

**GENDERED PATTERNS OF MALAWIAN CONTEMPORARY MIGRANCY:
THE CASE OF ZUBAYUMO MAKAMO AREA IN MZIMBA DISTRICT,
1970s – 2005**

By

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DECLARATION

I declare that this is my original work and that it has not been already presented for a degree at this or any other institution of higher learning. Where work of others has been used, acknowledgement has been accordingly given.

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

We certify that we have examined this thesis by **Harvey Chanaichi Chidoba Banda** and find it satisfactory as a basis for the award of the MA Degree in African Social History.

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DEDICATION

To my late brother, Khwima Chidoba Banda, whose earthly ambitions went unfulfilled.

I hope either my son, Owen Khwima Banda, or myself will fulfill the same.

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Lastly, many thanks go to my loving wife, Jennifer, and my son, Owen, for their rare understanding and rapport during the entire period of study.

May God richly bless you all!

ABSTRACT

For a long time much of the literature on international migrancy from Malawi has portrayed migration as a male phenomenon. Despite its existence, female migration has not been documented. This study documents the gendered nature of international migrancy from Malawi, especially between the 1970s and 2005.

By using the human agency school, the study seeks to retrieve women from their marginalization in academic research where they are either relegated to footnotes or erased altogether. The study addresses the gendered patterns and processes of migration and argues that women have not been simple recipients of the proceeds of male migration, neither have they been simple victims of the social and economic effects of it. Acting on their own and sometimes encouraged by family members, women have at times shown initiative by migrating for work or for trade. In doing so, they have taken advantage of economic and social opportunities both at home and abroad.

The study further shows that even during the old migration days of the colonial period, migration was, to some extent, a gendered phenomenon. Thus, the study further argues that the economic and political changes taking place between the 1970s and 1990s both at the local and regional levels facilitated the participation of increased numbers of women in migrancy.

The study also examines the social categories of both male and female migrants involved in migration, the decision-making processes behind it and the gender-specific motivations of male and female migrants. The experiences of female migrants demonstrate the creative responses of women themselves. They show how women can create a world of migrancy of their own both at the individual and the group levels.

The study then concludes that female migration is, among others, a result of weakening patriarchal structures and women empowerment at both the household and community levels.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS USED

CDSS	Community Day Secondary School
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
DC	District Commissioner
ID	Identity Certificate
LTD	Limited
MASAF	Malawi Social Action Fund
RNLB	Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau
RNLSC	Rhodesia Native Labour Supply Commission
RGC	Re-employment Guarantee Certificate
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
TA	Traditional Authority
TEBA	The Employment Bureau of Africa
WNLA	Witwatersrand Native Labour Association

LOCAL WORDS USED

<i>Chitumbuka</i>	Local language spoken in the Northern Region districts of Mzimba and Rumphu
<i>Katapila</i>	System of money lending where the borrower is expected to give back the money together with a huge interest
<i>Katundu</i>	Goods or items in general. In this case, goods brought from South Africa by the migrants
<i>Kutchona</i>	Overstaying, in this case in South Africa. The migrants who overstay are referred to as ‘matchona’ meaning the overstayers
<i>Malowolo</i>	Bride price
<i>Matola</i>	Local transport by small lorries or pick-ups. This is common means of transport in most parts of rural Malawi
<i>Mthandizi</i>	‘Helper’. Term used to refer to the Rhodesia Native Labour Supply Commission (RNLSC), because it used to organize “free” transport to Southern Rhodesia (present day Zimbabwe)
<i>Nkhokwe</i>	Granary for storing farm produce
<i>Selufu</i>	Self Migration. Literary comes from the word ‘self’. Selufu was used to refer to independent migration during Wenela days. It is now used to refer to the current pattern of migrancy.
<i>Sima</i>	Meal prepared by using maize flour. This is main meal for most Malawians.
<i>Ulere</i>	Free transport offered by Mthandizi to transport recruited migrants from Malawi to Zimbabwe, then Southern Rhodesia

Wenela Term used to refer to the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association
(WNLA)

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Fig. 1 MAP OF MALAWI SHOWING STUDY AREA



Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

This study starts from the premise that the traditional male-dominated, long-term and long-distance migrancy from Malawi, as in Africa in general, is becoming increasingly feminised. This is the central theme of the study. In most historical accounts the maleness of the migrant labour force is taken for granted. Despite its existence, international female migrancy has been hidden from history. This study documents female migrancy by examining its form and nature.

The study is therefore about the changing migration patterns from Malawi to South Africa from the 1970s to 2005. It shows that in the period prior to the 1970s migration was a male phenomenon. This pattern changed from the 1970s following the end of contract migration. From this time women began to join the migration process. The central argument of this study is, therefore, that migrancy from Malawi is no longer a male phenomenon. Both men and women actively participate in it. Though fewer than men, women are a noticeable feature of Malawian migrancy to South Africa.

The study further argues that changes in patriarchal control, and those at the political and socio-economic levels, both at the local and regional scene, have played an important role in the gender shifts in Malawian migrancy. This is so because the changes have created new avenues for women to migrate. However, these changes, by themselves, would not

be enough without the women's own spirit of enterprise. It therefore needs to be demonstrated that women by themselves are active participants in the migration process.

One of the themes in this study is the motive of migration. The study shows that the motives of male migrants are not assumed to represent those of female migrants. Hence the study examines the gender-specific reasons for the emigration of both males and females. Women, just like men, have specific motives behind their emigration. Some of them have ulterior motives which would not necessarily be exclusive only to them, as they also apply to men.

The second theme is the social categories of the migrants. These include age, marital status and household social position. The study shows that despite patriarchal restrictions against female migrants, of late, some families prefer the emigration of single female members of the households.

The analysis in this study is divided into two historical periods. The first is the old migration period from 1900 to the 1970s while the second is the new migration period from the 1970s to 2005. The experiences of both male and female migrants both at home and abroad are also examined within these historical periods. The study shows that the experiences of male and female migrants were rather different at every point in history. These differences were important in the female construction of their world of migrancy. Related to this, the study shows that migrancy had differential impact on male and female migrants.

The other theme in the study is the competition for Malawi's labour supply in history. This was a factor both for and against female migration. There was competition between official migration and independent migration during the old migration period. Here the government was a regulator of official migration. Its policy was restricting the migration of family units so as not to disrupt local communities. Women were to remain at home so as to maintain social units. Men were to work briefly in South Africa and periodically rejoin their families at home. However, the government failed to extend this role to independent migration. The competition also applied between the external labour recruiters themselves. For instance, there was competition between the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association, which was locally known as *Wenela*, and the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau, which was later replaced by the Rhodesia Native Labour Supply Commission. The latter was popularly referred to as *Mthandizi*. In order to stand the competition, since their conditions were poorer than those of *Wenela*, *Mthandizi* introduced the migration of the wives of migrants to Southern Rhodesia from the early 1950s.

Migration in the Regional Context

Earlier scholars writing on migrancy from Malawi and the southern African region as a whole concentrated on the period from the 1900s to the 1970s. This period is generally referred to as the old migration period. They tended to write on the maleness of migration since migration was largely ungendered. In most cases it was the men going away to work, mainly in the mines, and the women looking after the homes. Where women were involved, they were caregivers, looking after their husbands and children, in the vicinity

of the mines¹. Migration from the 1970s onwards is referred to as new or contemporary migrancy. There are notable differences between the kinds of migration during these two periods. Migration during the old period took the form of official contract migration and independent migration. The literature covering the first migration period deals mostly with such themes as motives for labour migration, the competition between official labour migration and *selufu*, and also between the internal and external labour recruiters, the role of the government in regulating international labour migration, and the impact of labour migration on the labour supplying areas, focusing mainly on the development and the underdevelopment of the areas².

During the second period there was still contract migration, but for shorter periods and by relatively younger men. There was also a change in the contracting agency, from Wenela to The Employment Bureau of Africa (TEBA). From the mid 1980s, because of changes in South Africa itself, there was a need to recruit more from within. There was, therefore, a reduction in the numbers of people recruited from outside. Countries close to South Africa, for example, Lesotho and Mozambique, were preferred. It is within the contemporary migration period that this study establishes feminisation of migration.

¹ G. Chauncey, "The Locus of Production: Women's Labour in the Zambian Copperbelt, 1927-1953", Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1981, p. 135.

² The major arguments under each of the development and underdevelopment themes are highlighted in the later chapters. The following are the works covering some of the themes in question: (a) Motives and impact (Development and Underdevelopment perspectives): Chirwa, "Theba is Power", pp. 6-18; G. Coleman, "International Labour Migration from Malawi, 1875-1966", Journal of Social Science, Vol. 2, 1972, pp. 36-46; (b) Competition for Malawian labour: B.G. Nkhoma, "The Competition for Malawian Labour: *Wenela* and *Mthandizi* in Ntcheu, 1935-1956", History Department, Chancellor College, Zomba, 1995, pp. 9-29; Banda, "Competition for the Labour Supply in Mzimba", pp. 15-36; Chirwa, "Theba is Power", pp. 122-136; Coleman, "International Labour Migration from Malawi", pp. 36-46; F.E. Sanderson, "The Development of Labour Migration from Nyasaland, 1891-1914", Journal of African History, Vol. 2, 1961, pp. 259-271.

During this period more women joined the migration process. Some of the issues examined in relation to this period include the reasons women joined the labour emigration ‘en masse’, the decision-making processes regarding who is to emigrate from the rural households, the composition of the migrant labour system, and the ‘destinations’ of the female migrants as compared to those of men. Some of these issues form part of the analysis of female migration from Zubayumo Makamo area. It is within this contemporary gendered migrancy that this study is set.

It is worth noting that migrants migrate for varied reasons during the contemporary period. Unlike during the old period, under contemporary migrancy people emigrate to seek wage employment in different sectors in addition to mining, for example, in the service provision and the domestic sectors³. In addition, some emigrate for commercial purposes. It is for this reason that most recent studies on migration prefer the term migrancy than labour migration. This is the view that is adopted in this study. In this study the term migrancy is used to refer to the kind of migration in which both men and women participate actively for several reasons beyond wage employment. The study establishes that there are some migrants who migrate from Malawi to South Africa only to procure goods for sale and for domestic use.

Schools of Thought

Up to the 1970s the dominant schools of thought in the literature on migration were the modernization and the under-development perspectives. Scholars writing from the

³ W.C. Chirwa, “No TEBA...Forget TEBA: The Plight of Malawian Ex-migrant Workers to South Africa, 1988-1994”, International Migration Review, Vol. 31, No. 3, 1997, p. 643.

modernization perspective emphasized the positive effects of migration. Contrariwise, those writing from the under-development perspective advanced the view that migration brought about more evils than benefits in the labour source areas⁴. During this period the emphasis was on general migration issues. Such themes as causes and results of migration featured prominently in the literature. The theme of feminisation of migration was largely ignored. Most scholars used the cheap labour power thesis to explain the reasons why only men were employed in the mines. The thesis was used to explain the origins and functions of migrant labour in South African historical studies. The mining companies encouraged a system of migrant labour to avoid maintaining workers' families at the mines. The argument here was that because mine work was generally tough, it was suitable for men⁵. The real reason is that it was cheap because men were paid "single men's" wages. That way it was cost effective for an industry that was characterized by high operational costs.

Since the mid-1970s clear changes in the national composition of migrants to South Africa began to emerge. Following the attainment of independence, several countries in the region, for example, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, imposed restrictions on migration to South Africa because of the latter's apartheid regime. However, the case of Malawi was different. Malawi withdrew its labour in 1974 following an aviation accident in Botswana that killed 74 Malawian miners, but relaxed these strictures in 1976.

⁴ Modernisation and Under-development as dominant schools of thought in international migration in the period up to the 1970s are discussed at length by W.C. Chirwa in his PhD Thesis, "Theba is Power", pp. 6-18.

⁵ For details on the argument under the cheap labour power thesis see: B. Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies", Journal of South African Studies, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1983, p. 143; and K. Jochelson, "Women Migrancy and Morality: A Problem of Perspective", Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1995, p. 324.

However, South Africa stopped recruiting Malawian labour in 1987 following a dispute over HIV testing⁶. The Malawi government refused ‘on moral and legal grounds’ to screen all potential recruits for HIV and AIDS at home before leaving for employment in South Africa⁷.

This study demonstrates that as official recruited migration was phasing out due to these developments, independent free migration increased. It is within this context that women entered migrancy. Prior to these developments women did not participate considerably in external labour migration in the same manner that men did. In a majority of cases, they were left behind by their male folk to manage the household affairs and farming⁸. Recent studies, however, point to an increase in female migration from neighbouring countries to South Africa in the contemporary period following the political, economic and social changes at the regional level⁹.

Until recently, the dominant school in explaining feminization of migration has been the morality thesis. It states that women were forced out of their home areas into towns

⁶ G. Kanyenze, “African Migrant Labour in Southern Africa”, Paper presented at the ICFTU-AFRO Conference on ‘Migrant Labour’, LEDRIZ, Nairobi, 15-17 March 2004, p. 4. See also: Chirwa, “No TEBA...Forget TEBA”, p.628.

⁷ Chirwa, “No TEBA...Forget TEBA”, p. 629.

⁸ K. Matlosa, “Overview of Labour Markets and Migration Patterns in Southern Africa”, in K. Matlosa (ed.), Migration and Development in Southern Africa: Policy Reflections (Harare: SAPES Trust, 2001), p. 48.

⁹ *Ibid*, p.48. Other studies that have information on the migration of women from southern African region to South Africa include: A. Adepoju, “Issues and Recent Trends in International Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa”, International Social Science Journal, Vol. 165, 2000, p.385; L. Zinyama, “Who, What, When and Why: Cross-Border Movement to South Africa”, in D.A. MacDonald (ed.), On Borders: Perspectives on International Migration in Southern Africa (New York: St. Martins Press, 2000), p. 72; B. Dodson, “Women on the Move: Gender and Cross-Border Migration to South Africa from Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe”, in D.A. MacDonald (ed.), On Borders: Perspectives on International Migration in Southern Africa (New York: St. Martins Press, 2000), p. 122.

because of the negative impact of male labour migration on, for instance, family stability and moral standards. Women are portrayed as victims of the migrant labour system, ‘without ambitions or life strategies of their own’, and that in towns they resorted to prostitution¹⁰. Various writers have counter-argued against this thesis, which depicted women as moral polluters. These writers have argued that the assumptions of this thesis are questionable. For instance, the implied argument is that men migrate for money, while women migrate because of broken hearts. In fact, these critics have maintained that this image is highly misleading. Instead, they have emphasised other reasons for female migration. They argue that women were not simple and passive victims, but purposive individuals. The dominant view here is that women emigrated for economic reasons, especially following increased urban job opportunities¹¹. This is the view that this study adopts.

In the decision-making process, as regards who is to emigrate from rural households, the ‘household strategies’ model is dominant in the literature. It states that male and female migration follows collective decisions by family members. However, some writers have critiqued this model and they maintain that men migrate more independently than women, who are subject to the will of either a parent or a partner¹². This study argues that to an extent gendered migration is indeed a result of collective decisions at household level.

¹⁰ Jochelson, “Women Migrancy and Morality”, p. 323.

¹¹ J. Crush, “Migrations Past: An Historical Overview of Cross-Border Movement in Southern Africa”, in D.A. MacDonald (ed.), On Borders: Perspectives on International Migration in Southern Africa (New York: St. Martins Press, 2000), pp.17-18. A similar discussion of the morality thesis and its critique can be found in Jochelson, “Women Migrancy and Morality”, p. 325; J. Gugler, “Women Stay on the Farm No More”, p. 351.

¹² Dodson, “Women on the Move”, p. 11.

Several writers have written somewhat substantially on international labour migration from Malawi to southern African countries, especially Zimbabwe, then Southern Rhodesia, and South Africa. However, these writers have tended to focus mainly on male labour migration. In their works, the emigration of females was embedded in the emigration of males. The issue of female labour migration, to Southern Rhodesia and not South Africa, has received some attention in such works as H.C. Banda, “Competition for the Labour Supply in Mzimba District: The Case of *Wenela* and *Mthandizi*, 1906-1956”, W.C. Chirwa, “TEBA is Power: Rural Labour, Migrancy and Fishing in Malawi, 1890s-1985”, and B.G. Nkhoma, “The Competition for Malawian Labour: *Wenela* and *Mthandizi* in Ntcheu, 1935-1956”. In these works it is maintained wives joined their husbands to Southern Rhodesia. That is why this study argues that by the 1990s female labour migration from Malawi was not totally a new phenomenon. It was a continuation of the trend that had been there since the *Mthandizi* days. What had changed by the early 1990s is the numbers, categories involved, and, what is most important here, the destination of the female migrants in question.

A lot of literature talks about the period from the 1980s as the new labour migrancy or contemporary migrancy. During this period, scholars writing on South Africa and its neighbouring countries have debated the uneven penetration of capitalism, the limitations of the power of the state, for example, on regulating labour migration, and the crafty responses of rural people to their incorporation into the capitalist system. By employing the concept of the ‘power of the periphery’ or the ‘history from below’, these scholars

have shown that ‘the countryside was not simply a receptacle of change’, and, furthermore, that the rural Africans in general were not ‘passive victims’ of their incorporation into the regional capitalist economy. Instead, the scholars argue, they responded quickly, and, what is more important, creatively to the forces confronting them, and that their actions and ‘struggles’ did have material consequences on the course of the capitalist penetration¹³. It is important to note that terms like ‘history from below’; ‘power of the periphery’; and ‘Africans not passive victims, but actually initiators of the labour migration process’ largely constitute the major arguments in this paper. Put differently, this paper is written from the social history or the human agency perspective, which dates back to the 1980s as applied to the southern Africa context.

This study employs the social history approach to show that women are not passive observers of the migration process. It shows that women joined migrancy not because of the negative consequences of male migration, rather because of their own purposive decisions to migrate in order to better their own living. The study advances the argument that, given the same chances, women and men would participate in more or less the same way, but that both men and women would have advantages over the other. Evidence shows that women from Mzimba have pseudo-traditionalist advantages over men because they have always been caregivers at home. As a result of this, female migrants are preferred as domestic workers in South Africa and therefore dominate employment in the domestic service. This indicates that women have the potential to out-do men in some sectors of the job market.

¹³ W.C. Chirwa, “Theba Is Power”, p. 16.

Using the human agency perspective used by social historians, this study adopts individuals and households as units of analysis. It focuses on the motives and decisions of the individuals, both males and females, and also of the households from which they come. It shows that both male and female migrants make either individual or collective decisions to emigrate depending on their local context and their view of the losses and benefits of migrating. The study raises the argument that the gendered power difference within the family does not mean that the women are entirely powerless and that they play no role in decision-making. Women can influence family decisions even if they may not have the final word. It is also worth noting that their bargaining power varies significantly by age, marital status, household position, and parity. Evidence from the study area indicates that female migrancy is a result of several multi-faceted, but related factors. It is partly a result of resistance to parental control. It is also a result of weakening patriarchal structures. For example, oral evidence shows that parental objection towards the emigration of females was strong in the past, for example, in the early 1990s, but this is now changing. Nowadays there are some parents who are in favour of the migration of their daughters. This view is highlighted further in chapter three.

Much as emphasis is put on the human agency of the individuals and the collective power of the households to bargain specific situations, these are not enough in themselves. There is a much wider context in which human agency needs to be understood. Hence the study looks at the changes taking place at a much wider level as well. For instance, changes in the southern African labour market increased mobility at the regional level.

By doing this, the paper shows how local communities are integrated into the regional economic system. Responses of the individuals at the local level and the collective responses of their communities relate to the changes at a much wider level within which these communities are located. The study therefore shows the interplay between exogenous and indigenous factors and how they play at the local community level.

Viewed from a different perspective, the study employs the concept of rural accumulation to refer to the process of rural acquisition of economic resources from outside the rural economy for individual and for household socio-economic betterment.

Research Methodology

The evidence for this study comes from Zubayumo Makamo area, west of Mzimba District (see Figures One and Two). The area was chosen as a case study for a number of reasons. Mostly, it was chosen because of perceived existence of female migrancy from the area, especially to South Africa, and also because the area has a long history of labour migration and remains one of the major migration areas in the district. Other migration areas in Mzimba are Manyamula, Engalaweni, Chiseng’ezi, and Bulala¹⁴.

According to people in the area, up to the 1980s there existed both independent and official migration. Of the two, people preferred emigrating independently. Following the end of contract migration in the 1980s, almost all migrants continued to emigrate

¹⁴ On Figure Two Chiseng’ezi is a migration area that is close to Kamteteka. Bulala is to the north west of the same map on route to Euthini.

independently. It is within this development that the feminisation of migration from the area is situated.

Since this is a localized study there is need to describe the area so as to understand its social structure and to highlight issues that are unique to this place. (This is done in detail in chapter three.) Some of the factors highlighted in this chapter would apply generally to Malawi and other countries in the Southern African region.

The information about the local area is mostly from oral sources as there are not enough secondary sources on it. Data collection was carried out between January and October 2005. The following categories of informants were interviewed: male and female migrants; male and female ex-migrants; and male and female potential migrants. Several interviews were conducted with each of these randomly selected informants. From these, information was collected on: their social background, especially childhood and education; the migration histories of their families; the factors for emigration; the actual emigration process; and their reintegration into the society upon return. Special attention was paid to the migrants' influence on others, and especially those that had not migrated before.

At the household level, the study used semi-structured questionnaires to interview members of the families. The responses from these showed, among others, the kind of collective decisions that are made during the migration process. Furthermore, these responses showed the gender differences in sending remittances to family members at

home. The informants maintained that female migrants send more assistance to their families than their male counterparts.

In addition, key informant interviews were conducted. The categories of those interviewed included: village headmen, primary school teachers, and leaders of different religious institutions. Of paramount importance among the issues discussed was the origin of female migration from the area. Also interviewed were local businessmen in Zubayumo Makamo area. These included five grocery shopkeepers and local transporters¹⁵. Two grocery shopkeepers were females. Through such interviews the causal relationship between these businesses and the migrancy that takes place in the area was established.

Unlike the earlier migration period, the contemporary period is difficult to document statistically because of the informal nature of migrancy. There are no offices keeping the records of male and female migrants. During the oral interviews, effort was made to compile the numbers of male and female migrants in the study area, but the results were not fruitful. The informants largely relied on speculating the figures since some of the migrants were away in South Africa.

¹⁵ Despite the popularity of migration from the area, there are few grocery shops in Zubayumo Makamo area. This indicates less investment in this field by the migrants and their ex-migrant counter-parts. Information about this and the nature of transport business comes in chapter three. It is worth noting, though, that most of the transporters based at Mzimba boma come from this area, showing sound investment in the transport sector.

The study also interviewed a cross-section of male and female migrants right at their places of work in South Africa. Data was collected on the nature of their jobs; and the problems faced, for example, accommodation and commuting costs, xenophobia, and the risk of being deported. Since the migrant workers while in South Africa usually stay indoors for fear of deportations, they were met at a church service every Sunday¹⁶.

At the Malawi National Archives library in Zomba files containing information about the international labour migration from Malawi from the 1900s onwards were consulted. Data was largely collected on official and unregulated migration; male and female labour migration; government's role in regulating migration; labour destinations; nature of jobs and inherent problems in the destination areas. Further information was collected on the benefits from labour migration including voluntary and compulsory remittances and deferred payments.

The data gathered was largely qualitative and it was, therefore, analysed qualitatively. Even the limited quantitative data was analysed descriptively since the numbers of female migrants were comparatively low. In this connection, the different numbers of female migrants themselves, for example, the numbers of unmarried women versus those of divorced women, and the numbers of male migrants versus those of female migrants were analysed descriptively.

¹⁶ On Sundays the migrant workers are off duty in South Africa and, therefore, have time to meet at one place for prayers. During these Sunday interview visits 10 female migrants and 10 male migrants were interviewed. The number was this small because the migrants stay in locations away from each other. The female migrants interviewed in South Africa were not necessarily from the western part of Mzimba district, but all were from the three Northern Region districts: Mzimba, as a whole; Mzuzu; and Nkhata-Bay. Contrariwise, almost all of the interviewed male migrants were from Zubayumo Makamo area.

Layout of the Study

The account below is divided into four chapters. This chapter has introduced the main arguments advanced by this study, focusing on feminisation of migrancy during the contemporary period. It has also highlighted the main historiographical debates on international migrancy in southern Africa and in Malawi in particular. It has been indicated that the main school of thought from the 1980s is the social history approach. The chapter has also presented the justification for the case-study approach and the methodology employed in the study. Chapter two below examines in detail the literature on international migrancy from Malawi during the old migration period. The chapter argues that the maleness of migrancy during this period was reinforced by, among other factors, colonial policy and recruiting methods. One of the themes examined in the chapter is the competition between the recruiting agencies, *Wenela* and *Mthandizi*. This competition, on the one hand, reinforced the maleness of migration, and encouraged the migration of females, on the other. The chapter ends by tracing the beginnings of female migration during the old migration period.

Chapter three examines the nature of migration during the contemporary period. It examines the changing male and female migration patterns and dimensions from Zubayumo Makamo area. It advances the argument that the changes at the local and regional levels between the 1970s and early 1990s were behind the changes in question. The focus is on feminisation of migration from the area. Using the human agency perspective, the chapter examines the gender-specific motives of the migrants. It shows that female migrants, just like their male counterparts, make rational decisions to migrate.

The chapter argues that partly female migration is a result of women's rebellion against patriarchal restrictions. The specific categories of men and women involved in migration are also examined.

In chapter four the study deals with the experiences of male and female migrants both at home and at the work place in South Africa. It shows that the experiences between male and female migrants were rather different. These differences were important in the female construction of their world of migrancy.

Chapter five, the concluding chapter, presents the lessons and observations made from the study. It goes a step further by highlighting the limitations of the study and the value of the study to the academic literature.

Chapter Two

MEN AND MIGRANCY

Chapter one has highlighted the main historical schools of thought on migration in Southern Africa. It has pointed out that the dominant schools of thought in the period up to the 1980s were the under-development and the modernization perspectives. During this period the focus was on general migration issues and not the gendered patterns of migration because migration was largely a male phenomenon. It has also been indicated that from the 1980s onwards the dominant school of thought was, and still is, the social history approach. The focus here is on the individual migrants, especially the kind of decisions made as whether to migrate or not. Using this perspective, in chapter three this study examines the changing migration patterns during the contemporary period with a view to establish the entry of more women into the migration process.

Much of the literature on Malawian migration during the old migration period portrays migrancy as a male phenomenon. This chapter reviews the literature for this period. The aim is to show the reasons for the maleness of migration. The competition between the external recruiters, *Wenela* and *Mthandizi*, is used to show how migration was a male preserve in that both agencies were looking for tough men to work in the mines. However, the chapter counter-argues that it is the same competition that prompted *Mthandizi* to open up to female migration as a strategy to out-do *Wenela*. The chapter also shows that women also feature in the discussion on the positive and negative impact

of migration in the rural areas. It advances the argument that women were not virtually absent in issues to do with migration even during the old migration period.

There are hardly any studies focusing specifically on the gendered nature of Malawian labour migrancy during this period. This is partly because for a long time it is the men who were actively involved in labour migration. The colonial government played a crucial role in ‘forcing’ the men to migrate, for instance, through the imposition of taxes and its control and regulation of labour migration. On their part missionaries detested labour migration because of its presumed disruption of social life that had a direct negative impact on women. Consequently, women are mentioned in migrant labour studies mostly in relation to the negative effects of the phenomenon.

N.H. Pollock and R.B. Boeder maintain that it is rather difficult to state with certainty the date when international migration first became a significant factor in Malawi. Pollock has indicated that some Tonga from West Nyasa (Nkhata Bay) district had found their way to the mines of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia before 1899¹ and Boeder has, similarly, indicated that by 1900 the level of emigration was sufficient to prompt a group of missionaries and planters to sign a petition in protest². Both studies addressed the negative impact of labour migration on women.

¹ N.H. Pollock, Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia: Corridor to the North (Pittsburg, 1971), p. 400.

² R.B. Boeder, “An Historical Essay on the Effects of Labour Migration on Rural Life in Malawi”, Seminar Paper, History Department, Chancellor College, 1972, p. 1.

However, women also featured in the discussion on the positive effects of migration. For example, van Velsen has argued that the Tonga women were transformed into local employers while their migrant husbands were away. This shows an element of rural accumulation and rural transformation. E. Kamanga, who expanded van Velsen's argument, shows that these women were using part of the remittances to employ the Ngoni men who used to migrate from Mzimba to Nkhata-Bay for employment³. By the 1970s and 1980s the Tonga women themselves started emigrating, but mostly to Tanzania and Zambia. There is also evidence that women from Mzimba were also emigrating to Zimbabwe during the same period⁴. In a few of his articles, W.C. Chirwa tackles the issue of gender when looking at the connections between labour migration and the spread of HIV and AIDS in the late 1980s and early 1990s⁵.

Motives and Impact of Labour Emigration

Undoubtedly, labour migration was a result of both push and pull factors⁶. These were applicable more to men than to women. It is generally argued in the literature that push factors played a major role in male migrancy in the southern African region. In Malawi, international labour migration was more of a result of pull factors that were applicable to

³ E.Y. Kamanga, "Labour Immigration and Ngoni Labour in Tongaland, 1930-1960s", Chancellor College, History Department, Seminar Paper, 1997.

⁴ Women were allowed to emigrate together with their husbands under *Mthandizi* to Zimbabwe. Labour migration to South Africa remained a male domain. See later sections in the chapter for details.

⁵ An example of such articles (by W.C. Chirwa) is entitled "Malawian Migrant Labour and the Politics of HIV/AIDS, 1985-1993", in J. Crush and W. James, Crossing Boundaries: Mine Migrancy in a Democratic South Africa (Cape Town: IDASA and Ottawa: IDRC, 1995)

⁶ Much of the literature on international migration from Malawi during the old migration period covered these factors.

men as wage workers. The difference in wages between Malawi and wealthier countries to the south made migration attractive to men. In the words of G. Coleman, labour migration in colonial Malawi represents a classic response of people seeking the most remunerative markets for their labour⁷. He argues that there developed a special interest in migration from Malawi to the 'south' at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. The reasons for this development were mainly economic because the rates of pay south of the Zambezi were far higher than those obtaining in colonial Malawi:

During the early years of the 20th century the rate of pay for the plantation labour in Malawi was still only 3 shillings per month and even the harder labour involved in building the railway to Blantyre (1903-1907) paid only 6 shillings per month. The same sort of labour could earn between 30 and 45 shillings per month (plus up to 15 pounds in deferred pay at the end of a contract) in the Transvaal mines and between 15 and 30 shillings per month in Rhodesia⁸.

While the 'pull' of these wage rates in Rhodesia and South Africa must have been significant, there was also an element of 'push' from within colonial Malawi due to the imposition of and increase in hut tax. The push factor was a male phenomenon because it is the men who were supposed to pay tax. Women were at times only required to use part of the remittances to pay taxes on behalf of their husbands who were away. Coleman argues that while in the short run the increased taxation encouraged a greater turnout of men for work within Malawi, "the longer term effect might as well have been adverse since the initial impetus to international migration which it provided quickly became an upward spiral which was to cause labour shortages throughout the protectorate period"⁹.

⁷ Coleman, "International Labour Migration from Malawi, 1875-1966", p. 37.

⁸ Pollock, 'Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia', p. 412.

⁹ Coleman, "International Labour Migration from Malawi", p. 37.

Independent Labour Migration

In order to understand the ungendered perspective of labour migration, one needs to look at both self¹⁰ migration, locally known as *selufu*, and the official contract migration. Most people preferred to migrate independently. However, independent migration was arduous. It involved walking on foot for long distances and long periods. It also involved taking risks, for instance, braving dangerous wild animals along the way and running away from captors during entry into South Africa and on the return end of the migration. The arduous journey and the conception of risk, among other factors, explain why only men were involved in independent migration.

Independent labour migration, or *selufu* as it was properly known, emerged way before official labour migration. H.C. Banda and W.C. Chirwa particularly support this view¹¹. On its part, though established around 1903, official contract migration only gained ground from the 1940s onwards. During the early period, between 1900 and 1940, it was unstable partly because of the official ban¹² from 1913 to 1936.

Banda argues that men exercised an independent choice between *selufu* and contract migration, and also between the recruiters¹³. The basis of their choice was the incentives offered by each of the competing agencies. According to Chirwa, the majority of labour migrants emigrated independently through *selufu*. He noted that the local people ably

¹⁰ The self here refers to an individual male migrant.

¹¹ W.C. Chirwa, "Theba Is Power", pp. 133-134; H.C. Banda, "Competition for Labour Supply in Mzimba District", p. 16.

¹² Banda, "Competition for the Labour Supply in Mzimba District", p. 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

distinguished between *chibaro*, or *joini*, ‘being recruited’, and *selufu*, and often the Nyasaland migrants avoided *chibaro* and preferred *selufu* instead”¹⁴.

Several views have been expressed not only in secondary sources, but also in oral sources as to why men preferred *selufu* to contract migration. One of the advantages of *selufu* that appears in most of the literature is the migrants’ choice of employers, nature of work and length of stay, and hence maximum accumulation of proceeds¹⁵. The following account substantiates this view:

The argument is appreciated that recruitment can be a means of safeguarding the interests and welfare of the recruits and their dependants and ensuring their return; recruitment however involves the recruit being tied for the period of his contract to an employer whom he does not know and may not like; the majority of Nyasas are independent and like to pick and choose their employers according to their own inclinations¹⁶.

Some male ex-migrants in Zubayumo Makamo area, who worked in South Africa during the *Wenela* days, echo the same sentiments:

I never worked in the mines. I went to South Africa in the 1950s, but I ended up doing gardening. I was very lucky that I was not arrested since the police used to arrest those who were going to South Africa on their own. The good thing with *selufu* is that you could change one job for a better one, unlike under *Wenela*¹⁷.

We were going as a group. It was very dangerous in those days. We were going to South Africa in stages, working along the way, for example, in Southern Rhodesia, thereafter proceeding and eventually reaching South Africa. Under *selufu* you were not bound by the contract period, for example, 18 months. Hence you could work in South Africa until you were satisfied you had accumulated enough¹⁸.

¹⁴ Chirwa, “Theba Is Power”, pp. 133-134.

¹⁵ Banda, “Competition for the Labour Supply in Mzimba District”, pp. 18-19.

¹⁶ MNA LB 10/4/7, General Correspondence, 1951-1952: Contract Labour Migration Versus Independent Labour Migration (Extracts from Communication by Labour Advisor, Zomba, 29/09/1952).

¹⁷ O.T. Lyson Bamiro, Galamala Mgungwe village, T.A. M’Mbelwa, Mzimba, 30/04/2005.

¹⁸ O.T. Winstead Lupafya, Zubayumo Makamo village, T.A. M’Mbelwa, Mzimba, 17/04/2005.

However, there were, and still there are, some problems associated with *selufu*. For instance, problems to do with transport arrangements, processing of passports, problems along the way, and eventually arrests and deportations upon illegal entry into South Africa. The following account elaborates the point:

We went to South Africa under *selufu*. We used to walk on foot. I first went to South Africa in 1955. Immediately after we entered the South African border from Botswana we got arrested and we were sent to *Bethani*, a farm prison, where most of those arrested for illegal entry were sent. There we were forced to dig Irish potatoes using hands. Luckily we managed to escape¹⁹.

The above account is evidence of the untold problems that female migrants could hardly have endured. Hence, women tended to remain at home.

Evidence also suggests that even the chiefs were encouraging their people to emigrate independently at the expense of contract migration. This view is illustrated by the complaint lodged by *Wenela's* Labour Representative to the District Manager, WNLA Ltd, Dowa:

Now it seems quite certain that whenever I have visited Chief M'Mbelwa at his headquarters that he is only bluffing me, by saying that he likes to help *Wenela* to recruit as many people as possible from his area, but instead of helping us he seems to be in favour of his boys going 'self'²⁰.

The message is clear from this account: Chief M'Mbelwa preferred the emigration of 'his boys' and not of both 'boys and girls'. This was done probably because women were physically weak and therefore had to do household chores at home. In fact, the entire recruitment process was a male sphere: male chiefs, male officials and male recruits.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ MNA 172/TEBA/1/3/2: Recruiting Permits: 1953 January-1961 August (Extract of memo by Labour Representative to District Manager, WNLA Ltd, Dowa on 7/10/1957).

Due to overstaying in South Africa, *selufu* apparently had more deleterious effects on the overstayers' home. In line with this view, Governor Colby argued that it was this large body of *selufu* migrants that caused social and economic problems in Nyasaland:

There is no obligation to support their dependants, no control and no definite period of absence. Many of them never returned at all, some were away twenty years or more, others married local women and entirely abandoned their dependants in Nyasaland. There were tens of thousands of such Nyasas in the Union, the great majority of whom were illegal migrants and liable to be deported at any time by the Union Government²¹.

The migrants, some of whom overstayed, were males because we are told in the quotation that they 'married local women in South Africa'. This is proof of the moralistic fears about the consequent detribalisation expressed not only by the colonial government, but also by the missionaries. The latter argued that labour migration had to be discouraged as it brought negative effects on the family and the society at large.

On the role the colonial government played regarding the control of *selufu*, Chirwa succinctly states that the government officials were quite aware that they could not control or regulate *selufu*²². Governor Colby believed the same:

There are certain fundamental facts which are inescapable. In the first place it must be appreciated that a considerable proportion of Nyasaland natives will, in spite of any action which may be taken, leave the country to seek employment and adventure elsewhere: this is a deeply rooted tradition, and, even if it were desirable, it is physically impossible to prevent migration over the thousands of miles of boundaries...²³.

In short, independent labour migration was a male domain because of several factors.

Men were adventurous and endured hardships in order to secure higher wages abroad.

²¹ MNA Governor Colby, Migrant Labour in South Africa and the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (Memorandum). See also: MNA NNM1/9/2: Committee to Enquire on Emigrant Labour (Revealed problems of *kutchona*).

²² Chirwa, "Theba Is Power", p. 134.

²³ MNA Governor Colby, Migrant Labour in South Africa, p. 1.

Selufu was also a result of the deep-rooted tradition. The society expected men and not women to venture out into migration. It was difficult for the government to control self migration because the male migrants were ready to escape even after capture.

Official Labour Migration

Women were not allowed to enter South Africa under contract migration. The recruiting procedure itself was for single men and not for married couples, especially to South Africa. In the case of *Mthandizi*, women were only allowed later on. The central issue about contract migration was government social control. The purpose of the latter was to control the labour force so as to limit the number of male migrants at each time and to ensure their brief stay in South Africa. The social control by the government justified why women had to remain at home.

The government's policy on labour migration was to 'control' and 'regulate' rather than abolish the system. The government could not abolish the system because it profoundly benefited from it. In this connection, the main aim of 'government controls' was to protect local labour needs²⁴. The colonial government made attempts to control labour emigration by issuing permits to recognized agencies only. Furthermore, the government fixed the agencies' annual quota of recruits. Chirwa argues that the government wanted to control the numbers of able-bodied men leaving the villages at one particular time so as to ensure sustained agricultural production and the maintenance of tribal life. The government was deliberately emphasizing the negative effects of emigration to control

²⁴ Pollock, 'Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia', p. 436.

the numbers of male emigrants - the women were to remain at home, only to be joined by their husbands 'now and again'.

In fact, the government intention to control contract migration was nullified by the competition between recruiters and between the employers or labour market points. There was competition at different 'fronts': between official migration and *selufu*; between local recruiters and their external counterparts; and between or among the external recruiters themselves. Competition for the Nyasaland labour supply intensified with the beginning of external recruiting in 1903. The government had granted permission to the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau (RNLB) to recruit up to 3,000 Nyasaland 'natives' for work in Southern Rhodesia. In the same year, the Foreign Office signed an agreement with the WNLA to recruit up to 3,000 Nyasaland workers for the South African gold mines. The terms included a capitation fee of 10 shillings per every recruit, and two-thirds of the wages were to be paid as deferred payment. Furthermore, the Nyasaland government would 'supervise' the recruiting and forwarding of the labourers to the WNLA agent based in the country²⁵. The association was to provide transportation, food, accommodation, and medical 'facilities' for the workers on their way to and from the mines. In fact, the above provisions were some of the advantages of official migration when compared with *selufu*.

Oral evidence indicates that there were advantages of contracted migration on the families of the migrants:

²⁵ Chirwa, "Theba Is Power", p. 122.

The parents of those who used to go to South Africa under *selufu* were generally well-to-do in society. *Selufu* was a dear alternative: One had to make 'secure' all the necessary provisions for the trip. While with *Wenela*, all provisions were available. Both journeys to and from South Africa were already catered for. We were also greatly benefiting from the system of deferred pay²⁶.

Such perceived advantages by the migrants themselves enhanced the competition between *Wenela* and *Mthandizi*.

Competition for Labour between *Wenela* and *Mthandizi*

H.C. Banda and B.G. Nkhoma have examined the issue of competition between *Wenela* and *Mthandizi* in depth. Banda in his paper 'Competition for the Labour Supply in Mzimba District: The Case of *Wenela* and *Mthandizi*, 1906-1956' argues that although *Mthandizi* posed a worthwhile challenge to *Wenela*, it was the latter that emerged victorious at the end of the day. But Nkhoma reaches a slightly different conclusion. In his paper 'The Competition for Malawian Labour, '*Wenela*' and '*Mthandizi*' in Ntcheu District, 1935-1956', he argues that "although *Wenela* was a dominant force in the recruitment of Malawian labour, it did not conduct its activities without major challenges and setbacks. *Mthandizi* and other recruiters posed a big challenge and sometimes effectively outdid *Wenela* up to the 1950s"²⁷.

Evidence from the two case studies suggests that Malawian migrants and potential ones were good at exercising their independent choice between *Wenela* and *Mthandizi*, and the other private recruiters. For instance, higher wages offered by *Wenela* were not the only

²⁶ O.T. Teddie Makamo, Kazezani Makamo village, T.A. M'Mbelwa, Mzimba, 21/04/2005.

²⁷ Nkhoma, "The Competition for Malawian Labour: *Wenela* and *Mthandizi* in Ntcheu", p. 2.

important incentive that the people considered. Other factors like male migrants being allowed to emigrate together with their wives and children, as in the case of *Mthandizi*, prove to have been crucial.

The strategies that the agencies employed facilitated the creation of a male identity. The campaign tools like T-shirts enhanced the maleness of migration. The agents employed, for example chiefs, preferred the emigration of their male subjects. The recruiting bodies were emphasizing healthy men in view of the tough work in the mines. Viewed from another angle, it is the same competition that introduced the migration of women, especially to Southern Rhodesia. These issues are in line with the stand established in the introduction of this chapter. As has already been indicated, there was a close relationship between contract migration and the maintenance of the families. Male migrants were sending especially monetary assistance back home while working in South Africa. Hence women were still confined to the home. This emphasizes the point about the control and regulation of male migration.

Remittances, Re-employment Guarantee and Male Migrancy

The other factors that reinforced the male nature of labour migration were the operation of remittances and the Re-employment Guarantee system. Under contract migration, there was an arrangement of withholding part of the migrants' monthly wages. This money was forwarded to the migrants' wives at home through the District Commissioners. Hence this formed remittances. The WNLA officials had some problems

in administering Compulsory Remittances. The migrant workers themselves caused some of these problems. These migrant workers were making private correspondence to the beneficiaries of these remittances at their respective homes, threatening them not to show up at the *Wenela* depots or District Commissioners offices to get the remittances. As such most nominees were scared and were not claiming these remittances. The letter written by the Labour Commissioner at Zomba to the DC of Karonga sheds light on this subject:

I shall be grateful if, in all cases where the nominee's slip is not produced when a claim is made for a remittance, the most stringent enquiries may be made from the nominee himself or herself and not from the sender, as to what has happened to the slip and the reasons for failure to claim on receipt of it.

A tendency has grown up in some districts for men sending Compulsory Remittances to their nominees by means of threats contained in private correspondence that the nominee is frightened to claim the amount of the remittance, thus defeating the whole object of the scheme²⁸.

Evidence here shows that the system of remittances reinforced male migration as women remained at home and relied on assistance from their husbands. However, evidence also shows that these women were not always benefiting from these remittances. Some remittances remained unpaid for a long time, sometimes for some months²⁹. It has also been indicated that some of these male migrants were claiming the unpaid remittances themselves upon return.

From the middle of the 1970s, it was the operation of the re-employment guarantee system that enforced the maleness of labour migration. During the transition from *Wenela* to TEBA, TEBA officials were looking for ex-migrants with past mining work

²⁸ MNA LB10/4/5: Remittances, Compulsory and Voluntary, Policy, 1946-1948. The letter itself is dated 24/11/1947.

²⁹ For the lists of unpaid WNLA Remittances see MNA LB10/4/5: Remittances, Compulsory and Voluntary Policy, 1946-1948.

experience – preferably those with two or more years of experience. Ex-migrants from Zubayumo Makamo area share this view³⁰. In this connection, it was indicated by some that they failed to make it to South Africa after the introduction of TEBA due to lack of necessary work experience. TEBA was looking for fewer numbers than its predecessor, *Wenela*, hence the difficulty for one to get through. TEBA was restricted to fairly small quotas from Malawi because of adequate supplies from more proximate sources. Those workers with past mine experience were easily being ‘re-engaged’ by TEBA once the latter traced the ex-employer’s record of service. The following documents easily facilitated easy re-engagement of the ex-migrant: Letters of Reference, Re-employment Guarantee Certificates (RGCs), and Leave letters³¹. This simply meant re-engagement of more male migrant workers in the mines since it is the men who had the required experience as they had been working in the mines for a long time. Women had no such experience and were therefore out of context. However, at the same time, there were changes in the regional markets. During the end of mine migrancy in the 1970s and 1980s, as male workers were withdrawing in larger numbers, female workers were joining the migration scene. These women were entering other sectors of the South African economy than mining. As noted in the introductory chapter, it is this contemporary migrancy from the 1970s onwards that is the concern of this study.

³⁰ Most of the interviewed ex-migrants maintained that those migrants who had two years of experience working in South Africa then, and especially those who had been engaged by *Wenela*, had an added advantage over those who were intending to go to South Africa for the first time, including those migrants who used to go to South Africa under *selufu*.

³¹ For details on these documents see MNA 172/TEBA/1/1/20: Malawi Employees, October 1987; and MNA 172/TEBA/1/1/21: Malawi Employees, October 1987.

Openings for female migration

Despite all the legal controls and given the physical risks for female migration, there were some minor opportunities for a small number of women to migrate, particularly to Southern and Northern Rhodesia. It has been demonstrated that the key issue about contract migration, and the competition that characterized it, is that it was a male phenomenon. Recruiting policies were designed in such a way that there was distinction between men and women. By policy design, women were supposed to be left at home. In fact, men were supposed to stay at the place of work only briefly and return home. In the previous section of this chapter it was indicated that from 1948 wives of male migrants were allowed to accompany their husbands to Southern Rhodesia. While there, they too used to provide wage labour. In contrast, female migration to South Africa was illegal. Official instructions were issued prohibiting women migrants from entering the Union of South Africa, as the following extract indicates:

...the labour officer, Johannesburg, has reported that the Union Authorities have declared to him that they will not allow the entry of Nyasaland women into the Union for the purpose of joining their husbands whether such husbands are in employment there or not³².

Women themselves reacted in various ways to the issue of female migration. On the one hand, women themselves were not interested in emigrating and, instead, preferred that their husbands be coming home ‘on a regular basis’, at least once every two years. This view is supported by ‘extracts’ from the letter by missionary Duncan Campbell written to the Commission of Enquiry on Emigrant Labour: “Practically none of the women have any desire to accompany their husbands to the south, and most of them would be entirely

³² MNA S36/1/5/4: Emigrants, 1940 July-1941 April.

satisfied if they were sure that their men-folk would return every three years”³³. On the other hand, it is argued that despite female migration to South Africa being illegal, women had interest to go along with male migrants to the extent that some of them managed to clandestinely enter South Africa. This view is supported by the following extract:

While it is appreciated that from humanitarian motives you wish to do your best for our natives, and that Nyasaland natives, both male and female, are able to enter the Union clandestinely, this does not alter the fact that, legally, they are classed as ‘prohibited immigrants’ by the Government of the Union of South Africa.... I am accordingly to instruct you that you should make it quite clear to applicants that under no circumstances will this government consider issuing passes or facilitating in any way the passage of wives who may wish to join their husbands in the Union³⁴.

The missionary view was that women would not have any problems if men were not overstaying in South Africa. In short, the missionaries preferred women staying at home in order to maintain social units.

According to E.H. Warren, the Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia Labour Officer based in Johannesburg, permission of female immigration into South Africa would have been a solution to the many social problems that used to arise in the Union. In a letter to the Acting Labour Commissioner, Warren wrote:

... I showed that if such permission were granted there would be considerably less promiscuous cohabitation with Union women and this would result to a large extent in one of the causes of strife between South African and Northern natives being abolished³⁵.

Most of the women interviewed in the study area shared this view. They feel it is better for husbands to go to South Africa together with their wives. For instance, Mrs. Bishop

³³ MNA NNM1/9/2: Committee to Enquire on Emigrant Labour.

³⁴ MNA S36/1/2/6: Female Immigration into South Africa.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Makamo pointed out that it is difficult for a migrant worker from Malawi to stay alone in South Africa because it is the South African women who make advances towards men. So after staying for one or two years away from their wives, most men fail to resist the temptations. Eventually they tend to forget their wives back home in Malawi³⁶.

The Travel Permits issued by the colonial authorities to women in the 1950s show that there was large-scale emigration of females to Northern Rhodesia, seconded by emigration of the same to Southern Rhodesia. The records indicate that no permits were issued to women wishing to travel to South Africa, as tables below exemplify³⁷.

Table 1: (a) Travel Permits issued to Women, November 1955 (Mzimba)

	Women	Children under 12(M)	Children under 12 (F)
Southern Rhodesia	13	8	4
Northern Rhodesia	43	15	20
South Africa	0	0	0

Source: MNA 6/4/5: Traveling Permits: Central and Northern Provinces.

Table 1: (b) Travel Permits issued to Women, September 1955 (Nkhata-Bay)

	Women	Children under 12 (M)	Children under 12 (F)
Southern Rhodesia	15	4	2
Northern Rhodesia	36	12	9
South Africa	0	0	0

Source: MNA 6/4/5: Traveling Permits: Central and Northern Provinces.

³⁶ O.T. Mrs. Bishop Makamo, Lithuli Mkamo Village, T.A. M'Mbelwa, Mzimba.

³⁷ MNA LB 6/4/5: Traveling Permits: Central and Northern Provinces.

By the 1960s there were probably more women migrating from Malawi mostly to the neighbouring countries of Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia. The 1966 Malawi Population Census reported a total of 266,000 migrants. Of these, some 22,000 were females and a further 2,000 were juveniles, leaving a total of 242,000 adult male migrants. It is worth noting that these are round figures that do not show any breakdowns, for example, on the categories of the migrants in question.

This chapter has examined the nature of migration to South Africa during the old migration period. It has shown that men largely dominated the migration process during this period. This male nature of migration was reinforced by, among others, the recruiting methods and the colonial policy that men should emigrate and women should remain at home. The chapter has argued that women were involved in the migration process despite government controls. It has been indicated that small numbers of women managed to clandestinely go to South Africa. Furthermore, women accompanied their husbands to Southern Rhodesia under the auspices of *Mthandizi*. In short, the chapter has traced the beginnings of female migration during this period.

Chapter three focuses on female migration by examining the nature that it is taking in the contemporary period. The central argument in this chapter is that developments in southern Africa, and in Malawi in particular, between the 1970s and early 1990s are behind the increase in the numbers of women joining the migration process. This is the view that was introduced in chapter one. In fact, the study advances this view throughout the paper. The following are some of the themes examined in the next chapter: the

gender-specific motivations of male and female migration; the decision-making processes; and a comparison of the remittances of male and female migrants under the impact of migration.

Chapter Three

LABOUR MIGRATION FROM ZUBAYUMO MAKAMO AREA

The previous chapter discussed trends in labour migration from Malawi during the old migration period. It traced the beginnings of female official migration to Southern Rhodesia and clandestine migration to South Africa. In the case of Southern Rhodesia, these women accompanied their husbands. The chapter argued, among other things, that the maleness of migration during the period was reinforced by legal and policy issues, on the one hand, and societal expectations, on the other.

This chapter examines the nature of migration during the contemporary period. As observed in the introductory chapter, it highlights research findings from Zubayumo Makamo area in Mzimba. It provides evidence for the argument that for the contemporary period there has been the entry of many women into the migration system. It is this feminisation of migration from Malawi that is the focus of this study. The chapter shows that unlike the previous migration period, during which women accompanied their husbands to Southern Rhodesia, during the contemporary period there are different migration patterns on the part of women. They migrate on their own or accompanied by their male colleagues.

As noted in chapter one, the study argues that changes in patriarchal control and those at the socio-economic and political levels, both at the local and regional scene, are behind the changing migration patterns. It is worth noting that several developments took place

in the 1980s and early 1990s that had a direct bearing on the nature of international migration from Malawi. The following are some of the changes in question: changes in political dispensations both in South Africa and Malawi; changes in the mode of transport between Malawi and South Africa; and, lastly, socio-economic factors. The chapter examines these factors with a view to justify the inherent changes in male and female migrancy.

This chapter examines the composition of the migrant labour force. Here the chapter shows the different categories of men and women who are taking part in migrancy. It also examines the gender-specific motives for migration. The motives of male and female migrants are not necessarily the same. The argument here is that women, just like men, are purposive individuals who make rational decisions to migrate. This is in line with the Human Agency perspective. The chapter also highlights the decision-making processes that take place before the migration of men and women. Evidence shows that, while some women get consent from their family members to migrate, there are some who migrate on their own. This is as a result of rebellion to parental control. It is also worth noting that female migration from the area is a result of weakening patriarchal structures. The impact of the changing patterns of migration at the local level is examined in chapter four.

Background Information: Familial, Social, and Patriarchal Structures

Zubayumo Makamo area is found on the western part of Mzimba district, along the ‘middle’ road from Mzimba *boma* to Kamteteka (see Figure Two for the location). Zubayumo Makamo covers approximately twenty-four square kilometers. The area is

generally flat, with fertile sandy soils suitable for the cultivation of maize and tobacco. The area is sandwiched between Mzimba River, to the north, and Ngoli River, to the south. To the extreme south there is a road to Edingeni via Manyamula and Engalaweni. This is generally regarded as a labour migration area. Migration is a very old tradition here. Evidence shows that it has been taking place since the 1930s. Other notable areas here are Manyamula, Engalaweni, Chiseng’ezi and Bulala.

There are several villages in Zubayumo Makamo area. These include Zubayumo Makamo village (proper), Zebediya Makamo village, Kazezani Makamo village, Lithuli Makamo village, Galamala Mgungwe village, Njowo Makamo village, and Kamangadazi Makamo village. This study is based on the research findings from the first five of these villages. The main reason for this is that these villages are close to Zubayumo Makamo village proper after which the entire area takes its name. The village heads and group village heads in this area are under the authority of Inkosana Ng’onomo Makamo, who in turn is under the ‘lordship’ of TA M’Mbelwa based at Edingeni headquarters.

All these villages have patriarchal and patrilocal structures. Before the arrival of the Ngoni in the district in the 19th century there were matrilineal familial structures of the Chewa. It is, therefore, argued that the arrival of the Ngoni brought about change from matrilineal to patrilineal structures. According to Titus Nyirenda, almost all the families in Zubayumo Makamo area are patrilineal¹. But Raphael Sakala holds a contrary view: that a few of the ‘new comers’ are still matrilineal, for example, those who left their

¹ O.T. Titus Nyirenda, Chikomeni Nyirenda village, T.A. M’Mbelwa, Mzimba, 17/04/2005.

original places to this area following their wives and others to secure ‘tenant’ jobs in tobacco estates in order to ease their plight². It is worth noting that although the area is renowned for exporting labour to South Africa, some people are engaged in tobacco farming on the outskirts of this area. It is on these estates where some matrilineal families secure ‘tenant’ jobs.

Zubayumo Makamo area is one of the major labour migration areas in Mzimba district. The district, with its mixture of predominantly *Ngoni* and *Tumbuka* peoples, has a long history of labour migration to, mainly, South Africa. The following account confirms this fact:

An important factor to be borne in mind is the inborn wander lust of the Ngoni with the offer of higher wages outside the country which forces them to emigrate and seek fortunes elsewhere, knowing that if they stay in their own country they have food shortages to face³.

In this connection, Charles Makamo had this to say: “In Mzimba district, in general, the Ngoni have been migrating to South Africa ‘since time immemorial’. However, there are now some specific areas in the district that are renowned for the migration in question. Some of these are Zubayumo Makamo area, Engalaweni, Manyamula, Chiseng’ezi just after Kamteteka and Bulala in Euthini”⁴. While the most northern part of the district, the area of T.A. Mpherembe, is a tobacco producing area attracting numerous workers from other parts of the district and also from other districts, the areas of T.A. M’Mbelwa and T.A. Chindi in western Mzimba continue to be characterised by massive male absenteeism because of migration. It is worth noting that the same area is popular for the

² O.T. Raphael Sakala, Zubayumo Makamo village, T.A. M’Mbelwa, Mzimba, 14/04/2005.

³ MNA NNM 1/9/1: General, 1927 January-1936 September (Report on the labour conditions among natives in Mzimba District by the DC, 1931 April).

⁴ O.T. Charles Makamo, Zebediya Makamo village, T.A. M’Mbelwa, Mzimba, 16/06/2004.

emigration of females. Different categories of women are involved in this migration process.

Zubayumo Makamo area is very popular in the district because of the level of development in terms of infrastructure in this rural setting. Going through the village one comes across beautiful and iron-roofed houses. Hence Zubayumo Makamo is more of a ‘town inside a rural area’⁵. The area is also popular in the district because of the vibrant trade that has developed as a by-product of the international migrancy⁶. When people in the district want to buy second-hand items such as musical equipment, bicycles, cars, solar panels, cell phones, sewing machines, they check with Zubayumo Makamo area, Chiseng’ezi, Engalaweni or Bulala, roughly in that order signifying the respective importance of each of these areas as regards migration to South Africa. In fact, even most of the informants interviewed at Mzimba *boma* alluded to this view. Furthermore, most of the South African items sold at Mzimba *boma* come from the same area. In this vein, Wilson Banda comments on the cheapness of most of the items for sale from Zubayumo area:

Zubayumo Makamo area is very popular not only at Mzimba *boma*, but even in far off places like Mzuzu, because most of the second-hand South African items are sold at very cheap prices in the area. Hence most people who want these items buy them from the area. Furthermore, some of the entrepreneurs buy these goods in the area and later sell them at a profit at Mzimba *boma*. But even in this case the goods still look cheap at the *boma*⁷.

According to B.G. Nkhoma, Ntcheu district was very popular for labour migration partly because the cultural practices of the Ntcheu people encouraged young men to emigrate.

⁵ The writer first passed through the area including Kamteteka and Engalaweni in June 2004.

⁶ Most informants in the area, including those at Mzimba *boma*, alluded to this view.

⁷ O.T. Wilson Banda, Londobala Bota village, T.A. Kampingo Sibande, Mzimba, 12/04/2005.

For young men labour migration was a kind of ‘rite of passage’ through which they proved their manhood and won the admiration of beautiful young women⁸. It is worth pointing out that this is largely a reverse of the trend in Zubayumo Makamo area, to be specific, and Mzimba district at large. In Mzimba district, including Zubayumo Makamo area, young men nowadays tend to get married first as part of their preparation for the migration trip to South Africa. This is what one father had to say about the intended trip of his son on the matter: “My son is only waiting for his passport to be ready before he can actually emigrate. Otherwise he has finalised all the preparations for his South African trip, for instance, he just got married a few months ago”⁹.

The key families in the area are Sakala, Lupafya, Chisi, Mwase, Jere, Makamo, Mgungwe, Tembo, and Thika. The majority of these are polygamous families. This is particularly true with married men of over forty years. Most of them have more than one wife. Each of these wives has children some of whom are working in South Africa. While a man with one wife would also have children, the argument here is that a child from a polygamous family would have more chances of going to South Africa to work because the likelihood of him or her having some of his or her siblings already working in South Africa is greater. Family members in South Africa usually assist the others at home to equally emigrate. So it can rightly be concluded that polygamous families are associated with labour migration more than the monogamous families. It is this use of kinship and family networks that is important. Much as these people migrate as individuals, there is a collective element to it. This is an instance of human agency.

⁸ Nkhoma, “The Competition for Malawian Labour in Ntcheu District”, p. 9.

⁹ O.T. Davies Dayire, Kamangadazi Makamo village, T.A. M’Mbelwa, Mzimba, 16/06/2004.

In this connection, a good example of the polygamous families is that of Jafta Chisi¹⁰, a labour migrant from Zebediya Makamo village. Jafta Chisi's father had three wives, and Jafta was from the first wife. Each of these wives has had children working in South Africa and these are, arguably, willing to assist each other during the period they are working in South Africa. It can, therefore, be argued that labour migration in the western part of Mzimba district and in Zubayumo Makamo area in particular, is largely a family affair. These people are investing not only in material things, but also in the family to maintain social units. This provides security and is also a safety-net, a means of assisting each other. Since these people can pool their efforts, they, therefore, have advantages over those families without such connections. The result here is differentiation at the local level, with some families emerging as better off than others.

However, polygamy in the area is fast changing. Polygamous families will soon no longer be dominant. This is the prediction of most of the informants interviewed in the area. Most young men nowadays prefer having one wife and sticking to the same for fear of contracting the HIV, the virus that leads to AIDS. The AIDS scourge is killing many people in the area, especially within the labour migration families. Most informants echoed this view, for example Burnet Sakala, who is a pastor of Chipangano Church in Zubayumo Makamo village¹¹. Patriarchal control was best embodied in polygamy. The decline in polygamy, that is, the move towards nuclear families, is, therefore, a clear indication of the weakening patriarchal control.

¹⁰ O.T. Merisha Mhone, Yesaya Nkosi village, T.A, M'Mbelwa, Mzimba, 04/05/2005.

¹¹ O.T. Burnet Sakala, Zubayumo Makamo village, T.A. M'Mbelwa, Mzimba, 14/04/2005.

Migration bolsters most of the economic activities taking place in Zubayumo Makamo area. The study came up with a ranking of the major sources of income in order of their importance. There are a few income generating activities in the area. Working in South Africa is the main source of income for most households. Very few people are working locally. Agriculture is the second source of income for the people locally. This is the second priority. Thirdly, some people are involved in businesses as income generating activities. For example, some have hawking businesses or small groceries, while others are local transporters. They have pick-up trucks for local *matola* (i.e. informal ferrying of passengers). Some use them to transport people, to and from South Africa, and *katundu* (goods) and money from South Africa¹². Some of the local farmers produce Oriental Tobacco and usually sell it to Limbe Leaf Tobacco Company Limited. The officials of the latter actually buy this tobacco, according to its grades, right from the farmers' homes. As for this area, the officials buy this tobacco from Zubayumo Makamo trading centre, next to the traditional court premises. It is the labour migration families that are able to produce more and good quality tobacco due to the remittances from the male and female migrant relatives working in South Africa¹³. This view on the rankings of the sources of income confirms the view that this area is popular because of the relatively large numbers of male and female labour migrants working in South Africa at each point in time.

Some of the social changes analysed in the preceding sections are actually the result of the general movement of women empowerment at the local level. It is therefore important

¹² Most informants shared this view.

¹³ O.T. Edward Zgambo, Mponda Mhango village, T.A. M'Mbelwa, Mzimba, 04/05/2005.

to highlight the empowerment in question. Evidence shows that for a long time women hardly held any power at any level in the area¹⁴. However, the situation nowadays is considerably changing. Women are being empowered through their active involvement in community development projects, for instance, church and MASAF projects. In most of these projects women are now said to be holding decision-making positions, for example, positions of chairperson, secretary, and treasurer. The study argues that such forms of women empowerment give an idea as to why women since the early 1990s regard themselves as ‘equally’ able, just like men. Put differently, they view themselves as capable and rational beings. Consequently, they joined the international migrancy scene. Their aim, just like that of men, is to secure jobs in South Africa as a solution to their families’ plight at home. The study further argues that the emigration of women is, in this case, another form of women empowerment through which they realize that ‘they are not liabilities in society’. This is in line with one of the central arguments of this study.

However, empowerment is not a common element for all women. In some families some women are becoming more empowered than others. This is also an issue of differentiation at the local level. The reason for this difference in empowerment is not very clear. There is still very little power sharing between husband and wife in certain families. For instance, some female informants, including wives of migrant husbands working in South Africa, showed that they leave decision-making entirely in the hands of

¹⁴ Power was solely in the hands of men. This was partly because of strong patriarchal control. The weakening of patriarchal control came along with decentralization of power not only within the family, but also at the community level. This was clearly evident in Zubayumo Makamo village proper where women are playing active roles in various churches.

their husbands. For example, Lucia Mwanza of Galamala Mgungwe village says that it is up to her husband to decide whether to invite her to South Africa or not. She says she cannot decide what to do¹⁵. On the other hand, some women have decision-making powers within the family. For instance, they influence their husbands to facilitate their emigration to South Africa because that is one way of preventing their husbands' temptations of having extra-marital affairs in South Africa, in the face of the HIV/ AIDS scourge¹⁶.

Labour Migration from Mzimba District

The migration from Zubayumo Makamo and the social factors relating to it should be understood within the wider context of migration from Mzimba as a whole. Thus the account below places labour migration from the study area within this context. International labour migration from Mzimba district is as old as migration from the entire country. This is due to a number of reasons. First, the geographical position of the district matters. Mzimba borders Rumphi district to the north, Kasungu to the south, Nkhata-Bay to the east, and Zambia to the west. This location was advantageous to labour migration in that the routes taken by the migrant labourers from the other districts cut across the district. In this way the incentives of labour migration from these neighbouring areas easily filtered to potential migrants in Mzimba. Furthermore, the international border location was favourable for independent migration. Since the government did not allow the latter, the migrants easily sneaked out across the border into Zambia, and proceeded south until they reached their destinations, in Southern Rhodesia or South Africa. Second,

¹⁵ O.T. Lucia Mwanza, Galamala Mgungwe village, T.A. M'Mbelwa, Mzimba, 28/04/2005.

¹⁶ O.T. Frances Zimba, Mgubani Chipeta village, T.A. Chindi, Mzimba, 05/05/2005.

the people of Mzimba were neighbours of the Tonga of Nkhata-Bay district, who had a long history of participating in labour migration. The Tonga developed a migrant tradition earlier than the Ngoni of Mzimba. The riches brought home by the Tonga migrants therefore influenced the Ngoni, especially that some Ngoni worked for the families of the migrating Tonga. It is noteworthy that the pioneer Ngoni migrants were exclusively male. The third reason was the economic situation in the district. The people of Mzimba had limited job opportunities. They were therefore prompted to seek jobs abroad after being exposed to migration. Fourth, Mzimba played the role of being the headquarters for labour recruitment operations in the northern region. The local people took advantage of the availability of labour recruitment offices of *Wenela* and *Mthandizi* to migrate in larger numbers. In fact, both oral and archival evidence indicates that *Wenela* and *Mthandizi* came to Mzimba district as early as 1938 and 1948, respectively¹⁷. Finally, the culture of the Ngoni of Mzimba is equally important in this respect. Their cultural practices encouraged them to migrate. The people in the district were of *Nguni* origin. In fact, their forefathers originated mainly from South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. Hence going to these two places for work was more like ‘going back to their roots’¹⁸.

Labour migration from Mzimba underwent several changes in terms of the volume and composition of the migrants. More people tended to join the labour migration process with the passage of time. Initially migration was a male sphere with women joining the

¹⁷ Banda, “Competition for the Labour Supply in Mzimba”, p. 10.

¹⁸ This is also applicable to the Ngoni of Ntcheu district as partly highlighted by B.G. Nkhoma in his paper “The Competition for Malawian Labour, ‘Wenela’ and ‘Mthandizi’ in Ntcheu District, 1935-1956”.

scene towards the end of the old migration period and especially during the contemporary period. Relatively less people migrated from Mzimba district in the period up to the 1980s because of several factors. There were untold transport problems. Male migrants relied largely on footing and lorries appeared on the scene only later. At the political level, during the one-party state women had limited rights unlike during the democratic dispensation that was ushered in the early 1990s. Related to this, there was no free movement of people during the old migration period. What is more, locally there was a strong patriarchal control where women had no say in the households and society at large.

Changes in Male and Female International Migration

The changes at the regional level impacted on the changing patterns in labour migration in the study area. This was especially the case from the 1980s such that by the 1990s these became more visible. Several changes took place in the early 1990s, which had a direct bearing on the nature of international migration from Malawi. These include the changes in political dispensations both in South Africa and in Malawi, changes in the means of transport between the two places, and the changes relating to regional labour markets¹⁹. The study examines these factors with a view to justify the consequent or inherent changes in male and female migration to South Africa from Zubayumo Makamo area.

¹⁹ Some of the works that discuss these changes include J. Crush, "Migrations Past: An Historical Overview of Cross-Border Movement in Southern Africa", in D.A. McDonald (ed.), On Borders: Perspectives on International Migration in Southern Africa; K. Matlosa, "Overview of Labour Markets and Migration Patterns in Southern Africa", in K. Matlosa (ed.), Migration and Development in Southern Africa: Policy Reflections; and W.C. Chirwa, "The Changing Migration and Employment Patterns in Malawi", in K. Matlosa (ed.), Migration and Development in Southern Africa: Policy Reflections.

Whereas in the period up to the 1980s the Malawian labour migrants traveled to South Africa either by planes, lorries, or trains, from the 1990s most traveled more cheaply by coaches. Obviously these coaches started operating freely between the two countries, Malawi and South Africa, following the removal of trade and movement restrictions in the SADC and COMESA regions and also because of the improvements in the regional road networks. Hence even the relatively poor could afford going to South Africa to look for employment. Though initially relatively fewer, of late there are several coaches operating between Blantyre and Lilongwe, on the one hand, and Johannesburg, on the other. According to personal observations, most of the passengers aboard these coaches are men, and of the female passengers, most are traders²⁰. The study argues that this is not surprising because in the case of female labour migrants working in South Africa, they are less mobile as they are based there and only travel home irregularly during holidays.

In addition to these coaches, many labour migrants travel to South Africa by lorries or pick-up trucks. It is important to note that in Zubayumo Makamo area there are several informal transporters who have, with time, specialized in the business of delivering labour migrants to specific 'locations' in South Africa, and goods and money from migrant workers in South Africa to their dependents in Malawi. According to Doctor

²⁰ The writer made personal observations during a trip to South Africa in February 2005. In addition to this, Dr. J.A. Andersson conducted bus surveys in the same year in trying to find out the kind of passengers traveling using coaches between Malawi and South Africa. Results here were also useful.

Sakala, himself one of the pioneer transporters operating between Malawi and South Africa, the history of this transport business in the district dates back to the early 1990s²¹.

In a related development, it was learnt that despite the fact that these local transporters charge higher fares compared to coaches, most labour emigrants prefer traveling by pick-ups. There are advantages or special attractions of traveling by these pick-ups. Firstly, the migrants are delivered at the homes of their relatives or dependents in South Africa, with whom the first-time migrant stays before he or she moves to his or her own apartment after securing a job. In this case the issue of first-time migrants getting stranded or lost in South Africa is virtually out of question.

Secondly, most informal transporters offer a payment-upon-arrival or pay forward service²². Consequently even a potential migrant who has a passport but has no travel money is able to go to South Africa as long as he or she has a migrant relative who has promised to pay the travel money upon arrival there. What is more, some transporters even allow migrants to pay for themselves for the trip made through installments after they secure a job there. However, oral evidence shows that there are at times complications regarding payment under this latter arrangement. Gomezgani Mwanza sheds more light on this:

One of my sons, Standwell Mwanza, was once transported to South Africa through the pay forward arrangement. The agreement with the transporter, Kazezani Makamo, was that Standwell would pay from his salary in South Africa. Unfortunately Standwell failed to pay the money as he got deported

²¹ O.T. Doctor Sakala, Zubayumo Makamo village, T.A. M'Mbelwa, Mzimba, 13/06/2004.

²² Source: Dr. J.A. Andersson's research on 'Informal Trade and Migration in the Mzimba District'. He has, among other issues, focused on the activities of these transporters between the study area and South Africa.

back to Malawi after only a few months. Consequently, back home the onus was mine to settle the issue. But Kazezani was very fair, as he did not claim any interest on top of the initial agreement of K10, 000²³.

Thirdly, transporters also accept payment in kind from migrants for these South African trips, for example in the form of cattle. Usually one cow or bull is ‘paid’ instead of K10, 000 to K12, 000, as of April 2005²⁴. However, ‘paying in kind’ is expensive as the bull or cow would, at the market price, be worth K20, 000 or more. It is therefore those who do not have immediate cash that go for this option. The families with the pseudo-traditionalist advantage of having large numbers of cattle may also opt for this method of financing migrancy.

In a related development, one would ask as to why migrant workers from Zubayumo Makamo area prefer sending their *katundu* and money through these local transporters. Oral evidence gives two main reasons for this. The first has to do with illiteracy levels in the area, especially among the migrants’ wives, usually the recipients of the sent ‘items’. They would, therefore, find it rather difficult to claim their ‘items’ at Mzimba *boma*. Secondly, it is too involving to send the same through the banks, as for money, and coaches in the case of *katundu*. With the latter, one has to travel to Lilongwe to await the goods, while with money one has to go to Mzimba *boma* where there are banks. The local transporters bring the same right to the homes of the recipients.

The other major change is the ‘political transformations’ in Malawi, on the one hand, and South Africa, on the other. The coming of multi-party politics and democracy in Malawi,

²³ O.T. Gomezgani Mwanza, Galamala Mgungwe village, T.A. M’Mbelwa, Mzimba, 29/04/2005.

²⁴ O.T. Anthony Lupafya, Zubayumo Makamo village, T.A. M’Mbelwa, Mzimba, 18/04/2005.

1992-1994, and in South Africa in 1994²⁵ played a crucial role in bringing about a political atmosphere conducive to free movement of migrants from Malawi to South Africa for trade purposes or to secure jobs in the informal sector. Unlike in the period up to the 1980s, when they could work both in the mines and in other sectors, from the 1990s up to the present migrants end up securing such jobs in domestic service, recreation, commerce and the service sector in general.

This study argues that the changes above influenced not only males, but also females of various categories to join the migration scene from the 1990s onwards. However, in the case of women, another crucial factor was the flow of information from South Africa to Malawi through their female colleagues. For some time before the joining of the single female migrants, male migrants were migrating together with their wives. In some cases the wives were following their husbands in South Africa, for instance, after some months. The initial motive of these wives was just visiting their husbands. During such visits, these migrant wives realized that there were jobs available for women. As a result they started working there on temporary basis. A good example of these is Sera Mgungwe, wife to Richard Makamo of Lithuli Makamo village²⁶. It is such migrant wives who brought the news home about the availability of job opportunities in South Africa. This, therefore, influenced even the single women, including school leavers, to emigrate so as to try their luck in South Africa after failing to make ends meet at home. Both male and female informants, migrants and non-migrants alike, in Zubayumo area support this view.

²⁵ Kanyenze, "African Migrant Labour Situation in Southern Africa", pp. 9-12.

²⁶ O.T. Sera Mgungwe, Galamala Mgungwe village, T.A. M'Mbelwa, Mzimba, 03/05/2005.

The study therefore argues that with the atmosphere being conducive to the emigration of both sexes, it is not surprising that for the first time not only married women but even the unmarried women emigrated to South Africa for employment, with or without patriarchal restrictions. The independent migration of single women is a good indicator of the level of human agency and the enterprising spirit of these people. The patriarchal control and the signs of its gradual weakening are discussed in detail in the later sections of this chapter.

Composition of the Migrant Labour Force

The changes in labour migrancy in the study area, as in the district as a whole, were not just in terms of patterns and mode of travel. They also included the composition of the migrants and their social categories. The main argument in this section is that from the early 1990s onwards, unlike in the preceding period, different categories of both men and women have been emigrating to South Africa for work and other reasons. However, the other worthwhile argument is that just like in the pre-1990 period when almost all migrants were exclusively male, in the post-1990 period male migrants are still dominant, although a good number of females, including unmarried ones, are joining labour migrancy. This is a popular view in each of the five Makamo villages covered in this study. The study estimates a ratio of one female migrant to every ten male migrants²⁷. This is, arguably, a considerable female proportion considering the fact that their male counterparts have a long and established history of working in South Africa.

²⁷ Most of the informants in the area gave this as an estimated ratio.

Whereas in the past a male migrant would be accompanied by his wife and, at other times, one child, for instance in the case of emigration to Zimbabwe during the *Mthandizi* days, as noted in chapter two, under contemporary migration a migrant couple usually emigrates without children. Furthermore, unlike in the past when young men emigrated with a view to accumulate money and property with which to attract ladies to marry, nowadays it is the general trend that most young men marry before emigrating.

It is worth noting that male migrants in Zubayumo Makamo area are of all ages: young men, fresh school leavers, including primary school drop outs, middle-aged men and very old 'ex-official migrants'. The latter are those who initially emigrated during the old labour migration period either as *Wenela/ Mthandizi* recruits or as *selufu* migrants. In fact, most of them worked there in South Africa for many years and came home for resettlement. But following the end of contract migration, which had restrictions, and due to poverty at home, they decided to go back to South Africa to look for jobs like gardening and house-keeping. Their major attraction under contemporary migrancy is that they decide how long to stay. They do not stay long because of age, and come back just when they have accumulated 'just enough' to tidy them up upon their return to Malawi.

A case in point here is Sandboy Mwase, who first went to South Africa under *Wenela* in 1964. He had worked there on and off until 1974 when he came home to settle down. However, in 1985 he went back to South Africa, this time under *selufu*. His last stay in South Africa was between 1993 and 1999. The following is his personal account:

During *selufu* I used to be employed as a cook. I would have retired in 1997. In that year I was joined by one of my sons who was due to take over my job as a cook. But my employer was not impressed with my son's drinking habits. Consequently, although I trained him, my boss opted for me. My son got employed elsewhere within a short time with the assistance from my boss and myself. I was, therefore, forced to work on until 1999, when I returned home because I was exhausted²⁸.

The dominant categories of women involved in migration are the wives of migrants, who accompany or follow their husbands, divorcees whose marriages have broken up, widows who are left with the burden of looking after their children following the deaths of their husbands, and single or unmarried women, for example, school leavers. It is important to note that widows and divorcees are, strictly speaking, also 'single female migrants' as they are no longer in their marriages. The last category, according to evidence from Zubayumo Makamo area, is composed of single females who have children outside marriage. Most of them have one or two children. The female migrants also vary in terms of their social categories. Some are relatively poor, while others are well-to-do by village standards. It is the latter category that has an enterprising spirit and emigrates in order to accumulate money so as to invest back home. Those people who have iron roofed houses, own livestock, and make money out of maize and tobacco farming are generally regarded as well-to-do in Zubayumo Makamo area.

This study observed that, in general, patriarchal control is weakening. Not only single women, but also some married women are migrating through rebellion. This is supported by evidence from the study area. For instance, there are some migrants' wives who equally emigrate through the use of force. A good example here is the wife of Marcel

²⁸ O.T. Sandboy Mwase, Zebediya Makamo village, T.A. M'Mbelwa, Mzimba, 14/04/2005.

Mgungwe. Mrs. Nancy Mgungwe went to South Africa without both the knowledge and consent of her husband, who was then already working in South Africa. Abraham Mgungwe, not related to Marcel, had this to say on the matter:

Marcel's wife decided to go to South Africa without the consent of the husband. Marcel told his wife not to follow him to South Africa so as to take care of their children back home. But the wife, who had already visited the husband in South Africa earlier, sold part of the household items so as to find transport money. Now its three years since the wife went to South Africa, but we hear that they are staying apart²⁹.

This is an indicator of human agency as well. Women are equally rational beings and fulfill their motives, in this case migrating and working in South Africa, despite any hindrances. Their ultimate aim is to alleviate their plight and also that of their households³⁰.

Motives behind Male and Female Migrancy

The motives of the female migrants are not necessarily the same as those of their male counterparts. The motives of migrating also differ according to the social categories of the migrants, along age, family migration history, marital status, wealth and economic well-being.

Furthermore, in line with the view presented in chapter one, the present chapter argues that females too have genuine motives for emigrating to South Africa. If these female labour migrants end up doing things contrary to what they had purported to do, for example, getting married in South Africa, it is just consequential. What is more, this is not exclusive to women: even men sometimes pursue ulterior motives. The situation is at

²⁹ O.T. Abraham Mgungwe, Galamala Mgungwe village, T.A. M'Mbelwa, Mzimba, 29/04/2005.

³⁰ Details of patriarchal restrictions against the emigration of women come later in this chapter.

times worse with male than with female migrants. This is confirmed by Dickson Sakala's account regarding what actually happens in South Africa:

I know quite a lot. The females who go to South Africa are of various categories. There are single females who go there alone and find jobs. Of these some end up getting married while working there. We hear that so and so, single woman, is now married in South Africa. There are women, wives, who are just invited by their husbands simply to visit them. They are there. But there are also male migrant workers who have girlfriends and other wives, informal marriages, there. That is what happens there³¹.

It is clear that the issue of motives of male and female migrants is rather controversial. The migrants themselves maintain that they go to South Africa to find jobs so as to ease their financial problems at home. In this case, it cannot be proper to argue that female migrants migrate for such motives as prostitution. However, at times what actually happens in South Africa is contrary to the migrants' own motives. Some of the migrants indulge in promiscuous sexual behaviour. In fact, this view is shared by some of the parents, especially fathers, in Zubayumo Makamo area. A good example here is Dickson Sakala above. Hence this is one of the grounds for parental resistance against female migration.

As far as the study is concerned, motives of the migrants are related to the impact of labour migration. For instance, for one to assess whether migrants fulfill their rightful motives or not, one has to examine how the migrants use the proceeds from labour migration. The latter comes in the last substantive chapter, chapter four.

³¹ O.T. Dickson Sakala, Zubayumo Makamo village, T.A. M'Mbelwa, Mzimba, 18/04/2005.

Unlike in the past when men were migrating as a ‘rite of passage’ to show their manhood, this time men do migrate generally after getting married first. This is in view of the threat of the HIV/ AIDS scourge. In fact, most of the parents in the study area prefer this arrangement. Oral evidence suggests that there are three clear-cut motives of male migrants, although in general all labour migrants go to South Africa because of poverty at home. The first category is that of male migrants who go to South Africa because of lack of jobs or income-generating activities at home. So they emigrate to secure jobs in South Africa to be in a position to support their wives, children and other dependents, by sending them material and monetary assistance. This group works in South Africa for as long as it is possible, only coming home for brief visits. It is not surprising that some of the migrants in this group end up becoming overstayers, *matchona*. Consequently, the situation that emerges at home is that of female-headed households, with the woman taking full charge over the welfare of the family. The wife is able to do this if there is a regular flow of assistance from the husband. If this is not the case, problems come in, some of which have been examined in chapter four³².

A second category is that of male migrants who set off with motives similar to the first category, but they change or modify their motives in due course. After realizing that they have accumulated enough for resettlement back home, they terminate their stay in South Africa, and come home to venture into other endeavours. The migrants in this category utilise lifetime opportunities as they arise. For instance, Bishop Makamo worked in South Africa ‘as part of his occupation’. Since he was going to be there for a long time, his boss

³² An example of the problems in question is migrants’ wives indulging in extra-marital affairs. For details refer to chapter four.

encouraged him to invite his wife in order to avoid temptations of indulging in extra-marital affairs³³. The wife followed. But unexpectedly his employers went back to America because their companies were no longer making the desired profits. As a ‘thank you’, the employers gave Bishop bonus money and two pick-ups. It is the latter which compelled him to cut his stay in South Africa, come home and venture into the transport business using the two cars. The study argues that such migrants do not go very far in their business endeavours due to lack of sound business plans. Bishop Makamo’s transport business is no longer operational. By the time of the interview, both pick-ups were not running and Bishop was struggling to raise money in order to repair them.

Migrants belonging to the third category determine their lifetime ‘career paths’ before they actually set off. They have specific motives to fulfill other than merely working in South Africa. Generally-speaking, they give themselves a few years of hard work in South Africa, during which they have to accumulate enough money or possessions to enable them to fulfill their ambitions at home. For this group, working in South Africa is simply ‘a means to an end’. For instance, some go there to earn money with which to venture into businesses. These are generally referred to as target migrants. The case of Anthony Lupafya, a migrant-turned businessman, illustrates the point:

Immediately after I secured a job in South Africa, I embarked on a house-building project, and within a short period of time I bought two maize mills. Although my 3-tonne pick-up still needs minor repairs following a breakdown, I still go ahead with my business of transporting migrants to South Africa, and goods from South Africa, using coaches, for example, *Munorurama*. This is because I had planned to switch onto this business right from the start³⁴.

³³ O.T. Mrs. Bishop Makamo, Lithuli Makamo village, T.A. M’Mbelwa, Mzimba, 03/05/2005.

³⁴ O.T. Anthony Lupafya, *Op. Cit.*

Others would like to invest their proceeds in small-scale businesses, such as hawking. The case of Rylex Makamo is a good example: “I gave myself a maximum of three years of working in South Africa, after which I had to come back no matter what. After this period I had accumulated enough money I wanted. All this is because of the determination I had”³⁵, he maintained. Rylex now owns a small-but-steady grocery shop at Zubayumo Makamo trading centre. It can therefore be conclusively argued that the determination and enterprise are behind the success of this category of migrants.

It is also worth noting that most of the migrants in this category expressed concern over the problems that creep into the family following the long absence of migrant husbands from their homes. For instance, during this period wives are usually tempted to engage in extra-marital affairs, in the process risking the possibility of contracting HIV and AIDS.

Abraham Mgungwe says the following situation usually arises due to male-absenteeism:

Despite the husband in South Africa sending a lot of money, the wife at home becomes unfaithful to her husband, for example, goes around with other men, because the husband has overstayed in South Africa. In fact, at times the wife spends the money together with her boyfriend at home, arguing ‘I did not get married to money, I came here, meaning to her husband’s home, following a man, not money, and the husband is nowhere to be seen’. At times the wife would prepare her boyfriend a nice dish, for example, *sima* with chicken, and dine with him right in her husband’s house at night³⁶.

The fears expressed by women that their husbands indulge in promiscuous sexual behaviours while away would also be applicable to men. While away the men are also worried about the behaviour of their wives at home. There is evidence from the study

³⁵ O.T. Rylex Makamo, Zebediya Makamo village, T.A. M’Mbelwa, Mzimba, 05/05/2005.

³⁶ O.T. Abraham Mgungwe, *Op. Cit.*

area of some women indulging in extra-marital affairs³⁷. As a result of this the aim of the migrant husbands is to be away from their wives for the shortest periods possible and thereafter reunite with their families for good.

Female migrants, just like their male counterparts, have their own respective and genuine motives when migrating to South Africa. In general, women migrate largely for work forced by the unforeseeable circumstances they find themselves in.

Migrant wives interviewed in the study area indicated that they are always willing to join their husbands in South Africa on a regular basis in order to prevent the husbands from indulging in extra-marital affairs with South African women. They reported that they are fully aware that most migrant husbands indulge in such affairs while away. Frances Zimba, wife to Bentry Makamo, says “we know our husbands have either girlfriends or second wives there in South Africa. That is why we would rather stay with them there or visit them regularly”³⁸. This view is similar to that expressed by E.H. Warren, the Nyasaland/ Northern Rhodesia Labour Officer based in Johannesburg in 1942. He argued that if wives accompanied their husbands to South Africa there would be less promiscuous sexual behaviour by their husbands with the South African women³⁹.

³⁷ Most of the informants, especially from the non-migration families, shared this view. However, they were not ready to give names of some of the women from the area. But these informants, for example Mrs. Bishop Makamo, maintained that some male migrants working in South Africa are aware of this.

³⁸ O.T. Frances Zimba, *Op. Cit.*

³⁹ MNA S36/1/2/6: Native (Nyasaland) Female Immigration into South Africa: 1942 January-October.

As for the divorcees, they are compelled to emigrate by the crushing burden of looking after their children. In most cases the divorced husband marries another wife and does not pay adequate attention to the welfare of the children of the first marriage. In addition to children, the divorced wives are also obliged to take care of their ageing parents. However, after such a marriage break-up these divorcees-cum-female migrants are not necessarily looking for men to marry, as can be proved from Albert Makamo's account:

From Lithuli Makamo village there are women who go to South Africa on their own, though they are not very many. For example, there is one female migrant, who was married, but the marriage broke up. Now looking at the difficulties she was facing she says she decided to try her luck by going to South Africa on her own to work⁴⁰.

According to Albert Makamo, the headman of Lithuli Makamo village, this divorcee says that it is difficult after a marriage break-up to find a good husband, who is able to financially support the family. So she decided to go to South Africa to work so as to assist her children, as well as her parents. Her argument is that if men make it by working in South Africa and assisting their households at home, she too can do the same. Albert Makamo says the female migrant in question comes home with a lot of *katundu*. This is an instance of rural accumulation, which is substantiated in the next chapter. Despite being approached by different men, we have not heard any news of her being engaged. When she goes to Mzimba *boma* on her personal business she comes back to the village before it is dark. Hence Albert argues that there is no suspicion that she is indulging in prostitution⁴¹. However, it is difficult to ascertain the view advanced by Albert Makamo.

⁴⁰ Albert Makamo was not ready to disclose the name of this female informant, insisting this was a sensitive issue. The female migrant was herself in South Africa at the time of the interview. This is one of the problems that were encountered during data collection.

⁴¹ O.T. Albert Makamo, Lithuli Makamo village, T.A. M'Mbelwa, Mzimba, 03/05/2005.

He was not ready to disclose much about the migrants from his area who were away. In addition to this, the female migrant herself was away.

Similarly, Jane Nyirenda⁴², born in 1967, divorced her husband in 1988. She says between then and 2000 she experienced a lot of hurdles. She went to South Africa in the same year. She has two children to look after. In addition to this, her sister and her husband, passed away in 1997, and left behind four children. She was, therefore, obliged to cater for their needs. In order to reduce the plight of the children of her late sister, Jane arranged the migration of one of her orphaned daughters. At the time of the interview, the daughter in question was still working in South Africa. She had a stable job and was able to send different forms of assistance to her brothers and sisters back home. In this way she was relieving Jane of some of her heavy responsibilities at home. However, on this Jane admits it is easier to facilitate the migration of males than of females, especially once the latter are married. Obviously this is due to patriarchal control that comes into play. That is why she says she only managed to invite one daughter of her late sister as the other daughters got married.

The same story is true for the widowed wives. Towera Gondwe of Chimbizga Gondwe village in Euthini recalled a similar experience:

My husband died in 1995. After this I had difficulties in looking after four children. As if this was not enough, both my elder sister and her husband died a few years later and left behind five children. My parents were too old to

⁴² O.T. Jane Nyirenda, Kapopo Mskanga village, T.A. M'Mbelwa, Mzimba, 16/02/2005.

support these children. It was therefore up to me to support them. That is why I decided to come to South Africa in the year 2000⁴³.

Most of the unmarried females, and especially school leavers, leave Zubayumo Makamo area for South Africa because of the lack of job opportunities⁴⁴.

Decision-making Processes

The motives for migrating were not enough in themselves. It also needs to be demonstrated that decision-making processes differed according to the decision-makers and the social categories of the migrants, for example, male versus female; young versus old migrants; and married versus unmarried migrants. The aim of the account below is to show whether or not the emigration of males and females is a family affair. There is an attempt to advance the argument that the labour migrants, especially female migrants, are rational and purposive individuals who achieve whatever they set out to do despite any form of hindrances. This is possible because of their determination.

International migration is a household or family affair. Family members agree to send one member, a pioneer migrant, for instance, one of the children in the family, so that he or she would facilitate the eventual migration of the others, often through the provision of monetary assistance. Good examples are the families of Jafta Chisi of Zebediya Makamo village, highlighted earlier in this chapter, and that of Dickson Sakala of Zubayumo Makamo village. In the case of the latter, Dickson Sakala narrated as follows:

I have nine children – four sons and five daughters. The following are the names of my sons from the eldest to the youngest: Doctor, Roland, Asani, and

⁴³ O.T. Towera Gondwe, Chimbizga Gondwe village, T.A. Chindi, Mzimba, 16/02/2005. This female migrant and the others like Jane Nyirenda were interviewed in South Africa.

⁴⁴ O.T. Henry Makamo, Kazezani Makamo village, T.A. M'Mbelwa, Mzimba, 17/04/2005

Adrian. Doctor was the first to go to South Africa to work. It is him who facilitated the emigration of his younger brothers, one at a time. Right now all these four sons are in South Africa⁴⁵.

Davies Dayire Kumwenda of Kamangadazi Makamo village also expressed the same view regarding the emigration of his sons: “My son who is in South Africa has already prepared a place for his young brother to join him there. The young brother has already made preparations for his impending trip. For instance, he has got married in readiness for this trip”⁴⁶.

Although most migrants upheld this view, there were some who held a contrary view, suggesting that labour migration is not always a household affair. This is because at times there is no obligatory assistance by the pioneer migrant from the labour migration family out of sheer jealousy. Elder brothers working in South Africa are threatened by the intention of their younger brothers to emigrate, and, therefore, by their potential to subsequently prosper. Here we can see an element of competition whereby the elder brothers would like as much as possible to remain superior in terms of their financial and material standing and possessions. This view was expressed clearly by Irene Theu, among other informants. Irene says she is married to Joseph Tembo of Lithuli Makamo village. They have three sons. Lyson was born in 1974, Ephraim in 1976, and Lazaro in 1978. All the three are married. Lyson was the first to go to South Africa in 1998. In February 2005 Lazaro joined his brother, though without any assistance from him. This is what Irene Theu reported regarding the assistance by elder sons towards the emigration of their younger brothers and sisters:

⁴⁵ O.T. Dickson Sakala, *Op. Cit.*

⁴⁶ O.T. Davies Dayire Kumwenda, *Op. Cit.*

In my home village, Lithuli Makamo, most migrants in South Africa are not willing to assist their brothers and sisters, including other relatives, financially, for these to equally emigrate, because of sheer jealousy. In my case, my eldest son, Lyson, upon learning that his younger brother, Ephraim, is intending to go to South Africa, has written a letter restraining Ephraim not to do so. His argument is that Ephraim should not bother to emigrate. Lyson has plans to secure him a job as a mechanic or a driver right here in Malawi. But all this is because of jealousy⁴⁷.

According to Irene, the other reason for this is that the elder brothers working in South Africa would like to be 'free' in whatever they are doing there without the interference or censorship from their younger brothers. She claimed that the elder brothers womanize and drink excessively without sending any form of assistance home. They know their younger brothers would not tolerate this behaviour once they join them in South Africa. Hence, the elder brothers feel that it is better for the younger brothers to remain at home.

Parents are generally reluctant to give permission to their daughters to emigrate, but they are more willing to facilitate the emigration of their sons. Their argument is that unmarried females emigrate not necessarily to work, but to indulge in sexual affairs or prostitution. The study here counter-argues that this is more of a perception than a general fact as it could hardly be verified. However, there is a possibility that this could apply to some female migrants from the area.

Most daughters still manage to emigrate despite parental restrictions. Because of their determination to emigrate, nothing stops them. Hence female emigration in this case is due to rebellion against parental control. Parental control is failing partly because of the

⁴⁷ O.T. Irene Theu, Wajingo Theu village, T.A. M'Mbelwa, Mzimba, 30/04/2005.

divisions within a family, especially between a husband and a wife. Usually the wife is in favour of their daughter going to South Africa to look for jobs. In this case the resistance by the father alone is not adequate to stop the daughter. In fact, there have been cases where the mother secretly assists the daughter in coming up with a perfect arrangement on how best to run away. Furthermore, parental control is failing because some of these daughters do not rely on their parents for money with which to travel to South Africa. If this were the case, it would be easy for the parents to withhold this financial assistance in order to frustrate the trip to South Africa. It is worth noting that, for the assistance in question, the daughters partly rely on their female friends who are already working in South Africa

In a related development, one of the reasons for the weakening of patriarchal control is the introduction of democracy in Malawi during the early 1990s. Generally speaking, the father is not as authoritative as before. The children claim that they have the freedom and the rights to do what they like. As a result of this, they get away with different forms of disobedience to their parents, including desertion. The other reason is that there are a good number of female-headed households in the area as a result of deaths, marriage break-ups and husbands working in South Africa. In cases where the husband is away in South Africa, the authority of the father is not felt on the ground. The father is available at home for a very short period. Consequently, some of his decisions, including his reservations on the migration of his daughters, are not adhered to. In cases of marriage break-ups, the children sometimes are raised by a step father. In such cases, the authority of such fathers is easily challenged.

It is rather easy for these women to desert because they have all the information from their friends already working in South Africa about transport arrangements. They are also aware that, due to competition among transporters, some even accept transporting someone free of charge only to be paid while in South Africa. The issue of family connections is also to their advantage. They already have relatives with whom to stay in South Africa. Modesta Makamo, daughter of Henry Makamo of Kazezani Makamo village, rebelliously emigrated to South Africa. The following account, narrated by Henry Makamo, sheds more light on this:

Modesta got married when she was about to start form two at Mwalawanyenje CDSS in Kasungu. Her husband was from Ntcheu. But we ended their marriage because the husband was against paying *malowolo*, bride price. Later we told Modesta to go back to school. But instead she processed her passport without our knowledge. Her sister, Helena, who was working in South Africa sent her some money, and one day we just discovered Modesta had ran away and joined her sister in South Africa⁴⁸.

Another case of resistance, not only staged by both parents, but also by ex-husband after divorce, is that of Agnes Mtonga of Kandani Phiri village. Agnes says that both parties above were against her emigration on the suspicion that she had found a husband in South Africa. She says that when she went to Mzimba *boma* in 1998 to process her passport, her ex-husband followed and caught up with her. The ex-husband tore her passport forms and all the money she had:

But this did not stop me from going. After that incident I made arrangements with a lady friend to have my passport processed in Lilongwe, my friend's home district. This was done. Then my friend, who was already staying in South Africa, had just come to Malawi for a holiday. On the return trip in the same year, 1998, I accompanied her to South Africa⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ O.T. Henry Makamo, *Op. Cit.*

⁴⁹ O.T. Agnes Mtonga, Kandani Phiri village, T.A. Chindi, Mzimba, 16/02/2005.

Sometimes it happens that of the two parents, father and mother, it is only the father who is against the emigration of the daughter. Mirika Chiumia says that her mother actually used to encourage her to go to South Africa to work. After the death of her husband she could not ably support her four children. She therefore took her own initiative to accumulate money to cover the cost of the trip, including processing her passport. She used to buy millet at a wholesale price and to resell it at retail price, thereby making some profit⁵⁰.

The study, therefore, argues that migrants, especially female migrants in this case, are purposive individuals who make rational decisions to emigrate. For instance, since poverty is one of the major problems they face, they strive to find its solutions. In this case the solution is to work in South Africa. Hence they have to emigrate despite any resistance by their parents or husbands.

However, some migrants indicated that there are now more and more single females emigrating from Zubayumo Makamo area because of weakening patriarchal and parental control. Some of the all-along-uncompromising male parents have realized that it is a better strategy to send daughters than sons to South Africa because the former send more assistance, for example, money. One parent who has changed his mind on the parental control in question is Andrea Mparani from Lithuli Makamo village. This is what he says:

The noted difference is that the daughter is more sympathetic with her parents in their suffering and, therefore, eager and willing to assist at any time, unlike

⁵⁰ O.T. Mirika Chiumia, Kamangadazi Soko village, T.A. Chindi, Mzimba, 16/02/2005.

the son. Because what happens is that when you complain to her while in South Africa, for example through telephone, she sends money right away. But for the son who is also working in South Africa, he tells you 'I have heard. Give me time to see how I can assist'. You are lucky if he sends you something after that month's payment. The son is, usually, busy with drinking beer and womanizing⁵¹.

Although he already has a son in South Africa, Andrea says plans were underway to send his daughter, an unmarried school leaver, so that may be the suffering at home may be reduced once she starts working in South Africa. Similarly, Towera Gondwe says she had the consent of both parents to go to South Africa to work following the death of her husband in 1995. She actually went to South Africa in 2000⁵².

In a related development, Burnet Sakala says one of his daughters was invited to South Africa by her husband. By April 2005 both were working in South Africa. This is what Burnet proudly says about his daughter: "My daughter assists me more than my migrant sons. She bought me an ox-cart and five pairs of suits"⁵³.

Evidence shows that it was generally easier for male migrants to get permission to emigrate than for female migrants. The fear was that the latter would indulge in prostitution while there and, therefore, had to remain at home. Furthermore, it has also been indicated that households easily released older migrants, whether male or female, than single unmarried migrants. According to some informants, both young men and women are expected to get married first before migration so that the familial obligations at home would prevent them from overstaying in South Africa. But of late, as already

⁵¹ O.T. Andrea Mparani, Lithuli Makamo village, T.A. M'Mbelwa, Mzimba, 30/04/2005.

⁵² O.T. Towera Gondwe, *Op. Cit.*

⁵³ O.T. Burnet Sakala, *Op. Cit.*

hinted at, some parents prefer the emigration of their single daughters, unlike that of their married daughters and sons, arguably because they send more assistance home.

This chapter demonstrates that there have been changes in migration patterns during the contemporary migrancy period. It has been argued that several changes during the 1980s and the 1990s facilitated the relatively free migration of both men and women. However, the numbers of female migrants are still smaller if compared to those of male migrants. The second argument is that both male and female migrants have genuine and achievable motives for migrating to South Africa. The argument that females emigrate to engage in prostitution is not verifiable. However, it has been indicated that both male and female migrants enter 'informal marriages' while in South Africa 'as a matter of consequence'.

It has also been argued that labour migration from Zubayumo Makamo area is more of a family affair. Through the assistance provided by migrant relatives, family members equally emigrate. However, it has also been counter-argued that there are cases where pioneer migrants are not willing to facilitate the emigration of their relatives at home.

One of the core arguments in the chapter is that women are purposive and rational individuals who will do whatever possible in order to solve the problems in their midst. In this connection, it was indicated that the emigration of females is largely a result of rebellion against parental control. It has also been shown that the emigration of these females is partly a result of the weakening patriarchal structures. More male parents nowadays are in favour of the emigration of their daughters following the realization that

female migrants send more assistance than male migrants. The next chapter continues the discussion of the research findings from the study area by critically examining the experiences of the male and female migrants both at home and abroad.

Chapter Four

EXPERIENCES ABROAD AND ON RETURN

The previous chapter examined the nature of male and female migrancy from Zubayumo Makamo area during the contemporary period. The chapter argued that more women joined migrancy following developments at the political and socio-economic levels. Using the human agency perspective, it also argued that female migrants, like their male counter-parts, are rational individuals and make purposive decisions to migrate in order to alleviate their suffering. It was also indicated that while both men and women seek consent from their household members before they migrate, some women migrate due to rebellion against patriarchal restrictions.

This chapter continues the discussion of gendered migrancy patterns by examining the experiences of migrants both at home and in South Africa. It shows that the experiences of male and female migrants were rather different. These differences are important in the female construction of their world of migrancy. The chapter shows how the experiences of migrants forced them to react the way they did. For instance, in South Africa reaction was in the form of group identity and restricted movements. It is worth noting that the church gatherings were and are not for prayers alone. Rather they were and are avenues for solving problems arising at the work place. They are also for sending messages and various forms of assistance back home. The chapter also highlights the successes and failures of male and female migrants at home and away.

The chapter examines the experiences of the migrants while in South Africa, and discusses the experiences of the migrants and of their households at home. In both sections issues to do with male and female migration have been handled simultaneously.

Experiences Abroad

This section documents the experiences of migrants while in South Africa with a view to highlight the similarities and differences between male and female migrants. It examines the migrants' actual experiences, their coping mechanisms and the perceived benefits of migration from the perspectives of both male and female migrants. The themes tackled include the nature of jobs, the risks of arrests and deportations, threats of xenophobia, and possibilities of sicknesses and deaths.

Although male labour migrants no longer work in the mines in South Africa, and that both male and female migrants nowadays work in more or less the same sectors, such as in the domestic service, the kind of jobs they secure are not necessarily the same. If both a male and a female migrant are to be employed by the same employer to work at his or her home, a male migrant is more likely to be employed as a gardener or landscaper to look after the surroundings, whereas the female migrant is more likely to be engaged as a housekeeper. According to the interviews conducted in South Africa among Malawian migrants, this is because female migrant workers are perceived to be more trustworthy so that employers leave the homes under their care. It was further reported that there are so many cases of burglary involving male housekeepers, who connive with South African robbers to break into the compounds of their employers. The white employers are afraid

of the effects of apartheid – the fear of violence, crime, theft, and burglary by men. Hence they tend to prefer female domestic workers.

Male migrants are also more likely to secure jobs outside the domestic sector. They secure such jobs as fuel attendants at service stations and as waiters in food shops¹. However, both male and female Malawian migrants, as well as those from other southern African countries, generally fail to penetrate other sectors of employment because of xenophobia on the part of the South Africans. The general feeling by the latter is that foreigners worsen the unemployment situation in the country by grabbing jobs from them. Oral evidence confirms the xenophobia experiences of the Malawian migrants:

Since we were hated, we were forced to change our names. For example, I changed my name from Trywell Chisi to Kingsley Lauhali. You also had to adopt their language as soon as possible. Furthermore, we were forced to marry South African women. In my case, I had a wife here at home, but I married another wife in South Africa so that things should work for me. In fact, even your in-laws, the brothers of your South African wife, would then assist you in securing better jobs. That is why I was able to work in garages and service stations².

A good number of male and female migrants do not have stable jobs in South Africa. They usually rely on ‘piece jobs’ or temporary jobs. For the latter the migrant worker may only work for two or three days a week, and, therefore, draw a smaller wage at the end of the month. In this case, the effort is made to work for as many days and for different employers per week as possible so as to maximize on wages at the end of each month. Where this is possible, such migrant workers at times get more wages per month than those having stable jobs³.

¹ O.T. J.J. Nyirenda, Chizobe village, T.A. Mzikubola, Mzimba, 17/02/2005.

² O.T. Trywell Chisi, Zebediya Makamo village, T.A. M'Mbelwa, Mzimba, 27/04/2005.

³ O.T. Towera Gondwe, *Op. Cit.*

Temporary employment is often not good for women as it does not give them adequate income to pay for their accommodation and transport costs to and from the work places. Such difficult situations at times force the female migrants to get married to Malawian male migrant workers having stable jobs. In fact, some of the female migrants confirmed such a development during interviews in South Africa. A good example here is Towera Gondwe whose initial husband died in 1995. She later got married to Adon Ngwira, a Malawian migrant working in South Africa. “I had no choice but to marry him because I have had no permanent job since I came in 2000. Now the situation is a bit bearable because at least I have somewhere to stay”⁴, says Towera.

The South African police and immigration officials frequently arrest these migrants for illegal entry and eventually deport them back to Malawi. The main reason is that these migrants usually do not have valid documents, for example, work permits and the highly valued South African ID for their comfortable stay in South Africa. Evidence suggests that there are some migrants who have been deported several times, for example three or four times. Examples of such migrants from Zubayumo Makamo area are John Jere from Galamala Mgungwe village and Jafta Chisi from Zebediya Makamo village. Consequently, they lose their jobs after each deportation as other workers immediately replace them. Furthermore, such deportees do not make progress simply because once they go back to South Africa they have to start all over again looking for a new job. However, it was also indicated that after being arrested and while awaiting deportation some clever migrants arrange with the employers to have someone replace them

⁴ *Ibid.*

temporarily. Hence they are able to get back their job later after obtaining appropriate documentation for their stay and employment in the country.

Both male and female migrants experience sickness and, at times, eventual death while working in South Africa. Informants, especially non-migrants, indicated that migrants are generally morally loose in South Africa so that they indulge in promiscuous behaviour. The danger of moralistic arguments is that they are difficult to prove. It is possible that the migrants contract the deadly STDs, especially HIV and AIDS, in Malawi and spread them in South Africa and vice-versa. Most of the migrants' deaths in South Africa are associated with these STDs⁵, rightly or wrongly as there is no concrete evidence. In order to assist each other during difficult times, Malawian migrants in South Africa have formed welfare societies and church associations⁶. In times of sickness paid-up members of these associations come together and use part of their monthly contributions to assist a sick member, for instance, arranging transport and other requirements for his or her repatriation back home. On illnesses the argument is that despite better facilities in South Africa, patients are sent back to Malawi so as to get full medical attention at home from relatives. In South Africa, because of their migration status, the migrants are not free to move about for fear of arrests and deportations. In the case of death, the other migrants, the members of an association, are responsible for all burial arrangements. The body is

⁵ See under 'Experiences on return' for details on this subject.

⁶ Labour migrants from Malawi, a good number of whom come from the western part of Mzimba district, meet on Sundays for church services. To prove that most migrants residing in Johannesburg are from the north of Malawi, the service in the 'United Church' in Parkmore (Johannesburg) is held in *Chitumbuka*. Here the service starts around 1 p.m., but migrant members meet at this place from as early as 9 a.m. for informal gatherings during which they share their experiences, including notifying each other about sicknesses or deaths. During the same time, the transporters operating between South Africa and Malawi get orders about *katundu* and money to be ferried back home. The study took advantage of these gatherings to learn about the experiences of these migrants during their stay in South Africa.

buried either there in South Africa or brought to Malawi for ‘proper’ burial⁷. Apart from assistance coming from these associations, well-wishers make generous contributions.

As to who benefits from these support systems, the study argues that the male migrants benefit more since they are more out-going than their female counterparts. Their participation in welfare associations is therefore more than that of their female counterparts. Consequently, they stand much better chances of receiving more support. The female migrants, it is maintained, spend much of their free time in-doors.

Experiences on Return: The Enterprising Spirit

While the previous account has looked at the migrant experiences in South Africa, the subsequent account examines the process of rural accumulation at home. Migrants go to South Africa so as to uplift their financial and social status in society upon return. This is in sharp contrast from the view in the next section, where migrants fail to fulfill their motives, and instead experience various problems. The study examines the kind of proceeds from labour migration and how they are utilized. Going through this section one would conclude that emigrating and working in South Africa is the only way out for a comfortable living in Zubayumo Makamo area. The indicators of the positive impact of migration in the area include permanent houses, cars, maize mills, and big granaries, *nkhokwe*, full of farm produce. However, in an attempt to reflect the reality on the ground, the negative impact is examined in the next section.

⁷ When the dead body is to be buried in Malawi, there are usually delays in ferrying it as migrants struggle to source enough money to meet the huge cost. This was noted during fieldwork in Zubayumo Makamo area in April 2005. One of the migrants died in South Africa and it took some 10 days for the body to reach home for burial.

According to personal observations, there are a number of structural changes in addition to social and economic changes taking place in the area. This view has been highlighted in chapter three when looking at the reasons why the area was singled out as a study area. Furthermore, almost all the informants alluded to the same view. For instance, it was indicated that migrants get exposed to ‘town life’ while working in South Africa. Consequently, after accumulating money they come home and build houses modeled on the ones they come across in South Africa. That is why in Zubayumo Makamo area there are iron-roofed houses with carports next to them. These carports are an indication that migrants and ex-migrants own cars or have the desire and ambition to do so. There are new lifestyles and new tastes. These are an indication of a society experiencing change.

The non-migrants envy their friends or former classmates who are now doing fine in the area after having worked in South Africa for different periods. A classic example here is the case of Raphael Sakala, a teacher at Mtenthe Primary School in the area. He cites the example of his old friend, Semantric Jere, who at the time of the interview in April 2005 was still working in South Africa.

Semantric Jere, who is from Zebediya Makamo village, was my classmate. He is now the proprietor of Dosma Communications Bureau at Mzimba boma. He has built a very nice house at his home. He also owns two cars. In fact, most of my peers nowadays laugh at me because they, unlike me, are doing very well.⁸

However, when asked why he, himself, has never worked in South Africa, while his friends are prospering this much, Raphael had no regrets:

I wanted to go to South Africa, but it did not materialize. I started off some three years ago, around 2002, but I was stuck in Lilongwe over the passport issue. I was, therefore, forced to come back home. But I do not regret not

⁸ O.T. Raphael Sakala, *Op. Cit.*

having gone to South Africa to work because migrants are now dying in large numbers. It was a blessing in disguise. For your information, just now one of the migrants, a Lupafya, is seriously sick in South Africa and one of the Lupafyas has just started off to pick him⁹.

It is not only material considerations that are involved in migration. There are also social considerations that are taken into account. Some of these social considerations include difficulties in raising children by single parents, marriage break-ups, and the increasing cases of sicknesses and deaths in the area as a result of partners contracting deadly STDs, including HIV and AIDS.

Most of the interviewed migrants and ex-migrants are proud because of the riches that they have amassed through working in South Africa. This is an indication of rural accumulation and the consequent rural transformation. A good example is Anthony Lupafya, who after working in South Africa from 1991 to 1995, later switched on to transport business between Malawi and South Africa. For details on such business refer to chapter three. This is what he says regarding his proceeds from working in South Africa:

After working in South Africa for a few months I built this house (pointing at the house). I now have two maize mills. In fact, I was supervising work at one of the maize mills behind the house when you arrived. I have just bought a house worth K70, 000 in Mzuzu. I want to renovate this house so that I should embark on renting business. I also own a 3-tonne truck and about ten cattle. All this is from working in South Africa¹⁰.

⁹ *Ibid.* Mr. Lupafya referred to here passed away a few days later right there in South Africa. The body was ferried home after about ten days. Raphael Sakala here alludes to the fact that, despite the development in the area and the prosperity of the migrants, there is also the bad side of working in South Africa. Details on such negative impact of labour migration come in the next section.

¹⁰ O.T. Anthony Lupafya, *Op. Cit.*

Anthony Lupafya rightly says that the value of the South African Rand is higher than that of the Malawi Kwacha. Hence, he argues, if you work there and buy goods here you are at an advantage. For instance, he says that if you have R200 in Malawi it is enough money for you to buy a bag of fertilizer¹¹. He further argues that due to financial constraints in Malawi a farmer, who is not relying on monetary assistance from migrant relatives working in South Africa, can hardly raise money to buy enough fertilizers for the effective cultivation of crops. This argument is in line with the general view that the migration family members are by far successful farmers producing enough food for the whole year, including a lot of surplus that is sold. In fact, it was learnt that most labour migrants invest their money in farming and a few in businesses. This is the reason why there are no big shops in Zubayumo area. It is worth noting that Zubayumo Makamo area is not very far from Mzimba *boma*, roughly about two hours walk. It is not surprising therefore that the people from the area frequent the *boma* for their ‘big’ shopping. Edward Zgambo, an official of Limbe Leaf Tobacco Company Limited, confirmed this development:

This area produces a lot of Oriental Tobacco because the people are able to buy enough input, for example, fertilizer and pesticides, without necessarily relying on the loans that we provide. The non-migration families rely on loans and as such do not make a lot of profit after selling their tobacco. This is simply because a good part of the total money realised is used to offset these huge loans since the input is bought at higher prices through this loan arrangement. In short, they pay back the loan with huge interest¹².

Members of the Sazamuleke Thika family, who grow Oriental Tobacco in addition to maize and groundnuts, upheld this view. For instance, Tereza Thika, one of the daughters

¹¹ The exchange rate of Rand to Kwacha was 1:20 as of April 2005. This means that R200 was equivalent to K4, 000. A bag of 50kg fertilizer was going at K3, 000 at the same period.

¹² O.T. Edward Zgambo, *Op. Cit.*

in the family, maintained that from the 2003 to 2004 growing season they managed to get K12, 000 as their profit from the sale of Oriental Tobacco. This figure was their actual profit after offsetting the loan with Limbe Leaf Tobacco Company. During the 2004 to 2005 season they improved the produce as they got K17, 000. Tereza admits that they are looking forward to the time when they will be growing this tobacco using input bought with their own cash and not through loans. “Our friends from the migration families in this same area are making a lot of money from Oriental Tobacco. As for us, we are still at the stage of subsistence production and are yet to reach commercial production stage”¹³, she said.

Since it is difficult to keep money, there is a tendency of both male and female migrants to use it to buy *katundu* in South Africa and send this *katundu* home through the transporters. At times the migrants bring the *katundu* themselves whenever on holidays. In times of financial difficulties, the household members sell part of the *katundu* in order to raise some money. The latter is usually used to buy food, agricultural input or to cover costs during illnesses or deaths in the household. This is why the area is popular for cheap South African products. In the case of the migrants themselves, they use the money realized from such sales to cover transport costs on their way back to South Africa.

Of late there is also the emerging view that female migrants send more assistance to their households than their male counterparts. This is rather difficult to verify as the assistance in question is in ‘relative terms’. For instance, what parents would regard as ‘more assistance’ from their daughter would in the actual sense be ‘less assistance’ when

¹³ O.T. Tereza Thika, Zebediya Makamo village, T.A. M’Mbelwa, Mzimba, 05/05/2005.

compared to the assistance sent by a male migrant to his wife. Furthermore, it is difficult to expect different migrants to send 'similar assistance' home when they are doing different jobs, hence getting different salaries, and, when their responsibilities at their respective homes are different. What is more, it is equally difficult for someone to verify the 'amount of assistance', for instance, the amount of money, received by parents at home since this is regarded as confidential, not for all to know. Assistance can also be in non-monetary forms. It can be in the form of material goods of various monetary values. A certain amount of money may be less than the value of a certain item at a particular time.

Limitations and Constraints of Rural Accumulation

Rural accumulation is limited because of the nature of the rural economy. The migrants cannot go beyond the small-scale businesses. The migrants usually invest in volatile endeavours, which are likely to collapse anytime. The account below examines the constraints of rural accumulation by highlighting the similarities and differences in terms of gender, age, wealth and other social categories of the migrants.

Most migrants in the study area invest in volatile businesses that usually collapse after a short period. For instance, while working in South Africa they buy goods like videos, solar panels, cell phones, radios and bicycles. Their intention is to sell these back home. However, most of the people in the area are generally poor and only buy these items at very low prices. Hence the migrants fail to realize expected income from the sales. In most cases, the buyers are expected to pay the money for these items in form of small

installments over a long period. As such it is difficult for the sellers to accumulate the money as these installments are spent as they come. In some cases they start small groceries in the area. However, the wives and the children fail to manage these businesses partly because they rely on the profits for their daily subsistence. The businesses fail to grow and usually collapse after some time.

Some migrants embark on local transport businesses upon return. The main problem with this category is that they buy second-hand lorries in South Africa that do not cope with the nature of the roads, especially between Zubayumo Makamo area and Mzimba *boma*. The owners spend a lot of money on repairs due to frequent break-downs. The drivers of these lorries simply worsen the problem. They are not trustworthy and end up pocketing a good part of the money realized since the owners are usually away in South Africa.

Money lending is another example of the volatile businesses. Some of the migration families resort to money lending as a means of investing the proceeds from South Africa. They give out money on loan and the borrower is expected to pay back the money together with a huge interest usually after an agreed period. This arrangement is locally referred to as *katapila*¹⁴. However, the problem comes in when the husband is in South Africa and the wife fails to fully recover the money lent out. Most of the borrowers do not have a steady source of income and therefore hardly raise the money to pay back. In some cases the borrowers use the money to go to South Africa, promising to pay back the

¹⁴ *Katapila* is one of the means of making a lot of money over a short period of time. It is practiced almost in all parts of Malawi. The main challenge is recovering the money lent out because of the huge interest rates.

money after a brief stay there. However, some of them end up overstaying there. As a result of such developments, the money lenders easily become bankrupt.

One of the most profitable businesses in the area is operating a phone bureau. The people in the area are either calling their relatives in South Africa or expecting calls from them. At the time of the interview there were only two bureaux in the area. The drawback was that there was no cell phone network coverage over a larger section of Zubayumo Makamo area. In fact, of the five study villages only Lithuli Makamo village had network coverage.

Another limitation to rural accumulation is the extravagance by the migrants when they come back home. They lead a luxurious life which they fail to sustain over time. They are generally referred to as the big spenders. They accumulate a lot of money and property over a long period of time, for instance, three years. But all this is spent in a period of not more than three months. By the end of this period, they literally have nothing. The financial problems in their households remain the same. However, at this time their only concern is to go back to South Africa at whatever cost. They are therefore forced to resort to *katapila*, promising to send the money after getting back to South Africa.

Most of the people in the area do not go very far with formal education. In fact, most migrants are primary school drop-outs. They maintain that they go to school to know how to read and write and thereafter go to South Africa to look for jobs. The result is that such migrants do not have the managerial skills to run most small-scale businesses. It can

therefore be proper to argue that low literacy level in the area is one of the constraints to rural accumulation. This also applies to the building projects in the area. Most migrants build big brick houses, for example, a house with five bedrooms. Such projects end up taking up all their savings. In some cases they even fail to finish these projects. To them owning such a big house is a status symbol in the village. However, this makes them poor at the end of the day.

Frequent deportations of migrants from South Africa due to lack of valid documents is another hindrance to the process of rural accumulation and the consequent rural transformation. There are cases of migrants who are hardly making any progress in terms of accumulating wealth or property ever since they started emigrating. In fact, their households are more or less as poor as they were before joining the emigration process. To a considerable extent, this is due to frequent deportations. A good example here is the case of Jafta Chisi of Zebediya Makamo village. Jafta has been deported three times since he started going to South Africa in 1997. Consequently, migrants fail to fully focus on the development projects and business endeavours because of lack of steady income.

One of the major issues worth highlighting under this section is *kutchona ku Sasafirika*, overstaying in South Africa. *Kutchona* has deleterious effects within the migrants' households in the labour source areas. The *matchona* at times do not send steady assistance to their wives, children and other relatives. As a result of this the people at home fail to manage small-scale businesses and other development projects.

It is also important to consider the reasons why people overstay in South Africa. According to Lucia Mwanza, some migrants do overstay in South Africa because the ‘frequent deaths’ at home are associated with witchcraft¹⁵. So when they realize that in South Africa they stay peacefully without such threats, they decide to stay longer there. It has also been indicated that some male migrants overstay in South Africa because of their womanizing and heavy drinking habits. In this connection, some of these migrants end up having second wives there. This distracts them from their investment endeavours at home. Anthony Lupafya laments: “The problem is that we go there where there is a lot of money, women and beer. We therefore tend to forget about our families at home”¹⁶. The result of such a development is that migrants’ wives resort to extra-marital affairs because the husband does not come home.

On another sad note, when some migrants overstay in South Africa, they do not send letters or any form of assistance home. That is why in the end migrants’ wives are forced to apply for divorce from the traditional courts. This is the reason why there are several marriage break-ups in the study area. This development also has a negative impact on the processes of rural accumulation and rural transformation. For example, the wife to Lyson Tembo of Lithuli Makamo village abandoned the marriage after Lyson’s six years of *kutchona*. Lyson went to South Africa in 1998. According to Irene Theu, Lyson’s mother, Lyson’s ex-wife got married to another man in the same locality.

¹⁵ O.T. Lucia Mwanza, *Op. Cit.*

¹⁶ O.T. Anthony Lupafya, *Op. Cit.*

In the end, in line with the view on the negative impact of migration, it can be concluded that it is much better for the husband and wife to remain at home and assist each other in earning a living. In this case such problems would hardly arise. In the cases where the wife and the family are abandoned, as highlighted above, then labour migration is, undeniably, bad. If the wife and children stay at home while the husband works in South Africa and sends assistance regularly, then labour migration is a good endeavour.

Labour migration is usually associated with the spread of diseases. Informants, especially the non-migrants, were explicit on this issue. They maintained that a good number of both male and female migrants, especially those who overstay in South Africa, indulge in promiscuous sexual behaviour. Hence in the end they contract HIV which leads to AIDS. They then spread the HIV to their loved ones at home whenever they are on holiday. Consequently, most members of the labour migration families, especially married couples, have died and continue to die of not only AIDS, but also other sexually transmitted diseases. Such deaths in the migration families are a major constraint to rural accumulation. The death of a migrant is a blow to the family because he or she was fending for the family. Consequently, all projects and businesses collapse.

In addition, other informants argued that the AIDS has spread 'far and wide' not only in Zubayumo Makamo area, but even beyond since this spread is not confined to a couple. Rather its spread is in the form of a 'chain reaction'. Once the migrant husband infects his wife at home and goes back to South Africa, the wife, who is not faithful, is prone to indulge in extra-marital affairs. In so doing the epidemic is spread far and wide.

It is important to note that HIV and AIDS can be contracted and passed on by either men or women, whether in South Africa or in Malawi. Some informants in the study area shared this view by pointing out that women at home are also contributing to the high mortality rate in the area by indulging in promiscuity. However, there is a belief among some people in the area that the deaths are a result of migrants contracting HIV and AIDS while working in South Africa.

Another scenario is whereby the wife contracts the disease through promiscuity and infects the husband. That is why oral evidence suggests that most of the deaths in the area, including deaths of migrants who die while working in South Africa, are associated with HIV and AIDS. This is what Abraham Mgungwe says on the issue:

Most migrants have ended up dying in South Africa or immediately after coming back home. We pray day in day out that our children should come back home alive. But we are never sure whether they will come home alive or dead. However, such deaths are also the order of the day here at home. It is a crisis. Our people have perished!¹⁷

On the issue of migrant husbands having sexual affairs in South Africa, wives do not only rely on rumours. Some wives who emigrate to South Africa see it for themselves. A classic case is the emigration of Mrs. Bishop Makamo. She first went to South Africa in 1997. Upon arrival there, she discovered that her husband had a girlfriend. She recalls the scenario:

I met the girlfriend of my husband in South Africa during my first trip in 1997. But upon seeing me and learning that I am Bishop Makamo's wife from Malawi, she was terrified and went away. She never came back. Since this trip, I used to visit my husband in South Africa regularly until he returned home, following the closure of his boss' businesses in 2002¹⁸.

¹⁷ O.T. Abraham Mgungwe, *Op. Cit.*

¹⁸ O.T. Mrs. Bishop Makamo. *Op. Cit.*

In reaction to such developments, some wives and girlfriends of Malawian migrants working in South Africa get morally loose at home, arguably to fulfill their sexual desires and also to find means of earning a living in the absence of steady assistance from their spouses in South Africa.

In the study area the wives' promiscuity is associated with the closure of the periodic market every Wednesday at Zubayumo trading centre. The people in this area have a market day culture just like in most parts of the country. The closure of the market is a very contentious and debatable issue. Several dissenting views have been advanced. There are two schools of thought. The first school has it that the periodic market was closed following the directive from T.A. M'Mbelwa. This was in response to complaints from the general public about the 'sexual unrest' that arose with the opening of the market in the area. In confirming the validity of this school, Sera Mgungwe has this to say:

It is true that the periodic market was closed with the intervention of Chief M'Mbelwa. It is reported that there was a lot of promiscuity and adultery between the migrants' wives, whose husbands were in South Africa at the time, and the sellers of the second-hand and grocery items. Parents in the area were vehemently against this development. That is why they approached M'Mbelwa¹⁹.

The second school maintains that the market was closed on economic and not social grounds. The sellers of *katundu* were not making profits since the people in Zubayumo Makamo area are used to wearing clothes from South Africa. Collins Nthara gives the following account on the market's closure:

The market was really opened here in 1999. However, it ran only for one year, up to 2000. The sellers of the *katundu* were complaining that they were not

¹⁹ O.T. Sera Mgungwe, *Op. Cit.*

making much sales because people in the area were preferring South African clothes, brought home by their migrant relatives. In addition, the sellers complained that the buyers used to come to the market to buy *katundu* from 4 p.m. onwards when, in fact, this was time for the sellers to pack their *katundu* and start off for Mzimba *boma*²⁰.

The view of this study is that it is the first school of thought which reflects the reality on the ground. In this connection, M'Mbelwa had to close the market in order to check the social unrest in the area. Furthermore, the second view is popular since the issue of promiscuity and adultery, advanced by the first school, is sensitive and, therefore, not to be talked about anyhow in society. It can, therefore, be concluded that the second view is but a superficial view aimed at glorifying labour migration and its proceeds.

Another debatable issue is the negative impact of female migration in the area. This is an admixture of people's perceptions and realities. For instance, despite the changing mentality, some parents are still hesitant to allow the female members of their households to emigrate because of the fear that they would 'end up getting married in South Africa'. Hence the understanding is that female migration is bad as female migrants end up contracting HIV and AIDS. While admitting that there might be some truth in this perception, there is glaring evidence that female migrants emigrate to work in South Africa as discussed in chapter three. At the same time, it is true that in certain cases female migration, just like male migration, brings about 'social unrest' within the families. For instance, there are cases where the wife follows her husband in South Africa without the knowledge and consent of the latter. A clear example here is the case of Nellie Gondwe, who upon arrival in South Africa, was rejected by her husband²¹. Since

²⁰ O.T. Collins Nthara, Paulos Nthara village, T.A. M'Mbelwa, Mzimba, 04/05/2005.

²¹ O.T. Lucia Mwanza, *Op. Cit.*

the wife was determined to work there, their marriage broke up in the end. Another case involves the family of Marcel Mgungwe as analysed in chapter three.

This chapter has examined the experiences of both male and female migrants while working in South Africa and after returning home. It has shown that these migrants continue to face a lot of challenges while in South Africa and after returning to Malawi. Some of these challenges are frequent arrests and deportations, and the scarcity of more permanent jobs. There is also the problem of inadequate wages and salaries. It is therefore difficult for the migrants to fully and steadily support themselves and also their families at home. One of the problems of most migrants is overstaying in South Africa and indulging in promiscuous sexual behavior leading to the contracting of STDs, including HIV and AIDS. The chapter also highlighted the benefits of migration through the experiences of the various categories of the migrants. Zubayumo Makamo area continues to shine amongst other migration areas because of the benefits in question.

Chapter five, the concluding chapter, wraps up the discussion of male and female migrants from Zubayumo Makamo area by highlighting the contributions of the study and its limitations.

Chapter Five

CONCLUSION

The dominant themes in this study are the motives of male and female migration, the composition of the migrants, decision-making processes behind migration, and the impact of migration, especially on the labour source areas. In the study these themes have critically been examined at three levels – at the southern African regional level, at the national level and at the local area level. In chapter one the aim was to highlight the main historiographical debates on international migration from the supplying states, Malawi inclusive, to the labour destination areas, especially South Africa. At the national level, chapter two examined the main historical arguments on the maleness of migration during the old migration period. Chapter three examined the changes in male and female migration from Zubayumo Makamo during the contemporary period in order to justify the entry of more women into the migration scene. In chapter four the problems associated with migration both at home and in South Africa were highlighted. The account below presents the main observations and lessons of the study. It also highlights some of the major limitations of the study.

Accounting for Reasons for Changes

The account in the foregoing chapters has demonstrated that international labour migration from Malawi to South Africa underwent a noticeable shift in the period from the late 1980s. Under the old labour migration from the early 1900s to mid-1970s, migrants would go to South Africa either through contract migration or *selufu*, whereas

under contemporary migration migrants emigrate only through informal means or the new *selufu*. Several factors were behind this shift. Of crucial importance was the end to contract migration. The political and the socio-economic factors, especially in the 1990s, played a pivotal role as regards the changes in the international migration patterns and proportions from Malawi. The study has argued that it is these factors that were behind the changing migrancy patterns during the contemporary period.

The study has shown how women negotiated their entry into the world of migrancy. It has been argued that developments taking place at the local level and at the wider regional level created new opportunities for women to join migrancy. The study, however, has shown that these developments are not enough in themselves. There is need to emphasise the human agency of the migrants. On this, the study has argued that migrants, especially female ones, make purposive decisions to migrate. The need to migrate at times force female migrants to rebel against parental or household restrictions. It has been pointed out that different categories of women from Zubayumo Makamo area manage to go to South Africa through such rebellion against patriarchal control. It can therefore be concluded that both male and female migrants are actively involved in the migrancy process. Migrancy can therefore no longer be portrayed as a male phenomenon.

It has further been pointed out that many categories of both males and females are involved in the migration process during the contemporary migration period than was the case under old labour migration. In relation to motives of migration, it has been argued

that both male and female migrants have genuine motives for leaving their homes. The migrants travel largely to find jobs.

Male and female migration leads to rural accumulation, household differentiation, and rural transformation in society. The members of the migration families are comparatively well-to-do because of the proceeds from migration unlike those of the non-migration families. It has also been argued that international labour migration, not only from Malawi, but also in the southern Africa region as a whole, is largely a family or household affair. Pioneer labour migrants from a household usually facilitate the eventual emigration of the other family members. In line with this view, those families with many of its members working in South Africa are likely to prosper more than the other migration families. This is because more proceeds are realised and these are invested in various business endeavours and other development projects at home.

On the impact of labour migration in Zubayumo Makamo area, it has been indicated that this is both positive and negative. Furthermore, it has been argued that whether the impact is positive or negative, it all depends on one's viewpoint. For instance, to the affected households, and particularly those that have prospered because one of their members has worked in South Africa, labour migration is a good endeavour, while to those who have experienced untimely deaths, marriage break-ups through their family members' involvement in migration, it is a bad phenomenon. At the same time it has been argued that the level of development in terms of infrastructure, the resultant vibrant trade in South African consumer goods in the area, and the level of agricultural

production, as a result of increased investment are indicators of the positive impact of migrancy.

The study has also presented a general emerging view among the labour migration households that it is better to encourage female rather than male members of the family to migrate because they send more assistance to their parents at home. It has further been argued that while this is the case sending ‘more assistance’ is more a result of one’s determination and inclination to assist than an indication that one is getting better wages in South Africa.

Limitations of the Study

Granted the above observations, lessons and conclusions, it must be stated that a study of this nature has certain limitations. Some informants for this study were suspicious about the real motives of the research, despite thoroughly explaining to them the academic motives. What is more, other informants were reluctant to be interviewed because this was not the first time they were approached for such a favour. Previously, the old labour migrants had been promised that the government would give them a ‘thank you’ token in appreciation of the service earlier rendered under TEBA arrangement. This never materialised. Consequently, these informants said they did not want ‘someone to waste their time’. Others actually demanded payment in exchange for the information they were asked to provide, arguing the government had funded the project. However, some in this category eventually got convinced that this was purely an academic study.

The sensitive nature of the topic, which covered issues of morality and promiscuity, affected the amount of information gathered and in a way affected the analysis of the subject. Some of the migrants who were willing to provide the information could not thoroughly respond to questions, which, to them, sought confidential or sensitive information. This was more applicable to single female migrants. On the impact of migration, some informants could only thoroughly explain the positive and not the negative impacts. For example, a few interviewed parents, whose sons and daughters were working in South Africa, failed to explain in detail the problems that had crept into their migrant sons' and daughters' households, such as marriage break-ups and deaths.

Another problem encountered was failure to interview some key informants because they were away, either within the country or in South Africa, working or doing business. Impact here was more felt if it was the female migrant informants who were away since the number of female migrants is smaller than that of male migrants in the area. However, it is not a surprise that the female migrants were few in the area since they are based in South Africa and only come home briefly. That is why some of the interviews were conducted in South Africa as a way of following these migrants.

Furthermore, most informants interviewed had low education levels. As a result they could not remember when particular things happened during their migration days. What is worse, some could not even understand the gist of the questions posed. As a result, some of the information they gave was irrelevant. But this was not very serious because

effort was made to pose these questions in *Chitumbuka*, the language of the people. These questions were paraphrased and brought down to the informants' level of understanding.

The findings in this study are presented qualitatively. However, they could have been strengthened if they included a quantitative analysis of the numbers of male and female migrants. As pointed out in the introductory chapter, even the limited quantitative data was analysed descriptively since the numbers of female migrants were comparatively low.

Granted the above limitations, this study makes a contribution to the debates on rural accumulation and rural transformation in Malawi. It highlights the role that female migrants, like their male counterparts, do play towards the development of their rural societies. It has been noted that generally speaking the people of Zubayumo Makamo area, unlike those of non-migration areas, are relatively prosperous due to their export of labour. Some of the indicators of prosperity are the iron-roofed houses with carports, successful commercial farming, adequate supplies of foodstuffs and possession of pick-up trucks for *matola*. This is the view of not only the informants in the area, but also the people of Mzimba in general.

What is more, the study has challenged, in varied ways, the historiography of labour migration not only in Malawi, but also in the region as a whole. For a long time analyses of migrancy in the region have portrayed it as a male phenomenon. The recent structural changes in the regional labour market have had considerable effects on the structure of

migrancy as well. Much as the changes in the labour markets have received adequate scholarly attention, not much has been said on how these changes affect various categories of people, let alone women. This local study is valuable because it goes beyond the descriptive analysis of the structural changes in the regional labour market to demonstrate that the effects of these changes create new opportunities for some groups of people. Increasing numbers of women are entering the migration process as a response to the opportunities and new avenues to accumulation created by the economic changes in the regional labour markets. However, these changes are not an adequate explanation for the behaviour of women. Social changes at the local level, such as weakening of patriarchal control, have bearings on how women respond to the opportunities at the regional level.

This study further demonstrates that much as the regional labour markets are shrinking, especially in the mining industry, opportunities for temporary menial employment have increased in the service sectors. These are the areas in which women have added advantages. Structural changes in the labour markets have therefore influenced changes in the patterns of migration.

Viewed from another angle, this study demonstrates that the behaviour and the position of women in the local communities in Malawi, as in southern Africa in general, should not be understood in a material vacuum. Behaviours are as much a product of the material environment as they are products of traditional social norms, beliefs and cultural practices. The rebellious responses of the Zubayumo women to patriarchal control have

come about because of their sense and understanding of the material security offered by migrancy. The women are able to turn this material security to some kind of social advantage by using the proceeds of migrancy to support their families. The support they offer gives them the social recognition, not only in their immediate households, but in local communities as well.

It is therefore concluded that the pseudo-traditionalist advantages available to both men and women and the particular environment in which they operate are as important as human agency in generating social change at the local level.

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