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Acquiring Human Capital Skills through Labour Migrancy: The Case of Colonial Njombe District, 1900-1960s

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Acquiring Human Capital Skills through Labour Migrancy: The Case of Colonial Njombe District, 1900-1960s

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Abstract

The migration of labourers to centres of mining, plantations and industrial production has been one of the most important demographic features of the African continent since its incorporation into the capitalist money economy. It is, however, surprisingly that the influence of this phenomenon on rural transformations remains largely unexplored. Most of studies have addressed the negative consequences of labour on the local communities. This is the impression that this paper aims to correct by using colonial Njombe as a case study. While not denying the detrimental impacts of labour migration, the paper integrates written and oral information to establish that such exclusive attribution of rural underdevelopment to labour migration was indeed a traditional way of viewing labour migration. Such views were mainly a result of macro-economic cost-benefit analysis that economists have always considered and emphasized upon. This article, therefore, is an effort to go beyond such economic arena by considering the acquisition of human capital particularly linking labour migration with western education and the spread of the Kiswahili language. Drawing from transformational approaches, this article argues that knowledge and skills that Njombe migrant labourers got from different work places, imbued them with elements which knowingly or unknowingly became part of the instruments for the wider rural transformations.

Keywords: labour, migration, capital skills, Njombe

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Adquisición de Habilidades de Capital Humano a través de la Inmigración Laboral: El Caso del Distrito Colonial de Njombe, 1900-1960

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Resumen

La emigración de trabajadores hacia explotaciones mineras, plantaciones y fábricas industriales ha sido una de las características demográficas más importantes del continente africano desde su incorporación a la economía monetaria capitalista. Sin embargo, es sorprendente que la influencia de este fenómeno en las transformaciones rurales permanece en gran medida sin explorar. La mayoría de las investigaciones han abordado las consecuencias negativas del trabajo en las comunidades locales. El objetivo de esta comunicación es corregir esta impresión a partir del estudio de caso de la Njombe colonial. Aunque no negamos los impactos perjudiciales de las emigraciones laborales, el artículo aporta información oral y escrita para mostrar que la atribución del subdesarrollo rural a las migraciones laborales era la forma tradicional de verlas. Tales concepciones eran principalmente el resultado de análisis macroeconómicos de costes-beneficios que los economistas siempre han llevado a cabo y enfatizado. Este artículo, así, representa el esfuerzo de ir más allá de la arena económica al considerar la adquisición de capital humano, particularmente vinculando las migraciones laborales con la educación occidental y la expansión del idioma Kiswahili. Partiendo de perspectivas transformativas, este artículo argumenta que el conocimiento y las habilidades que los inmigrantes económicos Njombe desarrollaron en distintos puestos de trabajo, les imprimieron elementos que, fuesen conscientes de ello o no, pasaron a formar parte de los instrumentos para transformaciones rurales más amplias.

Palabras clave: trabajo, inmigración, habilidades capitales, Njombe

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Colonial Njombe district was created by a colonial proclamation in 1926 (Graham, 1968, p. 3). Politically, the district was divided into three sub-tribal areas namely *Ubena*, *Ukinga* and *Upangwa*. In the 1970s, these tribal areas became separate districts. Upangwa became Ludewa district in 1975, Ukinga became Makete district in 1979 and Ubena, the current Njombe district (Giblin, 2005, p. 14). This study, however, is concerned exclusively with colonial Ubena[1], the modern Njombe district. Generally, the people who live in this area are referred to as *Wabena* and their language is *Kibena*. East of Njombe district there is Kilombero, located in the northwest is Mbarali while in the north of the district is Mufindi.

Among the events that affected the lives of Njombe people was their participation in colonial labour migration. Although no record exists to show exactly when labour migration began in Njombe district, it is recorded that by the mid-1920s long distance travelling for wage labour had become regular (Lwoga, 1984, p. 124). During the interwar period, labour migration by Njombe people increased. This was in part due to the demand for labour in the sisal plantations of north-eastern Tanzania. These plantations employed about one-third of the country's wage-labourers and earned a large part of its foreign exchange. During the same period, the majority of this industry's unskilled workers were peasant-migrants from the southern and western parts of the country (Graham, 1970, p. 25). Njombe District being part of Southern Tanzania, therefore, has its historical experience of migrant workers which is broadly illustrative of that of many thousands of peasant-migrants from other areas of the country.

Labour migration in Africa has evoked a fertile historiography. One might, therefore, ask what is to be gained in re-working on a somewhat old theme as this. Although the past does not change the questions we ask of it changes as conditions in our own times change. This is also necessitated by paradigm shifts. While a lot has been written on labour migration, its influence on rural transformations remains largely unexplored as most studies have focused on the negative effects of labour migration on the African region. To some, labour migration has always been detrimental to rural families and communities because it robbed them of able-bodied men who were essential for development (Wilson, 1941; Guliver, 1954; Graham 1968; Wilson, 1975, p. 17-18; Lwoga, 1984, p. 126). Similarly, the process

had subjected women to double roles (Omari, 1988, p. 33; Sunseri, 2005) and increased poverty (Bryceson, 1990, p. 211-216). Additionally, labour migration led to social consequences such as divorce, household dissolution and decline of childbirth (Sunseri, 2005, p. 166). They accordingly concluded that labour migration resulted in the deterioration of rural areas during the colonial period.

Despite the recorded negative effects of labour migration, it is important to also note that such effects depended among other factors, on the nature of its articulation with indigenous economies. Therefore, generalization of the impacts of labour migration cannot give us a clear picture of what was exactly taking place in each particular community. Colonial Njombe people were not merely victims of colonial compulsion. Instead, they sometimes sought to act autonomously with the intention of improving their lives through labour migration. It was the combination of material wealth, skills and experience acquired through such migrancy that contributed to the wider process of rural transformations in their district. Indicators like increased literacy, awareness of multiple religion and spread of Kiswahili language are used in this study to show such transformations. The study, therefore, adds to the literature on labour migration in Africa by illuminating an aspect that has so far received little attention. In historiographical terms, the study adds a new dimension to our understanding of African initiatives and agency in acting upon various processes affecting people's lives.

Theoretical Underpinning

Most of the studies on the impact of labour migration have approached the matter mainly from the economic point of view. Much of the sociologists, at least of the functional school argue for economic motivation as a powerful factor in migration (Mitchell, 1959, p. 12-47). Over emphasis on economic motivation of labour migration have led to most scholars concentrate on economic factors when discussing the impact of labour migration. On contrary, Gugler (1969, p. 134-155) believes that whilst economic factors can be alone responsible for labour migration, the process could also be solely explained on non-economic factors. Borrowing from this line of argument, this study considered the fact that labour migration embraces all

dimensions of social existence. That said, economic framework seems to be more helpful in pinning down motivations for migration than assessing the consequences of the process. That being the case therefore, transformational approach is used for this study. It appears that the transformation model is the best for assessing the consequences of labour migration.

The transformation approach developed by Stephen Castles (2008) provides the basis for a new understanding of the links between human labour mobility and rural change. In this study, social transformation is taken as a fundamental shift in the way society is organized that goes beyond the continual processes of incremental social changes which were always at work. This implies a 'step-change' in which the existing social-economic patterns are re-configured. Castle's argument that in developing countries forms of social transformations include intensification of agriculture, changes in education, politics and religion (ibid, p. 11) was also examined for its relevance in this case study.

People migrating for wages, need a degree of flexibility which is probably greater than that of others. Their flexibility could be related to spatial mobility and skills. Skills and experiences are also likely to increase flexibly because a skilled person can be employed in more fields than an unskilled one. Skills are in most cases the result of education and training. Through working as migrant labourers, Njombe people obtained experience and skills that need scrutiny in terms of the ways they contributed to rural transformation. As pointed out by P.R Masson, in explaining labour migration, the analysis of the acquisition and effects of human capital have been neglected in many studies (Masson, 2001, p. 4). In fact, human capital developed in work places has multiple effects. Referring to Tanganyika, Scott argues that the complex body of knowledge sisal labourers got even produced the unintended effect of a dense "field of operation" (Scott, 1995, p. 193). It was in such operations that workers navigated their lives on the plantations and nearby villages. Such a field of operation integrated diverse bodies of knowledge. To be able to consider such acquisition of human capital, one has to do more than just a macro-economic cost-benefit analysis that economists have always considered and emphasized upon.

Labour Migration and Education

Western (formal) education was a new phenomenon to the people of Njombe. It came with the colonial intrusion of the late 19th century. Like any other societies in Tanzania, education as a system of imparting desired knowledge has always been part and parcel of the Bena. Since pre-colonial time, informal education was intended to create a "good citizen" of the clan or tribe. This was by creating a picture in the minds of those who were taught, depicting the virtues, manners and the future life they were to lead. Formal (western) education and literacy skills in Tanzania were introduced in the 1860s by foreign voluntary agencies mostly connected with the arrival of Missionaries from Europe (TEN/MET, 1996, p. 8). Since then, informal education gradually lost its strength in favour of formal education.

Despite the emphasis on the importance of literacy, the pace at which individual Africans recognized the value of western education in their normal lives differed Despite the fact that Missionaries had already begun introducing schools in Njombe since the 1860s, most of the Bena did not quickly appreciate the importance of schooling (Interview: Victory Mgaya, 2012). As a result, most of them were reluctant sending their children to missionary schools. Most of the Bena who came to realize the importance of education were those who participated in European employment. Such employment necessitated them to developed interest in learning how to read and write.

The significance and value of Western education among the Bena was first recognized by migrant labourers in employment centres. Life in areas of employment encouraged many forms of learning among Africans. Apart from acquiring skills and experiences as a result of working and interacting, some labourers were interested in learning how to read and write. Giblin quotes Kilima of Parangavanu, expressing his desire to study because of the difficult moments he experienced while working as a labourer in sisal plantations. He wanted to be able to sign the payments as some few others did rather than putting a thumbprint which denoted illiteracy. Kilima expressed his discomfort saying:

> I got to Tanga. When I got my wages I had to sign. Ahaa! So I put a thumbprint while I saw others writing. This is what got me into

> studying, seeing how others knew how to write, as well as to read, while you didn't even know how to read yet! (Kilima in Giblin, 2005, p. 128)

The aspiration that Kilima got could also be seen in respect of many other migrant labourers from Njombe. Penseli Mwajombe of Makoga had similar encounters at work. While young, he worked as a 'store boy' to the Greeks in Dabaga, Iringa, between 1952 and 1956. He pointed out that despite the fact that his employers liked him very much; not knowing how to read and write was a great obstacle to his working as a store boy. Such a job required some literacy skills which Penseli did not have. This situation made him uncomfortable. He wanted to liberate himself from such an obstacle. He wanted to know how to read and write. Expressing such a situation, Penseli said:

> There were many workers, so many of them! This worker wanting to take this the other wanting to take that; Ohoo! I had to keep records, but how without writing? Initially, there were few workers, I could manage them…. I could just mark them and remember what they took, aah! Later it became difficult, some of the things got lost without my knowledge. I said no! I should learn how to read and write. That became my ambition (Penseli Mwajombe, 2012).

Penseli was lucky to have a co-operative employer who bothered about his illiteracy. The employer decided to help this young illiterate but very committed worker. Although he did not send him to school, he helped him by buying books and giving his employee time off for self study with some assistance. Eventually, Penseli became literate; he eventually knew how to read and write.

It was realized that educated migrant labourers were much sought after as clerks, supervisors and general office workers. This observation made many of the Bena migrants to aspire for education, even if it be elementary education. Petro Mpingwa explained his experience while working on sisal estates in Tanga saying:

> We soon found out at our work places that educated colleagues who knew how to read and write the *Mzungu's* [European] language

> were paid more money but did less manual labour than some of us who were not educated but did hard work. Those who knew how to use pencils worked in offices of the *Bwana mkubwa* [superior] with their hands always clean (Petro Mpingwa, 2012).

The fact that people like Mwajombe, Kilima and Mpingwa got the desire to learn how to read and write out of their working as migrant labourers in European enterprises is just one part of the story. Scrutiny on the ways in which such literacy had a transformative role in their home communities is imperative to get a fuller picture of the situation. Penseli returned to his home place, at Makoga in 1956. While at home, everyone was amazed with the way he had changed. His parents were shocked to see that their young boy could read and write though they had not sent him to school. The news of his being literate spread to almost the whole village. Apart from being literate, Penseli also learnt masonry and carpentry while working for the Greek settlers in Iringa. All those became the fruits embedded in the spirit of *kupagala*[2] which the Bena have manifested up to now.

The Bena described *kupagala* as the process of self improvement and learning undertaken in preparation for assuming adult responsibilities. This again reflects the intense interest of generations of men in colonial Njombe to participate in labour migration – to obtain wider knowledge of geography, economy, language, skills and technology. As Masson points out, such acquisition of knowledge and skills that are useful in the modern sector of the economy often require moving away from rural areas (Masson, 2001). That being the case, migrant labourers from Njombe got a chance to acquire various skills out of their working in distant places.

The fruits of working as migrant labourers did not benefit individual migrants alone. Their acquired knowledge and skills had a trickle-down effect back in their home communities. After migrants' return home, cognizant of the various skills the migrants had acquired, many parents sent their children to them to be taught how to read and write. In his own words, Penseli recalled:

> I did not believe my eyes. My father's house turned into being a school, many parents came here asking me to teach their children how to read and write…. I did so. My father was very proud of me;

> he could even joke with his friends regarding their children's illiteracy as if he had once sent me to school (Penseli Mwajombe, 2012).

The fact that parents began sending their children to be educated by individuals like Penseli implied that people now recognized the value of Western education. It also denoted individual efforts to educate themselves outside the formal sphere of schools established by Missions and the colonial Government. In these schools, most parents could not afford the school fees and other expenses related to their children's schooling. Sending their children to individuals who were educated from their labour migrancy was cheaper than formal schooling. This is because the system was negotiable as they could agree on forms of payment; in cash, kind or labour. This was affordable to most of the Bena who were in need of such education.

Augustino Mwalongo of Igosi was one of the famous people for good performance in masonry. Because of such known excellence, he was employed by a Chinese company during the construction of TAZARA railway. When he was asked as to where he got such training he simply said "thanks to Penseli Mwajombe of Makoga" (Mwalongo, 2012). This was the same Penseli who had undergone such training in masonry and other skills while working as a labour migrant for Greek settlers in Iringa. After his return home, Penseli did not only impart such skills to people in his own village (Makoga) but also to people from neighbouring villages.

Bena migrant labourers were among the pioneers in sending their children to school. Andrea Mgaya[3], popularly known as "Lunguja" of Igosi was one of them. While working in Tanga sisal estates, he made sure that he himself learnt how to read and write. On 1/1/1948 he bought his first book titled "*Masimulizi na Mafundisho*"[4] [Stories and Teachings] at a price of 150 cents. To impress other future readers, on the first plain page of the book he wrote in Kiswahili: "*Kitabu changu. . .Ukisoma ndani humu utaona utamu sana*" (My book. . . . Reading, you will find it very interesting). Using his money earned out of his working as a migrant labourer in sisal estates, Lunguja bought some other few books which his children and other people at home came to use (Mgaya, 2012). They, as well, came to enjoy the fruits of *Kupagala*.

After returning home, Lunguja became very active in matters of education. He was determined to send all of his children to school. However, chances were very limited by then. He could just send a few of them, one of whom was Victory Mgaya who later became a teacher. Since then, part of the objective of the Bena going to work in Tanga or elsewhere was to find money for their children's education. Referring to Mexico, Mc Kenzie and Rapoport argue that, 'one of the main channels through which labour migration impacts education, is the effect of remittances on the feasible amount of education investment'(McKenzie & Rapoport, 2006, p. 13). This was also realized in Njombe whereby, in the 1940s most of the Bena migrant labourers had realized the importance of sending their children to school (Adamson Msigala, 2012). This implies that from the 1940s, searching for school fees became one of the reasons for labour migration among the Bena.

For the Bena, apart from going to school, learning how to write letters became an important skill in their lives as it enabled them to communicate with their distant family members. It brought dramatic changes in the mode of communication between wives at home and husbands as labour migrants. On the other hand, letter writing as a new mode of communication further reinforced labour migration in the District. This was because, with such improved communication between labour migrants and their families at home, there was assurance of links between the migrants and their families left at home. Such observation was also made by the Njombe district Commissioner in his annual report where he noted:

> Even this elementary education is appreciated and helpful to the local natives. Such helpfulness is shown in the increasing amount of correspondence between men at work outside the District and their relatives at home (TNA 178/L.3/1).

Labour migration separated men from their families for long periods. Writing letters remained the only form of communication. It, therefore, became important for a Bena migrant labourer to know how to read and write. It was equally important for children or some relatives to know how to read and write so that they could read and reply to letters for the migrant husband's illiterate wife. This assured them of relative confidentiality of the content of the letter, failure of which would render it necessary for someone

from outside the family to read and write letters for him or his family. This was disliked by many of the Bena. It was taken as a shame to ask a person from outside the family to read and write letters for another family. Petro Mpingwa, put his complaints thus:

> Many people here went to the teachers to have their letters read for them or reply letters by dictating words for such teachers. In most cases this was free, but it was bad. Those teachers knew many of our secrets….We decided to send our children to school (Mpingwa, 2012).

Almost every village in Njombe had people who specialized in letter writing. Some of them even charged a small fee for the service. Payment was mostly in kind. Cereals like maize, wheat and millet were used for the purpose. There were, however, few Bena who managed to pay in cash. As pointed out earlier, when Njombe migrant labourers returned home, they began sending more children to school. They now realized that education could pay. In subsequent years, some educated Bena children joined labour migration and saw how rewarding education was. They, in turn, made sure that their own children, including daughters, went to school and had better education. Indeed, this was an important contribution of labour migration to education development among the Bena.

Since employment was associated with labour migration, a process that was basically only for men, it was assumed that Western education was only for boys who would eventually end up being migrant labourers, bringing money home in Njombe. For this reason, girls who were not considered for labour migration were deprived of chances for schooling. “Our fathers were not willing to send girls to school” narrated Alatuhiga Madano one of the then girls who expressed dissatisfaction with the situation (Madano, 2012). However, such a situation did not remain unaltered. With experience in urban areas, Bena migrant labourers slowly overturned this view. They found that with good education, girls could be teachers or nurses. Consequently they gradually began sending their daughters to school. However, elements of privileging boys over girls in education still prevailed among some of the Bena families.

Generally, human capital as a collection of resources – knowledge, skills,

abilities, training and experience possessed individually and collectively in a society represented a form of wealth. The education that Njombe migrants got out of their work places can be considered as integral to human well-being. This is because when people have ability to read and write can have the ability to make other choices which they value. Although any investment in education can be considered unproductive if it does not enhance output of goods and services, for the Bena, such acquisition of education was even important in itself irrespective of their contribution to labour productivity.

Labour Migration and the Spread of Islam and Kiswahili Language

In Tanzania, as is the case for the rest of East Africa, Islam was established on the Indian Ocean coast earlier than in the hinterlands. However, with time, it spread to other areas of the country at varying pace and extent. Labour migration of the Bena people to Tanzania's North-eastern agricultural plantations played an important role in the spread of Islam to different parts of Njombe.

In Njombe, Christianity preceded Islam. Christianity was introduced in Njombe District even before the Bena began to actively participate in colonial labour migration. When the Bena began their massive migrations to the North-eastern plantations for work, missionaries who were already established in Njombe, were worried of exposing their converted Bena Christians to the Islamic world. This is because the Missionaries in Njombe as it was in other parts of East Africa, acknowledged that they were competing with an expanding Islam (Iliffe, 1979, p. 218). In such competition for religious dominance, urgency demanded extensive evangelization and an adaptive approach rather than creating of closed communities. Iliffe quotes Bishop Vogt of the Holy Ghost Fathers to have written in 1912: "Our principal duty at present is to occupy the country by rural schools, in order to close it to Islam and the Protestants" (Quoted in Iliffe, 1979, p. 218). Colonial Njombe was divided into two Christian parts, the Northern part for Lutherans, while the southern part was predominantly Catholic (Giblin, 2005, p. 17). Except in Manda, the only schools in Njombe were run by Lutherans (Graham, 1968, p. 37). There were no Islamic elements yet to be vividly seen in Njombe before the Bena's contact with the

coast.

Discussing the spread of Islam in Tanganyika, Illife associates the adoption of Islam in Unyamwezi, Undendeuli, Kondoa, and some other places with labour migration (Iliffe, 1979, p. 307). However, such acquisition of coastal culture by the Bena was mostly superficial prior to 1960. Islam as a religion which spread among the peoples of the coastal hinterland made little impact on inland peoples during this time (Iliffe, 1979, p.79). In that case, a Graham point out that islamization was one aspect of social change in German East Africa which was conspicuously minimal in Njombe District (Graham, 1968, p. 37). However, the post 1960 period had witnessed a comparatively increase in Islamic influence in the area. The religion was seen acceptable due to its acceptance of polygamy, complying with African traditional culture. This could not be the case with Christianity which forbade polygamists.

Because of absence of railway and all-weather roads in the district, there was very little trade and few, if any, Moslem traders in Njombe. It followed, therefore, that the only contacts which most Njombe people had with Moslems were those developed through labour migration to the coastal sisal plantations in eastern and north-eastern colonial Tanzania. It was from such contact, that the Bena became aware of the presence of Islam. Their knowledge of Islam broadened their understanding on the presence of other religions beyond the ones they previously knew about. This became a platform for their knowing of cultural heterogeneity of people which formed part of their capital skills formation. If we consider human capital as collection of resources including experiences possessed by individuals or society, then it is obvious that the Bena migrant's exposure to Islam world gave them such capital.

Apart from Islam, the coast was also the centre of the Kiswahili language. Trade and migration to and from the Swahili coast during the nineteenth century helped to spread the language to the interior of Tanzania. Burton for instance, is reported by Iliffe to have found it being spoken widely by Sagara and Gogo in the 1850s[5]. He adds that, thirty years later the Kiswahili language was widely known in the coastal hinterland, while almost every inland village was said to contain someone who understood it (Iliffe, 1979, p.79). Renowned chiefs found it important to learn Kiswahili.

Rindi, Semboja, and Rumanyika spoke it fluently. Semboja's son, Kimweri Maguvu, was literate in Kiswahili. Those who were illiterate like Merere of Usangu had employed a Swahili secretary, as did Mirambo's successor (Iliffe, 1979). In the case of Njombe, Chiefs like Daniel Kiswaga found it necessary to learn Kiswahili. This was because rather than being merely a means of communication with coastal peoples as it used to be for Bena migrant labourers, it also became a language of inter-tribal communication in German times. The administration often rejected chiefs or headmen ignorant of Kiswahili. As noted earlier, plantation life encouraged many forms of learning. Asked on how he leaned Kiswahili, Simon Mgaya recalled proudly:

> We learned Kiswahili in Tanga. When leaving for labour migration, *Kibena* was the only language we were able to communicate through. To be able to communicate with people from other tribes in the work place, Kiswahili had to be leant (Simon Mgaya, 2012).

However, the migrants' propensity to acquire the host country's language depends, among other factors, on the length of stay (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 56). Therefore, the level of acquisition of Swahili differed among Bena migrant labourers depending on how long one had been in contact with the coastal people. "I learnt a bit of Swahili in Tanga but my brother became an expert of it as he stayed there much longer than me," said Kilima who compared his stay in Tanga for one year as opposed to his brother's three years (Petro Kilima, 2012). Further still, as observed by H. Sabea, the knowledge (including language) obtained by workers was not homogenous. Rather, they embodied the divisions among plantation workers on the basis of their positions in the labour process and the culture of work and sociality on the plantations (Sabea, 2010, p. 145). Referring to their working in Tanga, Hassam Mwajombe and Petro Mpingwa revealed that Bena migrant labourers who engaged in sisal cutting and lived in the nearby villages learnt Kiswahili faster than those who stayed in the sisal camps (Penseli Mwajombe, 2012). This was because the former had advantage over the later with regard to socializing with the indigenous people of the coast who already knew Kiswahili.

Knowledge of Kiswahili and other languages was a mark of distinction

for most of the returned workers in Njombe. Giblin quotes one of the then University students from Njombe who explained, 'I remember seeing those coming from South Africa speaking Afrikaans with pomposity' (Giblin, 2005, p. 128). This of course was the same with Swahili as those who knew it perceived themselves as more advanced than those who did not. Learning Swahili, therefore, became one of the incentives for Bena people to go to Tanga. To show their being literate in Kiswahili, many men who went to the sisal estates in Tanga took names in Swahili, the language of the coast. These names had a cosmopolitan ring for villagers in Njombe among whom Swahili was rarely used even in the 1960s. However, Giblin points out that, although these sisal workers adopted names in a new language, they maintained an older style of naming (Giblin, 2005, p. 113). For instance, praise names in Swahili were just direct translation of the Bena names and the naming system with just little alterations.

The praise names in Kiswahili now mapped the physical geography of migrant labour, its social contexts, moral imperatives and demands of the body. For example, an experienced migrant labourer could be known as *Msafiri* (traveller); too much complaining earned a man the name *Legezamwendo* (slow down); one who delayed his companion might be known as *Mwendapole* (slow pace); one who showed courage while passing through thinly populated and reputedly dangerous regions such as Ulanga might be called *Simbaulanga* (the lion of Ulanga) and many others (Petro Mpingwa, 2012). Generally, names reflected fascination with the cosmopolitan Swahili coast; others preserved memories of toil in work places while others referred to success or failure in obtaining wealth. It was also interesting that other names such as *Mpendakazi* or *Kazikupenda* reflected the conviction that individual character played a role in determining whether a man would accumulate cash savings and bundles of goods to take home.

Generally, the spread and adoption of Kiswahili language was an important preparation for the unity of the Tanzanian nation that was fought for and gained in 1961. From the start, Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's first president, promoted Ujamaa. This was a nationalist and pan-Africanist ideology that revolved around reliance on Kiswahili instead of on European languages. Though Tanzanian citizens possess tribal affiliations and

typically speak a tribal language in addition to Kiswahili, they value their allegiance to their countries common language. This priority is rare in Africa, a continent of people whose first loyalty belongs to their tribe. That general preference is unsurprising: many country borders' were drawn by European colonial powers, rulers who disregarded or intentionally opposed grouping Africans according to tribal and linguistic affiliations. Tanzanians, feel unified partly due to their common use of Kiswahili language.

Conclusion

In this article, it has been pointed out that, to a larger extent, the analysis of the impacts of labour migration in Africa, has been dominated by the underdevelopment theory. As a result, there have been no serious attempts made to follow the positive impacts that non-tangible skills and experience the labourers got in wage employment had on rural societies. Labour migration has, therefore, been understood from the perspective that it has only been draining able-bodied men from rural societies who never came back with any fruit. Viewing labour migration from this perspective, one inevitably finds it destructive to the sending areas. This is the impression that this study has tried to correct. Available evidence has been used by this study to analyse different ways in which the skills and experiences of migrant labourers were became change agents in areas of education/literacy, and mode of communication in Njombe district.

If Africans are viewed as creative and rational beings, one should appreciate that labour sending areas benefited from labour migration. Miracle and Berry (1970, p. 38) support this viewpoint when they say that "the home area is likely to gain from labour migration in both physical and human capital so long as the migrant labourer does not settle permanently outside his home area". Although some migrant labourers from Njombe preferred permanent to contractual employment, there is irresistible evidence that the majority of those who went to centres of employment came back to their district. Some of them travelled to and from those centres repeatedly while others went once and did not travel again after their return home. In such situation, we can argue that the socio-cultural transformations emanating from Bena participation in colonial labour migration was

inevitable. After all, labour migration was not a one-way process. This is because those who went back home after a period of serving as migrant labourers carried with them intentional and non-intentional products of their participation in distant wage labour centres – that was what transformed them. This conclusion however, does not suggest that all changes in Njombe District were due to labour migration. It only serves to demonstrate the contribution of labour migration to the wider process of rural transformations in Njombe district.

Notes

[1] Wabena or Bena. The core of this name, "Bena," is used to designate a variety of different things connected with being Bena. The prefix "Wa-" is the plural so "Wabena" refers to more than one group member including the group as a whole, while a single individual is an Mbena. Other prefixes are used, so their territory is Ubena, and their language is Kibena.
[2] Kupagala is a term in Bena language that implies working far from your home for the purpose of accumulating wealth, mostly in terms of cash, but also assets, knowledge and skills accruing from such working.
[3] Although he was dead at the time of conducting my interviews, his life story was narrated by Victory Mgaya – his son who holds great knowledge of his father's encounters.
[4] This was a book printed in 1931 by Lutheran Missions in Tanganyika Territory, found in Usambara Agentur, Mission Lwandai.
[5] One should note that these communities were positioned along important long distance and slave routes of the late 19th century.

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Appendix. Interviewees

Penseli Mwajombe, Makoga, 12, 20 November, 2012
Simon Mgaya, Igosi, 15, 16, 17 November, 2012
Alatuhiga Madano, Kidugalla, 18, 19, November, 2012
Victory Mgaya, Ivigo, 20, November, 2012
Petro Mpingwa, Usalaule, 16, 17, November, 2012
Augustino Mwalongo, 25, November, 2012
Adamson Msigala, Igosi, 14, 15, November, 2012
Petro Kilima, 5, 7, November, 2012

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