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# Copper's Corollaries: Trade and Labour Migration in the Copperbelt (1910-1940)

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*The geopolitical importance of the mining industry in Zambia and Katanga, and the rural-urban migration patterns that it brought about, has been the subject of many studies. And yet, the extent to which these industries were interdependent is often downplayed or overlooked. Looking more closely at the history of the Zambian and Katangese Copperbelts, one can see that, despite their separateness, there was interplay between them. During the British South Africa Company rule of Rhodesia (1899-1924), Northern Rhodesia was developed as an important labour and food reserve for the Katangese mines. Following the onset of the Great Depression in the early 1930s, Katanga's dependence on Northern Rhodesia diminished as the Katangese mines found new sources of labour and foodstuffs. Yet, at the same time, it appears that the Depression served to make the border more porous than it had been before. People of all origins crisscrossed the border between Belgian and British Africa to look for employment or to sell their produce. This article aims to bring this interaction to light.*

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## Introduction

The Copperbelt, as a geological zone, is known for its copper deposits and associated mining and industrial development. This comparatively small strip of land – covering some 450 km in length and 260 km in width – has, for about a century, formed the economic backbone of the two countries that host it: the Republic of Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. And yet, the extent to which these industries were interdependent is often downplayed or overlooked. The Copperbelt itself, because of its distribution over two countries, is generally studied as if it consisted of not one but two distinct entities. This, as Luise White contends, has to do with two factors: a disinclination to mix the history of Francophone and Anglophone Africa, and the fact that ‘the two histories do not provide a good chronological or comparative fit’.<sup>1</sup> The main discrepancy appearing in the timelines of the two regions is that copper mining in Katanga (the Congo’s most southern province where the Copperbelt is located) began well before the First World War, whereas in Northern Rhodesia (as Zambia was known at the time), it only really took off in the late 1920s. Another element that seems to set the two Copperbelts apart is the apparent disparity in labour policy. By 1926, before any copper mine was fully operational in Northern Rhodesia, the *Union Minière du Haut-Katanga* (UMHK), Katanga’s all-powerful mining company, had begun to recruit a more permanent labour force. On the Northern Rhodesian side, on the other hand, a family presence was not yet encouraged.<sup>2</sup> This created the idea that labour was ‘stabilised’ in Katanga while the copper mines of Northern Rhodesia still relied on a “classic” migrant labour system featuring short-term migration by rurally based migrants to the urban industrial centres.<sup>3</sup> The work of the *Rhodes-Livingstone*

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<sup>1</sup> Luise White, ‘Class struggle and cannibalism: Storytelling and history writing on the copperbelts of colonial Northern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo’, in *Speaking with vampires: Rumor and history in colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 274.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 275.

<sup>3</sup> James Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity: Myths and meanings of urban life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1999), 41.

*Institute* (RLI) – founded in 1935 with a view to investigate the impact of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation on local populations – contributed to a large extent to this idea.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, James Ferguson, in his influential *Expectations of Modernity*, argued that ‘rural-urban mobility was not always so orderly’<sup>5</sup> and that processes of mobility and urbanisation were more varied, more complex than usually suggested. ‘Already in the 1920s and 1930s’, he argued, ‘many Copperbelt mineworkers were much more used to long-term urban dwelling than the image of the cyclical migrant would suggest. Indeed (...) many of the early Copperbelt workers had long histories of urban employment at other labour centres in the region, especially the Katanga mines in the Belgian Congo and in the mining centres of Southern Rhodesia’.<sup>6</sup> In this way, different research traditions coupled with a larger tendency, in academia, to think in a ‘nation-state framework of analysis’,<sup>7</sup> meant that ‘with few exceptions, the threads that link the two Copperbelts have been overlooked, and the fluidity with which African labour penetrated colonial and cultural borders has not been the source with which history was written’.<sup>8</sup> In the present paper, it will be argued that the early development of the ‘two’ Copperbelts, far from being separate, was in fact defined by interdependence. Looking at the three decades spanning from about 1910 to about 1940, this paper will explore how transnational migration developed and consolidated in the colonial period as people looked for better wages and cheaper or better goods.

## Investments and Capital

In the late nineteenth century, Katanga, whose mineral wealth had been advertised by the works of such iconic travellers as David Livingstone and Frederick Stanley Arnot, had been the object of an intense competition between European powers. The contenders were King Leopold II of Belgium and financier Cecil Rhodes who, through his *British South Africa Company* (BSAC), was staking out claims to territory in the African interior on behalf of the British government. After more than two years and six expeditions (three Belgian and three British), it became obvious that Rhodes had lost the race to the mineral wealth of Katanga, having only been able to stake out claims as far north as the Luapula River and Lake Mweru in the East and the Congo-Zambezi watershed in the West, i.e. just below the area where copper deposits were known to exist.<sup>9</sup> As a result, Cecil Rhodes’ company had become the owner of a large territory, located right between the Katangese Copperbelt to the north and the mineral-rich territories south of the Zambezi (future Zimbabwe), with no apparent significant mineral wealth of its own.<sup>10</sup> That

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed study of the work of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in the twentieth century, see Lyn Schumaker, *Africanizing anthropology: Fieldwork, networks, and the making of cultural knowledge in Central Africa* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity*, 39.

<sup>6</sup> Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity*, 50.

<sup>7</sup> William I. Robinson, ‘Beyond nation-state paradigms: Globalization, sociology, and the challenge of transnational studies’ *Sociological Forum* 13, no. 4 (1998) 562.

<sup>8</sup> White, ‘Class struggle and cannibalism’, 275.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed description of the ‘Scramble’ for Katanga, see *Comité spécial du Katanga, 1900-1950* (Brussels: Editions L. Cuypers, 1950), 11-21. See also Hugh M. Hole, *The making of Rhodesia* (London and Edinburgh: Taylor & Francis Group, 1967), 249-50; John W. Donaldson, *Marking territory: Demarcation of the DRC – Zambia boundary from 1894 to the present day*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Durham, 2010, 103; Bruce Fetter, *The creation of Elisabethville, 1910-1940* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1976), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Prospecting, which began in the 1890s, only led to the discovery of minor deposits. Lead and zinc were found at Broken Hill (now Kabwe) and copper at the ‘Hook’ of the Kafue River as well as at Roan Antelope, Rietbok and Bwana Mkubwa. Further copper deposits, as well as some gold, were also found at Nkana, Kipushi and Kansanshi, just 12 miles south of the Katangese border. See Francis L. Coleman, *The Northern*

territory, known as 'Northern Rhodesia', was, as Andrew Roberts put it, 'an awkwardly shaped piece of debris resulting from Rhodes's failure to obtain Katanga'.<sup>11</sup> Northern Rhodesia having proved a disappointment, it was not long before the BSAC turned its attention back to Katanga. The latter, despite its obvious mineral wealth, had hitherto been left largely unattended by the Belgians who lacked funds, personnel and capital. This explains why, in 1900, Robert Williams, one of Rhodes' former associates and owner of a prospecting company, the *Tanganyika Concessions Limited* (TCL), was able to readily obtain from Leopold II the opportunity to explore the Katangese Copperbelt. By 1906, more than one hundred deposits had been located, including the gold mine of Ruwe (now Mutoshi), the copper and cobalt mine at Kambove, and the extremely rich carbonate deposit of the 'Star of the Congo' mine, close to which the future capital of Katanga, Elisabethville (now Lubumbashi), was to be founded in 1910.<sup>12</sup> Thanks to this 'plenteous bounty', Katanga was promised a very bright future indeed, being expected to be, as the *Livingstone Mail* claimed in 1908, 'the brightest spot in Africa'.<sup>13</sup>

In order to handle what promised to be an extremely important mining interest in Katanga, the *Comité Spécial du Katanga* (CSK), a semi-private concessionary company responsible for administering the territory, and the TCL launched a new chartered company on 28 October 1906: the *Union Minière du Haut-Katanga* (UMHK).<sup>14</sup> The fact that the UMHK was to be a joint venture between British and Belgian interests stemmed out of necessity. Not only was there no one in Belgium familiar, let alone experienced, with the mineral industry, but neither was there anyone familiar with Africa and its population. It is in recognition of that fact that, though the UMHK was Belgian in name, the technical direction, a.k.a. the overseeing of operations on the ground, was entrusted to the TCL.<sup>15</sup> In practice therefore, it was the TCL that dictated most of the UMHK's decisions, both short-term and long-term.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the UMHK was entirely dependent on British southern Africa for the export of its minerals. There was no connection between Katanga and a seacoast, which was a *sine qua non* condition for the export of Katanga copper on a large-scale. There was a project to build a rail link between Katanga and the Atlantic via the port of Lobito (near Benguela in Angola) but the line, whose construction had started in 1903, was not yet usable (and would not be until 1931).<sup>17</sup> By contrast, the British railway line from Kimberley (South Africa) had reached Broken Hill (now Kabwe) in Northern Rhodesia in 1907. Sustained by a financial alliance between the TCL and the BSAC, the

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*Rhodesia Copperbelt 1899-1962, technological development up to the end of the Central African Federation* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1962), 6-7; René Brion & Jean-Louis Moreau, *De la mine à Mars: La genèse d'umicore* (Tiel: Lannoo, 2006), 67; Charles Perrings, *Black mineworkers in Central Africa: Industrial strategies and the evolution of an African proletariat in the Copperbelt 1911-1941* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Roberts, *A history of Zambia* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976), 175.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Williams, 'The Cape to Cairo Railway', *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 20, no. 80 (1921), 249; Coleman, *Northern Rhodesia Copperbelt*, 8-9; Perrings, *Black mineworkers*, 10. For a detailed description of the initial prospection undertaken in Katanga, see Maurice Robert, *Le Katanga physique, cinquantième anniversaire du Comité Spécial du Katanga, 1900-1950*, (2nd edn. Brussels: Editions Montana, 1950), 95-101; *Comité Spécial du Katanga*, 53-9.

<sup>13</sup> *Livingstone Mail*, 26 December 1908, as quoted in Coleman, *Northern Rhodesia Copperbelt*, 14.

<sup>14</sup> Robert, *Le Katanga physique*, 101; Coleman, *Northern Rhodesia Copperbelt*, 9; Perrings, *Black mineworkers*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> The first administrative council of the UMHK was composed of five British representatives, all of whom were attached to the TCL, and five Belgians. See Brion & Moreau, *De la mine à Mars*, 74-5.

<sup>16</sup> Until World War I, the main language of communication in Elisabethville was English. Between 1907 and 1911, the Company even had two European headquarters: a head office in Brussels, where the Belgian senior management met, and a 'technical committee' in London. See White, 'Class struggle and cannibalism', 275; Bruce Fetter, 'L'Union Minière du Haut-Katanga 1920-1940, La naissance d'une sous-culture totalitaire' *Cahiers du CEDAF*, 6 (1973), 4.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Williams, 'The Cape to Cairo Railway', 253; Hance, William A. & Irene S. Van Dongen, 'The Port of Lobito and the Benguela Railway' *Geographical Review*, 46, no. 4 (1956): 466.

Southern African line was extended and reached Elisabethville in 1910. Henceforward, the Katanga mines imported coal and coke from a colliery just south of Victoria Falls, while their copper was exported via Rhodesia Railways to the Mozambican coast.<sup>18</sup> The profits generated through the use of the Southern African railway were reportedly the means by which the *British South Africa Company* was able to survive at all. In August 1931, Sir Robert Williams remarked:

Dr Jameson, when he asked me after Rhodes's death to try to get a connection for the Rhodesia Railways to the Katanga mines, told me that unless I got this, the Chartered Company would go into liquidation as that Company, of which Dr Jameson was then the president, was losing £300,000 per annum under its guarantee of interest to the Rhodesian Debenture Holders.<sup>19</sup>

In this way a mutually beneficial relationship was developed between Katanga and its southern neighbour. Katanga got the initial investment and capital that it needed while the Northern Rhodesian economy was kept afloat. However, given the context of severe imbalanced dual power in Katanga, it was not long before tension between Belgian and British settlers escalated within the province in general and the UMHK in particular. By the end of the First World War, Anglophobia was rife in Elisabethville, allowing Belgium to pursue a policy of 'nationalisation' of its industry<sup>20</sup> thanks to which, by the early 1920s, Brussels had finally and definitively come to replace London as the source of capital for the development of the Katangese Copperbelt. The *Tanganyika Concessions* had by then become little more than a holding company and the combination of British entrepreneurship and capital that had been so vital in the early years had lost its importance.<sup>21</sup> Yet, the UMHK, and the Katangese copper industry in general, could not break away completely from its English-speaking neighbour. For one thing, if British presence in the UMHK directorate was diminished it was by no means eradicated. British money kept flowing in and out of the Union Minière and British directors sat on the board until as late as the 1960s.<sup>22</sup> For yet another thing, the two territories were to continue to be economically interdependent for a while still, not least in terms of infrastructure (of which the railway was the principal element) but also in terms of *labour* and *trade*.

## Migrant Labour

### A Rhodesian Workforce for Katanga (1910-1925)

Around the time when initial prospecting was starting to decline in Northern Rhodesia, it became increasingly clear that, worse than not being lucrative, there was also a danger that the colony might not even be self-sufficient. At the end of his lengthy 1899 report on the Anglo-

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<sup>18</sup> Ian Henderson, *Labour and politics in Northern Rhodesia, 1900-1953: A study in the limits of colonial power*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1972, 57; Roberts, *A history of Zambia*, 177; Robert, *Le Katanga physique*, 103-104; Coleman, *The Northern Rhodesia Copperbelt*, 12; Williams, 'The Cape to Cairo Railway', 253.

<sup>19</sup> Coleman, *The Northern Rhodesia Copperbelt*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Between 1917 and 1920 many non-Belgians were successfully uprooted from their position of power in Katanga thanks to the constant campaign of opposition waged by the local Belgian settler community. This process was made all the easier by the fact that the Belgian franc declined in relation to the pound sterling after the war making London less keen to invest in Belgian ventures. See Fetter, *The creation of Elisabethville*, chapter 4 and Robert, *Le Katanga physique*, 110-113.

<sup>21</sup> Fetter, *The creation of Elisabethville*, 75-78.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew Hughes, 'Fighting for white rule in Africa: The Central African Federation, Katanga, and the Congo Crisis, 1958-1965' *The International History Review*, 25, no. 3 (2003), 595.

German boundary, C.F. Close remarked that, though some parts of North East Rhodesia on the Lower Zambezi river (well south of the boundary with the Belgian Congo) were fertile, the plateau region between the lakes where the boundary ran was a 'remote, unhealthy, unprofitable country', adding that 'it is unlikely, unless the native population largely increases in the next generation, that the country will be able to pay for its own administration'.<sup>23</sup> Fifteen years later, in his official report on the Anglo-Belgian boundary commission, I. Walker made a similar point:

One can only hope that when N.E. Rhodesia is fully opened up to prospectors and exploration, minerals (above all tin) will be discovered in workable quantities, for without this incentive to progress, this country will remain a backwater of empire for several years to come.<sup>24</sup>

Walker's comment turned out to be very insightful. From 1900 to the mid-1920s, Northern Rhodesia was acted upon as an appendage to its southern counterpart. If Northern Rhodesia was not to be another Katanga, there was only one economic function for it to perform: to serve as a labour reserve for the expanding mines of southern Rhodesia.<sup>25</sup> There is little doubt that one of the principle aims of the three shillings hut tax, introduced in the first years of the twentieth century, was to manipulate the Northern Rhodesian population into engaging in migrant labour.<sup>26</sup> Since opportunities for employment within Northern Rhodesia were scarce, Northern Rhodesians had few options to pay their tax but to engage in wage labour outside the territory.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time as this was being implemented in Northern Rhodesia, Katangese mines went into function and were – rather conveniently – in dire need of labour. The labour policy in Katanga was to copy the South African model in which workers would typically stay for a period of 6 to 9 months and then be replaced by new recruits. The success of such a scheme presupposed the comparative proximity of dense population clusters. Therein lay the rub. For not only was there no transportation means or set routes that could carry potential recruits to the mines, but Katanga was also much less populated than South Africa.<sup>28</sup> In 1912, at the time when mining in Katanga was entering its industrial phase, Katanga was described as '[une terre] inhabitée, sans ressource aucune au point de vue main-d'œuvre et ravitaillement'.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the region was still bearing the scars left by the era of the Congo Free State, as was noted in 1928 by the Northern Rhodesian Department of Native Affairs:

In the Congo the main difficulties are (1) scarcity of native population (2) extreme difficulty experienced in persuading the male natives to come out as wage earners in industry. The reluctance to work for Europeans, it can safely be said, was caused by the ruthless methods practiced in the early days of the

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<sup>23</sup> Confidential Report C. F. Close, 24 January 1899, FO 64/1549 (NAZ), p.35, as quoted in Donaldson, *Marking territory*, 136.

<sup>24</sup> Report by I. Walker on the Anglo-Belgian Boundary Commission, 1914, RC/609 (NAZ).

<sup>25</sup> Henderson, *Labour and politics in Northern Rhodesia*, 12; Jane, Parpart, *Labor and capital on the African Copperbelt* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1983), 16.

<sup>26</sup> The Hut Tax was enforced in 1901 in the East of Northern Rhodesia and in 1905 in the West. See Bruce Fetter, *Colonial rule and regional imbalance Central Africa* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), 89, 147.

<sup>27</sup> Roberts, *A history of Zambia*, 177.

<sup>28</sup> Fetter, 'L'Union Minière du Haut-Katanga', 12; Edward Clegg, *Race and politics: Partnership in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (London: Oxford UP, 1960), 39.

<sup>29</sup> 'An uninhabited territory without any resource at all in terms of labour and foodstuffs'. See Rapport sur L'Union Minière du Haut Katanga by Jules Jadot, Mars 1 1912, AGR, UM I, 963 as quoted in Brion & Moreau, *De la mine à Mars*, 81.

Congo Free State to exploit the rubber trade (...) The rubber trade is also responsible to a great extent for the sparseness of the population.<sup>30</sup>

For want of any viable alternative, the UMHK started to look towards Northern Rhodesia for the recruitment of its workforce.<sup>31</sup> For this purpose, a subsidiary called the *Robert Williams & Co.*, was formed. *Robert Williams & Co.*'s recruiters, using Fort Rosebery (now Mansa) as a base, set up an efficient recruitment system, concentrating in the area in Northern Rhodesia within 200 miles of Katanga's capital city, Elisabethville. In the early years, the *Robert Williams & Co.* was the sole provider of labour in Katanga, supplying all the requirements of the UMHK's three centres of operations – Ruwe, Kambove and the Star of the Congo – as well as a portion of the company's portage requirements.<sup>32</sup>

This, however, was the source of some concern for the BSAC, which seemed to resent the fact that Katanga was diverting some of the labour that could have been sent southwards to support the development of Southern Rhodesia.<sup>33</sup> According to Charles Perrings the bans against outward migration and labour recruitment that were enforced in 1905, ostensibly in response to the sleeping sickness epidemic in the Luapula valley, were in fact part of an attempt to place 'an embargo on the shipment of all labour from North-Eastern Rhodesia to Katanga'.<sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately, the closure of the border was less effective a check on African mobility than the BSAC would have liked.<sup>35</sup> By December, the acting administrator was describing the closure of the river as a 'dead letter', arguing that the 'popularity' of the Katanga mines was such, due to their geographical proximity, that no system of patrol could be effective. 'So long as the natives have no other lawful sphere of labour', he went on, 'they will evade the restrictions on their movements'.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, in Katanga, though a new recruiting agency called the *Bourse du Travail du Katanga* (BTK) had been launched in 1910, it was unable to round up enough recruits to meet the stringent needs of a territory undergoing an industrial and commercial boom.<sup>37</sup> These circumstances made it increasingly obvious to both BSAC and UMHK that a compromise had to be found. A conference was consequently held at Fort Rosebery in October 1910 where the North-Eastern Rhodesian administration agreed to permit the controlled flow of labour on the Luapula, on the condition that the *Robert Williams & Co.* retained control of recruiting operations inside North-Eastern Rhodesia.<sup>38</sup> Further agreements were reached in May 1911, establishing that Northern Rhodesian workers had to return home at the end of their

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<sup>30</sup> Northern Rhodesia Department of Native Affairs in Livingstone to Chief Secretary, 22 December 1928, SEC1/1472, Doc.1A (NAZ).

<sup>31</sup> Perrings, *Black mineworkers*, 14.

<sup>32</sup> Brion & Moreau, *De la mine à Mars*, 81; Fetter, *The creation of Elisabethville*, 39.

<sup>33</sup> Perrings, *Black mineworkers*, 15.

<sup>34</sup> Perrings, *Black mineworkers*, 15-16. See Chapter 2 for the measures enforced to fight the spread of the disease.

<sup>35</sup> David M. Gordon, *Nachituti's gift: Economy, society and environment in Central Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 70.

<sup>36</sup> Acting Administrator of North-East Rhodesia to the Office of the BSAC in London, December 18 1908 as quoted Perrings, *Black mineworkers*, 17.

<sup>37</sup> Brion & Moreau, *De la mine à Mars*, 81.

<sup>38</sup> In exchange for allowing the Robert Williams & Co. to recruit freely in Northern Rhodesia, the North Rhodesian administration requested that the recruits should 'cross the Luapula at Kalonga and proceed via Ndola and thence by rail', that they should be 'medically examined first in the district where engaged and again at Ndola' to avoid the spreading of sleeping sickness, and that no Northern Rhodesian should enter Katanga voluntarily without a 'permit'. See L. A. Wallace, North Western Rhodesia Administrator's office, Livingstone, to the Vice Governor General, Elisabethville, 26 January 1911, M.O.I. A.34, 3551, Liasse 46 (Brussels African Archives).

terms (six months renewable for six more). Then, finally, in a supplementary agreement reached in 1913, the Katanga government agreed to the posting of a permanent Inspector of Rhodesian Labour at the 'Star of the Congo' mine.<sup>39</sup>

By 1920, despite a short drawback towards the end of the First World War (when Northern Rhodesia closed its border temporarily because of the pitiful quality of the labour camps in Katanga<sup>40</sup>), labour migration routes were well established and the volume of the movements along them had increased. The Rhodesians had built themselves a reputation in Katanga for their reliability and resilience and their accumulated experience was a growing asset.<sup>41</sup> Their accommodation was better than those of the Katangese from the surrounding area, and since they were paid in sterling rather than depreciating Belgian francs, they also enjoyed greater buying power.<sup>42</sup> The number of Northern Rhodesians in Katanga grew steadily over the years<sup>43</sup> with a particularly dramatic and sudden increase in 1920 and 1921 (probably related to a rise in hut tax in 1920<sup>44</sup>): In February 1919, there were 1,301 Northern Rhodesian natives employed by Union Minière. By January 1920 there were 5,752, and by January 1921, 5,983. In 1920 and 1921, Northern Rhodesians represented more than half of the Union Minière's workforce.<sup>45</sup> The vast majority of the Northern Rhodesian recruits came from the Luapula area (the Awemba and Tanganyika Districts) in North-East Rhodesia. In December 1921, out of the 1,290 Rhodesian recruits that arrived that month, 1,069 came from North-East Rhodesia (158 came from Barotseland and 63 from other areas).<sup>46</sup> North-East Rhodesia had poor soils, was infested with tsetse flies, which hampered both agriculture and cattle husbandry, and had little to offer in terms of employment opportunities.<sup>47</sup> It is not surprising therefore that Luapulans soon flocked to the advantageously located Katangese mines to the point of forming the largest part of the UMHK's Rhodesian workforce.

From the mid-1920s, however, there was increased evidence that this *status quo* would not be sustainable. For one thing, Rhodesian recruits, despite their growing numbers, proved insufficient to palliate the difficulties in recruiting local labour and satisfy the ever-growing need for labour of a fast industrialising region. By the end of 1924, the Governor General of the Belgian Congo, Martin Rutten, warned the Minister of the Colonies that 'a labour crisis was fast developing', particularly alarmingly so in Katanga because of the 'impuissance où est l'Union Minière du Katanga de

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<sup>39</sup> Fetter, *The creation of Elisabethville*, 39-41.

<sup>40</sup> Report of the Inspector of Rhodesian Natives in the Katanga for February 1919, 28 April 1919, HC/1/3/53, Tag.1140, Loc.286, Doc. 1053/19, (NAZ).

<sup>41</sup> Henderson, *Labour and politics in Northern Rhodesia*, 46.

<sup>42</sup> Fetter, *The creation of Elisabethville*, 81-85.

<sup>43</sup> See Reports of the Inspector of Rhodesian Natives in the Katanga for February 1919 (HC/1/3/53, Tag.1140, Loc.286, 1053/19 28 April 1919); for January 1920 (A4/1/3, Tag.824, Loc.209, Doc. 80, 27 April 1920); for January 1921 (A4/1/3, Tag.824-Loc.209, Doc. 101, 18 April 1921).

<sup>44</sup> Fetter, *The creation of Elisabethville*, 81.

<sup>45</sup> In his 1972 PhD thesis, Ian Henderson, based on the reports of the Inspector of Rhodesian Natives, calculated that workers of Northern Rhodesian origins went from representing 34% of the UMHK workforce in 1917 (with 1661 workers) to representing 56 % in 1921 (with 5548 workers). Numbers dropped the following year (2177 workers, i.e. 33% of the UMHK workforce) but went up again in 1923 (4267 workers, i.e. 43% of the UMHK workforce. See Henderson, *Labour and politics in Northern Rhodesia*, 47.

<sup>46</sup> Report of the Inspector of Rhodesian Natives in the Katanga for December 1920, 7 March 1921, A4/1/3, Tag.824-Loc.209, Doc. 99.

<sup>47</sup> The Luapula supply areas, i.e. the great plateau of North-Eastern Rhodesia along the Luapula between Lake Mweru and Bangweolu, comprised the Bemba, Bisa, Mambwe, Iwa, Namwanga, Lungu, Ushi, Chisinga, Ngumbo and Eastern Lunda peoples. See Henderson, *Labour and politics in Northern Rhodesia*, 42-44; Perrings, *Black mineworkers*, 14-15; Giacomo Macola, *The Kingdom of Kazembe, history and politics in North-Eastern Zambia and Katanga to 1950* (Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 2002), 215.

maintenir ses effectifs ouvriers à la hauteur de ses besoins'.<sup>48</sup> This crisis, he went on, would not be an easy one to resolve because at its heart lay a basic conundrum:

Plus s'accroîtra l'occupation économique, plus se développeront les voies de transport, plus s'échelonneront le long de celles-ci les exploitations commerciales, agricoles, industrielles, petites ou grandes, plus deviendront précaires les conditions d'existence des grosses entreprises qui doivent recruter leur main d'œuvre au loin parce que fatalement elles verront se rétrécir de plus en plus le champ de leurs recrutements et cela en même temps que leurs besoins augmenteront.<sup>49</sup>

In another letter dated 25 July of the same year, the same Rutten pointed at another growing concern, common among industrialists and administrators in Katanga. Though there was little choice but to employ foreign labour as long as Katangese transportation means and routes were not better developed, the combined effect of the escalating need for labour and the almost exclusive reliance on foreign labour constituted a dangerous sword of Damocles for the Katangese industry:

Il y a des réalités qu'il faut savoir regarder en face : Le Katanga, c'est la grande industrie qui ne peut se développer, c'est à dire vivre, qu'en produisant toujours davantage. Pour cela il lui faut beaucoup de main d'œuvre, une main d'œuvre locale qui seule est assurée ; celle du dehors est précaire et se dérobera en nous ruinant dès que l'intérêt de concurrents voisins l'exigera.<sup>50</sup>

And indeed, by the mid-1920s, that prediction was slowly beginning to materialise. At the same time as labour scarcity was once more becoming increasingly problematic, the UMHK also gradually ceased to be the sole mining power in the region.

### **The Rise of the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt (1924-1931)**

Until the early 1920s, Britain's main concern had been to see that Northern Rhodesia was made to pay for its own upkeep, mostly through the export of labour.<sup>51</sup> However within a few years the situation changed unexpectedly and dramatically thanks to the growth of the automobile and electrical industries that followed the end of the First World War. These new industries engendered global demand for copper, considerably boosting copper prices. Towards the end of 1922, instead of granting individual prospecting licences, as it had previously done, the BSAC

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<sup>48</sup> 'The inability of the UMHK to maintain a large enough labour force to meet its needs'. See, Office of the Governor General of the Belgian Congo, M. Rutten, to the Minister of the Colonies, Boma, 2 December 1924, M.O.I. A 34, 3544, Liasse 3 (Brussels African Archives).

<sup>49</sup> 'The more economic activity expands, the more transportation routes are developed, the more commercial, agricultural and industrial exploitations, both small and large, spring up along them, the more precarious the conditions of existence of the large companies will be, which have to recruit their labour force from faraway places because they ineluctably see their recruiting sphere diminish at the same time as their needs increase'. Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> 'There are realities that need to be faced: Katanga is a large industry that can only expand, i.e. survive, by constantly producing more. To do this, it needs a large labour force, a local labour force which is the only one that is guaranteed; labour from outside is precarious and will evaporate, ruining us in the process, as soon as the interests of our neighbouring competitors will demand it'. See Governor General of the Belgian Congo to the Minister of the Colonies, 25 July 1924, M.O.I. A 34, 3562, Liasse 84 (Brussels African Archives).

<sup>51</sup> Roberts, *A history of Zambia*, 185; Parpart, *Labor and capital on the African Copperbelt*, 19.

began to grant exclusive prospecting rights to large mining concerns over extensive areas.<sup>52</sup> Two fish were hooked: A. Chester Beatty, a London-based mining financier whose holding company, *Selection Trust Ltd* provided some funds in 1920; and Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, founder of the *Anglo American Corporation*, who joined forces in 1924. New prospecting soon revealed large sulfide deposits containing copper at workable depths near Ndola close to the Belgian Congo border.<sup>53</sup> By 1930 four large new mines were being developed on the Copperbelt: Roan Antelope (Luanshya), Nkana (Kitwe), Mufulira and Nchanga (Chingola). The Rhodesian branch of Oppenheimer's *Anglo American Corporation* developed the Nchanga and Nkana mine, forming the *Rhokana Corporation Ltd* in 1931 to manage the latter. Beatty's *Selection Trust* incorporated the Roan Antelope and Mufulira mines in 1927 and 1930 respectively. In 1931, despite the worldwide Depression, Roan Antelope and Nkana went into production; Mufulira began producing in 1933; and a refinery was opened at Nkana in 1934. As a result, the value of exports increased spectacularly (five-fold) between 1930 and 1933.<sup>54</sup>

However, the newly formed Copperbelt companies were at first hard pressed to obtain sufficient African labour. One part of the problem lay in the fact that no local labour was available. As the Compound Manager of Nkana noted:

The Northern Rhodesia Copperbelt is a sparsely populated District, the supply of labour being totally inadequate to keep any large industry going and moreover the quality of the labour is very poor. It is therefore necessary to import labour from districts further afield.<sup>55</sup>

This lack of local labour meant that the Copperbelt mines had little choice but to engage in the migrant labour system. When they did so, however, they encountered stiff competition. Labour routes to other industrial centres had already been well established, having been trodden for two decades. In 1928 it was reported that some 15.7 % of the male population of Northern Rhodesia was working outside the territory, in the mines of Katanga, Southern Rhodesia, South Africa and even Tanganyika.<sup>56</sup> To counteract this trend, the Copperbelt companies adopted a series of strategies. In December 1925, they convinced the government of Northern Rhodesia to put an official limit on the number of Rhodesians allowed to work in Katanga.<sup>57</sup> In May 1929, representatives of the two main Copperbelt Companies met together with the governor of Ndola and agreed to establish a new labour bureau: the *Native Labour Association* and by 1931, the Association had 27 agents stationed at strategic points throughout the territory. In this way, the mines secured the major part of their labour force by recruiting in distant regions, usually east of the Fort Rosebery: the area favoured by Congo recruiters. To compete with them, Northern Rhodesian mines offered short contracts of 180 days' work, and of course, wages were also forced up considerably, as each mine tried to outbid the other, as well as the Union Minière.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Clegg, *Race and politics*, 37; Larry J. Butler, *Copper empire, mining and the colonial in Northern Rhodesia, c.1930-1964* (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008), 14; Coleman, *The Northern Rhodesia Copperbelt*, 32.

<sup>53</sup> Parpart, *Labor and capital on the African Copperbelt*, 20.

<sup>54</sup> Roberts, *A history of Zambia*, 186; Elena L. Berger, *Labour, race and colonial rule: The Copperbelt from 1924 to Independence*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 5-6.

<sup>55</sup> W.J. Schriviner (Compound Manager at Nkana), Report on Native Labour as Affecting the Copper Industry of Northern Rhodesia, 17 August 1934, SEC1/1293, Doc. 1 (NAZ).

<sup>56</sup> Northern Rhodesia Department of Native Affairs in Livingstone to Chief Secretary, 22 December 1928, SEC1/1472, Doc.1A (NAZ), 6.

<sup>57</sup> Fetter, 'L'Union Minière du Haut-Katanga', 18.

<sup>58</sup> Parpart, *Labor and capital on the African Copperbelt*, 33-34; Perrings, *Black mineworkers*, 93; Berger (1974): 13.

These strategies did know a measure of success. At the same time foreign labour, mainly from Nyasaland and Southern Rhodesia, was also increasingly attracted to the north. Early in 1927 there were about 8,500 workers on all the mines and concessions in the territory. At the end of 1928 the figure had risen to 16,073; to 22,341 at the end of 1929; to 29,689 at the end of 1930; and to a peak of 31,941 in September 1930.<sup>59</sup> However none of these measures succeeded in meeting the demands of the new mines and general labour scarcity endured. The companies struggled to offer conditions of employment comparable, or nearly comparable to those at neighbouring mines and there, as was noted by the Department of Native Affairs in 1928, lay the heart of the problem:

Our greatest and most serious problem is that the best of our labourers proceed to Southern Rhodesia, Congo Belge and even Tanganyika Territory in quest of employment in preference to working in our own territory because of the better conditions of employment and the better terms of wages offered them in these places. There is no reason to believe that this state of affairs will alter until employers in Northern Rhodesia pay the same wages as can be obtained elsewhere and conditions in respect of housing, feeding, medical treatment etc. are improved.<sup>60</sup>

Major G. St. J. Orde Browne, an expert on colonial labour policy, remarked in 1933 that the extent to which the African worker travelled and compared conditions of employment was not generally realised.<sup>61</sup> News travelled rapidly along the established labour routes, and conditions on the mines of Katanga, Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, as well as Tanganyika were well known. The general labour shortage of the 1920s in central Africa put skilled workers in a relatively good bargaining position in the labour market: jobs were plentiful and experienced workers in short supply. Northern Rhodesians knew they could change jobs easily, which they did, sometimes even before the end of their contracts.<sup>62</sup> The Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt, as the newcomer, found it particularly difficult to compete with industries that were better established and better 'stocked'.

It is no wonder therefore that when the Northern Rhodesian mines began construction in 1926, labourers did not flock to them. Katanga was a particularly tough act to follow, the standards of living of its mines having been described as 'positively amazing' by Orde Browne in 1929.<sup>63</sup> From 1926 on, to palliate the effects of the Northern Rhodesian government's decision to restrict the number of Northern Rhodesians in Katanga, the Union Minière had decided 'on an attempt to settle a native population on their properties and thus provide themselves with a permanent resident labour supply'.<sup>64</sup> From 1927, the UMHK began to enlist workers on three

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<sup>59</sup> Berger, *Labour, race and colonial rule*, 13; Parpart, *Labor and capital on the African Copperbelt*, 34.

<sup>60</sup> Northern Rhodesia Department of Native Affairs in Livingstone to Chief Secretary, 22 December 1928, SEC1/1472, Doc.1A (NAZ), 2.

<sup>61</sup> Granville St.J. Orde Browne, *The African labourer* (London: Oxford UP, 1933), 120.

<sup>62</sup> Very high rate of desertions were reported every month on both sides of the border. In the mine of Luishia in Katanga in particular, desertions were described as 'high' in Report of the Inspector of Rhodesian Natives in the Katanga for January 1921, 18 April 1921, A4/1/3, Tag.824, Loc.209, Doc. 101 (NAZ). In all the Northern Rhodesian mines, desertions were a regular occurrence. Berger, *Labour, race and colonial rule*, 13.

<sup>63</sup> Report by Labour Commissioner by Major G. St. J. Orde Browne on his Tour through the Belgian Congo and Angola, August 1929, SEC1/1472, Doc. 4, August 1929, Doc. 4 (NAZ).

<sup>64</sup> W. J. Schriviner (Compound Manager at Nkana), Report on Native Labour as Affecting the Copper Industry of Northern Rhodesia, 17 August 1934, SEC1/1293, Doc. 1 (NAZ), 4. The fact that Katanga mines were mostly open-cast mines meant that it was both possible and economical to use machinery on a large

year contracts and increasingly, though not exclusively, sought to attract men from within the Congo or Rwanda-Urundi.<sup>65</sup> In order to attract settled labour, a dramatic upgrading of African living conditions had been achieved by the end of the decade: the company built better houses and hospitals for employees and granted small salary increases and better food.<sup>66</sup> This made Katanga very attractive for Rhodesian workers and, even though the UMHK did indeed increasingly hire labour from within Congo, many Northern Rhodesians were still hired,<sup>67</sup> as is apparent from the UMHK recruiting statistics in the 1920s.

	<b>Belgian Congo</b>	<b>Northern Rhodesia</b> (North-East Rhodesia + Barotseland and Balovale)	<b>Ruanda-Urundi</b>	<b>Other Countries</b>
1922	3,395	3,332	-	651
1923	4,690	3,296	-	487
1924	6,003	5,586	-	528
1925	7,943	5,180	206	394
1926	8,522	3,058	1,353	779
1927	10,435	3,623	793	597
1928	9,888	4,196	1,273	633

*Table 1.* UMHK labour force nationalities statistics for the period 1922-1928<sup>68</sup>

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scale. This further enhanced the need for a skilled and stable workforce. It also meant that fewer workers were needed.

<sup>65</sup> In 1926 the government granted the company recruitment rights in the Maniema District of Orientale province as well as in the mandated territory of Ruanda-Urundi. In 1927 these rights were extended to three territories of the Lomami district: Kabinda, Tshofa and Kanda-Kanda. See Fetter, *The creation of Elisabethville*, 90.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 94. The then governor General had put particular emphasis on the upgrading of the workers' living conditions as part of an industrial strategy. 'Hygiène, éducation et instruction : tel doit être notre leit-motiv', he wrote in 1924. See, Office of the Governor General of the Belgian Congo, M. Rutten, to the Minister of the Colonies, 2 December 1924, M.O.I. A 34, 3544, Liasse 3 (Brussels African Archives).

<sup>67</sup> Parpart, *Labor and capital on the African Copperbelt*, 32; Fetter, 'L'Union Minière du Haut-Katanga', 32.

<sup>68</sup> UMHK Annual and Quaternary Reports for the years 1923, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1928. See References.

	Belgian Congo	Ruanda-Urundi	Other Countries
1929	9,432	2,528	4,664
1930	9,026	4,121	2,434
1931	6,866	2,316	866

Table 2. UMHK labour force nationalities statistics for the period 1929-1931<sup>69</sup>

Yet the total number of Rhodesians present in Katanga is likely to have been much larger than the number of UMHK employees may indicate. In 1924 J. P. McGregor, the British Vice-Consul in Elisabethville, estimated that his office looked after the interests of 10,000 Rhodesians when only half that number was reported to be working for the UMHK at the time.<sup>70</sup> There are several reasons for this discrepancy. First was the fact that the UMHK was not the sole employer in Katanga. The expansion of Katanga was paralleled in other industries and by 1924, industrial and commercial employment in Katanga outside the UMHK accounted for an average of 12,000 men.<sup>71</sup> In addition, Northern Rhodesians were also engaged in non-industrial wage labour. They worked as artisans, shopkeepers and, more importantly as 'houseboys' as it was 'a recognised fact that the Rhodesian natives are better servants. They are a pleasanter type and are better mannered, though their manners soon deteriorate after they have been a little time in the Congo'.<sup>72</sup> As late as 1929, the total number of Rhodesian male natives employed in Katanga as a whole was 'estimated approximately at 11000 or 12000' when only a few thousands were reportedly employed by the UMHK (see tables 1 and 2).<sup>73</sup> Another element that explains the sudden increase in Northern Rhodesian presence in Katanga was the fact that, in 1923, the *Union Minière du Haut-Katanga* decided to allow labour recruits to bring their wives and families to the mining townships, arguing that a man accompanied by his wife was more likely to be contented and consequently would both stay longer and be a better worker.<sup>74</sup> In 1929, therefore, despite restrictions enforced by both Katangese and Northern Rhodesian authorities, the Northern Rhodesian community in Katanga had remained large, representing 37.5% of the population in the UMHK's compounds of the Elisabethville area and 44% of the population of the Elisabethville district as a whole.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>69</sup> UMHK Annual and Quaternary Reports for the years 1929, 1930, 1931. See References.

<sup>70</sup> Henderson, *Labour and politics in Northern Rhodesia*, 70.

<sup>71</sup> The major part was employed by the railways but others were also employed by more recent undertakings such as the *Charbonnages de Luena*, the *Société Coloniale de Construction*, the *Société Belge Industrielle et Minière du Katanga* and the *Société Ciments du Katanga*. See Perrings, *Black mineworkers*, 49.

<sup>72</sup> Report on Rhodesian Natives in Katanga, 22 October 1929, SEC1/1472, Doc. 6 (NAZ), 4.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>74</sup> W. J. Schriviner (Compound Manager at Nkana), Report on Native Labour as Affecting the Copper Industry of Northern Rhodesia, 17 August 1934, SEC1/1293, Doc.1 (NAZ), 3.

<sup>75</sup> Fetter, *The creation of Elisabethville*, 99.

## The Change in the Direction of Labour Migration (1931-1940)

By the time Northern Rhodesian copper entered the world market in 1931, the onset of a severe depression dramatically reduced the price and demand for copper. In copper mining, the Depression years were 1929 to 1936, with copper prices starting to fall in mid-1930 and hitting bottom in 1932.<sup>76</sup> Mining companies in both southern Katanga and Northern Rhodesia reacted to the slump in copper prices by curtailing production and reducing the size of their labour force. Recruitment for the Katanga mines in Northern Rhodesia, which had already been decreasing for some years, came to a final end on July 31, 1931. In addition more than two-thirds of the UMHK workforce was laid off – the labour force was reduced from 16,000 to less than 5,000 Africans between 1930 and 1932 – with the Northern Rhodesians being especially targeted.<sup>77</sup> The number of Northern Rhodesians settled in Katanga drastically reduced from an approximated population of 20,000 in 1929 to an approximated population of 7,200 in 1932.<sup>78</sup> In the meantime, due to the combined effect of the Depression and the repatriation of Northern Rhodesia-born miners from the Congo, workers started to flock in the Northern Rhodesian mines in such numbers that the latter were able to disband recruitment in 1932.<sup>79</sup> What had been the companies' dearest hope just a year or two before, now was almost an inconvenience as there were more voluntaries than the Northern Rhodesian mines could realistically accommodate. In addition, the Depression was eventually to close all of the Northern Rhodesian mines except Roan Antelope and Nkana, and even these two remaining mines sharply scaled back production.<sup>80</sup> African employees on the mines, which had hit a peak of 31,941 at the height of the construction boom in September 1930, dropped to 6,677 at the end of 1932.<sup>81</sup> Gradually, however, the Depression lifted and the mines began to recover. Mufulira reopened in October 1933 and production facilities expanded at all three major mines.<sup>82</sup> As the world moved towards war for the second time, the demand for copper rose and prices followed accordingly.<sup>83</sup> From then on the Copperbelt enjoyed a phase of sustained growth thanks to which Northern Rhodesia was firmly established as one of the world's major copper producers by 1945. Accordingly, between 1935 and 1941, employment on the mines rose from 13,734 to 27,602, which was still a few thousand less than it had been at its peak in 1930. This reflected the vastly increased scale of operations at Mufulira, the reopening of Nchanga, and significant expansion at both Roan Antelope and Nchanga.<sup>84</sup> At the same time, there were substantial improvements in underground conditions, so that in many mines the conditions in which men worked improved and remuneration for skilled labour increased, bringing about an era of increased stabilisation in the workforce.<sup>85</sup>

Yet, despite the seemingly clear-cut situation that has just been presented, it is, in fact, difficult to ascertain the precise timing of changes in the direction of labour migration at this time. It is

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<sup>76</sup> Prices dropped precipitously from £112.635s per ton in 1929 to £27.25s per ton in February 1932. See White, 'Class struggle and cannibalism', 282; Parpart, *Labor and capital on the African Copperbelt*, 21.

<sup>77</sup> Fetter, *The creation of Elisabethville*, 123; Fetter, 'L'Union Minière du Haut-Katanga', 153; Perrings, *Black mineworkers*, 101; Roberts, *A history of Zambia*, 191.

<sup>78</sup> Report on Rhodesian Natives in the Katanga by the Acting British Vice Consul in Elisabethville as at December 31<sup>st</sup> 1932, 15 February 1933, SEC2/165, Doc. 18 (NAZ).

<sup>79</sup> Patrick O. Ohadike, *Development of and factors in the employment of African migrants in the copper mines of Zambia* (Manchester: Manchester UP [for] University of Zambia, Institute for Social Research, 1969), 1.

<sup>80</sup> Coleman, *The Northern Rhodesia Copperbelt*, 66.

<sup>81</sup> Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity*, 50; Ohadike (1969):1.

<sup>82</sup> Parpart, *Labor and capital on the African Copperbelt*, 21.

<sup>83</sup> Coleman, *The Northern Rhodesia Copperbelt*, 143.

<sup>84</sup> Ohadike, *Development of and ractors in the employment of African migrants*, 1.

<sup>85</sup> White, 'Class struggle and cannibalism', 283.

even more difficult to assess its significance. Blurring the picture is the fact that official data on migrant labour for that period is sorely lacking. The Northern Rhodesian government, which was only interested in labour in as much as it permitted the laws of supply and demand to operate freely, was insulated from the realities of labour conditions until the first Copperbelt strike broke out in 1935, and even then it took an additional few years before anything happened to change this state of affairs.<sup>86</sup> Orde Browne, attempting to analyse labour conditions in Northern Rhodesia in 1938, found that labour problems had been ignored in government annual reports: 'Statistics of the movement of natives, analyses of contract, records of court cases under industrial legislation and similar particulars, are not to be found: wider aspects of the problem are hardly mentioned'.<sup>87</sup> This haze of ignorance is a major handicap in attempting to quantify and analyse African labour before 1940. Henderson summarises the labour movements of the 1930s as follows:

If it is possible to generalise about the wage-labour activities of Africans in the 1920s and 1930s, one might say that labour migration continued unabated and uncontrolled by the government. The direction of the migration changed, but the volume continued unchanged except by the economic slump of 1931-33.<sup>88</sup>

Henderson adds however that the exact number of ex-Katanga mineworkers who went directly to the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt remains an 'open question'.<sup>89</sup> It is likely that the new market provided by the Copperbelt was seen as a potential life-belt by many of them, especially the inhabitants of the Luapula, who depended heavily on copper mining. In 1930, only 1,620 (or 25%) of the 6,420 voluntary mineworkers from Mweru-Luapula Province were estimated to have proceeded to southern Katanga while all the others were said to have proceeded to the Copperbelt.<sup>90</sup> The fact that the Northern Rhodesian government stayed largely unconcerned with labour issues until 1935 also meant that the composition and provincial origins of the original Copperbelt labour force is obscure. The fact that as many as 60% of the able-bodied Bemba men aged from 15 to 45 were reported to be away from their villages in 1931 seems to indicate that they constituted the bulk of the unskilled labour force.<sup>91</sup> Nyasaland also supplied a large number of workers.<sup>92</sup>

As for the Rhodesian presence in Katanga, it would be wrong to think that it was wiped out. Many Northern Rhodesians remained in Katanga throughout the 1930s. In 1933, though their number in the UMHK workforce had gone down so much that it became almost insignificant (there were 230 Rhodesian *and* Nyasaland natives employed by the UMHK at that time<sup>93</sup>), it was also reported that:

There are some 3,000 male Rhodesian natives employed in the town itself, practically, if not all, domestic servants and office boys are Rhodesian. In addition there are between 350 and 450 Rhodesian natives who have settled in the villages round the town as market gardeners. They rent the ground from the

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<sup>86</sup> Henderson, *Labour and politics in Northern Rhodesia*, 68.

<sup>87</sup> G. St.J. Orde Browne, *Labour conditions*, para. 6, as quoted in Henderson, *Labour and politics in Northern Rhodesia*, 69.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

<sup>90</sup> Macola, *The Kingdom of Kazembe*, 215.

<sup>91</sup> Coleman, *The Northern Rhodesia Copperbelt*, 65.

<sup>92</sup> Henderson, *Labour and politics in Northern Rhodesia*, 72

<sup>93</sup> Report on Rhodesian Natives in the Katanga by the Acting British Vice Consul in Elisabethville as at December 31<sup>st</sup> 1932, 15 February 1933, SEC2/165, Doc. 18 (NAZ).

Comité spécial and sell their produce in Elisabethville at the market which is held twice a week.<sup>94</sup>

This said, it is undeniable that there was net decline in Northern Rhodesian population and that the lives of those who chose to remain were becoming increasingly difficult. The Rhodesians remaining on the mines – now representing only 5% of the workforce – were reportedly ‘mainly skilled or trained workmen who have long periods of service with the Union Minière behind them and who have been retained for this reason’.<sup>95</sup> For the rest of the Northern Rhodesians, those who were unemployed, independent workers, or who for whatever reason were not as immovable as the qualified miners, life in Katanga was markedly more uncertain. Belgian administrators attempted to pursue the same policy as the UMHK of reducing foreign presence in the native towns. Workers were expelled if they remained unemployed for more than a month. To cope with this situation, many jobless married men sent their families back to the villages, and many left Katanga altogether.<sup>96</sup> Yet, the fact that there had been a Northern Rhodesian presence in Katanga for two decades made sure that there would be a significant number of Northern Rhodesians ‘visitors’, as workers would regularly come and gauge their working possibilities. In 1930-31 alone, the British Vice Consulate in Elisabethville registered 4,480 Northern Rhodesian men who left Katanga, while 3,652 new arrivals took their place.<sup>97</sup> The exact fluctuation in volume of Northern Rhodesian ‘visits’ is difficult to ascertain but their numbers reportedly went from 110 in 1931 to 1,335 in 1932.<sup>98</sup> Even where numbers are lacking, the evidence of cultural exchange attests to the volume of cross-border migration. Religious movements, witch-finding movements, and new dance fads crossed the border regularly.<sup>99</sup> Particularly telling is the ease with which Kitawala (or Watchtower), a millenarian movement widespread in Southern Africa, penetrated Katangese circles to the dismay of the colonial administration. Conditions of insecurity and economic distress and the constant threat of expulsion made Northern Rhodesians particularly receptive to Kitawala teachings.<sup>100</sup> Even more revealing is the ease with which rumours spread across borders. Luise White offers a detailed study of how one such rumour relating to vampire men (known as *banyamas* in Northern Rhodesia and as *batumbula* in the Congo) gained momentum in both Copperbelts between 1930 and 1964. Following stories of ‘mysterious’ disappearances, strangers, European doctors, corpulent administrators, prospectors, surveyors and tourists were all highly suspected of being *banyamas*. In her *Speaking with Vampires*, White not only shows how these stories were to a large extent a symptom of the ‘mood’ of dissatisfaction and confusion among the African population in a period of deep economic recession, but she also points out how these stories, which were widespread in an area encompassing Katanga and all of the former BSAC territories, were also extremely similar in the way they were told and the elements that they comprised.<sup>101</sup> The prevalence, pervasiveness and similarity of these stories are another indicator of the extent to which people penetrated colonial borders at the time.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Fetter, *The creation of Elisabethville*, 126-127.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Report on Rhodesian Natives in the Katanga by the Acting British Vice Consul in Elisabethville as at December 31<sup>st</sup> 1932, 15 February 1933, SEC2/165, Doc. 18 (NAZ).

<sup>99</sup> White, ‘Class struggle and cannibalism’, 276.

<sup>100</sup> For a detailed study of the development and impact of the Kitawala movement in Katanga and Southern Africa, see Higginson, John, ‘Liberating the captives: Independent watchtower as an avatar of colonial revolt in Southern Africa and Katanga, 1908-1941’ *Journal of Social History*, 26, no. 1 (1992).

<sup>101</sup> See White, ‘Class struggle and cannibalism’ and Mwelwa C. Musambachime, ‘The impact of rumor: The case of the Banyama (Vampire Men) Scare in Northern Rhodesia, 1930-1964’ *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 21, no. 2 (1988).

## Trade and Markets

In the wake of the burgeoning mining industry, another catalyst for migration and economic interdependence received an enormous boost: trade. Trade was not a colonial innovation. The fact that trade predates the establishment of the copper industry is well supported by archaeological and literary evidence. Both point to the existence, from at least the beginning of the second millennium, of extended regional trade systems thanks to which subsistence and prestige goods – not least among which was *copper* – travelled widely. As for the ravages of the infamous trade in ivory, slaves and rubber that peaked in the late nineteenth century, they too are well known and documented.<sup>102</sup> Yet these types of trade, extensive though they might have been, were of a different kind than the large-scale, institutionalised and wide-ranging marketing that developed in the Copperbelt in the early twentieth century. The latter came about as a direct result of the creation of large clusters of population that were entirely dependent on rations or marketed food.<sup>103</sup> In other words, the growth and development of large-scale trade in African foodstuff in the Copperbelt was a by-product of industrialisation and urbanisation.

### Feeding Katanga: An Alternative to Migrant Labour

Despite their (eventual) economic expansion, neither Katanga nor Northern Rhodesia were renowned for the diversity of their economy. In a regional survey carried out in 1960, the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt was described as ‘a compact economic oasis with seven springs, surrounded by a most extensive economic desert’.<sup>104</sup> Agriculture was particularly underdeveloped. Only very few areas of Northern Rhodesia were made use of to produce some international market-oriented crops; tobacco was grown in the east of the country, in the Fort Jameson (Chipata) area, and small amounts of coffee were produced by plantation agriculture in the Abercorn area (Mbala) in the north-east.<sup>105</sup> So if Northern Rhodesia was used as a labour reservoir, it was considered to have little chance of becoming a grain one. And yet, for a while, it came to play just that role for the mines of Katanga.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, the newly opened mines of Katanga were in great need of large quantities of foodstuffs to feed their new workforce. However the mining area of the Haut-Katanga, a high-plateau area (1,200 to 1,800 metres) with sandy soils, did not *a priori* offer favourable conditions for agriculture.<sup>106</sup> Southern Katanga in general, though it did contain small strips of fertile land, was characterised by what Bogumil Jewsiewicki calls ‘a near-absence of extensive areas capable of supporting large-scale mechanised agriculture’.<sup>107</sup> The

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<sup>102</sup> See Jan Vansina, ‘Long-distance trade-routes in Central Africa’ *The Journal of African History*, 3, no. 3 (1962); Richard Gray & David Birmingham, ‘Some economic and political consequences of trade in Central and Eastern Africa in the pre-colonial period’ in Richard Gray & David Birmingham (eds.), *Pre-colonial trade: Essays on trade in Central and Eastern Africa before 1900* (London: Oxford UP, 1970); Pierre De Maret, ‘Sanga: New excavations, more data and some related problems’ *The Journal of African History*, 18, no. 3 (1977).

<sup>103</sup> Vellut, Jean-Luc, ‘Rural poverty in Western Shaba, c.1890-1930’ in Robin H. Palmer & Neil Parsons (eds.), *The roots of rural poverty in central and Southern Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1977), 301.

<sup>104</sup> Special Commissioner to Ministry of Land and Natural Resources in Ndola, Report on a Regional Survey of the Copperbelt, 1 February 1960, WP1/2/64, Doc. 19 (NAZ).

<sup>105</sup> Clegg, *Race and politics*, 36; Henderson, *Labour and politics in Northern Rhodesia*, 12.

<sup>106</sup> Robert, *Le Katanga physique*, 140.

<sup>107</sup> Bogumil, Jewsiewicki, ‘Unequal development: Capitalism and the Katanga economy, 1919-1940’ in Robin H. Palmer & Neil Parsons (eds.), *The roots of rural poverty in central and Southern Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1977), 318.

nearest areas with agricultural potential were the Kamalondo plain in the north along the Lualaba River and the Luapula-Moëro (Mweru) plain in the north-east. These, however, in the absence of river routes or railways, were too difficult to reach.<sup>108</sup> Eventually, after several measures taken to deal with this problem locally, such as the attempt to build up a substantial European farming community,<sup>109</sup> proved unsuccessful, it became imperative to find new food-supplying areas. One of the most immediate candidates was Northern Rhodesia. Northern Rhodesia had means of transportation, and since the Katangese mines were already tapping into Northern Rhodesian labour reserves, it was not much of a stretch to include foodstuffs into the deal as well. Accordingly, in March 1911, *Robert Williams & Co.* concluded a major agreement with the firm of *King and Werner* in North-Western Rhodesia, under which the latter was contracted to supply the mines with the bulk of their requirements of both grain and beef.<sup>110</sup> These were, for the most part, raised by white immigrants, mainly Afrikaners from South Africa, who had begun to settle in Northern Rhodesia in the years that followed the Boer War. They were strung out along the railway that ran from Livingstone to Broken Hill, which happened to run through a tsetse-free and relatively fertile belt. The Katanga market expanded rapidly after the railway reached Elisabethville in 1910. Between 1911 and 1915, the white farmers of Northern Rhodesia were supplying most of the foodstuffs – cattle and maize – that fed the miners in Katanga.<sup>111</sup> In turn, Katanga, though it never represented a very large market (exports to it from Northern Rhodesia averaged about 50,000 bags per year in 1911-15 and peaked at around 100,000 in 1927), became the main outlet for all Northern Rhodesian producers for nearly two decades.<sup>112</sup> A prominent settler commented in 1913 that the Katanga mines had been ‘the saviour of this country; but for them I don’t know what would have become of us’.<sup>113</sup>

Africans too produced foodstuffs for Katanga, especially in the region where – incidentally – the bulk of the Katanga Rhodesian labour force came from: the Luapula. The Mweru-Luapula region emerged as an important food supply area for the same reason that it emerged as an important labour supply area: its geographical proximity to the growing industrial sites of Katanga.<sup>114</sup> Fish, in particular, became the winning asset of the Mweru-Luapula. The Mweru-Luapula had no shortage of water, hosting or being adjacent to three lakes (Lake Mweru, Lake Tanganyika and Lake Bangweolu), two rivers (the Luapula River and the Kafue River) and the Lukanga swamps. The volume of trade between the lower Luapula valley and the Katangese mining towns increased substantially between 1912 and 1915.<sup>115</sup> By 1927, the urban population of southern Katanga – the main market for Luapulan fish throughout the colonial era – seems to have consumed ‘some 500 tons of fish worth £5,000 and nearly the same quantity of native flour

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<sup>108</sup> Jewsiewicki, ‘Unequal development’, 318-321.

<sup>109</sup> In 1911, as part of an attempt to boost the settling process in Katanga, farms were created along the railway lines and Belgian settlers were dispatched to Katanga. These ventures were not as successful as they could have been mostly because farming and agriculture were still acted upon as less of a priority compared to the development of the mining industry. See Robert, *Le Katanga physique*, 124; *Comité Spécial du Katanga*, 236.

<sup>110</sup> Perrings, *Black mineworkers*, 19.

<sup>111</sup> Henderson, *Labour and politics in Northern Rhodesia*, 11-12; Roberts, *A history of Zambia*, 177; Mwelwa C. Musambachime, ‘Escape from tyranny: Flights across the Rhodesia-Congo boundary 1900-1930’ *Transafrican Journal of History*, 18 (1989), 153-54.

<sup>112</sup> Kenneth P. Vickery, ‘Saving settlers: Maize control in Northern Rhodesia’ in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 11, no. 2 (1985), 215.

<sup>113</sup> *Livingstone Mail*, 5 December 1913, as quoted in Vickery, ‘Saving settlers’, 215.

<sup>114</sup> Mwelwa C. Musambachime, ‘The role of Kasenga (Eastern Shaba) in the development of Mweru-Luapula Fishery’ *African Studies Review*, 38, no. 1 (1995), 57.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-56.

valued at £600'.<sup>116</sup> Though unstable (it depended on the prosperity of urban markets) the fishing industry brought the lower Luapula valley a new relative prosperity in the late 1920s. The Depression and the abrupt reduction in the demand for fish was to affect this business rather badly but the Second World War, increasing as it did the demand for copper and consequently for fish, allowed fish exports to southern Katanga to return to the same level as the late 1920s. In this way, fishing became an alternative to wage employment for a growing percentage of the residents of the Mweru-Luapula and allowed them to vary the ways in which they could make a living.<sup>117</sup>

In the 1910s and 1920s, the volume of food supplies imported and consumed in Haut-Katanga rose steadily, concurrently with the number of industrial workers employed in the region. In 1917-19 food consumption in Haut-Katanga was around 8,000 to 10,000 tonnes, of which probably 40 to 50 % was produced locally, the remainder being imported.<sup>118</sup> However, the constant increase in the demand for food during the 1920s and the desire to make the Katangese economy less dependent on the Rhodesias, led the Katangese authorities to gradually review their agricultural strategy and search for new supply areas within the Belgian colonies. One crucial development in this regard was the opening up of new railway lines.<sup>119</sup> On 12 July 1928 the *Chemin de fer du Bas-Congo au Katanga* (BCK), which linked Bukama, near the copper mines, to Port-Francqui (now Ilebo) in the neighbouring province of Kasai, was inaugurated. Then in 1931, the Tenke-Dilolo line linked the BCK to the Benguela railway of Portuguese Angola, and hence opened up Upper Lulua. These new lines, in addition to constituting a new export route for Katangese copper, not only enabled Kasai and Lulua respectively to send foodstuffs to the Haut-Katanga for the first time, but also contributed largely to boosting agricultural production in Katanga itself.<sup>120</sup> Throughout the 1920s and culminating in 1928 with the appointment of a new Governor of Katanga, Gaston Heenen, practical measures were implemented with a view to making local food-production self-sufficient: experts were called out, cattle was imported, experimental farms were created and market gardens, cultivated and overseen by 'agriculteurs indigènes' were developed around Elisabethville, Jadotville, Lubudi, Albertville and Sakania.<sup>121</sup> The decisive turning-point came in 1934 when it was agreed that the province of Katanga should be divided into two *zones agricoles* (Tanganika and Upper Katanga). These new zones were in turn subdivided into *regions économiques* designated as producers of food for the urban centres. In theory, the Tanganika zone was to be self-sufficient while the Upper Katanga zone would be supplied from Kasai and Lomami.<sup>122</sup> With the province so divided

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<sup>116</sup> W. Owen, Kawambwa Sub-District, annual report, 1927, encl. in E. Sharpe, Mweru-Luapula District, annual report, 1927, ZA7/1/11/8 (NAZ), as quoted in Macola, *The Kingdom of Kazembe*, 216.

<sup>117</sup> Macola, *The Kingdom of Kazembe*, 216; Gordon, *Nachituti's gift*, 68; Henderson, *Labour and politics in Northern Rhodesia*, 62. For a detailed study of fishery in the Mweru-Luapula, see Gordon, *Nachituti's gift*.

<sup>118</sup> Jewsiewicki, 'Unequal development', 320.

<sup>119</sup> To be noted that several minor railway lines were built between 1910 and 1918. In 1910, the *Chemins de Fer des Grands Lacs Africains* (CFL) brought a railway from Kindu, on the Lualaba River, to Kongolo further down the river which made the transport of goods to Bukama possible. Then the Kabila-Albertville line, which linked Lake Tanganyika to the Lualaba was completed in 1915, and the construction of a line from Kambove to Bukama in 1918 meant that the Lomami and Tanganika districts as well as eastern Katanga were reachable. In the period 1921-5 supplies from these areas increased by 18 per cent. There were no further extensions until 1928. See Jewsiewicki, 'Unequal development', 319-322.

<sup>120</sup> *Comité Spécial du Katanga*, 255-256.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 243-261.

<sup>122</sup> Jewsiewicki, 'Unequal development', 326-330. The Chamber of Commerce of Elisabethville described the project to the Minister of Colonies as follows 'Il s'agit de distinguer les agglomérations urbaines des agglomérations agricoles. Les premières grouperont les travailleurs et artisans employés à la ville. Les besoins de cette catégorie spéciale d'indigènes influenceront la conception des agglomérations nouvelles et leur prêteront un caractère propre. Les secondes grouperont les petits cultivateurs, qui jouiront du

into 'specialised' ('urban' or agricultural) units, the scheme was successful in diminishing Katanga's dependence on southern African farmers. Imports of maize and maize meal from the south continued to create some competition, but after 1930, Northern Rhodesian farmers, aware that they were rapidly losing the Katanga market, diverted their attention to the protected home market that the development of the Copperbelt offered them.<sup>123</sup> In this way, while before the Depression neither the administration nor the big companies assumed direct control over the food and labour markets, during and after the depression both became much more domineering. In Jewsiewicki's words:

the big companies in Katanga, wanted to lower the cost of living, and especially the total costs of the industrial Labour force, by a general lowering of agricultural prices and by offering high industrial wages, which would produce a supply of labour greater than the demand. In this way, the development of African market gardening, the first supplies of foodstuffs from Kasai all went hand in hand with the new labour-recruiting missions of the UMHK and the policy of labour stabilisation.<sup>124</sup>

### **A Vibrant Sub-economic Culture: The Market**

The end of Katanga's total dependence on Northern Rhodesia by no means put an end to cross-border commercial interaction, for the constant flow of travellers and the high concentration of population that the copper industry induced was accompanied by an automatic mushrooming of markets in every important mining town. By 1930, markets had become an important enough part of the economic life of the Copperbelt for the colonial administration of Northern Rhodesia to enforce regulations. These stipulated that that '(1) all markets established in a municipality or township shall be under the control and management of the local authority' and that '(2) all markets established by a native authority shall be under the control and management of the native authority'.<sup>125</sup> With these clauses, Northern Rhodesian authorities sanctioned the creation of markets on a more or less spontaneous basis, leaving local authorities to decide the shape these markets would take and how they would be organised. Copperbelt markets were to be copied on the Congo model in which inhabitants from the surrounding country could bring in dried fish, mealie, etc., for sale.<sup>126</sup> By the 1940s, the Copperbelts had become the home of the largest market complex in Central and Eastern Africa.<sup>127</sup> I.D.S. Mackigan, the District Officer for Chingola, gave a vivid description of the market in Bancroft in 1954:

African life at Bancroft centres round the market, which stands close by the largest of the Contractor's Compounds. Many African traders from Kasompe African township, Chingola bring their wares here; and fish traders from the

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lopin de terre qui leur sera concédé moyennant une certaine obligation de défrichement et de mise en valeur'. See Dubois and Dewailly on behalf of the *Comité de la Chambre de Commerce* of Elisabethville to the Minister of the Colonies, 1 June 1932, A.I., 1390, Dossier 2, II-B-11, Annex (Brussels African Archives), 2.

<sup>123</sup> Vickery, 'Saving settlers', 215.

<sup>124</sup> Jewsiewicki, 'Unequal development', 324-325.

<sup>125</sup> Draft Markets Ordinance, 19 May 1930, SEC2/263, Vol. I, Doc. 7 (NAZ).

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> In late 1959 there were 21 markets in the seven towns of the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt. See Marvin P. Miracle, 'African markets and trade in the Copperbelt' in Paul Bohannan & George Dalton (eds.), *Markets in Africa* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1965), 698-99; Robert I. Rotberg, 'Rural Rhodesian markets' in Paul Bohannan & George Dalton (eds.), *Markets in Africa* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1965), 585-86.

North and West, peanut vendors, salad oil sellers, men who boil up old bones and meat. All these traders operate in the open air or from small thatched booths. On a market day the scene is gay, animated and noisy, against a background of bright clothes for sale hung out upon lines or spread upon the ground.<sup>128</sup>

The markets were the main, if not the sole, source of food for the African population in the mining towns. In 1960 a regional survey of the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt revealed that there were 120,460 'natives' in employment in all the towns of the Copperbelt, that their total number was nearing 300,000 and that approximately the same number did their shopping 'on the Copperbelt itself'.<sup>129</sup> If markets were an important internal business, they were also very much an international one. In his social and economic study of the Copperbelt markets of 1947, V.W. Brelsford notes how the Copperbelt not only acted as a magnet to labour but also attracted 'traders of all types, even from as far afield as Senegal, Gambia and Nigeria'.<sup>130</sup> However, the most represented foreign group on the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt was, unsurprisingly, the Congolese. On a day a random count was operated in the largest market of the Copperbelt, that of Mufulira, it appeared that fourteen out of the twenty-four sellers were Congo natives.<sup>131</sup> In the same market, the Congo was also the main source of supply including many seasonal commodities such as mushrooms, maize, shallots, cassava root and leaves, potatoes of several types, and wild roots. It was calculated that the Copperbelt market in a normal year absorbed about 3,000 bags of cassava, practically all of which came from the Congo.<sup>132</sup> This, Brelsford argues, is partly due to the fact that 'Mufulira (...) is the nearest market to the Congo, so that most of the village produce comes from over the border. The tribe in the nearby area of Katanga Province of the Congo is also Lamba and among them are settled a number of Northern Province Rhodesian Natives such as Chisinga, Ushi and Bemba'.<sup>133</sup> Northern Rhodesians too made use of the Katangese markets. It was noted in 1933 that the Solwezi people, who were a bit more isolated from the Copperbelt economic centres than other groups, still found 'a ready market for produce of all kinds at Kapushi Mine in the Congo where a large number of natives are employed by the Union Minière'.<sup>134</sup> In the 1930s, the gradually improved network of roads in Katanga also made the travelling of people and goods easier as was the expressed intention of the Katangese authorities that were keen to drain 'à notre profit les activités neuves de la Rhodésie du Nord' and to present the cities of Katanga as 'les foyers du centre minier de l'Afrique' by welcoming the 'trafic des touristes et des gens d'affaires de la Rhodésie vers le Katanga et vice versa'.<sup>135</sup>

As they expanded, markets generally showed an increasing degree of professionalisation of market skills, generating more and more movement across the border. Peddlers, hawkers and traders of all kinds, some of whom were European or Indian, carried goods across the border

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<sup>128</sup> I. D. S. Mackigan, Chingola District Officer, Tour Report N.1, 1954, WP1/2/18, Doc. 8 (NAZ).

<sup>129</sup> Special Commissioner to Ministry of Land and Natural Resources in Ndola, Report on a Regional Survey of the Copperbelt, 1 February 1960, WP1/2/64, Doc. 19 (NAZ).

<sup>130</sup> William V. Brelsford, *Copperbelt markets: A social and economic study* (Lusaka: Government Printer, 1947), 12.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 93.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 44, 58, 93.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 93.

<sup>134</sup> Secretary for Native Affairs to the Chief Secretary, 25 September 1933, SEC2/263, Vol. I, Doc. 56 (NAZ).

<sup>135</sup> The Katangese authorities were keen to drain 'the new activities of Northern Rhodesia for our benefit' and to present the cities of Katanga as the 'focal points of the African mining centre' by welcoming the 'traffic of tourists and businessmen from Rhodesia to Katanga and vice versa'. See Dubois and Dewailly on behalf of the *Comité de la Chambre de Commerce* of Elisabethville to the Minister of the Colonies, 1 June 1932, A.I., 1390, Dossier 2, II-B-11 (Brussels African Archives), Annex : 8.

into Katanga and sold them for less than in Katanga's newly opened shops. Fish, especially dried fish, from the Mweru-Luapula continued to be a convenience food much in demand on both Northern Rhodesian and Katangese Copperbelts, though the former was a much more important consumer than the latter.<sup>136</sup> African individuals also spontaneously travelled to the nearest market, no matter which side of the border it happened to be, to trade the products of their land. This phenomenon took such proportions that it occasionally became the source of friction. The fact that Africans could to some extent decide where to do their shopping, and usually did so where it was most advantageous to them, was not necessarily to the advantage of permanent shops, or indeed to the advantage of the national economies. Measures taken to deal with these issues could be really unpopular. Some sources suggest that one reason for the very first strike that broke out on the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt, in 1935, was that, between 1934 and 1936, the Belgian Congo border was closed to all Northern Rhodesian trade and produce, ostensibly as protection against foot and mouth disease.<sup>137</sup> An annual report for the Native Affairs Department mentioned that:

restrictions imposed by the Government of the Belgian Congo on the transit of produce of every description across the Pedicle have for the time being practically killed the former flourishing fish trade conducted by natives of the Northern Province with the copper mines and the Congo. At Fort Rosebery, where it used to be a common thing to see large numbers of natives on bicycles laden with fish making for the copper mines, not a single permit was issued during the year.<sup>138</sup>

Without the option of engaging in trade, the dependence of individuals on wage labour became all but absolute. As Perrings argues, 'it would thus seem reasonable to suggest that what occurred in 1935 was indicative of the cumulative resentment of those who had experienced (...) major blows to their capacity for economic survival within a comparatively short space of time'.<sup>139</sup> This episode highlights the extent to which cross-border trade had become both voluminous and geopolitically significant.

## Conclusion

One could draw many parallels between the early development of Northern Rhodesia and Katanga. Both territories were formed and started their existence under the aegis of large companies. Both eventually became the economic neuralgic centre of their country. The population of both was deeply involved in mining, both in their own territory and each other's. Yet the extent to which their histories interpenetrated is easy to overlook quite simply because they cannot be made to fit a structured timeline of events. Developments on either side happened at a different pace, sometimes separately, sometimes not. The overall picture is – to put it candidly – messy. Yet the early decades of Copperbelt development can perhaps be divided into three more or less distinguishable – though by no means time definite – 'sub-periods'. The first 'sub-period' is characterised by the rise of Katanga as a major copper

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<sup>136</sup> Beef was more readily available in Northern Rhodesia. Therefore, fish were not considered an essential item in worker's rations, as they were in the Belgian Congo. See Gordon *Nachituti's gift*, 70.

<sup>137</sup> Charles Perrings, 'Consciousness and proletarianization: An assessment of the 1935 Mineworker's Strike on the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 4, no. 1 (1977), 40-41.

<sup>138</sup> Department of Native Affairs of Northern Rhodesia, Annual Reports (1934), pp.21-22 as quoted in Perrings, 'Consciousness and proletarianization', 49.

<sup>139</sup> Perrings, 'Consciousness and proletarianization', 49

producer on the one hand, and economic stagnation in Northern Rhodesia on the other. The second is characterised by the rise of Northern Rhodesia as a competing mining power and the gradual withdrawal of Katanga from its situation of economic dependency on British Africa. Finally the third 'sub-period' is characterised by the Depression of the early 1930s, which not only had the effect to accelerate some of the trends of the second period but also caused cross-border movements to intensify.

Throughout the late 1910s and the early 1920s, at the time when Northern Rhodesia's industrial economy was relatively stagnant, Katanga relied almost exclusively on Northern Rhodesian labour and foodstuffs. Yet the constantly rising labour and food needs of the Katangese mines coupled with the take-off of mining in Northern Rhodesia in the late 1920s, left Katanga in a conundrum to which there were two possible solutions. The first was the abandonment of the migrant labour policy, which could only be achieved through improvements in production techniques and the creation of a stabilised, skilled labour force. The second was to force extensive rural areas to engage in agricultural production. Thanks to the policy of compulsory cultivation, and thanks also to the fact that the railway network was finally completed on the eve of the Depression, Katanga's reliance on Northern Rhodesian labour and foodstuffs diminished until, with the onset of the Depression, it became marginal. In addition, the Depression, despite the Copperbelt's subsequent recovery, had rather profound effects on the African labourer. For, in a matter of months, the latter suddenly lost its leverage in the labour market. As a result, it appears that the Depression served to make the border more porous than it had been before. As employment opportunities dried up throughout southern Africa, people of all origins crisscrossed the border between Belgian and British Africa in search of better wages or better options of making money.

Unfortunately, neither the Belgian nor the British colonial government seem to have concerned themselves excessively with the numerical details of African migration in those early years. As a result, knowledge about the actual volume of labour migration in this period is patchy. Yet we may venture two large generalisations. First the master narrative that posits a clear-cut transition from the 'classic' short-term and cyclical migrant system to stabilisation and urbanisation, does not seem to be supported by the evidence. Instead of simple evolutionary dualisms, we are faced with complex shifts in patterns of mobility between urban and rural areas and between countries. Second, African migrants were by no means passive victims of an all-powerful mining industry. So far as possible, they chose their employer since both wages and working conditions varied considerably. This caused African labourers, artisans and hangers-on to crisscross the border for many decades, which they did without following any set pattern. As Luise White put it:

These movements must be added to the picture of African labour – the jigsaw puzzle again – (...) in which African workers' gossip passed on the latest information about the safest working conditions, the best living conditions, the best wages. Such talk sent African workers across cultural and colonial boundaries to work and to make money, where they found themselves in worlds and seams and stopes that had different safety records, different standards of living, and different rates of remuneration.<sup>140</sup>

Although the region of the Copperbelt had already been the scene of many population movements in pre-colonial times, the allied effect of an artificial border and the implantation of two powerful, neighbouring *and* competing mining industries changed the nature and patterns

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<sup>140</sup> White, 'Class struggle and cannibalism', 276.

of these movements. This new type of migration had, before anything else, an economic *raison d'être* and therefore transcended cultural boundaries.

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