3/3/6, F1. The letter was published in the Nyasaland Times, Bantu Mirror (Bulawayo), and Nkhani za Nyasaland (the government approved vernacular paper of the day). 1 October 1943, Ibid., F2.

⁶⁵ Nyasaland Times, 25 October 1943.

component.⁶⁶ In 1944, the Nyasaland African Congress was formed to articulate the grievances of Africans protectorate wide, and although slower to take shape, the principle of economic self-reliance was not abandoned.

In July 1947, Sangala managed to organize a meeting of several Native Authorities and interested African retail traders in Blantyre to discuss the establishment of a wholesale cooperative store. It was to be owned and managed by Africans. The objective was to reduce the reliance on European and Indian wholesalers. White collar African employees from Blantyre, several independent entrepreneurs and traders from as far afield as Chiradzulu, Lirangwe, Chileka, Luchenza and Mpemba attended the meeting.⁶⁷ Bingham attended the meeting and after listening to the proposal and discussions of it, expressed serious reservations about the project. His criticisms reveal the divergence of interests between the authorities and those Africans who attended the meeting.

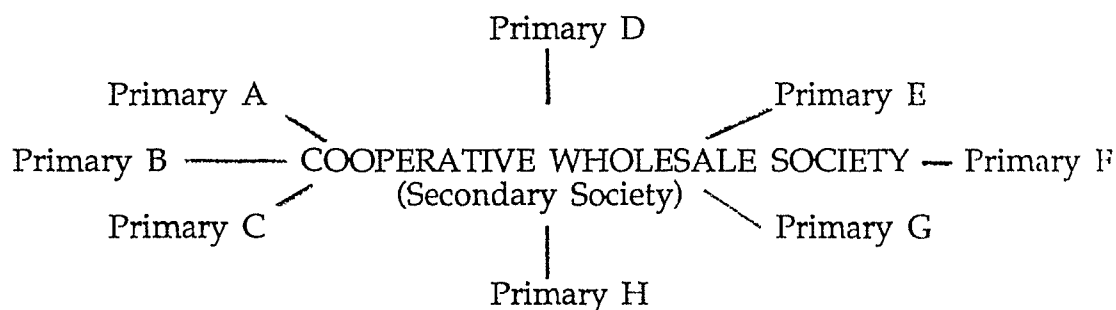
⁶⁶ The proposed Nyasaland African Company never materialized, but in 1944, Sangala and several other Southern Province Africans formed the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC). It is likely that the former organisation was an earlier conception for the NAC, but unlike the NAC, its aims and objectives clearly linked political and economic concerns. The twinning of economic self-reliance and African political independence was not a new idea in the history of Nyasaland. Bismarck's Native Industrial Union and the African Industrial Society are two examples of this for the pre-1914 period. They were founded on the idea of pooling of economic resources for community works, but were also intended to provide entrepreneurs with a source of investment capital. See Chapter Two.

⁶⁷ Sangala to Bingham, 15 July 1947, MNA, NSB3/3/6, F19.

First, he reminded those attending that the basic unit of a cooperative movement was the "primary" society -- in a consumers' cooperative structure, this would be the retail cooperative store with local membership. Chiradzulu and Luchenza, for example, were too far apart for members to be able to benefit from such a store. It was only through the association of a number of successful "primary" (retail) societies that a "secondary" (wholesale) society might be formed.⁶⁸ He supplied a graphic representation of the organisation:

Figure 5.1

Consumer Cooperative Societies Organisational Structure



Secondly, "no single person" or firm should constitute a Primary Society, since then "individuals could buy at wholesale prices for retail in their own private stores". And it was not the objective of cooperatives to provide individual retailers with wholesale goods. Cooperative societies were designed to benefit consumers through economies of scale and were not for the benefit of private retailers. The point was to keep consumer prices low through bulk buying or to keep them at market level and periodically redistribute profits according to use. Bingham wrote to

⁶⁸ Bingham to Sangala, 17 July 1947, *Ibid.*, F20.

Sangala:

I suspect, and I hope I am wrong, that numbers of individual traders hope to obtain supplies of goods at wholesale prices for resale in their own private stores. This, of course, would be utterly wrong. The function of a Wholesale Society is to supply goods to Co-operative Retail Societies and not to individuals.⁶⁹

This, of course, was not what African traders had in mind. They wanted a government assisted African Cooperative which could supply them with goods at wholesale prices for their private businesses. When it became clear that government would not support such a venture, African traders withdrew their support.

Instead of the desired wholesale cooperative, a consumer cooperative, Mvano Stores, was established in Blantyre Town. Its membership consisted mainly of government and private clerical workers. It dealt in cotton piece goods and local commodities.⁷⁰ Bingham was doubtful that Mvano would survive and he was proven correct. There are a number of explanations for its failure and these can be linked to the structure of protectorate trade. By virtue of its charter, the cooperative was compelled to insist on cash purchases only. Since credit buying was "freely offered by Indian storekeepers," Bingham doubted whether "members [would] have the strength of character to forgo the privilege ...

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Sangala's circular to Nyasaland Times, Bantu Mirror, and African Weekly, n.d., copy to Registrar of Cooperatives, received 11 August 1947, Ibid., F21. The society was registered in mid-December with a membership of twenty-four and a share capital of £65. Minutes of the First General Meeting of the Blantyre Mvano Store Limited, 13 December 1947, Ibid., F25.

and purchase for cash at their own store".⁷¹ Whether prompted to action through weakness of character or concern for their own pocket books, consumers did not "forgo" the privilege of credit purchasing. In Blantyre town, waged earners relied, to a large extent, on credit purchases at month end to tide them over until the next pay packet. African and Indian sellers recognized this and acted accordingly.⁷² Extending credit to consumers attracted a clientele and ensured future custom. Mvano could not compete with this. However politically compelling was the call for African unity it was not strong enough to compel African consumers to reject credit buying.

Moreover, by 1948, there were other options if people wished to "buy African". Ndirande and Chichiri, two of Blantyre-Limbe's peri-urban villages, already had several large groceries and dry goods shops owned and run by Africans.⁷³ There were no Indian or European shops in these areas and African grocers were willing to extend limited credit. They also

⁷¹ Annual Report for Cooperatives, 1947, March 1948, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Cooperative Division, 14019, F20a.

⁷² Many people freely attested to the practise of credit buying. Interview 10, Ruth Ascroft, Chirimba, Blantyre District, 4 February 1987; Interview 22, Edward Damba, Blantyre, Blantyre District, 14 March 1987; Interview 27 Moses Takomana, Blantyre, Blantyre District, 18 March 1987; Interview 48 Wilfred Kampadzaza, Kampadzaza Village, T.A. Machinjiri, Blantyre District, 23 June 1988.

⁷³ In the Blantyre-Limbe peri-urban area, the two biggest shops were owned by B.F. Chinseu and Steven Phambana, and there were numerous other small stores and canteens. Interview 37, Lines Phambana, Maliana Village, T.A. Kapeni, Blantyre District, 11 June 1988; Interview 15, B.F. Chinseu, Ndeka, T.A. Chigaru, Blantyre District, 16 February 1987; Interview 7, James Mpunga, Newlands Inn, T.A. Kapeni, Blantyre District, 29 January 1987.

offered other attractions to consumers. They were situated immediately in the peri-urban areas where most of Blantyre-Limbe's African population lived. This meant that they were conveniently located for "last minute" purchases of soap, salt and other essential items. Another less appreciated service was the willingness of African grocers to sell in smaller quantities than their non-African competitors. Small portion selling was another enticement for consumers on tight budgets who were not able to purchase in large quantities at lean times of the month.

Mvano Stores, on the other hand, was situated in Blantyre township. This meant that not only was it in direct competition with non-African shops, but that it had to absorb overhead costs which peri-urban businesses did not: rent and rates. Further, Mvano had difficulty obtaining stock given immediate post-war quotas on imported goods. As early as 1945, Cooperative adviser Campbell had mentioned "the general difficulty in obtaining trade goods" because of war-time shortages. He said that the natural tendency was for wholesalers to supply retail clients based on past performance.⁷⁴ But even Indian wholesalers were unable to supply all their usual buyers.⁷⁵ The post-war trade climate was too obdurate for African consumer cooperatives.

Government still held hope for producer and marketing cooperatives, but these enjoyed little success in Southern Province, mostly

⁷⁴ Campbell, "Report on a visit to Nyasaland".

⁷⁵ Bingham to Chief Secretary, March 1949, in MNA "Native Cooperative Societies", Ministry of Trade and Industry, Cooperative Division, File No. 14019/7883; See Chapter Three.

because planters dominated the agricultural sector. But in other spheres, Africans proved disinterested. In 1950, when the state was eager to increase the supply of meat to Blantyre-Limbe, the Director of Veterinary Services suggested a cooperative for butchers and meat dealers. This time, government was prepared to back up advisory assistance with monetary support of £200 for each cooperative member. Bingham discouraged the idea and cited "technical cooperative reasons" to explain why a coop for butchers and meat dealers would fail. He said that a cooperative was bound to fail because it would be wrecked by those who "stood out" -- individuals who would not keep to the prices agreed upon by the collective and would undersell the cooperative. Butchers, too, were known to sell on credit, contrary to cooperative principles.⁷⁶ The only way for government to control meat prices and supply, in Bingham's view, was through a meat marketing board.⁷⁷

Early efforts to cooperatise the Lirangwe Limemakers, 30 miles north of Blantyre, also failed. Evans Zintambira, a prominent lime maker and transporter in the 1940s and 1950s confirmed that Bingham often visited Lirangwe, but that he and his fellow lime makers resisted cooperation fearing "that if we made a society, the whites would take

⁷⁶ Interview 21 Isaac Peter Chisasa, Blantyre, Soche Forest Reserve, s/o Peter Chisasa, Head Butcher, Limbe Market, 14 March 1987; Interview 10 Ruth Ascroft.

⁷⁷ Bingham to Acting Director of Veterinary Services, 24 July 1950, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Cooperative Division 1415/11210.

over our business".⁷⁸ In 1955, the Lirangwe lime makers formed their own cooperative, but it was short-lived. According to Zintambira, it failed because:

... the ones we chose to be the "elders" were not well organised ... When the members gave money the elders were not taking care of it properly. Also they didn't go to look for orders. Sometimes when they get money or orders they did it on their own account.⁷⁹

According to more than one informant, competition in this business during the 1940s and 1950s was cut-throat.⁸⁰ Initially, the more successful lime makers were reluctant to throw in their lot with the less accomplished. Poorer lime makers were dependent upon the affluent for transport and, to some extent, for their clientele. To cooperatise would have meant profit sharing for the more prosperous lime makers and this they were naturally loath to do. After the lime makers formed a cooperative in 1955, the wealthier lime makers were able to retain their dominance in the industry through positions on the cooperative board of directors (the "elders"). In short, they were able to manipulate the cooperative to control access to clients and also to dictate the use of collectively owned lime mills and transport facilities.⁸¹

To Bingham's frustration, Africans all over Blantyre and

⁷⁸ Interview 19 Nelson Evans Zintambira, Lirangwe, T.A. Chigaru, Blantyre District, 6 March 1987.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Interview 15 Bernard Francisco Chinseu, Ndeka, T.A. Chigaru, Blantyre District, 16 February 1987; Interview 16 Peter Jacob, Lirangwe, Blantyre District, 18 February 1987.

⁸¹ Personal communication Mr. M., 4 March 1987.

neighbouring districts, demonstrated a tremendous propensity to "stand out". In 1948, two Africans applied to begin an "African Cinema Cooperative". They claimed to have 20 persons willing to become members and £200 capital.⁸² Bingham liked the idea of an African cinema, but balked at this proposal. He felt it "the intention of the promoters to found a business with a closed membership simply in order to make money, rather than to provide a necessary public service".⁸³ When the Nyasaland African Milling Company in Chichiri applied for cooperative assistance Bingham replied that he could not assist them unless they accepted the principle of unlimited membership. This was not a cooperative according to Bingham, but a "small group ... out to make money".⁸⁴

And indeed, they were. Cooperatives only received a genuine hearing from Africans when some personal gain seemed possible from participation in them. As soon as cooperative "ideals" were enunciated, a distinct lack of interest set in. As early as 1948, District Commissioner Haskard remarked:

The Africans in Blantyre district appear to be better suited by temperament to run 'one man' enterprises than cooperative ventures and the success which has attended the commercial activities of numerous individuals engaged in brickmaking, limeburning, milling and the production of sawn timber does

⁸² Hartwell Solomon and D.J. Tembo to Bingham, 8 July 1948 in MNA, NSB3/3/6, F40.

⁸³ Bingham to Rangeley, 5 August 1948, in *Ibid.*, F42.

⁸⁴ K.C. Matupa, Secretary of the Nyasaland African Milling Company to Registrar of Cooperatives, 24 November 1948, in *Ibid.*, F62 and Bingham's marginal notes.

much to confirm this view.⁸⁵

The real swan song for the cooperative movement in Blantyre came in July 1951 with the dissolution of Mvano Stores.⁸⁶ Virtually every attempt to launch a cooperative movement in Southern Province had failed. It is difficult to find evidence which supports Bingham's allegations that Southern Province Africans were business incompetents. Cooperatives were foiled by the efforts of individual business people to control them for their personal economic advantage or because they were simply not viable in an economy dominated by non-African commercial interests.

Thrift and loan societies proved unattractive since they failed to provide immediate benefits to the target group -- the educated elite. The choice to direct initial efforts at cooperation toward the "detrified" urban African was the result of a perverse paradox. Urbanisation was directly linked to "detrification". Yet, it was the progressive mission-educated African who could grasp the "modern" notion of cooperation and

⁸⁵ Annual Report Blantyre District 1948, MNA, NS3/1/14, F4a, p.13. The Lirangwe Limemakers voted to form a cooperative in November 1955, but by 1956, they were still not registered. When I visited Lirangwe in 1987, I spoke with some of the coop's original "members". There was general agreement that the coop was short-lived, and from my personal observations, it was clear that there had been very little about it which was truly "cooperative". Minutes of Limemakers from Lirangwe and Nkolombizo, 4 November 1955 and 11 December 1955, MNA, GE/11/1/5504.

⁸⁶ "Order For Dissolution" -- 16 April 1951, in MNA, AS/6/5507. In June 1952, a small consumers' cooperative was formed in Blantyre, however, the cooperative was unable to find a suitable location. S.D. Chikafu, Secretary of the Blantyre Cooperative Society to District Commissioner, 25 June 1952 and President of Naperi Housing Committee to Blantyre Cooperative Society 2 July 1952, in *Ibid.*, F28/29.

possessed the skills to make a go of such a venture. Ironically, such structures were deemed "appropriate" to Africa because of their similarity to "traditional" structures; but these were the very structures which educated Africans had already begun to abandon! If the colonial authorities hoped to turn the clock back on the development of an individualistic capitalist class through cooperative development they were mistaken. Indirect rule too, failed to create a new "tribalism" in the image desired.

Consumer cooperatives were unable to compete with African and non-African competitors alike. The experience of Mvano Stores illustrates this. It was unable to provide the same range of goods offered by the large non-African shops and too inflexible to compete with smaller African groceries which were able to offer consumers attractive purchasing arrangements. Moreover, African traders found nothing attractive about the prospect of merging their lots in cooperative ventures. The immediate abandonment of the proposed African Wholesale Cooperative provides strong evidence for this. Retail traders were keen to escape the wholesale stranglehold of Asian and European firms and an African wholesale outlet at first seemed to offer an attractive alternative. Nevertheless, when Bingham presented the reality of the cooperative structure, interest evaporated.

Producer cooperatives were stymied by the tendency for more prosperous individuals (like the butchers, meat dealers, lime makers and brick makers) to use the cooperative structure to further their own ends. The more affluent African producers and traders demonstrated a natural

hesitance to participate in such endeavours since the group orientation undercut their ability to respond quickly to market conditions. Moreover, they resisted profit sharing with other producers. Some entrepreneurs attempted to capitalize on government assistance for cooperation, but demonstrated no commitment to the "ideals" of cooperation. Even the pairing of cooperative ideals with increasingly radical political ideals failed to overcome economic self-interest as Sangala discovered in 1943.

Bingham's despondency was palpable. It was a frustrated man who in April 1951 delivered the grim indictment of Southern Province Africans cited in the first paragraph of this piece. Bingham condemned these people for their lack of managerial ability and proclaimed this as the main reason for the failure of the cooperative movement in Southern Province. Clearly, the real problem was an almost total lack of receptivity to the ideals of cooperation. Africans lacked the appropriate "community spirit". Neither indirect rule nor cooperatives were able to guide Africans in the economic path delimited by the state. Economic differentiation was already well under way and cooperation was unequal to its assigned task of fostering classless economic growth. At least in the Southern Province of colonial Malawi, small business developed and continued to develop as an "individual" affair.

Chapter Six
Business on the Margins, 1937 - 1953:
The Struggle for the City

Business on the Margins

James Mpunga got into his Austin 3 ton lorry at three in the morning to begin the two hour journey from Chichiri to Makwasa to buy bananas.¹ He had neither a road permit nor insurance for his vehicle, hence his early rising.² Police would not yet be on the roads to check his papers. CATCO (Central African Transport Company) had accepted post-dated cheques for the vehicle because his friends, Mr. Lali Lubani and Lawrence Makata, vouched for him. They, too, had purchased lorries from CATCO on instalment and had proven credit worthy.

By 6 a.m., James and his lorry were off the main Zomba - Blantyre road and he began buying bananas from villages spotted along the tributaries of this main artery. Only at dusk did James return to the main road to begin the long journey back to Chichiri. He arrived home around 9 p.m. It had been dark since six but the village was not yet ready for sleep. The women had been brewing beer and it was Mrs. Kahumbe's

¹ James Mpunga's story is based upon his testimony to me in an interview conducted in 1987 and subsequent informal discussions in that year and in the winter of 1988. Int. 7, James Mpunga, Newlands Inn, Thyolo Road, T.A. Kapeni, Blantyre District, 29 January 1987.

² From January 1, 1951, all public service and goods vehicles had to be registered, pass a government inspection, and were liable to a road service tax of £2 per annum. Private use vehicles did not require road permits. The Motor Traffic Ordinance, No. 34 of 1950, 12 December 1950 and GN112/51.

turn to sell tonight. The sounds of merry making rose from her compound. James was a Muslim and did not drink. He went home to the house he had rented from Mr. Chilinda since 1948 when he moved to Chichiri.³ There he had a small canteen where his wife sold tea, tobacco, and, of course, bananas.⁴

The next morning, James and his wife put the bananas in a deep trench and covered them with earth. They would be ripe in a few days at which time he would hawk them to motorists passing along the Blantyre-Limbe macadamized road running past Chichiri. Petrol was cheap and James drove a hard bargain. With the profits from the banana trade, James gradually paid off his lorry.

After making enough to licence and insure his vehicle, James began to drive during daylight hours.⁵ He left his wife in charge of the canteen while he began transporting firewood, a lucrative business since wood and charcoal were the most common fuels for cooking and remain so today. James had regular non-African customers (including Ryall's Hotel),

³ Mr. Chilinda worked as a book-keeper for Lawrence Makata, an Ndirande transporter and brick maker in the late 1940s. Interview 9 Lancy Makata, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 3 February 1987.

⁴ The licensing information is all taken from lists found in a file for Trading Licence Returns 1951 - 1953, MNA, LC/11/12301. This was the only compilation of trading licence lists I was able to find in the Malawi National Archives. Before this time, scant records were kept for Blantyre District, and the licence counterfoils had been destroyed. James Mpunga is recorded as having a retail trade licence for Chichiri as early as 1951, but he probably ran the canteen earlier than this. Interview 7, James L. Mpunga.

⁵ In 1952, James L. Mpunga applied for a general transport road permit to travel between Blantyre and Chikwawa, Neno-Mwanza, Makwasa and Fort Johnston (via Namwera). Nyasaland Protectorate Gazette, GN163/52, April 4, 1952.

but also supplied African consumers. Sometime in 1951 or 1952, at the urging of his friends, James began to manufacture and sell bricks. He did well enough that he was able to buy a saloon car -- a Humber Hawk -- which he drove as a taxi. To attract customers, he painted a huge Phoenix on the rear windscreen of the taxi with Nyasaland's motto "Lux in tenebris", or "light in darkness". He claims to have done very well with the taxi, and his contemporaries attest to his unwavering insistence on collection of fares.⁶ James always drove his own lorry and taxi since he trusted no one with their care and maintenance. Although this ensured the safety of his vehicles, mistrust of employees limited his business activities. Failure to delegate responsibility meant that he could only run one enterprise at a time. He could not be everywhere at once!

This account of James Mpunga's entrée into self employment in many ways typifies the new breed of businessmen which emerged after the Second World War in Nyasaland. Because capital and credit were so scarce, the business aspirant had to rely on his ingenuity and connections, such as they were, in order to get ahead. Often, this meant behaviour which skirted the margins of the law, like James's night-time journeying to avoid the authorities.

Unlike Charles Mtemenyama, James Mpunga had little formal education. He was born in Zomba sometime around 1905 and his father worked as a laundryman for a Mr. McFarlane who had a job at Government Press. James's father taught him rudimentary "ABCs", but

⁶ Interview 23 Alexander Mataka Bandawe, Chikwawa Road, Blantyre District, 15 March 1987.

his real education in the English language took place at the Zomba Gymkhana Club where he worked as a golf caddie for Europeans. No doubt, he acquired a colourful vocabulary in this line of work. Unlike the Bismarcks and Bandawes of an earlier generation, James' lack of formal education pulled him toward blue collar employment. "When I grew up I decided to learn driving in order to make money. Then I went to Zimbabwe". James apprenticed as a driver-mechanic with CATCO. This would have been before completion of the rail link to Salima in 1934. Some time in the 1930s, he went to Southern Rhodesia where he worked as a driver for the Ministry of Works. In this job, he travelled as far as Northern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo. It was during James' time abroad that he took night classes to improve his English, learned something of mathematics (from the transport clerk at work) and married. Because of personal problems connected to his marriage, James returned to Nyasaland in 1941. On the strength of his experience, James was rehired by CATCO as a driver. It was while working there that he made the acquaintance of Lali Lubani, Hartwell Solomon, and Grant Mkandawire, men who were to become instrumental in assisting him in independent business. At this time, they were also employed by various commercial firms. It was not long before James gave this up for self-employment. His salary was £5.10.0 per month at the time he left CATCO, an excellent wage for the day. Nevertheless, James considered it low and decided to go into business for himself.

His first effort at self-employment was, like his later adventures with transport, illicit. Lawrence Makata was working as a driver-

mechanic for Hall's Garage in Blantyre and one of the duties he performed was driving vehicles to and from Salisbury. James went along with Makata on several of these trips and used his savings (£10) to buy pipe beads in Southern Rhodesia and smuggle them into Nyasaland. Since the beads were imported goods, James ought to have bought a hawker's licence.⁷ But to do so would have meant explaining where he had acquired the beads and he feared having to pay import duty. James never had any trouble with the authorities over this, but his wife did. On James' prompting, she hawked beads herself until the day she was detained and questioned by a policeman who asked to see her licence. She had none, and although James managed to "talk" the policeman out of proceeding with the matter, his wife refused to sell beads thereafter.

In 1948 James found he had sufficient savings to begin a small canteen in Chichiri. It was also at this time that he began his illegal "banana" trade. There were others who had canteens and businesses at Chichiri. James remembers Lali Lubani, Time Chilopa, Chikwakwa, Mr. Mang'anda and Makwesya. Because of problems with licensing records, it is difficult to say when these people first began to trade in Chichiri.⁸ The remaining records reveal that one Harrison Chikwakwa was licensed to run a retail store in 1951 and 1952 in Mponda village. J.D. Mang'anda and Bartlett Makwesya both are recorded as holding retail licences for

⁷ Nyasaland Government Gazette Supplement, "Licensing (Hawkers) Rules", GN34/37, 30 April 1937. Hawkers of imported goods had to take out licenses for five shillings.

⁸ See note 4.

Kapeni and Maselema villages in these years. Lali Lubani is listed as having held a retail licence for Chilipa village in 1951.⁹ James had many Ndirande friends too, "because they had a club there". He was referring to the Ndirande Welfare Club, which, after 1944, was a common meeting place for the Nyasaland African Congress. Mpunga, a member of Congress, remembers going there in spite of the fact that Congress headquarters were in Chichiri. "Yes," Mpunga told me, "Chichiri was a historic place. A lot of things happened there".¹⁰

Just as life was easing up for James and others, the long arm of the state intervened to curtail his progress. In 1952, James Mpunga, along with fellow business people and other inhabitants of Chichiri, was evicted from his home (opposite present day Independence Arch). Chichiri village was raised to make way for an industrial park. James received £148 compensation and with this bought a Singer sewing machine and some cattle which he kept in Zomba "for memory".¹¹ He moved to his present home at Newlands outside Limbe, which he held under customary tenure with the permission of the Mbama village headman. He had no interest in buying land since he believed the land belonged to the

⁹ Lubani was chairman of the African Chamber of Commerce and Mang'anda was its treasurer in 1953. Minutes of General Meeting of the African Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 14 November 1953, MNA, AS/21/5507, F6A.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ James was a Yao from Zomba District. He lived in his wife's village until he began to reside virilocally in Chichiri.

Africans anyway.¹² Others, like Lali Lubani, bought freehold land at Chirimba on the Chileka Road running north from town. Others shifted to Ndirande, parts of which were not yet affected by the town plan. More still moved to Lunzu, Chigumula, and the Thyolo Road southeast of Limbe. After settling in Mbama, James stopped transport, sold his taxi, and focused on brickmaking. Today, at about 87 years of age, he still runs a grocery and a popular nightclub called the "Newlands Inn" at Mbama. He has an assistant now who handles the cash, but James still "does a stocktaking" each day. He has built himself several fine houses in Mbama and financed the construction of another for his daughter in the Malawi Housing Corporation development at Naperi in Blantyre. He retains his maternal family ties in Zomba and wants to be buried there. As James takes his "life stock-taking", he feels he has done very well for himself.¹³

Against all odds, Blantyre-Limbe had given birth to an small but determined and politicized African commercial class with a decidedly urban focus. The African Chamber of Commerce and Industry was born in Blantyre in July of 1953, just after Nyasaland, Southern and Northern Rhodesia merged to form the Central African Federation. It was dominated by brickmakers and transporters (all of whom were NAC members), but was to act as a mouthpiece for a broader business

¹² After independence, James got a lease for his two acres at Newlands.

¹³ Interview 7, James L. Mpunga, Newlands Inn, Thyolo Road, T.A. Kapeni, Blantyre District, 29 January 1987.

community. In the mid-1950s, the Chamber received government assistance to send several men to India for education in commerce.¹⁴ There is considerable irony in this. It was the first time that government had ever provided Africans with business training, and it did so after it had all but displaced them from the urban milieu.¹⁵

The story of Blantyre's entrepreneurs during and after the Second World War cannot be told without reference to the wartime economy and the planning mania which it bred in the Colonial Office and in the Nyasaland administration itself. The post-war boom in primary product prices combined with the planning enthusiasm of officials to produce an acceleration of state intervention in the economy. Government actively fostered the production and export of economic crops (which was nothing new in theory), and in the urban areas began a programme of secondary industrial development. This, in turn, produced an increased demand for

¹⁴ Interview conducted by Mr. Chiwambo with Grant Mikeka Mkandawire, Bolero, Rumphi District, 29 March 1987. Kulujiri to District Commissioner Blantyre, 17 July 1953, MNA, AS/21/5507, F1; 1A.

¹⁵ In 1949, government sanctioned development loans to Africans for agricultural purposes or "for any sound project which is recommended by a technical departmental officer in unanimity with the NA [Native Authority] and DC concerned as being of substantial value in a rural area". Chief Secretary's circular, 14 September 1949, MNA, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Division of Cooperative Development, File 1706/11213, F2 [old reference LOA/AF/LB]. It was not until 1956 that government suggested assisting "the business man in general -- transporter, miller, farmer, brickmaker, contractor". T.D. Thomsom, School of Local Government, Domasi to Chief Secretary, 16 November 1956, MNA, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Division of Cooperative Development, File 2117/11213. This came in the wake of Chalmers Wright's study on African shopkeepers, first published in 1956. Fergus Chalmers Wright, African Consumers in Nyasaland and Tanganyika, An enquiry into the Distribution and Consumption of Commodities among Africans carried out in 1952 - 1953, Colonial Research Studies, No. 17, (London, 1970).

labour in the urban areas; and general prosperity precipitated an urban population explosion. Both municipal and central governments had neglected African urban housing and rejected the notion of a permanent African town population. The lack of an articulated policy toward Africans in urban areas up to 1945 had given people considerable autonomy and forced Africans to create their own peri-urban communities and social welfare systems. After the war, this all changed. Government wanted a permanent urban African population in the interest of industrial development, but it wanted to be able to control it. "Town planning" was considered the key to constructive urban growth, but the agendas of developers and planners conflicted with that of peri-urban residents, particularly the self-employed and transients. The state wanted African workers in town, not African business people. Their blueprints reflected this and brought them into direct conflict with African town dwellers for the control of urban space.

Planning for Development and Grassroots Realities in the Development of Independent African Business

In late 1943, the Colonial Office turned its attention to the development of secondary industry in West and East Africa. Prompted by a serious post-war shortage of shipping, the Colonial Office supported a policy of "reasonable industrialization" for the colonies. It encouraged industries which promised to diversify employment, reduce dependence on primary products, promote import substitution "to conserve overseas purchasing power" (i.e. dollars), and to "provide scope for the progressive

development of the abilities of local inhabitants".¹⁶

Because development was not simply for the benefit of the colonies, Whitehall was concerned to plan and control it. For West African "peasant economies" differential licensing would serve to control industry. However, as the Head of the Colonial Office Economic Department quipped "'plan' is as much a compliment nowadays as 'monopoly' is an insult".¹⁷ Differential licensing could lead to accusations of monopoly and this would be hard to sell to Parliament. The best way to achieve control and deflect public criticism at the same time, was to incorporate protectionist measures within a planned development package. In "settler" colonies, zoning and town planning regulations could serve the same function as licensing did in West Africa. They could ensure that only certain types of industries (and owners) operated out of certain areas.¹⁸

The Colonial Office had asked the Nyasaland government to conduct a survey of secondary industries in May 1941.¹⁹ Ion Ramsay, formerly a District Commissioner for Blantyre was charged with the task. His report provides a skeletal summary of the state of "industrial development" in Nyasaland during the Second World War. There were no large scale secondary industries in Nyasaland as defined in the circular (those which produced manufactured goods for export), but there were

¹⁶ Cohen to Sandford, 20 November 1943, MNA, S36/1/5/2, F15d.

¹⁷ Clausen to C.R. Lockhart, 16 November 1943, *Ibid.*, F15e.

¹⁸ Cohen to Sandford, 20 November 1943, in MNA, S36/1/5/2, F15d.

¹⁹ Secretary of State for the Colonies Circular, 27 May 1941, MNA, S36/1/5/2, F1.

some which produced for domestic consumption. Of these, only the Mzimba ghee producers' cooperative was run by Africans. The remaining seventeen industries were under non-African control and ranged from carpentry and joinery shops to the tobacco manufactories.²⁰

Table 6.1

Survey of Secondary Industries in Nyasaland, 1944

Industry	No. in Southern Province		No. in Northern Province	Protectorate Totals
	(%)*			
Fish Hawkers	9,590	85	1,729	11,319
Photographers	8	80	2	10
Cobblers	10	50	10	20
Limeworkers	42	76	13	55
Mortar makers	130	94	9	139
Charcoal Burners	41	23	140	181
Wood & Ivory Carvers	52	27	144	196
Laundrymen	168	56	131	299
Beeswax Collectors	224	65	120	344
Bicycle and Gramophone Repairers	195	55	158	353
Boatbuilders	319	89	41	360
Tea Shops	235	55	191	426
Groundnut Oil Manufacturers	580	81	134	714
Blacksmiths	375	52	353	728
Brickmakers	270	37	467	737
Sawyers	570	65	304	874
Master Tailors	504	51	491	995
Fishermen	352	33	700	1,052
Carpenters	891	69	402	1,293
Potters	1,150	44	1,465	2,615
Market Gardeners	2,436	88	325	2,761
Basket Makers	1,899	77	1,580	3,479
Fish Driers	4,540	72	1,765	6,305
Mat Makers	2,405	35	4,396	6,801

Source: Secondary Industries in Nyasaland, 14 January 1944, MNA, S36/1/5/2, F16.

* Southern Province percentage share of Protectorate Industries.

The third industrial category called "Minor Industries and Crafts" was for those industries conducted principally at or near the homes of the workers. These were all owned and run by Africans. Table 6.1

²⁰ Secondary Industries in Nyasaland, 11 January 1944, in Ibid., F16.

represents the result of Ramsay's investigation of this form of enterprise. Nowhere in his report did Ramsay mention the number of persons each enterprise employed. Some, like tailors or cobblers would represent an individual, whereas a busy brick works might employ over one hundred persons each season on a full or part time basis. Hence, the survey is not very useful for determining the labour force reliant on African industry but it does give a rough idea of the regional pattern of industrial development up to 1944.²¹

Not surprisingly, the north had fewer "cottage industries" than the south. This can be attributed to poor infrastructure which left the North completely isolated for several months every year when the rains made roads, such as existed, impassable by motor transport. Only in a few industries did the north have a greater preponderance -- charcoal burning, carving, brickmaking, fishing, pottery and mat manufacturing. Some of these are curious. Fishing, for example, is better in the southern waters of Lake Malawi, and Lake Malombe, also in the south, has the most fertile waters in the country. Lake Chilwa too was an excellent source of fish. Secondly, these figures seem to jar with the large number of fish hawkers found in the southern province -- 9600 as compared with 1700 in the

²¹ An unofficial census taken in 1949 revealed that Blantyre-Limbe's wet season population was only about 12,000, but rose to 27,000 in the dry season. Such variations can be linked to the tobacco industry and the agricultural cycle. Packing and processing peaked during the dry season when agricultural labour was in least demand. The dry season was also the time for brickmaking and this industry attracted many temporary workers to the peri-urban villages where they built temporary grass shelters. This temporary population may not have been included in the census. African Provincial Council Meeting Minutes, 12-17 May, 1952, p.4.

north. Most of these hawkers would have used bicycles. While they may have moved fish by relay trade from the northern province down to the markets of Blantyre and Zomba, it is more probable that southern hawkers were getting fish from southern waters, particularly Lakes Chiuta, Chilwa and Malombe. It is possible that the number of fishermen in southern province were under-reported, perhaps because many of them hawked their own catches and show up in the census as hawkers.

Second, the large number of brickmakers in the north requires comment. The post-war construction boom was felt in the southern urban areas, but in the northern region, there had long been an African market for bricks. One of the first things returned labour migrants did at home was build themselves a new brick house. This would account for the large number of brickmakers in the north. However, it is difficult to say how many of these made brickmaking their chief means of livelihood, or how the figures changed after 1945.

The war had a number of effects on the economy of Nyasaland. African businesses, no less than others were affected by import quotas and rationing. Import scarcity led to rising prices of these commodities, in spite of government's effort to control them. Profiteering and black market persisted and contributed to general inflationary trends. In Blantyre and Limbe, food prices crept slowly upward as did the cost of other local commodities such as firewood and charcoal.²² Even tailors began to charge more for their services, and editorials accusing shop-

²² Nyasaland Times, 19 October 1942 reports considerable price hikes in foodstuffs in Blantyre Market.

keepers of profiteering appeared frequently in the Nyasaland Times throughout the war.²³

But the war produced a number of spin-off effects. Military service gave many Malawians valuable training. Some learned to drive and fix vehicles.²⁴ Others learned book-keeping and stock-taking. Armed service also exposed African soldiers to military organisation and authority structures and although no African officers were trained in the KAR, many Africans graduated to higher non-commissioned ranks, fought bravely and won military honours. Government was convinced that military service changed people, and believed that special care and attention be given to their demobilization. In an undated memo, probably written shortly before the end of the war, Patrick Williams, the Director of Training at the Jeanes Centre at Domasi predicted that demobilized soldiers would return to the village for a time, but would soon tire of it. He stressed the importance of providing ex-servicemen with trades so that

²³ Government attempted to regulate the price of foodstuffs, but enforcement was difficult. See, Nyasaland Times, 29 July 1943, editorial on sky-rocketing meat prices; article on increased prices charged by tailors, Nyasaland Times, 6 May 1943; see, also, "Gaol for Profiteers", Nyasaland Times, 12 August 1943.

²⁴ The Nyasaland Times of 16 September 1940 advertised for African Motor Drivers for Kings African Rifles (KAR) at a salary of 60 shillings per month, an excellent wage for the time. In the same issue a rather patronizing column was featured entitled "A Day at Namadidi Camp, The Making of African Motor Drivers". The writer was glowing in his praise of the training programme and said that his visit did much to dispel the notion that training of military drivers was a haphazard affair. In his words "Frankly, we believed (as did a number of other people) that an African aspiring to be a motor driver was briefly instructed in the elements of steering and gear-manipulation and was then put on a lorry; when he had succeeded in wrecking three lorries, if still alive, he was a qualified driver".

they would have an outlet for their energies.²⁵ This sentiment gave rise to programmes for ex-servicemen such as the artisan training scheme launched at Mpemba, south of Blantyre in 1945.²⁶ While the thrust of this training was to be toward skilled employment, there was an awareness that many ex-servicemen were keen to enter retail trade. To further this aim, government proposed a rudimentary course of instruction in accounting and shopkeeping for African ex-servicemen, but in general, ex-servicemen were outfitted to serve the needs of the colonial economy.²⁷

In the words of one observer, the military, in particular "was doing something for the African for which the African will be grateful long after this war is forgotten."²⁸ Gratitude for training, however, was not always expressed in ways anticipated or desired. Of the 5,000 African ex-servicemen who passed through Thondwe Dispersal Centre between September 1945 and February 1946, less than half demonstrated any interest whatsoever in training programmes. Most opted to return to their villages.²⁹ Others parleyed their new skills and gratuities into self-employment, preferring to work on their own account rather than "doing

²⁵ "Memorandum on African Training", Patrick E.W. Williams, n.d., MNA, LB8/2/1, F116.

²⁶ "Notes on a discussion in the Chief Secretary's Office", 20 November 1945, MNA, LB8/2/11, F1.

²⁷ "Memorandum on Post War Training and Employment for African Ex-servicemen in Nyasaland", October 1945, Provincial Commissioner Leslie's marginal notes, MNA, LB8/2/2, F92.

²⁸ "A Day at Namadidi Camp", Nyasaland Times, 16 September 1940.

²⁹ On average, African ex-servicemen received £26 in pay, grants and gratuities on demobilisation. Nyasaland Times, 18 February 1946.

for bwana".³⁰

Skills learned during the war were best transferred to an urban setting. As the peri-urban population grew so did the demand for convenience goods closer to home. In Ndirande and other peri-urban villages, the first African groceries opened in the late 1940s. The maize mill often accompanied the local store and these were often African owned.³¹ Peri-urban groceries did not enjoy the same success as some of their rural counterparts, because they competed directly with the downtown shops which were often the sources of their own stock. The non-African stores tended to have greater selection and larger inventories and many were able to sell on wholesale and retail bases. For this reason, the peri-urban groceries were often undersold. On the other hand, they were a boon to the peri-urban consumer especially at the end of the month when wages were almost spent since African grocers were willing to sell in smaller quantities than were larger stores in the township. They also often extended credit to people whose incomes were already severely stretched. While non-cash selling was criticized by experts like Chalmers

³⁰ Lali Lubani served in East Africa until his demobilization in 1946. He worked for CATCO until 1948 when he had sufficient resources to buy a lorry and take up independent transporting. Interview 20 Gerald Montfort (Whisky) Lobeni, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 7 March 1987.

³¹ Peri-urban villages on Trust Land were closed to non-African commerce. Chalmers Wright reported that in 1952 in Lilongwe township, millers charged 1 shilling 6 pence for every four gallons of maize milled. The monthly household expenditure on milling was four to six shillings. Milled maize had prestige value as well, and evidently it was not uncommon for women to wait hours in line rather than pound maize themselves. See, Chalmers Wright, African Consumers in Nyasaland and Tanganyika, p.67.

Wright, this may not have been detrimental to African businesses.³² After all, it is not credit which threatens a business, but default. Many people told me that customers were generally very conscientious about repaying debts. Were they not, they would not enjoy the same privilege twice. If James's story is at all representative, one could make a moderate profit from a canteen, but probably not enough to live on. Peri-urban groceries and canteens were limited in size because they could not compete with the lower prices and greater selection found in town, but they often served as complements to other enterprises.³³

A similar argument might be made for hawking. James Mpunga in fact began with this. The advantage of hawking was that there was little or no overhead cost. One charged higher prices simply for convenience. The goods sought out the customer and not the reverse. The number of town hawkers grew as urban housewives provided a ready door-to-door market. Hawking was such a popular occupation that in 1937 it was prohibited within a three mile radius of townships, sanitary areas, trading

³² Ibid., p. 55.

³³ There were exceptions to this. Diamond Phambana's grocery in Uwigo village [sometimes called Ralph Maunde village, after the headman of that name] was a prosperous concern. He and his wife, Lines, had trained as tailors in Southern Rhodesia before returning to Nyasaland in the 1940s. They settled in Uwigo and opened a canteen. It began as a small affair, selling food and some cloth, but grew to offer more expensive consumer items like pots and blankets. They employed four khonde tailors. She mentioned that a Mr. Sikawenga was already established when their shop opened, and B.F. Chinseu came after. He began as a cobbler and also sold foodstuffs and later expanded his selection of stock to include some imported goods. Interview 37 Lines Phambana, Maliana Village, T.A. Kapeni, Blantyre District, 11 June 1988.

centres or main roads.³⁴ Hawkers cut into the retail stores' profits.

Another important area of African enterprise was the fish trade. This was difficult for Africans to participate in on any scale before the war since stringent motor vehicle licensing made entry into transport difficult and prevented Africans from moving large amounts of fish from the lake to the urban centres.³⁵ Most fish transporters plied their trade on bicycles. There were some who rented lorries, but Yiannakis Brothers, Greek planters and fishermen, were able to undercut them since they owned their own vehicles, had greater capital resources and actually caught and sold their own fish.³⁶ The African fish seller was most often a

³⁴ Nyasaland Government Gazette Supplement, "Licensing (Hawkers) Rules", GN34/37, 30 April 1937. Hawkers of imported goods had to buy five shilling licenses. They could not remain at one site more than 12 hours at a time and after the expiry of that period had to repair to a minimum distance of three miles. They were not to sell at one site more than once a week and were not to sell from motor vehicles. Hawking was proscribed on the side of virtually every main road in Southern Province, but it seems to have continued nevertheless.

³⁵ This all changed after the war with the advent of the 1949 famine when all vehicles were called upon to move grain and foodstuffs. Motor Traffic Licensing Board and Traffic Control Board [name changed January 1947] Minutes, 20 January 1949, MNA, R2/1/4, R2/2/1. At this meeting, the Transport Advisory Committee solution lifted restrictions on motor transport on all routes in the protectorate. Up to this point, transport of goods by lorry was permitted only by a few vehicles and was confined to short hauls. For example, lorries could transport goods within the Dedza, Ntcheu, Balaka area, but not between that area and any place in Southern Province south of Zomba.

³⁶ Ramsay reported as early as 1931 that there were a few African fish vendors who rented lorries from Indian transporters returning to Blantyre-Limbe from Fort Johnston. Blantyre District Annual Report 1931, MNA, NSB7/1/2, p.6. Other references to this practice appear in court records, See, Supedi Limbani, versus J. Sinderam, Cause 32 of 1933, 16 March 1933 to 31 March 1933, Blantyre District Third Class Subordinate Court, MNA, BA5/1/1. Wiseman Chirwa, "Movement of labour and the development of small scale commercial fishing and fish trading in Malawi", for presentation at the Canadian Association of African Studies Conference, Carleton

middle man operating on a small scale.

Another middleman occupation which proved lucrative was maize trading. Like fishing, this was an enterprise which catered to town markets. Vaughan suggests that maize traders were typically 'retired government employees or returned labour migrants, who also had access to large plots of land and were themselves surplus producers'.

However, a considerable number of Blantyre and Limbe's entrepreneurs who were not primarily farmers were also involved in this, especially after inclement weather and pestilence combined to produce a serious famine in 1949.

In her book The Story of an African Famine, Megan Vaughan explained how maize traders reaped great profits in 1949. In January 1949, the District Commissioner for Blantyre asked those persons with food reserves in excess of one short ton to report this to him by month end.³⁸ He also asked for information on anyone failing to do so.³⁹ In an effort to protect Blantyre-Limbe's workers from food profiteering, government attempted to control the sale of maize and other staple foodstuffs by selling in bulk to employers who were then responsible for distributing rations among their employees. People could also get rations

Conference, Carleton University, Ottawa, 11-14 May, 1989; John McCracken, "Fishing and the colonial economy: the case of Malawi", Journal of African History, 28 (1987), 413-429.

³⁷ Vaughan, Story of an African Famine, p.106.

³⁸ Control of Foodstuffs (Emergency Powers) Order, GN13/49, 31 January 1949, and reprinted in the Nyasaland Times, 31 January 1949.

³⁹ Nyasaland Times, 27 January 1949.

at government depots, but these were often insufficient and did not assist unemployed or self-employed persons. It was these purchasers who fuelled the black market trade in grain.

Vaughan found that those areas most seriously affected by hunger were the crowded, marginal agricultural lands within a 10 to 15 mile radius of Blantyre and Limbe townships.⁴⁰ There, people relied on a mixture of agriculture and wage labour for survival. When crops failed and maize prices soared, they had no agricultural surplus to fall back on. Moreover, since access to government controlled maize supplies was contingent upon employment, those people who were not employed by government or a non-African firm had to buy maize from unauthorized suppliers.⁴¹ Demographically, famine struck at divorced and widowed women who usually supplemented their agricultural activities with the proceeds from beer brewing. Brewing for anything but consumption was forbidden during the famine and this forced women and dependent children into ganyao labour, often only in return for a little maize.⁴²

Maize traders reaped fat profits. Eric Barnes in his Annual Report for 1949 remarked that there were "maize thieves" operating in Blantyre District who were selling maize for as much as 9 pence per pound.⁴³ As

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.115.

⁴¹ Vaughan, Story of an African Famine, p.111.

⁴² Ganyao comes from the Portuguese verb ganhar which means "to gain". Ganyao labour was casual day labour and both Megan Vaughan and Landeg White argue that women and children most commonly worked on this basis.

⁴³ Nyasaland Times, 15 March 1951.

late as November, an outraged employer wrote the Nyasaland Times saying that his servant had purchased 2 1/2 pounds of maize from a private source for which he paid one shilling nine pence (8 pence a pound).⁴⁴ Government maize was not much cheaper. The price was raised from 1/2 pence per pound to 5 pence per pound in February of 1949.⁴⁵ It was lowered to 3 pence per pound in March and only after tremendous public outcry.

The attitude towards maize traders is ambivalent even today. Some people say that grain traders provided a needed service. Were it not for them, there would have been even less grain available. For the unemployed, they were the only source of food. Chester Katsonga acquired his maize in Dedza District, around Linthipe I, where there was "plenty of maize that year". He traded cattle for maize, the price of which exceeded that of beef during that time. Since he had no lorry of his own, he rented one from Lali Lubani, an African transporter and brickmaker who may also have been involved in maize trading. Chester's wife related the story of his involvement proudly. Without people like her husband, there would sometimes have been no food at all.⁴⁶

In general, however, maize traders made small fortunes through others' trials and this occasioned considerable resentment. One informant told me that it was during 1949 that he and his father "really made a

⁴⁴ Nyasaland Times, 24 November 1949.

⁴⁵ Nyasaland Times, 24 February 1949.

⁴⁶ Interview 3, Dalia Katsonga, Thondwe, T.A. Chikowi, Zomba District, 14 January 1987.

fortune". They acquired maize and rice from the border area around Dedza, and in Tete in Portuguese East Africa. They bartered cloth for maize (at three times the usual rate), transported it to Ntcheu and Blantyre and sold it. He recalled a day when his father's lorry, laden with grain, hit a pillar at Nsipe River bridge. According to him, the District Commissioner instructed people to push the damaged vehicle out of the way, which they did -- over the bank and into the river. He was later compensated for the damage, but the animosity his activities inspired is unmistakable.⁴⁷ Brickmakers, because they often had their own lorries, were well positioned to take advantage of the commercial opportunity offered by maize trading and many did.⁴⁸ Vaughan recounts tales told to her in which brickmakers were believed responsible for "holding the rain".⁴⁹ Hence, in the popular mind there was considerable ambivalence as

⁴⁷ Interview 47, E.B. Akimu, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 22 June 1988.

⁴⁸ Interview 9 Lancy Makata, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 3 February 1987; Interview 10 Ruth Ascroft, Chirimba, Blantyre District, 4 February 1987; Interview 15 Bernard Francisco Chinseu, Ndeka, T.A. Chigaru, Blantyre District, 16 February 1987; Interview 44 James Magola, Mpingwe, Limbe, Blantyre District, 18 June 1988. Mr. Magola used the profits from hawking beans and beads to begin maize trading. He had no lorry, but rented one from Mr. Bisani, an African transporter based in Chiradzulu. Evidently, he got his maize from Lizuru in Ntcheu District, and Tete. Bisani was a fairly prosperous businessman. Mr. Magombo, a sawyer from Ndirande mentioned that the same Bisani used to lend him money when he needed it. Interview 34 Rankin Magombo, Naperi, Blantyre District, 9 June 1988.

⁴⁹ Vaughan, An African Famine, p.108; E.P. Thompson reported similar allegations of middle-man interference which emerged during times of dearth in eighteenth century England. It was felt that bakers and millers were responsible for "doctoring" bread flour with alum, chalk, whiting and beanmeal as well as slaked lime, white lead and the ashes from "charnel houses of the dead". E.P. Thompson, "The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century", Past and Present, No. 50

to the activities of maize brokers during the famine of '49. On the one hand, they provided much needed maize; on the other hand, they were in the business of making money and many people could not afford to pay black market prices.

The experience of 1949 sheds light on one of the structural features of self-employment in Nyasaland and elsewhere during the colonial period. Some self-employed occupational categories bore up better than others during the famine. Those which relied on the discretionary incomes of the employed, for example tailors, barbers, cobblers and photographers were hardest hit. As an increasing proportion of workers' salaries was taken up in food purchases, non-essential service industries suffered. Moreover, by virtue of their self-employed status, artisans and tradespeople found it difficult to get food, unless they had the money to buy it or the means to fetch it; the two factors probably went hand in hand.

But 1949 was an unusual year. It offered boom profits for some, and for others, abject misery. Generally, the post-war period was characterized by steady growth across sectors. Tell-tale signs of increased affluence appeared in the pages of the Nyasaland Times which sported Chinyanja advertisements for gramophones and recordings of Zulu music and songs as well as myriad notices for the sale of bricks, lime and firewood.⁵⁰ Private and government construction took off after 1948,

(1971), 97.

⁵⁰ Nyasaland Times, 21 April 1947.

stimulating the demand for building materials and labour. Rising prices exerted upward pressure on wage rates, and government passed a profusion of ordinances to regulate the conditions under which people worked.⁵¹

Africans became important employers of labour at this time. Hundreds of people began to make bricks and Ndirande and Chichiri became the major centres of production in the Blantyre-Limbe area.⁵² A

⁵¹ The price of charcoal, for example, trebled in 1949, rising from 1 1/2 pence to 4 to 6 pence per bag, Nyasaland Times, 16 June 1949. Firewood, the other major fuel, rose from around 6 shillings per cubic yard to 9 shillings. This increase was the result of rising transport costs as vendors had to travel farther and farther from the townships to get wood. Nyasaland Times, 29 September 1949. An ordinance to fix minimum wages was first introduced after the outbreak of the war. The Minimum Wage Ordinance, No. 19 of 1939, 20 November 1939. It was revised in 1940 and replaced by the Wages and Conditions of Employment Ordinance, No. 32 of 1949, 28 November 1949. Provision for the unionisation of workers was made under the Trade Unions and Trade Disputes Ordinance, No. 5 of 1944, 14 March 1944 and the Trades Disputes (Arbitration and Inquiry) Ordinance, No. 6 of 1944, 24 March 1944. The latter was replaced in 1952 by the Trade Disputes (Arbitration and Settlement) Ordinance, No. 20 of 1952, 4 December 1952. Workers received some protection for injury at the work site through the Workmen's Compensation Ordinance, No. 2 of 1944, 14 March 1944. The employment of women was dealt with separately under The Employment of Women Ordinance, No. 16 of 1936, 31 October 1936. "Women" included all persons of the female sex regardless of age. Further legislation for women came under the Hours of Employment of Women Ordinance, No. 9 of 1938, 26 March 1938. In 1939, children and women were considered together in the Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Ordinance, No. 22 of 1939, 20 November 1939, amended in 1940, 1942.

⁵² The Chichiri brick fields were eliminated when the area was cleared for light industrial development in the early 1950s. Ndirande, on the other hand, retained its brick fields. H.C. Norwood estimated that in the late 1960s and early 1970s there were 29 independent brickmakers operating along the banks of Nasolo Stream who employed an average of 40 seasonal labourers each. He suggested that these pits supplied most of the bricks for the district. Brickmaking in Ndirande was proscribed in August 1971 and although this undoubtedly signalled an improvement in community health, it also represented a considerable loss of employment

patchwork of brick fields and pits blanketed the land surrounding peri-urban villages. In the dry season, populations swelled and hundreds of temporary grass huts sprang up to house seasonal workers.

Initially, brickmakers could not keep up with demand and could easily sell direct from the kiln. Those who owned lorries could deliver orders to purchasers and this gave them a slight advantage. As more people entered the industry and competition increased, so did the desirability of transport. Those brickmakers without it had to either charge a lower price for their bricks to encourage buyers to pick them up at the kiln or to hire lorries from their fellow brickmakers or transporters. In the mid-1950s, brickmakers even began canvassing door-to-door, displaying samples to potential buyers. In an effort to control prices through supply, a number of brickmakers combined in 1957 to form the Nyasaland Brickmakers Association. It sought to fix minimum and maximum prices for bricks and to restrict entry into the trade. It was never able to do this.⁵³ Brickmaking technology was accessible to

opportunities for the peri-urban area. Moving the fields farther out to places like Chirimba, Lunzu and Ndeka meant less employment in town. On the other hand, since brickmakers have over the years been compelled to move farther and farther from the city limits for firewood, the move might actually have benefited them. H.C. Norwood, "Ndirande: a squatter settlement in Malawi", Town Planning Review, XLVI, (1972), 142. Some illegal brickmaking continues in Ndirande today, but this is on a much smaller scale. In July 1988 I saw only three brick pits in Ndirande. The proprietor claimed to have had no trouble from the authorities, but he admitted that he had been quiet about the pits.

⁵³ The Brickmakers' Association was formed in 1957, but I was told that the Ndirande Welfare Club functioned in a similar way before this time. Most likely the club acted as a source of peer pressure more than an institution which passed resolutions and rules of conduct as the Brickmakers' Association tried to do. One of the changes advocated by the Brickmakers' Association was the banning of all but full time

everyone and there was nothing to stop non-members from undercutting prices. Because of this, brickmakers had to rely on product improvement and aggressive and innovative marketing strategies to sell their output.⁵⁴

Brickmakers were not the only group which attempted to control prices through combination. Blantyre and Limbe butchers were accused of price setting and bulk selling to select European purchasers. Market butchers were subject to municipally fixed prices. In 1950, they were accused of selling the majority of their meat to select European buyers [who were not named] leaving only inferior cuts to be sold in the market at fixed prices.⁵⁵ Whether or not these charges had any validity, it is true that butchers often paid out kick-backs to market inspectors and health officials in return for their turning a blind eye to minor infractions.⁵⁶ On the other hand, some butchers gave favoured customers good value for money. Ruth Ascroft remembers the benevolence of Lester Kaliati who

brickmakers in the trade. Since many of the Association's members were involved in other pursuits such as canteens, groceries, lime selling and bottle stores, this probably was directed at those individuals employed in the formal sector, for example, government clerks or mission employees. See, MNA, Labour Department 41/48/1, Brickmakers' Association correspondence, 1958.

⁵⁴ Lawrence Makata used a machine to press face-bricks and advertised this. He also marked his bricks with a "M" so there could be no question as to whom credit for workmanship was due. Aside from this partial mechanization of the industry, brickmaking technology changed little from the early days of the Scots Mission. Interview 9 Lancy Makata, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 3 February 1987.

⁵⁵ H.R. Price to Editor, Nyasaland Times, 16 March 1950.

⁵⁶ Interview 22 Edward Damba, Blantyre, Blantyre District, 14 March 1987; Interview 21 Isaac Peter Chisasa, Masese in Soche Forest Reserve, Blantyre District, 14 March 1987.

always gave her just a little extra meat for her "tickee" (three pence) and often, on credit.⁵⁷ Because prices were "fixed" in the market, butchers employed other strategies to sell meat. Touting outside stalls, outfitting clerks with attractive uniforms so as to improve the appearance of the establishment were used to attract custom. Through establishing friendly personal relationships, butchers often secured regular clients.⁵⁸ Like the brickmakers, butchers had to be innovative to maintain an edge over competitors.

The Lirangwe lime makers appear to have attempted some form price setting too. In 1947, a number of them posted price increases in the Nyasaland Times. The new prices ranged from £3.15.0 per long ton of unslaked lime at the kiln to £8.13.8 per long ton delivered to Mlanje. The notice was signed by four prominent lime makers: Evans Zintambira, M. Nyalugwe, J. Mbicholo and A.J. Mapemba.⁵⁹ They explained that price

⁵⁷ Interview 10 Ruth Ascroft, Chirimba, Blantyre District, 4 February 1987.

⁵⁸ Mrs. Katsonga mentioned that her husband was a regular customer of Mr. Damba, a butcher in Blantyre Market. She also remembers Lester Kaliati whose stall was in the same section as the Katsonga canteen, but did not say if they bought from him. Peter Chisasa was head butcher in Limbe for many years. He had supply contracts with Imperial Tobacco Company. He also employed young men to deliver meat on bicycles he bought for that purpose. Interview 3 Dalia Katsonga, Thondwe, T.A. Chikowi, Zomba District, 14 January 1987; Interview 21 Isaac Peter Chisasa, Masese in Soche Forest Reserve, Blantyre District, 14 March 1987.

⁵⁹ Evans Zintambira explained that Andrew Mapemba was not actually a lime maker. He was employed by the Limbe Tobacco Company, but acted as an agent for Lirangwe lime makers, soliciting orders from time to time. Interview 19 Nelson Evans Zintambira, Lirangwe, T.A. Chigaru, Blantyre District, 6 March 1987.

increases were necessary because of the rise in general cost of living.⁶⁰ Their main competition came from a "coloured" lime maker, M.M. Jussab, who operated out of neighbouring Ndeka. Jussab advertised in the same edition of the Times and his prices were identical to those set by his African counterparts at Lirangwe.⁶¹ This was probably coincidental, since Jussab usually undersold the Lirangwe group. And indeed, uniform prices lasted only until February of 1948 when Jussab slashed his prices.⁶² He raised them again in May, and the following month, the Lirangwe group brought its prices into line with Jussab's.⁶³ Competition was the rule in lime-selling and while the Lirangwe sellers might have been able to keep each other in line, they were powerless to control competitors like Jussab.

Before 1950, the limemakers usually cooperated in hiring private transporters like Christowitz, Hall's Garage and Milward.⁶⁴ After the war when it became easier to get vehicles licensed, the more affluent lime makers purchased lorries of their own. As competition increased in the lime selling business, it became more and more difficult for those without transport to hire from their fellow limemakers. Instead, those with lorries

⁶⁰ Nyasaland Times, 18 August 1947.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Jussab offered lime at £2.5.0 at the kiln and £3.10 and £3.13.9 delivered to Blantyre and Limbe respectively. Nyasaland Times, 23 February 1948.

⁶³ Advertisements in Nyasaland Times, 25 May 1948, 28 June 1948.

⁶⁴ According to one informant, transport cost about 15 shillings a trip in the late 1930s. Interview 19 Nelson Evans Zintambira.

began to buy at low prices from those less fortunate, taking on the role of middlemen in addition to marketing their own product.⁶⁵ Several transporters from the Blantyre-Limbe area, recognizing the potential of lime selling, entered into it as middlemen, buying lime in bulk from producers at Lirangwe and reselling to government and estates.⁶⁶ So, even though producers recognized the benefits of price-setting and supply control through combination in theory, practice showed that the temptation to reap higher profits proved too strong for individuals to comply with group price setting.

Lime makers also used agents to solicit orders.⁶⁷ This freed them up for other tasks at the lime quarry. However, relying on middlemen to secure orders was sometimes problematic as Evans Zintambira discovered in 1945. Zintambira had often used the services of Andrew Mapemba who worked for Limbe Tobacco Company. In fact, the two were good friends. Trouble began when Lawrence Mapemba, Andrew's brother offered to get Zintambira an order from Conforzi Estates in Thyolo where he worked as a clerk. What Zintambira did not know was that Lawrence was in debt to Conforzi. He led his employers to believe that it was his

⁶⁵ Interview 15 Bernard Francisco Chinseu, Ndeka, T.A. Chigaru, Blantyre District, 16 February 1987.

⁶⁶ Lali Lubani, Lawrence Makata, Aliketi Kankwatira and Hartwell Solomon are listed as contributors to the proposed lime cooperative. They never actually produced lime, but were interested in participating as transporters. Minutes of Lirangwe and Mkolombizo Limemakers, 4 November 1955, MNA, GE/11/1/5504.

⁶⁷ Such agency was common. Zintambira mentioned others who did this: Joseph Njelwa and Willie Lulembe were two he recalled. Interview 19 Nelson Evans Zintambira.

own lime that he was selling them. When his company account was credited for the value of lime sold, it was applied to his deficit balance. Lawrence was unable to pay Zintambira the money he owed him for the orders. Zintambira took Lawrence to court, won his case, but after two years had still not recovered the £33 owed him.⁶⁸ He added that this kind of thing was common.

The late Willie Lulembe died with my money ... The late Joseph Njelwa also died with my money. From that time I stopped having agents ... Up to this time, I do everything myself".⁶⁹

Like James Mpunga, Evans Zintambira preferred to see to most aspects of his business himself. He had tried to rely on others and had been disappointed. It was a common refrain among African businessmen. People could not be trusted. Isaac Chisasa recalled that his father, a prominent Limbe butcher, preferred to hire older men to run his market stalls because he found them more trustworthy than younger men.⁷⁰ Bernard Chinseu, a brickmaker, transporter and grocer also complained about labour problems. Brickmaking, he said, was a difficult business because good capitaos were hard to come by. "It [brickmaking] needed me to stay there and look after the labourers," he said, "Every time I went

⁶⁸ Zintambira versus Mapemba, Cause 9 of 1946, First Class Subordinate Court, Blantyre District, 2 January 1946 to February 1949, MNA, BA3/1/1.

⁶⁹ Interview 19 Nelson Evans Zintambira.

⁷⁰ Interview 21 Isaac Peter Chisasa, Masese in Soche Forest Reserve, Blantyre District, 14 March 1987.

away, they would go off and drink kachasu".⁷¹ For similar reasons, many people expressed the view that partnerships were rarely successful and something to be avoided. Inevitably, partners set to quarrelling over profits and managerial decisions.⁷²

The NAC tried to pull African business people together in 1950. James Sangala, the same man who championed Mvano Cooperative several years before, called for the creation of an "African Industrial Union or Association". It is unclear if this name was deliberately chosen to strike a chord in the hearts and minds of those who knew of Chilembwe's and Bismarck's efforts to create a similar organisation in the 1910s. The principles of the Association certainly had much in common with those of early endeavours. "[T]raders or businesses including brick-making, lime-making, timbering, shops, canteens" would find in the organisation "one common centre which will deal with matters affecting the disposal of African produce". The association's motto was to be "self-help" and members would pay regular subscriptions. From these revenues, a joint fund would be formed and used as a capital base. The Union executive would arrange lines of credit from banks and members could then apply

⁷¹ Interview 15 Bernard Francisco Chinseu, Ndeka, T.A. Chigaru, Blantyre District, 16 February 1987.

⁷² Partnerships seemed to have been formed from friendships. I found not a single example of a partnership which was successful. Inevitably, partners fell out over the distribution of profits, quarrels over business practices, personal matters, and so on. Interview 3 Dalia Katsonga, Thondwe, T.A. Chikowi, Zomba District, 14 January 1987; Interview 10 Ruth Ascroft, Chirimba, Blantyre District, 4 February 1987; Interview 19 Nelson Evans Zintambira, Lirangwe, T.A. Chigaru, Blantyre District, 6 March 1987; Interview 24 Nyemba Mbekeani, Limbe, Blantyre District, 16 March 1987.

for loans from the Union. It was also to act as intermediary between the African business community and government. Finally, the Union it would affiliate with Congress. A meeting of interested parties was scheduled for the 22 of April 1950, but if it ever took place, it was not reported in the Times or in the local African newspaper, Msimbi.⁷³

Up to 1953, African business in Blantyre-Limbe was characterized by competition and innovation. The affluent helped their less-advantaged fellows when it was feasible, but fell short of combining to set prices or control output. Business people preferred to attain their supplies, credit and labour through individual effort.

The Peri-Urban Villages and Social Welfare

These enterprises, bricks, carpentry, transport and allied service industries, were conducted from peri-urban villages. Consequently, these settlements grew in size and character to form multi-ethnic enclaves. They received none of the benefits of belonging to the townships such as electricity, piped water or macadamized roads, but by virtue of their isolation, they were able to maintain significant autonomy from municipal and central government meddling. Neglected by the authorities, peri-urban denizens created their own social welfare systems in which the business community played an important role. The first local bus service in Blantyre-Limbe was begun in 1953 by Lawrence Makata, perhaps the most successful African businessman in the protectorate. He ran three

⁷³ Nyasaland Times, 9 March 1950.

buses from Machinjiri Court to Ndirande, the Boys' and Girls' secondary schools, Henry Henderson Institute at the Blantyre Mission and Blantyre Market. School children paid reduced fares. The District Commissioner commended Makata for providing a much needed service which the Nyasaland Transport Company was loathe to undertake because of the poor condition of the local roads.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, Makata terminated the bus service after only three years. His conductors were reserving a portion of the fares to augment their salaries. Makata enjoyed greater success with his fleet of green and yellow taxis which he ran under the name "Yellow Line Transport". With taxis, he could check receipts against mileage which was the basis for the fare.⁷⁵

Individual and group action is what creates communities and gives them their own special characters. Those with the resources to do so often made significant material contributions. Makata and a fellow transporter and brickmaker, Lali Lubani, were two such people. Over and above their roles as businessmen, they indulged in philanthropy. Lali Lubani, recognizing the lack of "modern" education for African Muslims began an Islamic school at his Chichiri home in the 1950s. Children were instructed in the Koran in the morning and English in the afternoon.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ District Commissioner to Registrar of Motor Vehicles, 25 November 1953, in MNA, LC/5/5497, F77; Makata to Road Services Authority, 2 December 1953, *Ibid.*, F78.

⁷⁵ Interview 8, Lancy Makata (son of Lawrence Makata), Ndirande, Blantyre District, 3 February 1987.

⁷⁶ Interview 20 Gerald Montfort (Whisky) Lobeni; Interview 7, James L. Mpunga.

Lawrence Makata sponsored a primary school in Ndirande.⁷⁷ Neither of these men had been given a formal education but were committed to providing it to succeeding generations.

As striking and important as individual contributions were to the community, group effort also played a significant role. Voluntary organisations, based on common interest of participants were central to peri-urban life. The Ndirande Welfare Club, a venture inspired by missionaries from the Church of Scotland, operated as a social centre and women's health clinic well into the 1930s. After the war, it was recast to embody a political over and above its community health and recreational roles.⁷⁸

There were also ethnic or "tribal" associations, formed to look after the interests of certain cultural or ethnic constituencies. They functioned as charitable organisations and burial societies. The Angoni Highlands Association, for example, was formed in 1927 to raise money for the erection of a memorial to the Ngoni paramount, Gomani I, killed in 1896. The movement for the memorial was spearheaded by Peter M. Grant and Roderick Marko Chigwale [Chingwale?], two educated Africans from Ntcheu. At its first meeting, Joseph Phambala (an African photographer who lived in Michiru, just west of Blantyre township) acted as the chair

⁷⁷ Interview 7, James Mpunga; Interview 9 Lancy Makata.

⁷⁸ The clubhouse was built in 1941 and initially housed a clinic and football club. The club fell into disuse during the war and in the 1950s was revived under the chairmanship of Lawrence Makata. According to one informant Makata became chair because he was "well-to-do" and would not swindle the club's funds. Minutes Ndirande Welfare Club, 1941, NSB3/3/5.

and James Frank Kahumbe (husband of Mrs. Kahumbe of Chichiri), sat as treasurer. The fund-raising drive was a success and after this, the Blantyre branch functioned mainly as a benevolent society. Members made donations to the association's provident fund which was used to pay for funeral expenses or medical fees for destitute members of the Ngoni community in Blantyre and Limbe.⁷⁹ The Lomwe Tribal Association, headed by Lewis Bandawe, operated from 1943 to 1945. Its objectives centred on increasing the prestige of the immigrant Lomwe population.⁸⁰

There were pan-ethnic organisations with an economic focus. The Brickmakers Association and the African Chamber of Commerce and Industry were multi-ethnic in membership and functioned primarily for the advancement of independent business people. While the African Industrial Union idea failed to take hold in 1950, something like it coalesced in the African Chamber of Commerce, established in July, 1953. Although primarily an economic association, it had political overtones and all of its members belonged to the NAC. Its objective was "to unite all African business men and women" to promote and protect African traders and industrialists and to secure representation for them in the legislative

⁷⁹ D.D. Phiri, Malawians to Remember, Inkosi Gomini II, (Blantyre, 1973), pp.18-19; Angoni Highlands Association Minutes, 1949-1951, in MNA, AS/7/5507.

⁸⁰ Lewis Bandawe was the chairman of the Lomwe Tribal Association during its two year life span. He succeeded in getting government to use "Lomwe" instead of "Anguru" to refer to his people from Mozambique. Lewis Bandawe and B. Pachai (ed.), Memoirs of a Malawian. The Life and Reminiscences of Lewis Mataka Bandawe, (Blantyre, 1971), pp.128-129.

council.⁸¹ The Brickmakers Association, mentioned above, was also multi-ethnic and, like the Chamber, drew its membership from the Blantyre-Limbe area in its early days.

Business people constituted an important segment of the urban community and were active participants in many of these organisations.⁸² But there was also a curious overlap between self-employed and workers in early trade union activity. For example, in 1946 Lawrence Makata, Sidney Somanje, Lali Lubani, Lawrence Mapemba, James Mpunga and several others came together to form the Nyasaland African Drivers' Association (NADA) which later affiliated with the NAC.⁸³ At the time, Lubani was driving for CATCo, Makata for Hall's Garage and James Mpunga for the Nyasaland Transport Company. The reason for Somanje's involvement is obscure. He does not seem to have worked as a driver, but was a teacher at Henry Henderson Institute.⁸⁴ In 1948, all three

⁸¹ Kulujiri to District Commissioner Blantyre, 17 July 1953, MNA, AS/21/4407, F1.

⁸² When available membership lists for various organisations were cross referenced, the same names appeared on many of them. Many of these individuals also held trading licenses for small shops, canteens or barbecues. The information available was too spotty to warrant using anything more than a rough sort programme and a data base programme would likely have produced the same results although in more sophisticated form.

⁸³ M.O.J. Chipeta, "Labour in colonial Malawi: a study of the Malawian working class, c.1891 - 1961", Dalhousie University Ph.D., 1986, p.365.

⁸⁴ Interview 7 James Mpunga, Newlands Inn, Thyolo Road, T.A. Kapeni, Blantyre District, 29 January 1987; Interview 8 Sidney Benson Somanje, Chichiri, Malawi Congress Party Headquarters, Blantyre District, 2 February 1987; Interview 9 Lancy Makata.

drivers and Sidney Somanje quit their jobs and went into various businesses. This did not curtail their union activity, however. Makata and Hartwell Solomon (a self-employed carpenter and transporter) served as secretaries for the Nyasaland African Motor Transport Workers' Union (NAMTWU) in 1949 and 1953, respectively.⁸⁵ Somanje served as vice-president of the Commercial African Employees Trade Union in 1952 until it was pointed out that he was "unemployed". This, it was argued, made him ineligible for membership.⁸⁶ No one seems to have suggested that the presence of employers of labour in a workers' union might have involved a conflict of interest. In spite of his objective class position, Somanje always identified himself as a white collar worker and not as a business man. He, himself, said that the only reason he went into brickmaking was because his involvement in Congress politics made him "unemployable".⁸⁷ Hence, for him, his move into self-employment was a

⁸⁵ Inaugural Meeting of NAMTWU, 8 October 1949, MNA, LAB/TUC/29; and Commercial African Employees Trade Union Management Committee Meeting Minutes, 26 June 1953, in MNA, TU2/10576, F16.

⁸⁶ Minutes of Commercial African Employees Trade Union meeting, Blantyre, 4 September 1952, MNA, TU/B/4/13930, F3.

⁸⁷ Leo Kuper mentioned the propensity of white collar workers to move into private enterprise in South Africa. Michael Cowen later elaborated this process and called it "straddling" -- the propensity of urban white-collar workers to invest savings in land purchase and improved farming techniques. In Malawi, this also took place, but informants suggested that the move to pure self-employment was a result of their involvement in Congress politics after 1944 which made waged employment undesirable. Their political activities placed their continued employment in jeopardy and so they were forced into self employment. Others, like J.F. Sangala, opted for self-employment before being squeezed out of white collar work since this gave them room to be politically more active. Self-employment was taken up for political rather than economic reasons and so these white collar workers differ from Michael Cowen's

survival strategy rather than a positive choice.⁸⁸ This would account for his continuing identification with white collar workers. Moreover, he was never the businessman that Makata and Lubani were. As soon as he could, he returned to government employment. Perhaps this was why his peers identified him as an "unemployed" clerk.

These explanations cannot hold for Lubani or Makata. They had little formal education and so white collar jobs were closed to them. Their decision to engage in business was a conscious choice. Both men had reached the pinnacle of blue-collar employment available to Africans at the time. Driver-mechanics were well paid relative to other skilled workers. Nevertheless, they opted to work for themselves, in spite of the risks involved. It may be that their involvement in nationalist politics inspired them to get out from under their white bosses; "self-reliance", after all, had been one of the pillars of African resistance since the days

"straddlers" in that they saw self-employment as a means to further political rather than economic ends. See, Gavin Kitching, Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite Bourgeoisie, 1905- 1970, (New Haven, 1980), chapter eight. Kitching places Cowen's concept of "straddling" at the core of his analysis. Because so little of Cowen's work is published, I have used Kitching's interpretation of it as elaborated in Chapter Eight of Class and Economic Change. Leo Kuper, An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class, and Politics in South Africa, (New Haven, 1965), p. 266; Iliffe also employs Cowen's paper on "straddling". See, M.P. Cowen, "Differentiation in a Kenya Location", East African Universities Social Science Conference Paper, Nairobi, 1972, cited in Emergence of African Capitalism, pp. 6-17, fn. 36; p. 95. See also, M. Cowen and K. Kinyanjui, "Some problems of income distribution in Kenya", Institute for Development Studies, Nairobi, Discussion Paper, 1977, cited in Paul Kennedy, African Capitalism, The Struggle for Ascendancy, (Cambridge, 1988), p. 53.

⁸⁸ Interview 8 Sidney Benson Somanje, Chichiri, Malawi Congress Party Headquarters, Blantyre District, 2 February 1987.

of Chilembwe.⁸⁹

It is perhaps on this political level that the explanation for their continued participation and acceptance in trade unions lies. If the objectives of African unions were mainly "economistic", as has been suggested by many scholars, their ideologies were profoundly affected by politics. Many workers were Congress members and unions eventually affiliated with the party. Even though men like Makata, Solomon and Lubani came to occupy the position of management *vis-à-vis* labour, the African worker still identified the main employers of labour as non-African. In the urban setting, they were. Government and large European corporations were the largest employers of drivers, commercial and clerical workers. The dominance of the political over the economic allowed people like Makata and others to identify with and be accepted by African workers regardless of their objective class position as employer-capitalists.

Moreover, these men had only recently left the ranks of the employed. And doubtless, their rejection of European management won them support. Hartwell Solomon, for example, was sacked by Trevor Construction in 1949 for "impropriety". In fact, Solomon had been selling timber to Trevor on and off the whole time he worked for them as a driver. He was fired after he was discovered trying to sell the company

⁸⁹ Hartwell Solomon, in fact, proudly claimed to be a descendant of John Chilembwe. Interview 38 Chatengwa Bydon Biswick Kanchunjuru, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 13 June 1988

the same lumber twice!⁹⁰ One can imagine the glee with which this story was repeated.

This close link between employer and employee can be explained by common political cause, but it also demonstrates the fluidity of class structure in the peri-urban environment at the time; particularly blurred were the lines separating skilled workers and petty capitalists.⁹¹ It is a perfect example of the ease with which members of a petty bourgeoisie were able to slide back and forth across class lines, depending upon the purpose.

The same entrepreneurs who made up union leaderships were often

⁹⁰ Chiwambo's interview with Grant Mikeka Mkandawire, Bolero, Rumphi District, 29 March 1987.

⁹¹ This raises some serious questions as to the quality of the existing scholarship concerning working class development in colonial Malawi during this period. The portrayal is one which implies a clear cut division between employer and employees which was not the case in urban Malawi at least up to and arguably after 1953. I refer to O.J.M. Chipeta's thesis on the Malawian working class which is rife with conceptual problems relating to class consciousness. For example, Chipeta identifies Hartwell Solomon as a radical union activist. This man spent the better part of his time adult life trying to break into private business. Solomon spent his youth in South Africa working in the mines and returned to Nyasaland around 1948. He made several fiery speeches which indicated a flirtation with the Communist Party in South Africa, but also proclaimed the virtues of the independent African businessman. They bemoaned the lack of assistance given them by government. It is curious that someone who is identified as a "worker" should make such a strong plea for assistance to capitalists, whose interests are supposed to run counter to those of the working class! Solomon's main activity from 1948 to 1958 was political and revolved around the NAC. The administration kept a watch on him after his return from the south and there was some suspicion he had "red" leanings, but the epithet of "communist" was used by members of the administration to describe dissenters in the same way that "Capricorn" was used by the NAC to describe anyone not completely opposed to the Central African Federation. See Chipeta, "Labour in colonial Malawi"; Political Intelligence Reports August 1948, 14 September 1948, in PRO, CO537/3647/47272/2

prominent members of other voluntary organisations. Their names appear over and over again in minutes and petitions. These organisations gave uneducated business people a social and political voice unavailable to them through District or Provincial Councils. The non-chiefly members of these were drawn from the mission-educated elite.⁹²

It was not until after federation that Congress became a "mass" party. Its limited aims in the early days after World War Two reflect the conservatism of its constituents -- an elite group of white collar and skilled workers and petty bourgeois capitalists, united in their opposition to a colonial state that had frustrated their attempts at uplift for over fifty years. Communities like Chichiri and Ndirande were centres for such early nationalist politics and when the state targeted them as desirable sites for urban "development" it weakened both the communities and their leadership.

Town Planning and the Pretence of Multi-racialism

Before the war, government paid little attention to urban planning. Urban futures were left up to Blantyre and Limbe Town Councils, with government intervening every so often to offer advice over health and land questions.⁹³ The Central Town Planning Committee was the body

⁹² African Provincial Council Southern Province, Government Print, Zomba, 7 November 1944.

⁹³ A token effort toward planning for the future was made in 1929 when government designated "sanitary areas". These were settled areas too small to qualify as townships, but which had the potential to develop into them. A sanitary area was administered by a Sanitary Board of unpaid nominees empowered to make rules regulating drains, street plans, building plans and so forth. The object of the bill was to prevent "errors

which was to advise on these matters. It was formed in 1930, but was never officially constituted and does not seem to have done much before the war.⁹⁴

The problem of urban congestion was an old one. The few native locations in Blantyre and Limbe were inadequate and unappealing. Most African urbanites either rented accommodation in and around the towns or built their own houses in the peri-urban villages.⁹⁵ Similarly, accommodation for transients was makeshift. As early as 1928, migrants returning from Southern Rhodesia or South Africa were put up in Brown's Road and Sclater's Road buildings next to the mosque in Blantyre. Government stopped this in late 1935 because of the health risk associated with congestion and while some rest houses were available,

such as narrow and wrongly laid out streets, unsuitable positions of houses, and similar objectionable features which are strongly in evidence today [1928] at Blantyre and Limbe". Governor Bowring to Amery, 30 November 1928, MNA, M2/3/1, F7; The Sanitary Boards Ordinance, No. 1 of 1929, 4 May 1929.

⁹⁴ The Committee was made up of the Director of Medical Services, the Director of Public Works, the Lands Officer, and the Senior Health Officer. It sat for the last time in September 1944. Chief Secretary's Circular, 18 July 1930, MNA, M2/3/1; Chief Secretary's Circular, 19 September 1944, MNA, S39/1/8/9, F2.

⁹⁵ Evidently, housing was so short, Indians were converting garages, chicken houses and other outbuildings to dwellings. For example, I.I.L. Dossani's building on Market Street in Limbe, two boy's rooms were let out to two African families which meant three families resided on one plot. Rents varied between one shilling and five shillings per month per room. Minute, W.K.G. to Chief Secretary, 6 August 1928, MNA, S37/1/1/4; Sanitation Reports August - September 1936; January - February, 1939, MNA, M3/3/15, F27/F66.

they were inadequate to house this large floating population.⁹⁶

The African housing shortage worsened during the war. In 1944, the Central Town Planning Committee summed up the sorry state of affairs in a letter to the Chief Secretary:

Conditions in both locations are far from satisfactory. The Town Councils have built a number of burnt brick houses...but primitive and insanitary wattle and daub huts predominate while the amenities provided for Africans living in the locations are negligible ... at present the majority of Africans employed in the townships either live in overcrowded quarters of a deplorably low structural and hygienic standard ... and others just outside the boundaries of the townships. Some employees rent accommodation in insanitary huts wherever they can find room or walk long distances to and from their work. This lack of housing in properly planned and controlled township locations is encouraging the development of the social evils which prevail in the slums of industrial towns of Southern Rhodesia and South Africa.⁹⁷

Both Blantyre and Limbe Town Councils petitioned to expand existing native locations. Government opposed this for three main

⁹⁶ Sanitation Reports, September - November 1936, MNA, M3/3/2, F40; F43a. The Blantyre Town Council agreed to build a rest house for migrants at Naperi, but nothing came of this. Instead, Council approved the construction of a Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) rest camp near the train station in Blantyre. Blantyre Town Council Minutes, 18 May 1936 and 20 July 1936, in MNA, BL2/1/1/8.

⁹⁷ Central Town Planning Committee, T.A. Austin Director of Medical Services, J.R. Price, Public Works Department, W.G. Alcock, Lands Officer, to Chief Secretary 29 July 1944, in MNA, M2/22/28, F103. The Central Town Planning Committee was originally to have been a coordinating body which functioned protectorate wide. As early as 1930, the Director of Medical Services, the Director of Public Works, the Lands Officer, the Senior Health Officer and Provincial Commissioners met to discuss the rational developments of "sanitary areas" and townships. Chief Secretary's circular, 19 July 1930, in MNA, M2/3/1, F1. The committee was neither gazetted nor legally constituted and was abolished in 1949 in view of the Town and Country Planning Ordinance enacted the previous year. Chief Secretary's circular, 28 June 1949, in MNA, S39/1/8/9, F5.

reasons. First, given the pattern and pace of urban population growth, simply to expand the locations would mean incorporating a sizeable African residential area within the townships one day and this land "could better be used for other purposes". Secondly, neither Blantyre nor Limbe Town Councils had demonstrated the will or ability to provide decent accommodation in the locations presently under their control. To enlarge the locations would only exacerbate current problems. Finally, it made greater economic sense to place improvements like schools, recreation areas, electricity and sewage facilities in a single African township than in two distinct locations.⁹⁸ Since the municipalities had failed so miserably to provide for African needs, government began to intervene in urban development in an unprecedented fashion. Only comprehensive and coordinated town planning could solve the problem of urban congestion.

Town planning would mean the dislocation of existing peri-urban communities. People would have to be compensated and resettled and this meant the costly acquisition of freehold land "since the only land empty of settlement and reasonably near is freehold".⁹⁹ The Blantyre Town Council thought this all a jolly good idea, but had no intention of paying for any of it. "Government", it resolved, "should be responsible for the whole scheme and run and maintain the township for at least five

⁹⁸ Central Town Planning Committee to Chief Secretary, 29 July 1944, in MNA, M2/22/28, F103.

⁹⁹ Alcock to Director of Medical Services, 5 July 1944, MNA, M2/22/28, F97A.

years when the position could be reviewed".¹⁰⁰ Africans, with few exceptions, did not live in town, therefore they were not a municipal concern.

So, government assumed complete responsibility for land acquisition and the Central Planning Committee began to follow up on earlier enquiries.¹⁰¹ The land was to be used for the erection of "well laid out small town[s]" close to Blantyre and Limbe with houses "suitable to the various classes of Africans for whom provision is required".¹⁰² Land 10 to 12 miles from Blantyre and Limbe townships was favoured. Closer properties, like the Edwards Ndirande Estate, were unacceptable as relocation sites, allegedly because the soil was poor. A more likely explanation was their closeness to European residential areas.¹⁰³ When such properties came up for sale, however, there was nothing to stop Africans from buying them. In 1947, Colonel J.M. Sanders, a resident of Chirimba, wrote the District Commissioner of Blantyre urging him that the land in his neighbourhood should be reserved for European residences. He was particularly concerned with that portion of the Edwards Ndirande

¹⁰⁰ Blantyre Town Council Minutes, 18 September 1944, MNA, BL2/1/1/2.

¹⁰¹ The Committee solicited information from various legal firms and banks which would have knowledge of prospective land sellers. See, for example, Lands Officer to Wilson and Morgan, Barristers and Solicitors, 9 September 1941; Lands Officer to Barclay's and Standard Banks, 9 September 1941, MNA, S37/1/10/9, F1-6.

¹⁰² Provincial Commissioner Cecil Barker to Director of Medical Services Austin, 7 July 1944, in *Ibid.*, F98.

¹⁰³ Lands officer to Provincial Commissioner Southern Province, 17 June 1944, MNA, S37/1/10/9, F193.

Estate, recently acquired by J.T. Karbhari and O.A. Ibrahim. The British Central Africa Company Chirimba Estate was also sold in that year to a kaleidoscope of people. (See Table 6.2) Sanders feared that the "erection of wattle and daub structures" in Chirimba would depreciate the value of extant European residences. He asked that "only approved types of houses of good standard whether European or non-European" should be permitted; cloaking his petition in non-racial garb.¹⁰⁴ Sanders held up class as the basis for residential segregation. In this, he anticipated the rationale to be used for Blantyre-Limbe's town plan.

Table 6.2

Land Purchasers for Chirimba and Edwards Ndirande Estates

Chirimba Estate

A. J. Mponda ♦	J.M.B. Sanders
W.E. de Silva	J.F. Kahumbe *
H.L. Dossani	J.P. Kubwalo *
W.H. Chokhani ♦	Kululanga *
E. Ngondoma	De Souza *
G.F. Ponson	E.J. Chisuse ♦ *
Hannah Ragit Ismail	
H. Ascroft	
Agriculture Department	
S.T. Njiragoma ♦	
W. Sitima Dube	
Lalji Kurji	
Talib Haji Osman	

Ndirande Estate

J.T. Karbhari
O.A. Ibrahim
Mussa Kassam
C.K. Joshi
A. Mahomed Patas
J.J. Master
A.L. Hassam
D.M. Williams
G.L. Parbury
E. Roland

- ♦ Also purchased plots in 1939.
 * Not conveyed as at January 1947.

Source: Provincial Commissioner Southern Province to Chief Secretary, 11 January 1947, MNA, S39/1/8/3, F26.

¹⁰⁴ Hoole to Provincial Commissioner Southern Province J.M. Ellis, 9 January 1947, MNA, S39/1/8/3, F26a.

Government could do nothing to stop non-whites from buying private lands. Town Council, too, was powerless to do anything about building standards, these plots fell outside township boundaries. The Mpondas, Kubwalos, Kahumbes, Kululangas, Chokhanis, Chisuses and others had all been peri-urban residents before 1947.¹⁰⁵ Their decision to buy land at Chirimba was fortuitous. In August 1947, Blantyre Town Council notified the public that it was considering a town planning scheme and advised prospective buyers of land "within the township" to check whether the structures they intended to erect conformed with the proposed plan.¹⁰⁶ Five months later, articles began to appear in the Nyasaland Times lamenting the development of shanty towns like those in the Rhodesias and South Africa. One article pointed to the Blantyre-Limbe road where an "unsightly and unhygienic shanty town has sprung up".¹⁰⁷ It was clearly time to put the municipal house in order, but in so doing, government had to face the broader political implications of any scheme affecting African Trust Land settlement.

The question of closer union with the Rhodesias put a new wrinkle in the struggle for the cities in Nyasaland. The plea for closer union was rekindled in 1948 after the Nationalist Party victory in South Africa. Eager to counterbalance the white hegemon to the south, white settler

¹⁰⁵ Mponda, Chokhani, Njiragoma and Chisuse had owned plots in Chichiri since 1939, but did not have their primary residences there until later.

¹⁰⁶ Nyasaland Times, 28 August 1947.

¹⁰⁷ This is probably a reference to the Chichiri strip. Nyasaland Times, 12 February 1948.

nationalists in Southern Rhodesia spearheaded a new assault on London, asking for a political union with Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Amalgamation was officially shelved, but resurrected in the guise of "federation" at the 1949 Governors' Conference. Under a federal structure, Central African territories would benefit from common economic services and leave "native policy" in the hands of each constituent territory.¹⁰⁸ The NAC was at the forefront of opposition to federation arguing that closer political union with Southern Rhodesia would threaten the future of African rights in Nyasaland; specifically, it was concerned that this would delay African representation on the Legislative Council. Many Native Authorities also opposed federation because of its effect on government policy toward Africans, but their main concern was what this might mean for land policy.

Town planning was formulated in this volatile political atmosphere. Nyasaland's "urban policy" could not be seen to be going the way of Southern Rhodesia or South Africa where Africans were confined to townships remote from the main urban areas. A "segregated" urban plan

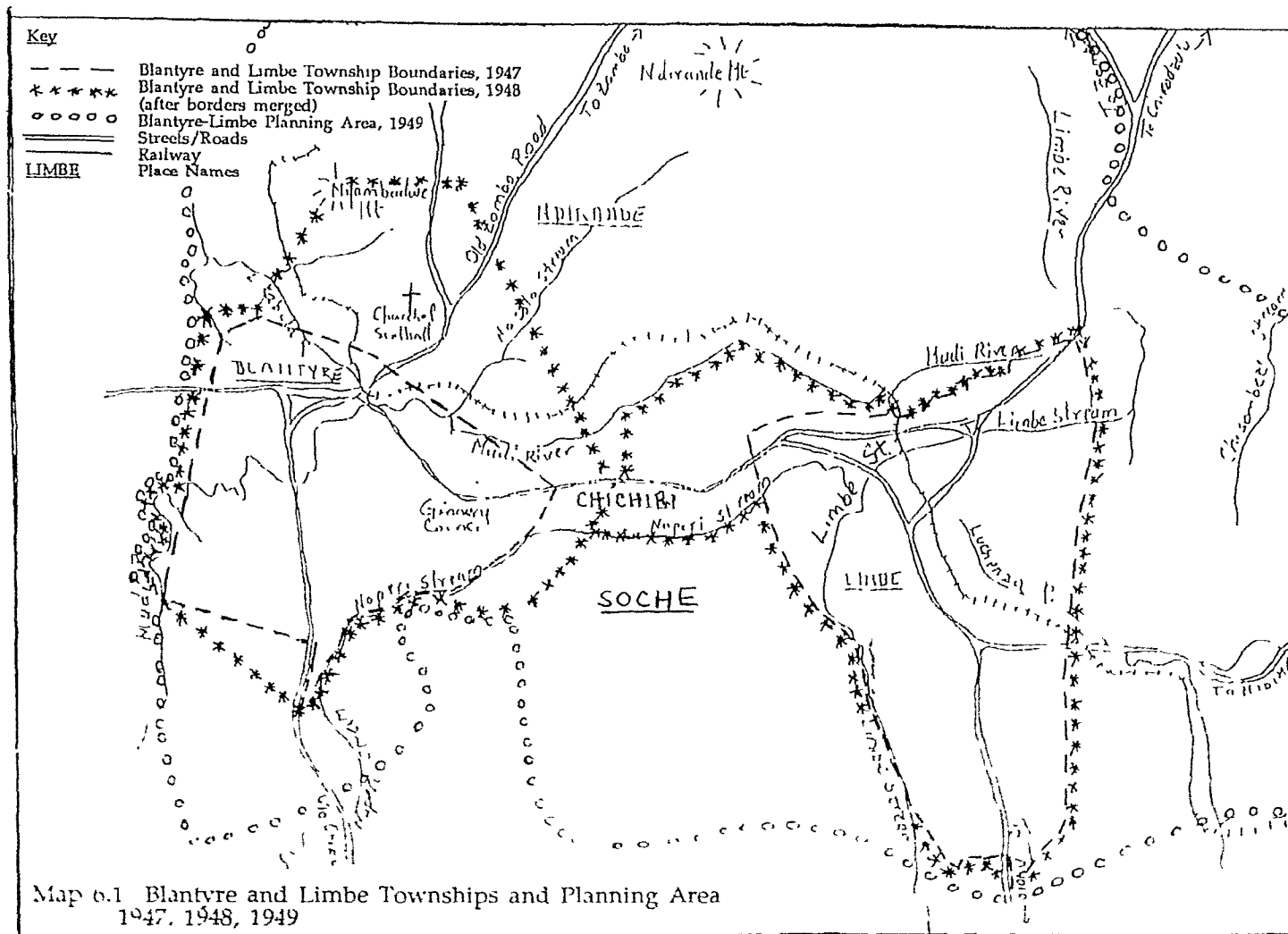
¹⁰⁸ Steps had already been taken in this direction. While the Bledisloe Commission Report of 1939 put paid to any notion of political merging of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland, in 1944, a Central African Council (CAC) was formed to replace the Interterritorial Conference and this had the effect of drawing the territories closer together economically. The CAC had no executive authority, but was an advisory body struck to coordinate research efforts into education, medical affairs, economic development, transport and communications. In October 1945, the Council met to discuss common air services, an interterritorial customs union, currency controls and a host of other matters which would, in effect, draw the three territories closer together. Robert Rotberg, *The Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa, The Making of Malawi and Zambia, 1873 - 1964*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), pp. 216 - 218.

was bound to be held up by Congress as evidence of government's betrayal of trusteeship. Moreover, many key Congress officials resided in the Blantyre-Limbe area and would be quick to point to any such development. On the other hand, the authorities did not want large unregulated African settlements within the municipality. With these factors in mind, planners set to planning.

After the dissolution of the Central Town Planning Committee in 1944, Blantyre and Limbe formed their own planning committees to liaise with government officials. By mid-1947, Town Councils had submitted proposals for new town boundaries and agreed to merge Blantyre and Limbe's eastern and western boundaries.¹⁰⁹ (See Map 6.1) The new municipality incorporated a portion of Blantyre Mission land and large tracts of Native Trust Land including large portions of Native Authority Kapeni's Ndirande and Soche sections. The Church of Scotland was as unhappy with the inclusion of its lands as was Kapeni, but the protests of both fell on deaf ears.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Blantyre Town Council to Chief Secretary, 23 July 1947, MNA, S39/1/8/3, F39; and enclosure with Ellis to Chief Secretary, 1 July 1948, in MNA, S37/1/10/4, F36. The latter map outlines the boundaries as at March 1947 and the proposed enlargement of July 1947.

¹¹⁰ The inclusion of the Church of Scotland Mission in the townships precipitated a battle between missionaries and Blantyre Town Council. Mission officials argued that the expansion of boundaries was simply to increase the ratable area of the townships. They doubted that the rates they would be obliged to pay would be met by adequate municipal services. Council responded by saying that the incorporation of the mission within the town was "long overdue" and that its close proximity to the township had given mission land greater value than it was intrinsically worth. Hence, the mission had already benefited from its location. Government came down on the side of council and brought the Church of Scotland lands into the township by government notice. J.A. Rodger, Church of Scotland to Chief Secretary, 18 April 1947, S39/1/8/3,



Native Trust Land presented a prickly political problem. Soche and Ndirande lands came under the authority of Chief Kapeni. They were considered excellent sites for the erection of African "townships" since intense cultivation had depleted their agricultural potential. Chichiri was a special case since its location mid-way between Blantyre and Limbe made it the perfect site for a light industrial park. Transforming Chichiri from a residential to a commercial site held an added appeal for Town Councils and planners. It would remove "from the vicinity of these townships a heterogeneous collection of undesirables".¹¹¹ In the words of District Commissioner Rangeley:

The Chichiri area is at present a very mixed area. ... There are some excellent African houses, some small African business premises such as carpenter's and bootmakers' shops, many relatively good houses and some very bad huts, and the whole area is generally acknowledged to be the gin-palace and brothel area of the district..¹¹²

While Rangeley advocated change for Chichiri, he felt that its 1200 inhabitants should be brought under control and the area accorded "special planned treatment". He wanted to improve conditions in Chichiri and maintain it as a residential area. He opposed plans for light industry since this would mean "kicking out the Africans and then selling land to Europeans and Indians".¹¹³

F52; Blantyre Town Council to Chief Secretary, 21 October 1947, *Ibid.*, F58; GN206/47, 3 December 1947.

¹¹¹ District Commissioner Blantyre to Lands Officer, 13 July 1944, MNA, S37/1/10/5, F12.

¹¹² Rangeley to Ellis, 24 April 1948, in MNA, S37/1/10/4, F57a

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

Provincial Commissioner Ellis held a different view. He felt that the community should not be preserved. In fact, Chichiri, as it had evolved, was ungoverned and ungovernable: "... the strip is populated largely by persons of undesirable occupations and habits and [...] the Native Authority for some time past virtually has abandoned any attempts to exercise control over it".¹¹⁴ The best solution for Ellis was to wipe the slate clean and start afresh. His views were to prevail. In mid-1948, Blantyre's eastern and Limbe's western boundaries became coterminous.¹¹⁵ In December of that year, the Town and Country Planning Ordinance was passed and seven months later, the Blantyre and Limbe Planning area was designated in the Government Gazette.¹¹⁶ This brought almost all Native Authority Kapeni's Soche section into the planning area.¹¹⁷ (See Map 6.1)

Government enlisted the services of an expert town planner, A. Slingsby, who drew up a comprehensive town plan.¹¹⁸ This was displayed

¹¹⁴ Ellis to Chief Secretary, 26 April 1948, in MNA, S39/1/8/1, F82.

¹¹⁵ GN114/48, Nyasaland Government Gazette Supplement, 15 June 1948.

¹¹⁶ The Town and Country Planning Ordinance, No. 30 of 1948, 10 December 1948; GN154/49, Nyasaland Government Gazette, Blantyre and Limbe Planning Area Order, 4 July 1949.

¹¹⁷ The government notice of 30 June 1948 which demarcated Soche Native Reserve was revoked in October of 1949 to pave the way for the absorption of Soche into the townships. GN223/49, 29 October 1949.

¹¹⁸ Slingsby consulted with Limbe and Blantyre Town Council planning committees and the new Town and Country Planning Committee, headed by Lands Officer J.F. Feeny.

at the agricultural showground in Chichiri from April to June 1951.¹¹⁹ All were invited to inspect the draft plan and make representations to the Town and Country Planning Committee in that period.¹²⁰ A pamphlet outlining the scheme was available through the Provincial Commissioner's office. According to this document, the plan had been devised with the aim of providing services and amenities for the amalgamated townships of Blantyre and Limbe in the most efficient manner. This involved the demarcation of high, medium and low density residential areas, commercial and light industrial zones. Residential areas were to be neighbourhoods which while "maintaining and developing their own separate entities and characteristics of life" would be "coordinated into a thriving and progressive community". Each would have its own schools and other amenities. The plan referred to the high density areas as "African townships". The civic centre to be established at Chichiri was to include a "multi-racial" sports stadium.¹²¹

The hollowness of the plan's commitment to non-racialist principles was as evident to Africans then as it is to us now. Why insist on a "multi-racial" stadium if segregation did not exist in Nyasaland in 1951? Why call high density residential areas "African townships" if their chief distinguishing feature was economic rather than racial? Echoes of

¹¹⁹ The decision to hire a specialist was taken in May 1948 at the urging of Ellis. Provincial Commissioner Southern Province to Chief Secretary, 19 May 1948, MNA, S37/1/10/4, F57.

¹²⁰ Nyasaland Times, 12 March 1951.

¹²¹ Nyasaland Times, 2 April 1951.

Southern Rhodesian "parallel development" rippled through the plan and Congress was quick to note and criticize this.

In response to a barrage of condemnations from Congress and Native Authority Kapeni, J.P. Feeny, Chairman of the Town and Country Planning Committee, submitted a formal response for publication in the Nyasaland Times in July. He began by saying that the plan was not "clearly understood by sections of the African community" and that it was never the intent of the committee "to create a 'colour bar' or to provide for racial segregation". He explained that the terms "African Residential" and "African township" were used in the outline scheme since "the less wealthy classes of the community of Blantyre and Límbe ... are in fact Africans". He said that the designation of these areas was for the protection of Africans since non-Africans would not be permitted to own plots or trade in these areas. Moreover, Africans who had the means to comply with the higher standards prevailing in low and medium density housing areas, were free to live there, just as they were entitled to establish businesses in commercial and industrial zones.¹²² While this may have been so in theory, the experience of Africans who applied for sites in Chichiri industrial park showed Feeny's to be a paper promise. The town plan was nothing more than the old system of racial segregation cloaked in 1950s planning terminology and it went ahead in spite of African protests.

¹²² Feeny to the Nyasaland Times, 19 July 1951.

The inclusion of Native Trust Lands in the planning area raised a special problem.¹²³ The Planning Ordinance gave officials the power to transform Native Trust Land into Public Lands and this was done in the case of those parts of Soche Reserve which fell within the new township boundaries.¹²⁴ This removed these areas from Kapeni's jurisdiction. Kapeni questioned this and was allegedly assured that those people in his area who were displaced by re-zoning were at liberty to relocate in that portion of his territory which fell outside the townships. But while people were at liberty to resettle elsewhere in Kapeni's area, government did not actively encourage them to do so. In fact, it held that the appropriate place for Africans was in the new high density areas within the townships or on freehold plots outside the planning area. The Chief Secretary alluded to this in a letter to District Commissioner Eric Barnes:

You will agree that it is essential that land in the Blantyre-Limbe area be made available at the earliest opportunity and that the appropriate place [for Africans] is within the high density area itself, either within the layout shortly to be prepared [west of Limbe] or on African Trust Land to the southwest of it.¹²⁵

¹²³ Provincial Commissioner Ellis warned the Chief Secretary of the complications this might raise when the first proposals to merge Blantyre and Limbe's boundaries were debated. Ellis to Chief Secretary, 26 April 1948, MNA, S39/1/8/3, F82.

¹²⁴ Map 6.1 shows the new boundaries of Limbe and Blantyre Townships in 1948. The Chichiri strip and that section of Soche Reserve north of Naperi stream (together covering 619 acres) were absorbed by the town. Since Blantyre and Limbe's boundaries were coterminous, Blantyre Town Council assumed jurisdiction over the portion of Soche Reserve west of the new boundaries and north of Naperi. Provincial Commissioner Ellis to Chief Secretary, 1 July 1948, MNA, S37/1/10/4, Map enclosed, F56.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

In 1952 when people actually began to be relocated, they were advised to move to the high density areas or to seek land on the recently purchased estates at Lunzu and Chiripa.¹²⁶ They do not seem to have been encouraged to settle on the Kapeni's Trust Land. When this came to light, Chief Kapeni wrote to the Blantyre District Commissioner. He reminded him that after the "misunderstandings" of 1951 (over the gazetted planning area) the Native Authorities had been assured that "the Town and Country Planning Scheme would never interfere with the rights of African inhabitants who lived or occupied in the Native Trust Land". He added that in 1951, the District Commissioner had informed him that the area north of the Naperi Stream (including Chichiri) no longer fell under his jurisdiction, but that the southern portion of Soche Reserve would remain Native Trust Land. The District Commissioner also assured him that those people removed from the water catchment area (Matenje and Makata villages formerly on Ndirande Trust Land) would not be discouraged from settling in Soche. He said that some of these people who had, in fact, settled south of the Naperi Stream, in his area, were

¹²⁶ By January of 1952, the government had set aside £30,400 for land acquisition and £3,600 for compensation payable to African to be moved in 1953 (£20 per building, including gardens). From 1953 to 1964, 992 dwellings were to be destroyed to accommodate the development scheme. This number included only those buildings erected before the declaration of the planning area in 1948. People were also to be removed from the catchment area around present day Coronation Dam. Those houses scheduled for demolition were marked with large red numbers and residents were served notices to quit by June 1951. J.P. Feeny, Lands Officer to Barnes, 12 January 1952, MNA, URB/TN/1/5329 F4; District Commissioner Blantyre to Sangala, 26 February 1951; District Commissioner Mlanje to District Commissioner Blantyre, 2 January 1951, in MNA, URB/F/2/48700.

now "being interfered with" and told to leave. He suggested that this constituted an abrogation of his former agreement with the District Commissioner and requested that the government disclose its intentions vis-à-vis the future of Africans on Native Trust Land.¹²⁷

Pincott's reply was terse and condescending. He denied that action had been taken without the knowledge of the previous Native Authority Kapeni, who had been deposed only a few short months before. He told the present Chief Kapeni that since he had been chief only a few months, he could not "expect all the things which were decided before [he] succeeded to the Chieftainship to be changed because [he] disagreed with them." He pointed out to Kapeni that the town boundaries had been extended in 1948 and that after this, all Native Trust Land within the boundaries became Public Land. Therefore, Kapeni had no authority in these areas. Those persons moved from land within the townships were free to move to Kapeni's land, but only that which fell outside the townships. Pincott closed his letter saying that he suspected Kapeni's real worry was the future of the Kapeni chieftainship and that he realized Kapeni was "in a difficult position on this point".¹²⁸

If Kapeni faced the progressive erosion of his political domain, others were placed in a comparably "difficult position". Several thousand African residents, including African businesspeople, faced eviction. James

¹²⁷ Native Authority Kapeni, Soche Court to District Commissioner Pincott, 8 December 1952, MNA, TN/12/5527, F7.

¹²⁸ Pincott to Native Authority Kapeni, 22 December 1952, in MNA, TN/12/5527, F8.

Mpunga, Hartwell Solomon, Fasso Chibante, Grant Mkandawire, Lali Lubani and Sidney Somanje all lived in Chichiri in the early 1950s and ran their businesses from there. It was an ideal location and they had considerable economic, not to mention emotional, investment in their Chichiri homes. They decided, not only to remain, but to erect new buildings in direct contravention of the planning order. In early 1952, it came to the attention of Limbe Town Council that several permanent African dwellings and business premises were being erected or renovated in Chichiri. In May 1952, these people were told to cease construction pending the approval of the joint Blantyre Limbe Town and Country Planning Committee.

Those people who built dwellings and out buildings after the posting of development plans were ineligible for compensation under the planning ordinance.¹²⁹ Mpunga, Mkandawire and others were well aware of this. When interviewed in 1987, James Mpunga was hesitant to speak of this difficult time, but his friend, Grant Mkandawire stated that the construction of his grocery and Mpunga's new Chichiri house were protests against the town plan. In fact, they were assisted in constructing the buildings by Chichiri and Ndirande Congress members like Lali Lubani, Lawrence Makata and Hartwell Solomon. They provided free labour, transport and bricks for the structures which were demolished in

¹²⁹ Such construction constituted "unlawful use of Public Land according to Section 21 of the Public Lands Ordinance, 1951".Footman to Barnes, January 1952, URB/TN/1/5329/8.

June of 1952.¹³⁰

Such gestures proving futile, some Africans decided to take government at its word, and test whether Africans were free to live and work anywhere in the new municipality, providing they had the resources to meet building requirements. James Mpunga applied for a half-acre leasehold site in the proposed Chichiri commercial and light industrial area. The value of the premises was to be £2,000. At the time of his application, June 1952, Mpunga had £500 capital in merchandise.¹³¹ Mpunga got the run-around. The District Commissioner advised Mpunga that he should write to the Town Planning Secretary and warned him that no decision could be taken on his application until Chichiri had been planned and surveyed. He added that this could take as long as two years.¹³² In August, Acting Chief Secretary Youens wrote Mpunga reiterating the District Commissioner's words and added that rents and other costs were likely to be high in Chichiri, i.e. that a 99-year lease required proof of £10,000 investment capital and yearly rental payments of £30.55. Since the African High Density Areas would be ready for development sooner and would involve a lower capital investment, Youens suggested Mpunga lease a commercial plot there.¹³³ James was

¹³⁰ Both Mkandawire and Mpunga remembered the exact date that their premises were bull-dozed and this is confirmed by the Limbe Town Council Minutes, 15 August 1951, 14 May 1952 and 11 June 1952, MNA, BL2/1/2/7.

¹³¹ James L. Mpunga to Pincott, 15 July 1952, LD/3A/134/518 F1.

¹³² Pincott to Mpunga, 25 July 1952, in *Ibid.* F3.

¹³³ Youens to Mpunga, 20 August 1952, in *Ibid.*, F5.

not interested in supporting the high density areas, however. Instead, he opted to move to the outskirts of Limbe on the Thyolo Road. This land was still Native Trust Land under Kapeni, although it was located within the planning area. It fell outside the township of Limbe and headman Mbama ceded him a two-acre plot.

Others, too, tried unsuccessfully to penetrate the urban core. Hartwell Solomon applied for a leasehold to set up "Solomon Industries", a furniture factory, in Chichiri as early as 1951.¹³⁴ In his application, submitted to the District Commissioner, he stated that he was already occupying the site under customary tenure. He claimed to have capital resources of £10,000.¹³⁵ The District Commissioner wrote back to him asking for proof of this.¹³⁶ Solomon replied that he was already in business, but that he was operating it on "floating" capital. The £10,000 was in South Africa where he had lived for most of his early life, and that he would repatriate it as soon as the leasehold was assured. He also wrote "I am determined to remain in the Industrial site of Chichiri which

¹³⁴ Solomon was something of an enigma, and a rich urban folklore surrounds him. Born in Malawi and raised in South Africa, he spoke and wrote English, liberally sprinkled with Latin tags. He was a self-proclaimed communist, trade unionist, businessman and nationalist. In fact, Solomon dabbled in everything. For example, it was he and D.J. Tembo who applied to start a cooperative cinema in 1948. According to his contemporaries Solomon was always out for the main chance, but seems to have been chronically impecunious. Hartwell Solomon and D.J. Tembo to Bingham, 8 July 1948 in MNA, NSB3/3/6, F40; Interview 23 Alexander Mataka Bandawe; Interview 7, James L. Mpunga; Chiwambo's interview with Grant Mikeka Mkandawire.

¹³⁵ Solomon to District Commissioner, Application for leasehold, n.d., MNA, LD/3A/122.

¹³⁶ District Commissioner to Solomon, 15 November 1951, *Ibid.*, F2.

place suits my Industrial enterprise and NO WHERE ELSE IN NYASALAND [emphasis Solomon's].¹³⁷ The District Commissioner again asked for proof of assets and Solomon replied that his money was tied up in loans and shares in a Building Society in Johannesburg.¹³⁸ Solomon does not seem to have followed up his letter and the application was put by for two years. In 1953 the District Commissioner wrote to his superiors that Solomon had applied again for a leasehold but that he had advised him that it would be some time before Chichiri industrial sites were surveyed.¹³⁹ In March, the District Commissioner told his superiors that he doubted that Solomon had access to £10,000 and subsequent correspondence asking for share certificates or bankers' letters went unanswered.¹⁴⁰

Solomon continued to operate out of his Chichiri premises until 1957 when he was given notice to quit. In November of that year, he wrote to the District Commissioner complaining about the compensation he had received for his Chichiri home and business premises that year. Solomon reminded officials that he had applied for a leasehold in 1952, had plans passed by the Town and Country Planning Committee and have even paid water rates for 1956. The District Commissioner informed

¹³⁷ Solomon to District Commissioner, 21 November 1951, *Ibid.*, F3.

¹³⁸ District Commissioner to Solomon, 29 November 1951; Solomon to District Commissioner, 17 December 1951; *Ibid.*, F4;5.

¹³⁹ District Commissioner to Provincial Commissioner Southern Province, 3 February 1953, *Ibid.*, F6.

¹⁴⁰ Provincial Commissioner Southern Province to District Commissioner, 12 August 1953, *Ibid.*, F16.

him that his application could not be considered unless he supplied proof of capital.¹⁴¹ Solomon's suit stopped there. He moved to Chigumula along the Thyolo Road.

It is doubtful that Solomon had the investment funds he claimed. But it is curious that he was left alone after most Chichiri people were moved. This may be because very little industrial development actually occurred in Chichiri until after independence. One can imagine the resentment this must have engendered within ex-Chichiri residents. They were moved to make way for industrial development which failed to materialize. Their applications to carry on business were rejected for lack of funds, but the land remained unused. This must have seemed unjust and wasteful.

In 1953, the Acting Chief Secretary stated that at Ginnery Corner, just west of Chichiri, the minimum investment capital needed to acquire a 99-year lease was £10,000. However, a shorter term lease could be granted for those with investment funds of £4,000. He imagined that the same provisions would hold for Chichiri sites.¹⁴² These requirements were clearly beyond the reach of men like Solomon and Mpunga, but even when African applicants proved that they had resources of £4,000 or more, they still failed to secure leaseholds within the townships. The experience of Lawrence Makata and Peter Jacob attests to this.

¹⁴¹ District Commissioner to Provincial Commissioner Southern Province, notes on meeting with Hartwell Solomon, 11 November 1957, Ibid., F22.

¹⁴² Acting Chief Secretary to Provincial Commissioner Southern Province, 17 March 1953, Ibid., F11.

In July 1952 Makata and Jacob, a building contractor, made enquiries about acquiring a leasehold plot in Blantyre where they hoped to build a hotel for Africans. Makata and Jacob both were highly respected members of the African community and had good relations with many of the towns' non-Africans.¹⁴³ In September, they applied for a 99 year lease for 3-4 acres east of Stewart Street between Sclater (Hailie Selassie) and Sharrer's (Glyn Jones) Roads. They submitted plans for a brick building with a tin roof. They intended to finance this project with £1,000 in cash and loans raised on the following collateral:¹⁴⁴

5 lorries (5 ton)	£1,500
2 box-body vehicles	600
1 touring car	150
1 Rister engine (21 hp)	
and LB 7 mill	475
Saw Mill and Plainer	236
Furniture and Ready	
Bricks	<u>2,903</u>
Total Assets	£5,864

Makata would have made his own bricks and Jacob, being a builder, could offer his expert labour free of charge. The District Commissioner replied asking Makata and Jacob to submit full financial particulars. Discouraged by the response, Makata and Jacob put their plans by for four years.

¹⁴³ Makata worked for Hall's Garage as a mechanic and driver until 1948. Mr. Hall, the proprietor of Hall's Garage, sold him a second hand lorry on an instalment basis. Makata never missed a payment and his good name enabled him to buy more vehicles from CATCO at a later date. Interview 9 Lancy Makata, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 3 February 1987.

¹⁴⁴ Makata and Jacob to Pincott, 15 September 1952; Application for leasehold, 15 September 1952, MNA, LD/3A/135

In March 11, 1957 Jacob and Makata followed up their initial proposal and asked for two acres next to the old Blantyre and East Africa Company factory on Sharrer's Road. On March 15, 1957, they again wrote the District Commissioner offering to convert the African Travellers' Rest House in Blantyre into a hotel. In the end, the District Commissioner informed the Provincial Commissioner Rangeley of Jacob's and Makata's two proposals and asked his opinion. The District Commissioner favoured the renovation scheme since it would involve less expense than the construction of a totally new hotel. In May of 1957, the District Commissioner was able to confirm that Makata and Jacob had accepted the government's offer to renovate and run the African Rest House.¹⁴⁵ It was around this time that Jacob and Makata's partnership dissolved along with the rest house project.¹⁴⁶

If Africans were discouraged from establishing businesses in the new industrial areas, they were given positive incentives to set up in "high density" areas. Grant Mkandawire, for example, received a

¹⁴⁵ Pincott to Makata and Jacob, 25 September 1952; Makata and Jacob to District Commissioner Blantyre, 15 March 1957; District Commissioner to Provincial Commissioner Rangeley, 18 March 1957; Rangeley to District Commissioner, 29 March 1957; District Commissioner to Rangeley 13 May 1957, in Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ According to one informant, Makata and Jacob fell out over money. Neither Makata nor Jacob had much formal education. Neither went beyond standard two. They employed a book-keeper, Lawrence Mapemba, to keep accounts for them, but do not seem to have drawn regular salaries from their joint business. Their differences seem to have emanated from disagreement over the distribution of profits. Interview 24 Nyemba Mbekeani, Limbe, Blantyre District, 16 March 1987; Interview 9 Lancy Makata, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 3 February 1987; Interview 16 Peter Jacob, Lirangwe, Blantyre District, 18 February 1987.

government loan for £1400 to build a grocery and hotel in Kanjedza high density area.¹⁴⁷ Chester Katsonga, also because he operated in "African" areas, enjoyed government assistance. He ran a canteen in Blantyre market from 1949.¹⁴⁸ He usually operated well within the law and dutifully petitioned Blantyre Town Council when he wanted to increase his prices.¹⁴⁹ In addition to running the market canteen, Chester catered Provincial Council meetings and was asked by chiefs and other "leading Africans" to open a restaurant for Africans. The District Commissioner proposed to Nyasaland Railways that Chester be allowed to start a new canteen on their grounds. He vouched for Chester's reliability and told the Railways General Manager that Chester already ran a canteen in Blantyre Market which turned a profit of £50 per month. Consequently, Chester would be able to finance the construction of a new canteen and could afford a maximum monthly rent of £2.10.0. He added that the stationmaster in Blantyre supported Chester's application and asked the

¹⁴⁷ Mkandawire (and Mpunga) worked for CATCO and Trevor Construction Company in Blantyre. He left Trevor in 1949. To build his grocery at Chichiri he had received help from his friends in the form of free labour and transport. The timber he used was scrap from Imperial Tobacco Company. Mkandawire maintains that the Provincial Commissioner was a man of "high integrity and sincerity" and it was because of his efforts that he received a loan. He received the money in two instalments: the first for £900 and the second for £500. The proceeds of the Kanjedza hotel and grocery support him to this day. Chiwambo's interview with Grant Mikeka Mkandawire.

¹⁴⁸ Pincott to General Manager Nyasaland Railways, 23 May 1952, MNA, DA/55/518 F1.

¹⁴⁹ Blantyre Town Council Meeting Minutes, 8 October 1951, MNA, BL2/1/1 F14.

manager to accommodate him.¹⁵⁰ In spite of official endorsement, the canteen proposal was rejected.¹⁵¹

Chester next applied for a leasehold site behind the Blantyre bus depot.¹⁵² Like Makata and Jacob, he wanted to open a twenty-room hotel for Africans. The District Commissioner put him in touch with Makata and Jacob, but the three failed to come to any agreement on the matter, although they did meet to discuss it.¹⁵³ Instead, Chester expanded his market canteen and in September 1953 was granted a six month liquor licence for it, thereby becoming the first proprietor of a legal African bar in urban Nyasaland.¹⁵⁴

Although Chester had proved his business acumen and even enjoyed a degree of official support he was unable to branch out into new ventures until much later.¹⁵⁵ Chester found he had insufficient capital to

¹⁵⁰ Pincott to General Manager Nyasaland Railways, 23 May 1952, MNA, DA/55/518, F2.

¹⁵¹ General Manager Nyasaland Railways to Pincott, 18 June 1952, Ibid., F3.

¹⁵² Katsonga to Town Planning Officer Slingsby, 14 July 1952, MNA, DA/55/518 F1,3,5.

¹⁵³ Interview 3 Dalia Katsonga.

¹⁵⁴ Blantyre Town Council Meeting Minutes, 14 September 1953, MNA, BL2/1/1 F15. Around the same time, there were European owned bars in town which would serve Africans who held a special permit signed by the District Commissioner who attested to their good character and permitted them to imbibe spirits and bottled beer. One of these was J.F. Ponson's bar in Blantyre, which, Blantyre Town Councillor Williams complained, Africans could patronize "without any difficulty whatsoever". Blantyre Town Council Minutes, 26 November 1951, MNA, BL2/1/1/15.

¹⁵⁵ Chester's Ndirande house fell prey to arsonists in December 1960 after his election to the leadership of the newly formed Catholic-backed Christian Democratic Party. Phillip Short, Banda, (London, 1974), p. 141.

lease town land on his own and private land owners were unwilling to rent to him. As long as he remained in the market, an African enclave, he was able to operate in town.¹⁵⁶

Those business people who resisted settlement in high density areas faced shrinking options. Little Trust Land was left in the planning area, and these spaces were soon filled. Ndirande received some of the displaced, and many moved to the township boundaries. By October of 1952, Limbe's Town Clerk was already complaining to the District Commissioner about an emerging "Chichiri slum area" on the Thyolo Road.¹⁵⁷ The worst congestion occurred just on the township boundaries between Mile 1 (at the Imperial Tobacco Company buildings in Limbe) and Chigumula Hill. The three villages singled out were Mbama at Mile 1 1/2 (James' Mipunga's village), Likatima at Mile 2 and Kapfuga at Mile 2 1/2. In addition, there was the estate of the late Willard Kalungwe at Mile 3 1/2 which, according to the District Commissioner, "really falls for consideration in connection with action to control building on private

After independence Chester built and ran a number of hotels and nightclubs, but his fortunes went up and down because of political troubles.

¹⁵⁶ He eventually acquired property outside of Blantyre, including a 75 acre farm at Thondwe on the Blantyre-Zomba Road. Much later (1962) he purchased a plot at Four Miles, close to Zomba township where he built "Helen's Bar", named for his first-born daughter. Interview 2 Henry Katsonga, Chester's Nightclub, T.A. Chikowi, Zomba District, 13 January 1987.

¹⁵⁷ Town Clerk Limbe to District Commissioner Blantyre, 28 October 1952, MNA, TN/12/5527, F4.

estates".¹⁵⁸ Town planning had not obviated the problem of congestion; it had simply moved it to the urban margins.

This land was still under the jurisdiction of Chief Kapeni even though it fell inside the planning area. The chairman of the Town Planning Committee advised the Executive Council that the area presented a serious social and political problem since it was virtually all that remained of Kapeni's Soche section. He advised government to "take the plunge", declare all Trust Land in the area Public, and compensate and relocate Kapeni and his people.¹⁵⁹ Possibly because of the delicacy of the federation issue, this course of action was delayed several years. In 1955, the whole of Soche area was declare Public Land, in spite of protests from Kapeni and the NAC.¹⁶⁰ Pincott's response to both Congress and the Native Authority was to say that the Soche area had been earmarked for high density and industrial development as early as 1949 and that the headmen should have made their representations then. He concluded that he had "no cause to recommend any change in the government policy".¹⁶¹ On the other hand, government did not actually evict all residents at

¹⁵⁸ Pincott Memorandum on "Control of development in the Town Planning area Outside of the Townships of Blantyre and Limbe", 17 December 1952, in *Ibid.*, F6.

¹⁵⁹ Memorandum Chairman of the Town and Country Planning Committee, 17 December 1952, MNA, TN/12/5527, F6.

¹⁶⁰ Village Headmen and Commoners, Soche to District Commissioner, Blantyre, 23 February 1955; Kinross Kulujiri, Secretary of the NAC to District Commissioner, Blantyre, 28 February 1955, in *Ibid.*, F33, F34.

¹⁶¹ Pincott to Secretary of the NAC, 4 March 1955, in *Ibid.*, F35.

Newlands, Mbama and so on. The reasons for this are unclear. Perhaps it was felt that after the problems with Chichiri, it was prudent to wait until the land was actually going to be developed. One might also speculate that the future of the protectorate was in question by the mid-1950s and led to a "wait and see" approach.

Bringing Africans into the urban fold even as high density residents presented a potential political problem at the municipal level. Limbe's Mayor Stevens summed this up in November 1952:

... the ground [High Density Area] was in the normal course going to be occupied by Africans who may or may not be in a position to pay rates covering the services which are required, and again, if Africans do pay rates, there might be difficulties with their representation on council.¹⁶²

Township authorities were unwilling to shoulder the expense of servicing African areas but if Africans were to be rated they would be entitled to seats on municipal councils. To avoid this Town Councils decided to give up some of their control over the municipality. They resolved that African high density areas should fall under central government control. Town Councils would provide essential services on a contract basis.¹⁶³ In this way, council avoided the economic drain of subsidized public services and did not have to include African rate-payers on Town Councils. Africans were given representation on the African

¹⁶² Limbe Town Council Minutes, 12 November 1952, MNA, BL2/1/2/7.

¹⁶³ Limbe Town Council Minutes, 10 December 1952, in *Ibid.*

Urban Advisory Board, but this body was virtually powerless.¹⁶⁴

Some members of the Limbe Town Council objected to even this limited African role in the municipal political process. When the Provincial Commissioner suggested the establishment of African Advisory Boards at a meeting with Council in early 1951, one councillor asked if "the formation of this board would not be dangerous" and would it not encourage Africans to "demand more once this was agreed to". Council's parochial concerns were acknowledged by Barnes, but, he noted Africans were already demanding "very much more".¹⁶⁵ He was doubtless referring to African pleas for representation on the legislative council and the NAC's staunch opposition to federation. But the NAC was also starting to demand "more" on other fronts, and this was connected to a change in its membership.

The NAC was unquestionably an elite organization in its early days but after 1948 more and more workers and business people joined its ranks. The latter provided important financial and material backing. In fact, the line which separated the self-employed from white collar elite members blurred as politics heated up in the years before federation. Men like Sidney Somanje found themselves "unemployable" because of their political activities. Somanje opened a canteen and started making bricks.

¹⁶⁴ In 1952, the board asked for the abolition of byelaw 63 that which enacted the curfew for Africans and also asked that more African place and street names be used. Council rejected the first proposal outright and said the second was irrelevant since the township already had African street and place names such as Mandala, Michiru and Mitsidi. Blantyre Town Council Minutes, 14 January 1952, BL2/1/1/14.

¹⁶⁵ Limbe Town Council Minutes, 31 March 1951, BL2/1/2/6.

His move into self-employment was politically motivated rather than a positive career choice but there were other nationalist politicians like James Sangala, who voluntarily moved into self-employment since it gave him greater political autonomy.¹⁶⁶

Whether driven into self-employment through black-balling by white employers or by personal choice, business people came to constitute an important part of Congress membership. Of the nine men nominated for the presidency of Congress in 1951, four were self-employed business people.¹⁶⁷ The NAC naturally began to reflect the concerns of the self-employed. It called for the abolition of the Credit Trades Ordinance, a measure of obvious interest to the self-employed, but not a new grievance.¹⁶⁸ More indicative of the growing concern with commerce and waged employment was Congress' call for changes to marriage and inheritance laws. These issues were also raised by mission-educated

¹⁶⁶ Interview 8 Sidney Benson Somanje; Interview 31 Mokrin [Fred] Sangala.

¹⁶⁷ The nominees were Kinross Kulujiri (a storekeeper), Charles Matinga, J.F.D. Mathiah, Wales J. Mbekeani, Grant Mkandawire (hotel and grocery owner), Andrew J. Mponda, James Duncan Phoya, Hartwell Solomon (transporter and carpenter), Sidney Benson Somanje (brickmaker). *Nyasaland Times*, 20 December 1951.

¹⁶⁸ See Chapter Four. The early native associations in Southern and Central Provinces agitated for the abolition of The Credit Trade with Natives Ordinance. This legislation in particular, vexed the Central Province (Universal) Native Association, formed in 1927 under the leadership of George Simeon Mwase. Its executive committee was dominated by store owners and tobacco farmers, and 75% of the association's membership were tobacco growers. See, Vail and White, "Tribalism in the political history of Malawi", p.175; Ndalama, L.J.C., "Native Authorities, Native Associations, and the peasant economy: a case study of Lilongwe District, 1925 - 1945", Chancellor College History Department Seminar Paper No. 4, 1987/88.

Africans and chiefs in Provincial Council meetings from 1947. In brief, they were confused discussion about how the economic interests of the male property owner and wage earner could be safeguarded. The question of marriage and inheritance, then, was directly linked to the expansion of capitalist property relations, and had little relevance for the village setting in Southern Province.¹⁶⁹

The economic and political climate in which men like Mpunga, Chisuse, Jacob and Makata functioned was almost as confusing as the ideological conflicts they unconsciously and consciously played out and exemplified. On a spatial level, district and central government and town councils in the 1950s were committed to commercial and industrial expansion but this was a commitment to European business under an invigorated federalism. African business was not directly discouraged; rather, it was channelled into "appropriate" venues, in this case high density urban areas. Africans initially resisted displacement and when this proved futile, tried to take a place alongside non-African business in the new "industrial" zones. They failed in the attempt and continued to operate on the geographic and commercial margins, pushed and maintained there by planners and developers.

Profound changes were at work in the economy and society; irresistible changes which were problematic for the people who underwent them. Business people not only struggled for urban space but also for security of property in a social milieu of increasing complexity. Survival

¹⁶⁹ See Chapter Eight. African Provincial Council Southern Province, Minutes, 5-8 May 1947, pp.11-12.

and success depended on how well one manipulated new economic structures while satisfying social conventions rooted in a precapitalist economy. Entrepreneurs were compelled to perform an intricate juggling exercise, bending to older social norms and values while slowly working toward changing them. This balancing act had profound implications for the long term viability of their firms and placed entrepreneurs themselves in an ambiguous position vis a vis their families, extended and nuclear, and society at large. New modes of acquiring material wealth coexisted and at times conflicted with older notions of what it meant to be "wealthy". Entrepreneurs strove to reconcile both old corporate kin and new individualistic capitalist notions of wealth, but found these idioms to be fundamentally at odds with each other. The basic contradiction between old world and new world values had deep significance for the process of capitalist accumulation over time. It is to the level of the firm, the proprietor and the interactions of both within the broader society that the story now turns.

Chapter Seven:

The Firm: Problems and Pitfalls

On one level, the capitalist firm is an existential entity; it has a life and character of its own. Limited liability gave legal expression to the firm's autonomy. But this was not the case with the family firm; this was a business which embodied "personal" relationships between proprietor and client, employer and employee. A warm institution, the family firm embodied the personality of the proprietor(s). So compelling an idea is this that the mega-corporations of today, in their marketing and public relations strategies, often portray companies as friendly, personal actors. In our age of rampant consumerism, the idea of dealing with an impersonal "thing" is less and less appealing to clients. Hence, we see the perpetuation of the "Ma Bell" image; slogans like "we do it all for you" communicate a portrait of the firm as a benevolent family. Sometimes this is extended to recruiting methods; advertisements for new personnel ask prospective job applicants to "join the team". To a large extent, this is a fiction put forward by marketing and public relations specialists. Japanese businesspeople, however, have long recognized that the notion of the corporate family can be developed and manipulated to enhance both worker and consumer loyalty. Even so, the "bottom line" is still oriented toward profit maximisation in the economic sense.

In spite of the emotional appeal of the "family firm", the large corporation is very different from its smaller predecessor. Family firms, or "mom and pop" stores are given dynamic by the human actors which constitute them. And because proprietors and workers are products of a

given social environment, so too is the firm. To decipher and understand the nature of the firm, its strengths and weaknesses, it follows that one must take cognisance of the social and economic pressures in the firm's host environment. These include the pressures directly affecting the firm as existential entity and the human actors who constitute it.

Those factors affecting the firm itself can be called "institutional" and the institutional environment can be fairly easily described and its effects analyzed. The institutional environment is made up of legal structures -- legislation, bylaws and the actors and organisations found within the formal economy. These structures each had an impact on African firms, but more importantly they gave legal sanction to an emerging economic structure as demonstrated in the development of merchant commerce in Chapter Three. This is why such care has been taken to outline the institutional framework in which African business people were working.

But institutions emerge from social and economic conditions and relationships and in colonial Malawi, especially in the urban areas, these relationships were in a state of flux. The changes brought about by the relatively rapid spread of wage labour and the speedy monetization of the economy were certainly profound, but change was mediated by other less tangible factors indirectly linked to the economy, for example, the culture of racism. These factors influenced the transition from a barter based exchange economy to one dominated by money exchange and capitalism and gave the process a special character. Perhaps more significant, however, was transition on the ideological level. The imperatives of an

individualistic capitalism were often at odds with older notions of accumulation and wealth and these socio-cultural pressures were crucial in the determination of the firm and African business as a whole.

Social change was profoundly felt in the cosmopolitan townships and in the period 1945 to 1953, with increasing urbanisation and migration to urban areas, the pressures exerted on town-dwellers became more acute. At this time, African peri-urban business faced a critical conjuncture. Some institutional constraints were easing. Because of an economic upswing, the commercial environment was ripe with possibility and while not totally unencumbered by rules and regulations, entrepreneurs were given much more room to ply their trades.¹ However, the reality of the "typical" African peri-urban business was that it did not outlast the life of the founder and rarely grew beyond a certain size. This cannot be attributed to institutional factors. It is crucial to situate the African firm within the context of the broader society.

Almost twenty years ago E.P. Thompson observed that "food riots" in eighteenth century England were not spasmodic events prompted purely by hunger. Far more complex forces were at play and these bore upon the crowd's "belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs; and in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community". He argued that food riots emanated from breaches in

¹ By loosening of institutional constraints, I am thinking of the opening up of motor transport industry after the war and the abandonment of licensing restrictions generally. Town planning meant the relocation of former peri-urban enterprises to less desirable sites, but it did not destroy them.

what were popularly held notions of what constituted fair prices and fair practice in marketing, and appropriate behaviour of buyers and sellers within the broader community. Taken together, these popular notions made up what Thompson called, the "moral economy of the poor" which conflicted with the new dogma of political economy as delivered by Adam Smith and others.²

More recently, Elias Mandala has employed the theoretical construct of "moral economy" to explain the actions of the peasantry in the Lower Tchiri Valley in southern Malawi.³ In urban Malawi, a moral economy coexisted with a new capitalist economy based on free market forces. Because of the disparate ethnic composition of Blantyre-Limbe's African population, it is difficult to tease out common elements of this world view, but there does seem to have been a popular consensus as to what constituted "wealth" and social and anti-social modes of acquiring it. Wealth reposed in people; it related to the number of retainers and clients a person could call upon. The entrepreneur accumulated material resources as a means to an end; as a way of "buying" dependants. One accumulated a following by providing assistance in the form of presents, contacts for employment and so on. Individual accumulation of material wealth placed one in a good position to distribute such favours.

² E.P. Thompson, "The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century", Past and Present, No.50 (1971), 78-79; 89-94.

³ Elias Mandala, Work and Control in a Peasant Economy, A History of the Lower Tchiri Valley in Malawi, 1859 - 1960, (Madison, 1990)

Entrepreneurs advanced themselves through individual effort, but their "wealth" and prestige reposed in the acceptance of their new found "worth" by the broader society. Good behaviour, in the old kinship idiom, was of singular importance and good behaviour included providing for the less fortunate. In 1959, Bettison and Apthorpe noted that a "pronounced phenomenon of Yao society, which has had its repercussions in Ndirande, is the attainment of status and political prestige through the accumulation of subordinate persons in one's village". The pursuit of "traditional" prestige was a goal of many entrepreneurs. Lawrence Makata pursued the Makata village headmanship in the mid-1950s even though he already commanded considerable material resources. As Bettison and Apthorpe noted, "though his occupation [was] far from that which is customary or traditional in Ndirande, he [Makata] yet regarded a position in the traditional politico-administrative structure as a prize worth seeking for".⁴

Capitalist accumulators trod a fine line between excessive individualism and community duty. They satisfied the latter in terms of the former. Material accumulation gave entrepreneurs some advantages over the traditional leaders in the community. Successful material accumulation placed entrepreneurs in a position whereby they might accumulate followers through distribution of favours and material goods. While they may have complained about the pressures exerted on them by

⁴ David Bettison and R.J. Apthorpe, "Authority and residence in a peri-urban social structure -- Ndirande, Nyasaland", *The Nyasaland Journal*, 14, 1(1961), 11; 18.

extended family and non-relations, they seldom rejected these claims, even when under the "traditional" system, they held little legitimacy (for example, with respect to the upkeep of children by fathers under matriliney). The tenacity and, indeed, widening of actual and fictive kin networks enhanced the prestige of the entrepreneur in the short term, but this new paternalism had important implications for the accumulation of capital over generations.

Through James Mpunga's short biographical sketch outlined in chapter six, we were able to get an idea of the kind of career path typical of an urban entrepreneur in colonial Malawi. However, to protect him, James's personal life and feelings were excluded in the narrative. To gain insight into the stresses and strains facing the self-employed, it seems more sensitive to use a composite biography. Gerard Phiri's experiences are drawn from the life stories of real people gleaned from some fifty interviews. By using a composite biographical format, the privacy of individuals is protected. What follows is, then, a stereotype, but one which included elements common to many of the careers of Blantyre-Limbe's entrepreneurs in colonial Malawi.

*

Gerard Phiri was born in Ralph Maunde village beneath Ndirande Mountain sometime after the First World War.⁵ His grandmother told

⁵ Ralph Maunde was a well-known village headman in Ndirande. He was educated at Blantyre Mission, worked in Northern Rhodesia in the late nineteenth century and returned to Nyasaland at the turn of the century. He worked for a short time at the Public Works Department and in 1902 joined the High Court in Blantyre as an interpreter. He retired in 1934 and died in the 1940s. Lewis Mataka Bandawe, (edited and introduced by B.Pachai), Memoirs of a Malawian, The life and

him it was before the big njala (hunger) which she remembered since the family feared that Gerard, being so small, would not survive. So many children died before their first birthday. His mother and father were Yao, and Gerard lived in the village of his mother. His mother had gardens there and he remembers little of his father since he was often away "ku Salisbury" (in Southern Rhodesia) making his fortune. The most important male figure in his life was his mother's brother, Rabson, who worked at Nyasaland Railways as a fitter. Rabson paid for Gerard's schooling for four years of vernacular school. He had to stop because his uncle had over thirty nieces and nephews by then and could not afford to pay the 6 pence per term school fee for each. So Gerard naturally looked for work in town.

Gerard's first sortie into employment was also his first experience with the white world of town. He was used to seeing Europeans driving to and fro in their motor cars along the road between Blantyre and Limbe, but he had never actually spoken to one. A cousin introduced him to Mrs. Smith who lived in Hynde. He worked there as a garden boy for five years before he "graduated" to the lofty position of house boy. By this time he had learned some English and was able to run errands in town for Mrs. Smith. It was during these shopping trips that he made the acquaintance of many of the vendors and shopkeepers in town.

War broke out in 1939 and Mr. Smith joined up. Mrs. Smith

reminiscences of Lewis Mataka Bandawe, M.B.E., (Blantyre, 1971), p.75
note 5; p.106

moved to Salisbury to stay with friends. In fact, many Europeans were leaving Nyasaland. In November 1940, still with no job and keen for adventure, Gerard joined the Kings African Rifles (KAR). KAR was an eye opening experience for Gerard. He was trained as a driver mechanic and travelled to Kenya, Ethiopia, Ceylon and Burma. His English improved greatly. After the war, he returned to Nyasaland and was demobbed in Nthondwe in 1946. He returned to Ralph Maunde village where he found himself in charge of his lineage's mbumba.⁶ Rabson had passed away in 1942. Gerard might have assumed his uncles responsibilities for the mbumba but for his frequent absences. An older man, the son of his mother's junior sister had undertaken the responsibilities of nkhoswe in Gerard's absence. By virtue of his wartime experience, Gerard was hired on as a driver-mechanic with CATCo in Blantyre. He stayed there three years and was a good worker, but as time went on, he grew more and more disheartened. "Coloured" mechanics performed the same tasks as he, worked the same hours, and were paid more. Eventually, he left to strike out on his own. On the strength of accumulated savings and his good name, he bought his first lorry from CATCo on instalment -- an Austin 5 ton -- for £100.

Gerard began by transporting firewood to town for cooking. It was on an expedition to fetch firewood in Lirangwe that he met his future bride, Margaret. She lived near Lirangwe trading centres in a Nyanja

⁶ Mbumba is the term which refers to the female dependant relations of a matrilineage. They are the responsibility of the senior male in the lineage.

village. They married in 1948 and Gerard built her a house in her village before receiving permission from her brother to take her to town. After all, Margaret could visit home often since Gerard's lorry made frequent trips between Blantyre and Lirangwe.

After 1948, more and more people were getting involved in the Blantyre building boom. Soon Gerard was supplying firewood almost exclusively to brickmakers. Eventually, he began to hire his lorry to these same people for brick deliveries. Over several seasons, Gerard realized that brickmaking was good business and that those with transport had a competitive edge over those without. His friends encouraged him to join in. There was plenty of room in brickmaking for everyone. He received permission from the village headman to begin a pit at Ndirande, but also invested in special moulds for making face bricks. He was able to charge much more for these.

As more people moved into brickmaking, Gerard expanded his operations and laid more emphasis upon marketing. He was fortunate in that his connections made during his time as a domestic servant, in the KAR and later at CATCo earned him the reputation as a reliable person. He did work extremely hard, rushing between the brick pits, soliciting orders at the PWD (Public Works Department) or Trevor Construction and attending to vehicle break-downs on the main roads. He ploughed his profits back into new lorries and machinery, but soon found it difficult to manage all his trucks and work sites. In fact, the personal touch and close supervision responsible for his initial success became less and less appropriate the wider his business network.

By 1952 Gerard owned two maize mills and a small canteen in addition to his brickworks. The canteen lost money consistently and one of the Lirangwe maize mills (about fifty kilometres north of Blantyre) showed a much smaller profit than the other which was in Ndirande. It later transpired that the capitao who ran the Lirangwe mill had been using it for his own personal gain. Gerard used to provide the capitao with a certain amount of petrol to run the mill for a given time. He knew how much grain could be milled given a certain amount of petrol. However, the capitao had begun to pocket much of the profit from milling by topping up the petrol. When Gerard asked why so little fuel had been consumed (and so little money earned) the capitao simply stated that there had been fewer customers than usual.⁷ Gerard sacked the man and put his wife in charge of the mill. The canteen also lost money because employees were skimming profits, but since he had only one wife, Gerard was compelled to close it.

Even though his wife was in Lirangwe at the mill, Gerard was not alone in Ndirande. In fact, because of his good fortune, he maintained a large house which was usually filled with a constant stream of relatives and friends. Many of his young relations were educated as a result of his benevolence. The man whose maternal uncle had been too poor to educate him now paid school fees for his own children and well as his nieces and nephews from his and his wife's family. This ran to considerable expense, and when sitting drinking a cup of beer, Gerard

⁷ Interview 42 Sheikh Twaha Katalama, Mbayani, Blantyre District, 15 June 1988.

and his friends were often heard grumbling about the rapaciousness of their relations, relating in detail the sums lent, the monies paid out, the cloth bought and the favours given. But there was a certain pride in their complaints which often took on the character of a humorous one-up-man-ship; each man lamenting the money he paid out and his colleagues commiserating in his misfortune to have so many "useless" relatives. And, he did it all on his own. He ran his trucks, supervised his labourers, helped out his friends with money and endorsements. No one could deny Gerard Phiri's generosity or that he was anything but a bwana mkubwa ("big" or important man).

But even if Gerard was a prominent person in his community, he continued to hear disturbing things about the prospect of federation and the worsening of the colour bar. He had seen something of this in his travels during the war and bridled each time he saw Africans buying their goods pa window at Mandala or Nyasaland Pharmacies.⁸ He used to do this himself, but since his commercial success, he was better accepted by the Europeans. He could even take a beer at Ryall's Hotel if he wished, although some of his peers remarked that to do so was to put on airs.⁹ The Europeans were also starting to talk about "development"

⁸ Several of the European shops and hotels refused admission to Africans. As a result, Africans could make their purchases through the window.

⁹ According to a number of informants, Lawrence Makata had the privilege of drinking in Ryall's. Several people said that in order for an African to drink hard liquor, he had to have a special permit, signed by the District Commissioner. I did not find any record of this, but it was mentioned so frequently that some form of "permit" may have been informally issued. "Coloureds" were permitted to drink in some European establishments, but according to one informant, he never felt at ease in

and "town planning", but Gerard was troubled by what this seemed to mean. Many of his friends' homes and businesses were being moved to the outskirts of town and they could find no place in the new light industrial park to be built in Chichiri. He could only conclude that this foreshadowed the intensification of racialism under a federal government dominated by the white Rhodesians. He found the prospect galling and it was for this reason that he and so many others joined Congress after the war.

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Gerard Phiri's life story includes many themes common to the experience of Blantyre-Limbe's post 1945 entrepreneurs. Gerard was an Ndirande man, born, probably in 1923 when severe famine was recorded. He grew up under colonial rule and close to the territory's main towns. His uncle worked in the cash economy and although Gerard knew the importance of education, this was denied him because of the family's tight finances. Rabson, the senior male in the matrilineage, could not provide all his nieces and nephews with the trappings of a mission education. Gerard's father was forever a shadowy figure in his life and contributed little to his sustenance. Gerard, like many of his contemporaries, had only rudimentary education.

the environment. Ponson's Bar on Victoria Road may have been the exception. Georges Ponson does not seem to have enforced informal segregation typical of other places. Interview 9 Lancy Makata, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 3 February 1987; Interview 23 Alexander Mataka Bandawe, Chikwawa Road, Blantyre District, 15 March 1987; * Interview 12 Anonymous "Coloured" informant, Blantyre District, 8 February 1987

Secondly, all urban entrepreneurs had some employment experience before striking out on their own. Gerard began as a domestic and may well have continued as one had it not been for the war. His time in the KAR served the same function for Gerard as labour migration did for others. Over and above training, travel exposed him to a plethora of new customs and experiences. It also provided a broader world view.

The impact of the war in the development of African nationalism has been somewhat overstated by some historians. Africans of the pre-war period were all too aware of the injustices perpetrated under colonialism. But if the scales did not fall from Africans eyes and immediately produce a generation of "nationalists", part of the legacy of wartime travel and labour migration was the heightening of desire for an "even shake" within the context of the colonial economy. Ultimately, this metamorphosed into a desire for political and economic self-determination. But initially at least, it demonstrated to Africans the enormous possibilities of different kinds of individual and corporate action in politics and commerce. As James Mpunga said, the war made him more conscious that "to be under somebody is slavery. Better start business."¹⁰

Thirdly, Gerard's experience conveys the importance of personal savings and connections to the success of initial endeavours. From all sources, it was clear that access to credit and temporary cash flow shortages were a problem experienced by almost all business men of the day, even though some, like Lawrence Makata, Lali Lubani, Mikeka

¹⁰ Interview 7, James L. Mpunga, Newlands Inn, Thyolo Road, T.A. Kapeni, Blantyre District, 29 January 1987.

Mkandawire and Billiat Akimu had some assistance from banks in the form of overdraft privileges, but this was not until after federation.¹¹

Government did not provide loans to individual Africans for business purposes until the late 1940s and these were to foster "appropriate" enterprises in the new high density urban areas.¹² Before this, government "development" loans were restricted to rural enterprises and to capital expenditures. They were not available to cover labour costs and the kind of expenditures which made running a business so difficult.¹³ One informant who was a carpenter during the 1940s and 1950s reflected that he was often short of cash even though he required that a client pay a deposit upon placing orders. When he had cash flow problems he simply waited for a customer to pick up an order.¹⁴

Lack of credit was behind the frequent failure of brickmakers. Start-up costs in brickmaking were fairly high since one had to purchase firewood and pay poso each week. Brickmakers made small kilns at first

¹¹ Interview 4 Dina Makata, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 22 January 1987; Interview 9 Lancy Makata, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 3 February 1987; Interview 20 Gerald Montfort (Whisky) Lobeni, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 7 March 1987; Interview 47 E.B. Akimu, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 22 June 1988.

¹² The Soche High Density Area Urban Authority granted loans of up to £150 at 5% over a 10 year period and buildings had to be erected within 12 months. Loans were part of Development and Welfare funds.

¹³ Ministry of Trade and Industry Cooperative Division Circular, 14 September 1949, in MNA, Ref. No. 1706/11211, F2. These loans were only to a maximum of £100 for individuals and £500 for cooperatives and had a 5 year payback period at 1% interest.

¹⁴ Interview 48, Wilfred Kampadzaza, Kampadzaza Village, T.A. Machinjiri, Blantyre District, 23 June 1988.

so as to be able to meet their monthly payrolls. Rushing to build and burn the bricks could mean poor quality product and a narrow margin of profit. Such small producers were also at the mercy of the elements since although brickmaking takes place during the dry season, there are occasional squalls brought in from Mozambique on the chiperoni winds. These could ruin green bricks were they not sheltered. Many brickmakers failed to pay their labourers on time and this coupled with sub-standard product meant that they were not long in the business.¹⁵

The real problem for urban business people was that of recurrent rather than start-up costs. Government offered no assistance, and banks, in the business of making money, naturally required that successful loan applicants have collateral. Only a few Africans were in such a position and according to one observer, whites had difficulty obtaining credit facilities too.¹⁶ Since credit was almost impossible to attain, the first businesses which Africans attempted were those which required small capital outlay, like a canteen or a market garden. Gerard chose to wait a while longer and use his savings to make a down payment on a lorry.

If "formal" institutional sources of credit were few there was greater support from informal lenders. Gerard received important assistance from his brickmaker friends, but this was mostly in the form of advice, favours

¹⁵ Interview 38, Chatengwa Bydon Biswick Kanchunjuru, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 13 June 1988. Mr. Kanchunjuru related how Hartwell Solomon, unable to pay his workers, had his property repossessed by the authorities.

¹⁶ Interview 5, Cynthia and Eric Emtage, Newlands, Limbe, Blantyre District, 23 January 1987. Mr. Emtage remarked on how difficult it was for small planters to get credit from the banks.

and shared information. This seems to have been common among African businesspeople.¹⁷ But while Africans assisted each other by lending machinery, deferring payment for transport, rentals and so on, only a few were in a position to offer direct financial assistance. Lali Lubani and Lawrence Makata were said to have loaned money, but most businesspeople did not.¹⁸ Europeans assisted African business people to a considerable degree, but this, too, was rarely in cash. CATCo, Hall's Garage, and Nyasaland Transport Company all sold vehicles to Africans on instalment bases, but more often than not, there was a personal connection which enabled this.¹⁹

¹⁷ Lawrence Makata, for example, introduced Bernard Chinseu to a chief at Ndeka (near Lirangwe where Makata had kin ties). Chinseu was granted land there by the chief. Interview 24 Nyemba Mbekeani, Limbe, Blantyre District, 16 March 1987.

¹⁸ Informants agreed that there was some lending of money between African businesspeople, all on verbal agreements. Bandawe and Lancy Makata both affirmed that Lawrence Makata lent money to people on occasion. Rankin Magombo a timber merchant mentioned that he had borrowed money from Mr. Bisani, an African wholesaler at Luchenza. He also received a £50 loan from Mr. Downs, a European auctioneer in Limbe. Interview 23 Alexander Mataka Bandawe, Chikwawa Road, Blantyre District, 15 March 1987; Interview 42 Sheikh Twaha Katalama, Mbayani, Blantyre District, 15 June 1988; Interview 34 Rankin Magombo, Naperi, Blantyre District, 9 June 1988.

¹⁹ For example, Lawrence Makata worked for Hall's Garage for several years and was an excellent mechanic. Mr. Hall apparently "gave" him a lorry when he left in 1948. Mpunga was able to buy his first lorry also because of his proven honesty. Many of these early transporters also continued to do business with the same people who employed them or provided them with equipment. Hence, it only made sense to ensure quick and full repayment of debts.

Ironically, it was the Indian shopkeeper who contributed the most direct financial assistance to African enterprises.²⁰ Every peri-urban grocery discussed or described in the course of interviewing purchased goods from Indians in town and many were able to buy on credit. The same logic of interdependence applied here -- retailers were dependent upon suppliers of stock for their survival and suppliers (although to a lesser extent) on retail consumers. It made sense to maintain sound business relationships and evidence suggests that the network of Indian general traders was tight enough to "blacklist" defaulters. Finally, African groceries in the peri-urban area were unlikely to threaten non-African shops in town.²¹

If credit and capital were in short supply, labour also posed a problem for entrepreneurs. Finding an adequate and efficient supply of workers was a constant preoccupation of Blantyre-Limbe's businesspeople. The brickmaking industry provides a case in point. Brick making was a labour intensive endeavour. Once a site was selected, a pit was dug and

²⁰ Ruth Ascroft told how her husband Henry Ascroft had even gone into partnership with an Indian businessman. The partnership did not work out. A coloured informant also mentioned receiving considerable financial assistance from Dossani, a prominent Indian wholesaler in Blantyre. He had a line of credit co-signed by Dossani such that he could draw £20 per month. This was so that he could get started in brickmaking. Interview 10 Ruth Ascroft, Chirimba, Blantyre District, 4 February 1987; Interview 12 Anon, Blantyre District, 8 February 1987.

²¹ By 1952-53, Blantyre and Domasi were the only districts where non-African shops outnumbered African shops. In Blantyre 55% and in Domasi, 58% of licensed shops were owned by non-Africans. Fergus Chalmers Wright, African Consumers in Nyasaland and Tanganyika, An enquiry into the distribution and consumption of commodities among Africans carried out in 1952-53, Colonial Research Studies No. 17, (London, 1970), p.111.

women sprinkled water onto it.²² Usually two men ("pit boys") then mixed the clay with their feet, pounding it into an even consistency. Sometimes, sand was added to strengthen the mixture. From the pit, the clay was put into wooden moulds by the brick moulder (misiri). He then passed the filled mould to a "runner", usually a small boy. The runner, aptly named, trotted the mould to the "layer" (malaya) who unmoulded the wet brick and laid it out to dry. The runner returned the mould to the brick moulder. Each pit employed one moulder, seven to ten runners, two pit-boys, one layer and two female water carriers. Brickmakers agreed that 1500 to 2000 bricks was the desired and attainable daily output.

A kiln was built with the dried bricks, a process which required considerable skill. First, the brickmakers constructed "legs" of about three brick lengths wide and to varying depths, to a height of about two feet. They left a two to three brick space between "legs" and then "set a table" between the legs by interlocking bricks from each supporting leg. Once this was completed, the bricks could be stacked on top. The spaces created between the legs were called "doors". This was where the fire was lit to burn the bricks. Kilns varied in height, but the best results obtained when they were between eighteen and 20 "lines" (brick heights)

²² In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was believed that the only suitable clay for making bricks was that made from the soil of ant heaps. In the 1940s, this had changed and brickmakers were able to make good bricks from just about any soil. The organisation of production changed little. This account of brickmaking technique is derived from the independent testimony of about twenty brickmakers and personal observation.

high. The number of bricks required to build the ideal eight door kiln was about 40,000.

Once the kiln was complete, it was covered with a "jacket" of mud. Fires were lit in alternate ends of each doorway and were temporarily blocked as well. People tended the fires day and night for five to six days. The bricks were adjudged to be ready once "salt" crystals appeared at the top of the kiln or grass placed on it smoked and burned.

It is possible to estimate the profitability of brickmaking for the 1940s and 1950s. Wage rates reported for this period remained fairly constant. Those recorded in Table 7.1 are taken from interviews, and are roughly comparable to those reported in documentary sources.

Table 7.1

Monthly Wage Rates for Workers in Brickmaking, c. 1950

Job	Monthly Wage Rates (including <u>poso</u>)
<u>Misiri</u>	£1. 5.0 to 3. 0.0
<u>Malaya</u>	12.0 to 1.10.0
pit boys	6.0 to 1.10.0
children	2.6 to 9.0
women	1. 0.0 to 1.10.0

Source: Interview 15, Bernard Francisco Chinseu, Ndeka, T.A. Chigaru, Blantyre District, 16 February 1987; Interview 13, Harcourt Mlangi, Thyolo Road, Blantyre District, 10 February 1987; Interview 12, Anon., 8 February 1987; Interview 9, Lancy Makata, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 3 February 1987; Interview 8, Sidney Benson Somanje, Chichiri, Blantyre District, 2 February 1987.

If each pit required the one misiri at £2.10.0 per month including poso, one malaya at £1.10.0, two to three pit boys at £1, two women at £1

and seven to ten child "runners" at 6 shillings each, the total wage bill per pit per month would have been £12. If each pit produced 1500 bricks per day, then it would take 26 days to build an eight door kiln and five to burn it. Each door required one 5 ton truck load of wood to fire the bricks or three to four cubic yards (at seven shillings six pence per cubic yard). For an eight door kiln, the cost of firewood then was about £8 putting total costs at £20.

The sale price of bricks varied to a great extent in the 1940s and 1950s. Written sources indicate a variation between £1.10.0 per thousand in 1945 and £3.5.0 per thousand in 1950.²³ Oral testimony confirms this variation and suggests that this increase in price was in part due to the building boom, but may also reflect seasonal variations. Naturally, bricks were dearer during the wet season when they were most scarce. By the mid-1950s bricks were selling for as much as £5 per thousand. An eight door kiln conservatively produced 40,000 bricks which meant a gross return of between £60 and £120 up to 1950 (based on a selling price of

²³ Oral sources indicated the price per thousand ranged from £3 at the kiln and £4.10.0 to £5 delivered. They also reported that face bricks were more -- from £5 per thousand. Interview 6 Wales J. Mbekeani; Interview 7 James Mpunga; Interview 8 Sidney Somanje; Interview Anon; Interview 20 Lobeni; Interview 36 Njobvuyalema. Blantyre and Limbe Town Councils bought bricks for prices ranging from £1.12.6 per thousand in 1929 to as low as a flat £1 in 1933. This shot up to £3.5.0 in 1950 and by the mid 1950s, it was common to pay from £3.10.0 to £5.5.0 at the kiln. Blantyre Town Council Minutes 1 November 1945 in MNA, BL2/1/1/24 and Limbe Town Council Minutes 7 March 1929; 2 May 1933; in MNA, BL2/1/2/10 and November 1949 and February 1950 in MNA, BL2/1/2/6. See also, "Brick and Tile Making Industry: Nyasaland", memorandum submitted by A.J.R. Hutchinson, Regional Officer Commerce and Industry to Secretary Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 8 November 1955, in MNA, Ministry of Trade and Industry, 6/4/4640, F2.

£1.10.0 and £3) and as much as £200 in the mid-1950s, or a profit of between £40 and £180 for an eight door kiln.

There was money in brickmaking and so the number of people who entered the industry grew over the 1950s. The number of kilns a brickmaker might produce depended on the length of the dry season (from May/June to October/November), but more importantly, the number of labourers employed. B.F. Chinseu remembers hiring between 70 and 100 labourers in the 1940s in Ndirande, and Harcourt Mlanga recalled that his father made five to six kilns per season varying in size from ten to sixteen doors in the 1930s. Another brickmaker made eight to ten kilns each year and Lancy Makata, son of Lawrence Makata, remembers that the land around Ndirande covered with his father's pits and dotted with his kilns. By 1955, independent African producers supplied the bulk of bricks used by private and government consumers. Demand for bricks was still high in the mid 1950s. The PWD estimated its needs at twenty to twenty-four million per year, and the President of the Master Builders' Guild guessed that private contractors' needs were conservatively four million per month. Imperial Tobacco and the Railways were always ready customers.²⁴

As we have seen in the case of trade unions, there was a community of interest between some independent African transporters and

²⁴ The main non-African manufacturers of bricks were Blantyre Brick and Tile and Quarrying Co. Ltd. (part of Muirson Construction), Martins and Naronha's Nyasaland Ceramic Co. Ltd., and the ALC which produced only for its own use. Martins and Naronha specialized in expensive face bricks. See, "Brick and tile making industry", MNA, Ministry of Trade and Industry, 6/4/4540, F2

drivers. There does not seem to have been a stark division between transporters as employers of labour and employees.²⁵ This community of interest was possible given the prevailing racial division of labour in the Protectorate, but it is worth asking whether the "community of interest" between employer-employee held in sectors, like brickmaking, which were dominated by African proprietors.

Brickmaking business required large numbers of labourers, sound planning and organisation. Conditioning people to work efficiently at a repetitive task day after day was as difficult to effect in twentieth century Nyasaland as in eighteenth century Manchester. Informants claimed that absenteeism was common and turnover high. Moreover, drawing on lineage or family ties for labour did not guarantee efficiency or engender any sort of loyalty to the firm.

Profitable brick manufacturing was directly linked to buoyancy of demand. As noted above, demand up to 1955 remained high but because of this, more and more people entered the industry. This exerted downward pressure on prices as the market became more competitive and so producers were faced with the need to cut costs, improve product, or both. Keeping wages low and remaining competitive as employers tested the innovative skills of Blantyre-Limbe's entrepreneurs. One way in which employers sought to attract workers was to offer high poso payments. Poso, the weekly food allowance, was a product of the colonial employment system. Because domestic workers lived in town,

²⁵ See Chapter Six.

they needed to purchase food. To increase the poso payment was attractive to workers since it meant that they had more discretionary income each week. It doubtless enhanced the benevolent image of the proprietor as well. This tactic was possible only for well-to-do employers who could afford to make large lump sum payments each week. Workers were keen to work for those brickmakers who were known to be in a position to offer such benefits and were unlikely to default on payment of wages in general. Consequently, wealthier brickmakers retained the most experienced and productive labour forces. Economic incentive encouraged worker loyalty and the week by week maintenance of labour's needs contributed to the image of the brickmaker as benign employer.

Another method of keeping labour costs low was to hire workers whose homes were remote from town. This too was the prerogative of those brickmakers with their own transport. Lawrence Makata drew many of his labourers from the less agriculturally advantaged Lower Shire district.²⁶ The fact that his first wife came from the Lower Tchiri may have assisted him in this.²⁷ He offered free transport in his own lorries to and from the home village.²⁸ Because brickmaking went on in the dry season, it did not conflict with farming and wages from it served as an important cash addition to family incomes. According to his son, Makata

²⁶ Interview 9 Lancy Makata, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 3 February 1987.

²⁷ Interview 38 Chatengwa Bydon Biswick Kanchunjuru, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 13 June 1988

²⁸ Interview 9, Lancy Makata

found that workers from the Lower Tchiri were willing to work for lower wages than those who lived closer to town.²⁹ It is impossible to check this assertion, but it stands to reason that country dwellers had fewer employment options than town dwellers who could move from one employer to the next were they dissatisfied with the terms of employment. The use of workers from distant districts contributed to lower rates of absenteeism since foreigners had to pay rent or built temporary shelters close to the work site. Marriage ties and kin ties may also have helped to regulate labour as in Makata's case. There is further evidence which suggests that other brickmakers used family connections to recruit labour from home districts.³⁰

African brickmakers used female and child labour to a greater extent than their European counterparts.³¹ This, too, tended to keep production costs low. Legislation controlled the employment of women

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ James Mpunga used to bring labourers in from Zomba District and Makata recruited in Ndeka and Lirangwe as well as the Lower Tchiri. Interview 7, James L. Mpunga, Newlands Inn, Thyolo Road, T.A. Kapeni, Blantyre District, 29 January 1987; Interview 9 Lancy Makata, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 3 February 1987.

³¹ Lancy Makata recalls being trained as a runner when a very small boy. Other informants told similar stories. Interview 9 Lancy Makata; Interview 13 Harcourt Charles Mlangi, Thyolo Road, Blantyre District, 10 February 1987; Interview 41 Dr. Charles Kahumbe and Elsie Kahumbe-Northern, Chirimba, T.A. Machinjiri, 14 June 1988; Interview 47 E.B. Akimu, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 22 June 1988.

and children but it was often ignored.³² The legislation defined "child" as all those under twelve years of age and "woman" as "all persons of the female sex without distinction of age". The initial ordinance and subsequent amending ordinances basically stated that children should not be employed at night or in any industrial undertaking other than one "in which only members of the same family are employed". This changed in 1940 when children were permitted to perform "light work" as defined in the Government Gazette.³³ Two years later, child labour was prohibited completely and "young persons", those between 12 and 14 years of age, were permitted to perform light work only as gazetted.³⁴ Brickmaking was not an industry in which child labour was permitted under the law.

In spite of legislation, Africans commonly employed children in brickmaking and other pursuits and the authorities turned a blind eye to the practice. Law-abiding brickmakers found this galling, not because they were humanitarians, but because the use of cheaper child labour gave their competitors an edge.³⁵ A year earlier, the Senior Education

³² The Employment of Women Ordinance, No. 16 of 1936, 31 October 1936 was followed up by the more comprehensive Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Ordinance, No. 22 of 1939, 20 November 1939 in PRO, CO625/4; CO625/5.

³³ The Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children (Amdt) Ordinance, No. 29 of 1940, 4 December 1940, in PRO, CO625/5.

³⁴ The Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children (Amdt) Ordinance, No. 9 of 1942, in CO625/5.

³⁵ In 1952 G.F. Parbury, a Blantyre brickmaker, wrote to the Provincial Labour Officer in Southern Province to protest the use of children in the brick manufacturing industry. He complained that he had invested in labour saving machinery to cut production costs but that his competitors continued to use child labour and consistently undersold him. Provincial Labour Officer Southern Province (PLOSP) Monthly Report

Officer in Blantyre complained that attendance at Lunzu central school had fallen off because of the employment of children in the Chirimba brickfields.³⁶ Investigation revealed that Roob Singh an Indian brickmaker employed 23 children out of a total labour force of 58 and that Yussuf Ismael, a coloured garage proprietor and part-time brickmaker employed 67 children out of a total work force of 167.³⁷ Rather than dismiss all the child employees, only those registered at Lunzu school were removed. In truth, female and child labour legislation was more a sop to the International Labour Office than a concerted attempt to control female and child employment. Since educational facilities were so inadequate, it is likely that the authorities were happy to have children and youths gainfully employed rather than "loitering" in the town precincts and possibly devising ways of absconding with the property of non-Africans. It could, in any case, be justified as a "natural" component of "traditional" African production methods in which old and young all played a part. The use of child labour, then, was one of the rare practices which served the ends of the colonial authority and the African producer in town.

As competition for market share increased during the 1950s, so did the importance of the brickmaker's marketing role. This meant that he had less and less time at the work site. The proprietor's main off-site concern was the procurement of contracts and orders. Men like Makata

April - May 1952, in MNA, LB11/3/8, F51.

³⁶ PLOSP Monthly Report 1-31 May 1951, in MNA, LB11/3/8, F27.

³⁷ PLOSP Monthly Report, 1-30 June 1951, MNA, LB11/3/8, F34.

and Lali Lubani established their reputations as reliable and competent individuals through stellar work records in the private sector. Others, like Sangala, Mlanga and Makonyola were well known in government.³⁸ All used their contacts made during employment to establish and enlarge clienteles.

Because brickmakers relied on personal relationships to fill orders, it was critical for them to find a reliable capitaos or supervisor to manage the pits during their absence. This was often easier said than done as Gerard Phiri's fictive case reveals. Family connections did not guarantee efficient or loyal supervision either. Sons were notoriously bad managers except in the rare cases where they were trained and given responsibility gradually and during the lifetime of their father.³⁹ B.F. Chinseu left brickmaking because he failed to find reliable overseers and his experience was the norm rather than the exception.⁴⁰

Paucity of good management was used to explain the conspicuous

³⁸ James Sangala worked at the High Court; Reverend Makonyola worked for the Department of Public Works in Zomba and supplied bricks for public construction. Charles Mlanga worked as the editor of Zoona and Nkhani za Nyasaland and had a very good reputation among Europeans. Interview 17 Reverend Duncan Hamilton Makonyola, Ntelekeza Estate, T.A. Mwambo, Zomba District, 25 February 1987; Interview 13 Harcourt Charles Mlanga; Interview 31 Mokrin [Fred] Sangala; Interview 27 Chrissy Sangala, Sangala village, T.A. Malemia, Zomba District, 2 April 1987.

³⁹ Interview 22 Edward Damba, New City Butchery, Blantyre, Blantyre District, 14 March 1987.

⁴⁰ Almost every entrepreneur interviewed or discussed mentioned the problem of unreliable staff. When asked why they thought this was the case, some attributed irresponsible behaviour to the impulsiveness of youth but most expressed complete mystification. None suggested that low wages made for sticky fingers.

lack of delegation in African firms. In almost every canteen, grocery and hotel business surveyed, the owner and his or her spouse alone handled the cash.⁴¹ This meant that the proprietor's valuable time was consumed in activities which could as well have been performed by someone else. Because bosses believed workers to be unreliable, they took on greater responsibility as their businesses grew. This, in turn, gave workers little incentive to behave responsibly and actually encouraged the sort of behaviour expected from an inefficient worker. Failure to delegate may have been as much a cause of unreliable help as a product of it. As in Gerard's case, the failure to find reliable capitalists meant that his business operations could not be monitored adequately.

Lack of delegation was a major stumbling block to expansion and diversification of businesses. There were some who overcame this obstacle either by paying high wages or through modified profit sharing or the promise of future compensation, but these cases were rare. For example, a successful transporter, Njobvuyalema, gave each of his sons a lorry. This gave each son his own interest in the business. They cooperated but only so long as it was profitable.⁴² Nonetheless,

⁴¹ Interview 2 Henry Katsonga, Chester's Nightclub, T.A. Chikowi, Zomba District, 13 January 1987; Interview 4 Dina L.S. Makata, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 22 January 1987; Interview 7, James L. Mpunga; Interview 8 Sidney Benson Somanje; Interview 9 Lancy Makata; Interview 15 Bernard Francisco Chinseu; Interview 21 Isaac Peter Chisasa; Interview 22 Edward Damba; Interview 37 Lines Phambana; Interview 39 Jason Gray Kachale, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 13 June 1988.

⁴² Interview 36 John Foloman Njobvuyalema, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 9 June 1988.

fragmentation of capital (lorries) and diffuse decision-making, denied Njobvuyalema economies of scale. Each son was able, and commonly did, focus on his own ventures first.

Because he assumed all responsibility and decision-making functions, the "Big Man" really was indispensable to the running of the business. Even those businesspeople like Lubani and Makata who hired lawyers and accountants, monitored even the smallest decisions.⁴³ This meant that the firm did not receive the full benefit of its proprietor's innovative ability, nor its employees' talents. The consequences of this are obvious. In the "Big Man's" absence, things fell apart. In 1959, during the State of Emergency, many of Blantyre-Limbe's self-employed business people were incarcerated and since no one was left on the outside who could write even a cheque for them, they incurred significant losses. Lali Lubani and Lawrence Makata never recovered from this blow.⁴⁴

The close association between proprietor and existential firm limited the size and short term viability of firms, but it also fed fissiparous

⁴³ Mr. Kanchunjuru recalled that Lawrence Makata and Lali Lubani both were barely literate. He used to help him out writing up invoices, delivery notes, bank slips and cheques. Lawrence Mapemba and Sidney Somanje also assisted Makata with his books. Interview 38 Chatengwa Bydon Biswick Kanchunjuru, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 13 June 1988

⁴⁴ Lali Lubani and Lawrence Makata lost a great deal as banks called in mortgages and loans. Makata was in the process of rebuilding his fortune when he was killed in a car accident at the Mchinji turn-off in Lilongwe in 1962. Most of the estate was liquidated and went to pay his debts and his family was left with the large brick house in Ndirande and four maize mills. Interview 9 Lancy Makata. Lubani died at the age of 62 of a heart attack in 1966 leaving behind huge debts. His estate was valued at £15,912, but most of this went towards payment of loans and mortgages. Interview 6 Wales J. Mbekeani; Interview 20 Whisky Lobeni.

tendencies after the death of the founder. When he died, the firm died with him. The existential firm and its place within the colonial economy presupposed an ideology more akin to the patrilineal patriarchal form of the colonizers. The capitalist firm should be an independent entity, manipulated by its proprietor, but not wholly dependent upon him. In his absence, anyone, in theory, should be able to step into the role of managerial decision-maker and allow the firm to function as before.

However, in colonial Malawi, the line between firm and proprietor was never clearly defined. Similarly, proprietors rarely came to terms with the contradiction between lineage and individual rights in rights in property. While most informants recognized the importance of centralized accumulation and decision-making to their businesses, they were hard-pressed to lay the ground work for the perpetuation of this after their deaths. This fact and indeed, the failure to train successors and delegate responsibility are intimately connected to the social dilemma faced by businesspeople to this day; this dilemma is rooted in a conflict between prevailing notions of wealth and prestige and the imperatives of capitalist accumulation. It also relates changing attitudes toward individual and corporate rights and obligations and shifting gender roles nascent in colonial capitalism.

Chapter Eight

Gender, Inheritance and Business Longevity

Central government and municipal authorities passed laws to preserve townships for Europeans, but they also discriminated against African women.¹ Urban Malawi was more profoundly affected by the colonial capitalist economy than the rural areas, and it was an economy that valued male over female labour.² The preference for male workers covered the range of urban occupations, from domestic service to government employ. The colonial role of male income earner extended to rural areas where men were regarded as heads of households, even in matrilineal/matrilocal areas. A case in point was the largely Cewa speaking Central Province where women's importance as agricultural decision-makers was encouraged by a migrant labour system which drew anywhere from 1/2 to 2/3 of all available adult males from the area at any given time (over the years 1900 - 1954). In spite of the fact that

¹ The Jackson Land Commission recommended that Blantyre and Limbe construct "native locations" for the use of African employees who worked in town, but neither council made much of an effort to do so before 1945. Blantyre Town Council Meeting Minutes from selected meetings 1922 to 1936, MNA, BL2/1/1/2-8. See also, Report of a Commission to Enquire Into and Report upon Certain Matters connected with the Occupation of Land in Nyasaland Protectorate, [Jackson Commission Report], (Zomba, 1921).

² After independence, male decision-makers remained the ideal stereotype for development projects. On the Lilongwe Land Development Project, See, Ester Boserup, Women's Role in Economic Development, (London, 1970); Lord Hailey, An African Survey. Revised 1956, A Study of Problems Arising in Africa South of the Sahara, (London, 1957), pp. 807; 1381; B. Pachai, Land and Politics in Malawi, 1875-1975, (Kingston, 1975), p.12.

tobacco continued to roll in, Lord Hailey held that matriliney (the prevailing mode of succession, inheritance etc.) was retrograde and that it was "one of the strongest reasons for the individualisation of holdings" since it would give "the cultivator [male cultivator] an adequate security of tenure". So, even while women were engaged in the cash economy, this was not the ideal in the eyes of the administration. Women were considered to be "conservative" and reluctant to innovate. Therefore, little effort was made to enhance their security of tenure.

Because of the preference for male workers, and the common transition from wage work to self-employment, urban capital accumulators tended to be male.³ As men moved to the urban areas for work, they took their wives with them. Since matrilineal peoples constituted the numerical majority in Blantyre District and in the peri-urban areas, virilocal residence marked a departure from "traditional" settlement patterns.⁴ It undercut the economic autonomy of wives and eventually

³ While women frequently adopted self-employment in urban Malawi as market gardeners and brewers, prosperous urban businesswomen are a very rare and very recent phenomenon. Janet MacGaffey's work on Kisangani reveals much the same pattern. Of the businesspersons surveyed by her in 1979-1980, only 11 out of 32 were women and all got their start in business after 1960. There is no indication of the nature of marriages which some have contracted, that is, whether they were "traditional" unions or unions contracted under state law. Moreover, because these enterprises are so recent, one has no sense of the role played by matrilineality in succession or in inheritance of property. See, "Women and class formation in a dependent economy, Kisangani entrepreneurs", Claire Robertson and Iris Berger (eds.), Women and Class in Africa, (New York, 1986), pp. 161-177; and, Entrepreneurs and Parasites, The Struggle for Indigenous Capitalism in Zaire, (Cambridge, 1987).

⁴ According to the 1931 census 49,168 out of a total African population of 73,650 in Blantyre District were Yao, Nguru (Lomwe) and Mang'anja, all of whom followed matrilineal succession and matrilineal residence. The largest group were the Yao who numbered 27,966, or 38%

added to the domestic responsibilities of husbands. Cash earning males were few relative to the population as a whole and they were increasingly pressured by male and female side relations to assist in meeting cash requirements. To understand the dimensions of change, it is essential to outline the way in which matriliney functioned before the spread of the cash economy.⁵

Yao and Nyanja speakers made up the majority of population in the Blantyre District throughout the protectorate period. Both groups followed matrilineal inheritance custom and matrilocal residence. The core of the village was the sorority group or mbumba (consanguineously

of the total. Ion Ramsay, Annual Report for Blantyre District 1931, M.N.A. NSB7/1/2.

⁵ The description of how matriliney was to have worked is an ideal type. Matrilineal succession and inheritance had been under pressure during the nineteenth century as Megan Vaughan and others have shown (see below). For example, Elias Mandala chronicled the change in gender relations which occurred in the Shire Highlands during the period of instability caused by the nineteenth century slave trade. In this important piece, he demonstrates how women's position was progressively undercut through changes in residence patterns. This involved an increasingly reliance on male "protectors" as scattered farming settlements gave way to secure mountain enclaves. According to Mandala, women were compelled to attach themselves to powerful chiefs and later, missionaries, in their search for physical protection. See, Elias Mandala, "Capitalism, kinship and gender in the lower Tchiri (Shire) valley of Malawi, 1860 - 1960: an alternative theoretical framework", African Economic History, 13(1984), 137-170; see also, Megan Vaughan, "Kinship and Class: stratification in the Zomba-Chilwa area of southern Malawi, c. 1800 - 1914", History Staff Research Seminar Paper, Chancellor College, 1978; John McCracken, Politics and Christianity in Malawi, 1875-1940, (Cambridge, 1978), p.97. After formal colonisation, people returned to lowland areas such as the Palombe plain to resume farming. Those who returned to their lowland farms around Blantyre and Limbe found most of this territory had been gobbled up by European planters and corporations. In spite of women's role as "perpetual dependants", matriliney still gave them some security within their kin group and continued to be the dominant custom for succession, inheritance, child custody and access to land.

related women reckoning back to a founding ancestress). Sorority group leaders (nkhoswe) were male, usually the senior female side uncle, brother or nephew of the mbumba. The nkhoswe's main responsibility was toward his sisters and their children. He, in council, allocated land, negotiated marriages and arbitrated in domestic disputes. In spite of this, the nkhoswe's position was ambiguous. Marriage was exogamous and males were obliged to perform "bride-service", usually a one or two year period of farm labour for the parents of their bride to be. The nkhoswe was not exempt from this obligation.⁶ He also married outside his natal village and consequently, operated in two social environments. While he was the highest local authority in his home village, he was an outsider in that of his wife. He might receive permission from his wife's family to reside virilocally, once he took on the role of sorority group leader, but the majority of Yao and Nyanja males did not enjoy this advantage. Instead, they split their time between their wives' and their own villages.⁷

⁶ Most commonly, men married before they became lineage nkhoswe. Some variation from the general rule of bride-service might prevail were he to marry after he had attained this office.

⁷ J.C. Mitchell, "The Yao of Southern Nyasaland", in E. Colson and Max Gluckman (eds.), Seven Tribes of British Central Africa, (London, 1951); The Yao Village: A study in the Social Structure of a Malawian People, (Manchester, 1971), first edition 1956. Kings Phiri, "Some changes in the matrilineal family system among the Chewa of Malawi since the nineteenth century", Journal of African History, 24(1983), 257-274; A.I. Richards, "Some types of family structure amongst the Central Bantu", A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and Darryl Forde (eds.), African Systems of Kinship and Marriage, (Oxford, 1950).

The transience of outsider husbands may have enhanced women's autonomy to a significant degree. Husbands were outsiders and in the numerical minority in their spouses' villages. Access to land was gained through the marriage tie, but children belonged to the mother's lineage. Women enjoyed the constant affective and psychological support of their kin, and this surely enhanced their autonomy *vis-à-vis* their spouses. Because they were "permanent" members of the village of residence, women made most of the managerial decisions with respect to farming. They also had control over the labour of their children. Matriliney may also have enhanced a woman's control over her own sexuality since "illegitimacy" under a matrilineal system was "a 'biological' impossibility".⁸ All children followed the mother, and so it is reasonable to suppose that paternity less significant for the perpetuation of the lineage than in patrilineal systems.

The threat of divorce (and the loss of land in the wife's village) may also have enhanced women's autonomy within the domestic sphere. Should a husband's behaviour prove unacceptable, she could have her *nkhoswe* discuss the matter with her husband's lineage representative. Failing that, she could petition to sever the marriage tie. While land was plentiful, this was not such a problem for men. They could take up land in their matrilineal homes. But in the Shire Highlands by 1907, much of

⁸ Wolf Bleek, "Abortion in precolonial Ghana?", *Africa*, 60,1 (1990), 123.

the good land had been appropriated by white planters.⁹ Where land hunger was most acute, the outsider husband's position became more precarious.¹⁰

Given the ambiguity of their positions, Yao and Nyanja males responded positively to the introduction of British freehold and later leasehold land tenure, but most commonly, they were priced out of the market.¹¹ Others sought to increase their autonomy by entering the colonial economy as workers, and increasingly after 1945, work took them beyond the borders of the Protectorate.¹² By the mid-1930s, emigration

⁹ See Chapter One. Land Register, Blantyre, Volumes 1-3, cited in Pachai, Land and Politics, pp. 50-51; W.H.J. Rangeley, "Early Blantyre", draft paper submitted to Journal of the Nyasaland Society, 18 January 1954, pp. 6-11, in Rangeley Papers in the Historical Society of Malawi Archives, Chichiri, Blantyre District, RP4/1/11.

¹⁰ Megan Vaughan has argued that women's status in the Shire Highlands was actually enhanced by land scarcity up to about 1940. Men's only access to land was through the his wife's matrilineage. This process, however, had natural limitations. As family farms became smaller, agriculture alone was insufficient for subsistence. Wages had become crucial to community survival, especially in places like the peri-urban areas of Blantyre and Limbe. The opportunities to work for wages favoured males and this signalled a change in gender relations the consequences of which were dramatically exposed by the 1949 famine in which single women were most seriously affected. The marriage tie had become critical for women's survival. By 1949 the tables had turned for Yao and Nyanja women and nowhere was this more evident than in the towns where the money economy dominated. Megan Vaughan, The Story of an African Famine, Gender and Famine in Twentieth Century Malawi, (Cambridge, 1987).

¹¹ See Chapter Two.

¹² The impact of migrant labour on the position of women, migrant males, and home communities in general has been widely discussed. Migration was not as important in the south as in other regions. For example, in 1934, a full 65% of the adult male population in Mzimba District was absent compared to 2% in Blantyre. "Report of the Committee to Enquire into Emigrant Labour", (Travers Lacey Report), MNA, COM8/1, p.87; Minutes of the Central Labour Advisory Board, 14

from Yao and Cewa areas was increasing and matrilocality residence was giving way to a modified form of virilocality residence in the rural areas.¹³ This tendency was even more manifest in towns where women were all but completely dependent on their husbands for subsistence.

Urbanisation accelerated dramatically after 1945 after the state changed its policy toward Africans in town. It was after this point that virilocality became more common as large numbers of women followed their spouses to town. Virilocality residence distanced women from their gardens and withdrew the psychological support of blood kin. It also weakened their ability to enlist the support of children, and denied easy access to affective ties. Town women became increasingly dependent on their spouses (rather than their nkhoswe) for subsistence and support. More and more, wives assumed positions of adjuncts to male income earners. Single women, however, were able to maintain economic independence through brewing and petty prostitution.

Colonial administrators and Native Authorities alike inveighed against the iniquitous influence which uncontrolled, single women exerted on urban society. Some African and non-African males shared common ground in their desire to control single women. As early as 1907, Hector Duff, the District Commissioner for Blantyre, noted the presence of "prostitutes" in Blantyre market. He lamented the fact that there was no ordinance under which they might be prosecuted and instead,

September 1943, MNA, LB3/3/1, F249-253.

¹³ See Chapter Four.

recommended periodic police checks in the market so that these women might be admonished and moved on.¹⁴ In 1924 the Southern Province Native Association petitioned the Governor to issue all married women identity "tickets". This would ease identification of "unchaste women in townships" many of whom travelled between the large towns "with the intent of immoral practices". According to this august assembly, these women spread venereal disease and aggravated the incidence of thefts perpetrated by domestic servants!¹⁵

Beer brewers were among the most self-reliant of female urbanites. They earned incomes comparable to certain "male" occupational categories.¹⁶ But they, too, were linked to urban vices and a host of

¹⁴ Blantyre District Notebook 1913, p.224, MNA, NSB3/13/1.

¹⁵ Minutes of the Fourth Assembly of the Southern Province Native Association, 31 May 1924, MNA, S1/3263/23, F9c.

¹⁶ In 1931, it was estimated that brewers could reap annual profits of between £8 and £10 based on four to six brews of 120 gallons per year. Of course, this varied according to a brewer's ability. Skilled artisans such as tailors, cobblers, and smiths earned between £12 and £24 per annum and skilled plantations labourers, seldom more than £7 per annum. The Blantyre Native Association (BNA) reported that a woman might brew six times a year. She might produce 6 twenty gallon barrels at a time. The cost for the production of 120 gallons of beer was 3 shillings for firewood, 3 shillings for millet, 4 shillings 6 pence for yeast, and 3 shillings 6 pence for maize flour. Should she need to borrow a neighbour's pots, this might cost 6 or 7 pence. Out of the 120 gallons, 20 would be given away free of charge to certain individuals, for example, the chief or headman and his officials. The beer was sold in basket cups which held about 3/4 to one pint. Therefore, she would sell 800 pints of beer at a penny each. Hence her gross taking was 67 shillings per brew. After subtracting 14 shillings for materials and maybe another shilling for equipment, her net profit was about 52 or 53 shillings or £2 13/-. As in all occupations, skill levels in beer brewing varied. A woman with a reputation for selling "sour" beer, obviously could not look forward to high returns. Snowden Thomas, Secretary for the BNA to Provincial Commissioner Southern Province, 21 April 1931, MNA, NS1/3/4, F20-21. The women I spoke to said that they brewed only about three or four times a year. On the

regulations were enacted to control their activities. Beer brewing and consumption was proscribed within Limbe and Blantyre townships in 1909 and 1910, respectively.¹⁷ In 1913, the ban on sale and consumption was extended to a two mile radius of the townships and in 1930 this was pushed to three miles. Vendors had simply moved to the boundaries of the prohibited zones to sell! Officials had little success with these regulations, partly because the police force was small, but also because many of the constables and Native Authorities lacked the will to enforce them.¹⁸ Because of this, the state sought to regulate brewers within the

other hand, these women were married and so had access to their spouse's income. Single women may have brewed more frequently, or have distilled kachasu (corn liquor) instead. Self employed wages are for 1931. Taken from Annual Report Blantyre District 1931, MNA, NSB7/1/2; skilled plantation workers wages were for the year 1937/8 and were taken from the Bell Commission Report, 1937-38, MNA, COM2/14, p.1 Interview 13 Harcourt Charles Mlangi, Thyolo Road, Blantyre District, 10 February 1987; Interview 26 Hedges Bwanamakowa, Chikwawa Road, Blantyre District, 17 March 1987 (also informally talked to his wife and this is recorded on tape); Interview 41 Dr. Charles Kahumbe and Elsie Kahumbe-Northern, Chirimba, T.A. Machinjiri, 14 June 1988. Also three interviews conducted by Dudley Chiwala in Zomba District, Interview 1 Mai E. Mwaona, Chilimire Village, T.A. Chikowi, Zomba, 31 March 1987; Interview 2 Mai Chikani, Chikanda Village, T.A. Chikowi, Zomba, n.d.; Interview 3 (group interview) Mai E. Chikanda, Mai H. Kalima, Bambo A. Chango, Mai Zinkambani, Mai Chasoma, Chikanda Village, T.A. Chikowi, Zomba, n.d.

¹⁷ These were only the first of a series of measures to control brewing. See, GN94/09, Limbe Town Council Rules, 6 July 1909; GN2/10, Blantyre Town Council Rules, 18 January 1910; Blantyre District Notebook 1913, p.225, MNA, NSB3/13/1; Blantyre Town Council Minutes, 10 November 1930, MNA, BL2/1/1/4; Blantyre Town Council Minutes, 13 October 1931, MNA, BL2/1/1/5; Blantyre Town Council Minutes, 19 August 1940, MNA, BL2/1/1/10.

¹⁸ Rumour has it that one kachasu-loving Native Authority in Blantyre having partaken liberally of Mrs. Kahumbe's beer and kachasu had become very merry. So much so, that when he came to cross the recently macadamized road between Blantyre and Limbe he mistook it for a river and called out for some one to come and help him ford the

peri-urban areas rather than to eliminate them all together. In this, they sought the assistance of local chiefs.

In 1931, the District Commissioner for Blantyre attempted to make a virtue of necessity when he suggested that permits be sold to brewers by local chiefs.¹⁹ Were there money in it, African authorities might be more inclined to control the production and sale of beer. By the 1940s, government was entertaining the establishment of beer halls in township locations in an effort to halt the illegal brewing and sale of beer.²⁰ Women were to brew independently and sell at central locations. Self-interested Native Authorities would ensure that these were the only places that beer was sold. Beer halls meant that no longer were women able to organise their own brewing rings.²¹

"stream". While he knew kachasu was a prohibited substance, he obviously did little to prevent its manufacture and sale. Interview 41 Dr. Charles Kahumbe and Elsie Kahumbe-Northern, Chirimba, T.A. Machinjiri, 14 June 1988.

¹⁹ Annual Report 1931, Blantyre District, Ion Ramsay, MNA, NSB7/1/2, p.5.

²⁰ Ramsay was opposed to the common practice of beer drinks being held at private homes in peri-urban villages. It posed a problem of control. Ramsay to Smith, Provincial Commissioner for Southern Province, 4 October 1940, MNA S43/1/7/25, F62; Jane Parpart has reported a similar change on the Copperbelt. In the 1930s, government prohibited the brewing of beer in Zambian towns and established government controlled beer halls instead. Profits allegedly went to welfare schemes. It would have been easier to regulate brewing in the compounds than in peri-urban villages since there was no easy way to monitor movements in and between villages. Jane Parpart, "Class and gender on the Copperbelt, Women in Northern Rhodesian Copper Mining Communities, 1926 - 1964", Claire Robertson and Iris Berger (eds.), Women and Class in Africa, (New York, 1986), p.144.

²¹ Beer brewing is labour intensive work. It involves five days of preparation and requires a great deal of water to be fetched. Because of this, brewers often helped each other and staggered production periods so

The introduction of beer halls coincided with a new urban "native policy". Policy shifted from an emphasis on a single, male, transient labour force toward creating a settled one, supported by spouses and families.²² Male workers were encouraged to bring spouses and children to town and post war town planning established a blueprint for the construction of African residential areas or "townships".²³

The increased vulnerability of town women was thrown in dramatic relief during the famine which swept over much of central and southern Malawi in 1949. As wives accompanied their husbands to town, they left

that on any given night, beer could be found somewhere in the peri-urban area. This solved labour problems and since the work was "unpaid" reduced the need for cash. Women were compensated for their labour through the assistance of other brewers when it came time for them to brew. The system also ensured that only a limited number of beer drinks were held on any given day. In this way, brewers did not undercut each other. Interview 26 Mai Bwanamakowa, Chikwawa Road, Blantyre District, 17 March 1987; Interview 27 Chrissy Sangala, Sangala village, T.A. Malemia, Zomba District, 2 April 1987. Interviews conducted by Dudley Chiwala in Zomba District, Interview 1 Mai E. Mwaona, Chilimire Village, T.A. Chikowi, Zomba, 31 March 1987; Interview 2 Mai Chikani, Chikanda Village, T.A. Chikowi, Zomba, n.d.

²² The native locations constructed in Blantyre and Limbe before 1945 were congested and unappealing. Most African urbanites either rented accommodation in and around the towns or built their own houses in the peri-urban villages. Housing was so short that Indian shop-keepers were renting out converted garages, chicken houses and other outbuildings to dwellings. For example, H.L. Dossani's building on Market Street in Limbe, two "boy's rooms" were let out to two African families. Rents varied between one shilling and five shillings per month per room. Minute, W.K.G. to Chief Secretary, 6 August 1928, MNA, S37/1/1/4; Sanitation Reports August - September 1936; January - February, 1939, MNA, M3/3/15, F27/F66.

²³ This can be contrasted with the Copperbelt case which Parpart describes as "stabilization without urbanisation", Parpart, "Class and gender", p. 145. The Town and Country Planning Ordinance, No. 30 of 1948, 10 December 1948; GN154/49, Nyasaland Government Gazette, Blantyre and Limbe Planning Area Order, 4 July 1949.

their kin and gardens, abandoned full time participation in the rural economy, and surrendered much of their economic autonomy. As noted in Chapter Six, Megan Vaughan has explored the gender dimension of the 1949 famine in Southern Province in her book, The Story of an African Famine. Those who starved were those with the weakest links to the colonial cash economy; peri-urban populations who relied on a mixture of agriculture and wage labour for survival. Divorced and widowed women were hardest hit.²⁴ While 1949 was a crisis year and hence, exceptional, it did make starkly visible patterns of gender dependency born of colonial capitalism.

Of course, this is only one half of the story. Men's sex roles were also changing as a result of the shift to a money economy and virilocal residence. While women grew more dependent on male cash earners, men assumed greater responsibility for their nuclear family's subsistence. They also began to provide for extended family members: their own and also those of their wives. Pressures to meet new cash needs -- school fees, hospital costs, travel expenses -- affected most male income generators, but had special significance for a small group of independent petty capitalists.

By 1945, Africans in Blantyre and Limbe had begun to establish businesses based upon private property and individual ownership. They used some family labour but the bulk of their labour forces were non-kin

²⁴ Ganyao comes from the Portuguese verb ganhar which means "to gain". Ganyao labour was casual day labour and both Megan Vaughan and Landeg White argue that women and children most commonly worked on this basis.

wage labourers.²⁵ Fathers from matrilineal ethnic groups such as the Yao, Chewa and Lomwe began to assume the financial responsibility for their children, extended matrilineal family and also those of their spouses. For them, increased familial responsibilities ate into liquid assets, stock (where applicable), but not always a firm's capital base. Proprietors seldom refused assistance to extended kin and commented that "family ties" of this nature were, at worst, inconvenient. Where the tenacity of the lineage connection was most detrimental was when it threatened the long term viability of firms. And this occurred after the death of the proprietor.

Custom held that children adhered to the mother's side. After death, the deceased's property passed to his or her matrilineage. Children of wealthy men had no customary claim on his estate; neither did his wife. But both wives and children had become more dependent on the income of the husband and father. Through residence in town, both wives and children had given up many of their rural ties (especially access to land) in the process. Hence, death of a wealthy income generator left his spouse and progeny particularly vulnerable to the

²⁵ Often, businessmen drew their wives directly into the running of the firm. Charles and Bela Mtemenyama, for example, worked side by side to build a laundry business in Blantyre township. I was told by Mr. Chunga at the Small Enterprise Development Corporation of Malawi (SEDOM) that commonly, men trusted their spouses over their sons as business associates. He cited the case of a well-known transporter in Southern Region who had the motto "Nyirenda and Wives, Inc." painted on the sides of all his lorries. Interview 18 H.M.S. Chunga, General Manager of Small Enterprises Development Organisation of Malawi (SEDOM), Blantyre, Blantyre District, 2 March 1987

avariciousness of the husband/father's relatives. In essence, then, the stakes in inheritance disputes were higher than before and custom proved slow to change along with altered economic circumstances. Charles and Bela Mtemenyama's laundry business discussed in Chapter Four exemplified how this was so.²⁶ A business, begun with little capital, which had survived an international depression and revived during World War Two, splintered on the rock of inheritance custom and the death of its founder.

The Mtemenyamas' experience was typical and it led propertied Africans to debate and call for legal change with respect to marriage and inheritance and marriage practices so that these might be brought into line with altered economic circumstances. The question of individual versus corporate kin rights were at the root of these discussions. After the founding of the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC) in 1944, its membership broadened to include a new petty bourgeois "commercial" element. Of the nine men nominated for the presidency of Congress in 1951, four were self-employed business people.²⁷ In part, this shift in membership can be attributed to the drift of nationalist white collar workers from civil service and private sector employment to private enterprise. Nationalist agitators like Sidney Somanje were driven to self-

²⁶ See Chapter Four.

²⁷ The nominees were Kinross Kulujiri (a storekeeper), Charles Matinga, J.F.D. Mathiah, Wales J. Mbekeani, Grant Mkandawire (hotel and grocery owner), Andrew J. Mponda, James Duncan Phoya, Hartwell Solomon (transporter and carpenter), Sidney Benson Somanje (brickmaker). Nyasaland Times, 20 December 1951.

employment through black-balling by white employers. Others, like J.E. Sangala opted to withdraw from government employ for the increased autonomy this gave him. Over and above this ex-civil service element, the NAC attracted a petit bourgeois element which had little white collar employment experience. These were men who had opted for self-employment for economic reasons and they had invested considerable time and money in self employment. For these reasons, Congress's agenda began to reflect the interests of the self-employed African business community and propertied Africans, in general.

Native Associations, particularly the Central Province Native Association (CPNA) founded by George S. Mwase, had championed the cause of African accumulators before 1944. The NAC, like the CPNA, petitioned for the revocation of inhibitive legislation like the Credit Trade with Natives Ordinance which limited the amount of credit recoverable by a non-African creditor from an African debtor.²⁸ But Congress went farther than this. It began to debate more fundamental issues affecting wage earners and businesspeople. Specifically, they targeted matrilineal inheritance and marriage custom.

Marriage and inheritance laws were discussed at the first Annual

²⁸ The early native associations in Southern and Central Provinces agitated for the abolition of The Credit Trade with Natives Ordinance. This legislation in particular, vexed the Central Province (Universal) Native Association, formed in 1927 under the leadership of George Simeon Mwase. Its executive committee was dominated by store owners and tobacco farmers, and 75% of the association's membership were tobacco growers. See, Vail and White, "Tribalism in the political history of Malawi", p.175; Ndalama, L.J.C., "Native Authorities, Native Associations, and the peasant economy: a case study of Lilongwe District, 1925 - 1945", Chancellor College History Department Seminar Paper No. 4, 1987/88.

General Meeting of the NAC in November of 1944. The meeting was held in Blantyre and so it is not surprising that participants should have been most concerned about the effects of matriliney on accumulation. Father J. de Ponti spoke of "consolidating the African family, the family being the basis of Church and State, the basis of tribe and race". He regarded matriliney as retrograde and said that there should be "no question of ukamwini but umwini or full authority of the father and husband, the head of the family". The Chairman thanked the Catholic priest for his "beautiful words". After lengthy discussion, Congress resolved to petition government to enquire into

... trouble arising from matrilineal marriages ... in order to give the husband, who is the head of the family, sole responsibility for, and full control over the wife and children, and at the same time ensure the women and children right of claim to inheritance in deceased husband's property.²⁹

Congress was asking for the instatement, not simply of patrilineal inheritance, but a shift to patriarchy based on patrilineality. That is, legal power within the family was to move from the senior male relatives in the sorority group (uncles and brothers) to senior males in newly emerging fraternities based on the nuclear family of husband, wife and progeny. In effect, they were asking for legal sanction for what had become an economic reality. Property was to be handed down directly without reverting to extended matrikin. This would have the effect of keeping property intact over generations within a male bloodline.

The marriage issue was raised again at the second annual meeting

²⁹ Annual General Meeting of the Nyasaland Congress, reported in Nyasaland Times, 16 November 1944.

of the NAC. According to a Dedza delegate (influenced by Cewa practice, no doubt):

Customs in our marriages require some consideration to fit the present walk of life. You all know that man today is not considered as the head of his family although he takes great care for his wife and children, i.e. clothing, feeding, hospital and school fees of children. When the man dies his people come to take away all his belongings and leave the women and children to the mercy of the world to look after themselves. I need not repeat to tell you that marriage with Chinkhoswe, the woman is the sole owner of their children. I maintain to stress that man is head of his family so that when he dies his property would be taken by his family and not his relatives. He should be given full liberty to control his family so that the two should not be strangers to one another in their own house.³⁰

Comments from the Dedza delegate are instructive. They indicate the degree to which colonial values had penetrated at least one segment of the African population. Most illuminating is the distinction which he drew between "family" and "relatives". The nuclear family, according to the speaker, should have taken precedence over the lineage, referred to as "relatives". Moreover, he alluded to the increased vulnerability of female spouses. While he suggested that wives and children could not expect sympathetic treatment from the husband's lineage, implicit in their potential "destitution" is the notion that neither could they anticipate support from their own matrilineage. This indicates the degree to which lineage ties had broken down.

The delegate from Dedza also described matrilineal unions as those in which men and women were "strangers in their own house". This

³⁰ Extract from Minutes NAC Conference held in Lilongwe, October 16 to 19, 1945, MNA, S43/1/14/2, F4.

depiction throws up an image of spouses alienated from each other. It also casts them, to some extent, in opposition to each other. More than anything else, this testimony reflects the degree to which matriliney had come to be regarded as an outmoded institution. The words of this man resonated in the hearts and minds of many others who attended the meeting, and discussion of these issues extended to more 'conservative' forums.³¹

Provincial and District Councils of chiefs and educated African advisors began to debate marriage and inheritance soon after it was raised by Congress. At the African Provincial Council meeting for Southern Province in 1947, Lewis Bandawe made the case for changes to marriage and inheritance laws. He did not condemn the old practices, but implied that they were no longer applicable to economic circumstances. He said that no longer did the wife's brother care for her children. This fell to the father. Hence, a father should have rights over his issue. He abhorred what he regarded as the relatively recent practice of spouses being driven off by avaricious relatives of the deceased.

In the old days, on the death of a man or his wife, the ankhoswe [those matrilineal relations of the husband] came quietly and reverently, but now they come running in to wrench off the doors and tear out the windows, and pester a

³¹ Later that month, a committee was struck to discuss possible changes in African marriage laws. The Attorney General assumed chairmanship of the committee. Other members were the Bishop of Nyasaland, M.E. Leslie (Provincial Commissioner), Eric Barnes (Provincial Commissioner), Father Flavius Oullet, Father L.P. Hardman, Reverend J.W. Minaar, Reverend P.H. Borrowman, Reverend Charles Chinula, and Lewis M. Bandawe. GN319/45, 31 October 1945.

widow to find where the dead man hid his money.³²

Bandawe's reckoning of the ideal past when relatives were less avaricious may well be nostalgic, but it is significant that he pointed to factors which explained the "new" greed lineage members. First of all, the stakes were higher. Relatives were chasing "the dead man's money", his valuable doors and window frames. Colonial capitalism ushered in a new era of economic differentiation. One did not have to be born to privilege; accumulation was, in theory, open to all. Independent business, migrant labour and education were avenues for material advancement peculiar to the colonial experience; they were means through which one might accumulate material wealth. Scrambling for the property of a deceased relative was simply a way in which the lineage tapped into that material wealth. A person might escape "traditional" obligations in his lifetime distancing himself from kin or reducing dependence on resources controlled by the lineage (land), but custom ensured that eventually, this wealth would revert to the corporate kin group.

There were provisions in colonial law which enabled the testamentary disposition of property by Africans. However, law also bowed to the imperatives of "custom". The Christian Native Marriage Ordinance and after 1923, the Marriage Ordinance, applied English

³² African Provincial Council Southern Province, Minutes, 5 - 8 May 1947, p.12.

common law with respect to intestacy.³³ However, Section 39, subsection (a) exempted real property from the equation, specifically, judging that the disposition of this should be governed by custom:

...Provided also that real property, the succession to which cannot by native law or custom be affected by testamentary disposition, shall descend in accordance with the provisions of such native law or custom, anything herein to the contrary notwithstanding [emphasis mine]³⁴

In other words, real property -- land, houses, equipment -- was subject to customary inheritance practices. In matrilineal systems, this meant that property devolved to the man's matrilineage. His spouse and children had no claim to his property. In practice, moveable property was also passed down in this way. Few persons made wills, even when they knew of the option. One informant told me that while his father left a will, he had not. When asked why, he said he preferred to make his wishes known verbally before his death.³⁵ In spite of legal framework, few people took refuge in it, perhaps because they knew it held little value in practice. For example, Thomas Mtemenyama and his wife had a registered marriage, but the estate was pillaged by relatives just the same. "When he died his nephews chased their aunt, shared the irons and what have you and the man who remained there tried to make good of what

³³ The Christian Native Marriage Ordinance, No.15 of 1912, 8 November 1912 and its amending ordinance, 16 May 1913 were repealed in 1923. After that, Africans could marry under the Marriage Ordinance, No. 3 of 1902, 31 December 1902.

³⁴ Marriage Ordinance, No.3 of 1902, S.3 ss.(a)

³⁵ Interview 23 Alexander Mataka Bandawe, Chikwawa Road, Blantyre District, 15 March 1987.

was left, but it couldn't work".³⁶ While people many years later empathised with Bela Mtemenyama, no one at the time was able or even willing to intervene on her behalf. Even though she had the full weight of English intestacy law behind her, in practice, this was of no value.

Very few people made registered marriages. The need to reject polygyny doubtless made this repugnant to some and the difficulty of obtaining divorces surely discouraged others. But this is only a small part of the picture. There seem to have been other more deep-seated concerns which discouraged males from exercising existing legal options.

"Christian" or British common law union might have been more consistent with the objective material circumstances of an emerging entrepreneurial elite and their mode of accumulation, but it was incompatible with the dominant ideology which defined "wealth" in rather different terms. The south, at least, was founded upon an agricultural base. People were the scarce commodity, and in fact, the repository of "socially recognized wealth". Bernard Belasco had described similar notions of wealth among the Yoruba which are broadly parallel to those which prevailed in the southern province of Malawi during the colonial period. Belasco distinguished between the ideas of "wealth" and "money" in Yoruba consciousness and suggests that the former was more highly valued than the latter. Money was valuable only in so far as it enabled one to cultivate ties of clientage. Megan Vaughan's argues along similar lines for the Yao and Nyanja peoples of nineteenth century Malawi --

³⁶ Interview 6, Nyemba Mbekeani, Mkulumadzi Bakery, Limbe, Blantyre District, 25 January 1987.

elders commanded respect through the accumulation of people.³⁷ Young Yao men were able to capitalize on the slave trade by accumulating material wealth to attract retainers, and to directly increase their followings through the accumulation of captives, especially women. She further contends that the arrival of the anti-slavery British cut off the male Yao's avenue for concentration of wealth.³⁸ John McCracken argued that Ngoni males turned to the pursuit of education or to labour migration after the pax Britannica cut off a similar process of accumulation.³⁹ The Yao, Vaughan contends, turned their attention to land acquisition, but this failed in face of inhibiting colonial policies and "a persistent concern for the benefit of the kin group rather than for individual advancement".⁴⁰ What British colonialism did not transform was the dominant ideology which defined "wealth". Wealth continued to be reckoned in terms of retainers, clients and so on.

"Western" inheritance and marriage practices were appropriate to individual accumulation and consolidation of material wealth. In fact, they stood in stark opposition to corporate kin ideology which emphasised the survival of the group over the individual. This is not to say that individual action was either impossible or undesirable. Individuals continuously manipulated economic structures to further their own

³⁷ Bernard Belasco, The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero: Preadaptations in Nigerian Economic Development, (New York, 1980).

³⁸ Vaughan, "Kinship and class".

³⁹ McCracken, Politics and Christianity, p. 97.

⁴⁰ Vaughan, "Kinship and class", p.11.

advancement, but advancement was reckoned in terms of the dominant ideology, and that remained rooted in the corporate lineage - an ideal construct, albeit, and one which ran counter to individual capitalism. It was however, a construct fully endorsed and encouraged by the colonial state through the introduction of DANO, Indirect Rule and the retention of "trust land". No matter how different the economic base of Malawi's colonial towns, the dominant culture was rural and urbanites continued to reckon fundamental principles, such as wealth, in "rural" terms.

What hard evidence is there for this? It is impossible to quantify or "prove" social attitudes and values, but one can look for indicators of urban-rural ties. One of these is the extent to which people dropped their affective ties to their areas of origin. Burial practices may provide some assistance in this. Most of the men and women interviewed expressed the desire to be buried "at home". For many, their "home" villages were places that they visited very seldom during their lifetimes. Nevertheless, the connection to the "land" of birth remained strong. In Blantyre and Limbe after the 1920s, burial societies existed for both the Tonga (from the northern lake shore regions) and for the Ngoni (from Dedza and Ncheu Districts).⁴¹ These benevolent societies solicited funds from members of

⁴¹. The Angoni Highlands Association, for example, was formed in 1927 to raise money for the erection of a memorial to the Ngoni paramount, Gomani I, killed in 1896. The movement for the memorial was spearheaded by Peter M. Grant and Roderick Marko Chigwale [Chingwale?], two Africans from Ntcheu. At its first meeting, Joseph Phambala (an African photographer who lived in Michiru, just west of Blantyre township) acted as the chair and James Frank Kahumbe (husband of Mrs. Kahumbe of Chichiri), sat as treasurer. The fund-raising drive was a success and after this, the Blantyre branch in functioned mainly as a benevolent society. D.D. Phiri, Malawians to Remember, Inkosi Gomani II, (Blantyre, 1973), pp.18-19; Angoni Highlands Association Minutes, 1949-

various ethnic groups for provident funds from which burial expenses transportation home and medical expenses were paid. Not only that, informal assistance for transportation to the place of burial was common. Lawrence Makata frequently lent his lorries for the purposes of "repatriating" the body of a person who had died in town.⁴² Burial practices, then, reflect the continuing ideological importance of the rural link.

Another way to assess the importance of rural ideology is to pose direct questions to people about capitalist behaviour; how observers regard the activities of accumulators. A well-known taxi-owner was roundly criticized by several informants for his "stinginess". It was said that he would refuse transport if customers could not demonstrate their ability to pay the fare. Sound capitalistic behaviour, but one which was interpreted as miserly action.⁴³ Also, accumulators themselves were asked how they felt about relatives who asked for hand-outs. Almost unanimously, they responded that they could not refuse to give assistance. Fred Sangala explained the reason for this at some length. He acknowledged that "poor relations" could be a drain on resources, but that this had to be born. To refuse them was counterproductive in the long run since it would diminish a person's status in the eyes of the community:

1951, in MNA, AS/7/5507.

⁴² Interview 9 Lancy Makata, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 3 February 1987.

⁴³ For obvious reasons, the names of parties are confidential.

... So, if it was a shop and I saw somebody, a cousin of mine coming in, he has, he's just got that hope that he is going to pluck a few sweets and give to me free, because he has got a lot of money. He will give me a Coca Cola drink because I am poor... And so on like that. They don't have the feeling that the more this man is taking more commodities, he's draining his profits out. But because of the relationship connection, that relationship connection is more than the goods that this man has. That's why the person respects that sort of thing [more] than the property... [later] ... That sort of extended feeling in kindness in relationship interferes in the business. You could feel ashamed if you said "no, I can't give you a coke, my sister or my cousin, because this coke represents the money that I'm holding in this business. Then he goes back swearing at you, sulking and say, "Here you are very greedy. How can you do that to a brother? How can you do that to a sister?

When I asked this man about the very common practice of extending credit to relations, he went on to explain why it was difficult to discourage this.

Mmm. But now in our traditional custom, that could be very bad because we have things like sickness. We have things like sickness. Somebody gets to bed, he is ill. All right. We have things like funerals. Mmm? When somebody is dead you want people to come and condole you. And to condole you depends on the attitude you present to your relatives. If you are a bad person to-do, they say "He's in trouble. Somebody in his family passed away." They say, "All right. Let him go sweat. He has got a lot of money. Let his money do everything that we could have done ourselves." ... You see, because I will not send my money to go and pick my goods somewhere when I'm sick. I will have to require somebody to say, "Can you go and withdraw my money from the bank?" I will have to have somebody to go there. And then he will say. "Why don't you go and send your money to go and get the money for you? You are a very stingy man". You see, this is the thing. So we live that way...⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Interview 31 Mokrin [Fred] Sangala, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 7 May 1987.

African entrepreneurs were eager to accumulate material wealth, but they did so as a means to an end, not as an end in itself. Material wealth was valuable for the ties of dependency which it could engender. In the twentieth century, it was an important avenue for the acquisition of socially recognized wealth which reposed in the accumulation, not of money, but of "a following"; a retinue of clients who looked to the "big man" as patron and custodian. In the nineteenth century this involved slaves and pawns. In the colonial context, the "big man's" economic success in the cash economy enabled him to build a patronage network. He could supply goods, services, employment, school fees, advice, references, business contacts credit and, every so often, money loans. The accumulation of material wealth was a means of attaining "socially recognized wealth"; that which really counted. Not only did a man's clientage network enhance his prestige (and also his ability to accumulate material wealth) during his life time, it ensured the perpetuation of an individual's memory. While obligations to family and clients was a financial drain, they were also a source of prestige and immortality. Perhaps for this reason, big men were reticent to adopt western practices, especially those pertaining to marriage and inheritance.

Both matriliney and patriliney worked against individual property accumulation and emerging capitalists were fully cognisant of this, as evidenced by the frequency with they discussed these issues. Nevertheless, they resisted the full scale adoption of Western practices. Instead, individuals worked within existing structures to safeguard property as much as possible. For example, one informant explained that

in order to keep his property in the family, avoid ukamwini (compulsory bride service) and provide for his wife and children, he deliberately married a paternal cousin.

... I have married a cousin. I married a cousin. She comes from the Sangala clan where my father comes from. You see? So, she's a bit of that half, half the other way, but she comes from Zomba. All right? That's her home. Now, it is still all more or less the same if she stayed in Blantyre because she is part of the Sangalas. You see? I have not married like the other people who go to, perhaps Lilongwe, or else to Chiradzulu and get somebody from there and then ... If I had married in Chiradzulu, then you would be interviewing me in Chiradzulu, where it would have been the home of my wife. But it's not like that with me because, I, um, what do they say? I am not mkamwini, you see, I am not mkamwini to my wife. No. Because I've married my cousin ... I did this deliberately because I married very late. Now, when I married very late, I had already acquired property. You see the point? When I came in from Zimbabwe, I had collected quite a number of things .. Then, I thought to myself, "What do I do? I'd better go home where my father comes from, get somebody of my relatives who will come and enjoy my property. So if I die, I am leaving my property with my own people. I'm not going to leave my property with different people staying there. That's my way."⁴⁵

At least, after his death, Sangala's wife and children, by virtue of being from his the husband's lineage, would benefit to some extent from the inheritance. When asked about a will, he replied that he had "a paper" but that this kind of marriage was better.⁴⁶ In other words, his

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Cousin marriage was not only "better", but it was accepted by older family members. Rankin Magombo married a cousin late in life at the urging of his parents. John Njobvuyalema's first and second wife were from the same family ("house"). He married this way (chokolo) because he is of a chiefly family. By taking wives from the same family, he ensured that his children would "always be chiefs". Interview 34 Rankin Magombo, Naperi, Blantyre District, 9 June 1988; Interview 36 John Poloman Njobvuyalema, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 9 June 1988.

children's claim to his property was less likely to be questioned because he married a cross cousin from his natal village.⁴⁷ On the other hand, it was still the corporate kin group which inherited, not individual children.⁴⁸

Through the autonomy gained by the male via urban employment came a shift in gender relations such that his power over and responsibility for his wife and children increased. This meant greater responsibility for the nuclear family. Food, clothing, shelter, school fees, and the costs of training were shouldered by these men. If the man had, and it was commonly so, rural relatives, there came a time when he took on responsibility for them in town. With this, too, came monetary cost. He could not ignore this responsibility since his reputation, his posterity and his soul would suffer. At the same time, he did not abandon his new "nuclear", patriarchal responsibility since if he did, he should have worked for nothing. The male business person who came from a matrilineal background, then, took on a double burden in his efforts to accumulate.

⁴⁷ Cross-cousin marriage was an old and accepted practice. Of those who married cousins were Njobvuyalema (Ngoni), Magombo (Lomwe) and Sangala (Yao). Both patrilineal and matrilineal peoples practised this kind of union.

⁴⁸ Some entrepreneurs attempted to provide for children during their lifetimes by making them "presents" of houses and even savings accounts. By bequeathing goods and funds before death, entrepreneurs ensured that partible inheritance notwithstanding, their progeny would receive a share of the material wealth. Interview 7, James L. Mpunga, Newlands Inn, Thyolo Road, T.A. Kapeni, Blantyre District, 29 January 1987; Interview 19 Nelson Evans Zintambira, Lirangwe, T.A. Chigaru, Blantyre District, 6 March 1987.

Increasingly, the main source of economic security for women and their children in the urban environment was attachment to a cash earning male. In return for short term security, they abandoned the rural ties which had formerly given them access to important productive resources in perpetuity. While women often maintained connections to their matrikin, their ability to work their country gardens declined as the distance between urban and rural area increased. Some continued to maintain country plots, but were seldom full-time residents in the countryside. This, of necessity, undercut their ability to act as managerial decision-makers. As Mary Ryan observed for nineteenth century America, the cult of domesticity was the female counterpart of and directly linked to the cult of the "self-made man". The emergence of both, she argues "were built on the assumption that the household was no longer the place of production, the locus of breadwinning".⁴⁹ While the division between firm and person was not complete by 1953 in urban Malawi, the connection between male self-employment and the erosion of women's economic autonomy there is evident. The relegation of women to the "domestic sphere" was certainly underway.

Urban men and women lived in two worlds. Men may have gone to town to lessen kin obligations, but, relatives sought them out for food, shelter and employment opportunities. Town accumulators did not discourage this. The accumulation of retainers increased their prestige in the eyes of a community which reckoned "wealth" and prestige in terms

⁴⁹ Mary P. Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class, The Family in Oneida County, New York, (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 61-64; 146.

of people. In order to build a following, men utilized capitalist methods, but this process conflicted with the ends it sought to produce.

In spite of the fact that males were assuming more and more financial responsibility for male and female side relations and their own children, inheritance patterns remained largely unchanged. The bulk of a deceased male's estate devolved to his extended family and not to his wife and children. The implications of this for the male headed firm are clear: there was no incentive for a man to train his children since they had no access to their father's property (or that of the firm) after his death. Neither was there much point in training nephews or nieces to inherit since wealth was divided among all members of the corporate group. Obviously, children had little incentive to work hard for parents since they were likely to lose the fruits of their labour in an inheritance dispute. In short, while the cash economy was broadening the economic role of fathers, the ideological superstructure had not changed to accommodate this.

The primary objective of the capitalist firm is to accumulate material resources through production and exchange and to reinvest the proceeds in further accumulation. The tenacity of lineage values undercut the last part of this process, material wealth was invested in "people", in the process of distributing material and social favours in return for socially recognized wealth and achievement.

As elsewhere in Africa,

[c]apitalist penetration [had] not obliterated established principles of solidarity and differentiation, but [had] created new contradictions within them. People [did] not choose between relations of kinship and those of class, depending on the immediate

circumstance (as pluralist models suggest), but pursue[d] the interests of each in terms of the other.⁵⁰

Men and women lived in an increasingly economistic world, yet they continued to reckon "wealth" in former idioms. Urbanisation and capitalism placed African town-dwellers in an historical conjuncture where social and economic structures were changing at different rates. People operated in "old" and "new" worlds simultaneously; they understood and expressed contemporary events and sought to resolve problems in terms of both. Not surprisingly, during this period of transition, tensions emerged between the desired mode of material accumulation -- individualistic capitalistic -- and the adhesive ideology of the lineage which emphasised corporate rights and responsibilities. Men assumed greater responsibility for kin and non-kin clients and women came to rely on marriage attachments for their subsistence. Men accumulated material wealth to gain socially recognized wealth, but the tenacity of the lineage and the desire to retain a following undercut the willingness of men to pass on material goods to their dependent wives and children. For this reason few firms outlasted their founders. While her husband lived, a wife was secure, but after his death, she was at the mercy of his kin. No clear line divided economic accumulation from social status for propertied males; this left their newly dependent nuclear families particularly vulnerable and curtailed the process of capital accumulation over generations.

⁵⁰ Sara Berry, Fathers Work for their Sons, Accumulation, Mobility and Class Formation in an Extended Yoruba Community, (Berkeley, 1985), p.13.

Conclusion

Blantyre and Limbe were not designed for African habitation, therefore the state made no provision for African urbanites until after 1953. To that point, social control mechanisms focused on keeping Africans out of the towns. Since there were no "traditional" African structures suited to urban governance, these were created by the urbanites themselves. The family in town had to accommodate mixed marriages, changed settlement patterns, dependence on the market for foodstuffs and changes in gender relations. All of this emanated from a colonial economy which favoured a male breadwinner. Status, for Africans, lay in the attainment of a western education and a white collar clerical job. Hence, self-employment was the domain of the least educated, especially after 1915. In that year, no African business people were included among Nyasaland's list of "prominent" Africans. By the 1940s there were several. White collar employment was still the "best occupation", but self-employment had increased in prestige. The combined forces of a shift to a cash economy and rapid urbanisation had led to an historical conjuncture where one might advance oneself through a "two track" system - one which led to skilled paid labour, and the other which culminated in self-employment and the hiring of others. This threw up a situation in which "traditional" attitudes and values, no longer fully appropriate, were questioned. Yet they were not completely abandoned.

Capitalism transforms society and people's objective material conditions and roles within it, but old economic orders die hard. In

Blantyre-Limbe, business people were constantly faced with the challenge of balancing new methods of accumulation with older notions of wealth and prestige. While confronting and manipulating the structures of an increasingly economic world, entrepreneurs valued and pursued material wealth only in so far as it brought them dependants and clients. These retainers were extended kin, but commonly also non-kin. They included employees, business colleagues and political allies. Similarly, entrepreneurs utilized family labour in their businesses, but more importantly, non-kin wage labourers. They included family in their enterprises, but devised strategies to protect material gains from kin rapaciousness. In some cases, they mollified relatives by giving gifts, sometimes significant gifts such as houses. They offered favours and assistance which did not significantly cut into their material base. In fact, gift-giving can be viewed as a calculated investment to produce socially recognized wealth for an individual. It also compensated older relations for their loss of economic power over younger kin. Hence, "business success in the twentieth century ... required a capacity to manipulate both the traditional and the modern worlds".¹

Accumulators were able to manipulate these worlds during their lifetimes, and identified very closely with their enterprises, firmly maintaining sole proprietorship. Because of this close association of person and firm, inheritance of property at the proprietor's death became the critical

¹ Peter C. Garlick, African Traders and Economic Development in Ghana, (Oxford, 1971), p.146; Keith Hart, "Swindler or public benefactor? - the entrepreneur in his community", in Jack Goody (ed.), Changing Social Structure in Ghana, (London, 1975), p.17, cited in Iliffe, The Emergence of African Capitalism, p.70.

moment in the process of capital accumulation. It was the moment when the lineage reasserted its "customary" rights to the property of the lineage member. Iliffe observed that sole proprietorships the world over tend disappear with the death of the founder, and added that "it is virtually impossible to imagine how a sole proprietorship could often survive its owner's death in a matrilineal society".² This was certainly valid for the Malawian case but patrilineal inheritance custom was as conducive to the fragmentation of capital as matrilineal custom. Both systems embodied partible inheritance and it was this which posed the greatest barrier to capital transfer over generations.

It is accurate to say that during a businessperson's lifetime, wealth was concentrated in his hands and controlled by him. He used material wealth to form ties of dependence. While he lived, he assumed greater responsibilities for extended kin and nuclear family and greatly enhanced the dependence on him of spouses and children. Ultimately, however, property was not his to dispose of. The kin group reasserted its claims to the property of the individual at death. "Custom" dictated inheritance and ensured that the property of the individual devolved to the corporate group. While entrepreneurs debated the suitability of partible inheritance to their changed material conditions and correctly linked this to marriage custom, they fell short of exercising extant rights to testamentary disposition of property provided by the colonial legal system. The reason for this was the tenacious value system perpetuated by the lineage. A man would not deny

² Iliffe, The Emergence of African Capitalism, p.70; 74.

relatives their "rightful" claim to his estate for fear of tarnishing a "good reputation". A "good reputation" was still defined in terms of the dominant culture which valued the redistributive function of the "big man". In the end, the lineage elders and society at large, decided the measure of the individual and how his or her memory would be preserved for posterity.

Conflict on the ideological level is bound to be most rife where the social and political order is in flux. This is especially true where political systems work against the complete transformation of social and economic relationships. Tony Woods has argued that the colonial state in Malawi was on the one hand unwilling and, on the other, unable to fundamentally alter production relations. State interference with primitive accumulation, he argues, had much to do with Malawi's rural poverty.³ Following Warren, he argues that the problem with capitalism in Malawi was not that it exploited the Malawian economy, but that it did not exploit it enough.⁴

The crux of capitalist accumulation is that it be self-sustaining. For this to be so, capitalism must be the dominant mode of production and must be supported by a value system (in structural parlance, an "ideological superstructure) sympathetic to it. It also presupposes that the political structure works in the interests of capitalism. This was most definitely not the case in colonial Malawi, an imperial backwater to be sure. Direct state intervention in colonial economic development in British Africa after 1945 focused almost exclusively on rural production and distribution. In Malawi,

³. Woods, "Accumulation and order".

⁴. Bill Warren, Imperialism, Pioneer of Capitalism, (London, 1980).

government policy vis-à-vis urban Africans took a back seat to rural "development and welfare" in the post war era.

Town dwellers operated in old world and new worlds simultaneously, interpreting contemporary events in terms of both. Their economic strategies changed over time, directed by prevailing circumstances. Up to 1915, the "new men" in the south pursued plantation agriculture and small trading in their efforts to accumulate under the mistaken assumption that colonial tutelage meant that they would one day compete equally with their white counterparts. The Chilembwe rising and its aftermath effectively blocked this avenue of accumulation and bifurcated the African petit bourgeoisie. State policy continued to favour non-African merchants and planters such that by the end of the First World War, foreign firms and individuals had monopolised wholesale and retail trade in urban areas. Hence, in the inter-war period, African business concentrated on the tertiary sector.

The most common forms of urban self-employment during the interwar period were market gardening, tailoring, carpentry, sawyering, fish vending, enterprises with low start up costs. Loans were virtually unattainable at this time and so entrepreneurs got their initial stakes from savings most commonly obtained through work outside the Protectorate. Malawians moved to the Rhodesias and South Africa where they accumulated funds to purchase consumer goods and semi-durables such as sewing machines, bicycles and fishing nets which were used for businesses

back home.⁵

The Second World War and the economic upswing of the post-45 years changed opportunities. More people were able to engage in self-employment. No longer were motor transporters sacrificed to the railway. It was easier to attain commercial vehicle licenses and the 1949 famine in the south meant that the profits obtainable in maize trading were high. At the same time, a building boom opened windows of opportunity for African brickmakers, transporters and builders who, often through patronage, were able to thrive. Benefactors appear to have played a greater role in starting up such businesses. Makata, Lubani, Mpunga and others, while they had travel experience, found that the connections made to non-Africans in Malawi were more important for covering start-up costs than were savings from migration. All these men used their contacts to the non-African business community (especially transporters) to acquire lorries on credit. Henry Ascroft was able to draw heavily on Indian credit for his transport and retail concerns.⁶ But perhaps the most significant change in the post war period was the sheer scale of African business -- more and more people took advantage of self-employment opportunities than ever before.

But even though the general economic upturn led to loosening of some legislative barriers (e.g. the Motor Vehicle Ordinance) this had little to do with a new "liberal" policy. Crucial obstacles to business for Africans

⁵. Wiseman Chilwa, oral presentation Canadian Association of African Studies Conference, York University, Toronto, May, 1991.

⁶. Interview 10 Ruth Ascroft, Chirimba, Blantyre District, 4 February 1987.

were not dismantled -- specifically, the credit trades ordinance remained in effect and no changes were made to leasehold legislation. In fact, it was even harder for Africans in peri-urban Blantyre and Limbe to gain work sites. New zoning legislation served to push them farther from the urban areas. African business hung on in the urban areas more because of African tenacity and European fear of criticism over "native policy" (linked to federation debate) than to any genuine change in policy regarding African enterprise in towns.

Capitalist structures were most deeply rooted in the urban areas, the spaces most closely linked to European commerce. Given that 1948-9 was a watershed year -- the year of famine and the year of town planning -- it is not surprising that much of the evidence on social change should emanate from this time. Of course, this is also because informants remember the period best. What is clear, in the context of Blantyre-Limbe, is the very real changes thrown up by the economic boom of these years. In spite of the fact that Ndirande and Chichiri were on "trust land" under the authority of Chief Kapeni, it is clear that after the war, Kapeni's authority was minimal. The state's willingness to abandon him in the face of town planning indicates that in Blantyre-Limbe, at least, indirect rule had been a dismal failure. But this did not mean that peri-urbanites had abandoned "corporate values" all together. On the contrary, a new kind of "tradition" of community spirit had grown up in these cosmopolitan enclaves; they had become communities increasingly geared toward "cash", but still involved a strong sense of duty and service to the community. This was clearly shown in the case of the cooperative experiment which entrepreneurs rejected in the

1940s. Rejecting cooperation, of course, did not mean the abandonment of corporate values; African response to the cooperative experiment simply highlighted a misapprehension of colonial officials' relating to the role of individual action within the larger group.

On the other hand, this did not mean that Africans had abandoned corporate values. As we have seen, few firms outlasted their founders and property reverted to the corporate group. The tenacity of the lineage had much to do with the low development of social welfare infrastructure for Africans in town. While successful entrepreneurs themselves tried to fill the role of urban benefactors by engaging in philanthropy (Lubani and Makata's schools and Makata's bus line between the Henry Henderson Institute and surrounding areas), they did not reject prevailing notions of "tribal loyalty" and chiefly prestige. Blantyre-Limbe's entrepreneurs were also members of "ethnic" societies like the Ndirande Welfare Club (not exclusively Yao, but almost), the Angoni Tribal Association and the Lomwe Association. In fact, they were more likely to be members of these organisations than the ostensibly multi-ethnic "native associations" of the south, since membership in the latter often depended upon having more than rudimentary western education. Moreover, even though real chiefly authority in Chichiri and Ndirande was weak, chieftaincy still had the cachet of prestige. For example, Lawrence Makata was a well-to-do business man who dabbled in philanthropy, was a member of the Ndirande Welfare Club, the Motor Transport Workers Union and the NAC. Nevertheless, he still sought a headmanship in the 1960s, indicating that he, at least, considered it a prize worth fighting for. This indicates that while a host of new social

organisations were in the making and a battery of new prestige symbols, "traditional" values were far from dead. Civic responsibility and corporate duty were fundamental to town life, even though "the corporate group" come to embrace more than one or two lineages.

In this context, hesitance to alter inheritance patterns in such a way as to deny corporate kin seems less contradictory. To fully adopt primogeniture or some other kind of inheritance would be to alienate the very people in whose eyes one wished to succeed. Material accumulation was a means to an end and not an end in itself. To miss this crucial aspect of economic change would be to confuse the mode of accumulation with the end objective; to miss the connection between economic accumulation as a means of gaining socially recognized wealth.

The colonial state contributed to the persistence of "custom"; it supported "customary law" which, as Chanock has pointed out, differed significantly from "custom" of the precolonial era.⁷ The deliverers of the law were not colonial officials alone, but their African appointees, the indirect rulers, the old men and women who "found" the law and, not surprisingly, cast it in their own interests. "Tradition" was held up to legitimize the retention of partible inheritance, the state sanctioned it, and Africans yielded to it. Blantyre-Limbe's African leaders and followers, like Mandala's Lower Tchiri peasants, held "a distinctly moral view of the economy", one in which workers, peasants and accumulators, all members of the broader society, had

⁷ Martin Chanock, Law, Custom and Social Order: the Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia, (London, 1985).

distinct rights in each other.⁸

Urban entrepreneurs were liable to group influences. While they may have adopted the path of capitalist accumulation to avoid kin ties in the short run, they did so in order to enhance their wealth and prestige. The latter were determined by the broader society. For example, one of the appeals of labour migration was that it offered young men a way of escaping kinship ties. Nevertheless, this seems to have been true only in the short run. With the exception of the machona (lost ones) who never returned home, most migrants did return to their natal regions and if Margaret Read's observations and those of many others are true, they often experienced difficulty in reestablishing residence back home. Neighbours accused them of aspiring to authority they did not deserve, of putting on airs.⁹ The individual could never completely transcend the values and pressures of the group. The entrepreneur walked a fine line between social and anti-social behaviour as defined by custom and custom demanded that one assist one's kin and redistribute material wealth.

⁸ Mandala, Work and Control, p. xxi. John Iliffe makes the same observation about Yorubaland and Bernard Belasco implicitly agrees with this. See, Iliffe, The Emergence of African Capitalism, p.57; Bernard I. Belasco, The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero, Preadaptations in Nigerian Economic Development, (New York, 1980), passim.

⁹ Kings Phiri, "Some changes in the matrilineal family system among the Chewa of Malawi since the nineteenth century", Journal of African History, 24(1983), 257-274; Margaret Read, "Emigration from Nyasaland: its effects on village life", Preliminary Report, Margaret Read, 22 June 1939, Malawi National Archives, Zomba, Malawi (hereafter MNA), M2/3/10; "Migrant labour in Africa and its effects on tribal life", International Labour Review, (XIV, 1 January 1942).

The literature on marriage and inheritance patterns in Central Africa is a growing one which owes a debt to women's history.¹⁰ Eager to probe the differential experience of genders under colonialism, scholars have focused on the family and particularly women's land rights and how state policy intersects with kinship system. In general, the findings agree that women's rights in land were not enhanced under colonialism. While this is fertile ground for investigation, the centrality of land inheritance has meant that studies have tended to preserve a rural focus. While this is representative of the majority experience in Africa (which remains largely an agricultural economy), it leaves important gaps in urban history. This study has tried to redress the imbalance by focusing on urban patterns of accumulation. Here, too, capitalism seems to have worked against women and children. Because urban accumulators were based in town, their wives and children became more dependent on them for subsistence. Women lost access to important rural resources (land) and the father took on more and more responsibility for children's maintenance. While linkage to a male provider was sufficient while he lived, wives and children had no clearly defined rights to his property after his death. Property reverted to his lineage and wives and children were thrown upon the mercy of their kin. In Southern Province where land was scarce, this was a truly critical

¹⁰ Chanock, Law Custom and Social Order; Jane I. Guyer, "Marriage and the state in Africa: marriage law, inheritance and resettlement", Boston University, African Studies Centre Working Papers, No. 129, 1987; Margaret Jean Hay and Marcia Wright (eds.), African Women and the Law: Historical Perspectives, Boston University Papers on Africa, VII, (Boston, 1982); Christraud M. Geary, "On legal change in Cameroon: women, marriage, and bridewealth", Boston University, African Studies Centre Working Papers, No. 113, 1986.

moment for dependents of "big men". It was also a critical moment for the firm.

The African firm in Blantyre Limbe was so much an extension of the proprietor that it seldom outlasted his passing. When asked why this was so, most informants responded that they did not know. When asked why African firms did not pass to the sons or nephews as did Indian firms, the response was equally vague. One man simply said, "Indians are not like us. Their children are different." Several informants suggested that the Ngoni were "different" as well, in that they were more likely to hand enterprises on to sons. The two cases I found where businesses survived beyond a generation involved Ngoni proprietors. The Ngoni are virilocal and patrilineal. Fathers had rights in their sons and so sons deferred to their fathers. In addition, sons were entitled to inherit from their fathers. For this reason, sons had a vested interest in maintaining the prosperity of the father's business. But if it were simply "Ngoni-ness" which guaranteed business success, there would be many more success stories in southern Malawi today. The more typical case resembles the story told to me by the Manager of Small Enterprise Development Organisation of Malawi (SEDOM) in 1987. Mr. Chunga told me of a transporter whose children were squandering his money. He feared that this would mark the end of his business which was based upon transport and maize milling. This man had six wives and so he put each of them in charge of a maize mill. His trucks bore the logo "J.J. Nyirenda and Wives". In this way he was able to preserve the integrity of his enterprise, during his lifetime. The reality is that most "Ngoni" firms did not outlast their founders and for reasons

similar to those of "matrilineal" firms. Either relatives ate up the estate or the firm founder was unable or unwilling to train a successor.¹¹ Hence, matriliney and patriliney do not offer full explanations of the failure of firms to outlast a single generation.

This story stops in 1953 with the advent of the Central African Federation. Evidence suggests that African enterprise under federation and even today continues to be significantly shaped by extra-economic concerns. The following homily, commonly found on the walls of Malawi's groceries and bottle stores today is strongly indicative of this:

You are my friend, zikomo [thank you]
 You are my family, zikomo
 My business has no friends or family

Businesspeople still need to remind themselves and their customers of the separation between the firm and the individual; the public and the private; the economic and the social. That constant reminders of this are necessary suggests that the separation of economic and social spheres are far from complete.

¹¹ Interview 18, H.M.S. Chunga, General Manager of Small Enterprise Development Organisation of Malawi, Blantyre District, 2 March 1987.

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Oral Evidence

1. Interviews conducted by Joey Power

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Interview 2 Henry Katsonga, Chester's Nightclub, T.A. Chikowi, Zomba District, 13 January 1987.

Interview 3 Dalia Katsonga, Thondwe, T.A. Chikowi, Zomba District, 14 January 1987.

Interview 4 Dina L.S. Makata, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 22 January 1987.

Interview 5 Cynthia and Eric Emtage, Newlands, Limbe, Blantyre District, 23 January 1987.

Interview 6 Wales J. [Nyemba] Mbekeani, Mkulumadzi Bakery, Limbe, Blantyre District, 25 January 1987.

Interview 7, James L. Mpunga, Newlands Inn, Thyolo Road, T.A. Kapeni, Blantyre District, 29 January 1987.

Interview 8 Sidney Benson Somanje, Chichiri, Malawi Congress Party Headquarters, Blantyre District, 2 February 1987.

Interview 9 Lancy Makata, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 3 February 1987.

Interview 10 Ruth Ascroft, Chirimba, Blantyre District, 4 February 1987.

Interview 11 C.W.J. Kamba, Chitawira, Kamba's Bar, Blantyre District, 6 February 1987.

* Interview 12 Anon, Blantyre District, 8 February 1987.

Interview 13 Harcourt Charles Mlangi, Thyolo Road, Blantyre District, 10 February 1987.

Interview 14 Erikson Joseph Nkumba and Florence Nkumba (nee Bismark), Bismark village, Namwili Estate, Blantyre District, 12 February 1987.

Interview 15 Bernard Francisco Chinseu, Ndeka, T.A. Chigaru, Blantyre District, 16 February 1987.

Interview 16 Peter Jacob, Lirangwe, Blantyre District, 18 February 1987.

Interview 17 Reverend Duncan Hamilton Makonyola, Ntelekeza Estate, T.A. Mwambo, Zomba District, 25 February 1987.

Interview 18 H.M.S. Chunga, General Manager of Small Enterprises Development Organisation of Malawi (SEDOM), Blantyre, Blantyre District, 2 March 1987.

Interview 19 Nelson Evans Zintambira, Lirangwe, T.A. Chigaru, Blantyre District, 6 March 1987.

Interview 20 Gerald Montfort (Whisky) Lobeni, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 7 March 1987.

Interview 21 Isaac Peter Chisasa, Masese in Soche Forest Reserve, Blantyre District, 14 March 1987.

Interview 22 Edward Damba, Blantyre, Blantyre District, 14 March 1987.

Interview 23 Alexander Mataka Bandawe, Chikwawa Road, Blantyre District, 15 March 1987.

Interview 24 Nyemba Mbekeani, Limbe, Blantyre District, 16 March 1987.

Interview 25 Grace Kamwendo, Chirimba, Blantyre District, 16 March 1987.

Interview 26 Hedges Bwanamakowa, Chikwawa Road, Blantyre District, 17 March 1987.

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Interview 29 Elwin Mothello, T.A. Chikowi, Zomba District, 21 April 1987.

Interview 30 Nyemba Mbekeani, Limbe, Blantyre District, 5 May 1987.

Interview 31 Mokrin [Fred] Sangala, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 7 May 1987.

Interview 32 Annie Zimbiri, Zomba, Zomba District, 23 May 1988.

Interview 33 Hilda January, Zomba, Zomba District 24 May 1988.

Interview 34 Rankin Magombo, Naperi, Blantyre District, 9 June 1988.

Interview 35 Dilly George Chimalizeni, Mandala, Blantyre, Blantyre District, 9 June 1988.

Interview 36 John Foloman Njobvuyalema, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 9 June 1988.

Interview 37 Lines Phambana, Maliana Village, T.A. Kapeni, Blantyre District, 11 June 1988.

Interview 38 Chatengwa Bydon Biswick Kanchunjuru, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 13 June 1988.

Interview 39 Jason Gray Kachale, Ndirande, Blantyre District, 13 June 1988.

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Interview 43 Gideon Justice Chimphonda, Chitawira, Blantyre, Blantyre District, 16 June 1988.

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Interview 45 Kenneth Morris Luwani, Blantyre, Blantyre District, 21 June 1988.

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2. Interviews from the Zomba History Project (conducted by Dr. Kings Phiri, Chancellor College History Department)

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ZHT 6, Wilson Godfrey Idi, Malonje Village, T.A. Malemia, Zomba District, 1 October 1986.

ZHT 7, James Khondiwa Phiri, Mjojo Village, T.A. Mlumbe, Zomba District, 2 October 1986.

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