

Research Article

Colonial Labour Migrations Among the Nyakyusa: Causes and Impacts (1920 - 1960)

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Abstract

Labour migration is an integral part of Tanzania's history. This theme has been widely studied by various scholars in Tanzania. However, most of these studies have not focused mainly on the Nyakyusa despite the fact that this ethnic group, which is found mainly in the Mbeya Region, was largely involved in colonial labour migration. This study, therefore, has made an attempt to show that Nyakyusa labour migration began during the colonial period, where the subsistence economy of the Nyakyusa had become weakened due to the effects of the First World War. This caused the Nyakyusa not feed themselves sufficiently as they had done many years before. In the second decade of the twentieth century, the Nyakyusa began internal labour migration in colonial Tanganyika. For example, they moved to work in the gold fields of Chunya District. By 1930s, the Nyakyusa became used to external labour migration, too. They moved to work in the mines out of colonial Tanganyika. They worked in the copper and gold mines in Zambia and South Africa, respectively. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the causes and impacts of Nyakyusa labour migration during the colonial period. Evidence for this study came from various sources, namely, archival sources accessed at the Tanzania National Archives and oral recollections gathered from various informants in Rungwe District. The study also benefited from newspapers accessed at the East Africana Section of the University of Dar es Salaam Library, where they are intensively and extensively archived. Archival sources and oral accounts were supplemented by secondary sources, particularly books and journal articles. The study has demonstrated that the Nyakyusa labour migration was not caused by a single factor, but by multifaceted factors ranging from economic to social factors. The study has, in the final analysis, indicated that colonial labour migration had both positive and negative impacts on the livelihoods of the Nyakyusa communities.

Keywords

Nyakyusa, Labor Migration, Internal Migration, Ukubhamba, Ubunyago

1. Introduction

Migration of African communities from one place to another is not a new phenomenon. It started since pre-colonial days [43]. However, systematic labour migrations in Africa started during the colonial period when people started migrating to different parts seeking wage labour in European-

owned projects such as cash crop plantations and mines to earn income for buying various household items and fulfilling colonial tax obligations [49]. In South Africa, for example, the Bapedi and Basotho began working in the European farms in early 1840s [75]. Moreover, the discovery of

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diamond and gold in the second half of the nineteenth century led to the expansion of labour migration in South Africa.

Like South Africa, labour migration in West Africa emerged in the same century. The number of migrant labourers went on increasing over time since the beginning of the twentieth century, due to the growth and expansion of plantations and mining activities for the colonial export economy [64]. The colonial governments in Africa acted as facilitators and driving force for labour migration in Africa. To ensure constant supply of labour, the colonial governments used various ways to stimulate labour migration in Africa. For example, in West Africa, the French introduced forced labour and tax that pushed the people of Togo, Mali and Burkina Faso to move to Ghana and Ivory Coast for wage labour in the mines and plantations [43, 65]. In Angola, diamond mines obtained migrant labourers from different parts of the country through a forced labour system known as *shibalo* [65]. Similarly, hut tax was used in Central Africa and East Africa to push Africans to become migrant labourers. For example, migrant labourers from Malawi in Central Africa moved to work in the gold mines in South Africa [73]. In East Africa, harsh tax collection pushed the Ha in Tanganyika to move to work in the sisal plantations as migrant labourers [68]. Likewise, taxation in Kenya forced men to seek wage labour in the settler farms in the Kenya Highlands and sisal plantations in the coastal areas [48].

Despite forced labour and taxation that were enforced by the colonial governments, self-motivation made Africans become migrant labourers. African men sought wage labour in distant places in order to meet their needs. In different parts of Africa, migrant labourers wanted to obtain money to buy cattle for bride wealth and foreign consumer goods such as clothes, shoes, bicycles, and agricultural implements [48, 73]. In some societies, men moved to work in distant places in order to obtain money for defending their traditional rule. For example, the Bapedi and Basotho became voluntary migrant labourers on European farms in South Africa in order to obtain cash for buying guns to counter the attacks of the Zulus, Swazis, and Colonists and for hunting activities [75].

2. Historiographical Note

Colonial labour migration in Tanzania has been widely studied by various scholars. Sunseri [70] studied labour migration in colonial Tanzania and noted that labour migration had substantial impact to the abodes of the migrants and the distant places where they worked. His study shows that the Ngoni and Mozambicans who moved to work in the Rufiji plantations deserted their wives of their homelands and established new relationships with other women in the working places [70]. Migrant labourers from inland who worked at the coast were converted to Islam. They changed their names and adopted Swahili culture. When they returned to their homelands they disdained their wives because of not being followers of the new faith [70]. He also observed that coloni-

al labour migration had negative impact to the homelands of the Nyamwezi such as the decay of some villages due to massive labour migration; fall of agricultural production as villages were left with few old men; decline of the Nyamwezi population due to long absence of men from their families; and the rise of adultery and divorce [70]. However, Sunseri's study was limited to the German colonial period. This study expands Sunseri's discussion by examining the causes and impact of labour migration during the British colonial rule in Tanganyika.

Sago [68] studied the labour migration of the Ha of Kigoma to the sisal plantations in colonial Tanzania. He noted that harsh tax collection pushed the Ha in Tanganyika to move to work in the sisal plantations as migrant labourers [68]. Also, Kigoma being a reserve area, the British colonial government neglected to promote traditional farming of the Ha. Moreover, Sago [68] noted that labour migration led the Arabs and the Swahili to despise the Ha and regard them as backward people because they were employed to a demeaning work of sisal cutting [68]. However, Sago's study did not focus on the Nyakyusa. This study will focus mainly on the Nyakyusa.

Turshen [72] studied the movement of the Ngoni from Songea, which was a reserve area, to the sisal plantations in colonial Tanzania. Turshen [72] observed that labour migration brought negative effects to the homeland of the Ngoni. The Ngoni deserted their wives and children for long periods. This situation pushed women to engage in adultery. She also noted that labour migration led to the decline of agriculture that consequently brought about high rates of malnutrition [72]. Also, Kjekshus [56] studied the movements of the Nyamwezi to sisal plantations in colonial Tanzania, where they worked as migrant labourers. He observed that Nyamwezi migrant labourers who returned home acted as carriers of venereal diseases such as syphilis from sisal plantation areas to their home places [56].

Wilson [80] studied labour migration among the Nyakyusa during the colonial period. Wilson [80] noted that the Nyakyusa went to work as migrant labourers in different parts of colonial Tanzania. They moved to work in the sisal plantations in the coastal areas [80]. Many able-bodied men became reliant on wage labour to meet their needs [80]. However, her study paid little attention to the motives of Nyakyusa labour migration and its impacts to the Nyakyusa society.

Iliffe [53] and Gulliver [50] studied movements of the Nyakyusa to the Copper Belt in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and the Rand Gold Mines in South Africa where they worked as migrant labourers. They noted that they were attracted to work in the foreign mining areas because the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WENELA) provided free transport for them. Moreover, high wages and less authoritarian rule motivated the Nyakyusa to go to work to the Copper Belt in Northern Rhodesia. Their studies are silent on the impact of the Nyakyusa labour migration to their

respective home communities.

3. The Origin of the Nyakyusa

There are two main traditions which trace the origins of the Nyakyusa. The first tradition traces the origin from a “dark house (nyumbanditu, which the Bena call ‘nyumbanitu’)” at Ilongo in what is now Njombe Region. At Nyumba Nditu, the tradition holds, the Nyakyusa lived with other ethnic groups such as the Kinga, Ndali, Mahansi, Kisi and Pangwa [80]. In due course, the Nyakyusa crossed the Kipengere Mountains and settled near Rungwe Mountain, becoming the centre of dispersion within the District [81]. The second tradition draws the origin of the Nyakyusa from Mahenge in Morogoro Region, where they intermingled with other ethnic groups such as the Luguru, establishing settlements in Rungwe about 500 years ago [63]. From Morogoro, they settled in Njombe at Nyumba Nditu, before moving to Ukinga, in the present day Makete District, where they settled with the Kinga. The Nyakyusa then moved from Ukinga to Utengule in Usangu and, finally, crossed the Kipengere Mountains and settled at Kabale in Rungwe District. The Nyakyusa who settled at Kabale identified themselves as Kukwe [16, 71]. Other groups moved to different places and had different names. The two traditions agree that, at first, the Nyakyusa settled in the northern part of the District and that they were not early inhabitants of Rungwe District. They gradually established their homes in an area previously occupied by the earliest inhabitants, the Abiliima. From available sources, the origin of this group remains unclear, but it is clear that it consisted of small scattered groups of people with diverse ethnic and linguistic origins, living predominantly as hunters and gatherers of honey. The earliest inhabitants from Bukinga and people who are said to be akin to the Bungu people from Lake Rukwa are examples of member groups of the abiliima [82].

The available evidence shows that, after having settled in their areas, the Nyakyusa organized themselves into small chiefdoms led by their chiefs. Historians and anthropologists agree that the number of chiefdoms increased over time as a result of splitting after the death of the reigning chief. The Nyakyusa developed small independent chiefdoms resulting from amalgamation of several villages [80]. By 1936, there were over one hundred Nyakyusa chiefdoms in Rungwe District [45]. They were led by hereditary chiefs locally known as abanyafyale (malafyale in singular). Frederic Elton, a European explorer, travelling from Mozambique via Malawi and Unyakyusa en route to Zanzibar in 1877, observed many Nyakyusa chiefdoms in Rungwe District [80, 85].

Studies show that the Nyakyusa, like other communities, engaged in more than one economic activities [66]. The geographical location of Rungwe District influenced the nature of the Nyakyusa economic activities. Agriculture remained throughout the nineteenth century as the main economic activity. They grew crops such as bananas, cassava, sweet pota-

toes, squash, finger millet, maize, and coco-yams [35]. They produced various crops throughout the year, because Rungwe District had fertile soils and received abundant annual rainfall [61]. In addition to crop cultivation, the Nyakyusa were cattle keepers. They bred back humped cattle from which they obtained milk and meat for human consumption. Other animals kept by the Nyakyusa for consumption were goats, sheep, and fowls [62].

Furthermore, the Nyakyusa developed trade relations with the neighbouring ethnic groups. By the nineteenth century, barter trade enabled them to obtain goods from other societies which they did not produce or were scarce in their society. The Nyakyusa obtained salt from the Ndali in the west, as well as pots from the Kisi in the south [55, 62]. The Nyakyusa also obtained iron hoes from the Kinga in the eastern side of Rungwe District. Due to lack of iron ore in Rungwe District, only few people could possess iron hoes, mostly rich men [80, 53]. In return, the Nyakyusa sold mats and food crops such as maize, sweet potatoes, beans, bananas, as well as yams [19, 20, 22].

4. Causes of the Nyakyusa Labour Migration

There are various forces that pushed the Nyakyusa migration to the mines in the twentieth-century Tanganyika, particularly, in the Lupa goldfields in Chunya District and in Central and South Africa. Before the outbreak of the First World War, labour migration among the Nyakyusa out of Rungwe District was not popular [60]. Formerly, the Nyakyusa were isolated from the outside world in various ways and were not interested in labour migration. The mountain ranges and the geographical location of the District isolated them from regular interactions with distant communities, including the Pangwa, Bena, and Hehe [80]. Joseph Thomson, observing the District in the second half of the nineteenth century, revealed that by 1871, the Nyakyusa were not aware of the existence of an inland lake, namely, Lake Tanganyika [80]. Despite the limitations, the Nyakyusa fed themselves sufficiently for many years and earned their living by farming [71]. Nevertheless, political and economic development that followed after the end of the First World War weakened the subsistence economy of the Nyakyusa and forced them to interact with the outside world beyond Rungwe District [80].

The Nyakyusa began internal migration for wage labour in the gold mines in the 1920s after the discovery of alluvial gold at Lupa in Chunya District in 1922 [53, 67]. They were employed by the Europeans to work in the goldfields. By 1930s, many Nyakyusa regularly moved to the goldfields [78]. The goldfields area of the colonial Chunya District came to be traditionally known as Kumbiibwe, meaning dig a stone, in Nyakyusa language [3]. It provided an opportunity for the Nyakyusa to gain experience in mining and became

reputable underground miners before the European employers [53]. Historical records and oral testimonies confirm that the Nyakyusa had begun working in foreign mines before 1940. For instance, Solomoni Mwangwamba, interviewed at Mbyasyo, Bujonde, explained that he went to work in the Rand mines in 1944, while Bujo Mwakatumbula, interviewed at Mbaka, recalled going in 1948. Both noted that some of their older brothers had already begun working in the Rand before 1940 [4, 21, 38]. However, large numbers of the Nyakyusa men voluntarily started going to the Copper Belt in Northern Rhodesia and Witwatersrand in South Africa from the early 1940s onwards for a better pay [53]. The Copper Belt was locally known as Kambofi, while the Witwatersrand was named after its largest city, Johannesburg, which was locally known as Kujoni by the Nyakyusa [7, 12].

There are intertwined motives that stimulated the Nyakyusa to become migrant labourers in the mines. One of the motives was the ambition for material wealth that became the prime mover for young men in Nyakyusa, making labour migration inevitable. McCracken [59] shows that migrant labourers from Malawi, particularly from Mzimba area, moved to South Africa in order to accumulate wealth in a form of various essential items in their daily life. In this regard, labourers from Mzimba who worked in South Africa came back home with various important items for domestic use such as clothes, hats, shoes, bicycles and sewing machines [59]. Wage labour in the mines enabled them to get money for buying essential needs for domestic use that were not affordable at home. We learn from Godfrey Wilson that the Nyakyusa developed a habit of going to the Lupa gold fields frequently in the 1930s to earn money for buying clothes [78]. Mine workers from the low flat land areas of Rungwe District preferred bicycles to other items, because they facilitated movement within their villages. Conversely, the Nyakyusa in the highland areas of Rungwe District were influenced by the cold condition to buy blankets [19, 51]. The variation in relief and climatic conditions within Rungwe District determined the choice by the mine workers what to buy for home use. Moreover, after having been married, men among the Nyakyusa needed to accumulate wealth in the form of cattle. It was important to own cattle to obtain milk for home use [1, 13]. Because of the valuable importance of cattle to the people, the Nyakyusa thought that it was possible to live as a bachelor, but not possible to live without cattle [62].

The Nyakyusa were pushed by the British colonial government to seek wage labour in the mines. The British colonial government enforced hut and poll tax in Rungwe District that was levied on every adult male as laid down in the German ordinances [39, 40]. The Germans introduced head and hut tax of Three Rupees for every adult male in Rungwe District in 1900 [37]. With the taxes, the government wanted to raise revenue and force the Africans to sell their labour in the colonial economic projects [47]. On the part of Rungwe District, it was difficult to raise money for hut and head tax

in the rural areas, due to poverty. Sarah Lusulo Mpalile recalled that money was very scarce (*ihela jali mbala*) to the majority of the rural population, except for the wealthier people who owned cattle, coffee, or rice farms [19]. The presence of serious and harsh tax collectors made the poor Nyakyusa men spend most of their time hiding in bushes and mountain forests such as the Livingstone Mountain [19, 22]. The available evidence shows that some Nyakyusa decided to migrate to the neighbouring District of Mbeya as a result of strict enforcement of native tax payment in Rungwe District. In 1939, for example, the Southern Highlands Provincial Commissioner, C. McMahon, reported that the increase in the rate of native tax from 8 to 9 shillings in 1938 in Rungwe District led some Nyakyusa in the District to migrate to Mbeya District where the tax rate was not increased that year [41]. The migration was probably caused by the fact that those who failed to meet their tax obligations were in most cases arrested and harassed. Mpalile, an old woman from Matamba, recalls the strict enforcement of tax payment in Rungwe District. She said that people in Nyakyusa who failed to pay colonial taxes were in most cases arrested and harassed [19]. Chaula and Kangalawe had similar observations when they noted that colonial authorities in Njombe District sometimes used harsh methods to enforce tax payment among the natives [46]. In order to pay tax, men had to look for wage labour in the mines to meet the demand of the government. Godfrey Wilson, who studied the Nyakyusa society in the 1930s, shows that the Nyakyusa moved to the Lupa gold fields in Chunya to earn money for paying tax, among other things [78]. Thus, the imposition of colonial tax regardless of individual's income acted as a pushing force to look for wage labour beyond the borders of colonial Rungwe District in order to evade physical and psychological torture.

Besides tax obligations, marriage pushed Nyakyusa young men to wage labour in the mines. Marriage was venerated by Nyakyusa, particularly among the adult men. Any overstayed bachelor in the society earned contempt from his age-mates [1, 12]. So, moving to work in the mines became crucial among the unmarried youths in order to meet this social obligation according to the custom of the Nyakyusa and become accepted members in the society. Many men from northern Mzimba in Malawi moved to work in South Africa in order to accumulate money for bride price [59]. The then government sociologist, P. H. Gulliver, who studied the Nyakyusa society in 1954, wrote a report that Nyakyusa mine workers wanted to earn income for bride wealth. They used earned money to buy cattle for paying bride price [51]. This is because farms of cash crops such as rice and coffee were largely the property of married and settled men [38]. The youths had to go to the mines more than once in order to accumulate sufficient amount of money for marriage payment. The success of youths to manage payment of bride price depended on the support of their respective fathers who would usually keep money for them. In the process of accumulating money for their sons, parents buried coins in the

ground as a safe way to keep money and refrain from misusing it [5] [The informant moved to work in the Rand in South Africa in 1951. Then in 1954 went to work in the Copper Belt in Zambia].

The Nyakyusa had customs that compelled men to comply with traditional ceremonies in relation to the death of the close adult relative. The Nyakyusa in Rungwe District had ritual sacrifices in the event of the death of a close relative. One of the anthropologists who studied the Nyakyusa culture in the 1930s, Godfrey Wilson, observed that Nyakyusa burials were accompanied with killing cattle to express the emotions of affection, grief, sympathy, and respect [79]. However, he did not link the sacrifice of cattle with Nyakyusa labour migration to the mines during the colonial period. This ritual sacrifice to pay great respect to the deceased was known as ukubhamba. A responsible person was required to slaughter a cow to honour the deceased in the event of the death of parents, heir, as well as father-in-law and mother-in-law. For example, in the event of the death of a father, his first son was traditionally compelled to honour the deceased by offering a cow for the funeral ceremony [14]. Similarly, when the father-in-law died, each man who had married his daughter was responsible to offer cattle to honour him. The act of ukubhamba was compulsory and supposed to be done during the funeral, immediately after the death announcement. Men who possessed wealth were able to perform ukubhamba in time. However, responsible men from poor families failed to perform ukubhamba at the right time and, therefore, they were regarded to have a debt to their respective clan and the society at large [1, 2, 15]. In that vein, the poor people were obligated to move to the mines for wage labour in order to fulfill the need of ukubhamba. The failure to esteem the deceased was believed to bring about various social problems such as diseases and deaths in the family and in the society; and people scandalized the person concerned [8, 10, 14, 15]. That is why it was common to find a poor person whose father had died, roaming around the homestead with his hands on his head, weeping and wailing uncontrollably, crying eeee tata ngafyagekuughu [Oooh father, where shall I get it (a cow for ukubhamba)] [15].

Apart from ukubhamba, the Nyakyusa had another obligatory traditional ceremony called ubunyago. This was an inevitable ceremony held to mark the end of mourning period in the event of the death of parents. The ceremony was accompanied with butchering a cow. In case a poor family lost the father, the elder son of the deceased had to look for money to buy a cow to perform ubunyago. The obligatory ubunyago enforced men from poor families to look for wage labour in the mines. The ubunyago was important, because it paved the way to declare the successor. In addition to the obligations presented above, there were many other rituals related to the death of a family member. These rituals included some restrictions such as shaving their heads, women tying a piece of cloth on their heads and round their waists and remaining untidy for the whole mourning period. Therefore, the be-

reaved was set free from the restrictions related to mourning period after performing ubunyago ceremony. For example, women who were close relatives to the deceased stopped tying a piece of cloth round the waist and the head locally known as ingwamba and ingiga, respectively [2, 5, 15, 18].

Mine work was also associated with the impressive status in the society. Irrespective of individual's income, some Nyakyusa moved to the mines for prestige. This involved youths from the wealthier families who were able to pay bride price for their sons according to the Nyakyusa tradition [76]. They were attracted by men who were proud of working in the mines in the foreign lands and became admired in the society. So, they developed the desire to know foreign lands. For example, people who worked in Northern Rhodesia narrated about copper mining activities and spoke Zambian native languages such as Bemba language [2] [The informant moved to work in South Africa in 1940s. Later in 1950s moved to Northern Rhodesia at Mufurila and Katanga in the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo]. Similarly, repatriated mine workers from South Africa narrated about air transport that was provided to them from Chitipa to South Africa and, vice versa, by the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association commonly known as WENELA. They also narrated about the fantastic underground working in the mines. They became wonderful and interesting stories to the common men who never went to the mines [2, 5, 14, 33]. On top of that, men who had gone to South Africa for mining activities introduced a song for being proud of themselves that later became a common song among the Nyakyusa in various traditional occasions [2, 5, 14]. One of the singers in the group would wave a white piece of cloth while singing the following song:

Kweseni bendela x 2 (Rise the flag) Kweseni bendela, bendela jafuma, jafuma jubeki x 2 (Rise the flag, it is from, it is from Jubeki) Jahuli (It is true) Jahuliii Jahuliii jafuma jubeki (It is true, it is true, it is from Jubeki)

[According to Bujo Mwakatumbula [4], the name Jubeki refers to the town of Johannesburg. Also, the song was sung in South Africa during the happy moments during the weekend when mine labourers got time to take local brew [4].

To fulfill the ambition of gaining prestige, some parents allowed their sons to go to the mines for wage labour as a means of knowing foreign lands besides earning cash [1, 3]. The parents of Mwakapake and Kyamundu owned large herds of cattle and the informants were given cattle by their fathers for bride price. However, the informants went to the south in 1946 and 1955 respectively for adventure. Others, however, rejected the requests of their sons to move to the mines in the Copper Belt in Northern Rhodesia and Rand in South Africa, due to the deaths associated with mining activities [3, 21]. In his article, Simons [69] shows that hundreds of wage labourers in the gold mines were dying every year, because of accidents in the first half of the 20th Century. Parents feared to lose their productive sons at the youth age [11]. It is alleged that even sons of royal families in Rungwe

District were attracted to move and work in the mines. But for the sake of maintaining their royal status, chiefs forbade their sons to go there and become labourers [7, 10]. For example, Fulano, a step-father of Chief Mwakatumbula, refused his sons to go to the mines in the Copper Belt or South Africa. He discouraged his sons by saying ‘mkajege fuko ukukumba pasi’ (you want to become moles to dig the ground) [15]. Fulano is Mwaipasi’s father. Due to the reluctance of his father, Mwaipasi never went to work in the mines as he belonged to the royal family. Nevertheless, self-determination of the sons from the royal families enabled them to fulfill their dreams. One of his sons called Gordon Mwaipasi Mwakatumbula secretly attempted to go to South Africa after being recruited by WENELA. His journey ended at Chitipa after becoming seriously sick of an unknown disease and was eventually repatriated to his home [15]. However, some sons of Chief Mwakatumbula of Masoko who was rich as he possessed a large herd of cattle managed to escape to the Copper Belt, where they worked in the mines. Even when the chief died on 1. 12. 1955, shortly after the confrontation with Kipapa, one of his subjects, over thatching grass dispute, some of his sons were working in the Copper Belt [2, 14, 15].

Rungwe District was a centre of recruiting labourers for work out of the area. Many youths were inspired by the recruiting agencies to become migrant labourers in Tanganyika and out of Tanganyika. WENELA had its centre at Tukuyu that engaged the Nyakyusa for employment in the gold mining industry in South Africa. The agency recruited many labourers to feed the Witwatersrand mines for underground and surface mining activities [30]. WENELA’s office at Tukuyu began operating as a transit centre in March 1959 [28]. Moreover, the authorities of WENELA collaborated with the Nyakyusa chiefs to encourage their people to move to the South. WENELA promoted friendship with the local chiefs by providing them with various gifts. Furthermore, WENELA officials at Tukuyu Centre tended to deceive the local chiefs that the Nyakyusa migrant labourers in South Africa worked in good conditions and were treated well [23]. Apart from that, the Nyakyusa were recruited in Rungwe District by the Mthandizi for coal production at Wankie in Southern Rhodesia [31]. But the recruitment of migrant labourers for Southern Rhodesia was not substantial as it entailed long contracts and low wages [51]. Moreover, Tukuyu was used as the centre for the Nyakyusa to inspire each other to move to the Copper Belt in Northern Rhodesia. There was reliable road transport from Tukuyu via Mbeya to the Copper Belt [51].

The colonial Rungwe District had insufficient opportunities to absorb young men for wage labour. Due to the shortage of wage labour in colonial Rungwe District, men from poor families opted to move to the mines. The number of the Nyakyusa who were looking for wage labour exceeded the demand [38]. For example, in 1930, two hundred Nyakyusa were employed as farm labourers in the coffee and tea farms

owned by the Europeans [38]. In the same year, a large number of the Nyakyusa moved out of Rungwe District to seek for wage labour. Six hundred fifty-five (655) were employed as plantation labourers in the coastal areas, eighty-eight (88) men were employed as copper mine workers in Northern Rhodesia and three thousand (3,000) labourers were employed to work in Lupa goldfields [38]. Thus, Nyakyusa reliance on wage labour had become high to earn quick money to ameliorate family, social, and government obligations entrenched in the colonial period. They presented themselves in large numbers to WENELA’s office at Tukuyu to meet their ambitions. In 1959, the number of Nyakyusa who submitted themselves to the WENELA for employment in the mines in South Africa had exceeded the demand. For example, in October 1959, one hundred and five (105) persons who were seeking for a mine work in South Africa were left behind for the number had exceeded the demand [32]. However, before the establishment of the WENELA’s office at Tukuyu, the Nyakyusa used to cross the border of Tanganyika to Malawi to secure contracts for mine work at Karonga and Chitipa, formerly Fort Hill, in Northern Malawi where they were recruited by the same recruiting agency [51, 77].

5. Impacts of the Nyakyusa Labour Migration

Historians agree that labour migrations in both colonial and post-colonial Africa had significant impact on African societies. For example, Masebo [58] studied the impact of labour migration in Ileje and noted that colonial labour migrations played a significant role in the spread of diseases in what is now Ileje District. Similarly, Jackson [54] explored the nature of colonial labour migrations in Mbeya District and found that it had significant impacts on African societies in that District. This study, just like other studies undertaken by other historians, has revealed that labour migrations had significant impacts on African societies.

One of the outcomes of labour migration in Rungwe District was the integration of the Nyakyusa into the capitalist economy. They were made to sell their labour as a commodity to the European controlled mines during the colonial period. European employers were in need of cheap labour to produce minerals such as gold and copper to feed European manufacturing industries [38]. Apart from selling their labour, Nyakyusa migrant labourers acted as a market for European manufactured goods. Cash obtained through wage labour in the mines was used to buy various foreign items that were not available in their respective rural areas such as clothes [78]. Similarly, a scholar, West [74] observed that Mozambican migrant labourers who worked in colonial Tanganyika spent their earned cash to purchase items that were not available in their respective country. They bought foreign goods such as sewing machines, bicycles, radios, shoes, specific types of cloth and clothing, and firearms [74]. Moreo-

ver, some Nyakyusa migrant labourers established cash crop farms after the end of their contracts in the mining areas. For example, they dealt with coffee production in order to earn cash without moving away from their homes for wage labour. This is because they managed to buy cattle that became a source of manure for their farms, besides using cattle to pay bride price [12, 36]. The British colonial government began promoting coffee production in Rungwe District since 1927. However, extensive coffee planting in the District took place in the years 1936-1938 [36].

Labour migration brought about transformation of the instruments of labour for agricultural activities. Scholars Austen and Headrick [42] show that African societies tended to improve hand hoes over time to promote agricultural production. They reveal that many African societies made a change from using wood hoes to iron hoes. Moreover, Wilson [80] and Iliffe [53], drawing examples from Rungwe District, show that there was scarcity of iron hoes in Rungwe District that forced the poor to use wooden hoes that were deficient for heavy tilling. The Nyakyusa workers in the Copper Belt turned the mining activity into an opportunity to combat the scarcity of hoes at home. Young men returning from Northern Rhodesia brought back used shovels to Rungwe District. The Nyakyusa blacksmiths skillfully changed the smuggled shovels into hand hoes which were considered efficient in heavy tilling loam soil such as making ridges (*isinde*) for growing sweet potatoes and mounds (*amatumba*) for maize cultivation. Such hoes were more preferred by the Nyakyusa as they were similar in shape to traditional hoes they had used for many years. Hoes made by modifying shovels were traditionally known by the Nyakyusa as *Posolo* [6, 9]. The name was derived from the Chikabanga language in Zambia [44]. The Nyakyusa initiatives to smuggle shovels enabled the poor to own iron hoes. Additionally, in the last decade of colonial rule, the British colonial government introduced large curved tanged hoes to suit the traditional Nyakyusa cultivation in the District. The hoes were labeled 'Rungwe Hoe' on the top edge of the hoe to imply that they were preferred by the Nyakyusa in Rungwe District [6, 17]. Nevertheless, *posolo* remained the popular name among the Nyakyusa for the modern large curved hoes [6, 20].

Labour migration to the mines added to the beauty of traditional dances. Oral testimony shows that returning mine workers promoted the performance of traditional dance styles of the Nyakyusa known as *ing'oma* and *ipenenga*. The mine workers came back home with used helmets that became part of the traditional costume in dancing *ing'oma* [2, 13]. The players of the said traditional dance wore white shirts with short or long sleeves and white shorts. On top of that, only leaders of subgroups in the dance wore helmets. The leaders of subgroups who wore the helmets were such as *unkingi*, *unkopolo*, and *unsajenti*. Some titles of the leaders of subgroups were derived from army ranks such as *unkopolo* derived from corporal and *unsajenti* derived from sergeant. The use of helmets for *ing'oma* dance enhanced impressive-

ness (*ubusisya*) to the players, as well as the viewers who were made to respect and admire them [5, 13]. Furthermore, the miners brought the tails of the horses locally known as *amakomang'ombe* that they bought from the Jewish and Italian traders in South Africa. The *ipenenga* dance players waved the *amakomang'ombe* in various directions in a fantastic and systematic manner that made the dance more attractive [4]. Bujo Mwakatumbula testifies that the Nyakyusa created a large market of the horses' tails to the European traders in South Africa [4]. The Nyakyusa became used to playing *ipenenga* dance during the happy moments in South Africa. The informant recalls that the Nyakyusa played *ipenenga* dance on the Christmas day of 1949 at Crown Mine Fourteen Shaft where he was working. The Europeans wondered how the Nyakyusa played the dance in a systematic manner without singing [4]. Helmets and tails of horses that were brought home by the miners from South Africa promoted the development and peculiarity of the Nyakyusa traditional dances.

As already hinted above, labour migration helped the Nyakyusa to purchase modern household items. They bought various items for domestic use such as plates, cups, blankets, clothes, shoes, bicycles, hoes, kerosene lamps, razors, combs and bars of soap, among others [3, 24]. These house items were found in various shops in Rungwe District. For example, a new shop was established at Ndola village in the area of Mwaya in 1938, where they could buy various items such as clothes. Therefore, the shop made people not have to walk a long distance to Kyela and other places where there were shops to buy house items [27]. It was further reported that combs were bought in large numbers by the residents of Rubiga area near Tukuyu town. Apart from using combs for combing their hair, they were also used as a decoration in the event of playing traditional dances [25]. Wage labour enabled them to improve the standard of living of their respective families. This is because modern items began replacing locally produced items. For example, barkcloth was gradually replaced by modern clothes, as well as mats of thick banana fibre locally known as *imipuku* were replaced by European blankets [7, 12, 83]. Furthermore, some goods such as cigarettes and beer were also bought for personal enjoyment [19, 24]. Therefore, Nyakyusa migrant labourers managed to meet household needs through wage labour in the mining areas.

The Nyakyusa migrant labourers afforded to buy cattle for traditional obligatory needs. Youths from poor families obtained money from mine work as migrant labourers for buying cattle in order to pay bride wealth [5, 14]. Traditionally, bride price was paid in a form of cattle locally known as *ing'ombe ija lusyonja* and other minor items, and not in cash. This is because cattle were highly valued by the Nyakyusa for providing milk, meat, and being offered for obligatory traditional ceremonies such as *ubunyago* and *ukubhamba* [19, 22, 78]. Parents who had cattle paid bride price for their sons according to the Nyakyusa tradition [78, 80]. Therefore,

youths from poor families managed to find bride price on their own through wage labour in the mining areas. The more they went on earning cash from wage labour, the more they married more wives [11, 21]. This is because the Nyakyusa valued polygamy as a symbol of prestige to cattle owners who were able to marry many wives [80]. The introduction of wage labour in and out of colonial Tanzania provided a new opportunity for youths from poor families to obtain cattle for bride price. Formerly, youths from poor families had to provide labour service to their relatives or chiefs for some years in return for cattle to pay bride wealth [62]. Moreover, labour migration enabled the Nyakyusa to buy and own cattle as a symbol of wealth possession and to gain prestige in the society [19]. Men who failed to possess cattle for whatever reasons were regarded as poor accumulators of wealth and became subjected to ridicule in the society. For example, my informant's father, Lusulo Mwakwenda, used to say *abikile ikikingi pammilo*, which literally means that he has erected a pole for tying cattle on his neck. This is a person who prefers to spend money for consumption without saving cattle [19]. Cattle ownership ensured the Nyakyusa to avoid social problems that were believed to be caused by the failure to perform obligatory traditional ceremonies [2, 5, 15, 18]. Moreover, it made men to avoid shameful acts against them by the family of the father-in-law for failure to perform *ukubhamba* such as denying him his wife for a moment after the end of the funeral. It was done so to stimulate men to fulfill *ukubhamba* ceremony without a long delay [19, 22].

Wage labour enabled the Nyakyusa to fulfill their tax obligations to the colonial government. Part of the amount of money obtained from wage labour in the mining areas was used to pay hut tax [40]. The Nyakyusa were forced to pay tax in order to avoid humiliation from strict and harsh tax collectors in Rungwe District. Payment of tax made them free to move within their respective places without fear of tax collectors to interfere with their social and economic activities [19, 22]. As already said, those who failed to meet their tax obligations tended to spend most of their time in hiding [22].

The migration of adult men in large numbers from Rungwe District to the Rand and the Copper Belt had an adverse effect on the labour supply available to the local tea industries. Authorities of the tea estates in Rungwe District complained about a very serious shortage of labour in 1954 and by May, the same year, the number of employed labourers had dropped by seven hundred (700). As the Nyakyusa were attracted by a high pay in the mine works in the Rand and Copper Belt, the tea estates were forced to raise their wage rates to attract more labour force [29]. Despite the decreasing number of Nyakyusa migrants, there was an exponential increase in the wage rates from Shs. 16 plus rations to Shs. 20 plus rations in respect of resident labour and from Shs. 20 to 30 without rations in respect of non-resident labour. A further inducement to steady turn-out was also offered in the form of an increase of Shs. 1 after every fourth

completed labour card up to a maximum of Shs. 25 and Shs. 35, respectively. Wages for women and juveniles were also increased accordingly. In spite of those increases, the response of the Nyakyusa labourers was disappointing. As the labour question was complicated by the foreign mine works, the Tanganyika Tea Company Limited attempted, in vain, to recruit labour from Nzega District through the Manamba wa Senga organization. The labourers of Nzega were reluctant to come to Rungwe because of the cold and damp climate conditions that prevailed in Tukuyu [29].

Labour migration brought about destabilization of family cohesion in Rungwe District. Many young married women in Rungwe District were left alone by their husbands who moved to the mines. Both short and long absence of men at home paved the way for marriage problems in various ways. Long absence encouraged women to get divorce because they were able to prove that their husbands had been away continuously without making adequate provision for them [34]. They did so in order to be free to marry new husbands. Furthermore, long absence made some women to marry new husbands because long absence of men exposed their wives to the social environment of committing adultery that led to family quarrels [18]. Also, some men fled with married or unmarried women to mining areas [52, 84]. Normally, men were able to lure married women because they had money which they had obtained from mining. A man who had true love to his wife that had fled with a lover to either Lupa Goldfield in Chunya or Copper Belt in Zambia would go to search for his wife. If he succeeded to find the man who had lured his wife, he would just ask the man to pay a fine locally known as *ukuposola* and then go back home with his wife. In case the woman refused her husband's demand, the new lover was then obliged to pay both a fine and bride price, which was then returned to the former husband [18]. So, adultery and desertion acted as one of the causes of the breakdown of various marriages in Rungwe District during the colonial period [8, 18].

Furthermore, labour migration acted as a cause of spreading new diseases. Scholars agree that male migrants introduced both sexual and non-sexual transmitted diseases to their homelands. McCracken [59] shows that diseases such as syphilis and tuberculosis were brought by the male migrants from South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. Rungwe District was also adversely affected by venereal diseases because the returning young men from the mining centres brought them to their homeland. For example, there was high spread of sexually transmitted diseases in the gold fields of Chunya. Many people suffered from syphilis and gonorrhea in that area. The British colonial government was pushed by the worse situation of diseases to allocate Dr. D. V. Latham in Chunya in order to suppress venereal diseases and other diseases that affected gold miners [26]. The common sexually transmitted diseases brought by the migrant labourers in Rungwe District were syphilis, gonorrhea, and groin lump locally known as *mandelelele* [22]. There was a rampant

spread of transmitted diseases because of the style of life of the people at that time. Anthropologist Wilson [78] shows that adultery was the order of the day in colonial Rungwe District. Also, Kjekshus [56] observed that Nyamwezi migrant labourers who returned home acted as the carriers of venereal diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea from sisal plantation areas to their home places. Venereal diseases troubled not only the common men, but also the local chiefs who inter alia approved the contracts of their people to move to the mines [14]. In 1950s, Rungwe District had the highest rates of venereal diseases compared to other parts in colonial Tanzania which made many chiefs and their subjects to go to Mpuguso dispensary for treatments of syphilis [57]. The said diseases were regarded as diseases of shame. Most patients did not want to be known to the public [22]. So, not all people who suffered from venereal diseases went to the hospital. Some of them opted for the services of witch doctors.

The redistribution of communal land narrowed the chances of mine workers to maintain their lands. They lost ownership of their land because the chiefs allocated it to the young who remained in Unyakyusa. This was done so for migrant labourers who did not assign their relatives to look after their farms during their absence. For mine workers who demanded for their lost land, they were to make request to the lifumu for a new land [14, 15]. The increase in population and coffee farming led to the shortage of land. So, men who were given small pieces of land after coming back from the mines by the lifumu migrated to other Districts for permanent settlement. For example, many Nyakyusa miners who worked in the Copper Belt settled in Mbozi District in areas such as Halungu, Lwati, Igamba, and Itaka. They were attracted to settle in Mbozi because there were large open spaces for settlement, cultivation, and cattle herding as they did in Rungwe District [5, 18].

6. Conclusion

This study has explored the historical causes of the Nyakyusa labour migration during the colonial period. The study has used various sources such as archival sources, oral testimonies and secondary sources to examine the causes and the impacts of the colonial labour migrations among the Nyakyusa people, one of the largest ethnic groups in Mbeya Region. The study started by giving a brief overview of labour migrations in colonial Africa, as well as analyzing previous studies conducted on labour migrations in colonial Tanzania. The study also has highlighted the origin of the Nyakusa, as well as their economic and political organization. It has demonstrated that the Nyakyusa labour migrations were not caused by a single factor, rather they were caused by different factors, ranging from economic factors to social factors. It has also revealed that colonial labour migration had both positive and negative impacts in the Nyakyusa society. On the positive side, wage labour in the mines became a source of cash for the Nyakyusa people to meet their

needs such as buying cattle for marriage and obtaining modern European goods for domestic use. Moreover, labour migration had a negative impact on the Nyakyusa people in a number of ways, including a family destabilization, spreading venereal diseases and loss of land because of their long absence from home.

Author Contributions

Noah Constantine Sweve is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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