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KUTAFUTA MAISHA: CONNECTIONS BETWEEN AGENCY AND STRUCTURE IN MAKONDE MIGRATORY LABOUR FROM MOZAMBIQUE TO TANZANIA (ca. 1907-1964)

Kutafuta Maisha: conexões entre agência e estrutura na migração laboral de Macondes entre Moçambique e a Tanzânia (ca. 1907-1964)

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MIGRAÇÃO LABORAL E PRODUÇÃO DE COMMODITIES NA ÁFRICA: CONEXÕES GLOBAIS
LABOR MIGRATION AND COMMODITY PRODUCTION IN AFRICA: GLOBAL ENTANGLEMENTS

ABSTRACT
The drive for making colonial territories “profitable” through various means such as commodity production got entangled with complex events that stood well beyond the intervening capacity of colonial administrators, and labour migration was no exception. This article analyses Makonde migration from Northern Mozambique towards sisal plantations in neighbouring British Tanganyika during the twentieth century and argues that the interweaving of written and oral sources renders two contrasting pictures: one of an orderly planned commodity sector mediated by industrial pundits and sustained by a rhetoric of colonial “development”; and another of spontaneous, haphazard yet rational life decisions undertaken by migrant men and women. We challenge the conventional take on African labour migration by showing how the colonial labour migration system had to address the migrants’ needs and how migrants successfully subverted coercive structures for their own benefit. By doing so, Makonde migrants established their own transformative connections with global phenomena that extended far beyond their participation in commodity production chains.

KEYWORDS
Labour migration. Sisal industry. Makonde.

RESUMO
A busca por tornar territórios coloniais “rentáveis” por meio de iniciativas diversas, tais como a produção de commodities, se entrelaçou com eventos complexos que estiveram muito além da capacidade de intervenção de administradores coloniais, e a migração laboral não foi uma exceção. Este artigo analisa a migração dos macondes do norte de Moçambique para as plantações de sisal no Tanganyika britânico durante o século XX e argumenta que a abordagem conjunta de fontes escritas e orais gera dois quadros contrastantes: um de um setor de commodities planejado e ordenado, manejado por especialistas e sustentado por uma retórica de “desenvolvimento” colonial; e outro de decisões de vida espontâneas, desordenadas, mas racionais, tomadas por homens e mulheres migrantes. Desafiamos a visão convencional sobre a migração laboral africana ao mostrar como o sistema colonial de migração laboral teve necessariamente de atender às necessidades dos migrantes e demonstrar como os migrantes subverteram, com sucesso, estruturas coercitivas para seu próprio benefício. Ao fazer isso, os migrantes macondes estabeleceram suas próprias conexões transformadoras com fenômenos globais que se estenderam muito além de sua participação nas cadeias de produção de commodities globais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVES
Migração laboral. Indústria Sisaleira. Macondes.

Economic coercion in colonial Mozambique has long been identified as a major factor in promoting emigration by international observers and historians alike. Yet the migratory flows that connected northern Mozambique to other colonial territories in East Africa has received far less historiographical attention than its southern counterparts. Unlike labour migration between southern Mozambique and the settler-based economies in South Africa and South Rhodesia, which were strictly regulated by Portuguese, British and South African authorities, the movement of tens of thousands of Mozambican Makonde migrants to neighbouring Tanganyika occurred across imperial backwaters and was largely unmonitored until the mid-twentieth century.

Studies have shown that Makonde mobility across colonial borders fostered transcultural connections that were creatively interpreted by migrants, host societies, and their brethren upon the migrants' return, helping to transform traditions that had never been static in the first place (Bortolot, 2013; Israel, 2014). These northbound migratory movements were heavily influenced by Portuguese exactions; they grew alongside the booming sisal industry in British Tanganyika, and by the late 1950s, Makonde migrants were also deeply involved in the burgeoning global markets of African art (Dick-Read, 1964; Mohl, 1977; Kingdon, 2002; Laranjeira, 2017). Interviewing Mozambican Makonde carvers located in Dar es Salaam in the late 1960s, for instance, Elisabeth Grohs ascertained that the precarious economic outlook in northern Mozambique "forced" many people to cross the border. Yet the connections between mobility, work in sisal plantations, and woodcarving were made by her interviewees in less stark outlines. In their narratives such activities took place rather seamlessly alongside many other viable possibilities for securing a livelihood (Grohs, 1974).

So how does this picture of Makonde labour migration fit prevailing narratives of African labour migration during colonialism? With regard to labour migration in colonial Tanganyika's chief economic enterprise throughout the twentieth century, the export of hard fibres hinging on sisal plantations, analysts have focused on describing systems of economic coercion that propelled people to move towards sisal plantations across the territory, with migrant agency fading beneath the weight of structural exactions imposed by colonial rule (Gulliver, 1955; Iliffe, 1979; Rodney *et al.*, 1983; Maddox *et al.*, 2017).

Recent scholarship on labour migration within and beyond Africa has challenged the emphasis on structural aspects governing human mobility, emphasising the need to identify the ways labour migrants engaged and transformed their historical circumstances. While it is indeed impossible to shrug off "coercion" from any account of labour migration, theoretical insights spawning from the field of Global History have made it easier to study how migrants navigated through structures that facilitated or hampered their mobility across boundaries over time (Bernardi *et al.*, 2023), further helping to steer us away from dichotomic interpretations of "forced" vs. "voluntary", or "traditional" vs. "modern" mobility in colonial Africa (Haas; Frankema, 2022). Moreover, the very belief that African labour migration was one-sidedly determined by colonial demands for cheap labour has been justifiably questioned (Atkins, 1993; Harries, 1994; Delius *et al.*, 2014).

This paper builds on these historiographical developments by taking the migratory flows and labour on sisal plantations by Makonde groups transiting between contemporary Tanzania and Mozambique to study the tensions between structure and agency along decades of labour migration across colonial/imperial, and later national, boundaries. We argue that the multiple life stories behind Makonde mobility between contemporary Tanzania and Mozambique in the mid-twentieth century contradict the conventional take on African labour migration movements during colonialism: instead of looking at helpless and anonymous migrants making their way to the sisal plantations in response to external

pressures, what we see are colonial overlords and employers struggling to control highly mobile African populations. Unlike most labour migration networks in colonial Africa that were predominantly composed of male migrants (Harries, 1994; Martino, 2022), the flows of Makonde people across East African imperial borders consisted of women and children as well as men. Indicating the relative powerlessness of colonial authorities and plantation owners does not, however, mean taking an apologetic stance on colonialism. Rather, we wish to situate African agency against the backdrop of the historically precarious – and inherently violent – nature of colonial rule.

In other words, in searching for a better life, Makonde labour migrants made transformative connections that defied colonial structures in many ways, and these connections are best understood in terms of a global scenario of commodity production and (anti)colonialism. Our analysis of Makonde migrations pays heed to the imperative of moving beyond a descriptive view of labour migration as something mechanically produced by the relationships between labour supply and demand, focussing instead on how migrants in colonial Africa played a central role in shaping the growing interconnectivity of African territories with the global economy, be it through commodity production or otherwise.

In a literal formulation, the Swahili phrase in this paper's title, *kutafuta maisha*, may be translated as "to search [for a] life". It is an expression widely used in contemporary Tanzania with reference to making important decisions in the quest for a secure livelihood. The meaning of *kutafuta maisha* also praises human mobility, namely in seeking better opportunities wherever they may be found (Monson, 2003; Billings, 2013). We adopt this expression for two reasons. First, it encompasses resourcefulness and mobility as key aspects of the life stories that constituted Makonde migration during the twentieth century. Recognising these two aspects is especially helpful in bridging the inconsistencies between documentary evidence – overwhelmingly produced by colonial observers – regarding these migratory networks, on the one hand, and oral testimonies collected from Makonde men and women who decided to migrate, on the other.[1]

Second, it nods to a pioneering study published forty years ago on the topic of Mozambican labour migration by Edward Alpers (1984). We seek to address gaps in Alpers's cursory, yet most stimulating investigation by examining sources located in archives in London, Dar es Salaam, Maputo, and Lisbon with the objective of writing a history of transimperial labour migration networks that critically intertwines human agency and structural limitations. We discuss the discrepancies between oral and written sources, and pay close attention to the strategies Makonde migrants deployed in "searching for life" abroad.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first section begins with a discussion of how in German East Africa a colonial labour market was created that relied on workers recruited over long distances and analyses how the British occupiers maintained and consolidated a structure geared to meet the colony's labour needs under the *kipande* system, a method of organising African labour that played an ambiguous role in fuelling the colonial labour market by being at once an instrument of coercion and autonomy. This section also situates the development of the sisal industry in the twentieth century up to and during the Second World War, indicating its increasing dependence on labour migration, including from northern Mozambique.

Following the establishment of the Tanganyika Sisal Growers Association (TSGA) in 1929, the second section delves into what we perceive as a "bureaucratisation" of a colonial labour migration structure. We focus on Tanganyika's Sisal Labour Bureau (SILABU) created by the TSGA in 1944 and its consolidation over the next two decades to identify how

[1] The oral sources studied in this paper were collected during Clara Torrão Busin's fieldwork, conducted in Dar es Salaam in December 2022 and October 2023.

industry pundits and colonial administrators endeavoured to control African migratory flows in Tanganyika. As the relative chronological contiguity between the historiographical present and this later period allows a greater use of oral sources, we argue that this bureaucratisation notwithstanding, Makonde migrants themselves saw their itineraries from Mozambique to Tanganyika and back in a very different light, while making their own connections to global markets along the way and subverting the very structure that created an African *manamba* [lit. "numbers"] workforce on colonial plantations.

ORGANIZING LABOUR: THE CREATION OF A STRUCTURE

Historians of East Africa have posited for at least three decades that the drive for making colonial territories profitable through various means, especially through commodity extraction, got entangled in complex events that stood well beyond the intervening capacity of colonial administrators. This was the case for historical studies on contemporary Tanzania, as scholars increasingly focussed not only on African communities' success in thwarting European interventions, but also by recognizing the kaleidoscopic nature of the multiple and conflicting interests vested in colonial administrations (Cooper, 1980; Koponen, 1994). While there existed some concerted efforts from metropolitan industries all the way to the European "men on the ground", these efforts were often related to specific productive sectors and were not impervious to criticism within the colonial government, as Thaddeus Sunseri has argued for cotton production in German East Africa (Sunseri, 2002).[2] Moreover, many concerted efforts might produce disastrous failures, such as the Groundnuts Scheme in British Tanganyika (Hogendorn; Scott, 1981; Rizzo, 2006).

The historiography of such developments recalibrated the emphasis on describing structural forces that bent Africa and Africans into playing a subordinate role in the increasingly globalised capitalist economy (Cooper, 1994; Ochonu, 2013), an analytical strand best represented by Walter Rodney's seminal book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972). This recalibration mattered for scholars concerned with labour migration. In a posthumous publication organised with the Tanzanian scholars Laurent Sago and Kapepwa Tambila, Rodney (1983) argued that African labour migration under colonialism epitomised colonial exploitation and rooted territorial dependence in an export-oriented plantation sector. The African workers who manned these plantations in Tanganyika came to be known as *manamba*, or "numbers" of people who migrated to plantations from regions that were planned to serve as labour reserves.

While Rodney's work articulated "push-pull" descriptions of labour migration that prevailed in his day (cf. Asiwaju, 1976), it paid scant attention to migrant agency per se. His take on labour migrants as structural victims of economic exploitation was also shared by Tanzanian officials shortly after independence, who were keen on stamping out what were seen as the colonial legacies underpinning the existence of a vast *manamba* workforce across the country. In 1963 they abolished a cornerstone of plantation labour relations, the *kipande* system. Yet former labour migrants, including those hailing from Mozambique, decried the ensuing loss of autonomy as a return to "slavery" and rejected the notion of *manamba* as sheer exploitation (Sabea, 2000, p. 315). Tracing parallels between slavery and the labour migration networks in East African history was not uncommon, as will be discussed in the following section by looking at the appearance of the *kipande* system and the critical views that accompanied it.

[2] The "Tanganyika Territory" was created as a League of Nations mandate following the British occupation of German East Africa and historically corresponds to mainland Tanzania.

What became to be known as *kipande* was a card system created to regulate African labour in colonial plantations in German East Africa and almost universally applied in the late 1890s (Iliffe, 1979, pp. 153-159). Furthermore, as the abysmal working conditions and pay rates prevailing in the areas most densely inhabited by German settlers foreclosed the existence of a stable workforce, card systems were expanded further in 1907 to include not only plantation workers, but to compel all adult African men within Wilhelmstal, currently Lushoto, to work for European employers. These cards contained thirty empty spaces, each space being filled in at the end of a day's work. A worker was paid upon submitting a completed card within four months. Failing to meet this deadline could be framed as a breach of contract, leaving the cardholder liable to imprisonment and flogging (Bolton, 1980; Sabea, 2000; Liebst, 2021). Whether as the "Wilhelmstal card system" (Class, 1913; Schrader, 1919; Tetzlaff, 1970) or the earlier card systems applied in colonial plantations, such cards quickly became known across all German East Africa under the name of *kipande* (pl. *vipande*), Swahili for "piece".

To understand the reasons behind this expansion, it is necessary to recognize that despite having "impelled Africans to work for Europeans", this system "was flexible from the standpoint of all parties concerned" (Koponen, 1994, p. 400). As soon as this regime was increasingly implemented in German East Africa, workers began to exploit the inherent flexibility of the *kipande* system to pace their workdays on plantations and their displacement to/from plantations according to their own personal circumstances. African workers thus managed to negotiate the terms of their entry into the colony's labour market in accord with the rhythms of peasant social life by carving "realms of autonomy" within the colonial economy, as interpreted by Sunseri (2002, p. 157-158).

The conquest of German East Africa by the Entente in 1918 culminated in the creation of "Tanganyika Territory" by the United Kingdom. One of the major legacies of the German period was the economic preponderance of sisal plantations concentrated in the northeastern coastal region around Tanga, with secondary production hubs sprawling along the central railway between Dar es Salaam and Morogoro, as well as in the southeastern coast in Lindi and Mikindani/Mtwara. Such economic layout required the recruitment of migrant labour over long distances within the colony and beyond. Moreover, the British heavily relied on the German colonial legislation until specific regulations were promulgated by British officials in Dar es Salaam and the Colonial Office in London.

This meant that the *kipande* system that had prevailed on colonial plantations, regulated under the German labour ordinance of 1913, continued to be in force despite the wishes of Tanganyika's first governor, Horace Byatt, who attempted to abolish it several times during his tenure from 1916 to 1925. Byatt insistently argued vis-à-vis the Colonial Office that *kipande*'s flexibility bred "indolence and indifference" among Africans (Banton, 2004, p. 279), but to no avail. In 1926 his successor, Donald Cameron, passed Tanganyika's "Master and Native Servants Ordinance", which consolidated *kipande* as a legal form of contract. In a report submitted to the League of Nations in 1927, Cameron explained:

> The principal result of the 1926 Ordinance is to give legal recognition to the existing practice by which a contract with locally engaged native labour was made, not for a definite time, but, in effect, for the performance of a certain number of days' work within a reasonable time. The contract, though it normally extended for longer than one month, was not reduced to writing, but evidenced by a 'kipande', or labour card (REPORT BY […], 1927, p.21)

Cameron further explained to his superiors in London a year later that a worker contracted under a *kipande* "labour card" was "free to take more or less than the time of a

normal working day to perform" a day's work (UKNA,[3] CO 691/99/1). A crucial point, then, relates to what constituted a "day's work": the British commissioner responsible for Lindi Province along the border with Mozambique wrote that the "length of a day's work or the size of the daily task depends very largely on the individual employer", adding that "[f]ew labourers complete their thirty days' work-card in less than six weeks and many take longer than that" (Tanganyika Territory, 1940, p. 66).

While labour migrants used the flexibility afforded by the *kipande* system from the outset to their own advantage, what emerges from the colonial documents is indeed a coercive structure: employers had a major leeway in setting the terms of *vipande* contracts on their plantations, and the withholding of wages or the arbitrary suppression of a day's work from a labourer's *kipande* was a common occurrence throughout the colony (Iliffe, 1979, p. 158). Moreover, labour conditions worsened significantly in the aftermath of the Great Depression. By late 1930, many sisal estates were operating at a loss of 30 shillings per tonne of sisal fibre exported (UKNA, FCO 141/177299).[4] It should not be surprising that plantation owners banded themselves in a syndicate, the TSGA, and made concerted efforts to slash wages by about 50% per completed *kipande* – a reduction large enough to worry officials in Tanganyika and London about the capacity of African workers to afford paying taxes (UKNA, CO 691/114/7). Paradoxically, though, *vipande* were even used by labourers to avoid paying taxes altogether, as Dianne Bolton's analysis of the workforce enrolled in sisal plantation at Tanga region indicated. By 1933, a plantation in Muheza had 1200 labourers on active *vipande*, yet only about 15% of them daily turned out to work, as most workers held several *vipande* for adjacent plantations. This "very leisurely pace" in completing a *kipande* hindered the capacity of colonial officials in collecting taxes from plantation workers on a regular basis, as the very low labour turnout meant that most of the workers on a plantation's payroll – that is, active *vipande* – had no balance from which taxes could be deducted (Bolton, 1980, p. 97-98).

However, it must be noted that the strategy of simultaneously holding more than one *kipande* to avoid paying taxes may not have been as effective elsewhere in the colony. It is likely that the smaller concentration of sisal plantations in places such as Morogoro and the southern provinces foreclosed its viability. By 1937, for instance, labour conditions on plantations around Morogoro had deteriorated to alarming proportions – as far as the Colonial Office staff were concerned – and resulted in the deaths of many migrant labourers. At the behest of London, the Tanganyika Government investigated the matter, with the ensuing enquiry putting the *kipande* system and the recruitment of migrant labour under crosshairs. Tanganyika's acting governor in 1938 lambasted the *kipande* system for carrying "within itself the seeds of trouble", as the low labour turnout incentivised lax supervision of workers' health conditions. Yet he recognized that the "… labourer […] seems to prefer it and must, I suppose, be given some freedom in forming his contractual relationships" (UKNA, CO 691/167/2). One of the upshots regarding the recruitment of "unsuitable" workers over long distances was, according to the Governor, that the "Sisal Growers Association [TSGA] has at last realised that they must set up their own recruiting organisation, with depots at key points, in charge of a reputable Labour Agent" (UKNA, CO 691/167/2).

Prior to considering the creation of a recruitment branch by the TSGA, it is important to grasp how recruitment took place before it. For the Mozambican Makonde, the earliest written evidence sent to officials in London suggests that individual recruiters operated along the Rovuma River, the boundary between British and Portuguese territories. In December

[3] United Kingdom National Archives in Kew, London.
[4] The value of a tonne of sisal (c.i.f.) declined from approximately £38 in 1929 to £21 in 1930, dipping further to £14 in 1932 (TANGANYIKA TERRITORY, 1931, p. 217; Guillebaud, 1958, p. 9-10).

1929, Donald Cameron mentioned in a despatch to London that "an Indian firm operating in the Lindi Province" was considering "the employment of river craft in connexion [sic] with the development of their sisal estates", in a reference to recruiting migrants along the Rovuma River. Visiting the border a few years later in 1935, a German traveller commented with regard to Mozambican Makonde migrants:

> They make up a large percentage of workers in plantations all the way to Tanga. In Newala Chini […] I met an Indian man, a "modern slave hunter" that recruited Wamavia [Mozambican Makonde] to estates in the north. Every day numerous whole families cross the Rovuma [river] during the dry season's low tide attracted by the higher wages offered to these undemanding "bush negros" to work on sisal estates (Schlieben, 1941, p. 360-361).

Equating a labour recruiter to a "modern slave hunter" may throw light on how European observers interpreted the mobility of largely anonymous Africans headed toward sisal plantations. Yet as Enrique Martino has demonstrated for labour migration networks between the Bight of Biafra and the Spanish colony of Fernando Pó, such descriptions can be misleading, as they were often written by pundits deeply concerned with unchecked African mobility (Martino, 2022). Furthermore, unlike the compulsory contracts enforced by Spanish authorities upon the arrival of migrants in Fernando Pó, the *kipande* contract in Tanganyika was used by many Makonde migrants to leverage their position by capitalising on the sale of unfinished *vipande* in plantations located in southern Tanganyika at "present value" to other workers, thus accruing money required for travelling further north towards Tanga, where wages in the sisal industry were higher and labour conditions less appalling (UKNA, CO 691/187/1). Paying attention to the way African migrants engaged with different "contractual arrangements" during colonialism is thus fundamental to avoid indiscriminately labelling every instance of labour migration as coercive (Alexopoulou; Silva, 2022, p. 179).

On the Portuguese side of the border, Inspector Manuel Martello reported after conducting an inspection of the administration of the Cabo Delgado district in 1951/1952 that Makonde migration to what is now Tanzania began in 1935 (AHM[5], ISANI cx. 91). His report offers no evidence for this claim but mentions the long-standing relationship of the coastal population with the neighbouring territory, the hinterland, and places across the Indian Ocean; he was evidently aware of the historical integration of this region into the wider economic network of the Indian Ocean and the continuing mobility that this entailed. Yet, as far as he was concerned, the Makonde remained outside these older patterns of mobility.

The Makonde people historically built a reputation of being a closed community, as reflected in the view of Inspector Martello. This characteristic has been described by scholars to be the result of a strategy to resist slave raids, dating from the 18th and 19th centuries (Liebenow, 1971; Alpers, 1984; Dias *et al.*, 1998; Laranjeira, 2017). While Alpers questions this narrative by pointing out that the Makonde in the early 20th century engaged in cross-border migration to southwestern Tanzania and were inserted in wider trade networks, he did not include Makonde migration in geographically wider migration patterns. His analysis is based on archival material, which is scarce for the turn of the century on both sides of the border.[6] As a result, it is exceedingly difficult to trace migration patterns through colonial sources prior to the late 1920s and early 1930s, not least because of the fact that up until the mid-1950s anyone crossing the border was "hindered by little more than crocodiles" (Tanganyika Territory, 1954, p. 13). Drawing upon oral history and recent

[5] Mozambican National Archives.
[6] Many German records were destroyed during the First World War (Koponen, 1994, p. 350), and the archive of the *Companhia do Niassa*, that administered northern Mozambique from 1894-1929, is lost.

scholarship, we will advance some evidence that Makonde labour migration is indeed "older" and was inserted into wider geographical migratory flows (Jamal, 2015; Ali, 2016; Basos, 2022).

During interviews conducted with members of the Makonde diaspora in Dar es Salaam in 2022 and 2023, the far-reaching cross-border family networks that Alpers (1984) mentioned for southern Tanzania appear in almost every life trajectory. For instance, Edward[7] states that, when he left his village in Cabo Delgado some fifty years ago, he first went to stay with an aunt in southern Tanzania, near Mtwara. At his aunt's place, he met a *ndugu*[8] whom he had never seen before. This family member had come from Mafia Island and was lodging with the same aunt. Eventually, the two decided to look for work in Dar es Salaam and left together for the big city. Edward had a vast network of known and unknown family members to rely on when deciding to leave Mozambique. Moreover, his *ndugu* from Mafia suggests that a relative of Edward's had earlier left the village and reached the island, expanding the family there, as Edward's *ndugu* himself had been born in Mafia (Interview with [henceforth, Int. w.] Edward, Dar es Salaam [DSM], Dec. 12th. 2022).

Mafia Island had many plantations providing work opportunities for labourers from the continent, as the sisters Sofia and Ines, both currently in their 80s, recalled during an interview in Dar es Salaam in 2023. Their parents worked on a plantation in Zanzibar. While they could not remember when their parents arrived, they did mention that Ines was born on the island. It is likely that Ines was born between 1933 and 1943 and that her parents arrived in Zanzibar before this. The sisters could not recall whether their parents met on a plantation in Mozambique or had previously worked on plantations on the mainland (Int. w. Sofia and Ines, DSM, Oct. 15th-19th 2023). Yet it is likely that they followed the same path as other mainlanders, from the hinterland to the coast and thence to the islands, while working at one or multiple locations at the coast before making their trip to the islands (Conversation with Abdul Sheriff, DSM, Dec. 5th. 2022). While Ines was still little, her parents moved to Mafia, where they continued to work on a *shamba* until Sofia was born. Eventually, the family moved to Tanga and later to Dar es Salaam.[9]

These family histories suggest that the Makonde became part of wider and historically longer migration patterns that date from at least the early British period and/or the German period. Their presence on the islands of Zanzibar and Mafia in the stories told above is interesting. In Zanzibar, for instance, during the 19th century a large clove-growing industry developed. It first covered its need for manual labour with enslaved people and then, with the abolition of slavery in 1897, with migrants from the mainland. The Makonde are known to have been among the migrants that went to Unguja and Pemba to work on the plantations (Ali, 2016).

The hut tax was first introduced in Northern Mozambique in 1898 (Medeiros, 1997), and although during the first couple of decades the *Companhia do Niassa*'s grip over the hinterland was tenuous, the need to generate income was present. Possibilities to earn money were scarce in the *Companhia*'s territory, and hence it is likely that the Makonde went to neighbouring territories to seek income-generating activities on German or British plantations. As long as the location of the *Companhia do Niassa*'s documents remains unknown, there is only a handful of documents attesting to these migratory movements. One example is a letter written by the manager of the *O.A. Plantagengesellschaft Kilwa Ludland*

[7] To protect the interviewees, their names have been changed.

[8] Swahili word used to describe a younger sibling, cousin, or relative. Since the *Ujamaa* period it has also been widely used to denote a comrade. However, we believe that Edward used it to describe a relative he considered as his younger sibling or cousin, though not necessarily a consanguineous relative.

[9] Ines did not specify the kind of plantation she and her parents worked at, and as Mafia and Zanzibar were not primary sisal producers, it probably was not a sisal plantation. Nonetheless, her life story is a testimony to how the search for livelihood demanded a constant adaptation to exterior conditions.

Mkoe, in Lindi District in German East Africa, to the Portuguese local administrator in Negomano, in Northern Mozambique. The manager requested permission to recruit workers directly from Mozambique, as he noted that a significant number of workers from Portuguese territory had migrated to German territory during the year 1911 to work on the plantations (AHD[10], S.13.1. E14 P06 82798 *Acontecimentos no Rovuma*, pp.105-106). Such extant sources are consistent with the especially pronounced demand for migrant workers in German East Africa since 1910, as identified in German records by Bernd Arnold (1994, p. 205).

Therefore, one could advance the hypothesis that what emerged in the early 1930s were the *manamba*, the labour migration statistically measured by British administrators, while Makonde labour migrants already existed and had formed a part of wider labour migration patterns. Still, more research is needed on this topic, especially inquiries based on archaeology, linguistics and cultural studies, which could shed light on the longevity of these labour migration networks, similar to the research already conducted about the Makua in Mozambique (Declich, 2007; Macuácua, 2023).

THE BUREAUCRATISATION OF THE LABOUR ORGANIZATION AND MIGRANT AGENCY

As the sisal industry in Tanganyika coalesced into a powerful lobbying association, the TSGA, and achieved substantial growth after the early 1930s, recruitment became a pressing issue among British administrators and mobilised numerous private actors into providing labour to the industry. Yet it was only during wartime that efforts to set up a bureaucratised recruitment agency came to fruition. The Sisal Labour Bureau, or SILABU, was formed in August 1944 and had wide powers to recruit workers, conduct medical examinations or provide motorised transport to and from sisal plantations. For workers willing to accept long contracts before departing for the plantations, the Bureau could offer amenities such as blankets, cookware, and food provisions for the journey to the plantations. (Gulliver, 1955; Guillebaud, 1958).

During its initial months, SILABU coexisted with the conscription of labourers to sisal plantations as part of Britain's war effort – itself another source of grave deterioration in work conditions across Tanganyika (Iliffe, 1979, p. 371; Rodney *et al.*, 1983). SILABU immediately made plans to recruit labour in neighbouring colonies, reaching out to the Belgian and British authorities by the end of 1944. As TSGA's chairman, Eldred Hitchcock, put it rather boldly to the Colonial Office: "One thing is clear, if we want sisal production there must be better arrangements for labour supply" (UKNA, CO 691/199). Yet unlike their counterparts in Southern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, and Ruanda-Urundi, the Portuguese authorities in Mozambique were never officially approached by SILABU. Instead, recruiters on SILABU's behalf – as well as clandestine labour agents – resorted "to the old method of recruiting from just over the border", to borrow the words of an experienced British labour officer in London (UKNA, CO 691/199).

Labour touting by SILABU and unlicensed recruiters along the Tanganyikan side of the Rovuma River caused much friction between Portuguese and British authorities over the following decade. Recruitment activities not only led to international quarrels; even within the colony they were a source of tension:

> It was sincerely hoped, by Members of this Branch, that the advent of 'Silabu' in the province would solve all labour problems and put production on a

[10] Arquivo Histórico Diplomático, Lisbon.

> sound basis; this, however, has not been the case, and unfortunately 'Silabu' has helped materially to drain this Province of thousands of productions labourers (TNA[11], Accession 16. File 36/4).

The above excerpt from the minutes of a meeting between the TSGA branch of the Southern Province and SILABU members, which took place in 1950 in Lindi, testifies both to the planters' hopes and frustrations with regard to SILABU. The organisation was not living up to expectation, and the local branch voiced its concerns to a group of SILABU employees from Tanga who were visiting the Southern Province at the time. The meeting must have been tense, as at some point Mr. Hitchcock himself, who was among the visitors, felt the need to state that:

> they should not be considered as the "opposite" Party but as colleagues […] [Hitchcock] stated that they were here to hear the Branch's views and difficulties and to decorticate them into a manageable solution. The Southern Province is not a reservoir of labour but a corridor for labour. (Id.)

Since, as previously shown, SILABU was a product of TSGA, it might seem surprising that Hitchcock was reminding fellow TSGA members to regard him as a colleague and not as an enemy. The recruiting situation in the Southern Province represented a particular challenge to private and administrative colonial actors alike; hence Hitchcock's insistence upon the Southern Province being not a labour reservoir but a labour corridor. Indeed, the Southern Province did not correspond to the typical case of a labour reservoir, as it simultaneously served both as departure and destination point of migrants seeking work. The division of regions into places providing labour and places needing labour in the colonial context created inequalities and tensions (Okia, 2023), yet in the case of the Southern Province, these tensions existed not only within one colony/protectorate but also within the same province. The sisal plantations and government projects such as the Groundnut Scheme in the coastal districts (Kilwa, Lindi and Mikindani/Mtwara) needed a steady flow of workers, whereas people in the interior districts, such as Masasi, Tunduru, and Newala, where wage labour was rare, needed opportunities to earn money. The population of the interior usually had two choices: to seek work in the coastal districts or on the Central Lines and in Tanga. The salaries being higher and the working conditions better in the latter, it was often the preferred destination for people from the interior districts (Rodney, 1983; Alpers, 1984; Jamal, 2015; Dinani, 2019).

The migrants' preferences, as the previously mentioned minutes illustrate, did not go unnoticed by the planters, who were in constant worry not to be able to meet the labour needs of their own industry. Yet the planters were not the only ones with an ambiguous attitude towards SILABU activities in the Southern Province. District officers complained multiple times to the Provincial Officer about the recruiters' activities in their districts. One of the most prominent cases is the district officer of Tunduru, who out of fear that his district would become empty and after complaining repeatedly to the Provincial Officer, took matters into his own hands and hindered the recruiters' work by refusing to let men leave his district (TNA, Accession 16, File 13/7, Vol XI). On the one hand, the Provincial Officer had to handle the complaints of the district officers from the interior saying they could not properly execute their tasks with most of the male population being absent (op.cit, Vol. XII); on the other side, the central government in Dar es Salaam required industries in Tanganyika to prosper and therefore needed the plantations in Tanga and on the Central Lines to be able to secure enough workers (TNA, Accession 460, File 541/18). The encouragement of migration while

[11] Tanzanian National Archives, Dar es Salaam.

at the same ordering its immobility is emblematic of the way colonial actors envisioned labour migration as something they could direct and manipulate (Okia, 2023, p. 264).

Frequent meetings of the TSGA, government officials and recruiters took place to discuss the labour question in the Southern Province. In the minutes of those meetings a strategy reveals itself. Makonde migrants were frequently used as bargaining chips to strike a balance among the different parties involved (TNA, Accession 16, File 36/4). This becomes particularly clear when one considers the measures taken by provincial officers and SILABU to limit the "exodus" of Southern Provincial inhabitants. There were different levels of limitation issued over time. Sometimes recruiting was forbidden for the entire province but only during a certain amount of time (ibid.), at other times recruiting in certain districts was restricted (TNA, Accession 16, File 13/7, Vol XI), or recruitment for work outside the province was temporarily forbidden or restricted by imposing an annual quota per recruiting agency and district (op. cit, Vol XII). These measures were implemented to address the needs of the Southern Province, private and public alike. In order not to displease the planters of the Central Line and Tanga as well as the central government, Makonde migrants were deliberately kept mainly outside of these regulations. On the first recruiting permits issued, one can often find a restricted number of locals of the southern district but an unlimited number of Makonde from Mozambique, both residents and migrants to be recruited (ibid.). Besides, "voluntary" engagement remained permitted at all times. Migrants were allowed to go to the plantations and enter a work agreement by themselves as well as offer their workforce to a recruiter "voluntarily". In those cases, though, they entered the number regulated by the quota. Thus, the measures put in place safeguarded the interests of the northern planters and ensured their labour needs were met.

At one of the meetings, a planter in the Southern Province raised the question whether the recruiting activities still guaranteed the "free will" of the migrant and whether, in the absence of recruiting structures in Newala, which was a main entry port for Makonde migrants, more of them would choose to seek work in the Southern Province (TNA, Accession 16, File 36/4). This led to the suggestion of closing down the SILABU office in Newala altogether. Yet, the planters quickly asked for the branch to be reopened, as they had considered neither recruiters from other plantations or agencies nor the migrants in their equation (ibid.). SILABU was the main recruiter for TSGA, but other plantations, such as Betty Beaty and Paulings & Co, had their own recruiters present in Newala (ibid.). Furthermore, the conditions were still better on the Central Lines and in Tanga; hence these destinations were still preferred by migrants, who continued to make their way northwards. The only consequence of closing the SILABU office in Newala was that the TSGA members without their own recruiting system found it harder to secure their labourers. One of the measures that would have probably redirected the migration flow was raising salaries to match those in the North, but this was seen as too expensive (Rodney, 1983, p. 20-25).

The concept of worker-recruiter permits hinged on the idea that headmen on leave in their home communities would persuade others to join them and return with them to the plantations. These activities, although illegal, are said to have taken place in Mozambique too (TNA, Accession 16, File 13/7, Vol XII). When asked about the circumstances that led to them leaving Mozambique, different reasons are named by the migrants. Isabel, for instance, recalls her brother asking her one day if she wanted to join him and others of his village to go and work in Tanganyika (Int. w. Isabel, DSM, 16.10.23). Francisca, on the other hand, said her husband had been active in the cross-border trade, selling chains bought in Tanganyika in his area in Mozambique. One day a neighbour warned them that the Portuguese police were on their way to arrest the husband on suspicion of "subversive

activity".[12] On that same day, they took their child and fled northwards (Int. w. Francisca, DSM, Oct. 17th. 2023). Meanwhile, Beatriz remembers the news arriving in her village that the Portuguese were on their way to gather people for work. She recalls how all the young people fled into the bush for the night and then left together for Tanganyika (Int. w. Beatriz, DSM, Oct. 22th. 2023). Beatriz's story reflects the brutal reality of forced labour that existed in colonial Mozambique (Allina, 2012; Alexopoulou; Silva, 2022). These experiences draw a different picture than the one gained through the colonial sources. Recruitment played a minor role in the reason for leaving. Isabel could have been part of a group recruited by a worker on leave, yet, if she was, she did not consider it worth mentioning.

In response to the question "how they knew where to go", Beatriz and Isabel said that it was someone from their group who knew the way, and in Francisca's case, her husband obviously knew it already. By the time these women migrated (ca. 1950-1964) many Makonde had already travelled to Tanganyika for seasonal or long-term plantation work. Therefore, it seems likely that someone in the groups with whom Beatriz and Isabel travelled had already undertaken the journey, or that one of their relatives, neighbours or other social contacts had provided them with directions, gathered during their own migratory trajectories. The sharing of knowledge and encouragement to leave was taking place without the bureaucratization of worker-recruiter permits and the inducements from SILABU. In many of the life stories collected, the interviewees mention that at least one other relative had already undertaken the journey or was still in Tanganyika.

While the motives for leaving were varied, none of the migrations were planned. They correspond to what Gregory and Piché (1983) describe as "spontaneous" migration. Although the use of this word is questionable, it has the advantage of avoiding the colonially charged term "voluntary migration". Gregory and Piché use the term to express an active decision on the part of the migrant to leave, but they rightly insist that the conditions that led a migrant to make such a decision were deliberately created by colonial governments. In their words spontaneous labour migration "is the culmination of 50 years (or several hundred years, if we include slavery) of more strictly controlled forms of acquiring African labour." (Gregory; Piché, 1983, p. 174).

The lack of adequate words to describe this labour migration may also be interpreted as a significant difference in ways of looking at life itself. The manner in which the interviewed women recalled their departure reflected a perspective where life is a sequence of happenings outside of one's reach. Therefore, even in cases where there was no immediate threat, premeditation of the migration journey seems to have been rare. Isabel had not particularly thought about leaving before being asked by her brother and there was no urgent need to leave, even though the extra money would benefit her and her family. As she formulated it, the opportunity presented itself and she took it. Peaks in the number of migrants coming to Tanganyika, as British colonial officers noted, correlated with conditions in Portuguese East Africa, and the British could not predict or influence them. For instance, in 1947 the provincial officer for the Southern Province noted a reverse migration trend with many Makonde returning to Mozambique, and he correlated it with working conditions there improving (TNA, Accession 16, File 11/260). Makonde migrants did not integrate into the urban or semi-urban environment and generally wanted to return home to their rural lifestyle whenever conditions allowed it (Grohs, 1974).

The infrastructure provided by SILABU allowed migrants to reach their destination faster with motorised transport, but also counted them. Many migrants used the recruiting

[12] From the late 1950s and especially in the early 1960s, Portuguese authorities were afraid that the political movements across British and French African territories would spill over to their colonies. As MANU and later FRELIMO were known to sell membership cards in Northern Mozambique, it is likely that Francisca's husband's connections to Tanganyika raised suspicion.

office in Newala in the same way as Isabel and Beatriz. Isabel recalls seeing a bus the first time in her life, and Beatriz recalls people on her bus chanting in the Makonde language during the entire journey, as these buses were almost always carrying only Makonde people. However, an unaccounted number of migrants made their way independently northwards, either entering the recruiting structure in Kilwa or making their whole journey to Tanga or Morogoro on foot. This is the case of Francisca. After escaping the Portuguese, she and her husband first went to rest at a relative's house close to Mtwara and then went to look for work in Morogoro. A Tanzanian interview partner, having grown up just north of Newala, remembers seeing as a child the *manamba* passing on foot close to his village heading north (Int. w. Peter, DSM Oct. 21, 2023). Administrators mentioned groups of Makonde from Mozambique walking all the way to Kilwa or even farther north (TNA, Accession 460, File 541/18). Thus, despite the existing infrastructure, there were many migrants who preferred to make their own travel arrangements rather than using the means provided by SILABU. This specificity partially explains the lack of reliable figures for Mozambican Makonde migrants.[13] The trend of migrants opting for autonomy in forming their own contractual relationships, instead of relying on SILABU-brokered contracts, was observed by P. H. Gulliver in the 1950s (Gulliver, 1955) and was echoed in Francisca's trajectory.

Due to the lack of an international agreement on labour supply, the planters and colonial administrators were thus constantly forced to adapt their strategies to the preferences of the migrants (Sunseri, 1996). While acknowledging the colonial context in which this migration occurred and the suffering and pain that many migrants endured, the flexibility of the system allowed migrants to make the best of their situation and to improve their working conditions by seeking better opportunities elsewhere or exercising their bargaining power, and it should be noted that some 'Mawia' workers even led strikes (TNA, Accession 16, File 11/260).

CONCLUSION

Although big in numbers, with an estimated 30.000 Mozambican Makonde located in Tanganyika by the early 1960s, Makonde migration has received scant attention from scholars. Many aspects of Makonde labour migration remain understudied, above all the role played by the Mozambican Makonde diaspora in Tanzania during the Mozambican liberation struggle (1962-1975). We hope to have addressed some of the gaps in our understanding of these migratory flows during the 20th century. By combining archival sources collected from colonial repositories with oral testimonies, we have demonstrated that colonial administrators were unable to tailor labour recruitment and African mobility as they saw fit, having to cater to the frequently conflicting needs of plantation owners, industry pundits, recruiters, and migrants themselves.

Colonialism deeply transformed the conditions in which waged labour took place. But the structures created by European overlords in what is now Tanzania to coerce Africans into providing labour, such as the *kipande* system, were widely used by migrants throughout the colonial era as an instrument to retain their autonomy. We have highlighted Makonde migrant workers' agency as a telling example of how colonial structures stopped well short of determining the destinations of migrant labour, as well as controlling the multiple outcomes of the migrants' mobility across imperial boundaries.

Furthermore, in drawing upon both oral and written evidence, we have questioned the idea of *manamba* – or how anonymous masses of migrant workers could be turned into

[13] Mozambican Makonde were only counted in the Native Censuses of Tanganyika in 1948 and 1958 under the derogatory ethnonym of "Mawia", thus limiting the usefulness of colonial censuses for studying Makonde labour migration (Alpers, 1984).

"numbers" in colonial Tanzania – as the byproduct of colonial structures aimed at regulating African mobility. In both the British and the Portuguese documentation, migration only started once the Makonde migrants became accounted for; yet, as we have pointed out, this migration was probably much older and geographically wider than colonial authorities assumed in the mid-twentieth century. Lastly, we have shown how Makonde men and women made their own transformative connections with an increasingly globalised world by engaging in colonial commodity production not as "numbers", as colonial administrators and plantation owners would have them, but as people whose "search for life" brought about lasting effects wherever they set foot.

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Interviews collected by Clara Torrão Busin for her PhD thesis. The interlocutors have asked to remain anonymous. Therefore, in the text alternative names are used. The same names will appear here (with the exception of Abdul Sheriff):

Sheriff, Abdul, conversation (5.12.2022) with Clara Torrão Busin in Dar es Salaam for her PhD Project *At the Crossing of Borders: The Southern Swahili Coast between Palma (Mozambique) and Mikindani (Tanzania), ca. 1870 -1975*

Edward, interview, interviewed by Clara Torrão Busin in Dar es Salaam on the 12.12.2022, for her PhD Project *At the Crossing of Borders: The Southern Swahili Coast between Palma (Mozambique) and Mikindani (Tanzania), ca. 1870 -1975*

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Francisca, interview, interviewed by Clara Torrão Busin in Dar es Salaam on the 17.10.2023, for her PhD Project *At the Crossing of Borders: The Southern Swahili Coast between Palma (Mozambique) and Mikindani (Tanzania), ca. 1870 -1975*

Beatriz, interview, interviewed by Clara Torrão Busin in Dar es Salaam on the 22.10.2023, for her PhD Project *At the Crossing of Borders: The Southern Swahili Coast between Palma (Mozambique) and Mikindani (Tanzania), ca. 1870 -1975*

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