

# The decline in mine migrancy and increase in informal labour migration from northern Malawi to South Africa, 1970s-1980s<sup>1</sup>

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## *Abstract*

International labour migration from Malawi to South Africa is more than a century old. Malawian migrants started going to, largely, South African mines around the 1870s and 1880s following the establishment of diamond and gold mines. This migration took two forms: formal migration to the mines and informal migration to different sectors of the economy. Formal migration, initially masterminded by the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) and later by The Employment Bureau of Africa (TEBA), declined in the 1970s and finally collapsed in the 1980s. This article critiques this decline in mine labour migrancy by analysing the developments in the 1970s and 1980s. Contrary to previous scholarship, the article centrally argues that the decline could be traced from as early as the 1960s and that the 1974 plane crash incident and the 1987 HIV wrangle between Malawi and South Africa merely brought mine migrancy to a grinding halt. The article largely uses archival and oral sources. On the use of the latter, interviews were conducted among migrants and ex-migrants from Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay, the two districts historically associated with labour migration to South Africa from northern Malawi.

**Keywords:** Migrancy; Formal migration; Informal migration; *Selufu*; *Wenela*; *Theba*; Internalisation.

## **Introduction**

This article examines the decline of mine migrancy from northern Malawi districts of Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay to the South African mines in the 1970s and 1980s. Between the 1870s and 1900 this labour migration was informal, locally known as *selufu*,<sup>2</sup> and at the beginning of the twentieth century it also took on a formal character. This followed the introduction of labour

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- 1 This article is the outcome of the research work I conducted towards my PhD studies at the University of the Witwatersrand between January 2015 and December 2016. I remain indebted to Professor Sekibakiba P Lekgoathi and Dr Andrew Macdonald for their insights on an extended chapter on which this article is based.
  - 2 *Selufu* is a Tumbuka word in northern Malawi and is derived from the word self and it stands for self or independent migration.

recruitment operations from 1903 onwards. The aim of the article is to trace the decline in mine migration and, in its stead, the gradual increase in informal labour migration or *selufu*. It is noteworthy that for a larger part during the twentieth century, formal labour migration occurred alongside *selufu*. In fact, it is proper to argue that while labour recruitment from Malawi (then Nyasaland) was intermittent, due to the banning and unbanning of recruitment by the government, *selufu* continued undisturbed. In short, this article focuses on the end of the Witwatersrand Native labour Association (WNLA, commonly referred to as *Wenela*) recruitment activities in Nyasaland following the 1974 plane crash incident, the beginning and end of The Employment Bureau of Africa (TEBA)<sup>3</sup> recruitment activities during the 1970s and 1980s and the elements of informal labour migration during this period.

Malawians have for many years emigrated to such countries like Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa largely for wage employment. This is due to the lack of employment opportunities in a country generally lacking in mining and manufacturing industries. Of these destination countries, South Africa proved a major attraction because of the relatively higher wages not only in the mines, but also in the manufacturing and service sectors. Most Malawians emigrated to Tanzania for trade purposes, hence commercial migration. The latter is outside the scope of this article. This article focuses on the emigration of unskilled and semi-skilled migrant workers. In addition to these categories, Malawi's poor economy has pushed out skilled workers like nurses and teachers. However, the emigration of skilled professionals is also beyond the scope of this article.

This article critically examines the reluctance by the labour-supplying countries to forward labour to the South African mines, the 1974 plane crash incident,<sup>4</sup> and, thereafter, the 1974 boycott, in order to understand the factors for the decline in mine migrancy in the 1970s. The 1974 boycott led to the end of *Wenela* recruiting activities in Malawi. Two years later, formal recruiting was re-introduced in Malawi, under TEBA. The latter also recruited labour on behalf of the South African Chamber of Mines. However, in 1987 inter-state disagreement arose between Malawi and South Africa over HIV testing of potential Malawian labour migrants.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, the ensuing sections

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3 TEBA was formed by merging WNLA and the Native Recruiting Corporation (NRC) to mastermind labour recruitment for the South Africa's mines.

4 Details on this incident come later in the article.

5 WC Chirwa, "No TEBA...forget TEBA: The plight of Malawian ex-migrant workers to South Africa, 1988-1994", *International Migration Review*, 31(3), 1997, pp. 628-629.

are devoted to a critique of what exactly led to the collapse of TEBA recruiting activities in Malawi thereafter. It also examines the reaction by the Chamber of Mines in trying to mitigate the impact of reduced foreign African labour supply.

For close to a century since the 1880s, Malawi was one of the major labour-supplying areas in southern Africa. Much of the labour supply was destined for South African mines<sup>6</sup> and farms and, to a lesser extent, Zimbabwean mines and farms.<sup>7</sup> This development was largely a result of lack of wage-earning opportunities within Nyasaland.<sup>8</sup> Where wage employment opportunities were available locally, for instance in the Shire Highlands and Blantyre District area, the wages on offer were comparatively little compared to those obtaining abroad, especially in the South African mines.<sup>9</sup> Low wages in Nyasaland paled in the face of hut taxes imposed by the Nyasaland Protectorate around the 1890s. It is against this background that many Malawian migrants sought better-paying employment outside Nyasaland either through formal labour recruitment channels or *selufu*. It is not surprising, therefore, that some scholars like Bill Paton have argued that during certain periods, for example, during the colonial period, “the majority of wage earners from Malawi were employed outside the country”.<sup>10</sup>

Literature shows that the Tongas of Nkhata-Bay District were the pioneers of labour migration from Malawi to South Africa.<sup>11</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, the Tongas were relatively well educated as compared to other ethnic groupings, for example, the Tumbuka and the Ngoni in northern Malawi.

- 6 For information on labour migration from Malawi to South Africa during the earlier period, that is, from the 1880s to the 1950s, see R Boeder, *Malawians abroad: The history of labour emigration from Malawi to its neighbours, 1980 to the present* (East Lansing, Michigan State University, 1974); FE Sanderson, “The development of labour migration from Nyasaland, 1891-1914”, *Journal of African History*, 2, 1961, pp. 259-271; G Coleman, “International labour migration from Malawi, 1875-1966”, *Journal of Social Science*, 2, 1972, pp. 31-46; J McCracken, *A history of Malawi, 1859-1966* (New York, James Currey, 2012), pp. 74-99 and 162-192. For information on the South African mines and how they “exploited” foreign migrant labour from the ‘satellite countries’, see J Crush, A Jeeves & D Yudelman, *South Africa’s labour empire: A history of black migrancy to the gold mines* (Cape Town, David Philip Publishers Ltd., 1991); A Jeeves, *Migrant labour in South Africa’s mining economy: The struggle for the gold mines’ labour supply, 1890-1920* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1985); D Yudelman, *The emergence of modern South Africa: State, capital and the importation of organised labour on the South African gold fields, 1902-1939* (Cambridge, CUP, 1972).
- 7 For details on the nature of labour migration from Malawi to Zimbabwe during the colonial period, see ZR Groves, “Malawians in colonial Salisbury: A social history of migration in Central Africa, c. 1920s-1960s” (PhD, Keele University, 2011); EP Makambe, “The Nyasaland African labour ‘ulendos’ to southern Rhodesia and the problem of the African ‘highway men’, 1903-1923”, *African Affairs*, 79, 1980, pp. 548-566.
- 8 Nyasaland which was declared a British Protectorate in 1891 became Malawi following the attainment of independence in 1964.
- 9 For a discussion of low wages obtaining in Nyasaland and the comparatively higher wages abroad, see, for example, G Coleman, “International labour migration from Malawi”, *Journal of Social Science*, 2, 1972, p. 37.
- 10 B Paton, *Labour export policy in the development of southern Africa* (Macmillan, Macmillan Press, 1995), p. 26.
- 11 B Pachai, *Malawi: The history of the nation* (London, Longman Group Ltd., 1973), p. 28.

This was attributable to the missionary influence, especially Bandawe Mission that was established in the Chintheche area in 1881.<sup>12</sup> The missionaries did not open only churches, but also mission schools where the Tonga attained education. Consequently, by 1900 most Tongas were able to read and write and questioned the lack of employment opportunities in their area. Consequently, they out-migrated to the Shire Highlands for wage employment. Although most of them secured employment here, the wages were low.<sup>13</sup> For instance, it is worth noting that during the early years of the twentieth century the rate of pay for wage employment, for example, plantation labour in Malawi was 3 shillings per month. However, a similar kind of wage labour could earn between 30 and 45 shillings per month, for example, in the Transvaal mines and between 15 and 30 shillings per month in Zimbabwe.<sup>14</sup> It was the white missionaries who alerted the Tonga around the 1880s about the availability of relatively higher-paying jobs outside the country. This marked the beginning of the phenomenal labour migration from Malawi not only to South Africa, but also to other countries in the region such as Zimbabwe, Zambia and even Tanzania to the north.<sup>15</sup>

### **A note on methodology**

This article has relied on information that was collected from three sources: archival, oral and secondary sources and a review of relevant literature. Archival research was conducted at the Malawi National Archives (MNA) in Zomba, Malawi, and at the South African National Archives in Pretoria, South Africa, between March and November 2016. This yielded information particularly on the activities of WNLA (*Wenela*)<sup>16</sup> and TEBA (*Theba*) in the 1970s and 1980s. However, because of the contemporary nature of the study, oral sources have played a complementary and supplementary role. Oral interviews were conducted among male and female migrants and ex-migrants in the Mzimba and Nkhata-Bay districts of Malawi. From the interviews, information was sought on the migrants' motivations and experiences in South Africa. The interviews revealed that while migrants from Mzimba

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12 B Pachai, *Malawi: The history of the nation...*, p. 17.

13 J McCracken, *A history of Malawi...*, p. 84; B Pachai, *Malawi: The history of the nation...*, p. 119.

14 G Coleman, "International labour migration from Malawi", *Journal of Social Science*, 2, 1972, p. 37.

15 Although Malawian migrants have for a long time been freely emigrating to these countries, the strength in the attraction or pull by each country has always depended on the comparative wages offered to the wage earners. That is why in terms of prominence one would argue that these countries have always been ranked as follows: South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Tanzania as the least desirable destination country.

16 The terms *Wenela*, *Theba* and *selufu* are local, vernacularised forms of 'WNLA', 'TEBA' and 'self-migration', respectively.

largely emigrated through *Wenela* or *Theba*, their counterparts from Nkhata-Bay preferred to emigrate informally, that is, under *selufu*. Secondary sources were analysed to establish the position of the previous scholarship regarding the decline in mine migrancy from northern Malawi to South Africa.

### **Decline of mine migrancy from Malawi**

Labour migration from Central Africa to the South African mines dates back to the late nineteenth century. This development followed the discovery of diamond and gold in South Africa in 1867 and 1886, respectively. Within the Central Africa territories, labour migration was a result of various push factors: through the imposition of various forms of taxes, for example, hut taxes, people were forced to look for wage employment and the latter was not readily available locally. In addition, following the introduction of the money economy or monetisation within these territories, people looked for ways of finding money with which to buy various basic household needs. The relatively higher wages in the South African mines acted like a pull factor, attracting people into South Africa. This marked the beginning of decades of labour migration not only to the mines, but also to the farms and other employment sectors.

Developments in the labour-supplying countries of central and southern Africa including Malawi, especially following the attainment of independence, contributed to the reduction in foreign labour supply to the South African mines. Independent countries like Tanzania, Zambia and Malawi were against the continued supply of labour to the mines, arguing that their local economies needed to utilise this labour if they were to become powerful. Tanzania and Zambia took the lead in ending the labour supply from their countries. In the case of Malawi, following the opening of tobacco estates by local farmers in the central and northern regions in the 1960s, Malawians were encouraged to secure jobs in this agricultural sector, hence a preferred switch from international migration to internal labour migration. In this regard, Francis L Coleman argues that “as these countries became independent, so they became increasingly reluctant to supply the mines with labour. Tanzania and Zambia banned recruitment and supplies from other countries became increasingly tenuous”.<sup>17</sup> Apart from the economic reasons, these countries banned labour supply to South Africa for political reasons as a reaction against the policy of apartheid. The ban was a way of exerting pressure on the South African government to renounce apartheid. As for Zimbabwe, continued labour

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17 FL Coleman (ed.), *Economic history of Africa* (Pretoria, HAUM, 1983), p. 193.

supply to South Africa was rather absurd since labour was equally needed in the local mines and farms.

In Malawi, unlike in the case of Tanzania and Zambia, Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, the then President of Malawi, maintained strong ties with apartheid South Africa because the country benefitted a lot from the supply of migrant labour in terms of foreign exchange earnings. In addition, the South African government provided Malawi with funding which assisted in the construction of the capital city in Lilongwe, moving it from Zomba in the process. Consequently, the need for local labour within the estates, which got established from the 1964 onwards, did not appear as an immediate reason to curtail labour supply to South Africa. It was, therefore, the 1974 plane crash incident, in which seventy-four Malawian migrant workers were killed at Francistown in Botswana *en route* to Malawi from the South African mines, that compelled Dr Banda to ban the labour supply in question.<sup>18</sup> Dr Hastings Banda imposed the famous 1974 labour boycott. Although the Malawi Government encouraged labour emigration to the South African mines in the 1960s, efforts were made during the same period to discourage emigration of the lowest paid, that is, unskilled labour. These migrants were equally needed to work in the newly-established plantations and estates. On this, Dr Banda frequently boasted, saying 'he had killed *Wenela*', for example on this occasion in 1983:<sup>19</sup>

I have 'killed' two recruiting agencies, the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) (*Wenela*) and the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau (RNLB) (*Mthandizi*)... They no longer recruit in Malawi. They have surrendered all their buildings to the government... because the majority of the people have responded to my appeal to stay here and work in their gardens or on the estates.

The government encouraged the opening of new estates, especially for tobacco. It has, therefore, been argued that:<sup>20</sup>

... although the 1974 boycott appeared to be sudden, Dr Banda had begun reversing his position on emigration in 1973. He had called on workers to

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18 WR Bohning (ed.), *Black migration to South Africa: A selection of policy-oriented research* (Geneva, International Labour Organisation (ILO), 1981), p. 34.

19 WC Chirwa, "The Malawi government and South African labour recruiters, 1974-92" (State Address to Malawi Parliament, 3 August 1983). It should be noted that *Mthandizi* initially stopped operating in Malawi (then Nyasaland) in 1956 over poor working conditions during the construction of the Kariba Dam. For details here, see for example RR Boeder, "We won't die for four pence: Malawian labour and the Kariba Dam", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 15(2), 1977.

20 B Paton, *Labour export policy...*, p. 54.

stop going to South Africa, Zimbabwe and Tanzania, where he claimed they received low wages compared with the new opportunities for cash-crop profits at home.

In March 1974, a month before the imposition of the boycott, the Malawi Government stopped labour recruitment for Zimbabwe.<sup>21</sup> The 1974 boycott was, therefore, a painful result of the shortages of labour on the estates and plantations in the country. In other words, it is proper to argue that Dr Banda merely took advantage of the 1974 plane crash to officially stop recruitment and withdraw Malawian migrants from the South African mines. In this regard, Deborah Fahy Bryceson succinctly argues that Dr. Banda “had become concerned with the restricted wage labour supplies to Malawi’s large-scale tea and tobacco plantations”.<sup>22</sup>

In line with the argument of this study, Wiseman C Chirwa argues that “the campaign to divert labour to the estates started earlier than the 1974 plane crash”.<sup>23</sup> He continues to point out that the adage *chuma chili mdongo* (“wealth is in the soil”) was popularly used by Dr Banda during his political rallies and was meant to encourage Malawians to concentrate on food-crop and cash-crop farming or to engage in wage or tenant labour on the estates. In addition, the songs composed and sung by the members of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) Women’s League (WL) also emphasised the social evils of migrancy. The following song<sup>24</sup> in *ChiTonga* from Nkhata-Bay District is a good case in point:

*Ndalindirira! Ndalindirira!*  
Ndalindirira waka ine eee  
Alumu wangu we ku Wenela  
Ndalindirira waka ine eee  
Watuwa uko wato munyangu!  
Ndalindirira waka ine eee  
*Danilopu wawwala munyangu*  
*Ndaliya waka kotu eee!*

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21 B Paton, *Labour export policy...*, p. 55.

22 DF Bryceson, “*Ganyu* casual labour, famine and HIV/ AIDS in rural Malawi: Causality and casualty”, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 44 (2), 2006, p. 181.

23 WC Chirwa, “The Malawi government and South African labour recruiters...” (State Address to Malawi Parliament, 3 August 1983), p. 629.

24 WC Chirwa, “The Malawi government and South African labour recruiters...” (State Address to Malawi Parliament, 3 August 1983), pp. 629-630.

(I have waited! I have waited!  
I have waited in vain  
My husband went to *Wenela*  
I have waited in vain  
He came back and married someone else!  
I have waited in vain  
The (plastic) shoes have been worn by someone else!  
I have cried in vain! Poor me!)

It has been maintained in the literature that some migrants began returning to Malawi to take up jobs in the newly-opened estates in the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>25</sup> The returning migrants were not just those whose mine contracts had expired, but also those who curtailed their contracts in preference for wage employment in these estates. The establishment of these estates greatly reduced the problem of unemployment in Malawi. The government also created a conducive environment for these estates by offering the estate owners free land and soft, low-interest loans. However, despite these offers by the government, the estates could not engage enough labour because of the low wages that they were offering. Moreover, most labour migrants returning from the South African mines generally shunned estate employment just upon arrival back home.<sup>26</sup>

Nonetheless, the above developments contributed to a substantial reduction in international formal labour migration, in the process replacing it with internal migration. Most of the returning labour migrants were headed not only to the estates in question, but also to the various wage-earning opportunities in the building of the new capital city in Lilongwe.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, Bill Paton argues, although there were still some continuing and new emigrants, on the whole the estimated numbers of Malawians formally working abroad fell from 400 000 in 1973 to 150 000 by 1977.<sup>28</sup> These figures do not include the numbers of *selufu* migrants who emigrated not only for mine work, but also employment in other sectors in South Africa. It is certain that the numbers of *selufu* migrants

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25 JA Andersson, "Informal migration and trade in northern Malawi: Why a Nokia 3310 is cheaper in Mzimba than in Johannesburg" (History seminar paper, Chancellor College, University of Malawi, Zomba, November 2005), p. 3.

26 JA Andersson, "Informal migration and trade in northern Malawi..." (History seminar paper, Chancellor College, University of Malawi, Zomba, November 2005), pp. 3-4.

27 Dr HK Banda had masterminded the transfer of Malawi's capital from Zomba, southern region, to Lilongwe, central region; and as part of the terms of the 1967 Treaty, South Africa loaned Malawi a sum of \$33 million to construct the new capital in Lilongwe B Paton, *Labour export policy...*, p. 51.

28 B Paton, *Labour export policy...*, p. 57.

increased following the 1974 boycott.<sup>29</sup> Most of the migrant workers who used to work in the mines resorted to emigrating informally after the boycott.

The decision by the newly independent countries of Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania to focus on internal migration at the expense of supplying labour to the South African mines opened the eyes of the South African Chamber of Mines to the unreliability of foreign labour. The Chamber, therefore, easily switched to its alternative supplies in the Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland countries.<sup>30</sup> This reduction in the labour supply, however, was also generally in line with the plans of the Chamber to switch to mechanisation which would eventually result in the reduction in the numbers of mine employees.<sup>31</sup> Simultaneously, there was pressure inside South Africa to create a more stable black mine workforce of skilled workers with migrant labour from within South Africa, a move generally referred to as internalisation or localisation. Francis Wilson argues that developments in the gold mining industry necessitating the move towards internalisation and mechanisation could be traced to as early as the end of the 1960s:<sup>32</sup>

By the end of the 1960s the mining industry was faced with crucial decisions: the declining number of South Africans willing to work on the mines – these opted for higher wages in the other economic sectors; either they had to compete with other high-paying manufacturing sectors or they had to employ labour from ‘further afield’. With the increase in gold price, they opted to engage South Africans at higher prices.

In addition to local South Africans shunning low wages then obtaining on the mines, there were other developments from the late 1970s to the early 1980s: the incremental collapse of the apartheid policies. This development in turn brought about an end to compulsion in recruitment of black workers in South Africa. Wiseman C Chirwa argues that “following the abolition of various laws in 1986, black South Africans became free to seek work wherever they wished”.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, from the mid-1980s the South African mining industry increased its recruitment of local workers, leading to a process of internalisation (or “stabilisation”) of its labour supplies. Labour migration from Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique and, to a lesser extent, Botswana, to the Rand mines nevertheless still continued.

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29 In fact, even after the beginning of TEBA operations in 1977, the numbers of formal labour migrants remained relatively small, and did not equal those of the pre-1974 ban period (Image 1: years 1975 to 1990).

30 These countries are collectively referred to as the BLS countries.

31 For details on mechanisation, see FL Coleman (ed.), *Economic history of Africa...*, p. 193.

32 F Wilson, “International migration in southern Africa”, *International Migration Review*, 10(4), 1976, p. 464; A Jeeves, *Migrant labour in South Africa’s mining economy...*, p. 19.

33 WC Chirwa, “No TEBA...Forget TEBA...”, *International Migration Review*, 31(3), 1997, p. 630.

In addition to the offer of higher wages to South African black labourers, the mine authorities devised means of attracting more local recruits. These included embarking on campaigns in “the homelands” (i.e. black residential areas); making use of labour bureaux as recruiting facilities, for instance, for disseminating information on vacancies in the mines; and establishing mine labour training centres and mine schools in the homelands.<sup>34</sup> The labourers from the homelands were engaged partly under the Assisted Voluntary System, briefly called the “A.V.S”. The A.V.S. labourers were assisted to come to the mining areas and obtain work on the mines of their choice.<sup>35</sup> What is more, the travel expenses to and from the mines, after the completion of the contracts, were covered by the mine authorities. This was one of the substantial benefits to the local miners.

The withdrawal of Malawian migrant labour following the 1974 Boycott was immediately followed by the reduction in the labour supply by the Mozambique Government. This came after the socialist-oriented Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) took over leadership from Portugal in 1974. Thereafter, Mozambique’s self-reliant and socialist development policy differed from that of apartheid South Africa.<sup>36</sup> Hence Mozambique was not willing to continue supplying its labour to South Africa. However, the decline in Mozambican migrant workers did not coincide with the Malawians’ withdrawal; otherwise the impact would have been catastrophic for the South African mines. While Malawi withdrew its labour in 1974, reduction of Mozambican workers only started in 1976.<sup>37</sup> According to Jonathan Crush, “the dramatic reduction in Mozambican labour in 1976 (after a jump of 27 000 between 1974 and 1975) coincided with Frelimo’s equivocal attitude to migrancy and its reorganisation of the *Wenela* recruiting apparatus in that country”.<sup>38</sup> Suffice to mention, though, that Malawian and Mozambican mine workers had been making a significant contribution to the South African mining industry by virtue of their large numbers. I have no access to Jonathan Crush, Alan Jeeves and David Yudelman. In that edited book I recall a table up to the 1980s where labour from Lesotho, Mozambique and Swaziland was dominant in the South African mines. The paragraph here may overstate the significance of Malawian labour

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34 National Archives of South Africa (NASA), BAO/2332/C-28-26: Witwatersrand Native Labour Association, Mine Labour Organisation (*Wenela*) Limited; NASA, BAO/2331/C-28-26: Witwatersrand Native Labour Association.

35 NASA, BAO/2332/C-28-26: *Wenela*.

36 WR Bohning (ed.), *Black migration to South Africa...*, p. 36.

37 WR Bohning (ed.), *Black migration to South Africa...*, p. 37.

38 J Crush, “The extrusion of foreign labour from the South African gold mining industry”, *Geoforum*, 17, 2, 1986, p. 164.

in South African mines after Malawi's independence in 1964. Table 1 makes my case, for instance, the table shows that the fall in labour supply from Malawi between 1975 and 1990 was replaced by supply from Swaziland.

Most potential migrants, a good number of whom were ex-*Wenela* migrants, were enquiring about the re-opening of *Wenela* recruitment operations in Malawi following the 1974 ban. Here is an example of such letters by Malawian migrants desperate for mine employment in South Africa: "Firstly, I want to find out if you re-opened 'joyini ya Kamuzu'. In case you will re-open, please inform us. Right now we are getting conflicting information about the re-opening of *Wenela*".<sup>39</sup> This is an excerpt of a letter dated 14<sup>th</sup> August 1974 by Renford Mkandawire of Mubanga Juba Village, TA Chindi in Mzimba, Malawi and was addressed to the Ministry of Labour, Lilongwe, Malawi. The following is an excerpt of a general response by the Secretary for Labour in Malawi (dated 29<sup>th</sup> August 1974) to the numerous letters by potential migrants enquiring about the re-starting of *Wenela* recruitment operations:<sup>40</sup>

I acknowledge receipt of your letter and I would like to inform you that in the event that labour recruitment operations for mines in South Africa have re-started, you will all be notified through your home districts. I am sure that the same message will be disseminated through the courts.

The 1974 boycott was ended in 1976. This followed the realisation that Malawi's feeble economy badly needed the foreign exchange from migrant jobs like mine work abroad. This compelled the Malawi Government to re-negotiate with South Africa to resume formal recruitment for the South African mines. Malawi negotiated with the Chamber of Mines for better wages and an improvement in the general working and living conditions for the migrant workers. On its part, the Chamber of Mines reduced the number of recruits and this was partly due to mechanisation and the new policy of localisation. Consequently, formal recruitment resumed in Malawi in 1976, not under the then defunct *Wenela*, but under TEBA. Earlier in 1966 *Wenela* changed its name to Mine Labour Organisations (MLO) (*Wenela*) Limited whereas in 1977 it changed from the latter

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39 In this context, "Joyini ya Kamuzu" refers to "Dr Kamuzu Banda's *Wenela*" i.e. *Wenela* during Dr HK Banda's reign. "Joyini" in Chitumbuka (in northern Malawi) literally means 'to join' or to get recruited, in this case by *Wenela*, for the South African mines. For more details, see Malawi National Archives (MNA), Zomba, MNA ESD/6/1/II: Enquiries for labour, South Africa.

40 Malawi National Archives (MNA), Zomba, MNA ESD/6/1/II: Enquiries for labour, South Africa, 1970-1976. Most of the letters in this file refuted categorically that *Wenela* had re-started recruiting labour for the South African mines after the 1974 ban.

to TEBA.<sup>41</sup> Despite the boycott's end, however, the volume of labour migration from Malawi to the mines did not revert back to the pre-1974 situation. In fact, it kept on declining. The attestations of labour migrants in the South African mines (archival data) show a decline in migrants during TEBA as compared to the *Wenela* period. For instance, in 1982 there were about 15 000 Malawian labour migrants against about 120 000 in the 1970-1973 period.<sup>42</sup> This is enough proof of the declining trend in labour migration in the 1970s and 1980s. This decline is illustrated in the table as in Image 1 below:

Image 1: Contract labour migration to South Africa mines, 1920-1990

Year	Angol	Bots	Les	Malw	Moz	Swaz	Tanz	Zam	Zim	Other	Total
1920	0	2,112	10,439	354	77,921	3,449	0	12	179	5,484	99,950
1925	0	2,547	14,256	136	73,210	3,999	0	4	68	14	94,234
1930	0	3,151	22,306	0	77,828	4,345	183	0	44	5	99,355
1935	0	7,505	34,788	49	62,576	6,865	109	570	27	9	112,498
1940	698	14,427	52,044	8,037	74,693	7,152	0	2,725	8,112	70	168,058
1945	8,711	10,102	36,414	4,973	78,588	5,688	1,461	27	8,301	4,732	158,967
1950	9,767	12,390	34,467	7,831	86,246	6,619	5,495	3,102	2,073	4,826	172,816
1955	8,801	14,195	36,332	12,407	99,449	6,682	8,758	3,849	162	2,299	192,934
1960	12,364	21,404	48,842	21,934	101,733	6,623	14,025	5,292	747	844	233,808
1965	11,169	23,630	54,819	38,580	89,191	5,580	404	5,898	653	2,686	232,610
1970	4,125	20,461	63,988	78,492	93,203	6,269	0	0	3	972	265,143
1975	3,431	20,291	78,114	27,904	97,216	8,391	0	0	2,485	12	220,293
1980	5	17,763	96,309	13,569	39,539	8,090	0	0	5,770	1,404	182,449
1985	0	18,079	97,639	16,849	50,126	12,365	0	0	0	4	196,068
1990	0	15,720	108,780	72	50,104	17,816	0	0	2	0	192,044

Source: TEBA; J Crush, V Williams & S Peberdy, "Migration in southern Africa" (Paper, the policy analysis and research programme of the Global Commission on International Migration, September

41 MNA, Zomba, MNA 172/TEBA/1/3/4 WNLA: Agreement: January 1976-March 1983 (Birth of TEBA/ Change of recruiting company name).

42 MNA, Zomba, MNA 172/TEBA/1/9/20: Attestation and despatch returns, January 1980-September 1982; Malawi National Archives (MNA), Zomba, MNA 172/TEBA/1/9/21: Attestation and despatch returns, January 1983-December 1986.

2005); The years 1920-1935 reflect the impact of the ban following high death rate amongst 'tropical workers' (see numbers Image 1: Zambia and Tanzania), whereas the years 1970-1990 depict the decline in mine migrancy following the recruitment ban from Malawi due to the 1974 plane crash and the 1987-88 HIV wrangle between Malawi and South Africa.

TEBA was restricted to relatively small quotas from Malawi because of adequate supplies from more proximate sources. There was also pressure on the Chamber of Mines to reduce dependency on countries other than the BLS countries. Most of the migrants who were engaged by TEBA were usually those with past mining experience, that is, those who had earlier been recruited by *Wenela*. In fact, some informants indicated that a large number of potential migrants failed to make it to South Africa in the late 1970s and in the 1980s because of lack of the requisite mine work experience.<sup>43</sup> In this connection, the use of false documents shows an element of desperation on the part of Malawian (potential) labour migrants to ensure re-engagement by TEBA.<sup>44</sup> Although my informants were silent on how these false documents were processed, there is a likelihood that they were paid for, hence an element of bribery with mine officials.

The following excerpt of a letter on forged re-entry of Malawian labour migrants into South Africa sheds more light on this: "We should be grateful if you could please look out for any similar letters which clearly indicate that they have been forged to facilitate the re-entry of some ex-miners into South Africa".<sup>45</sup> This is an extract of a letter which the Administrative Officer, Mr. Dokiso Chirwa, wrote to the TEBA Representatives in Lilongwe, Malawi on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1984. The aim was to curb this practice. Efforts were also made to trace TEBA Officers involved in this malpractice: "You may wish to take this matter up with the Manager (Malawi) to see if the officer issuing this fraudulent letter can be traced".<sup>46</sup> Because of the reduced size of the recruitment quotas and the strict requirements for Malawians to be engaged by TEBA (unlike by *Wenela* previously), some potential migrants failed to get recruited by TEBA. As a result of these difficulties to secure employment with TEBA, some of these potential migrants ended up emigrating independently, that is, under *selufu*. It

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43 This view was indicated by a cross-section of ex-migrants in Mzimba District because they were relying on recruitment first by *Wenela* and later by *Theba*. HCC Banda (Personal collection), interview, AJ Chauma (Mzimba), 26 August 2015; HCC Banda (Personal collection), interview, L Nkhoma, 7 (Nkhata-Bay) January 2016.

44 MNA, Zomba, MNA 172/TEBA/1/1/23: Former Senior Malawi employees, 22 November 1977-2 December 1977. For some migrants, out of sheer luck, the mine authorities did not repatriate them back to Malawi upon discovery that they had used such false documents; rather they merely deployed them to mines in need of labour.

45 MNA, Zomba, MNA 172/TEBA/1/1/26: Former Malawi employees.

46 MNA, Zomba, MNA 172/TEBA/1/1/26: Former Malawi employees. This is an extract of the memorandum by the Chief Liaison Officer, Mr HS Peters, dated 21<sup>st</sup> November 1977 to the TEBA General Manager.

would, therefore, be proper to argue that the decline in the numbers of formal recruits by TEBA in one way or another encouraged *selufu*.

The following documents facilitated easy re-engagement of the ex-migrants: Letters of Reference, Re-employment Guarantee Certificates (RGCs)<sup>47</sup> and Leave Letters.<sup>48</sup> Employers were issuing these documents to their employees at the end of a contract with the understanding that they would later assist the employees' re-engagement by the same mines later on. The excerpt below is an example of Letters of Reference which migrants attached to their application (letter) for mine employment during TEBA days to ensure re-employment:<sup>49</sup>

This is to certify that Brown Alidi had been working under the above address (i.e. Bafokeng North Mine, Impala Platinum Limited) as a Shaft Clerk, in the Study Department, from January 1974 to November 1975. During his working, he greatly showed joy on and hard working to his daily work. I stand to recommend if he intends to come back at the same mine, he may re-join in my department.

Since some ex-*Wenela* migrants who failed to be recruited by TEBA did not emigrate under *selufu* during the TEBA days,<sup>50</sup> this meant impoverishment of their households as a result of the loss of remittances. On a national level, this loss of remittances greatly affected the country's economy by the mid-1980s. For instance, Malawian mine workers were reduced to only 7000 by the end of 1988, 6000 by May 1989 and none by the end of 1989. Reduced mine workers directly meant reduced foreign exchange earnings by the Malawi Government.<sup>51</sup> It can, therefore, be safely argued that the decline in mine migrancy that started following the 1974 boycott continued during the TEBA period. Consequently, this had a deleterious effect on the already faltering country's economy. For example, by the mid-1980s the Malawian economy was facing challenges. Many households in the rural areas suffered a drop in income from the loss of the miners' remittances.

With this background, it is important to critique what actually led to the end of TEBA's recruiting operations in Malawi in 1987 and 1988. Although

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47 For details on the operation of these RGCs, see WC Chirwa, "The Malawi government and South African labour recruiters...", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 34 (4), 1996, pp. 632-638.

48 MNA, Zomba, MNA 172/TEBA/1/1/20: Malawi Employees, October 1987; MNA, 172/TEBA/1/1/21: Malawi Employees, October 1987.

49 MNA, Zomba, MNA 172/TEBA/1/1/21: Malawi Employees, October 1977.

50 HCC Banda (Personal collection), interview, S Nyirenda (Mzimba), 13 January 2016; HCC Banda (Personal collection), interview, E Ng'oma (Nkhata-Bay), 29 August 2015. These are examples of ex-*Wenela* migrants who did not get recruited by TEBA, and did not equally emigrate under *selufu* during the *Theba* days.

51 B Paton, *Labour export policy...*, p. 59.

the official view cited in the literature is the inter-state disagreement between Malawi and South Africa over the need to test Malawian recruits for HIV,<sup>52</sup> the reality on the ground shows that there were several other factors. For instance, negotiations between the Malawi Government and TEBA had become rocky as early as January 1987. This was partly because TEBA was finding recruitment operations relatively expensive in Malawi by the day. This was occasioned by the availability of steady and relatively cheaper sources of migrant labour from within South Africa (amongst blacks) and from the BLS countries.<sup>53</sup> The credibility of the HIV testing in this wrangle becomes more questionable because “when the incidence of HIV among Botswana’s migrant miners rose above that of Malawi’s, no similar action was taken”.<sup>54</sup> It is, therefore, in view of this, that this study emphatically argues that the 1987 recruitment deadlock was caused by factors other than the HIV testing in question.<sup>55</sup>

In line with the argument presented earlier under the 1974 boycott, Dr Banda was already looking for ways of curtailing labour emigration to the South African mines, with a view to making labour available to the newly-established and burgeoning tobacco and tea estates in the country. He, therefore, merely took advantage of any opportunity on the scene to achieve his goal. In this case, he capitalised on the weakness of the argument by the South African mines to have Malawian migrants screened for HIV. This is somewhat supported by Christiansen and Kydd, who argue that “whereas political decision-making was the immediate cause of declining mine migration, reduction in international migration was induced mainly by economic opportunities”.<sup>56</sup> Since an expanding estate sector producing for export markets demanded labour, the agricultural sector absorbed large numbers of returning migrant workers.<sup>57</sup>

The deadlock officially marked the end of TEBA labour recruitment operations in Malawi. Consequently, “20 000 Malawian mine workers dwindled to only 7000 by the end of 1988, 6000 by May 1989 and none by the end of 1989”.<sup>58</sup> This deadlock was followed by the process of repatriating Malawian labour migrants from the South African mines back to Malawi

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52 R Black, J Crush & S Peberdy, *Migration and development in Africa: An overview*, (Cape Town, Idasa, 2006), p. 122; WC Chirwa, “Aliens and AIDS in southern Africa: The Malawi-South Africa debate”, *African Affairs*, 97, 1998.

53 The availability of local labour followed, among other reasons, the collapsing apartheid laws.

54 B Paton, *Labour export policy...*, p. 59.

55 This argument is in line with B Paton’s view. For details see B Paton, *Labour export policy...*, p. 59.

56 Christiansen and Kydd, “The return of Malawian labour from South Africa and Zimbabwe”, p. 311.

57 JA Andersson, “Informal migration and trade in northern Malawi”, p. 3.

58 B Paton, *Labour export policy...*, p. 59.

between 1988 and 1992. By the latter year all Malawian mine migrants had returned home.<sup>59</sup> Archival evidence at the MNA shows that Malawian labour migrants were subjected to compulsory repatriation during this four-year period.<sup>60</sup> Eventually, formal labour recruitment, which had for a long time occurred simultaneously and side by side with informal or “clandestine” migration came to an end and in its stead *selufu* picked up. The subsequent section examines the nature of *selufu* during the old labour migration period. *Selufu* actually gained ground during the post-1994 period and this followed the end of apartheid in South Africa and the beginning of democratic governance in Malawi in 1994.

### ***Selufu* during the old labour migration period**

Informal labour migration from Malawi to South Africa dates to as far back as the late nineteenth century. In fact, much of the literature shows that it predates official labour recruitment operations in Malawi (then Nyasaland).<sup>61</sup> While some Malawian migrants were destined to work in the mines in South Africa and Zimbabwe, others migrated informally to work on commercial farms in Zimbabwe and South Africa and in South Africa’s service sector. Richard Black, Jonathan Crush and Sally Peberdy argue that “the majority of this was goal-directed. The model of a successful migrant career was to accumulate sufficient rural resources to invest in business activity at home and opt out of the system”.<sup>62</sup> This largely applies to informal labour migration or *selufu* during the contemporary period, that is, from the 1990s onwards.<sup>63</sup>

The main argument here is that although *selufu* was not allowed by the government, it remained in existence throughout the period in question. This

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59 WC Chirwa, “No TEBA...Forget TEBA...”, *International Migration Review*, 31 (3), 1997, pp. 628-654.

60 MNA, Zomba, MNA C/13/15: Compulsory Repatriation of Nyasaland Africans from the Union of South Africa. For more details, see WC Chirwa, “No TEBA...Forget TEBA...”, *International Migration Review*, 31(3), 1997, pp. 628-654. For the list of repatriates, see MNA 172/TEBA/1/8/5: Repatriates, March - April 1988; MNA TEBA/1/8/9: Repatriates, March - August 1989.

61 See WC Chirwa, “‘TEBA is power’: Rural labour migrancy and fishing in Malawi, 1890s - 1985”, pp. 133-134; HCC Banda, “Competition for the labour supply in Mzimba district”, p. 16. WC Chirwa argues that these *selufu* migrants were able to distinguish between “*chibaro*” (official recruitment viewed as a kind of punishment) or “*joini*” (that is, to join, as in ‘to join mine recruitment’) and *selufu*, and usually they preferred *selufu* instead. For details on this, see WC Chirwa, “TEBA is Power...”, p. 133.

62 R Black, J Crush & S Peberdy, *Migration and development in Africa...*, p. 122.

63 Labour migration from Malawi to South Africa may be categorized into two periods: the old period up to the decline in mine migrancy in the 1980s and the new or contemporary period, that is, from the 1990s onwards. For details, see HCC Banda, “Gendered patterns of Malawian contemporary migrancy”, 2008.

was partly a result of the determination of *selufu* migrants to make ends meet by emigrating to, and working in, South Africa.<sup>64</sup>

The risks they take are indicative of their determination to find work, to help themselves. Migrating illegally is a wager, which they might lose, but they know they will definitely lose if they do not migrate. It is indeed, economic risk-taking, if of an unconventional kind.

In fact, *selufu* had an upper hand over official migration for the most part of the pre-1990 period. This was a result of the advantages with which it was associated by the *selufu* migrants. One of the notable advantages that *selufu* had over official migration was the migrants' choice of employers at the destination, nature of work and length of stay, and hence maximum accumulation of proceeds.<sup>65</sup> The following account sheds more light on the choice of employers by *selufu*<sup>66</sup> migrants:<sup>67</sup>

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 *Nyasa*s are independent and like to pick and choose their employers according to their own inclinations.

In addition, while official migration was banned or restricted during certain periods, for example, between 1909 and 1934 due to high mortality rates on the mines,<sup>68</sup> and between 1939 and 1945,<sup>69</sup> as a result of World War Two (WWII), *selufu* migrants emigrated to South Africa throughout the period.

Nonetheless, *selufu* too had a host of disadvantages and that is why some migrants preferred official recruitment over it. For instance, *selufu* was rigorous and hazardous since migrants had to walk on foot through dangerous forests; they had to process travel documents on their own and were liable to arrests and deportations upon entry into South Africa. Because of the arduous nature of the journey, migrants usually went to South Africa in stages, that is, they worked briefly along the way, for example, in Zambia, Zimbabwe before

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64 P Kok, D Gelderblom, JO Oucho & J van Zyl (eds.), *Migration in south and southern Africa: Dynamics and determinants* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2006), p. 9.

65 HCC Banda, "Competition for the labour supply in Mzimba district...", pp. 18-19.

66 People from Nyasaland (before it became Malawi) were called *Nyasa*s or "Nyasa boys".

67 MNA, Zomba, MNA LB 10/4/7: General Correspondence, 1951 - 1952: Contract labour migration versus independent labour migration (Extracts from communication by Labour Advisor, Zomba, 29 September 1952).

68 RM Packard, *White plague, black labour: Tuberculosis and the political economy of health and disease in South Africa*, (California, California University Press, 1989), p. 17.

69 B Paton, *Labour export policy...*, p. 27.

finally reaching their destination, South Africa.<sup>70</sup> The following account attests to the rigorous nature of the “step-by-step” journey to South Africa:<sup>71</sup>

Actually, migrants under *selufu* walked on foot to South Africa. *Wakatemanga simbo mmalundi kuti ghaleke kutupa.* (They were applying some powdered medicine on the razor cuttings on their legs to allow the medicine get into the blood stream so that the feet do not get swollen). They would set off via Lundazi (Zambia) then to Lwangwa, Fela in Mozambique, then to Wanke Coal Mine in Zimbabwe. Upon arrival in Zimbabwe, they would split going to various towns to look for work. After working for some months, they would proceed to South Africa passing through Mashivingo and cross Limpopo into South Africa. Now, tired and hungry, they could find meat in the bushes which they were eating. In fact, those were carcasses of people killed by lions, but they couldn't know.

On the arrests and imprisonment during the old migration period, *selufu* migrants used to be imprisoned at a notorious farm prison in Bethal, known as *Bethani* in Chitumbuka, the language of northern Malawi. The following account attests to this:<sup>72</sup>

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 escape.

The imprisonment at Bethal was for six months and those who completed the service were being given a letter (permit) and released. They were then allowed to proceed into towns to continue with their quest for employment using this permit. Oral evidence shows that most of these did not return home: they integrated into the host society.<sup>73</sup>

Although the Malawi Government (previously Nyasaland Protectorate) and the South African government were against female migration during the period under discussion, some women managed to emigrate alongside men under *selufu*. In the study area it was men from Nkhata-Bay who preferred

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70 This kind of migration is sometimes referred to as step migration. Most of the interviewed migrants who went to South Africa under *selufu* indicated that they had work stoppages along the way. HCC Banda (Personal collection), interview, W Lupafya (Mzimba), 17 April 2005.

71 HCC Banda (Personal collection), interview, L Bota (Mzimba), 14 January 2016.

72 HCC Banda (Personal collection), interview, W Lupafya, 17 April 2005.

73 HCC Banda (Personal collection), interview, L Bota (Mzimba), 14 January 2016. L Bota indicated that despite the availability of train transport connecting South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia, most *Bethani* prison 'graduates' chose not to return home. One possible reason for this is the 'work permit' which might have given them courage to 'walk freely' in South Africa.

to emigrate independently to South Africa.<sup>74</sup> It is not a surprise, therefore, to come across a number of Tonga women who emigrated under *selufu* during the old migration period.<sup>75</sup> In most cases, these female migrants were wives of these male labour migrants. They were accompanying them largely to take care of their husbands as house wives while their husbands worked in the farms and other sectors. In rare circumstances, these women were securing jobs as domestic workers and farmers on the same farms on which their husbands worked. In the domestic sector, women were employed to do laundry (*kuchapa*) and also to assist in preparing foodstuffs (*kuphika*). It is, therefore, proper to argue that labour migration was dominantly, but not exclusively, male during the old migration period.

In addition, literature maintains that employers other than from the mine industries relied on informal migrant networks.<sup>76</sup> One of the reasons cited was that these employers could not compete with the mining industries on the amount of wages offered to their employees. In other words, they were looking for cheap and exploitable labour.<sup>77</sup> It is these employers who tended to encourage, as it were, informal international labour migration. Oral evidence<sup>78</sup> also shows that some migrants, who migrated informally, went to South Africa to work in such sectors as domestic, construction, transport and service sectors.<sup>79</sup> *Selufu* migrants mainly worked in the farms in the northern provinces from the early 1920s all the way to the 1970s. These areas were close to the entry points of the Malawian migrants: they illegally crossed the border from parts of Zimbabwe. Since *selufu* was illegal, they easily secured wage employment in the nearby farms and quickly integrated themselves into the society to avoid being arrested. It was only after adopting the local culture including language that these immigrants became free to look for better-

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74 This was partly because *Wenela* did not establish recruitment depots in Nkhata-Bay.

75 HCC Banda (Personal collection), interview, V Banda (Nkhata-Bay), 7 January 2016. V Banda is an example of the female ex-migrants in question. This evidence runs counter to the prevailing literature which maintains that because the governments were against women emigrating, therefore labour migration before the 1990s was exclusively male. In my MA thesis, I argued that there were elements of female migration before the 1990s, for instance, through *selufu* and also because *Mthandizi* allowed men to emigrate with their wives and children to Zimbabwean farms. This was a strategy to out-do *Wenela* in their fierce competition. For details, see HCC Banda, "Gendered Patterns of Malawian Contemporary Migrancy" ..., 2008.

76 J Crush, V Williams & S Peberdy, "Migration in Southern Africa..." p. 2; J Crush, "Migrations past: An historical overview of cross-border movement in southern Africa", D McDonald (ed.), *On borders: Perspectives on international migration in Southern Africa* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 17-19.

77 J Crush, V Williams & S Peberdy, "Migration in Southern Africa..." , p. 2.

78 However, the informants I interviewed (former *Wenela* TEBA and *selufu* migrants) in Mzimba District did not provide a clue as to the proportion of *selufu* migrants vis-à-vis formal *Wenela* and TEBA migrants.

79 HCC Banda (Personal collection), interview, W Chima (Mzimba), 24 March 2016; HCC Banda (Personal collection), interview, F Makamo (Mzimba), 15 April 2005. For details about the sectors in which *selufu* migrants worked, see, for example, J Crush, V Williams & S Peberdy, "Migration in Southern Africa..." , p. 2.

paying jobs outside the farming sector. This is how some of these migrants diverted and ended up working on the mines.<sup>80</sup>

In fact, although some migrants who emigrated under *selufu* were against the rigorous nature of mine work, others only hated certain aspects of formal recruitment, for instance, the binding contract arrangement (i.e. eighteen to twenty-four months contracts) and they devised a strategy of overcoming this drawback. They, therefore, went under *selufu*, but upon entry into South Africa, they still secured mine work. In this way, they were not bound by the contract arrangement. As a result, they used to get higher wages as compared to formally recruited migrants since the deferred pay arrangement<sup>81</sup> did not apply to them. In addition, they were not staying in mine compounds; rather outside, in private residences. Hence they were able to ‘enjoy social life’.<sup>82</sup> This was also typical of labour migrants from Nkhata-Bay during the old migration period.<sup>83</sup>

Following the end of TEBA, most migrants complained of having to go back to Malawi to their “tough and backward life”.<sup>84</sup> It is some of these migrants who continued to emigrate to South Africa, but on an informal basis (*selufu*) this time. In fact, a good number of such ex-*Wenela* and ex-TEBA migrants continued to work in South Africa’s domestic and service sectors. Even after the end of *Wenela* most migrants did not make it back to the mines through TEBA because the latter was looking for fewer migrants. While some found something to do at home, others went back to South Africa under *selufu*.<sup>85</sup>

Whereas political decision-making is assumed to have been the immediate cause of the decline in mine migration, Christiansen and Kydd have argued that “the reduction in international labour migration... was induced mainly

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80 This view was maintained by ex-migrants in Nkhata-Bay, the majority of whom emigrated under *selufu*. As for the migrants in Mzimba district, they indicated that it was fashionable to emigrate under *Wenela*.

81 This was a system whereby mine workers only got part of their monthly wages and the rest was forwarded to the Malawi Government. The mine workers were allowed to claim this money in Malawi upon return from South Africa. A fraction of these wages was also going to the government as part of foreign exchange earnings.

82 HCC Banda (Personal collection), interview, L Nkhoma, 7 January 2016.

83 HCC Banda (Personal collection), interview, L Nkhoma, 7 January 2016; HCC Banda (Personal collection), interview, B Phiri (Mzimba), 25 March 2016. These are examples of *selufu* migrants from Nkhata-Bay and Mzimba who ended up working in the mines.

84 A Wilson, “Of love potions and witch baskets: Domesticity, mobility and occult rumours in Malawi”, *Western Folklore*, 71 (2), 2012, p. 156.

85 HCC Banda (Personal collection), interview, E Soko (Nkhata-Bay), 29 August 2015; HCC Banda (Personal collection), interview, LD Manda (Nkhata-Bay), 29 August 2015; HCC Banda (Personal collection), interview, G Nthara (Mzimba), 19 April 2005. These are examples of migrants who went back to South Africa under *selufu* in the 1970s and 1980s.

by economic opportunities...”<sup>86</sup> However, Jens A Andersson has counter-argued that the “economic opportunities” argument ignores several issues, for instance, that the burgeoning tobacco estates in Malawi were less attractive to the returning labour migrants; that most people in northern Malawi preferred maize cultivation over labouring on these estates; and, last but not least, that many migrants continued to go to South Africa as informal labour migrants.<sup>87</sup> Hence suffice to argue that despite the decline in mine migrancy, wages in sectors other than mining in South Africa continued to attract large numbers of labour migrants from Malawi. It is, therefore, proper to argue that the decline in mine migrancy led to an increase in informal migratory flows from Malawi.

## **Conclusion**

In this article it has been argued that while much of the literature has focused on the 1974 plane crash incident and the 1987 HIV test debate as developments behind the decline and end of mine migrancy. It has been centrally argued that these incidents were merely “final sparks that lit the fire”, but that there was a long build-up towards this climax. For instance, in the article it has been highlighted that the intention by the newly independent African states were to use their labour locally, generally, and in the case of Malawi, to use the local labour on the newly-established tobacco estates, specifically. It has further been shown that although formal migration occurred alongside *selufu* for a greater part of the twentieth century, it was this decline in mine migrancy that inexorably led to the escalation of *selufu*.

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<sup>86</sup> R Christiansen & JD Kydd, “The return of Malawian labour from South Africa and Zimbabwe”, p. 311.

<sup>87</sup> JA Andersson, “Informal migration and trade in northern Malawi”, pp. 6-7.