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Recommended Citation

Peša, Iva (2013) "Wealth, Success, and Personhood: Trajectories of Labour Migration from Mwinilunga District, 1930s-1970s," *Zambia Social Science Journal*: Vol. 4: No. 1, Article 6.
Available at: <http://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/zssj/vol4/iss1/6>

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Wealth, Success, and Personhood: Trajectories of Labour Migration from Mwinilunga District, 1930s-1970s

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What were the causes and consequences of labour migration from Mwinilunga District between the 1930s and 1970s? Within Zambian historiography, economic and political aspects of labour migration have received much attention. Labour migration has been analysed within dichotomies of rural-urban, development-underdevelopment or tradition-modernity. Instead, this article proposes to bridge such dichotomies and to foreground the socio-cultural dispositions behind labour migration. If mobility is viewed as a social, rather than a geographical practice, connections and long-term continuities come to light. Through the case of Mwinilunga District the causes, motives and effects of labour migration will be examined. Why did individuals decide to migrate, how did they spend their earnings and did they retain contact with their 'home' areas? In Mwinilunga labour migration could function as a strategy to realise aspirations, develop relationships and enhance ones status. It could be a pathway towards wealth, success and personhood. A focus on self-realisation proposes an alternative perspective which places labour migration within the broader context of social connectivity, stressing the variety of migrant trajectories and the interconnections between rural and urban fortunes.

Kwenda kumona nzovu – To travel is to see an elephant (Lunda proverb)¹

Introduction

In Mwinilunga District, located in the north-western tip of Zambia which borders Angola and Congo, mobility is part and parcel of life.² Whether for purposes of hunting, trade or to participate in the labour market, individuals have migrated over long distances to grasp opportunities.³ Mobility has been central to the socio-economic and political strategies of the population of Mwinilunga, even functioning as a marker of identity. If one travels one can see an elephant, attain wealth, success and advance personhood. Alternatively, people who just 'sit around' the village (*kushakama hohu*) are denounced and are not likely to obtain influence, status or power.⁴ Since the end of the nineteenth century, individuals from the area have moved, temporarily or for longer periods of time, to seek waged employment in urban areas, predominantly on the Congolese and Zambian Copperbelts.⁵ This article explores the dynamics of this movement, by looking at the causes and consequences of labour migration from Mwinilunga District between the 1930s and the 1970s.

¹ Proverb recorded by Gibby Kamuhuza, Ikelenge, April 2010.

² O. Bakewell, 'Refugees repatriating or migrating villagers? A study of movement from North West Zambia to Angola' (PhD thesis, University of Bath, 1999); V. W. Turner, *Schism and continuity in an African society: A study of Ndembu village life* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1957).

³ See: F. De Boeck, 'Borderland breccia: The mutant hero in the historical imagination of a Central-African diamond frontier', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 1, no. 2 (2000).

⁴ Interview with Justin Kambidima, Ntambu, 22 October 2010.

⁵ J. A. Pritchett, *The Lunda-Ndembu: Style, change and social transformation in South Central Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001); A. von Oppen, *Terms of trade and terms of trust: The history and contexts of pre-colonial market production around the upper Zambezi and Kasai* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 1994).

In Zambian historiography, questions of labour migration, its effects on migrants and on rural sending areas, have been fervently debated over the course of the twentieth century.⁶ Most influentially, the Rhodes Livingstone Institute (RLI) has linked labour migration to processes of social change.⁷ On the one hand, the historiography has interpreted labour migration within a 'modernist narrative', 'a metanarrative of transition, in which tribal rural Africans were swiftly becoming modern, urban members of an industrial society'.⁸ Such narratives have associated labour migration with 'modernity', enhancing 'development' and 'progress'.⁹ Even if labour migration could provide access to waged employment and material gain, it has, on the other hand, been connected to more negative processes of 'proletarianisation', 'detrimentalisation' and rural decay.¹⁰ In these debates, polarising dichotomies of urban and rural, development and underdevelopment, and modernity and tradition have all too often been applied.¹¹ Rather than through such dichotomies, which adopt an overtly economic and political lens, this article argues that labour migration should be analysed as the outcome of socio-cultural dispositions, as a means towards self-realisation.¹² If mobility is viewed as a social, rather than a purely geographical practice, connections and long-term continuities come to light.¹³ Instead of being transformative, mobility could serve to diversify and secure livelihoods, maximise opportunities, build personhood and give shape to the locality. By viewing labour migration as a

⁶ See especially: J. Ferguson, 'Mobile workers, modernist narratives: A critique of the historiography of transition on the Zambian Copperbelt', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16, no. 3 (1990), 385-412 and 16, no. 4 (1990), 603-21; H. Macmillan, 'The historiography of transition on the Zambian Copperbelt: Another view', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, no. 4 (1993), 681-712; D. Potts, 'Counter-urbanization on the Zambian Copperbelt? Interpretations and implications', *Urban Studies*, 42, no. 2 (2005), 583-609.

⁷ See: A. L. Epstein, 'Urbanization and social change in Africa', *Current Anthropology*, 8, no. 4 (1967), 275-95; J. Clyde Mitchell, 'The causes of labour migration', *Inter-African Labour Institute Bulletin*, 6, no. 1 (1959), 12-47.

⁸ J. Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity: Myths and meanings of urban life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999), 33.

⁹ More generally: J. Lucassen and L. Lucassen, 'The mobility transition revisited, 1500-1900: What the case of Europe can offer to global history', *Journal of Global History*, 4, no. 3 (2009), 347-77; A. de Haan, 'Livelihoods and poverty: The role of migration - a critical review of the migration literature', *The Journal of Development Studies*, 36, no. 2 (1999), 1-47.

¹⁰ G. Arrighi, 'Labour supplies in historical perspective: A study of proletarianization of the African peasantry in Rhodesia', *The Journal of Development Studies*, 6, no. 3 (1969-70), 197-234; N. Plange, 'Opportunity cost' and labour migration: A misinterpretation of proletarianisation in Northern Ghana', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 17, no. 4 (1979), 655-76; S. Amin, 'Underdevelopment and dependence in black Africa: Historical origin', *Journal of Peace Research*, 9 (1972), 105-19; B. O'Laughlin, 'Proletarianisation, agency and changing rural livelihoods: Forced labour and resistance in colonial Mozambique', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 28, no. 3 (2002), 511-30; see also RLI work: A. I. Richards, *Land, labour and diet in Northern Rhodesia: An economic study of the Bemba tribe* (London: Oxford UP, 1939).

¹¹ J. A. Andersson, 'Administrators' knowledge and state control in colonial Zimbabwe: The invention of the rural-urban divide in Buhera District, 1912-80', *Journal of African History*, 43, no. 1 (2002), 119-43; De Haan, 'Livelihoods and poverty'.

¹² Inspiration for this approach has been taken from: J. A. Andersson, 'Re-interpreting the rural-urban connection: Migration practices and socio-cultural dispositions of Buhera workers in Harare', *Africa* 71, no. 1 (2001), 82-112. See the discussion on self-realisation below.

¹³ I. Kopytoff, 'The internal African frontier: The making of African political culture', in I. Kopytoff (ed.), *The African frontier: The reproduction of traditional African societies* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987), 22; J. A. Andersson, 'Informal moves, informal markets: International migrants and traders from Mzimba, Malawi', *African Affairs*, 105, no. 420 (2006), 375-97.

strategy towards self-realisation, existing debates in Zambian historiography might be approached from a different perspective.¹⁴

This article examines the effects of labour migration in one rural area. How did labour migration influence Mwinilunga District between the 1930s and the 1970s, and how might looking at labour migration from Mwinilunga further the understanding of the dynamics of Zambian labour migration?¹⁵ This case study examines the causes, motives and effects of labour migration, looking at the interrelationship between rural and urban areas. It will be argued that rather than belonging to the impoverished masses, who lacked the resources to migrate to urban areas in the first place, migrants were part of the more educated and prosperous segments of rural society. It will be explored why individuals decided to migrate, how they spent their earnings and whether they retained contact with 'home' areas. By examining patterns of labour migration through the analytical lens of self-realisation, it will be proposed that individual interests – more than economic or political factors – shaped migrant trajectories. A focus on self-realisation enables an alternative understanding of Zambian labour migration, by challenging the 'modernist narrative', notions of development and underdevelopment and the discursive rural-urban divide.¹⁶

Reassessing Perspectives on Labour Migration

In Zambian historiography and social sciences, labour migration has been much discussed. According to James Ferguson, Zambian labour migration has predominantly been understood within a 'modernist narrative', as 'the progressive, stage-wise emergence of a stable, settled urban working class'.¹⁷ Allegedly, labour migration developed through a number of 'stages', whereby an initial phase of short-term and circulatory migration was replaced by partial stabilisation of labour and eventually by permanent urbanisation.¹⁸ This view proposes that lone male migrants were increasingly supplanted by migrating families, including women and children.¹⁹ Furthermore, the 'modernist narrative' suggests that ties between rural and urban areas were gradually severed, as migrants settled in town for longer periods of time.²⁰ Such views present the urban and the rural as two opposing spheres, 'the urban as the site of modernisation, individualisation and change, as opposed to the rural as the locus of tradition, communality and continuity'.²¹ In this sense, the movement between rural and urban areas becomes a transformative act of social change. The stage-like progression of the 'modernist

¹⁴ Research was conducted in Zambia in 2008 and 2010. Archival research in the National Archives of Zambia (NAZ), the United National Independence Party archives (UNIPA), Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines archives (ZCCM) and the Rhodes House library in Oxford, UK (BOD), was combined with oral interviews conducted by the author. Elderly labour migrants have been interviewed in order to record their life histories and experiences.

¹⁵ See: Turner, *Schism and continuity*; Pritchett, *Lunda-Ndemba*.

¹⁶ See: Andersson, 'Reinterpreting the rural-urban connection'.

¹⁷ Ferguson, 'Mobile workers', 385.

¹⁸ Ferguson, 'Mobile workers'; Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity*.

¹⁹ J. L. Parpart, 'Where is your mother?': Gender, urban marriage, and colonial discourse on the Zambian Copperbelt, 1924-1945', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 27, no. 2 (1994), 241-71; G. Chauncey, 'The locus of reproduction: Women's labour in the Zambian Copperbelt, 1927-1953', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 7, no. 2 (1980-81), 135-64.

²⁰ Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity*; P. Geschiere and J. Gugler, 'The urban-rural connection: Changing issues of belonging and identification', *Africa*, 68, no. 3 (1998), 309-19.

²¹ Andersson, 'Reinterpreting the rural-urban connection', 89; See: J. Ferguson, 'The Country and the City on the Copperbelt', *Cultural Anthropology*, 7, no. 1 (1992), 80-92.

narrative' has been fundamentally contested recently.²² Ferguson himself provided a critique of the modernist narrative, whereas Hugh Macmillan argued that the RLI had never adopted a 'modernist narrative' in the first place. After the heated debate between Ferguson and Macmillan in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* in the 1990s, a number of detailed local and regional studies of labour migration have been published, which have challenged received wisdom.²³ Critics have suggested the co-existence of various patterns of migration, thereby questioning the idea of the 'typical migrant'.²⁴ Furthermore, the enduring ties between rural and urban areas, as well as recent trends of counter-urbanisation, disprove ideas of linear change.²⁵ By examining labour migration from Mwinilunga District, the 'modernist narrative' can be challenged on several points. First of all, migration from Mwinilunga followed a wide range of patterns rather than a linear trajectory from temporary migrant labourer to permanent urbanite. Secondly, ties between rural and urban areas have not been severed. To the contrary, labour migration might be seen in terms of social connectivity, establishing close and enduring links between rural and urban localities. Thirdly, the modernist narrative – as well as much subsequent historiography – places undue emphasis on economic motives for migration. Instead, life histories from Mwinilunga suggest the importance of socio-cultural dispositions and aspirations towards self-realisation.

Labour migration has often been explained as an outcome of the interests of capital and the state.²⁶ This structuralist economic perspective has prevailed, in particular, in debates concerning the impact of labour migration on the village setting. Accounts have suggested that labour migration would lead to either 'development' or 'underdevelopment' and 'rural decay'.²⁷ On the one hand, urbanisation and industrialisation could generate monetary income and wealth, leading to 'development'.²⁸ In Mwinilunga District, this positive association was acknowledged by colonial officials in the late 1930s: 'Activities have increased in the industrial centres and the prosperity in these areas is reflected in the villages which supply the men who are employed in them'.²⁹ In connection to this, labour migration might generate remittances and an increase in human capital, benefitting the area of origin by raising standards of living.³⁰ Nevertheless, the effects of labour migration remain ambiguous and debated. In a more negative

²² Macmillan, 'The historiography of transition'; H.L. Moore and M. Vaughan, *Cutting down trees: Gender, nutrition, and agricultural change in the Northern Province of Zambia, 1890-1990* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994); Potts, 'Counter-urbanization on the Zambian Copperbelt?'

²³ For example: Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting down trees*; K. Crehan, *The fractured community: Landscapes of power and gender in rural Zambia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Also: J. Pottier, *Migrants no more: Settlement and survival in Mambwe villages, Zambia* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1988). For a broader Southern African perspective: G. Kanyenze, 'African migrant labour situation in Southern Africa', *ICFTU-AFRO Conference on Migrant Labour*, Nairobi, Kenya, 15-17 March 2004.

²⁴ Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting down trees*; But see also: H. Englund, 'The village in the city, the city in the village: Migrants in Lilongwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 28, no. 1 (2002), 137-54; Andersson, 'Reinterpreting the rural-urban connection'.

²⁵ W. van Binsbergen, 'Globalization and virtuality: Analytical problems posed by the contemporary transformation of African societies', *Development and Change*, 29, no. 4 (1998), 873-903; Potts, 'Counter-urbanization on the Zambian Copperbelt?'

²⁶ T. Sunseri, 'Labour migration in colonial Tanzania and the hegemony of South African historiography', *African Affairs*, 95, no. 381 (1996), 581-98; J-B. Gewald, 'Researching and writing in the twilight of an imagined conquest: Anthropology in Northern Rhodesia, 1930-1960', *History and Anthropology*, 18, no. 4 (2007), 459-87.

²⁷ See: De Haan, 'Livelihoods and poverty'.

²⁸ Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity*, 33; F. Cooper (ed.), *Struggle for the city: Migrant labor, capital, and the state in urban Africa* (Beverly Hills, London and New Delhi: Sage, 1983), 12.

²⁹(NAZ) SEC2/153, Mwinilunga District Annual Report, 1939.

³⁰ De Haan, 'Livelihoods and poverty', 21.

way, labour migration has been connected to issues of underdevelopment and proletarianisation.³¹ According to such views, widespread rural poverty propelled individuals to earn money through labour migration, yet migration and waged employment equally divorced workers from an independent means of production in the form of land. This process would make workers increasingly dependent on the capitalist sector and would aggravate the impoverishment of rural 'labour reserves', which had been depleted of the workforce needed to till the land.³² Scepticism about the negative effects of labour migration on rural society in Mwinilunga District has been voiced by colonial and post-colonial officials as well as by Victor Turner, a renowned anthropologist of the RLI, who noted that 'changes brought about by the growing participation of Ndembu in the Rhodesian cash economy and an increased rate of labour migration, have in some areas (...) drastically reshaped some institutions and destroyed others'.³³

The economic and political aspects of labour migration have thus been foregrounded, whilst personal motives, aspirations and trajectories have remained underrepresented.³⁴ Nevertheless, 'state and capital did not determine migratory movements', but rather 'migrants' own initiative' shaped practices of labour migration.³⁵ Moving away from existing interpretations of labour migration, mobility might more usefully be seen as a process towards self-realisation, because 'mobility and migration may have been about recruitment of skills'.³⁶ In the area of Mwinilunga, a person could become valued within the community through mobility, attaining status, wealth and respect among peers.³⁷ Individuals sought 'the acknowledgement, regard, and attention of other people – which was the basis of reputation and influence, and thus constitutive of social being'.³⁸ In this connection, 'it was not only the great figures but everyone who seems to have had the possibility of authorship of something, however small', and labour migration could be a means of achieving 'reality', 'value' and 'self-realisation'.³⁹ Within the context of much older aspirations towards self-realisation, workers sought to 'conquer the city and shape their own moral and social economies in this urban space'. In order to do so, they tapped 'into (pre-)colonial sources and routes of rural identity-formation, thereby negotiating and reinventing the content and architecture of the (...) world in which they find themselves'.⁴⁰ Movement to town was rooted in distinctly rural realities, as 'the desire to improve the conditions of life in villages frequently leads to periods of residence in town'.⁴¹

In Mwinilunga District, labour migration could be an integral part of building one's career. Yet, labour migration is only one among many strategies towards self-realisation, which include

³¹ See: Amin, 'Underdevelopment and dependence'; Arrighi, 'Labour supplies in historical perspective'.

³² Amin, 'Underdevelopment and dependence'; Arrighi, 'Labour supplies in historical perspective'.

³³ Turner, *Schism and continuity*, 17.

³⁴ There has been recent work on the personal motives and aspirations for labour migration, but this has not been applied to this period and area. See, for example: B. Whitehouse, *Migrants and strangers in an African city: Exile, dignity, belonging* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2012).

³⁵ Andersson, 'Informal moves', 386-7.

³⁶ J. I. Guyer and S. M. Eno Belinga, 'Wealth in people as wealth in knowledge: Accumulation and composition in Equatorial Africa', *Journal of African History*, 36, no. 1 (1995), 115.

³⁷ See: J. I. Guyer, 'Wealth in people and self-realization in Equatorial Africa', *Man*, 28, no. 2 (1993), 243-65; F. de Boeck, 'Domesticating diamonds and dollars: Identity, expenditure and sharing in Southwestern Zaire (1984-1997)', *Development and Change*, 29, no. 4 (1998), 777-810; De Boeck, 'Borderland breccia'.

³⁸ K. Barber, 'Money, self-realization and the person in Yoruba texts', in: J. I. Guyer (ed.), *Money matters: Instability, values and social payments in the modern history of West African communities* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995), 216.

³⁹ Guyer, 'Wealth in people and self-realization', 255.

⁴⁰ De Boeck, 'Borderland breccia'.

⁴¹ Englund, 'The village in the city', 137.

agricultural production, hunting and trade.⁴² That is why labour migration should be analysed in its full societal setting. Work is 'a positive aspect of human activity, and is expressed in the making of self and others in the course of everyday life'.⁴³ Labour migration did not primarily serve to attain wealth, but was geared towards social standing. Self-realisation, far from being an individual pursuit, proved a thoroughly social undertaking. One could only make a name for oneself in relation to others.⁴⁴ For the context of Mwinilunga, Turner explained that 'a man can acquire wealth by working in the White economy as a wage labourer', but 'it seems often (...) to be the aim of returned labour-migrants (...) to obtain influence and subsequently office, in traditional villages'. Turner concluded that most labour migrants 'see the village as their ultimate home, and regard their wage-labour as a means of acquiring the wealth that will give them prestige in the village sphere'.⁴⁵ Next to placing an emphasis on personal ambitions and aspirations towards self-realisation, this statement questions the dichotomy between rural and urban areas. Even if labour migration involved physical mobility and a (temporary) movement away from the village, it was not necessarily a transformative act. Rather, labour migration could be a means to acquire wealth and influence within the village, by becoming a 'Big Man' and building wealth in people.⁴⁶ In this sense, 'the rural and the urban constitute a single social universe encompassing both rural and urban geographical spheres'.⁴⁷ Becoming a 'Big Man' and gaining the respect of others was the ultimate aim of successful individuals, and this aim could be attained through labour migration as income-earning opportunities within the village remained limited. In order to understand why viewing labour migration as part of the process towards self-realisation might advance debates within Zambian historiography, the dynamics of labour migration from Mwinilunga District will first be explored.

Origins and Patterns of Labour Migration

In Mwinilunga District, labour migration built on long-established patterns of mobility, notions of work and employment. In the nineteenth century, men from this area had already found employment as caravan porters, at mission stations or at mines and farms in Congo, Southern Rhodesia and South Africa.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the scope of colonial labour migration differentiated it from previous patterns of work and mobility. Labour migration ratios from Mwinilunga District increased steadily over the colonial period and remained high after independence. Whereas in 1935 7.5% of the taxable male population was reported to be at work outside the district, figures rose to 21% in 1947, 33% in 1952 and 56% in 1960.⁴⁹ After independence, labour migration ratios were no longer measured as such, but it can be postulated that migration from Mwinilunga District to urban areas continued in large numbers.⁵⁰ Post-colonial

⁴² Bakewell, 'Refugees repatriating'; Turner, *Schism and continuity*; Pritchett, *Lunda-Ndembu*; Guyer and Eno Belinga, 'Wealth in people as wealth in knowledge', 105.

⁴³ J. L. and J. Comaroff, 'The madman and the migrant: Work and labor in the historical consciousness of a South African people', *American Ethnologist*, 14, no. 2 (1987), 197.

⁴⁴ De Boeck, 'Borderland breccia'; De Boeck, 'Domesticating diamonds and dollars'.

⁴⁵ Turner, *Schism and continuity*, 135.

⁴⁶ See: Guyer, 'Wealth in people as self-realization'; J. C. Miller, *Way of death: Merchant capitalism and the Angolan slave trade 1730-1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

⁴⁷ Andersson, 'Reinterpreting the rural-urban connection', 84.

⁴⁸ See: Turner, *Schism and continuity*; Pritchett, *Lunda-Ndembu*.

⁴⁹ (NAZ) SEC2/133, R. N. Lines, Mwinilunga District Annual Report, 1935; (NAZ) SEC2/154, F. M. N. Heath, Mwinilunga District Annual Report, 1947; (NAZ) SEC2/135, W. G. Reeves, Mwinilunga District Annual Report, 1952; (NAZ) NWP1/2/102 Loc.4919, E. L. Button, North Western Province Annual Report, 1960. The reliability of these figures is of course doubtful, see: B. Fetter, *Demography from scanty evidence: Central Africa in the colonial era* (Boulder etc., 1990).

⁵⁰ For the post-independence period: D. S. Johnson (ed.), *Handbook to the North-Western Province 1980* (Lusaka, 1980), 74; P. O. Ohadike, *Demographic perspectives in Zambia: Rural-urban growth and social change* (Lusaka, 1981); M. E. Jackman, *Recent population movements in Zambia: Some aspects of the*

government policies, lifting colonial restrictions on mobility and relaxing regulations on urban residence, caused Zambia to 'reap the whirlwind'. Rural populations flocked to the towns, because 'everyone wanted to come to urban areas in search of work, pleasure or even schooling'.⁵¹ Only after 1980 were there signs of diminishing rural outmigration, or even counter-urbanisation, as the (inter)national economic downturn caused a glut in urban employment and redirected migration flows away from the Copperbelt towards the capital city Lusaka, district centres such as Mwinilunga Township and to rural areas.⁵² The length of service showed an increase over time, but fluctuated considerably according to individual cases. Whereas in 1935 a taxable man would on average work 0.75 months a year, in the 1950s labour migrants would stay away at their place of employment for an average of four years.⁵³ Even then, however, some would work for several months, whereas others would remain in town their entire life.

The causes and motives for labour migration were manifold and interrelated. The factors stressed most frequently and forcefully in the historiography pertain to the economic sphere.⁵⁴ Labour migration has been understood as the outcome of 'push' and 'pull' factors, being driven by relative poverty and a lack of opportunities in rural areas (push factors), whilst being attracted by a growing demand for labour in industrialised urban areas (pull factors).⁵⁵ Economic explanations for migration have been proposed at both individual and structural levels.⁵⁶ Labour migrants are either seen as acting individually, according to a rationale of economic self-interest and profit maximisation.⁵⁷ Or labour migration is seen as the structural outcome of global capitalism.⁵⁸ In this latter view, individuals and entire rural communities have been 'gradually divorced from their means of production and subsistence', propelling the need for labour migration to urban areas where the process of 'primitive capitalist accumulation', effected through taxation and state coercion, was already underway.⁵⁹ This process would result in the formation of rural 'labour reserves', a 'rural-urban divide', but might also potentially lead to development.⁶⁰ Although other factors should be taken into consideration, economic factors are indeed important in explaining patterns of labour migration from Mwinilunga District. Colonial officials identified the need to earn a monetary income, especially for purposes of taxation, as the driving force behind migration from Mwinilunga District. Officials complained about 'the exodus of the younger generation to gain what may be termed "easy money" by work

1969 census (Manchester, 1973). Based on the 1969 census Ohadike and Jackman calculated 'expected growth rates', concluding that -2.6% and -3.8% respectively were due to out-migration from Mwinilunga District.

⁵¹ (NAZ) HM77/PP/2, P. W. Matoka, A Contribution to the Media Resource Center Freedom Forum, 08 November 1997 – Review of Zambia's 33 Years of Independence.

⁵² Potts, 'Counter-urbanization on the Zambian Copperbelt?'; D. Potts, 'Shall we go home? Increasing urban poverty in African cities and migration processes', *The Geographical Journal*, 161, no. 3 (1995), 245-64; Pottier, *Migrants no more*; V. Jamal and J. Weeks, 'The vanishing rural-urban gap in sub-Saharan Africa', *International Labour Review*, 127, no. 3 (1988), 271-92.

⁵³ (NAZ) SEC2/133, N. S. Price, Mwinilunga District Annual Report, 31 December 1935; (NAZ) SEC2/960, K. J. Forder, Mwinilunga District Tour Report, 28 September 1952.

⁵⁴ Andersson, 'Informal moves'; Sunseri, 'Labour migration in colonial Tanzania'.

⁵⁵ O. Bakewell, 'Keeping them in their place': The ambivalent relationship between development and migration in Africa', *Third World Quarterly*, 29, no. 7 (2008), 1345; De Haan, 'Livelihoods and poverty'.

⁵⁶ See also: J. Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2007).

⁵⁷ O'Laughlin, 'Proletarianisation, agency and changing rural livelihoods'.

⁵⁸ Amin, 'Underdevelopment and dependence'.

⁵⁹ Plange, 'Opportunity cost and labour migration', 661.

⁶⁰ See: Arrighi, 'Labour supplies in historical perspective'.

on the mines', stating that 'the earning capacity of the native has increased enormously and must continue to grow – more money creating fresh wants'.⁶¹

Migrants viewed opportunities in urban areas in relation to those in rural areas, as officials noted: 'The cost of living is rising rapidly and we find that many educated men (...) will seek employment in the Copperbelt where more money can be earned'.⁶² Throughout the twentieth century, money-earning and employment options within Mwinilunga District generally remained limited.⁶³ The consequent disparity between rural and urban income levels propelled some to seek opportunities outside of their villages:

Money is very easy to earn and to spend in populated areas and few now think it worth while to labour on their own for small wages or benefit. These areas should be the granaries of settled areas. Instead they are becoming backwaters and depopulated areas. The native farmer, with the cost of transport, cannot possibly compete with wages which are given on the line [of rail], and the wives of natives now only judge their husbands by what they can provide for them in the way of clothes and a soft time.⁶⁴

Due to the lack of opportunities to sell crops locally and a general 'discontent with the prices paid for produce grown at home' some decided 'to give up agriculture and look for a job' in urban areas where employment appeared more lucrative or easier to obtain.⁶⁵ Even in the late 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s, when an agricultural boom prevailed and crops could easily be marketed in Mwinilunga District, officials noted that 'the overwhelming majority of males now look to industry for an assured wage, and will not consider the alternative of improved farming with its heavy toil and uncertain returns and markets'.⁶⁶

After independence, migrants continued to judge urban attractions in the light of rural realities. Government reports from the 1970s lamented that:

During the six years since Independence (...) we were not able to close the gap between urban and rural incomes. In fact, it is even wider today than it was when we started off on our own. This development does not encourage our young people to remain in the rural areas and take up farming as a career. The trend to go to the towns is increasing even if the people know that the chances of finding a job are very remote indeed.⁶⁷

Although employment proved difficult to obtain in towns, especially from the late 1970s onwards, urban areas still held relative attractions vis-à-vis rural areas.⁶⁸ These attractions had to do with national income disparities, which could be substantial in certain years. In 1968, for example, Zambian mineworkers earned K1300 a year, urban wage earners K640, whereas peasant farmers earned a meagre K145 a year.⁶⁹ Official reports stated that 'rapidly increasing prices for consumer goods and cost of production, on the one hand, and stagnant or even

⁶¹ (NAZ) SEC2/131 Vol. 1, D. C. Hughes-Chamberlain, Mwinilunga Sub-District Annual Report, 31 December 1929.

⁶² (NAZ) North-Western Province African Provincial Council, April 1958.

⁶³ Turner and Turner, 'Money economy'; Pritchett, *Lunda-Ndembu*.

⁶⁴ (NAZ) SEC2/955 H. B. Waugh, Mwinilunga District Tour Report, 11 October 1940.

⁶⁵ (NAZ) SEC2/137, F. R. G. Phillips, Mwinilunga District Annual Report, 1954.

⁶⁶ (NAZ) NWP1/2/102 Loc.4919, E. L. Button, Mwinilunga District Annual Report, 1960.

⁶⁷ (UNIPA) UNIP, A new strategy for rural development in Zambia, 1970.

⁶⁸ Potts, 'Counter-urbanization on the Zambian Copperbelt?'

⁶⁹ (NAZ) Report of the Second National Convention on Rural Development: Incomes, Wages and Prices in Zambia, 12 December 1969.

declining producer prices, on the other, make farming not a very attractive proposition'.⁷⁰ The contrasts between rural and urban areas were posed in stark terms, of 'stagnation' as opposed to 'dynamism', or even 'tradition' versus 'modernity'.⁷¹ Such a 'dualism' was adopted in discourse and popular consciousness, being reflected in reports from the 1970s:

On one side we have the monetised side of our economy with all the characteristics of dynamic temporal change based on modern technology. On the other side we have the so-called rural sector characterised by a low level of technology, economic performance and in fact painful poverty, ignorance and disease. The result of the yawning gap between the urban and rural areas in the standards of living is the exodus of able-bodied people from the rural countryside to the line-of-rail urban areas.⁷²

Economic understandings of labour migration propose a stark dichotomy between rural and urban areas. Yet residence in urban areas was driven by rural realities, which encompassed more than just economic motivations. Labour migration could be underpinned by a 'desire to improve the conditions of life in villages'.⁷³

Moving beyond purely economic motives, labour migration could be a strategy to enhance the security and predictability of life for the inhabitants of Mwinilunga District.⁷⁴ It formed part of a diversity of livelihood options, existing next to agricultural production, animal husbandry and waged labour within the district.⁷⁵ Some individuals would migrate to town, marry there and would never move back to Mwinilunga, whereas others would undertake only one trip to work for several months, thereafter investing their earnings in agriculture or trade.⁷⁶ These diverse possibilities cannot be reduced to fixed stages as proposed by the 'modernist narrative'.⁷⁷ Even one individual could combine numerous patterns of movement within the course of a lifetime. Nyambanza Kaisala, for example, was born in Sailunga Chiefdom in 1905. After having worked for four years as a cook in Elisabethville (Congo), he started working as a *capitao*⁷⁸ in the same city for eight years. Thereafter, he continued his employment as a *capitao*, but moved to Kolwezi (Congo), where he was in employment for ten years. Subsequently, he worked at Nkana mine (Zambia) for six years, after which he returned to Mwinilunga District to work as a government *kapasu*⁷⁹ for six months. This employment history of 28.5 years straddles the boundaries between short-term migration and permanent stabilised urbanisation. Leaving as a single migrant, Nyambanza married after his return from Congo and took his wife with him to subsequent places of employment. Over the course of his career he visited his home village, though not at regular intervals. Moreover, although he did return to Mwinilunga District after his retirement from the Copperbelt, he settled in the *Boma* rather than in his village of birth.⁸⁰ This life history defies the predictions made within the 'modernist narrative', suggesting the need for a different conceptual framework. Instead of being the outcome of economic push and

⁷⁰ (NAZ) A New Strategy for Rural Development in Zambia, 23 March 1970.

⁷¹ Ferguson, 'The country and the city', 80-92.

⁷² (UNIPA) UNIP Chairman of the Rural Development Committee, 22 September 1973.

⁷³ Englund, 'The village in the city', 137.

⁷⁴ Compare with: P. Harries, *Work, culture, and identity: Migrant laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860-1910* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994), 17.

⁷⁵ Pritchett, *Lunda-Ndembu*; De Haan, 'Livelihoods and poverty'.

⁷⁶ This view is based on oral interviews.

⁷⁷ Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity*; Macmillan, 'The historiography of transition'; Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting down trees*.

⁷⁸ *Capitao* is a Portuguese word and might be translated as 'overseer' or 'foreman'.

⁷⁹ *Kapasu* might be translated as 'messenger' or 'policeman'.

⁸⁰ (BOD) Richard Cranmer Denning Papers, 15 files, Uncatalogued, Notes from 1948. The *boma* is the administrative headquarters of the district, Mwinilunga Township.

pull factors, or being determined by state policies, labour migration might be better understood within the context of socio-economic dispositions towards self-realisation.⁸¹

Labour migration could be a 'deliberate strategy to accumulate wealth', rather than being a 'last resort' of impoverished rural producers who sought to generate tax money.⁸² Labour migration was not so much rooted in absolute rural poverty, but was driven by a desire to prosper in rural areas. In this sense, it could be part of a process towards self-realisation.⁸³ Colonial officials noted that: 'those at work are the younger, more energetic and more educated members of the population'.⁸⁴ Indeed, 'it is not the poorest of the poor who migrate – they cannot afford it – but it is those with lower-middle incomes. Mobility is a privilege of the relatively wealthy'.⁸⁵ Resources are required in order to migrate. Not only knowledge, skills and material wealth, but social capital and personality have to be cultivated.⁸⁶ Application letters to the mines on the Zambian Copperbelt suggest that workers from Mwinilunga District aspired towards self-realisation. This was viewed as an inherently social achievement, involving family, kin and ideas of the nation. One applicant declared that: 'I would like to develop myself' as she wished to 'be able to look after my family'. She applied to the mines because 'it is one of the largest industries in Zambia which serves both the nation and neighbouring countries'.⁸⁷ Another applicant wanted to become 'successful', further wishing his 'career to grow into something which will make me support myself and the relatives who want support. Also my studies to be continued so as to strengthen my career'.⁸⁸ A third applicant stated that he wanted to be trained to help the company and the country. He continued: 'I like working very much because I can feed myself. I dislike to stay without working because I can't feed myself'.⁸⁹ Educated and skilled individuals, who failed to find lucrative employment locally, would move to urban areas where opportunities were more readily available.⁹⁰ Not all mission-educated individuals, for example, could obtain employment as teachers or orderlies within Mwinilunga District. Consequently, large numbers would seek their luck on the Copperbelt or in the capital city Lusaka.⁹¹

The practice of labour migration contributed to the process of self-realisation in Mwinilunga District. Labour migration was driven not only by economic objectives, but encompassed ideology, culture and aspirations towards a 'good life'.⁹² Next to income disparities, differences

⁸¹ Andersson, 'Reinterpreting the rural-urban connection'; Englund, 'The village in the city'; Guyer, 'Wealth in people and self-realization', 243-65; Barber, 'Money, self-realization and the person', 205-24; De Boeck, 'Domesticating diamonds and dollars', 777-810.

⁸² Andersson, 'Administrators' knowledge', 128.

⁸³ Englund, 'The village in the city', 151; Andersson, 'Reinterpreting the rural-urban connection'; De Haan, 'Livelihoods and poverty'.

⁸⁴ (NAZ) SEC2/966, C. J. Fryer, Mwinilunga District Tour Report, 9 September 1958.

⁸⁵ Bakewell, 'Keeping them in their place', 1350; De Haan, 'Livelihoods and poverty', 16-22.

⁸⁶ See: Guyer and Eno Belinga, 'Wealth in people as wealth in knowledge'.

⁸⁷ (ZCCM) Rabby Sameta, Mine No. 76934, Loc. Y4.9A, Born 29.8.1952, Entered Service 21.8.1972, Left Service 1.12.1972.

⁸⁸ (ZCCM) Moses Kanjanja, Mine No. 82803, Loc. 18.1.5F, Born 18.08.1959, Entered Service 15.05.1979, Left Service 31.10.1992.

⁸⁹ (ZCCM) G. Sameta, Mine No. 80106, Loc. 16.4.2A, Born 15.2.1956, Entered Service 30.6.1975, Left Service 31.8.1994.

⁹⁰ Pritchett, *Lunda-Ndembu*; W. H. M. L. Hoppers, *Education in a rural society: Primary pupils and school leavers in Mwinilunga, Zambia* (The Hague, 1981).

⁹¹ W. S. Fisher and J. Hoyte, *Ndotolu: The life stories of Walter and Anna Fisher of Central Africa* (Ikelenge, 1992); W.T. Kalusa, 'A history of disease, missionary medicine and African medical auxiliaries in North-Western Zambia: The case of Mwinilunga District, 1893-1964', (PhD thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 2003).

⁹² M. Barrett, 'Walking home majestically': Consumption and the enactment of social status among labour migrants from Barotseland, 1935-1965', in: R. Ross, M. Hinfelaar and I. Peša (eds.), *The objects of*

in the provision of services (health care, education and leisure) between town and country were pronounced.⁹³ The 'bright lights' of the city acted as a magnet and the lifestyle in towns ('town life') propelled labour migration. Colonial officials concurred that 'it is only too easy to understand why the young and energetic want to leave the monotony of village life and see the excitements and wealth of the Copperbelt'.⁹⁴ The 'beerhalls, tea rooms, and facilities for purchasing European food – all of which appeal to the village African', attracted workers from Mwinilunga to the Copperbelt.⁹⁵ Individuals consciously weighed terms of employment, conditions of service and other factors before taking up urban residence.⁹⁶ Urban and rural areas were viewed relationally. In urban areas wages were higher, whilst employment and leisure opportunities were more readily available than within Mwinilunga. This opened avenues towards self-realisation and motivated numerous individuals to migrate. Labour migration is a 'lifestyle (...) inspired by aspirations that do not simply envisage material accumulation', but are premised on socio-cultural dispositions.⁹⁷

Consumptive aspirations, a motive for mobility which has been neglected in much recent work, further bolstered the incentives to earn money and engage in labour migration from Mwinilunga District.⁹⁸ One migrant explained his trip to Johannesburg, largely on foot, as driven by a desire to purchase clothing, to obtain a nice suit contributing to good apparel.⁹⁹ Consumptive desires furthermore explain why recruiters offered blankets to prospective workers, and why these could be effective inducements to engage in labour contracts.¹⁰⁰ Consumption, however, was not a purely economic act, but was connected to social relationships and status.¹⁰¹ Migrant labourers did not only purchase clothing for themselves, but would distribute clothing to their kin in the village whilst on leave or they would bring back goods upon cessation of their contracts.¹⁰² Whilst working on the line of rail where consumer goods were cheaper than within Mwinilunga, labour migrants would 'buy what few cloths they require'.¹⁰³ Goods could function as a marker of social relationships but could also further goals of self-realisation by making wealthy migrants into 'Big Men'. Due to labour migration and the wealth this generated, consumer goods such as clothes, pots and pans became more widespread in the villages throughout Mwinilunga and demand for these goods increased.¹⁰⁴ Labour migration raised expectations of consumption and thereby further stimulated the need to earn money and migrate. Once consumer goods came to be regarded as necessities, consumptive aspirations

life in Central Africa: The history of consumption and social change, 1840-1980 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 93-113.

⁹³ H. Powdermaker, *Copper town: Changing Africa: The human situation on the Rhodesian Copperbelt* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); G. Wilson, *An essay on the economics of detribalization in Northern Rhodesia* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1942); Parpart, 'Where is your mother?'

⁹⁴ (NAZ) SEC2/966, C. J. Fryer, Mwinilunga District Tour Report, 14 November 1958.

⁹⁵ (NAZ) SEC2/957, A. Stockwell-Jones, Mwinilunga District Tour Report, 30 January 1949.

⁹⁶ See: Harries, *Work, culture, and identity*; E. Allina-Pisano, 'Borderlands, boundaries, and the contours of colonial rule: African labor in Manica District, Mozambique, c. 1904-1908', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 36, no. 1 (2003), 59-82.

⁹⁷ Englund, 'The village in the city', 152; Andersson, 'Reinterpreting the rural-urban connection'.

⁹⁸ See: R. Ross, M. Hinfelaar and I. Peša (eds.), *The objects of life in Central Africa: The history of consumption and social change, 1840-1980* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 2-3.

⁹⁹ Interview with Mr. Makajina, Ikelenge, March 2010.

¹⁰⁰ (NAZ) KSE1/1/1, R. W. Yule, 13 October 1915.

¹⁰¹ Barrett, 'Walking home majestically', 93-113.

¹⁰² See: Turner, *Schism and continuity*; V. W. Turner and E. L. B. Turner, 'Money economy among the Mwinilunga Ndembu: A study of some individual cash budgets', *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, 18 (1955), 19-37.

¹⁰³ (NAZ) F. V. Bruce-Miller, Mwinilunga District Annual Report, 1926.

¹⁰⁴ See: Wilson, *An essay on the economics of detribalization*.

provided an incentive towards labour migration.¹⁰⁵ Migrants' markers of economic success, in the form of clothing, a bicycle or a sewing machine, might entice others to pursue a migrant career as well.¹⁰⁶ Consumption could act as a self-propelling force behind labour migration, but this was only due to the linkages between consumption, social relationships and the process of self-realisation.¹⁰⁷

Urban employment was not motivated by purely economic incentives, but was driven by aspirations of personal and social advancement. Such aspirations resulted in a diversity of strategies. Value could be composed from a multiplicity of sources: 'Adepts were many and varied, each pushing up against the outside limits of their own frontier of the known world, inventing new ways of configuring, storing and using what must have been an ever shifting spectrum of possibility'.¹⁰⁸ Whereas some migrants sought short contracts so that they could return to their village to cultivate crops, others might stay in town for long periods of time to accumulate monetary wealth with which to set up a trading enterprise.¹⁰⁹ Strategies towards self-realisation could be various, straddling the boundaries between rural and urban spheres.

Labour Migration and Village Life

Even more than the consequences of labour migration on individual trajectories, the historiographical debate has discussed the effects of labour migration on village society and the rural economy.¹¹⁰ Disconcertedly, colonial officials in Mwinilunga would complain that 'the mines can't "have it both ways", that is have cheap labour and at the same time expect an abundance of cheap food from the villages which they have depopulated'.¹¹¹ Because urban employment drained the labour force from rural areas, officials feared that urban and rural wealth could not coincide. Given prevailing labour bottlenecks, wage employment would jeopardise agricultural production.¹¹² That is why the male absenteeism due to outmigration and the supposedly deleterious effects this had on agricultural production and village make-up were cause for such serious distress among officials. In the 1950s, one official lamented that: 'there is a lack of men which seriously impairs the village labour force. I frequently met old men and hungry women and children in the same community as possessed miles of good but uncultivated land'.¹¹³ The potentially negative effects of labour migration on agricultural production had been noticed since the 1920s:

It is becoming more and more evident that the exodus of youths and men from the villages, consequent upon the greatly increased demands for labour, is having a serious

¹⁰⁵ (NAZ) SEC2/131 Vol.1, D. C. Hughes-Chamberlain, Mwinilunga Sub-District Annual Report, 31 December 1929.

¹⁰⁶ Andersson, 'Informal moves', 393; Barrett, 'Walking home majestically'.

¹⁰⁷ Guyer, 'Wealth in people as self-realization'.

¹⁰⁸ Guyer and Eno Belinga, 'Wealth in people as wealth in knowledge', 93.

¹⁰⁹ This diversity has been explained by Turner, *Schism and continuity*; Turner and Turner, 'Money economy', 19-37; Pritchett, *Lunda-Ndembu*.

¹¹⁰ For a case study of a rural area, see: Richards, *Land, labour and diet*; Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting down trees*; For labour migration and agricultural production, see: R. H. Palmer and N. Parsons (eds.), *The roots of rural poverty in Central and Southern Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1977). This has been discussed in great detail for West Africa, see: Whitehouse, *Migrants and strangers in an African city*; de Bruijn, van Dijk & Foeken, *Mobile Africa*.

¹¹¹ (NAZ) SEC2/131 Vol. 2, E. Sharpe, Kasempa Province Mwinilunga District Annual Report, 1930.

¹¹² See: Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting down trees*, 140-77; But: D. H. Potts, 'Worker-peasants and farmer-housewives in Africa: The debate about 'committed' farmers, access to land and agricultural production', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, no. 4 (2000), 807-32.

¹¹³ (NAZ) SEC2/959, K. J. Forder, Mwinilunga District Tour Report, November 1951.

effect upon native agriculture (...) It has been reported, from certain districts, that the number of able-bodied men remaining in the villages is so small that the women have been compelled to cultivate old gardens in which the soil had become impoverished. The crops reaped have, naturally, been poor.¹¹⁴

In this connection, officials anticipated that labour migration might provoke a 'vicious circle', as 'it is not possible to develop an area if there are no able-bodied people there to do the work, and the people will not stay at home unless there is a means of obtaining a remunerative return for their labours'.¹¹⁵ As a consequence, 'in the worst affected villages life just stagnates', and 'there is a great tendency for the houses occupied by their [labour migrants'] wives to be allowed to fall into a very dilapidated condition'.¹¹⁶ Officials overwhelmingly regarded the effects of labour migration on village life and agricultural production as detrimental. In the late 1940s a report stated that:

The greatest limiting factor [in rural development] is the progressive impoverishment of the villages with the drift to the Towns. It is idle to talk about social welfare and development here unless and until some bold and constructive means can be found and enforced to stop this drift. Over-industrialisation of the Territory, if at the cost of the rural districts, must in the long run prove extremely costly, if not disastrous (...) [Migrants] send no money, no clothes home, and the state of the village is most pitiable.¹¹⁷

Rural decay and underdevelopment were attributed to policies of urban bias, as high wages would attract disproportionate labour force from rural to urban areas.¹¹⁸ In order to lessen rural-urban income disparities, especially after independence, government policy rhetorically aimed 'to raise productivity on as wide a front as is practical in order to (...) make rural life more attractive and thus curb the drift towards urban employment'.¹¹⁹

Nevertheless, these views of rural decay, disruption or even breakdown do not seem to be in congruence with the rapid increase in agricultural production and the boom in marketing throughout Mwinilunga District in the 1940s, 1950s and much of the 1960s.¹²⁰ In spite of the drain on village labour force as a result of high levels of outmigration, agricultural production flourished and rural life seemed to prosper. In recent years, more cautious voices in the historiography have suggested that migration to towns did not necessarily result in rural decay.¹²¹ In exceptional cases, rather, labour migration could prove compatible with high levels of agricultural production and rural prosperity, as the case of Mwinilunga suggests.¹²² Whereas during the opening decades of the twentieth century the marketing of crops in Mwinilunga District had been confined to administrative and local requirements, from the 1940s onwards as much as 600 tons of cassava, in addition to other (cash) crops, were marketed each year. Demand from urban areas, where the copper boom caused heightened food requirements,

¹¹⁴ (NAZ) Northern Rhodesia Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1929.

¹¹⁵ (NAZ) SEC2/962, R. S. Thompson, Mwinilunga District Tour Report, 16 September 1954.

¹¹⁶ (NAZ) SEC2/967, W. D. Grant, Mwinilunga District Tour Report, 21 April 1959; (NAZ) NWP1/2/2 Loc.4897, C. M. N. White, Mwinilunga District Tour Report, 7 December 1938.

¹¹⁷ (NAZ) SEC2/155, Western Province Annual Report, 1948.

¹¹⁸ See: Potts, 'Counter-urbanization on the Zambian Copperbelt?'; Jamal and Weeks, 'The vanishing rural-urban gap'.

¹¹⁹ (NAZ) Annual Report of the Ministry of Agriculture for the Year 1965.

¹²⁰ Pritchett, *Lunda-Ndemba*; Turner, *Schism and continuity*.

¹²¹ See: W. Beinart, *The political economy of Pondoland, 1860-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982); Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting down trees*; Pottier, *Migrants no more*.

¹²² Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting down trees*, 155.

motivated this increase in production and marketing, which was possible despite male labour migration ratios of more than 50%.¹²³ Whilst some officials in Mwinilunga District complained about the lack of 'able bodied men' in the villages, others noted that notwithstanding high levels of absenteeism there were relatively few signs of disruption in the villages.¹²⁴ How might this paradox be explained? Rather than understanding rural-urban relations as dichotomous, attention should be paid to interconnections between rural and urban spheres.

Labour migration has all too often been viewed as an exit option for impoverished agricultural producers who fail to find market outlets locally.¹²⁵ Nonetheless, the assumption that the poorest or the least educated, those deprived of all other opportunities, would be compelled to migrate by capitalist pressures, does not seem to hold. Rather, 'the poorest are generally excluded from migration opportunities. Migration presupposes a measure of relative well-being, which provides the material and ideological conditions for seeking new fortunes through spatial mobility'.¹²⁶ Indeed, labour migration ratios from the area around the mission station Kalene Hill have always been relatively high, even though education levels and income-generating opportunities are favourable when compared to other parts of Mwinilunga District.¹²⁷ Contrary to what might be expected, areas where crops are difficult to market and employment opportunities are poor seem to send less migrants to urban areas, whereas more migrants originate from areas enjoying favourable educational and marketing opportunities.¹²⁸ Migration is rooted 'not so much in the poor rural living conditions as in migrants' desire to prosper in the rural areas'.¹²⁹ Agricultural production and labour migration were not conflicting strategies, but could coincide. Whereas some individuals might focus on marketing pineapples within Mwinilunga District, others would seek to develop personhood by building a career in urban areas. Because labour migration allowed skilled individuals to enhance existing opportunities, the practice could contribute to rural sustainability and prosperity, rather than leading to breakdown or decay. Labour migrants might invest in agriculture upon their return, or they might facilitate the marketing of agricultural produce in urban areas.¹³⁰ Rather than causing impoverishment or rural decay, labour migration could stimulate rural entrepreneurship and prosperity.¹³¹

Viewing labour migration as part of the process towards self-realisation can bridge the rural-urban dichotomy at the basis of theories of both development and underdevelopment.¹³² If labour migration is interpreted as a social strategy to attain wealth and power, the focus lies not so much on the disruptive act of geographical mobility, but on the links which migrants create through a complex network of cultural, economic, social and political relations.¹³³ Migrants 'often see their stay in town through the prism of their rural aspirations'.¹³⁴ Even though labour

¹²³ See: I. Peša, 'Cassava is our chief: Negotiating identity, markets and the state through cassava in Mwinilunga, Zambia', in: J-B. Gewald, A. Leliveld and I. Peša (eds.), *Transforming Innovations in Africa: Explorative studies on appropriation in African societies* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 169-90. In the 1960s demand slumped again, as long transport hauls made marketing from Mwinilunga District unprofitable.

¹²⁴ (NAZ) SEC2/959, K. J. Forder, Mwinilunga District Tour Report, November 1951.

¹²⁵ Andersson, 'Administrators' knowledge'; See: Palmer and Parsons, *The roots of rural poverty*.

¹²⁶ Englund, 'The village in the city', 139.

¹²⁷ Fisher and Hoyte, *Ndotolu*; Pritchett, *Lunda-Ndembu*; Turner, *Schism and continuity*.

¹²⁸ See: De Haan, 'Livelihoods and poverty'.

¹²⁹ Englund, 'The village in the city', 151.

¹³⁰ I. Peša, 'Buying pineapples, selling cloth: Traders and trading stores in Mwinilunga District, 1940-1970', in: R. Ross, M. Hinfelaar and I. Peša (eds.), *The objects of life in Central Africa: The history of consumption and social change, 1840-1980* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 259-80.

¹³¹ Bakewell, 'Keeping them in their place'; De Haan, 'Livelihoods and poverty'.

¹³² Andersson, 'Reinterpreting the rural-urban connection'.

¹³³ Bakewell, 'Keeping them in their place', 1347.

¹³⁴ Englund, 'The village in the city', 153.

migration might lead to permanent urban residence, the practice is underpinned by rural realities, resulting in the 'simultaneous and overlapping presence of urban and rural spaces in migrants' lives'.¹³⁵ Over time individuals have sought to complement and enhance existing livelihood strategies within Mwinilunga District through labour migration. In an attempt to build one's career and establish personhood, avenues to wealth and success have been sought in either rural or urban localities.¹³⁶ Because labour migration enhanced existing opportunities towards self-realisation, it could serve to constitute the locality of Mwinilunga.

Contradicting views of rural decay and underdevelopment, some officials noticed 'comparatively little outward signs of disorganisation', despite high levels of outmigration from Mwinilunga District.¹³⁷ Labour migration could be an alternative, complementary strategy to agricultural production, aiming to make rural life more secure. Rather than being disruptive, waged employment could contribute to agricultural production through remittances and agricultural investments made by returning labour migrants.¹³⁸ In Mwinilunga District markets for agricultural produce were volatile and generally limited. In this setting, labour migration could serve to cushion the fluctuations of agricultural production and marketing, whilst providing additional income.¹³⁹ As colonial officials acknowledged, the wealth of urban areas could spread into rural areas:

The prosperity in the urban areas was to a lesser degree felt in the rural areas where wages and ration allowances in lieu of rations in kind have shown a steady increase, while the demand for surplus native foodstuffs and fish has brought a considerable sum of money into African pockets in several districts.¹⁴⁰

Instead of a stark rural-urban dichotomy, rural and urban areas might more usefully be viewed as two sides of the same coin.¹⁴¹ By straddling the boundaries of both, migrants sought to maximise opportunities and increase livelihood security. There is, thus, a 'mutual dependence between urban and rural fortunes'.¹⁴² Remittances, the opportunity of schooling relatives in town, or assistance in obtaining urban employment, all contributed to rural diversification and security, rather than decay.¹⁴³

Remittances in money and in goods have been taken as a main sign of enduring rural-urban connections.¹⁴⁴ Interpreted within debates of development and underdevelopment, migrant remittances have predominantly been judged for their economic importance.¹⁴⁵ In this connection, colonial officials painted a grim picture for the area of Mwinilunga, as migrants did not seem interested in remitting money. While migrants were in employment in urban areas, remittances and contact with kin would generally remain minimal.¹⁴⁶ Long transport hauls and

¹³⁵ Englund, 'The village in the city', 142; Andersson, 'Reinterpreting the rural-urban connection', 84.

¹³⁶ Englund, 'The village in the city'; Andersson, 'Reinterpreting the rural-urban connection'.

¹³⁷ (NAZ) SEC2/133, N. S. Price, Mwinilunga District Annual Report, 31 December 1937.

¹³⁸ Turner and Turner, 'Money economy'; See also: Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting down trees*, 172-7; Pottier, *Migrants no more*.

¹³⁹ Pritchett, *Lunda-Ndemba*.

¹⁴⁰ (NAZ) SEC2/157, Western Province Annual Report, 1950.

¹⁴¹ Englund, 'The village in the city'; Andersson, 'Reinterpreting the rural-urban connection'.

¹⁴² Englund, 'The village in the city', 149.

¹⁴³ Andersson, 'Informal moves'; Andersson, 'Reinterpreting the rural-urban connection'.

¹⁴⁴ Geschiere and Gugler, 'The urban-rural connection'.

¹⁴⁵ E. Obadare and W. Adebani, 'Transnational resource flow and the paradoxes of belonging: Redirecting the debate on transnationalism, remittances, state and citizenship in Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, 36, no. 122 (2009), 499-517.

¹⁴⁶ See: Turner, *Schism and continuity*.

the difficulty of communication with Mwinilunga District made that remittances tended to be infrequent and limited, as officials remarked:

There was no evidence that the migrant workers, speaking generally sent much money home. Taxes were all paid in tikkies and pennies and sixpences, which I took to be the product of local trade, and not of postal orders sent from the towns.¹⁴⁷

Officials lamented the loose ties between labour migrants and their kin in the villages, as 'they return seldom, and remit money and clothes never'.¹⁴⁸ Remittances did not seem to be migrants' primary concern: 'most natives who have savings appear to be more occupied with what use they can make of them on the spot than with safe and cheap methods of remitting money to their relatives'.¹⁴⁹ Rather than remitting on a regular basis, migrants would carry goods or money as gifts or investment capital upon their return. Yet remittances are but one aspect of the ties between migrants and their home areas. Patterns of remitting should be placed within their broader societal context.

Some labour migrants contributed to agricultural production in the form of investment in inputs, such as fertiliser, hoes or axes.¹⁵⁰ If labour migrants invested their earnings in agricultural production upon return, they might expand production and start marketing crops on a large scale within several years. Official concerns that labour migration would jeopardise agricultural production, for 'if people are away from their village for six months or more they cannot cultivate proper gardens', appeared unwarranted.¹⁵¹ Numerous pineapple farmers, for example, used their earnings from urban waged employment as starting capital to buy suckers or to engage labour to prepare fields.¹⁵² Migrants earned cash incomes and these could be invested in productive enterprises in rural areas. As a result, labour migration might lead to increased rural living standards. In the 1950s, within a time span of five years, the District Commissioner observed a marked 'improvement' in material culture throughout Mwinilunga: 'Dresses, clothes were better, there were more bicycles, more Kimberley brick houses, lamps, suitcases, blankets etc. all seemed to have improved'.¹⁵³ Government officials on occasion credited migrant labourers as agents of 'development'.¹⁵⁴ One District Commissioner stated that: 'returning workers bring with them, as a rule, higher standards of housing and some ideas about gardening for pleasure'.¹⁵⁵ Migrant labour could be a means of self-realisation which straddled rural-urban divides, as Turner acknowledged. Returning labour migrants could play a role in diversifying rural livelihoods or creating an environment conducive for enterprise, but this was a social rather than an individual endeavour:

Remittances of money are sometimes sent home to relatives, but it is more usual for migrants to return with presents and distribute them among kin when they arrive at their villages. Many of the migrants purchase the standing-crop in gardens rather than wait for eighteen months for the cassava crop to mature. Some migrants are beginning to start small 'businesses' with their savings. Some buy sewing machines and set up as

¹⁴⁷ (NAZ) SEC2/957, R. N. Lines, Mwinilunga District Tour Report, 6 March 1949.

¹⁴⁸ (NAZ) NWP1/2/26 Loc.4901, R. N. Lines, Mwinilunga District Tour Report, 10 January 1949.

¹⁴⁹ (NAZ) SEC2/151, Western Province Annual Report, 1937.

¹⁵⁰ Turner and Turner, 'Money economy'; Pritchett, *Lunda-Ndembu*.

¹⁵¹ (NAZ) KSE6/3/1, Mwinilunga Sub-District Indaba, 13 October 1916.

¹⁵² Peša, 'Buying pineapples, selling cloth'.

¹⁵³ (NAZ) SEC2/966, R. J. Short, Mwinilunga District Tour Report, July 1958.

¹⁵⁴ See: Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity*; Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting down trees*.

¹⁵⁵ (NAZ) SEC2/967, R. J. Short, Mwinilunga District Tour Report, May 1959.

tailors, others start 'tea-rooms' on the motor roads, and others again become hawkers and small traders.¹⁵⁶

What this excerpt evidences is that labour migration should not be interpreted as an individual pursuit leading to personal wealth. Migrants would distribute earnings among kin upon their return to the village, even if they had not regularly sent remittances whilst in employment. Furthermore, earnings from urban employment could be used to support and advance rural livelihoods. Urban wealth might be translated into rural farming enterprises, trade or other businesses. Urban and rural strategies should therefore not be seen as detached. Rather than acting as individual agents, migrants depended on social relationships which straddled the rural-urban divide. Material wealth had to be translated into success for only then could a migrant become a 'Big Man', either in rural or urban areas.¹⁵⁷ The realisation of this goal depended on the careful cultivation of skills and relationships, on a personal following and social connectivity. In this sense, labour migration is motivated by a desire to gain wealth and influence in either rural or urban areas, a desire towards self-realisation.¹⁵⁸ Self-realisation should be seen as a process through which individuals could enhance their social standing through connectivity with others. Monetary earnings could increase one's social standing and labour migration provided one avenue to earn wealth.

Still, labour migration did not create a dynamic of economic growth or development. Even though labour migration offered prospects of material gain, increased social status and a return to the village as a respectable 'Big Man', wealth and self-realisation entailed risks as well.¹⁵⁹ Individuals travelling long distances could earn large amounts of money, acquire skills and bring home copious goods, but might equally be struck by adversity along the way. The narrative of *Kabalabala* embodies this sense of both opportunity and risk involved in labour migration:

Kabalabala, a man who lived along the Kabompo River, possessed charms with which he could turn himself into a lion. People who walked long distances would get tired and would rest along the road, where they would erect temporary shelters to spend the night. Especially those travellers returning from the towns to their villages would carry considerable possessions, purchased with urban wages and serving as gifts or items of exchange and use in the village. Kabalabala would come and chat with these people during the day, covertly making an inventory of their possessions. At night Kabalabala would transform himself into a lion, return to the travellers' camp, steal all their belongings and kill one or more members of the travelling group. Clothing, pots and all other goods would be taken from the travellers by Kabalabala, who would sell these items for money. This made travelling to and from town dangerous, because Kabalabala could not be killed by spears, axes or guns. Travellers not only risked losing their belongings, but might die if attacked by Kabalabala.¹⁶⁰

This narrative evidences that wealth is not merely economic, but also social. Wealth is inherently risky and has to be translated into social success in order to become legitimate. This can be done by distributing wealth among kin, neighbours and friends. Labour migration could

¹⁵⁶ Turner and Turner, 'Money economy', 23.

¹⁵⁷ Barrett, 'Walking home majestically'.

¹⁵⁸ Englund, 'The village in the city', 151.

¹⁵⁹ Comaroff, 'The madman and the migrant', explore the negative consequences of labour migration for individuals.

¹⁶⁰ Compilation from several interviews, especially Minas Kantumoya Kasolu Kachacha, Kanongesha, 27 July 2010 and Fred Mpenji, Kanongesha, 03 August 2010. For comparable cases of vampires on the Copperbelt, see: L. White, *Speaking with vampires: Rumor and history in colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

be a strategy towards self-realisation, but it also entailed a loss of labour force within the village. Kin who remained behind in the village might benefit from migrant remittances, but they might also make claims which a migrant could not meet, resulting in grudges, witchcraft accusations and narratives such as *Kabalabala*. Wealth could thus be dangerous, as much as it was beneficial. The outcome of labour migration might be 'the creation of wealth that can grow over time', but migrants' wealth and success had to be translated into social status within the community, expressed through self-realisation and social connectivity.¹⁶¹

Labour migration could enable individual wealth and success, being a pathway towards self-realisation. Some returning migrants who had accumulated 'considerable savings' might become 'Big Men', if they deployed their savings to diversify agricultural livelihoods, engage in craft production or trade.¹⁶² But because self-realisation is an inherently social process which occurs in relation to others, labour migration inevitably influenced rural communities as a whole. Colonial officials attributed material gain and improved living standards in the villages to migrants' engagement in the flourishing urban economy, suggesting the thoroughly intertwined nature between rural and urban fortunes:

Wages have been substantially increased, especially on the Mines and Railways (...) the African standard of living both in town and country has risen appreciably. A man and his family are better clothed and better nourished than they were even three years ago.¹⁶³

Officials noted that returning labour migrants made a definite impact on village life: 'The return to the villages of people who have been working for numerous years on the Copperbelt, was most marked'. Yet officials equally feared that this influence would merely encourage further migration, or that migrants' stories 'might be detrimental to efforts at stimulation of the production of an economic crop'.¹⁶⁴ Labour migration might influence village societies either positively or negatively, yet the relationship between rural and urban areas did not have to be conflicting, but could be symbiotic.

Labour migrants viewed urban residence through the prism of rural aspirations. Consequently it becomes crucial to look at social connectivity and at aims towards self-realisation in order to understand the dynamics of labour migration from Mwinilunga District. Labour migration was not so much transformative, but could prove constitutive of rural life:

The rural (...) is the key ideological domain in which migrants anchor their understandings of their aspirations and dilemmas. The domain of the rural, both as an object of moral imagination and as a geographical site, is constantly re-made in relation to what migrants achieve and fail to achieve during their stays in town.¹⁶⁵

Not all migrants returned to their village of origin. Some found opportunities in town more attractive or were driven away from their village due to quarrels or witchcraft accusations. Others, perhaps, settled in villages where they had kin or friends, or in the *Boma* where employment opportunities, trade avenues and social amenities were more favourable than in the villages.¹⁶⁶ Even so, labour migration should be seen as a strategy which connected rural and urban areas, rather than dividing them. Although some migrants severed ties to rural areas,

¹⁶¹ J. H. Cohen and I. Sirkeci, *Cultures of migration: The global nature of contemporary mobility* (Austin, 2011), 31.

¹⁶² (NAZ) SEC2/966, M. A. Hinds, Mwinilunga District Tour Report, 22 September 1958.

¹⁶³ (NAZ) SEC2/155, Western Province Annual Report, 1948.

¹⁶⁴ (NAZ) SEC2/957, A. Stockwell-Jones, Mwinilunga District Tour Report, 30 January 1949.

¹⁶⁵ Englund, 'The village in the city', 153.

¹⁶⁶ Turner, *Schism and continuity*; Turner and Turner, 'Money economy'.

most sought to enhance social standing by cultivating both rural and urban linkages. Instead of leading to rural impoverishment, labour migration enhanced opportunities within rural areas by offering a means towards self-realisation.

Conclusion

By looking at the case of labour migration from Mwinilunga District between the 1930s and the 1970s, it has been argued that examining trajectories of labour migration through the analytical lens of self-realisation might advance our understanding of Zambian labour migration. First of all, viewing labour migration as a strategy towards self-realisation places this form of mobility within its full societal context. Labour migration is not just propelled by an economic rationale or political necessity, but builds upon socio-cultural dispositions, which are crucial to a proper understanding of the dynamics of mobility.¹⁶⁷ Secondly, a focus on self-realisation enables the bridging of the discursive rural-urban divide, which has been proposed so forcefully in the historiography hitherto.¹⁶⁸ Even if some migrants did eventually sever ties with rural areas, urban residence was fundamentally driven by rural realities. It therefore becomes crucial to look at rural-urban interconnections.¹⁶⁹ Thirdly, this approach allows an understanding of the relative attractions of urban vis-à-vis rural areas. Rather than resulting from rural poverty, labour migration is part of aspirations towards the 'good life', which might be located in either rural or urban areas.¹⁷⁰ Most importantly, this approach does not stress the transformative aspects of labour migration, but suggests that the practice might have been constitutive of rural society in Mwinilunga District. In this sense, a focus on self-realisation can challenge the 'modernist narrative', which proposes sharp ruptures and linear stages of labour migration.¹⁷¹ A focus on self-realisation proposes an alternative perspective which places labour migration within the broader context of social connectivity.

Within Mwinilunga District labour migration functioned as a strategy to realise aspirations, develop relationships and enhance status. Nevertheless, labour migration should not be interpreted as a straightforward strategy of economic development. Neither does the framework of the 'modernist narrative' apply. There were considerable variations in worker strategies, some planning to retire in rural areas, others choosing to remain in town indefinitely: 'similar socio-cultural dispositions regulating (...) migrants' behaviour (...) may give rise to different urban [and rural] trajectories', as there are many alternative trajectories 'whereby positions of high status can be attained'.¹⁷² In order to understand the dynamics of labour migration it is imperative to look at case studies of migrants' life histories and specific rural areas. Individual strategies were underpinned by a relative judgement of opportunities and risks, costs and benefits in rural and urban areas. The motivation to move to urban areas was deeply rooted in rural realities and prevailing opportunities in Mwinilunga District. In the 1930s officials were still surprised 'to note in a District so close to the industrialised areas how very thoroughly most of those returned from work on the mines seemed to have been reabsorbed by their traditional environment'.¹⁷³ This appears less surprising if rural and urban areas are viewed as connected through the process of self-realisation. Viewing labour migration as part of the process of self-realisation might advance existing debates within Zambian historiography, which all too often resort to polarising dichotomies of rural versus urban, or development versus underdevelopment. By partaking in rural-urban networks, migrants reconfigured ideas

¹⁶⁷ See: Englund, 'The village in the city'; Andersson, 'Informal moves'.

¹⁶⁸ See: Andersson, 'Administrators' knowledge'; Geschiere and Gugler, 'The urban-rural connection'.

¹⁶⁹ Englund, 'The village in the city'; Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity*.

¹⁷⁰ Bakewell, 'Keeping them in their place'.

¹⁷¹ Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity*.

¹⁷² Andersson, 'Reinterpreting the rural-urban connection', 105.

¹⁷³ (NAZ) NWP1/2/2 Loc.4897, A. F. C. Campbell, Mwinilunga District Tour Report, 23 August 1937.

of locality, success and personhood. In the end, 'the motive for migration was, perhaps (...) to seek alternative means of being local'.¹⁷⁴

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¹⁷⁴ Z. Ngwane, "Christmas time' and the struggles for the household in the countryside: Rethinking the cultural geography of migrant labour in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, no. 3 (2003), 689.

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