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AN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF SOUTHERN MALAWI

Land and People of the Shire Highlands



Brian Morris



Palgrave Studies in World Environmental History

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An Environmental History of Southern Malawi

Land and People of the Shire Highlands

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Cover image © Typical village in Southern Malawi: set in a clearing within *Brachystegia* woodland circa 1950. Source: D. Arnall, Nyasaland Information Department.

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To those pioneers of environmental anthropology: Roy Ellen and Tim Ingold.

PREFACE

I first came to Malawi—then Nyasaland—in February 1958, sitting with my rucksack in the back of a pick-up truck as it passed through Fort Manning (Mchinji) customs post. I had spent the previous four months hitch-hiking around southern and central Africa, mostly sleeping rough. During that time I encountered no other hitch-hiker and very few tarred roads, and the only place I met tourists was at the Victoria Falls. I was however, so attracted to Malawi and its people that I decided to give up my nomadic existence. I was fortunate to find a job working as a tea planter for Blantyre and East Africa Ltd, an old Scottish company founded by Robert Hynde and Ross Stark around the turn of the century. This company had earlier been an integral part—as discussed in the book—of the history of colonial Malawi, for the company had pioneered the growing of fire-cured tobacco through tenant farming as well as the production of tea in both the Thyolo and Mulanje district. I was to spend over seven years (1958–1965) as a tea planter working in the Thyolo (Zoa estate) and Mulanje (Limbuli estate) districts. I spent much of my spare time in natural history pursuits, my primary interests being small mammals (especially mice), the flora of Mulanje Mountain, and the epiphytic orchids of the Shire Highlands. I formed close friendships with many well-known naturalists, such as Arthur Westrop, Rodney Wood, ‘G-D’ Hayes, Peter Hanney and Geoff Harrison, as well as with botanists and foresters such as Jim Chapman, George Welsh and Dave Cornelius. I also spent many, many hours digging up mice with local Africans, or climbing into the hills on botanical expeditions, either with my wife Jacqui or with an African companion. I still have the fondest memories of these companions, men

such as Jimu Bomani, Benson Zuwani and Nyalugwe Chibati. As I was then only in my early twenties all these men were much older than myself. My close friend Arthur Westrop in fact, whom I accompanied on many natural history excursions—he was an accomplished and pioneer wildlife film-maker—was some 43 years my senior! My spare-time natural history pursuits led to the publication of many articles—on the ecology, habits and folk knowledge of small mammals, on the wild flowers of Mulanje Mountain, and on the epiphytic orchids of the Shire Highlands, as well as a book on the latter subject (Morris 1964, 1970, 2009).

In 1979–1980 I returned to Malawi after qualifying as a teacher at Brighton College of Education and studying anthropology at the London School of Economics. Based at Makwawa near Domasi, the year was spent engaged in ethno-botanical researches, and I travelled widely throughout the Shire Highlands, usually accompanied by a local herbalist. With my companions and informants I spent many hours studying plants and their medicinal uses in the *Brachystegia* woodlands, or accompanying a group of women collecting edible fungi in the same woodland setting. I became particularly well acquainted with the Chinyenyedi valley near Zoa tea estate, the foothills of Malosa Mountain, and the evergreen forests of Soche and Ndirande Mountains.

Again, I continue to have warm memories of my woodland companions—my mentors in the local culture—and may I mention in particular Salimu Chinyangala, Pilato Mbasa, Chijonijazi Shumba, Efe Ncharawati, Jafali Zomba, Nitta Sulemani, Rosebey Mponda and Samson Waiti. My ethno-botanical researches were published in many articles and books—on the sociology of herbalism, folk classifications, medicinal plants, weeds and edible fungi (Morris 1984, 1987, 1996a, 2009; Banda and Morris 1986).

In the year 1990–1991 I again renewed my interest in Malawi, and returned to the Shire Highlands to undertake research studies in human–animal relationships, specifically people’s relations to mammalian life. Again based at Makwawa near Domasi, I travelled widely throughout the year, but nevertheless spent many weeks exploring Mchemba hill near Migowi, and the nearby Mchese and Mulanje Mountains, invariably accompanied by a local hunter. At this period I was deeply indebted to the support and help of several friends and informants—especially Paul Kotokwa, Wyson Bowa, Heronimo Luke, Davison Potani and Ganda Makalani. My researches led to publication of several articles and books on the history and cultural aspects of the mammals of Malawi (Morris 1998, 2000, 2006A, 2009: 169–311).

My researches during the year 2000–2001 were in a sense a follow up of my earlier animal studies, but they focussed specifically on the anthropology of insect life. This time I was based at Kapalasa farm near Namadzi, and although I travelled widely throughout Malawi I spent much time in the Shire Highlands. This was particularly so with respect to studies of bee-keeping (at Zoa estate), insects as a food resource (Kapalasa farm and the surrounding villages), agricultural pests (Makoka research station) and with regard to the insect pests of coffee and tea (Mulanje). My researches I wrote up as a comprehensive ethnographic study of insect life in Malawi (Morris 2004).

Finally, I returned to Malawi in 2009 (January—June) mainly to study subsistence agriculture and to undertake archival research with respect to the present study.

From the above reflections it may be recognized that I have spent more than a decade of my life, living, working and researching in the Shire Highlands. In fact I have spent more than a year residing in four separate rural locations—Domasi, Namadzi, Thyolo and Mulanje. I have climbed and explored almost every hill and mountain in the Shire Highlands, usually with a Malawian as my companion, guide and mentor—looking for birds, mammals, medicinal plants, epiphytic orchids, fungi or insects (especially edible caterpillars and cicadas)—whichever was my current interest. Some of my most memorable life experiences have therefore been in Malawi, and many of most closest and cherished friendships have been with Malawians or with ‘expatriates’ who have spent their lives in Malawi.

All the above experiences constitute a real preface to the present study, for the Shire Highlands landscape and its people have long been inextricably linked to my own life and to my vocation as a university teacher in anthropology.

With respect to the present book I would like to thank in particular the following who have long given me friendship, support and hospitality: Father Claude Boucher, Shay Busman, Janet and the late Les Doran, Cornell Dudley, Vera and the late Rev. Peter Garland, John Kajalwiche, the late Colin Lees, John and Anne Killick, Martin Ott, Kings Phiri, Hassam Patel, Frances and Annabel Shaxson, June and the late Brian Walker, the late Jessie Williamson and John and Fumiyo Wilson.

With regard to my more recent researches in Malawi I would very much like to thank Carl Bruessow and Mike Bamford of the Society of Malawi, Paul Kishindo and Paul Kakhongwe of the Centre for Social Research,

Chancellor College, Joel Thaulo and Zione Banda at the National Archives, Dilys and Paul Taylor, and Angela Travis for all their help and support.

Finally, I should like to express my thanks to my family and to my colleagues at Goldsmiths College for continuing support, and to my friend Sheila Camfield for kindly typing up the manuscript.

April 2, 2015
London, UK

Brian Morris

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

To commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the Chilembwe Rebellion against the colonial state in January 1915 an earlier version of Chapter Six was published in *The Society of Malawi journal*, volume 68/1: 20–52.

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GLOSSARY

A short glossary of some important terms in the Chinyanja language for kin and kinship relations; social-structuring objects, places, rituals and relationships; large-scale environmental factors (climate, landscape); and materials. Terms in Chinyanja and other languages of the region for plants and animals; domestic, agricultural and manufacturing objects and activities; detailed social structures and relationships; nicknames and titles of groups and individuals; and many other matters will be found throughout the text.

<i>ambuye</i>	grandparents
<i>banja</i>	family, home, household
<i>bwalo</i>	cleared space in centre of village
<i>chibale</i>	kinship, friendship
<i>chilimwe</i>	dry season
<i>chinamwali</i>	general term for initiation rites
<i>chiroombo</i>	wild animal; useless or obnoxious organism
<i>chirope</i>	blood, ailment associated with hunting, ritual eating of meat
<i>chizimba</i>	activating medicine
<i>chulu</i>	termite mound
<i>dambo</i>	marsh, valley glades/ grassland
<i>dimba</i>	valley gardens
<i>dothe</i>	soil
<i>dziko</i>	country land
<i>dzinja</i>	rainy season

<i>jando</i>	boys' circumcision ritual among the Yao
<i>kachisi</i>	small hut or shrine where sacrificial offerings are made to the spirits
<i>lupanda</i>	boys' initiation rite among Yao
<i>makhalidwe</i>	disposition, nature, character
<i>maliro</i>	funerary rites
<i>malume</i>	maternal uncle
<i>manda</i>	forested graveyard
<i>mankhwala</i>	medicinal substances
<i>mathuthu</i>	mound
<i>matsenga</i>	sorcery, trick, mysterious happening
<i>matsoka</i>	ill-luck, misfortunes
<i>maula</i>	divination
<i>mbumba</i>	matrilineal or sorority group
<i>mfiti</i>	witch
<i>mfumu</i>	chief or village headman
<i>mkamwini</i>	in-marrying male affine, son-in-law
<i>mlamu</i>	affine of own generation (pl. <i>alamu</i>)
<i>m'michira</i>	ritual specialist or healer (who possesses medicine tail, <i>mchira</i>)
<i>moto</i>	fire
<i>mowa</i>	beer
<i>mudzi</i>	village
<i>mulungu</i>	common name for the divinity
<i>munda</i>	upland garden
<i>munthu</i>	person
<i>mvula</i>	rain
<i>mwali</i>	initiate
<i>mwambo</i>	tradition
<i>mwayi</i>	good fortune, luck
<i>mwezi</i>	moon, month, menstruation
<i>mwini</i>	owner, guardian
<i>mzimu</i>	spirit (of the ancestors) (pl. <i>mizimu</i>)
<i>mzinda</i>	large village
<i>namkungwi</i>	ritual leader at initiation rites or in spirit rituals
<i>ndiwo</i>	relish
<i>ngaliba</i>	circumcision in Yao boys' initiation
<i>nganjo</i>	iron furnace
<i>nsembe</i>	offerings to the spirits of the ancestors or the divinities

<i>nyama</i>	wild game, meat
<i>nyau</i>	ritual fraternity among men, masked dancers or initiation rites
<i>nyengo</i>	season
<i>nyumba</i>	house, home
<i>phiri</i>	hill, mountain
<i>tchire</i>	woodland, usually regenerate bush
<i>thangata</i>	a system of labour rent
<i>thengo</i>	woodland
<i>visoso</i>	shifting cultivation

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Introduction: An Environmental History of Malawi

Situated in Southern Malawi, to the east of the Great Rift Valley and the river Shire, the Shire Highlands form a ‘plateau’ region, as the missionary-explorer David Livingstone described it, mainly at an elevation of between 2000 and 3500 feet (610–1067 m). Hailed as a well-watered and ‘delightful country’ by his compatriot John Buchanan (1885: 41), the plateau is surrounded by a range of hills and high mountains that form a crescent to the west and south of the Lake Chilwa basin, which itself lies on the plateau of 2000 ft.

Although archaeological evidence has indicated that the Shire Highlands has been inhabited by humans from the very earliest times, when Buchanan and other Europeans settled in the highlands towards the end of the nineteenth century—for it was deemed to be a healthy landscape for Europeans—it was described as ‘well-wooded’ and as largely ‘unoccupied’.

This book aims to provide a history of the people of the Shire Highlands—both Africans and Europeans—from the late nineteenth century until the end of the colonial period. Written from an anthropological perspective, the study is offered as a contribution to environmental history, in that it seeks to explore the inter-relationship between the people of the Shire Highlands and the natural world.

When in 1980 I gave a talk on ‘Changing Views of Nature’ to the Wildlife Society of Malawi (Morris 1996b [1982]: 25–36) the number

of books then available that dealt specifically with people's conceptions of nature (or wildlife) could almost be counted on the fingers of one hand, and environmental history had hardly emerged as a field of study (but see Collingwood 1945; Glacken 1967; Nash 1967; Barbour 1973). The famous introduction to history by Edward Carr, *What is History?* (1964) hardly mentions the natural world, and the same could be said for many introductions to social anthropology available when I was a student. As far as most philosophers, anthropologists and historians were concerned, nature was simply the existential backcloth that could be safely ignored in studies of the human life. There were, of course, notable and important exceptions. The geographer Clarence Glacken (1967), for example, wrote a superb historical account of changing attitudes towards nature—specifically the earth as the 'abode' of humans—within Western culture from the ancient Greeks to the end of the eighteenth century. The *Annales* school of French historiography, associated with such pioneer scholars as Lucien Febvre, Fernand Braudel and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, stressed the crucial importance of the natural environment—particularly with respect to landscapes, climate and disease epidemics—in understanding the vicissitudes of human life (Braudel 1980; Worster 1988: 291; Burke 1990). Likewise, in the United States, what has been described as the frontier and Western school of American historiography—scholars such as Frederick Jackson Turner, Walter Prescott Webb and James Malin—explored the impact of human settlement on the Great Plains of North America. They thereby initiated an ecological approach to history (Worster 1988: 291; Hughes 2006: 35).

Within anthropology, the pioneer figure is Julian Steward—whose work often tends to be ignored by environmental historians. Steward's cultural ecology sought to explore the adaptation of human cultures to their natural environments and to advance a theory of multilineal cultural evolution (Steward 1955; Kerns 2003). Nor must we forget the illuminating studies of urban life by Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford which came to encapsulate an ecological approach to human life. As Mumford famously expressed it: 'All thinking worthy of the name must be ecological.' Their approach came to be known as social ecology; an approach further developed by the eco-socialist Murray Bookchin and the microbiologist René Dubos. Although both these scholars were seminal figures in the development of the environmental movement in the 1970s, they also tend to be by-passed by environmental historians (Mumford 1970: 393; Morris 2012; cf. Hughes 2006; Radkau 2014).

During the 1970s a growing awareness of an impending ecological crisis—deforestation, the adverse impact of industrial farming, global warming, the pollution of rivers, oceans and the atmosphere, the wanton destruction of wildlife and the loss of biodiversity—led to the emergence of a world-wide and diverse ‘environmental movement’ (Radkau 2014). Significantly, it was also during this period that environmental history emerged and blossomed as a field of academic study, and the writings of the following scholars (among many others) are particularly noteworthy: Carl Sauer, Donald Worster, Alfred Crosby, William Cronan, Roderick Nash, William Beinart, Carolyn Merchant and Richard Grove (Worster 1988; Hughes 2006).

It is common for such environmental historians to take a global perspective, and to specifically focus on such important environmental factors (or issues) as climate change, deforestation, famines, fire, or the impact of infectious diseases on human social life. In this study, however, I shall adopt a much more modest approach. Although we shall touch upon or explore several of the above topics, the study will be concerned only with one particular region—the Shire Highlands—and will focus specifically on people’s relationship to the land—its soils, its vegetation and its wildlife. We shall thus be centrally concerned with the nature and changing dynamics of the region’s agrarian economy, and especially the complex and changing relationships between the colonial state, European planters and African subsistence farmers with respect to land issues in the Shire Highlands. Throughout the study I try not to lose sight of the fact that people in the Shire Highlands, along with their societies and culture, are an integral part of a wider ecological system—a natural world that is complex, diverse and continually undergoing change.

As with my other studies, this book, and my researches, is based upon and informed by a philosophy of evolutionary (or historical) naturalism. I thus reject the nihilistic ethos of postmodernism and the neo-Kantian idealism that pervades much of contemporary scholarship, and affirm a realist metaphysics—an understanding that the natural world *exists* independently of human cognition; an ontology that can be described either as emergent materialism (Bunge 2001: 73) or dialectical naturalism (Bookchin 1990: 29–30); and an epistemology that expresses both an ecological sensibility and the salience of human agency. I fully endorse, then, the ‘dual heritage’ of anthropology in combining hermeneutics—the interpretive *understanding* (*verstehen*) of cultural phenomena, and empirical science in seeking to *explain* socio-cultural life through causal (historical) analysis.

I therefore reject the two extremes—‘textualism’ (postmodernism) that denies any empirical science and tends to completely by-pass the integrity and agency of the natural world, and ‘positivism’ or reductive materialism which tends to obliterate or downplay cultural meanings and human values. Thus, like Franz Boas, I conceive of anthropology as a historical science, concerned not only with understanding the meaning of social-cultural phenomena—past and present—but also seeking to know, through causal analysis, ‘how it came into being’ (Boas 1940: 305; Morris 2000: 2–13, 2014 [1997]: 26–56).

In his seminal studies of the agrarian history of the Lower Shire Valley in Malawi, which the present study complements, Elias Mandala (1990, 2005) suggests, following the palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould, a dialectic between two distinct conceptions of time. These are: ‘cyclical time’, which is reflected in recurring seasonal events and the agricultural cycle, which Mandala felt was the dominant conception in the lives of the peasants of the Lower Shire Valley; and linear time, ‘time’s arrow’, reflected in conceptions of time as an irreversible sequence of unique events—such as a particular famine (2005: 15). Both conceptions of time, of course, are expressed in all human communities, as well as in the present study. Time, as many scholars have stressed, is a relative concept, and only has meaning in relation to specific material entities or events—whether natural or social (Bunge 2001: 10).

In this book I focus neither on cyclic nor on linear time, but rather on ‘time as history’, on socio-cultural evolution as envisaged by Steward and Bruce Trigger (1998) and on time as involving historical processes. I thus explore the development of specific social institutions—the origins and evolution of the colonial state and the plantation economy, particularly the development of the *thangata* system, tobacco farming and the tea industry, and thus the subsequent decline of the ivory and slave trade and the power of the Yao chiefdoms. I also discuss the Chilembwe rising of 1915, and offer reflections on the various causes of the rebellion—psychological, social and economic. Finally, I explore the emergence of a conservation ethic in colonial Malawi—relating to wildlife, forests (*Brachystegia* woodland) and soil conservation—and the eventual eruption in the 1950s of a peasant resistance movement against both the *thangata* system (of labour rent) and the state-imposed conservation projects.

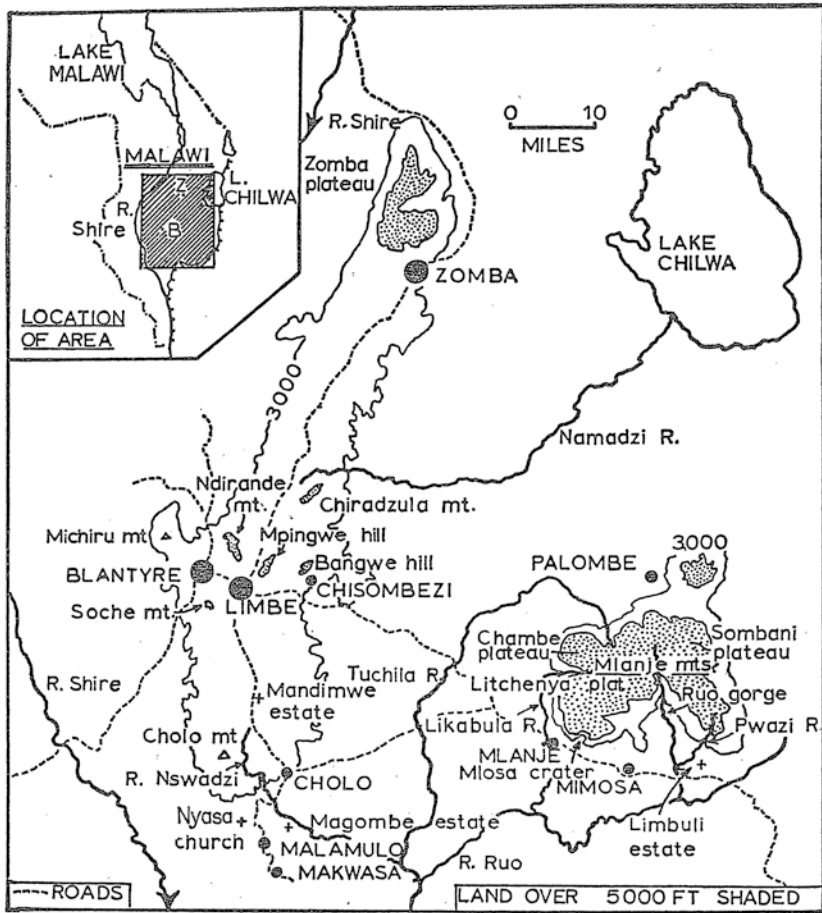
The Shire Highlands has always been of key significance in the history of Malawi. Highlighted by David Livingstone during the era of the slave trade, Zomba in the highlands was selected by Harry Johnston to be the

capital of the colonial state—initially known as British Central Africa, then, in 1907, as the Nyasaland protectorate. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century there was a large influx of Yao and Lomwe people from Mozambique into the highlands and, as we explore below, it was in the Shire Highlands that a plantation economy developed. This involved the alienation of large tracts of land to European companies and settlers, the imposition of the *thangata* system and the cultivation of coffee, cotton, tobacco and tea, mainly employing tenant labour. Significant, too, was the fact that the Church of Scotland mission was established in Blantyre in 1876, and that the township that formed subsequently became the commercial capital of the protectorate. The Shire Highlands was thus always at the centre of events—whether economic or political—involving the colonial state and the complex relationships between colonial officials, the European planting community and African subsistence farmers throughout the colonial period.

It is worth making a note here on the geographical coverage and the naming of the Shire Highlands.

Although professional biologists, ever eager to find endemic species, often describe Mulanje Mountain or the Lake Chilwa basin as if they were not a part of the Shire Highlands, it is worth emphasizing that geologically, ecologically—in respect to flora and fauna—and in terms of social history, the districts (and mountains) of Zomba, Blantyre, Thyolo and Mulanje as well as the Lake Chilwa basin and the Phalombe plain all form a part of the Shire Highlands as a plateau region. This was certainly how the early writers Buchanan (1885) and Harry Johnston (see map 1897: 188) envisaged the Shire Highlands—as a unique highland landscape. This accords with my own conception.

For some reason, perhaps to affirm his political radicalism, or his sympathy with the people of the Lower Shire Valley—his original home—Elias Mandala insists on employing the Mang'anja name *Tchiri* instead of Shire, as no villager, he tells us, would recognize the latter term (2005: 25). By the same logic English-speakers should write Praha instead of Prague, and Malawians (including Mandala) should refrain from writing *Kherekhe* (Clegg), *tchalitchi* (church) and *kalabu* (club)! The anglicized 'Shire' is the term generally employed to refer both to the river and the highlands, and it is even doubtful if it was ever a local name. *Tchiri* is not to be found in any Nyanja/Mang'anja dictionary, and according to David Clement Scott (1929) *chiri* originally meant a steep embankment, while *tchire* is commonly used to refer to the 'bush', that is, regenerate *Brachystegia*



MAP OF THE SHIRE HIGHLANDS

Fig. 1.1 Map of the Shire Highlands

Source: Brian Morris, *The Epiphytic Orchids of Malawi* (Blantyre: Society of Malawi Library, 1970). Reproduced with kind permission from the Society of Malawi

woodland, as distinct from the more mature woodland *m'thengo*. Any extensive body of water, whether a large river like the Shire or a lake is usually known as *Nyanja*. As my book is written in the English language I shall use the common term 'Shire' to describe the highlands (on the term 'shire', see Price 1966).

As with my earlier studies, research data for the present book was gathered by myself from a wide range of sources—the accounts of early European travellers (such as those of Livingstone, Buchanan and members of the ill-fated Universities Mission to Central Africa), ethnographic and historical studies written during the early colonial period (especially by African scholars), the history seminar papers by Chancellor College students, and diverse archival material—newspaper reports, government papers, the annual reports (especially) of the agricultural and forest departments, ecological surveys, letters and correspondences and various collections of oral traditions.

But an important debt, and also an invaluable source of ideas and data, has been the writings of many scholars who have pioneered Malawian historiography over the past forty years. Indeed Malawi has been particularly well-blessed by a coterie (if that is the right word) of historians who have produced a wide range of excellent and insightful studies on the history of the country. Especially noteworthy are: Leroy Vail, Kings Phiri, Colin Baker, Bob Boeder, Megan Vaughan, Owen Kalinga, Matthew Schoffeleers, Elias Mandala, Martin Chanock, Wapu Mulwafu, Robin Palmer and Landeg White. When I was engaged in ethnobiological studies in 1979–1980 and 1990–1991 I often attended the research seminars of the Department of History at Chancellor College and always found them stimulating. But one scholar deserves particular mention in the present context, and that is John McCracken. For almost forty years McCracken has been publishing seminal and engaging articles on the history of Malawi, many within the genre of environmental history. His *History of Malawi* (2012) is a truly magisterial work of scholarship and an important source of reference. In fact, I consider this present book to be an offshoot—a rhizomatic development—of his work, exploring in much greater depth the history of one particular region of Malawi—while focussing specifically on environmental issues, especially on the relationship between the people of the highlands and the natural landscape.

One final point. As again with my earlier studies, I have not written this book specifically for academic specialists, but rather as a contribution to the environmental history of Malawi that will appeal to a wide range of people: scholars, students and laypersons alike, but especially Malawians. Although a work of scholarship (I trust) I have thus attempted to keep it free of academic jargon and academic pretensions, and to write in a style that is both lucid and readable. All references to source material are indicated clearly in the text, rather than hidden among a hundred pages of abstruse footnotes.

The study consists of eight substantive chapters, arranged roughly in chronological order, and a brief summary is offered here of each chapter.

Chapter 2 gives an account of the natural landscape and the early history of the Shire Highlands, and thus provides essential background material to the study. After outlining the geomorphology and climate of the highlands I discuss the various vegetation types that characterize the plateau: the *Brachystegia* woodland (which we emphasize is an anthropogenic plant formation), the evergreen forests that clothe the higher mountains of Zomba, Chiradzulu, Soche, Thyolo and Mulanje, and the *Acacia-Combretum* woodland—a dry savanna—that once covered much of the Phalombe plain. We then discuss the wildlife of the Shire Highlands—focussing on mammals, birds and snakes—and end the chapter with a discussion of the early inhabitants of the highlands, the Batwa hunter-gatherers and the Iron Age peoples.

Chapter 3 begins, as it were, by setting the historical scene, with a description of David Livingstone's journey into the Shire Highlands in 1859. This led to the establishment of the Blantyre Mission and John Buchanan's pioneering agricultural ventures. I then briefly outline the early history of northern Zambezia, the rise of so-called Maravi states and the main ethnic communities associated with the Shire Highlands—the Maravi cluster (Nyanja/Mang'anja), the Yao and the Lomwe. I provide a description—from rather scant sources—of the socio-economic life of the people of the Shire Highlands prior to the establishment of the colonial state, going on to discuss their primary mode of production—shifting agriculture, their various craft industries—focussed especially around cotton and iron—and conclude the chapter with an account of communal land tenure, the main forms of social organization found in the Shire Highlands, and their relationship to land.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century the Shire Highlands was described as a land of turmoil—for this period was characterized by economic insecurity and political unrest (McCracken 2012: 25–37). But Chap. 4 attends less to these 'cycles of violence' than to two other, inter-related topics: the rise and fall of the Yao chiefdoms, which were specifically focussed on the slave trade and the hunting of elephants for ivory; and the foundation of the colonial state under Harry Johnston's administration in the last decade of the nineteenth century. It was during this decade that large tracts of land in the Shire Highlands were alienated to European settlers, amounting to around half the land area of the Shire Highlands—some 1458 square miles (378,000 ha). I conclude the chapter with a discussion

of two of Johnston's pet projects, both of which had important economic implications—the establishment of a modern road system and the Zomba Botanic garden.

Chapter 5 focusses specifically on the European plantation economy that developed in the Shire Highlands in the early years of the twentieth century. After an initial discussion of the early export trade—specifically ivory and coffee—I discuss the dilemma facing the colonial state in its support of three conflicting economic strategies—encouraging the supply of labour to the South African mines, peasant agriculture, or the plantation economy. I then turn to discuss two important factors that in a sense enabled the development of the plantation economy—the influx of large numbers of Lomwe people into the Shire Highlands from Mozambique, and the consolidation of the system of forced labour-rent, *thangata*. The chapter concludes with a discussion of two important plantation crops in the early colonial period—cotton and tobacco.

In Chap. 6 I offer a critical account of what came to be described as the 'Chilembwe rising', the rebellion of John Chilembwe that took place in January 1915, and was famously described by Shepperson and Price in their classic study *Independent African* (1958). After initially discussing Chilembwe's early life and his relationship with his mentor, the Baptist Missionary Joseph Booth, the chapter is devoted to three essential themes: the situation on Magomera Estate and the degree to which Chilembwe identified with the Lomwe tenants who were experiencing the *thangata* system in its most oppressive form; Chilembwe's relationship with an emerging class of African planters who were among the ringleaders of the revolt; and, finally, a discussion of the rebellion itself, and of the many interpretations of it that have been proposed. My essential aim is to emphasize the close relationship of the revolt to land issues in the Shire Highlands.

In Chap. 7 I offer a wide-ranging account of the history of the tea estates in the Thyolo and Mulanje districts in the early decades of the twentieth century. But the chapter is prefaced by two related topics; the building of the trans-Zambezi railway, which greatly facilitated the export of commercial crops, and the re-affirmation of the *thangata* system after the Chilembwe rising. I then discuss the early history of tea planting in the Mulanje district and the development of the tea industry in the Thyolo district during the 1930s, and conclude the chapter with an outline of the ecology and production of tea in colonial Nyasaland.

Chapter 8 is devoted to a discussion of what historians have described as ‘conservation mania’ on the part of the colonial administration. This relates to the deep concern that the government of Nyasaland expressed with regard to the conservation of natural resources during the inter-war years. Such conservation efforts focussed on three concerns, and a discussion of these forms the substance of the chapter. The first concern was the conservation of wildlife—essentially the larger game animals. I discuss the decline of wild mammals in the early decades of the twentieth century, and the efforts made by the colonial government to preserve wildlife, essentially restricting, through the game regulations, the hunting of larger game animals to Europeans. With the rise of a conservation ethic in Nyasaland in the 1930s, the second concern was forest conservation, and this led to the creation of forest reserves and village forest areas. The final part of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of the third concern which, in the aftermath of the ‘dust bowl’ phenomenon in the United States, involved a veritable crusade by the colonial government to promote soil conservation. This laid the seeds for the *Nkhonda ya mitumbira*—the ‘war of the ridges’—in the 1950s.

The final substantive chapter describes the eventful post-war years. Heralded as an ‘age of development’ in Nyasaland, it involved the transformation of the agrarian economy. The first part of the chapter outlines this agricultural transformation, which centred on the increased productivity and marketing of three crops: tobacco, maize and groundnuts, as well as the expansion of the tea industry. It was hailed as a ‘cash crop boom’. After then discussing the serious famine of 1949, the chapter outlines the various ‘land acquisitions’ secured by the colonial government in the wake of the Abrahams Report of 1947—the buying of private estate land in an attempt to alleviate the ‘land problem’ by various resettlement schemes. We conclude the chapter and the body of the book with a focus on the general unrest and discontent expressed by rural people in the Shire Highlands throughout the post-war years. This unrest centred almost exclusively on land issues, specifically people’s opposition to the *thangata* system and their resentment against the soil conservation measures which were being imposed in almost draconian fashion by the colonial state throughout the 1950s. I discuss in some detail the 1953 ‘disturbances’ that erupted in both the Thyolo and Domasi districts.

Overall, in this book, following in the footsteps of Donald Worster and other environmental historians, I have attempted to portray the relationship between the people of the Shire Highlands, specifically Europeans

and Africans, and the natural world in all its complexity and diversity. In particular I have focussed on issues around land—its soil, its vegetation and its wildlife, for, as the Nyanja saying goes, ‘*dziko ndi anthu*’—the land (country) is its people.

The Natural History of the Shire Highlands

I PROLOGUE

This first substantive chapter aims to provide, in broad outline, an account of the natural landscape (and early history) of the Shire Highlands, which inevitably forms the essential background to all human activities. After an initial discussion of the geology, soils and climate (Sect. 2), I examine in some detail the main vegetation types to be found in the highlands. There are descriptions of the nature and ecology of the anthropogenic *Brachystegia* woodlands—a moist savanna—that once clothed much of the Shire Highland; the evergreen forests that are to be found on the main mountain and hill ranges—Zomba Mountain, the Blantyre hills, Thyolo Mountain and Mulanje Mountain—along with their associated vegetation—the montane grassland and bracken-briar; and finally, the vegetation of the Lake Chilwa basin and the Phalombe plain. The latter is essentially a type of dry savanna, an *Acacia*–*Combretum* woodland.

We then discuss (Sect. 4) the wildlife of the Shire Highlands—its fauna—focussing on the larger mammals, the avifauna and the snakes, for these tend to have a particular salience for local African people.

In the final section I describe the early inhabitants of the Shire Highlands, the Batwa hunter-gatherers and the red schematic rock paintings with which they are associated, and conclude with a brief sketch of the pre-colonial history of Malawi.

2 GEOMORPHOLOGY AND CLIMATE

The Shire Highlands, as defined in this study, is located on the eastern edge of the Great Rift Valley, and thus to the east of the River Shire. It covers an area of roughly 2800 square miles (7250 square km), and was widely known by Livingstone and the early botanists as the ‘Mang’anja hills’. A natural ecological region, it largely consists of a plateau lying between 2000 and 3500 feet (600–1100 m), with numerous hills and mountains forming a kind of arc to the west and south of Lake Chilwa basin and the Phalombe plain (see Fig. 1.1). All the rivers of the Shire Highlands flow either west and south into the River Shire, or north and east into the landlocked Lake Chilwa. Around 325 square miles (840 square km) in area most years (as in 1960) and always rather shallow, the level of Lake Chilwa has fluctuated enormously over the centuries, and in recent decades it has often become completely dry. Some 200 years ago, during a pluvial period, when there was around 30 % more rainfall than was usual for the Shire Highland, Lake Chilwa was much more extensive, linking with Lake Chiuta in the Mangoche district (Pike and Rimmington 1965: 37; Wilson 2014).

Forming a crescent of numerous rocky hills and mountains, the Shire Highlands was described by the geographer, Frank Debenham, as forming a ‘lunar landscape’ (1955: 26). Surrounding Lake Chilwa and the Phalombe plain, the highlands consist essentially of four clusters of hills or mountains, namely, the Chikala hills and Zomba Mountain (6846 feet; 2087 m) north of Zomba township; the hills comprising what has often been described as the ‘core’ of the Shire Highlands—the hills of the Blantyre district (Chiradzulu (5821 feet; 1774 m), Soche (5030 feet; 1533 m), Ndirande (5293 feet; 1613 m), and Michiru (4836 feet; 1474 m) mountains) along with the Mikolongwe hills; Thyolo mountain (5670 feet; 1728 m) and, finally, Mulanje mountain (9724 feet; 2827 m).

Geologically, the Shire Highlands consists of a basement complex of pre-Cambrian rock formations, mainly gneisses, schists and granulites. These rocks were subjected to various cycles of erosion and to basic intrusions of metamorphosed rocks that came to form the Michiru, Ndirande, Soche and Thyolo mountains. Charnockitic granulites thus became the dominant rock-type, forming most of the ‘core’ of the Shire Highlands (Evans 1965: 22). But the Shire Highlands, as we now know it, was formed mainly during the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods of around 150 million years ago. At this time much of the landscape was fractured, faulted and

uplifted, the Rift Valley was formed, and there were massive intrusions of igneous rock—a granitic syenite. These became Zomba and Mulanje mountains. Such syenite infusions had a ring-like structure, leading early travellers to think that the ‘crater’ above Lauderdale estate, Mulanje, for example, was of volcanic origin.

At various locations throughout the Shire Highlands there were iron-ore deposits (haematite), such as near Mindale hill north of Blantyre and near Lake Chilwa, and the geologist, Frank Dixey, found bauxite deposits—a source of aluminium—on Lichenya plateau, Mulanje Mountain. Much of the land near Lake Chilwa and on the Phalombe plain consists of alluvial deposits of various soils laid down more recently during the tertiary period from around 65 million years ago (Dixey 1927; Evans 1965; Pike and Rimmington 1965: 3–22).

Given its complex geological history it is not surprising that the soils of the Shire Highlands are extremely complex and varied. Most of the main types are named by local people, and their characteristics with respect to agricultural potential and their varied uses were widely recognized (Burtt-Davy et al. 1936: 15; Berry and Petty 1992: 57).

Over much of the Shire Highlands, especially at the mid-altitudes between 2500 feet (760 m) and 4000 feet (1220 m), soils were derived mainly from the gneisses, granulites and syenites. These soils vary from yellowish-brown to dark-red sandy clay loams, being most lateritic at the lower altitude. Slightly acidic, they contain a high percentage of iron and aluminium and are particularly susceptible to both erosion and leaching. Soils in the Thyolo district indicated a high level of phosphate (P) and potash (K), making them particularly suitable for the growing of tea, but were extremely variable with respect to the amount of nitrogen (N) (Cutting 1956). The ferruginous sandy clay loams (*katondo*) are—contra Mulwafu (2011: 30)—often viewed by the people of the Shire Highlands as good agricultural soils, though they tend to prefer the lighter-brown loams. Over much of the Highlands the red lateritic soils were associated with the *Brachystegia* woodland that originally covered much of the region.

In the low-lying *dambo* areas in the highlands, along the fringes of Lake Chilwa and over much of the Phalombe plain, a wide variety of hydromorphic soils are found. Alluvial in origin their composition varies according to the source rock. The best-known are the grey to black clays, widely known as the ‘black cotton soils’ (*makande*). Highly alkaline these soils are well cultivated, though the soils are not particularly fertile. The sandy

soil (*dothi lamchenga*), though easily cultivated, do not hold water and generally lack organic matter.

In marked contrast, soils at a higher altitude, specifically those in ever-green forests, though in many respects similar to the ferruginous leached soils of the lower altitudes, tend to be much richer in organic matter.

Compared with other parts of Africa, the soils of the Shire Highlands are generally regarded as fertile (*nthaka*), though there is wide variation in their nutrient status, with respect to soil type, location and anthropogenic status (on the soil types of the Shire Highlands see Hornby 1924; Evans 1965: 38; Pike and Rimmington 1965: 83–90; Chapman and White 1970: 18–20).

The climate of the Shire Highlands is deeply influenced by what climatologists describe as the inter-tropical convergence zone. This relates to shifting patterns of rainfall and temperature that result from the annual rhythms of changing air pressures, the temperature of the Indian Ocean, and the earth's rotation around the sun. In the latter part of November this convergence zone, moving south, brings to Malawi, and the Shire Highlands in particular, widespread rainfall. Although the onset of rains is variable, between late December and February the rains may be extremely heavy. The period from late November until April is often described as the 'main rains' and during this period around 85 per cent of the annual rainfall may be experienced.

The climate of the Shire Highlands has therefore often been described as if it consisted only of two seasons (*nyengo*)—the wet or rainy season (*dzinja*) and the dry season (*chilimwe*). But in fact, three distinct seasons may be recognized. For after the main rainy season, which is a warm and wet period, the remainder of the year may be divided into two distinct periods. From May until July is the cold, dry season. However, during this period the south-east trade winds from the Indian Ocean often bring long spells of light rain and cold mist. The moist air is widely described, especially among European planters, as a '*chiperoni*', named after the mountain in Mozambique, lying some 60 miles south-east of Mulanje. This drizzle and mist is particularly associated with the Thyolo and Mulanje districts, and was an important factor in the development of the tea industry in these regions during the 1930s (see Chap. 7).

In contrast, from August until October is the hot, dry season, with temperatures progressively increasing until the break of the rains in November. The mean annual temperature for much of the Shire Highlands is around

69°F (21°C) (Pike and Rimmington 1965: 53–66; Chapman and White 1970: 13–16).

There are, of course, wide variations in the pattern of rainfall, both in terms of location, and from year to year. In the Shire Highlands generally the average annual rainfall ranges from 40 inches (1016 mm) to 50 inches (1270 mm), but in rain-shadow areas such as Chileka and Phalombe, the annual rainfall may be around 35 inches (890 mm) or below, while along the southern foothills of Mulanje mountain the annual rainfall may be over 70 inches (1778 mm). On Lichenya plateau itself the annual rainfall is over 110 inches (2794 mm) (Dixey 1927: 611; Pike and Rimmington 1965: 71).

To illustrate the pattern of annual rainfall Table 2.1 shows the figures from three typical locations (1930):

Annual rainfall from year to year may also fluctuate widely. As indicated in Chap. 7, rainfall on Zoa estate in the Thyolo district in 1950–1951 was 45 inches (1156 mm) while the following year it was 64 inches (1639 mm). Such a contrast, of course, had a great impact on the productivity of the tea gardens.

Table 2.1 Rainfall in inches (mm) in 1928/1929

	<i>Chiradzulu</i>	<i>Blantyre</i>	<i>Thyolo</i>
November	1.73	5.47	4.20
December	6.93	11.90	9.90
January	11.18	10.50	9.60
February	7.55	10.06	10.00
March	12.82	8.30	8.60
April	1.54	4.04	4.30
Sub-total	41.75	50.27	46.6
May	0.28	1.25	2.40
June	0.00	0.67	1.60
July	0.00	0.30	1.50
Sub-total	0.28	2.22	5.50
August	0.25	0.65	1.00
September	0.10	1.35	0.30
October	1.60	1.51	2.20
Sub-total	1.95	3.51	3.50
Total	43.98 (1117 mm)	56.00 (1422 mm)	55.60 (1412 mm)

The Shire Highlands is also subject to periodic and unpredictable cyclones, violent storms that come from the Indian Ocean. In December 1946, for example, one tropical cyclone caused what became known as the Zomba flood. Over the weekend of 13–15 December around 28 inches (711 mm) of heavy and continuous rain fell in Zomba (according to *The Nyasaland Times*) causing a cataclysmic flood that inflicted serious damage, destroying roads, houses and bridges, and devastating two villages in the Ntiya area. It was reported that 21 Africans and a European lost their lives in the flood. This catastrophic event was interpreted by local people as due to the movement of the serpent-spirit Napolo in passage from a subterranean lake on the plateau to Lake Chilwa. Similar disasters due to heavy rainfall occurred in relation to Zomba Mountain in March 1985 and Mchese Mountain in March 1991, the latter flood devastating Phalombe Township, and causing over 400 deaths, (On these natural disasters and the Napolo phenomenon see Edwards 1948; Morris 2000: 207–211; Mulwafu 2011: 189–195.)

3 VEGETATION

Ever since Paul Topham's pioneering effort to outline some of the 'Forest Types of Nyasaland' (Burt-Davy et al. 1936: 7–20), there have been numerous ecological surveys that have attempted to delineate some of the main vegetation types or 'communities' in the country (Jackson 1954; Pike and Rimmington 1965: 91–102; Hardcastle 1978).

Given the diversity in the geology, topography, climate and soils of Malawi, such vegetation types are, of course, complex and varied, as well as continually changing. But in relation to the Shire Highlands specifically, and with regard to the scope of the present study, we shall focus here only on three habitats or vegetation types: the *Brachystegia* woodlands, the evergreen forests—along with the associated montane grasslands and bracken-briar; and, finally, the vegetation of the Lake Chilwa basin and the Phalombe plain.

3.1 *Brachystegia Woodlands*

A well-known scholar affirmed some time ago that the fundamental *leit-motif* of his book on the environmental history of Africa is 'the premise that African landscapes are anthropogenic, that is the product of human action' (McCann 1999: 2).

This seems to be a common assumption among many environmental historians who assert that ‘all landscapes are anthropogenic—shaped by human activity’ (Bassett and Crummey 2003: 4).

This premise seems to have been adopted long ago by many scholars writing about the vegetation of Malawi—specifically when referring to the ubiquitous *Brachystegia* woodland. Paul Topham, for example, wrote that perhaps 90 % of the woodland area of Malawi bore signs of having been cultivated by African people at some time or other in the past (1936: 8). Likewise, in their important text, Pike and Rimmington suggest that ‘very little of the vegetation in Malawi is in its natural state’ (1965: 90).

Although some professional biologists still seem to regard *Brachystegia* woodland as purely natural vegetation type, on par with that of evergreen forests, scholars have long recognized that these moist savanna-type woodlands (Huntley 1982: 107) have been influenced by human agency. Not simply a ‘fire-climax’ (Malaisse 1978: 602) or in equilibrium, *Brachystegia* woodlands are a dynamic form of vegetation whose ‘productivity’ is not only influenced by climate (water) and soils (nutrient supply) but also by the continual modification of the woodland by humans—through hunting, fire, cultivation, animal husbandry or the collection by local Africans of forest resources (Bassett and Crummey 2003: 7).

As I expressed it long ago, drawing on the researches of C.R. Hursh (1960):

Studies have shown that floristically they [*Brachystegia* woodlands] are complex; not only do they vary according to local and specific factors such as altitude, rainfall, drainage and soil type, but they vary also from one acre to another both in condition and composition. Each ‘plot’ has its own individual history (due to human impact), and the principal characteristic of *Brachystegia* woodland is, in fact, its striking diversity. (Morris 2009 [1970]: 55)

Archaeological evidence has indicated that people have been living in the Shire Highlands for many centuries, and the *Brachystegia* woodlands of the highlands have, therefore, long been adapting to the impact of human agency—particularly in the relation to fire, shifting cultivation and the collection of woodland resources—such as timber, firewood, medicinal plants, edible fungi, thatching grass and wild herbs. This, no doubt, accounts not only for the high number of ‘hybrid’ species within the genus *Brachystegia* (Lawton 1978; Campbell 1996: 6), but the ‘mosaic pattern’ that is so characteristic of this woodland formation.

Brachystegia woodland is a widespread forest type found throughout a greater part of eastern and central Africa. In the Shire Highlands it was, until comparatively recently, the main vegetation type covering much of the highlands, particularly the hills and escarpments between 2000 feet (610 m) and 5000 feet (1525 m). Almost always dominated by species of *Brachystegia* it is often described as ‘*miombo*’ woodland, after the local names for *Brachystegia longifolia* (*miombo*, Nyanja; *njombo*, Yao). Among the *Brachystegia* species common in various parts of the Shire Highlands are the following: *B. floribunda* (*tsamba*), *B. boehmii* (*mombo*), *B. spiciformis* (*chumbe*) and *B. manga* (*mpapa*). All have bipinnate leaves, and belong to the family Fabaceae, sub-family Caesalpinioideae.

Other trees common in Brachystegia woodland and associated with *miombo*, are *Julbernardia globiflora* (*mchenga*), *Uapaca kirkiana* (*msuku*)—which often forms close stands on eroding infertile soils—*Monotes africanus* (*mkalakate*) *Bridelia micrantha* (*mpasa*), *Faurea saligna* (*chinsense*), *Pterocarpus angolensis* (*mlombwa*), *Terminalia sericea* (*naphini*), *Dalbergia nitidula* (*ntandanyerere*), and *Burkea africana* (*mkalati*). All are well known to local people and used for a variety of purposes (Williamson 1975; Morris 1996a).

Scholars have distinguished various forms of gradients of Brachystegia woodland, especially according to altitude or soil type (e.g., Jackson 1954; Hardcastle 1978).

Compared with evergreen forest, Brachystegia woodland lacks both a shrubby understorey and a dense growth of scandent plants. There is an open canopy, and trees are around 25 feet (8 m) tall. Most of the trees are deciduous for a short period during the dry season. The grass cover is usually sparse and poor in quality, with the genera *Hyparrhenia*, *Andropogon* and *Panicum* dominating. The families Asteraceae, Fabaceae (the dominant tree species are all legumes), Malvaceae and Acanthaceae are all well represented in Brachystegia woodland, reaching their optimum abundance at the end of the rains. By October, in the Shire Highlands, the annual fires have reduced the undergrowth to ashes. But with the arrival of the first rains, or shortly before, a remarkable transformation occurs, and it is a phenomenon for which Brachystegia woodland is justly renowned. The trees break forth in a flush of new leaf growth that has an impressive colour, ranging from red and salmon pink to a coppery fringe, and almost overnight the charred earth becomes an attractive carpet of wild flowers. Two families are prominent in this floral array, the Orchidaceae and the

Zingiberaceae, many of the latter, a purely tropical family, having curious trumpet-like flowers (Morris 2009 [1987]: 62–68).

Although *Brachystegia* or *miombo* woodlands tend to look rather monotonous and uniform to the outsider, they are, as stressed above, floristically rather complex, their nature and composition depending not only on specific local factors but also on their past history in relation to human contact. The relation of African people of the Shire Highlands to such woodlands is extremely positive. This contrasts markedly with that of Europeans. Even wildlife biologists, who have spent long period in Africa ‘have little love for *miombo*’. The woodlands are described as a ‘flat, monotonous stretch of trees’ and as ‘unchanging’, and to travel through them one has to endure, we’re told, ‘numbing boredom’ (Adams and McShane 1992: 123–124; Morris 1995, 1998: 127). Africans look upon the woodlands very differently—a source of many essential resources.

Equally, Europeans and Africans in the Shire Highlands had very contrasting attitudes towards fire. Whereas for Europeans, particularly foresters, fire was viewed in negative terms, as essentially a destructive agent, for local people fire was seen as primarily a transformative agent. For fire was essential in the clearing of the woodland for agriculture, the smelting of iron, beer-brewing, the making of pots, the cooking of food, and the hunting of wild animals (*nyama*), as well as analogically, the initiation of both boys and girls. In the past, the first firing of the woodland was ritually conducted by the local chief, and seen as essential in the regeneration of the woodland and the provision of rain (see the perceptive essay by Schoffeleers 1971; Morris 2000: 180–184).

Four final points of interest are worth noting briefly with respect to the ecology of *Brachystegia* woodland.

- In a botanical survey of Sanjika hill (3686 feet, 1123 m) near Blantyre, which had a protected area of *Brachystegia* woodland, many plants were recorded which, though common, were not in fact indigenous to the Shire Highlands. They included the following: the aromatic khakhi-weed *Tagetes minuta*, *Nicandra physalodes* (*mkalabwinja*), *Galinsoga parviflora* (*mwamuna aligone*—My husband sleeps), and *Argemone mexicana* (*doza*), as well as the cultivated guava (*Psidium guajava*). All these plants, of course, are ‘exotics’, natives of tropical America, which have firmly established themselves in the Shire Highlands (Banda 1974; Banda and Morris 1986).

- As *Brachystegia* woodland is associated with a strongly seasonal rainfall, and with acidic soils that are generally nutrient-poor, lacking in organic matter, trees in these woodlands tend to form a close relationship with fungi. They thus have ectomycorrhizae in their root systems, enabling them to exploit porous, infertile soils. This means, of course, that *Brachystegia* woodland is particularly rich in macro fungi (*bowa*), widely gathered as food by women in the Shire Highlands and throughout Malawi (Campbell 1996: 40; Morris 1987, 2009: 105–142; Williamson 1975: 313–336; Boa 2002).
- As fire is a key factor in the development (or otherwise) of *Brachystegia* woodland many trees and shrubs—for example, *Pterocarpus angolensis* (*mlombwa*), *Pericopsis angolensis* (*mwanga*), *Diplorhynchus condylocarpon* (*thombozi*), *Strychnos spinosa* (*mteme*) and *Uapaca nitida* (*msokolowe*)—have become fire-tolerant species. Equally important, in adapting to fire, many plants, as members of the family Vitaceae, have developed enormous underground root systems. It has been estimated that, in Zambia, roots average around 35 % or more of the total biomass of the woodland (Malaisse 1978: 594; Campbell 1996: 25–49; Morris 1996: 40).
- A prominent feature of *Brachystegia* woodland, especially in the Namadzi district, is the presence of large termite mounds (*chulu*), specifically of the fungus-growing genus *Macrotermes* (*chiswe*). The creation by the termites of what has been described as nutrient ‘hot spots’ has far reaching consequences, in supporting a form of vegetation that is quite distinct, both in structure and composition, from the surrounding *miombo* woodland. In *Brachystegia* woodlands there is, indeed, a close, intimate and vital relationship between trees, termites and fungi (Malaisse 1978: 592; Campbell 1996: 42–43).

Finally, it is worth noting that within *Brachystegia* woodlands there are often low-lying depressions and valley bottoms that are collectively known as ‘*dambos*’. Often seasonally waterlogged, they are generally covered in short grasses and various flowering plants.

As we have discussed elsewhere (2009 [1995]: 213–233) *Brachystegia* woodland was a constituent part of the socio-economic and ritual life of the people of the Shire Highlands. But during the twentieth century, with an increasing human population, much of the *Brachystegia* woodland that once covered the Shire Highlands has been replaced by croplands—subsistence cultivations, blue-gum plantations, tobacco farms and tea gardens.

By the turn of the present century, with an increasing demand for firewood and charcoal by an ever-expanding urban population in Blantyre–Limbe and Zomba townships, the Shire Highlands landscape has been virtually denuded of its woodlands.

3.2 *The Evergreen Forests and Associates*

The high plateaux and the mountains of the Shire Highlands support a flora and vegetation types which have very little in common with the *Brachystegia* woodlands that surround them—relating specifically to evergreen forests and their associated montane grasslands and bracken-briar.

Our knowledge of the evergreen forests of Malawi has been greatly advanced by the pioneering studies of Frank White and Jim Chapman (1970) and more recently Françoise Dowsett-Lemaire (White et al. 2001). Such studies have indicated the diversity and complexity of the evergreen forests of Malawi. But here, focussing on the Shire Highlands, and avoiding abstruse taxonomic debates, we shall be concerned only with four broad categories of evergreen forest, namely Montane, submontane, lowland and riparian forest.

Adopting a geomorphological as well as a botanical perspective, we shall discuss these various types of evergreen forest in relation to the four mountain ranges that characterize the Shire Highlands. But first there will be a brief outline of the four types of evergreen forest, along with their associated plant communities at the higher altitudes: montane grassland and bracken-briar.

The main locations of the evergreen forests in the Shire Highlands are indicated in Table 2.2.

3.3 *Montane Forest*

Variouly described as ‘moist forest’ or simply as ‘Montane forest *sensu stricto*’, Montane Evergreen rain forest has a very restricted distribution in the Shire Highlands. For it is found only above 5000 feet (1500 m) on the highest mountains—Malosa, Zomba, Chiradzulu (above 4700 feet), Mulanje and Mchese. At this altitude there is generally very high rainfall—on Zomba and Mulanje Mountains, for example, the annual rainfall figure is over 90 inches (2200 mm). The trees in the forest are all evergreen, usually with smooth bark (contrasting with that of *Brachystegia*) and between 50 feet (15 m) and 80 feet (25 m) tall, forming a dense and continuous

Table 2.2 Evergreen forests of the Shire Highlands (White et al. 2001: 62)

<i>Locality</i>	<i>Altitude (m)</i>	<i>Evergreen forest type</i>	<i>Size (ha)</i>
Chikala hill	1300–1600	Submontane	285
Malosa Mt	1700–1950	Montane	730
Zomba Mt	1600–1950	Montane	600
Chivunde	1350–1450	Submontane	19
Mpita estate	1100	Lowland	6
Chiradzulu Mt	1450–1750	Montane	150
Lisau	1300–1450	Submontane	160
Ndirande Mt	1400–1600	Submontane	60
Soche Mt	1300–1520	Submontane	150
Bangwe hill	1350–1550	Submontane	60
Malabvi hill	1200–1440	Submontane	30
Thyolo Mt	1170–1450	Submontane	1000
Thyolo tea estates	1000–1100	Lowland	600
Machemba hill	1150–1300	Lowland	40
Mulanje Mt (incl Mchese)			
Foothills	600–950	Lowland	200
Mid-altitude	900–1500	Submontane	1800
Plateaux	1500–2300	Montane	5000

1000 m = 3280 feet

1 hectare = 2.47 acres

canopy. Trees typical of montane forest include: *Chrysophyllum gorungosanum* (*chifira*), *Ekebergia capensis* (*ntonduko*), *Podocarpus milanjianus* (*mkute*), *Pygeum africanum* (*mpeuma*), *Mystroxydon aethiopicum* (*mpakate*) and *Xymalos monospora* (*chikakalaka*). The Montane forest is also characterized by a shrubby undergrowth, mostly plants belonging to the family Acanthaceae and an abundance of lianes, ferns, mosses and epiphytic plants. Tree ferns, especially *Cyathea dregei* are often found near streams (Chapman and White 1970: 105–109; White et al. 2001: 64–65).

3.4 Submontane Forest

Also described as ‘mid-altitude’ forest, the submontane evergreen forest is very similar to that of montane forest in general appearance, and in being dense, shady, cool and moist, but it has a very different floristic composition. This type of forest is found on Chikala hill, most of the higher hills and mountains of the Blantyre district (Chiradzulu—on the Lisau saddle—Ndirande, Soche, Bangwe, Malabvi and a remnant patch

on Michiru mountain, prototypically on Thyolo Mountain, as well as at the mid-altitude (3000–4700 feet, 900–1430 m) on Zomba and Mulanje Mountains—respectively the Chivunde Valley above Domasi mission and the Ruo Gorge above Ruo tea estate. Forming a closed evergreen forest, the tree-species characteristic of submontane forest includes: *Cola greenwayi* (*mkope*), *Garcinia mlanjiensis* (*mtundira*), *Albizia gummifera* (*chikwani*), *Ficus capensis* (*nkuya*), *Sapium ellipticum* (*nchenjeli*), and *Ochna holstii* (*mgonela*). Often as a ‘cloud forest’, enveloped for long periods in heavy mist, submontane forest, as with the evergreen forests at the higher altitudes, has a profusion of ferns, mosses, and epiphytic plants (such as orchids), as well as well-developed lianes. The average height of the trees is around 80 feet (24 m) (Chapman and White 1970: 100–104; White et al. 2001: 63–64).

3.5 Lowland Forest

The prototypical example of lowland forest is the evergreen forest that clothes the southern slopes of Machemba hill (4260 feet, 1300 m), situated on the Phalombe plain, some 6 miles north of Phalombe township. Machemba, like Mulanje Mountain is a syenite intrusion. This type of lowland forest consists of such evergreen trees as *Khaya anthotheca* (syn. *K. nyasica*) (*mbawa*), *Newtonia buchananii* (*nkweranyani*, Climbed by baboons), *Zanha golungensis* (*mtutumuko*), *Cola mossambicensis* (*mkope*), *Macaranga capensis* (*mbwabwa*), and *Parkia filicoidea* (*mkundi*).

There are fewer bryophytes and ferns compared with the montane evergreen forests, and epiphytes are largely confined to the crowns of the larger trees. Both *mbawa* and *mkundi* are often strongly buttressed. In contrast with the resilient *Brachystegia* woodland, which is resistant to fire and coppices easily, lowland evergreen trees are easily damaged.

There is evidence to suggest that this type of lowland evergreen forest was once more widespread in the Shire Highlands, particularly in the higher-rainfall areas of Zomba, Thyolo and Mulanje. Much of this along the foothills of Mulanje and Thyolo Mountains was cleared in the opening-up of the tea estates in the first decades of the twentieth century. But remnant patches of lowland evergreen forest are still to be found in the Thyolo highlands—on Mwalantunzi (93 ha), Naming’ombe (80 ha) and Mikundi (40 ha) tea estates; on the bend of the Litchenya river near Milonde court (of Chief Mabuka), Mulanje; and on Mpita tobacco estate

three miles west of Thondwe, in the Zomba district (Chapman 1962: 69–70, 1988; White et al. 2001: 60).

It has been suggested that given protection from fire (and human intrusions) a ‘transition’ woodland begins to form, as the *Brachystegia* woodland ‘gradually returns to (lowland) forest’ (White et al. 2001: 57).

In contrast with *Brachystegia* woodland, the montane evergreen forests of the Shire Highlands were rarely visited by local people, apart from the occasional hunting party, or a man collecting timber, medicines or wood for carvings. Indeed, in the past the general attitude of African people towards the mountains of Zomba, Thyolo, Mulanje and Mchese was one of awe and fear, for they were associated with lions and hyenas, the early Batwa people (see below), and the spirits of the ancestors. As the Lomwe historian L.D. Soka, for example, writes, Mchese Mountain was a ‘mountain of spirits’ (1953: 28–29). For as we have discussed elsewhere, the evergreen forests that clothed the hills and mountains of the Shire Highlands—as well as the forested graveyards associated with the territorial chiefs, such as at Mpita and Milonde—were all associated with the spirits of the ancestors (*mizimu ya makolo*). Rain shrines (*kachisi*) were situated in the evergreen forests (*nkhalango*) or in graveyard thickets (*msitu*), and offerings were made (*kutsira nsembe*) to the spirits of the ancestors for support, especially at times of drought (Morris 2000: 192–193).

3.6 *Riparian Forest*

When early Europeans like David Livingstone first travelled through the Shire Highlands they were deeply impressed by the number of streams and rivers with clear running water that they encountered—even during the dry season. They were equally struck by the fact that such watercourses were usually fringed with impressive tracts of evergreen forest. Once a characteristic feature of the Shire Highlands these fringing or riparian forests, found between 2500 feet (760 m) and 4000 feet (1200 m) often contained large evergreen trees up to 50 m tall. Among the trees common in riparian forest are the following: *Khaya anthotheca* (syn. *K. nyasica*) (*mbawa*), *Adina microcephala* (*chonya*), *Erythrophleum suaveolens* (*mwabvi*)—the famous poison ordeal tree—*Bridelia micrantha* (*mpasa*), *Harungana madagascariensis* (*mbuluni*), *Syzygium cordatum* (*nyowe*) and *Trema orientalis* (*mpefu*). Many of these trees, such as *mbawa*, *chonya* and *mpasa* are useful timber trees, widely used in the manufacture of furniture and other household goods. The palm *Raphia farinifera* (*chiwale*) is also

characteristic of riparian forest, herbaceous plants of the families Araceae and Zingiberaceae are common in the undergrowth, and epiphytic orchids often festoon the tree canopy (Chapman and White 1970: 160–161; White et al. 2001: 59; Morris 2009 [1965]: 37–45).

Associated with the evergreen forests at the higher altitudes are two vegetation types—montane grassland and bracken-briar.

3.7 *Montane Grassland*

Montane grassland is usually regarded as a ‘fire-climax’, a secondary vegetation that was formed with the destruction of the Montane forest. There is a suggestion, then, that the grassland has expanded at the expense of the montane forest over the past centuries, and has been maintained by regular burning. Montane grassland is a common vegetation type on all the higher mountains of the Shire Highlands: Malosa, Zomba, and Mulanje—at the plateau level of around 6000 feet (1830 m). The main grasses that characterize montane grassland are *Themeda triandra* (*chitengwa*), *Hyparrhenia* spp. (*nyumba*), *Setaria sphacelata* (*nchira wa garu*, dog’s tail), and *Loudetia simplex* (*mpudzakubelu*). They may constitute a sward up to ‘knee high’ (Chapman), that is, up to one metre. After the annual fires and around the outbreak of the rains the grassland becomes a carpet of colourful herbaceous plants (Jackson 1969; Chapman and White 1970: 21–22; White et al. 2001: 69; Morris 2009 [1967]: 46–47).

On both Zomba and Mulanje Mountains there are a variety of different kinds of shrubby vegetation. But at the edge of the montane forest and in rocky terrains the commonest vegetation-type is that usually described as bracken-briar.

The bracken fern *Pteridium aquilinum* (*chitambala*) is an extremely hardy and fire-resistant plant, and often forms with other shrubby plants an almost impenetrable thicket up to around 8 feet (2.5 m) tall. Shrubs that are associated with bracken-briar include Erica (*Philippia benguetensis*) (*Kachamba*), *Hypericum revolutum* (*ncheju*), *Heteromorpha arborescens* (*kapoloni*), *Tecomaria capensis* (*masasa*), *Rhus longipes* (*mtatu*—on account of its trifoliate leaves), and the thorny shrub *Rubus rigidus*. On both Zomba and Mulanje Mountains the introduced Himalayan raspberry *Rubus ellipticus* (*mpandankhuku*) has become a ‘serious pest’. Many of these shrubs are resinous and extremely aromatic. The scandent thorny shrub *Smilax anceps* (*mkwandula*) is also common in bracken-briar (White et al. 2001: 68).

We may turn now to the four mountain ranges with which the evergreen forests are specifically associated—Zomba, the Blantyre hills, Thyolo and Mulanje.

3.8 *Zomba Mountain*

Zomba Mountain, like Mulanje Mountain, consists of a ring-like syenite intrusion. Lying on the Western edge of the Shire Highlands it overlooks the upper Shire section of the Great Rift Valley. The intrusion actually comprises two quite separate mountains, Zomba Mountain (6846 feet; 2087 m) and Malosa Mountain (6816 feet; 2078 m), separated by the steep-sided Domasi valley, at a depth of some 2000 feet (610 m). Domasi Mission was established in the valley during the 1890s. Both mountains have a high-plateau area, situated at around 6000 feet (1830 m) which consists of a 'mosaic' of montane grassland and montane evergreen forest.

Only a few square miles of evergreen forest remain on the two mountains—estimated at around 1300 ha (around 5 square miles)—and these have long been under threat. The montane grassland—especially in the vicinity of Chingwe's hole—has long been renowned for its terrestrial orchids, which flower mainly during the rainy season from December to March. Belonging to such genera as *Habenaria*, *Disa*, and *Satyrium*, their tubers (*chinaka*) are often collected as food by local women who climb up to the plateau from the Domasi valley. The plateau is also inhabited by around 50 species of mammals, the rock hyrax, klipspringer, yellow baboon and the blue monkey being particularly noteworthy (Van Strien 1991, on the geomorphology of Zomba Mountain see Bloomfield and Young 1961, on the evergreen forest flora see Chapman and White 1970: 172; Dowsett-Lemaire 1989a: 93–96).

Throughout much of the twentieth century the foothills of Zomba and Malosa Mountains, particularly in the Domasi valley, were covered with *Brachystegia* woodland.

Zomba Township, established by Harry Johnston in the 1890s as the administrative capital of the future Nyasaland protectorate, is situated on the Southern Slopes of Zomba Mountain.

Zomba plateau, specifically the Mulunguzi basin, fulfils a vital role as a water catchment area for Zomba Township, and as early as 1913 Zomba Mountain was gazetted as a protected area—of around 23 square miles. Early experiments were made with the planting of Mulanje cedar *Widdringtonia whytei* (*mkunguza*) on the plateau, but it was not until

the 1940s that extensive plantations of pines were established, mostly *Pinus patula*, but with smaller areas planted with another conifer, the Mexican cypress *Cupressus lusitanica*. Plantings were mostly in areas originally under montane grassland or bracken-briar. The aim of the Forest Department was to establish the commercial production of softwood timber, on a 30-year rotation cycle (Utila and Nthenda 2008: 5).

Timber production flourished in the late colonial period, but during the mid 1990s, a time of political upheaval, the imposition of what came to be described euphemistically as ‘structural adjustment programmes (by the IMF and the World Bank) caused many forestry workers to be laid off work or their pension rights denied; in retaliation the workers set fire to the pine plantations on Zomba plateau. It was estimated that 40 per cent of the plantations were destroyed.

The demand for fuel wood, whether in the form of charcoal or firewood, by the growing population of Zomba Township has led not only to the destruction of the *Brachystegia* woodland that once clothed the foothills of Zomba and Malosa Mountains, but has led to increasing pressure on both the evergreen forests and the remaining pine plantations (White et al. 2001: 76; Utila and Nthenda 2008).

3.9 *The Blantyre Hills*

The hills and the mountains of the Blantyre district have been described as the ‘core’ of the Shire Highlands, for they are a constituent part of a ridge of around 3000 feet (915 m) that extends from Zomba Mountain in the north to Thyolo Mountain in the south—a distance of around 60 miles (100 km).

Blantyre itself became the first European settlement in British Central Africa, with the establishment of the Church of Scotland mission there in 1875. The township subsequently became, together with Limbe, the commercial capital of the Nyasaland protectorate.

The Blantyre district is characterized by numerous large rocky hills which were formed from a variety of basement complex rocks, mainly gneisses and granulites that are rich in such minerals as quartz and hornblende (Evans 1965: 17–19). As indicated earlier the main hills and mountains include Chiradzulu (5821 feet; 1774 m), Soche (5030 feet; 1533 m), Mpingwe (4704 feet; 1433 m), Bangwe (5059 feet; 1433 m), Malabvi (4775 feet; 1455 m) and Mikolongwe (3979 feet; 1212 m). Often ridge-like in form, the summits of all of these hills were clothed in small closed

evergreen forests. During the 1920s many of these hills were declared forest reserves (see Chap. 8), for it was recognized by foresters like John Clements that their value as water-catchments far outweighed their importance as a source of timber or firewood. As Jim Chapman described these remnant tracts of submontane rain forest

The closed forests are restricted to the ‘cloud belt’ on the tops of the hills and the gullies on their sides, where not only is the rainfall greater but cloud and mist conditions bring moisture during a considerable part of the year when the surrounding plateau is dry. They reach their best development on southerly aspects which experience the full benefit of the chiperoni’s. (in Evans 1965: 13)

There is evidence that these evergreen forests were much more extensive in the past, but the impact of fire, cultivations, the extraction of the larger trees for timber, especially the *mbawa* (*Khaya anthotheca*) and the cutting of trees for firewood and charcoal, has led to their severe decline. The evergreen forest on Mpingwe hill near Limbe was wantonly destroyed in the 1960s—as I witnessed (Morris 2009 [1967]: 29)—and there is very little evergreen forest now left on Ndirande and Michiru Mountains. The forests on both Soche and Bangwe Mountains have been severely reduced in size through illegal felling and the encroachment of cultivations into what officially were designated forest reserves. Both in terms of holding water resources, and in terms of conserving what are unique forest ecosystems, the conservation of these submontane forests continues to be a political imperative (Stead 1978: 30; Dowsett-Lemaire and Dowsett 1988).

Most of the submontane forests of the Blantyre hills, but especially Soche and Michiru Mountains, were associated with the spirits of the ancestors, and thus, in the past, were the location of important rain shrines. These shrines were once a crucial part of the socio-cultural life of the people of the Shire Highlands—both Mang’anja and Yao (MacDonald 1882: 1/70; Werner 1906: 46–61; Morris 2000: 192–193).

Apart from the forest flora itself, two aspects of the submontane forests have been of particular interest to naturalists—this long before research biologists arrived on the scene. One is the wealth of epiphytic orchids to be found on the hills of the Blantyre district—either within or in the vicinity of the montane forests. On Soche Mountain for example, at an altitude of 4800 feet (1460 m), a short distance below evergreen forest, a wooded spur provided, in an area of under half an acre, eighteen different species

of epiphytic orchid. These included such genera as *Tridactyle*, *Polystachya*, *Bulbophyllum* and *Cyrtorchis* (Morris 2009 [1967]: 26; Dowsett-Lemaire 1989a: 99).

Secondly, naturalists have long been fascinated by the birds of the submontane rainforests—its avifauna—for such birds are elusive, usually confined to montane or submontane forests, and have a very varied distribution. Between 30 and 40 different species of birds are found in the hill forests, and among the more common species are the following: Placid bulbul (*Phyllastrephus placidus*), green loerie (*Tauraco livingstonii*), starred robin (*Pogonocichla stellata*), Thyolo alethe (*Alethe choloensis*), white-tailed crested flycatcher (*Elminia albonotatus*) and the cape batis (*Batis capensis*).

(Stead 1978; Johnston-Stewart 1984; Dowsett-Lemaire 1989b. On the forest flora of the Blantyre hills see Dowsett-Lemaire 1989a: 96–99).

3.10 Thyolo Mountain

Lying about 20 miles (32 km) south of Blantyre-Limbe, Thyolo Mountain (4795 feet; 1462 m) dominates the tea-growing areas of the Thyolo district. The mountain, in the form of a flat ridge some four miles long (6 km) was, until comparatively recently completely covered with extensive submontane evergreen forest. Apart from the mountains that were formed from syenite intrusions, namely Zomba-Malosa and Mulanje-Mchese, Thyolo Mountain holds one of the most extensive tracts of evergreen forest in the Shire Highlands—an area of around 3.86 square miles (1000 ha).

The Thyolo mountain forest was dominated by *Chrysophyllum gorungosanum* (*chifila*), a tree growing to 60 m, with milky fruit, and by various fig trees, of which the strangler fig *Ficus samsibarica* was the most numerous. Other common canopy trees include *Albizia gummifera* (*chikwani*), *Drypetes gerrardii* and *Macaranga capensis* (*mbabwa*), while *Khaya anthotheca* (*mbawa*) is found in gullies at a lower attitude. Epiphytic ferns and orchids are abundant in the forest (Chapman and White 1970: 156–159; Dowsett-Lemaire 1989a: 100–101, on the birds of upper Thyolo see Johnston-Stewart 1982).

As with the Blantyre hills, Thyolo Mountain in the past was an important rain shrine. In July 1962 Lovell Proctor of the Universities Mission to Central Africa climbed the mountain, and described it as a mountain that was ‘full of spirits (*mizimu*) and that the place never wanted for rain’.

The mountain, in fact, was linked with the Mang'anja chief Lundu and the Mboma territorial spirit, and thus the local chief Mankokwe often prayed to the spirit of Thyolo Mountain for rain (Bennett and Ylvisaker 1971: 303–305; Morris 2000: 212).

The presence of a rain shrine on Thyolo Mountain was still evident when I climbed the mountain with Arthur Westrop in 1959.

Around that period Jim Chapman described the forests on Thyolo Mountain as having 'never been exploited' (Chapman and White 1970: 160).

But it is well to recognize that much of the evergreen forest that once clothed the slopes of Thyolo Mountain as well as the lowland forests were felled and cleared at the end of the 1920s to make way for the tea plantations—given the high rainfall for the district.

Regrettably, during the past three decades Thyolo Mountain has been subjected to continual encroachment, much of the forest being felled not only for firewood and charcoal, but also for extensive cultivations, particularly of maize and potatoes. In the gardens, often the only trees left standing are *Dracaena fragrans (mchemani)*. Efforts by the Forest Department to curb encroachments into the forest reserve have largely proved to be unsuccessful—given the pressure on land with the growing population. When I first came to Malawi in 1958 the population of the country was around 4 million; it is now 11 million.

3.11 *Mulanje Mountain*

The energetic travel-writer and alpinist James Riddell (1956) accurately described Mulanje Mountain as an 'African Wonderland', for it is truly a magnificent mountain. A first view of the mountain from Thyolo, across the Luchenza plain, is perhaps one of the finest sights in Africa.

The mountain was made famous by another travel-writer, Laurens van der Post, in his best-selling book, *Venture to the Interior* (1952), though his graphic account of his 'encounter' with Mulanje Mountain is both fanciful and facile (see my critique Morris 2009: 322–325). And it was not some 'unknown' mountain as van der Post pretended, for Alexander Whyte, head of the Scientific Department in Harry Johnston's colonial administration, had climbed Lichenya plateau—in October 1891. Whyte spent two weeks botanizing on the mountain, and discovered the famous Mulanje cedar which was later described as a new species in the *Transactions of the Linnean Society* (1984). But

even Whyte was not the first European to climb to Lichenya plateau or to observe the cedars. This was achieved by the Scottish missionary the Rev. Robert Cleland, who first climbed the mountain in December 1888 (Life and Work in BCA 139/7; Chapman 1995: 1).

Since that time a good deal of geological, botanical and zoological research has been undertaken on Mulanje Mountain, and this has given rise to a wealth of publications (see, for example, Dixey 1927; Brass 1953; Chapman 1962; Dowsett-Lemaire 1988; Strugnell 2006).

Mulanje Mountain is situated in the south-east corner of the Shire Highlands close to the Mozambique border. It is an isolated massif, a syenite intrusion which formed around 130 million years ago, covering an area of more than 245 square miles (640 square km). About 30 miles from Thyolo, the two mountains are connected via the Luchenza plain, which lies at a general level of 2000 feet (610 m). Mulanje Mountain rises very abruptly from the surrounding plains—like the ‘walls of a Byzantium fortress’ as van der Post vividly described it (1952: 94)—to several high plateaux at around 6000 feet (1830 m), which are themselves surmounted by rocky peaks, the highest of which is Sapitwa (‘Don’t go’) at 9855 feet (3002 m).

There are six distinct plateaux on the mountain: Chambe, Thuchila, Litchenya, Sombani, Ruo and Madzeka. To the north of Mulanje Mountain is Mchese Mountain (7500 feet, 2289 m) which is connected to the main massif by a broad saddle called the Fort Lister Gap. Mulanje Mountain serves as an important water catchment area for the whole of the Mulanje district. Mulanje *boma*—the District headquarters—and numerous tea estates are situated along the southern foothills of the mountain.

Like Zomba Mountain the vegetation of Mulanje Mountain has been described as a montane forest/grassland ‘mosaic’ (Spriggs 2001). But unlike Zomba Mountain the evergreen forests on Mulanje are far more extensive and complex, and all types of evergreen forest aforementioned are represented on the mountain. Thus on the southern and south-eastern slopes of Mulanje Mountain, specifically in the Lichenya and Ruo Gorges, a form of lowland forest is found. *Newtonia buchananii* (*nkweranyani*) is the dominant tree, often growing to a great size, and it is interspersed with such trees as *Albizia gummifera* (*chikwani*), *Khaya anthotheca* (*mbawa*) and *Authocleista zambesiala* (*nkungubwi*). The herb layer consists almost exclusively of aromatic Zingiberaceae (Chapman 1962: 17).

As noted earlier, lowland forest was probably widespread along the southern foothills of Mulanje Mountain in the past. But with the

opening-up of European tea estates in the early decades of the twentieth century, much of it was destroyed. Small relic patches, such as the forested graveyard on the bend of the Lichenya River, are all that remain.

Submontane on mid-altitude forests on Mulanje are found between 3000 feet (900 m) and 4500 feet (1350 m) and are mainly represented by the Chisongeli forest, which covers the south-eastern foothills below Manene peak (8700 feet, 2650 m). Its floristic composition is noted above: it was a forest rich in ferns, mosses and epiphytes. From the 1970s onwards an influx of refugees from war-torn Mozambique led to the destruction of much of Chisongeli forest as people opened up the land for maize gardens. Little evergreen forest thus remains below 5000 feet (1500 m) (Dowsett-Lemaire and Dowsett 1988: 160).

Above 5000 feet on Mulanje Mountain are the famous *Widdingtonia* forests, scattered widely in the ravines and gorges. They occur mainly between 5000 feet (1525 m) and 7000 feet (2100 m) on the drier sides of the mountain (Chambe and Thuchila plateaux and on Mchese), and form a part of the montane evergreen forest that covers perhaps around 19 square miles (5000 ha). But *Widdingtonia* forests only occur in one-third of this forest, and it has been estimated that the total area of cedar forest on Mulanje amounts to 5.64 square miles (1462 ha). It has also been recognized that there are in fact two species of cedar on Mulanje Mountain, namely, the majestic *Widdingtonia whytei* (syn. *W. cupressoides*) (*mkunguza*), which is a broad crowned canopy tree growing to 40 m and *Widdingtonia nodiflora*, which is a multi-stemmed shrub 4 m tall that grows mainly at the forest edges (White et al. 2001: 82–83). Paradoxically, although Mulanje cedar is extremely sensitive to fire, it is dependent on the intervention of fire for its successful regeneration (Chapman and White 1970: 168).

Other important canopy trees found in the montane forests of Mulanje Mountain include: *Ilex mitis* (*katenji*), *Podocarpus milanjiensis* (*mkunguza*), *Ekebergia capensis* and *Cassipourea congoensis*. The forests are characterized by an abundance of ferns, epiphytic orchids, and in the wetter forests, pendent club mosses (Chapman 1962: 17–20, 1995: 9–21; Chapman and White 1970: 162–163).

Although Mulanje Mountain was gazetted as a forest reserve in 1927, throughout the colonial period Mulanje cedar was exploited as a construction timber, being durable, easily-worked, resistant to termites and having a pleasant resinous aroma. It was used extensively in the making of furniture, bridge building, and even in the construction of boats. The cedar was

cut by means of pit-saws on the plateau, and the timber carried down the mountain by indefatigable and extremely agile porters (Chapman 1995: 29–31). In recent decades through illegal felling, much of the cedar forest has been lost, leading Chapman and others to make an earnest plan for its conservation, particularly as it has been designated Malawi's national tree (Chapman 1995).

Besides the montane forests the other important vegetation type on Mulanje Mountain is the montane grasslands. As noted above, these grasslands are held to be a secondary vegetation, enduring only after the destruction of the montane forests by fire, and thereafter maintained by regular burning. These grasslands, and particularly the firebreaks, provided the setting for an array of attractive and colourful wild flowers, especially during the early part of the rainy season. More conspicuous flowers include the fire-lily *Cyrtanthus welwitschii*, the iris *Moraea carsonii* and the delightful blue orchid *Disa hamapetala*, as well as numerous species of everlasting flowers, *Helichrysum* spp. Twenty-three species of the genus have been recorded from Mulanje including the endemic *H. whyteanum* which has its silvery bracts delicately flushed with pink (On the wild flowers of Mulanje Mountain see Morris 2009 [1967]: 46–54; Eastwood 1979: 29–33; on the ecology of the montane grasslands see Chapman 1962: 21–22.)

During the 1940s, pine plantations were established on Chambe and Sombani Plateaux, mainly of *Pinus patula*, the intention being to use the pine as a nurse crop for the cedar. This never materialized and since then the pine has, through natural regeneration, spread over most of the Mulanje Plateaux. It has thus become, along with the Himalayan raspberry (*Rubus ellipticus*) a major 'plant invader' on the mountain (Edwards 1982; on other introduced species see Strugnell 2006: 18–21).

As with the other hills and mountains of the Shire Highlands, on Mulanje Mountain there is a variety and a profusion of bird-life. It holds such birds as the spotted thrush (*Turdus fisheri*) and the Thyolo alethe (*Alethe choloensis*), which have a very restricted distribution in Malawi. Around 180 species of birds have been recorded from Mulanje Mountain (Dowsett-Lemaire and Dowsett 2006: 81).

Mammals such as Bushback (*mbawala*), klipspringer (*chinkhoma*), red forest duiker (*kasanye*) and rock hyrax (*mbira*) continue to survive on the mountain in spite of severe hunting pressure (on the vertebrates of Mulanje Mountain see Van Strien 1989).

3.12 *The Lake Chilwa Basin and the Phalombe Plain*

With respect to the ecology of Southern Africa, botanists have long made a broad distinction between two types of savanna woodland; moist savanna—the *Brachystegia*-type woodlands (discussed above) and arid savanna, the *Acacia*–*Combretum* woodlands, which are generally found in low-rainfall areas—with an annual rainfall below 35 inches (890 mm). Such woodlands tend to be completely deciduous, and have a more spiny vegetation and more succulents (Huntley 1982: 102–112).

The natural vegetation that once covered the Phalombe plain, which comprises an area of 450 square miles (1165 square km), can be broadly characterized as arid savanna. The plain stretches from Zomba Mountain and Lake Chilwa in the north southwards to Luchenza and Mulanje Mountain. It lies at an altitude of between 2040 feet (622 m) and 2400 feet (735 m), and, consisting essentially of lacustrine deposits, it has been described as ‘remarkably flat and uniform’ (Pike and Rimmington 1965: 37). The annual rainfall at Phalombe, close to Mchese Mountain, is around 35 inches.

In the past—and this must be stressed—the plain was largely covered with dry deciduous woodland, with tall *Hyparrhenia* spp (*nyumbu*) grasses. Among the trees characteristic of this savanna landscape were: *Sterculia quinqueloba* (*msetangyani*), the knobthorn *Acacia nigrescens* (*nkunku*), *Sclerocarya caffra* (*mtondo*)—used in the making of canoes—and *Combretum imberbe* (*msimbifi*). On black ‘cotton’ soils the flat-topped *Acacia seyal* (*chisawani*) was common, often forming pure stands, and was associated with such grasses as *Setaria* spp (*msenzi*) and *Ischaemum africanum* (*njogo*). On sandy soils along the fringes of Lake Chilwa, *Terminalia sericea* (*naphiri*) was common. Other noteworthy trees that were found in various parts of the Phalombe plain or in the vicinity of Lake Chilwa were the baobab, *Adansonia digitata* (*mlambe*), the sausage tree *Kigelia africana* (*mvunguti*) and *Lonchocarpus capassa* (*mpakasa*)—this last being widely known as a ‘rain tree’ (Chapman in Evans 1965: 14–15; Morris 1996 with regard to local names).

The vegetation in the vicinity of Lake Chilwa is complex and consists of three main types: the swamps of the reed *Typha capensis* (*njedza*) at the fringes of the lake; the diverse vegetation of the marshes which include both the familiar tall grass *Phragmites mauritianus* (*bango*), used for a variety of purposes including the making of *mphasa* mats, and the sedge *Cyperus alternifolius* (*chetsa*), widely used in the past for the making of

salt (*chidulo*); and, finally, the flood-plain grassland. Two points are worth noting. Firstly, the swamps, marshes and grassland were all regularly burnt during the dry season. Secondly the vegetation in the vicinity of Lake Chilwa was subject not only to annual fires, but also to continual change, for the lake, always relatively shallow—around 2–3 metres—became completely dry every decade or so (Wilson 2014: 43–45).

During the colonial period most of the land on the Phalombe plain and in the vicinity of Lake Chilwa was opened up to settlement by the provision of boreholes. This led to the expansion of subsistence farming—especially of maize, pigeon pea (*nandolo*), beans and cassava—and livestock husbandry, as well as the commercial production of rice (near Lake Chilwa) and cotton (near Thuchila and Phalombe). This in turn led to the widespread deforestation of the Phalombe plain, and by the 1960s the virtual eradication of the *Acacia*–*Combretum* woodland. Land to the east of Zomba township and most of the Phalombe plain became, in fact, one of the most densely populated areas in Malawi, with over 162 people per square km, most people cultivating less than 1 ha (2.4 acres) of land (Jensen et al. 2000: 16–25).

4 WILDLIFE

Evidence from the writings of early European travellers and missionaries suggests that at the end of the nineteenth century the Shire Highlands was a haven of wildlife, that the larger mammals were common, especially in the vicinity of Lake Chilwa and on the Phalombe plain. Even so, sable and hartebeest were common in *Brachystegia* woodland. As we shall discuss in Chap. 8 keen big-game hunters such as Henry Drummond and Hector Duff all wrote enthusiastically about the Shire Highlands being some of the finest ‘game country’ in Africa, having an abundance of larger game animals. Nowhere in Africa, wrote the Scottish cleric Drummond, did he see ‘such splendid herds of larger game animals’ than near Lake Chilwa, zebra being especially common (1889: 30).

The larger mammals known to have existed and, in many cases, known to have been common in the Shire Highlands at the end of the nineteenth century are listed in Table 2.3.

Neither impala nor nyala were common in the Shire Highlands, and there is a questionable record of the roan antelope from near Namadzi in 1902 (Duff 1903: 153; Ansell and Dowsett 1988: 85).

Table 2.3 Large mammals known to have existed in the Shire Highlands at the end of the nineteenth century

Black rhino ^a	Kudu ^a	Sable ^a
Buffalo ^a	Hartebeest ^a	Serval
Bushbuck	Lion	Side-striped jackal
Bushpig	Oribi ^a	Spotted hyena
Cane rat	Otter	Vervet monkey
Civet	Pangolin	Warthog
Eland ^a	Sun squirrel	Waterbuck ^a
Elephant ^a	Bush squirrel	Wild cat
Genet	Porcupine	Wild dog ^a
Hippopotamus ^a	Red forest duiker	Yellow baboon
Klipspringer	Reedbuck	Zebra ^a

^aNo longer occurs in the Shire Highlands (Morris 2006a: 81)

Within only a few decades many of the larger mammals of the Shire Highlands had been completely eradicated, and there was a serious decline in the mammalian fauna, specifically the larger ‘game’ animals (Hayes 1972; Dudley 1979; Morris 2006a: 78–83). As we discuss below, three factors seem to have been involved in this decline of the mammalian fauna: the ‘population explosion’ that occurred in the Shire Highlands in the early years of the twentieth century, with the large influx of Lomwe people, and subsequently the opening-up of European estates and African subsistence cultivations; the increasing availability of firearms, specifically muzzle-loading guns, among African hunters; and, finally, the fact that hunting was a favourable pastime among almost all Europeans during the colonial period—whether administrators, missionaries or planters. In the 1930s the only location in the Shire Highlands where game animals were still plentiful was on the Thuchila plain, in the Mulanje district. But by the outbreak of the Second World War almost all the larger mammals of the Shire Highlands had been eradicated, apart from the vervet monkey, yellow baboon and bushpig, and in the more remote parts of the higher mountains such mammals as leopard, hyena, porcupine, bushbuck, grey duiker, side-striped jackal and klipspringer.

But throughout the Shire Highlands smaller mammals continued to flourish, particularly bats and rodents. Around 34 species of bats (chiroptera) and 30 species of rats and mice (rodentia) have been recorded from the highlands. In total 137 species of mammals have been recorded (Sweeney 1970: 2/114–148; Ansell and Dowsett 1988, on folk classification and the cultural aspects of mammals in Malawi see Morris 1998, 2000, 2009: 143–182).

The study of the avifauna of Malawi and the Shire Highlands in particular, has advanced greatly since Charles Belcher (1930) wrote-up his ‘bird notes’ from the 1920s. Unfortunately, modern texts on the birds of Malawi (Benson and Benson 1977; Dowsett-Lemaire and Dowsett 2006) tend to be rather specialist, and unlike Belcher, the authors not only express no interest at all in local bird names, but, in rather elitist fashion, simply assume that everyone, including Malawians, are fully conversant in biological nomenclature.

Much of the extensive *Brachystegia* woodland that once covered the Shire Highlands has long been replaced by cultural environments—maize fields, pine and bluegum plantations, orchards, tobacco farms, and tea gardens. Yet there is still a profusion of bird life to be found in the Shire Highlands. The use of bird-lime in the trapping of small birds has, in fact, long been an intrinsic part of Malawian socio-cultural life, particularly in times of food shortages.

Although cultivations and farm land are often treated as if they were only a marginal habitat for birds, in fact, many birds have become adapted to and flourish in these cultural environments. Indeed, some of the most conspicuous birds, such as, for example, *mnankwichi*, the pin-tailed widow (*Vidua macroura*), *kasisisi*, the blue waxbill (*Uraeginthus angolensis*), *mkuta*, the white-browed coucal (*Centropus superciliosus*), *pumbwa*, the black-eyed bulbul (*Pycnonotus barbatus*), *kapingu*, the bronze manikin (*Lonchura cucullata*), *nkhwali*, the red-necked francolin (*Francolinus afer*) and *chokochoko*, the arrow-marked babbler (*Turdoides jardinezi*), all seem to be well-adapted to cultivations, and are well-known, not only to ornithologists, but to the local people of the Shire Highlands.

The number of commoner bird species recorded in the Shire Highlands, with respect to a select number of families, is given in Table 2.4. Altogether 522 species of birds have been recorded from the Shire Highlands.

Three bird-species (among many others) which are significant in the socio-cultural life of the people of the Shire Highlands are: *namng’omba*, the ground hornbill (*Bucorvus cafer*), which is important medicinally and symbolically in both Mang’anja and Yao initiation rites; the *nkulu kulu*, Livingstone’s Turaco (or Loerie) (*Tauraco livingstonii*), whose red wing feathers were highly valued and were utilized in the past to signify the authority of territorial chiefs; and the *kadzidzi*, the spotted eagle owl (*Bubo africanus*) which is widely associated with witchcraft (*ufiti*) by local people.

Table 2.4 The number of common species of bird in the Shire Highlands

<i>Bird family</i>	<i>Number of species</i>
Ardeidae—herons, egrets	16
Anatidae—ducks, geese	12
Accipitridae—eagles, hawks	41
Colombidae—doves, pigeons	12
Alcedinidae—kingfishers	9
Picidae—woodpeckers	6
Pycnonotidae—bulbuls	11
Turdidae—thrushes, robins	22
Sylviidae—warblers	24
Muscicapidae—flycatchers	7
Nectarinidae—sunbirds	10
Ploceinae—weavers	21
Estrildidae—waxbills	18

After Dowsett-Lemaire and Dowsett 2006, for general descriptions of birds of Malawi see Sweeney 1970: 2/66–113

An important conservation issue in the Shire Highlands is the commercial exploitation of wildfowl around Lake Chilwa, mainly by means of snares, traps and shotguns. Most birds are sold locally for food. Around 20 species of wildfowl may be trapped or shot, but the main bird-species involved are the following: *chipiyo*, the fulvous whistling duck (*Dendrocygna bicolor*), *kateule*, the Hottentot teal (*Anas hottentota*), *nadiditi*, the purple gallinule (*Porphyrio porphyrio*), *nkutuwili*, the lesser moorhen (*Gallinula angulata*), *nomalindi*, the black crane (*Limnicorax flavirostris*), *sekhwe*, the spur-winged goose (*Plectropterus gambensis*) and, finally, *mphiipi*, the reed cormorant (*Phalacrocorax africanus*).

Over 400 villages are involved in the trapping and shooting of wildfowl. Leaving aside the wildfowl shot by European and African wildfowlers as a recreational sport during the shooting season (July–December), it was estimated that in 1996 and during the 1998–1999 rainy season that around 53,000 fulvous whistling duck, 52,000 gallinules, 135,000 moorhens, and 5000 hottentot teals were either trapped or shot by local villagers around Lake Chilwa.

It has to be recognized that the large-scale trapping and shooting of wildfowl on Lake Chilwa is a relatively recent phenomenon. Earlier studies of Lake Chilwa found little evidence of widespread commercial exploitation of the wildfowl (Kalk et al. 1979: 265). The reason for this change was

the (temporary) drying up of Lake Chilwa in 1995, and the subsequent complete collapse of the fishing industry—and thus the people’s search for an alternative means of livelihood. In addition, at the end of Banda era, firearms became more readily available. Indeed, when in Mulanje, close to the Mozambique border in 1995 I was offered an AK47 for a mere twenty dollars!

In response to a perceived ecological crisis, a Danish-funded project attempted from 2000 onwards, largely through the initiative of John Wilson, to create legally constituted conservation zones for the wildfowl (specifically in relation to their breeding ground) and to encourage local community participation in the protection of the various bird species, particularly the control of illegal hunting. It is not clear whether this project will be ultimately successful—to the benefit of both the wildfowl and the people living in the vicinity of Lake Chilwa (Wilson and Van Zegeren 1996, 1998; Wilson 1999; Dowsett-Lemaire and Dowsett 2006: 83).

As to be expected, many species of snakes, lizards and amphibians are common and widespread throughout the Shire Highlands, and are found in a wide variety of habitats. Around 32 species of snake (*njoka*) have been recorded in the Shire Highlands and the commoner species are listed in Table 2.5.

Like people elsewhere, African people in the Shire Highlands tend to fear all snakes (and chameleons) and hold them in awe, and several species have a deep cultural significance. The python, for example, is closely identified with the rains, and as the spirit-snake *thunga* is viewed as a manifestation of the supreme deity Chiuta (meaning ‘great bow’). In contrast the file snake (*njokondala*) and puff adder (*mphiri*) are associated with the ancestral spirits (*mizimu ya makolo*), who may take the form of the snake (Morris 2000: 197–235). Also noteworthy, is that there is a widespread belief in a crested cobra, *songa*, a highly poisonous snake that lives in forested hills and has a red crest and is alleged to crow like a cock. It is said to be extremely ‘fierce’ (Ntara 1973: 52; Sweeney 1961: 24; Morris 2000: 199).

Of the many other reptiles that are fairly common in the Shire Highlands mention may be made of the *mng’anzi*, the monitor lizard (*Varanus eximaticus*), *gulo*, the blue headed agama (*Agama mossambica*), *buluzi*, the common house gecko (*Hemidactylus mabouia*) and *nazikambi*, the flap-necked chameleon (*Chamaeleo dilepsis*) (see Mitchell 1946; Sweeney 1970; 2/23–47, on the many species of tortoise, gecko, skinks, chameleons and various other lizards to be found in the Shire Highlands). Amphibians—

Table 2.5 Common species of snake recorded in the Shire Highlands

<i>Common name</i>	<i>Nyanja name</i>	<i>Scientific name</i>
Burrowing snake	<i>nthongo</i>	<i>Typhlops schlegelii</i>
African python	<i>nsato</i>	<i>Python sebae</i>
Egg-eating snake	<i>kasambwe</i>	<i>Dasyeltis scabra</i>
Louse snake	<i>chankusa</i>	<i>Boaedon fuliginosus</i>
Water snake	<i>chirumi</i>	<i>Lycodonomorphus rufulus</i>
File snake	<i>njokandala</i>	<i>Mehelya capensis</i>
Eastern green snake	<i>chamasamba</i>	<i>Philothamnus hoplogaster</i>
Olive grass snake	<i>chidya msana</i>	<i>Psammophis sibilans</i>
Vine snake	<i>nalikukuti</i>	<i>Thelotornis capensis</i>
Boomslang	<i>mbobo</i>	<i>Dispholidus typus</i>
Egyptian cobra	<i>mamba</i>	<i>Naja haje</i>
Green mamba	<i>mbobo</i>	<i>Dendroaspis angusticeps</i>
Puff adder	<i>mphiri</i>	<i>Bitis arietans</i>
Night adder	<i>kasambwe</i>	<i>Causus rhombeatus</i>
Burrowing viper	<i>chigonakusa</i>	<i>Atractaspis bibronii</i>

After Sweeney 1961

frogs and toads—are also common wherever there are suitable habitats, and 32 species have been recorded from the Shire Highlands, many of them with extremely attractive colouration (Stewart 1967; Sweeney 1970: 2/7–21).

Numerous species of fish are to be found in Lake Chilwa and in the larger rivers of the Shire Highlands. Among the species of particular salience to local people are: *mlamba*, the common catfish (*Clarius gariepinus*), various species of the genus *Tilapia* (*chambo*)—one of the more popular fishes that are eaten—*makumba* (*Oreochromis shiranus*) and *matemba* (*Barbus paludinosus*). A total of 27 fish species have been recorded from Lake Chilwa and its tributaries, and the above four species represent the main fish caught. Fishing is by far the most important economic activity in the Lake Chilwa basin, at least when the water level is high (Sweeney 1970: 2/1–6; Jensen et al. 2000: 41–43).

Although millipedes (*bongololo*), the many varieties of spider (*kangaude*), ticks (*nkhufi*) and scorpions (*nankalizi*) are all common in the Shire Highlands and have salience for local people, by far the most important group of invertebrates are the insects. There are many thousands of species of insects to be found in the highlands, and human–insect relations in Malawi have been discussed at length in my earlier study *Insects and Human Life* (2004). Insects, of course, not only constitute an important

source of protein for Malawians—especially locusts, termites, cicadas and edible caterpillars—but also negatively impinge on their life in important ways—as household pests, as vectors of disease (mosquito and tsetse fly), or as serious agricultural pests. It has been estimated, for example, that around 10 % of the maize crop may be lost each year to insect pests—especially through the maize stalk-borer (the caterpillar of the rather small and insignificant moth *Busseola fusca*) (on the insect life of Malawi see Sweeney 1970: 1/6–110; Morris 2004: 217–286).

5 THE EARLY PEOPLE

The earlier inhabitants of Malawi, and the Shire Highlands specifically, were not Bantu people. In oral traditions they are usually referred to as Batwa or Akafula. The stem *-twa* (like the Nyanja prefix *ka-*) essentially means small or diminutive (person) and is widely used by the people of Southern Africa to describe the Bushmen—the Khoisan hunter-gatherers (Barnard 1992: 85).

The term Akafula probably derives from the root *ku-fula*, one of its meanings being ‘to dig’—such as the activities of a bushpig digging up roots. Thus the word usually denotes a ‘small digger’—that is, a hunter-gatherer or forager (on the name Akafula see Nurse 1967).

Another term widely used to describe the early inhabitants of the Shire Highlands is *Amwandionerakuti*. This literally translates as the question: ‘From where (what distance) did you see me?’ When you meet these people, the Chewa historian Samuel Ntara wrote, they would ask: ‘Where did you see me?’ If you replies that you had seen them from afar, they would be happy, as it was considered insulting to refer to their small stature (*wamfupi msinkha*) (Ntara 1973: 98–99). The name *Amwandionerakuti* (or *pati*) and the above dialogue is commonly recalled, not only in oral traditions, but in everyday conversations throughout Malawi.

There are oral traditions throughout Malawi relating to these early inhabitants. At the end of the nineteenth century, for example, Harry Johnston recorded a ‘curious tradition’ (as he put it) which suggested that until recently Bushmen still lived on the Mulanje plateaux. The Mang’anja of the district positively assert, he wrote, that there used to live on the upper part of the mountain ‘a dwarf race of light yellow complexion with their hair growing in scattered tufts’ and which they described as Arungu—a term probably relating to the spirits (1897: 53). To contemporary people living in the vicinity of Mulanje and Mchese Mountains

these Batwa people still have a living presence—although its difficult in conversation to distinguish whether people are referring to the spirits of the Batwa or to the Batwa themselves (Morris 2000: 209).

There is some dispute among scholars as to whether the Batwa and the Akafula belong to the same culture, but according to Ntara the Akafula were nomadic hunter-gatherers with beards, who had a knowledge of fire-making and used arrow poison, as well as being ‘clever at making iron’ (1973: 99).

The talented administrator and amateur cultural historian W.H.J. ‘Bill’ Rangeley, however, strongly denied that the Akafula were Khoisan people or associated with the early rock paintings in Malawi; the Akafula were, he suggested, a ‘skilled iron-age people’ who had displaced the earlier ‘stone age’ hunter-gatherers who had painted the rock shelters (The Rangeley Paper, correspondence 1/1/1).

On the other hand, the archaeologist David Phillipson (1976: 186) has suggested that the red schematic ‘paintings’, found throughout Malawi and Eastern Zambia, were the work of food-producing early Iron Age people who may have been contemporaries of the Stone Age hunter-gatherers who, he felt, painted the famous Bushman-type paintings.

There have been many important studies of the rock art of eastern and southern Africa (Vinnecombe 1976; Leakey 1983; Garlake 1987; Lewis-Williams 1983). What these studies have suggested is the existence, or co-existence, of three distinctive painting styles. These may be described as:

1. Polychromatic naturalistic art, the well-known Bushman paintings, that depict both humans and animals, and are particularly focussed on such iconic animals as the giraffe, kudu and eland.
2. Red schematic or geometric art which J. Desmond Clark identified with the Stone Age Nachikufau culture of Zambia (1959: 210–211).
3. White stylized paintings that have been associated with later, indeed recent, Bantu-speaking peoples.

There are no naturalistic ‘Bushman’ type paintings to be found in Malawi, of the kind associated with the San hunter-gatherers of southern Africa. The white stylized paintings, whether of theriomorphic figures (which people usually suggest are of monitor lizards—*mnganzi*) or of various Nyau representations, seem to be mainly found in the Dedza district. They are especially associated with such rock shelters as Namzeze,

Chigwenembe, Chencherere and Mphunzi (Lindgren and Schoffeleers 1978: 8–9; Morris 2002: 36–37).

Red schematic paintings have been found all over Malawi, often in combination with the white theriomorphic paintings. The schematic paintings are usually but not always, situated in the hills and mountains, either in caves (*phanga*) in the form of a rock overhang, or under a large boulder. In the Shire Highlands the rock paintings are almost exclusively of the red schematic type. The principal rock shelters on which they have been found are at the following locations: Kasumbwa hill near Domasi, the hills of Naisi, Nkhoronje and Sanjika near Zomba, Lisau and Ntawira hills in the Chiradzulu district, the Midima and Mikolongwe hills near Blantyre, and on Machemba hill near Migowi. The rock shelters are often described as *mwala wolemba* (the rock/stone of writing).

The patterns depicted in the red schematic paintings are extremely varied, but the common designs found include concentric circles, zig-zag lines, ovals, simple dots, parallel lines, grid-iron shapes, circles with rays (sunbursts) and ladder patterns. Many scholars have speculated on the meaning of the red schematic paintings and the cultures associated with them. The rock shelters, which usually face south, were clearly ritual centres. It has been suggested, for example, that they were associated with rain rituals in the past, or that they were ‘entopic’ phenomena, linked to shamanic rites and altered states of consciousness. It has generally been assumed, however, that the red schematic paintings are linked with Batwa people (if not the Akafula) who are identified as late Stone Age hunter-gatherers (circa 8000 BC to 200 AD) (J.D. Clark 1972: 24, on the rock paintings of Malawi see J.D. Clark 1959; Cole-King 1968; Lindgren and Schoffeleers 1978; Morris 2002).

Archaeological evidence seems to suggest that the ‘Iron Age’ in Malawi began around 200 AD. There must have been a long period, stretching over many centuries, when the Batwa hunter-gatherers and the incoming Bantu agriculturalists co-existed, but archaeologists seem to agree that between 50 BC and 300 AD Bantu people moved into south-central Africa, including the Shire Highlands, and that these people are ancestral to modern Malawians. The people who came into northern Zambezia—Malawi then did not exist!—at this time brought with them what Martin Hall has described, in his excellent study, as the ‘Iron Age package’. This suggests that these ‘first farmers’ who arrived in the Shire Highlands at this period were people not only of the same physical time and language—Bantu—but had knowledge of metallurgy, agriculture, pottery making,

and animal husbandry, as well as advanced hunting techniques. The introduction of this cultural and economic 'package' is thought to have been complete by 500 AD (Hall 1987).

Various iron-age cultures have been distinguished by their types of pottery, and it is evident that the Shire Highlands was inhabited not only by hunter-gatherers, but by shifting cultivators from the very earliest times. Evidence from the Iron Age sites in the Mikolongwe district and north of Mchese Mountain suggest that the ancestors of the Lomwe people, with their Nkope, Mawudzu or Longwe pottery ware, may have been living in the area long before the emergence of the Maravi states (circa 1500 AD) (Denbow 1973; Robinson 1977).

Throughout much of the Iron Age period in the Shire Highlands it is probable that people lived in small scattered communities, settled in cleared areas of woodland, and combined shifting cultivation with hunting, fishing, metallurgy and the gathering of wild vegetables. Chiefdoms may have developed in some areas, but these tended to be fragile and transitory, and a decentralized form of politics seems to have been the norm. It was an era of kin-based, local communities.

From the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onwards, as we shall discuss in the next chapter, several petty states or chiefdoms emerged in the Northern Zambezia region—usually described as the Maravi states. These centralized states—Kalonga, Undi, Lundu—were essentially based on long-distance trade, especially that of ivory. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the expansion of the ivory and slave trade, numerous chiefdom or 'city' states emerged, and seem to have flourished. In fact, a state of political and social turmoil seems to have existed in the Shire Highlands throughout much of the nineteenth century—until the establishment of the colonial state, under Harry Johnston, in the last decade of the century (on the history of the early Maravi states (chiefdoms) see Ntara 1973; K. Phiri 1979, 1988; Langworthy 1972; Newitt 1982; Schoffeleers 1987).

Such is the historical background of the Shire Highlands, and of the present study, which explores the environmental history of the highlands from the mid-nineteenth century.

The People of the Shire Highlands

I PROLOGUE

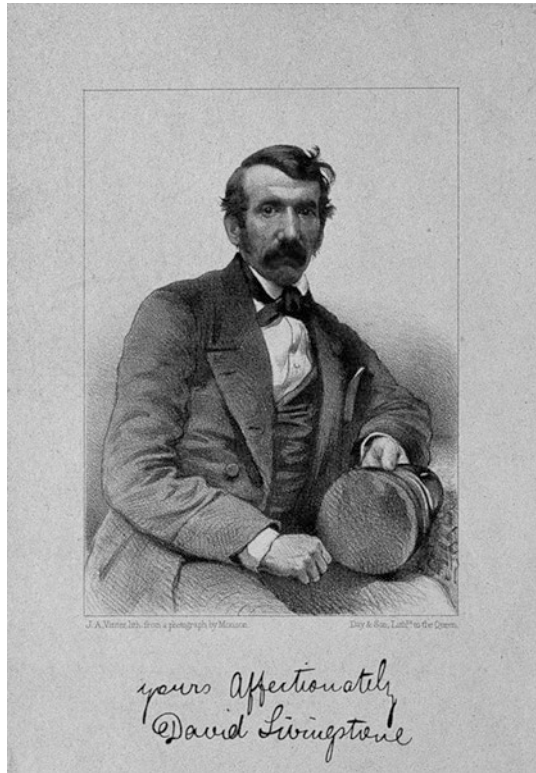
This chapter is focussed on the matrilineal people of the Shire Highlands in the pre-colonial era, their socio-economic life, and their relationship to the land. But to set the scene, as it were, we begin with David Livingstone and the history of the Blantyre Mission and its associates.

When the redoubtable Livingstone travelled through the Shire Highlands in 1859 on his way to Lake Malawi (as it is now called) he did not find, as some colonial historians have suggested, a ‘comparatively empty land’ (Debenham 1955: 24). European missionaries and planters would never have settled there had it been. Rather, it consisted of a fairly well-wooded region with numerous scattered villages. The Shire Highlands presented a complex and ever-changing mosaic of *Brachystegia* woodland and human settlements—the latter comprising village communities, dispersed hamlets and diverse and extensive cultivations. Livingstone was travelling through what Europeans at that time described as the ‘dark continent’ (Drummond 1889: vii).

But it is clear that after his experiences on the River Zambezi and the Lower Shire, where Livingstone and his companions had encountered oppressive heat and humidity, the hostility of local chiefs, the ‘acute misery’ inflicted by myriads of mosquitoes, and the constant bouts of tropical fever, that Livingstone found the Shire Highlands, in contrast, an exhilarating tract of country. As he wrote to the British government four years

Fig. 3.1 David Livingstone. Lithograph by J.A. Vintner after Monson

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later: he had ‘discovered’, he felt, a ‘magnificent healthy region’, a tract of land that was fertile and which truly delighted his companions, specifically the botanist John Kirk, ‘by it’s beauty and (the) number of running rills at the driest season of the year’ (FO 63/871; Martelli 1970: 126).

In this well-known narrative account of the Zambezi expedition, Livingstone re-affirmed his positive impressions of the Shire Highlands. The Mang’anja country, he wrote,

Is delightfully well-watered, the clear, cool gushing streams are very numerous. Once we passed seven fine brooks and springs in a single hour, and this, too, near the close of the dry season. Mount Zamba, which is twenty miles long, and from 7000 to 8000 feet high, has a beautiful stream flowing through its verdant valley on its summit, and running way down to Lake

Shirwa (*Chilwa*). The highlands are well wooded, and many trees, admirable for their height and timber, grew in various watercourses' (1865: 99).

This 'splendid country' with its pleasant air, its lack of mosquitoes, its fertile land, its numerous hills and its majestic mountains, filled Livingstone, it seems, with 'never-failing delight' (1865: 99). It was reminiscent of Scotland.

The government-sponsored Zambezi expedition led by David Livingstone (1858–1864), along with the ill-fated Universities Mission to Central Africa, headed by Bishop Charles MacKenzie, has, of course, been the subject of a welter of historical studies (Rowley 1866, 1970; Pachai 1973a). Equally important and fascinating are the published Zambezi journals of Livingstone's companions, specifically the artist Thomas Baines, the botanist John Kirk, and the young geologist Richard Thornton, who tragically died in April 1863 of fever and dysentery. He is buried near the Majete game reserve, overlooking the Shire River. Along the river, below the Murchison Falls, now re-named Livingstone's Falls (*mathithi*:) hippopotamus and crocodiles are still common, or, at least, they were some 20 years ago (For useful accounts of Livingstone and the Zambezi expedition (see Coupland 1928; Wallis 1952; Tabler 1963; Foskett 1965; Jeal 1973: 247–336; White 1987: 3–70).)

The aims of the Zambezi expedition and Livingstone's own motivations are quite explicit: they were to bring 'Christianity, commerce and civilization' to the peoples of Central Africa. It was felt that the people of the region were still living within a 'stagnant culture', somehow bypassed by history. As even the more enlightened Duff MacDonal put it: the people of the Shire Highlands 'Were living in darkness' (1882: ix). The main aim of the expedition, as Livingstone wrote, was not only to extend our knowledge of the resources of Central Africa, but 'To improve our acquaintance with the inhabitants and to endeavour to engage them to apply themselves to industrial pursuits and to the cultivation of their land, with a view to the production of raw materials to be exported to England in return for British Manufactures' (Livingstone 1865: 22).

The development of legitimate commerce and the resources of the country, Livingstone contended, would lead to the demise of the infamous slave trade, then ravaging the region. Christianity and commerce, for Livingstone, were always intrinsically linked.

But Livingstone also felt that the Zambezi region should not only be opened to lawful commerce (capitalism) and Christian Missions but also

to wider ‘civilizing influences’. This could best be achieved, Livingstone argued, through the colonization of the Highlands by European settlers. As he wrote: the ostensible object of the Zambezi expedition was the development of African trade and the promotion of civilization. ‘But I hope it may result in an English colony in the healthy highlands of Central Africa’ (Pachai 1973a: 33).

Livingstone’s writings came to exert a profound influence on British political culture. He is alleged to have provided the moral basis for the ‘vision of Empire’ and for the massive imperial expansion in Africa at the end of the nineteenth century (Jeal 1973: 19) But Livingstone also had a profound influence on the subsequent history of the Shire Highlands (For a lucid discussion of Livingstone’s legacy see McCracken 2012: 41–45.)

By all accounts David Livingstone was an extraordinarily difficult, complex and enigmatic individual. He was the last person one should have chosen to lead a scientific expedition, in that he was devoid of any leadership qualities or any administrative talent. He dismissed, on the flimsiest of grounds, three members of the Zambezi expedition! However, given that he came from a Scottish slum, and had spent his earliest years from the age of ten working in a cotton factory in Blantyre, Livingstone seems to have been endowed with an almost indomitable spirit. He was renowned for his physical courage, imaginative enterprise and dogged feats of endurance. But he was also rather morose, self-centred, secretive and given to moods of ‘manic-depression’ often not conversing with anyone for days, even weeks, at a time. He was, it was said, a rather ‘lonely man’ (Coupland 1928: 42; Martelli 1970: 239–242; Jeal 1973: 277).

What is unusual and significant however—and this probably stems from his working-class background—is that although Livingstone’s relationships with other Europeans were usually brusque, awkward and rather strained, his relationships with African people, even chiefs who resented his intrusions, seems to have always been warm and engaging (Coupland 1928: 42). He had an unusual empathy for Africans. Being also an acute and sensitive observer, both of the natural world and of human social life—though his political judgements have been questioned—Livingstone thus penned a sympathetic account of the people of the Shire Highlands. He has indeed been credited as having done more than any other European in breaking down the Victorian stereotypes of the African, either as a cringing slave or a benighted ‘savage’ (Jeal 1973: 456).

Livingstone, therefore, writes of the Mang’anja of the Shire Highlands sympathetically—as an ‘industrious race’, cultivating the soil extensively

and as being deeply engaged in cotton-spinning, iron-smelting, and basket-making. He also noted that their economic life was not simply one of local subsistence, for it also involved a great deal of trade between the villages. Such trade was ‘by means of barter in tobacco, salt, dried fish, skins and iron’ (1865: 101–103). We discuss the social and economic life of the peoples of the Shire Highlands in more detail below, drawing on Livingstone’s account, among others.

Significant in the history of the Shire Highlands was the foundation of the Blantyre Mission in October 1876. Inspired by Livingstone’s legacy and travels, the mission site of the Church of Scotland was named Blantyre, in honour of Livingstone’s own birthplace. Situated some 3000 feet (914 m) above sea level, and surrounded by three spectacular mountains (Soche, Michiru and Ndirande), the mission was built on land obtained from a friendly Yao chief, Kapeni, who claimed political suzerainty over the area. Initially the mission consisted only of a medical missionary, Dr Thornton Macklin, and five artisans, but in July 1878 the Rev. Duff MacDonald (1850–1929) joined the mission as its first ordained minister. It is noteworthy that two of the artisans of the mission, Jonathan Duncan and John Buchanan, were trained gardeners and agriculturalists. The Blantyre mission garden therefore, as we shall observe, played a key role in the introduction of many exotic plants to the country, and in the development of plantation agriculture. However, in assuming what MacDonald himself described as ‘Civil Jurisdiction’—creating a tiny ‘Christian State’ as McCracken puts it (2012: 46) with some exaggeration—the mission staff became implicated in an unsavoury affair, indeed, in a rather notorious scandal. For in assuming civil authority the artisans began flogging, sometimes in the most brutal fashion, any African suspected of stealing mission property. Such flogging resulted in the death of one individual, and the flogging of another who was completely innocent of any misdeed. As a result of an enquiry, both Duff MacDonald and John Buchanan were dismissed by the mission, along with two other artisans (Hanna 1956: 25–32; Stuart-Mogg 2004: 24).

Happily for posterity, MacDonald and Buchanan went on to write two landmark studies of the Shire Highlands; both men clearly feeling that they had been harshly misjudged and unfairly treated by the Committee of Enquiry into the scandal. What is important about these books, however, is not the details of the mission history and politics that they recall; it is rather the informative and fascinating accounts they give of the Shire Highlands in the nineteenth century, and of the social and cultural life of

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[APRIL: 1896]

OUR RECENT LOSS.

IT is with the deepest pain and regret that we have to record the death at Chinde on the 9th. of March of the well-known head of the firm of the Messrs Buchanan Brothers. Mr. John Buchanan left Blantyre on the 2nd of March, on his way home with his wife and child, evidently in excellent health and spirits. On the journey down river he got fever and the malady terminated fatally at Chinde. The unexpected news was received with the deepest regret and sorrow by the community and much sympathy has been expressed for his wife and family. It is impossible for us even now to realise our loss for, if there was one man who had done much for the country, it was John Buchannan, one of the original pioneer party of 1876, and the founder of the coffee-planting industry. It is difficult at this time for those who knew him well to speak of the man who has gone in anything like critical terms, but, more as a tribute to the memory of the departed, than as an estimate of his life and character we give, in another column, a few remarks on his busy and useful career which has thus been closed by death at the comparatively early age of thirty-nine.



Fig. 3.2 John Buchanan: obituary of an agricultural pioneer
Source: *Central African Planter*, 1896. Reproduced by permission of the Society of Malawi Library

the people of the region. Both men had established close personal relationships with several Yao chiefs—such friendships were imperative in the early days of the Blantyre mission (D. Phiri 2004: 136)—and were genuinely interested in African societies. Like Livingstone, both men were sympathetic observers of African cultures, though not uncritical, and certainly not without conveying their own cultural prejudices.

The first volume of Duff MacDonald's *Africana, or the Heart of Heathen Africa* (1882), is devoted entirely to 'Native customs and beliefs', specifically to the social and cultural life of the Yaos of the Blantyre area. Expressing the 'deepest sympathy' with African people, MacDonald suggested that the aim of his study was to contribute to a better understanding of the African 'heathen', even indicating that 'we' (Europeans) might 'learn lessons from them' (1882: 1/viii). The book is a pioneer ethnographic study of the Yao. Although MacDonald left Blantyre in July 1881 under a cloud, and never returned to Africa, the book is in many ways his lasting legacy.

The subsequent career of John Buchanan (1855–1896) is very different. Indeed MacDonald and Buchanan had very contrasting personalities. The Presbyterian minister was by all accounts a gentle, scholarly and amiable man, having a real affection for local people, especially children: Buchanan, on the other hand, was a rather rugged individual—energetic, forceful, practical, with a robust physique and highly enterprising. Among Africans he was known by the nickname ‘*Makanani*’ (*Makani*, denoting struggle and dispute). MacDonald’s African nickname was more benign. He was called ‘*Masom’mwamba*’, because he had the habit of constantly looking up when walking (Bandawe 1971: 72).

Born in the village of Muthill in Perthshire, Buchanan’s only education was at the local parish school. But he became a gardener on the Drummond Estate, and was warmly supported by his local minister, the Rev. Dr James Rankin, who recognized his talents and acted as his mentor. Joining the pioneer Blantyre mission in 1876 Buchanan spent five years working as an artisan agriculturalist. During these years he established a mission outstation at Zomba, on the banks of the Mulunguzi River, and though still in his early twenties, befriended many Yao chiefs, and quickly acquired huge tracts of land. Although still working for the mission, Buchanan, in a private capacity, became a ‘large landed proprietor’ on his own account—as MacDonald puts it (1882: 2/82). He seems to have acquired over 170,000 acres of land (69,000 ha), partly as an avid and acquisitive ‘land grabber’ (as McCracken suggests) and partly to forestall Portuguese claims to the sovereignty of the Shire Highlands. For example, Buchanan acquired Michiru Estate near the Blantyre Mission from the Yao Chief Kapeni, an area of some 3065 acres (1240 ha), for only a gun, 32 yards of calico, two red caps and several other small items (Pachai 1978: 31). A decade later, in 1891, Buchanan acquired Zoa estate in the Thyolo district, an area of 19,760 acres (7972 ha) stretching from Nankungu hill to beyond the Zoa Falls.

After his dismissal from the Blantyre Mission in 1881, Buchanan took over the Mulunguzi estate in Zomba and there established himself as an enterprising planter of coffee and sugar, as well as a land agent, to be joined later by his two brothers, David and Robert.

In 1885 Buchanan returned to Scotland for a four month sojourn. Encouraged by his mentor Dr Rankin, there he wrote his well-known study *The Shire Highlands as Colony and Mission* (1885). The title indicates Buchanan’s prime motivation; to publicize and promote the economic potential of the Shire Highlands to prospective planters and settlers. He

thus extols the fertility of the Highlands, the existence of large tracts of unoccupied land, the abundance of water, the availability of cheap labour, and the potential profits to be made from coffee production as well as potentially from the growing of indigo and cinchona (1885: 51–59). But the book also includes an account of his travels around the Shire Highlands, excellent ethnographic reflections on the people of the region, especially with regard to their economic life, brief notes on the flora of the country, as well as graphic descriptions of his own agricultural work in the Blantyre mission garden and on his Mulunguzi estate in Zomba.

Originally surveyed and laid out by the Civil Engineer James Stewart in 1877, who constructed a series of terraces, the Blantyre mission garden from the outset was a site of agricultural experimentation. A wide variety of seeds were sown in the early part of the first rainy season, mainly those of typical English vegetables—cabbages, lettuces, onions, cauliflowers, carrots, cucumbers, melons, marrows and tomatoes. Cabbages and tomatoes, in particular, seem to have flourished, Buchanan noting that the tomatoes, ‘felt at home, and grew and fruited splendidly’. Potatoes also grew well, as did the Cape gooseberry, which was now to be seen, Buchanan wrote, ‘almost anywhere and everywhere’. But efforts to grow wheat proved a complete failure (Buchanan 1885: 61–65).

There was no shortage, it seems, of culinary vegetables in the Blantyre mission garden and over the next decade the mission provided ‘baskets of vegetables’ to most of the European traders and planters living in the Blantyre district (Stuart-Mogg 2004: 27). The production of vegetables, particularly potatoes, tomatoes and cabbage, grown in *dimba* gardens, and for the local market—catering especially for Europeans in Blantyre—soon became, in fact, an important aspect of the local economy (Blantyre District Book 2007, MNA/NSB 3/13/1). As we shall explore later, the cultivation of vegetables in *dimba* gardens continues to be an intrinsic and significant dimension of smallholder agriculture.

When the other artisan gardener at the Mission, Jonathan Duncan, arrived in 1878, he brought with him from the botanical gardens in Grahamstown, South Africa, a variety of fruit trees, including orange, lemon, pomegranate, guava, peach, custard apple and granadilla. Duncan also brought with him from the Edinburgh botanical gardens three coffee plants and one tea plant. Initially only one of the coffee plants survived, but all the fruit trees seem to have flourished.

A keen botanist and horticulturalist Buchanan also ensured that the mission gardens always displayed a ‘splendid variety of flowers’, and

introduced several flowering trees. The introduction of the jacaranda (*J. caerulea*), which famously flowers at the end of September and the bougainvillea creeper (*B. spectabilis*), both natives of tropical America, are particularly noteworthy. During the colonial period, the flowering of the jacaranda came to symbolize the end of the tobacco auctions in Limbe.

According to Alexander Hetherwick, who joined the Blantyre mission in 1883, many experiments were also made with plants of potential economic value, and camphor, ginger, pepper and mulberry all found a habitat within the mission garden (1931: 179).

Perhaps the most significant and far-reaching exotic introduction was that of the blue gum—the various species of the genus *Eucalyptus*, a native of Australia. The first to be introduced was probably *Eucalyptus globulus*, planted in 1879 as an avenue of trees on the Blantyre to Katunga road. Buchanan records that within a few years these trees had reached a height of 60 feet (18 m) with stems a foot in diameter (1885: 66). Two other important blue gums, both valuable timber trees, initially found a first home in the Shire Highlands at the Blantyre mission, or on Buchanan's Mulunguzi Estate: these were *E. citriodora* and *E. saligna*. Plantations of blue gums are now, of course, widespread throughout the Shire Highlands, and were actively promoted in the Blantyre fuelwood project of the 1980s.

In the early part of the twentieth century, the Blantyre mission garden was one of the 'sights' of Blantyre, and Hetherwick in his memoir, *The Romance of Blantyre* devotes a whole chapter to the mission garden (1931: 177–181). Yet when I visited the garden in 2009 there was little left of its former glory, apart from a small orchard of citrus trees, a few standing *mbawa* (*Khayo nyasica*), *kachere* (*Ficus natalensis*) and *mpasa* (*Bridelia micrantha*) trees—all indigenous—and a few flowering shrubs such as poinsettia (*Euphorbia heterophylla*) and oleander (*Nerium oleander*).

John Buchanan's main agricultural endeavours, however, were concentrated on his Michiru and Mulunguzi estates, and on the production of tobacco, coffee and sugar as commercial crops. From the first plantings of coffee, specifically that *Coffea arabica* seedlings brought from Edinburgh botanical gardens by Jonathan Duncan, Buchanan obtained several seeds. These he planted on the Mulunguzi estate, and, as he noted, they 'grew remarkably fast', as they were tended carefully and irrigated during the dry season (1885: 69). By 1885 Buchanan had 40 acres (16 ha) under coffee. A decade later he had become a large landowner in the Shire Highlands with ten separate plantations of coffee.

On his Mulunguzi estate Buchanan also planted two acres of sugar—and with great ingenuity, freely drawing on local materials and on the knowhow—the expertise—of local people, he built a functioning mill to crush the sugar cane (1885: 66–67). In contrast, on his Michiru estate he focussed mainly on tobacco and experimented in the making and marketing of cigars and cigarettes. Joined by his two younger brothers David and Robert, Buchanan established the firm of Buchanan Brothers—as planters, land agents and wholesale merchants.

It is of interest that, according to Machinga Yao oral traditions, Buchanan was considered a ‘good white man’ who, on his Mulunguzi estate employed largely Tonga and Nguni workers, rather than demanding *thangata* or labour rent. Buchanan tended to pay these migrant workers a wage at the end of each month. Nevertheless, his management style seems to have been harsh and exacting, hence his nickname *Makanani*.

Although Buchanan’s political activities have been neglected by some historians—Cynthia Crosby’s (1980) historical dictionary, for example, makes no mention of him—this enterprising planter played a significant role in the early history of the Nyasaland protectorate. In 1886 Buchanan and his brothers built one of the most interesting and remarkable of colonial buildings in the country—the government residency in Zomba, which housed Harry Johnston, the Commissioner of the British Central Africa Protectorate, from 1891 to 1897. It is now the Hotel Masangola. Buchanan also, as acting consul, declared, in September 1889, after treaty negotiations with Makololo and Yao Chiefs, a British Protectorate over the lower Shire Valley and the Shire Highlands as far north as Chikala Mountain (Baker 1970: 14–15). But what Buchanan seems most renowned for, besides his huge land holdings, was the fact that he was widely acknowledged and honoured by the local European planters as the founding inspiration of the coffee industry in the Shire Highlands.

Having married in the spring of 1893, and having already lost his eldest daughter, Buchanan was returning to Scotland with his wife and second daughter in March 1896, when he was struck down with fever. He died suddenly at Chinde, at the mouth of the Zambezi; although apparently he had left his Michiru house in Blantyre only a short while before in excellent health and spirits. He was only 41 years of age (*Central African Planter* April 1896: 147).

2 POLITICAL LIFE AND ETHNICITY

The political history of Malawi, or rather Northern Zambezia, as portrayed by nationalist historians, is, it seems to me, somewhat misleading. First we have the emergence, in a rather sudden and dramatic way, of the Maravi state system, with the arrival of the Phiri clan—the ‘Phiri rulers’—from the Luba country in Katanga, sometime around the fifteenth century (Pachai 1973b: 6). Then came the setting-up of the powerful, unified, Kalonga state, based at Mankhamba, near Ntakataka, on the southern lakeshore. This involved the subjugation of the Banda and Mbewe clans, who continued to have ritual connections with the land and rain-making powers. By 1650 the Maravi state of Kalonga had become an ‘empire’ covering much of the Northern Zambezia, stretching as far as the East African coast (Nurse 1972: 130). Subsequently, through conflicts within the Phiri dynasty, the Maravi state of Kalonga fragmented. Independent and subsidiary states (or kingdoms) were established at Manu in northern Mozambique (*Undi*), at Mbewe-wa-Mitengo near Chikwawa (*Lundu*) and at Muonda in the Mwanza valley (*Kaphwiti*). By the end of the eighteenth century the Maravi ‘empire’ had fragmented even further, with the demise of the other Maravi states—*Undi*, *Lundu* and *Kaphwiti*—through a ‘natural tendency towards decentralization’. Northern Zambezia therefore became, it is alleged, a politically decentralized region. The Malawi empire (and people), as Bridglal Pachai put it, ended up as many dispersed and decentralized ethnic communities (Pachai 1973b: 6; Langworthy 1972: 120). What is now Malawi is thus envisaged as having been ‘decentralized’ until the establishment of the colonial state at the end of the nineteenth century.

Elsewhere, I have questioned this portrait of the political history of Northern Zambezia (Morris 2006b). The power of the Kalonga state—which is perhaps better described as a chiefdom (Earle 1991)—and the extent of its territorial suzerainty, have both been somewhat exaggerated, although, in being able to muster several thousand armed retainers, the chiefdom certainly impressed and alarmed the small Portuguese garrisons at Zumbo and Tete on the Zambezi. But as political entities or systems of domination, the so-called Maravi states were simply akin to those chiefdoms that were later associated with Jumbe (*Nkhotakota*), Mwase (*Kosungu*), Mkanda (*Mchinji*) and the more powerful Yao chiefdoms of *Makanjila* (on the south-eastern lakeshore), *Mponda* (on the River Shire north of Mangochi) and *Matapwiri* (Mulanje Mountain)—all of which

emerged during the nineteenth century. Thus during this century what is now Malawi, including the Shire Highlands, was more, not less, politically centralized—in terms of pretty states or chiefdoms—than it was in the earlier centuries. Moreover, the rise and decline of these chiefdoms had little to do with dynastic squabbles, but was intrinsically linked to shifting patterns in long-distance trade, specifically of ivory and slaves (Morris 2006b: 20).

It is evident from the historiography, especially the writings of early Portuguese travellers, that throughout the Northern Zambezia region, there existed from an early period distinct ethnic communities or tribes—using this term as an anthropological concept without any demeaning connotations. Thus early travellers to the region write of such people as the Chipeta, Mang'anja, Chewa, Nyanja, Nsenga, Mbo, Makua, Bemba, Yao and Bisa (Gamitto 1960: 63–65; Wiese 1983).

It is, however, misleading to view these ethnic communities as somehow intrinsically belonging to, or as sections of, some once powerful 'mother tribe'—the Maravi (Bruwer 1950), for the term Maravi (*Malawi*) earlier denoted a political entity, not a cultural or ethnic community, and specifically referred to the Kalonga kingdom (chiefdom) on the south-western lakeshore and to its various 'offshoots' and early rival chiefdoms—Undi, Kaphwiti and Lundu. The term Maravi (*Malawi*), in fact, has complex meanings. In Chewa/Chinyanja the word *lawi* means the frames of a fire, and thus, as Father Schoffeleers insightfully documented, Malawi has diverse associations—with the ruling Phiri clan, with the smelting of iron, and with the complex symbolism that is associated with the ritual firing of the *Brachystegia* woodland and the provision of rain by territorial chiefs (Schoffeleers 1972b).

A clear distinction therefore has to be made between on the one hand, the *political* chiefdoms of Kalonga, Undi, Lundu and Kaphwiti, as well as those of the nineteenth century, and, on the other hand, the various ethnic communities of Northern Zambezia (Langworthy 1972: 104). Two points, however, need to be made with respect to such ethnic affiliations, which, of course, were always fluid and shifting.

The first is that all the ethnic communities were evidently associated with specific locations or regions. Indeed, their names usually refer to landscape features; such as Chipeta (a place of high grass), Nyanja (of the lake), Mbo (of termite hills), Mang'anja (associated with iron-smelting) Nsenga (of the sandy country, i.e. the Luangwa valley), Makua (*likuwo*, valley or grassland) and Kokhola (woodland). Alternatively, the specific

community derives its name from its hill or origin such as Yao or Lomwe (from *nlomwe*, the black soil of Namuli hill in Mozambique) (Rangeley Papers 1/1/3; Young and Banda 1946: 10; Bandawe 1971: 31; Abdallah 1973: 7–8; Boeder 1984: 4).

Secondly, although these ethnic communities often spoke Bantu languages (or dialects) that were distinctive, though often mutually intelligible, the matrilineal peoples of Northern Zambezia did in fact share a common cultural heritage. This had been commented upon by both European and African scholars. Antonio Gamitto, for example, who travelled through the region in 1831–1832, while describing the various ethnic communities—Chewa (*Chewa*), Lolo (*Bororo*), Mang'anja (*Maganja*), Makua (*Makwa*) and Yao (*Nguru*)—all of which he saw as belonging to the 'Maravi race', nevertheless recognized their cultural affinities in terms of 'habits, customs, languages etc.' (1960: 64). Cullen Young, Levi Mumba (1930) and more recently Edward Alpers (1975: 7) all affirm that the people of east Central Africa shared a common culture. Thus Cullen Young, discussing the religious culture of the Chewa, Nsenga, Mbo, Makua, Nyanja and Mang'anja, suggests that for practical purposes they are 'one people' and—though this is a contentious issue—sharers of a common name—Maravi (1950: 37). Likewise, Clyde Mitchell was later to describe the 'tribes' of the Shire Highlands—Yao, Nguru (*Lomwe*) and Nyanja—as being culturally 'all very similar' (1956: 4).

Livingstone described the Shire Highlands as the 'Mang'anja Hills' (1865: 97), and although the Mang'anja are often described as the original inhabitants of the highlands it is clear that this region at the end of the nineteenth century was already the home of several ethnic communities, and that there was widespread inter-marriage between the different tribal groups (Werner 1906: 31; White 1987: 49). During the 1880s, for example, large numbers of Tonga and Nguni migrants began moving into the Shire Highlands from the north, seeking work at the Blantyre Mission, or as porters for the African Lakes Company (the trading company early affiliated to the Scottish missions), or on the newly established tobacco and coffee plantations of European planters like Buchanan. Around 4000 Tonga were soon in the employ of planters, who tended to favour agricultural labourers whose homes were far away (Pachai 1973b: 115). They were then less likely to abscond, the planters believed, to work on their own farms. Even so, one Blantyre planter complained that it was quite common for the Tonga to sign a six-month work contract, and then, on receiving *tapa* (a month's pay in advance), 'run away' after only a week's

work. He therefore advocated a system of 'labour passes' to control labour (*Central African Planter* March 1896: 127). The notion suggested by some historians that the African peoples of Northern Zambezia were fundamentally subsistence-oriented, and reluctant to take up wage labour (*ganyu*) is somewhat misleading. It all depended on the historical circumstances, the nature of the work, and the degree to which the labourer could maintain some degree of autonomy.

The Tonga, of course, who inhabited the lakeshore between Nkhata Bay and Bandawe, were a matrilineal people, renowned for their egalitarian culture and their individualistic tendencies. A later ethnographer, Jaap van Velsen, described their society as one of apparent 'anarchy' with diffuse political power, their generally peaceful social life being the outcome—paradoxically—of frequent disputes and the individual 'manipulation' of kinship ties (van Velsen 1964).

The Nguni of the nineteenth century were a very different people. Descended from the Zulu and Swazi of South-eastern Africa (the original *Nguni*) the Nguni, after some 50 years of warfare and migrations, entered Northern Zambezia around the middle of the nineteenth century. With a patrilineal kinship system and an age-set organization, in addition to an economy based mainly on cattle herding, Nguni tribal life was also highly militarized. Their culture was thus very different from that of the matrilineal peoples of Northern Zambezia.

The Nguni quickly established their political hegemony over the peoples of the region, specifically the Tumbuka, Henga, Tonga and Chewa. Their military success was mainly based on their powers of cohesion, and the use, like Shaka Zulu, of the short stabbing spear—the assegai. Two distinct political systems or kingdoms were established by the Nguni between 1850 and 1870 in what is now Malawi. These were the Mbelwa Nguni on the Vipya plateau (*Mzimba*), who had close and complex relations with the missionaries of the Free Church of Scotland (McCracken 1972; Thompson 1995); and the Maseko Nguni, who established themselves at Domure Mountain, near Dedza.

During the 1880s the Maseko Nguni, under their paramount chief Chikuse, reached, according to one historian, the 'apogee of their glory' (D. Phiri 1982: 101). Inevitably during the final decades of the nineteenth century, serious and bloody conflicts arose between the Nguni and various rival chiefdoms, namely, those of Mwasi (Kasunga), Jumbe (at Nkhotakota) and the Yao chiefs Mponda and Kawinga, each vying for territorial suzerainty and for control of the lucrative long-distance trade.

This trade essentially entailed the exchange of ivory and slaves for guns and calico.

With respect to the Shire Highlands the important point is that not only did many Nguni migrate to the highlands seeking work, but that towards the end of the nineteenth century groups of Nguni warriors—'raiders'—invaded the Shire Highlands 'blazoning their assegais' as the talented Nguni historian Desmond Phiri expressed it (1982: 102). Nguni military supremacy led to constant incursions into the Shire Highlands where they appropriated food, material goods and slaves—whether Nyanja, Yao or Mang'anja—and, according to MacDonald, killed anyone who made any resistance. This led to the Nyanja retreating to Chilwa Island, and both the Yao and the Mang'anja taking refuge in the hills and mountains of the Shire Highlands—especially on Mulanje, Chiradzulu, Soche and Zomba Mountains. People seem to have led a precarious existence throughout the 1880s, moving between their gardens and their places of refuge high on the slopes of the mountains (MacDonald 1882: 24). The 'war party' of Maseko Nguni that swept across the Shire Highlands in 1884, causing widespread devastation, significantly did not attack the Blantyre mission, or the Africans associated with it. David Clement Scott, who joined the mission in 1881 on MacDonald's departure, had earlier visited Chikuse, the paramount chief, and had secured the safety of the mission. Two years later the British consul, A.J. Hawes, also visited Chikuse and secured a pledge that Nguni would not harass the Blantyre mission, or the planters in the Blantyre and Zomba districts. Chikuse seemingly kept his pledge (Hanna 1956: 68).

It is evident that complex inter-ethnic relations developed throughout the Shire Highlands during the nineteenth century. Indeed, scholars have described Malawi as having 'no strong tribal organization', or even, misleadingly, as a 'melting pot' (Debenham 1955: 161; Pike and Rimmington 1965: 124). But essentially the people of the Shire Highlands at the end of the nineteenth century, consisted of three broad ethnic configurations, or what Alpers describes as 'socio-linguistic groups' (1975: xvii)—the term *mtundu*, meaning a group or kind, being generally used to denote a person's ethnic affiliation. These are the Nyanja/Mang'anja, who are usually described as belonging to the Maravi cluster, the Yao, and the various groups that are now designated by the term Lomwe. We may describe each of these ethnic configurations in term, recognizing of course, as earlier noted, that such ethnic affiliations are flexible and shifting, and that with regard to a specific individual or group, always subject to change.

2.1 *The Maravi*

All members of the so-called Maravi cluster claim to be descendants of groups of people who moved into the Northern Zambezia region around the fifteenth century. Associated with the Maravi states, specifically that of Kalonga, and with the Kaphrintiwa shrine in the Dzalanyama hills west of Lilongwe, such people are generally viewed as consisting of four distinctive ethnic groups—at least in relation to what is now Malawi. These are the Chipeta, in the highland regions south of Lilongwe and on the Kirk range—those Chipeta taken by the Nguni being described as Ntumba (Ntara 1973: 18); the Chewa, the largest group, who settled on the Kasungu–Lilongwe plain, and who, as an ethnic community, extend into Zambia and now number well over one million people; the Nyanja, who reside on the southern lakeshore and around Lake Chilwa and have long been noted as a fishing community; and the Mang'anja, who frequented the Shire Highlands and the Lower Shire Valley. It is, however, quite misleading—as historians often did during the Banda era (when Banda endeavoured to promote Chewa hegemony)—to equate the Nyanja and Mang'anja with the Chewa, although, of course, they have obvious cultural and linguistic affinities.

Nyanja (*Syn-Yao*, *Nyasa*) simply means 'people of the lake' (*wa-nyanja*), or any large expanse of water, while Mang'anja clearly refers to the iron-smelting (*nganjo*, a smelting furnace) that was commonly practised, as we shall note, by people of the Shire Highlands (Price 1963: 75). The Nyanja and Mang'anja thus constitute the two important ethnic communities of the Maravi cluster that came to reside in the Shire Highlands.

Historically, the Maravi were agricultural people, combining shifting cultivation largely focussed (after the initial clearing of the woodland) around a group of matrilineally related women, with the hunting of mammals—or external trade—left to the province of men. Around the lakeshore and near Lake Chilwa, fishing was important, specifically for the Nyanja. Indeed, one early missionary suggested that the social life of the Nyanja could be summed-up in one word: 'fish!' (Mills 1911: 226) It has thus been suggested that the Nyanja lacked any 'strong hunting traditions' (Vaughan 1978a: 7). But, of course, economic strategies among the Nyanja were diverse and flexible, and at times when Lake Chilwa became completely dry—an event that occurred around every 25 years or so—then Nyanja men took to the hunting and trapping of mammals and birds—especially the ubiquitous waterfowl that are found on Lake Chilwa.

Normally they combined fishing and hunting at different seasons of the year. But in oral traditions the Nyanja are closely identified with fishing, which, of course, was the province of men. They were known as *asodzi a nsomba* (catchers of fish) (Vaughan 1978a: 5).

Fish, both for local subsistence and trade, was taken in considerable quantities from Lake Chilwa, when the lake level was high, the main species being the catfish *mlamba* (*Clarias gariepinus*) *chambo* (*Tilapia* spp.), and *matemba*. The fish were caught by means of traps, nets, rod and line (often at night) or fish poisons. Nets were made from the shrub *bwazi* (*Securidaca longipedunculata*), while the canoes were invariably made from the common riparian tree *chonya* (*Breanadia microcephala*) (Morris 1998: 45–47; McCracken 2012: 15).

The hunting of game animals was more common among the Mang'anja, but neither the Nyanja nor the Mang'anja seem to have developed the kind of hunting fraternities or guilds that were evident among the Bemba, Bisa, Lomwe and Makua. Apart from some goats, pigs, sheep and chickens the Maravi people of the Shire Highlands had few livestock, and there was no developed pastoral economy. From earlier times, as we shall discuss below, there was a developed handicraft industry, based on the manufacture of baskets, salt, cloth and iron goods.

During the nineteenth century, besides the incursions of the Nguni, two other ethnic communities migrated into the Shire Highlands: the Yao, principally (but not exclusively) into the Zomba and Blantyre districts; and the Lomwe, who settled mainly in the Chiradzulu, Thyolo and Mulanje districts, particularly at the end of the century. Thus, as we have indicated above, complex inter-ethnic relations developed throughout the Shire Highlands in the nineteenth century, creating a social context that was essentially multi-ethnic. (For studies of the history and culture of the Maravi Peoples see Chifulumira 1948; Rangeley 1948; Marwick 1963; Ntara 1973; Mandala 1990.)

2.2 *The Yao*

The Yao (Chinyanja, *Ajawa*) came into the Shire Highlands around the middle of the nineteenth century, although Mitchell (1956: 2) describes them as 'invaders' rather than immigrants. While hunting was important for the Mang'anja, their menfolk seem to have been much more actively involved in the local subsistence economy than were the Yao, who had a wide reputation as itinerant hunters and traders. Abdallah describes the

Yaos, or at least the men, as having a ‘roving disposition’ (1973: 28). Oral traditions indeed suggest that a crucial feature of Yao culture was the general disdain the men had held in the past for agricultural activities (Alpers 1975: 23; Vaughan 1982: 356). For, like the Bisa, Yao men were actively involved in the ivory and slave trade from the middle of the eighteenth century. However, agriculture was important for the Yao: it was simply mainly focussed around women. Abdallah calls it their ‘principal industry’ (1973: 10), sorghum and millet being the staple crops, with cassava and maize becoming established during the nineteenth century. As with the Mang’anja, iron-working had been important in the past. In common with the Nyanja and Mang’anja, with whom they inter-married, the Yao were a matrilineal people, and uxori-local residence was commonly practised—as it still is in rural areas of the Shire Highlands.

From the 1850s onwards, the Yao chiefs gradually established their political authority over most of the Shire Highlands, the various chiefdoms being deeply implicated in the ivory and slave trade. The main chiefs involved belonged to either the Mangoche or Machinga ‘sub-tribe’—as it has been described (Yao, *mawele*, of the breast, i.e. a matrilineal kin group) (Abdallah 1973: 9). The chiefdom that became so prominent at the end of the nineteenth century on the south-eastern shores of Lake Malawi, that of Makanjila, belonged to the Masaninga sub-tribe (Mitchell 1956: 25; Abdallah 1973: 35–37).

Commercially strident and possessing guns, the Yao, as we shall discuss below, came to affirm their political dominance over the peoples of the Shire Highlands towards the end of the nineteenth century. When confronted with British imperialism, aggressively imposed by the Johnston administration, many Yao chiefs led ‘a bitter struggle to maintain their independence’ as chiefdoms (Alpers 1972: 168).

It is significant to note that all the various Yao sub-tribes or groups derive their name from the hills with which they were associated or came to live near (Abdallah 1973: 9; for further studies of the history and culture of the Yao see MacDonald 1882; Stannus 1922; Mitchell 1956; Rangeley 1963; Alpers 1969, 1975).

2.3 *The Lomwe*

The colonial administrator, W.H.J. Rangeley, was of the firm opinion that the Yao were originally ‘Nguru’ (*Lomwe*) people, who became separate from the parent group when they became successful traders, and took

their name from a local hill in Northern Mozambique (1963: 9). This is not the opinion of the Yao historian, Yohanna Abdallah who associated the Nguru with a hill south of Blantyre, possibly Mulanje Mountain, and stressed the distinctiveness of the Yao (1973: 8). Nguru, in fact, is said to be a Yao term for a neighbouring people who could not speak fluent Yao, in the same way as Mpotola was an Nyanja term for Yao who could not speak chinyanja correctly (*potola*, to twist, be crooked). Mpotola cannot therefore be described as a coherent ethnic group or tribe (Bandawe 1971: 129; cf. Mitchell 1956: 58–59).

Throughout the colonial period, Nguru was a common name for the Lomwe people, but the Lomwe themselves resented this term because of its negative and derogatory connotations. In 1943 Lewis Bandawe formed the ‘Lomwe Tribal Association’ and petitioned to the government to abolish the name Nguru. However, some Lomwe still identify themselves as Nguru. They are closely allied linguistically and culturally with the Lolo, who settled around Quelimane (*Chiwambo*) and the Makua of Northern Mozambique. The Lomwe as an ethnic group—this ‘great tribe’ as Bandawe described it—is itself divided into a number of dialects or sub-tribes, such as Kokhola Thakwani, Mihavani and Nyamwelo. As already noted, the term ‘Lomwe’ itself refers to the black soil or *nlomwe* that abounds on the plateau of Namuli Mountain (7936 feet; 2419 m), which is considered the Lomwe homeland and lies some 80 miles (130 km) east of Lake Chilwa (Bandawe 1971: 31; Boeder 1984: 3).

Archaeological evidence suggests that there may have been Lomwe in the Mulanje district prior to the emergence of the Maravi chiefdoms (Robinson: 1977: 42–43), but it was essentially from the end of the nineteenth century that Lomwe groups began moving into the Shire Highlands. The primary reason for this migration, according to Lewis Bandawe was ‘famine in the country’ (1971: 44). Attached to the Blantyre Mission, Bandawe spent 14 years as a Christian evangelist at Mihecani in Mozambique (1913–1928), in the heart of what he described as ‘Lomweland’.

With the opening up of European plantations in the Shire Highlands and the need for labour, many Lomwe moved into the Mulanje, Thyolo and Chiradzulu districts, encouraged to do so by the planters, who sent labour recruiting agents into Mozambique. With a similar cultural heritage and matrilineal clan system, the Lomwe either attached themselves to local Yao or Mang’anja chiefs, or established their own village communities—at the end of the nineteenth century large tracts of unoccupied Brachystegia

woodland were still available for settlement. Needing the labour of the Lomwe immigrants, the planters established, through the colonial government, in the early years of the twentieth century, the renowned, or infamous, *thangata* system. This was essentially a system of forced labour, and was the cause of much political unrest throughout the colonial period. Indeed, the Lomwe were closely associated with the Chilembwe rebellion in the Chiradzulu district in 1915 (Boeder 1984: 27). We discuss the Lomwe migration into the Shire Highlands, and such issues, more fully in Chap. 6.

In terms of kinship organization, general customs and religious beliefs, the Lomwe were very similar to the Yao and the Mang'anja. Although essentially subsistence agriculturalists during the nineteenth century, hunting seems to have played an even more fundamental role among the Lomwe than it did among the Yao, Chewa or Mang'anja. One writer suggests—with some exaggeration, although the remark is significant—that the Lomwe formerly subsisted 'almost entirely on hunting' (Whiteley), or the proceeds from it. For they had established hunting fraternities associated with the hunting of buffalo and elephant (Alpers 1975: 8–11). Bandawe notes that it was the 'custom' among the Lomwe that 'every male adult in every village should possess a gun'—usually an old 'tower' musket. Early missionaries at Mulanje noted that it was a common sight at the Sunday service to see as many as 20 guns ranged along the wall of the church, together with ammunition pouches and powder horns (*Life and Work* 1902, July; Bandawe 1971: 33; Alpers 1975: 8–11), for other important studies of the Lomwe see Soka 1953; Boeder 1984; White 1987).

The important point, of course, as I have continually stressed, is that there was much inter-mingling and inter-marriage between the three main ethnic configurations of the Shire Highlands—the Maravi (Mang'anja, Nyanja), Yao and Lomwe—as the nineteenth century drew to a close.

3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, John McCracken writes, 'Malawi was essentially a land of Bantu-speaking agriculturalists' (1968: 97). At the beginning of the nineteenth century of course, at the risk of sounding pedantic, Malawi as a political entity did not in fact exist. What we are engaged with are the people of the North Zambezia region, specifically

the Shire Highlands, and in this regard the statement reflects an important truth: although agriculture was only one facet of their socio-economic life.

There seems to be a general recognition that during the nineteenth century the people of the Shire Highlands practiced slash-and-burn cultivation, otherwise known as shifting cultivation or swidden agriculture. Throughout the colonial period this form of subsistence was subject to much denigration and derision by colonial officials—as being inefficient, wasteful and as wantonly destructive of the forest environment. Harry Johnston, for example, dismissed local shifting agriculture as a ‘heedless system, ruinous to the future interests of the country’ (1897: 424)—a sentiment echoed by many later colonial administrators. For foresters, in particular, it was seen as a ‘criminal outrage’, verily an act of ‘arson’ (Radkau 2008: 41). The use of fire especially—which in essence puts the nutrients contained in the forest vegetation into the soil—was seen as fundamentally destructive. What then was the nature of this form of agriculture?

Both Livingstone and Buchanan well describe how people of the Shire Highlands ensured a good crop of maize or sorghum: as Buchanan expressed it: the ‘method is simple, though destructive of timber’. Early in the dry season a man selects a patch of *Brachystegia* woodland as a site for a new garden, and puts his mark upon it, either by ‘blazing’ a few trees, or hoeing together a few tufts of grass, tying them together with a ‘knot’. This signified that the land had been ‘betrothed’ (*ku-toma*, to bespeak or betroth). He then, using an axe of ‘soft native iron’ cuts down the trees three feet or so above the ground level—enabling, of course, the subsequent regeneration of the trees. He may leave some of the very large trees standing, mainly, according to Buchanan, on account of the ‘hard-work’ that may be involved. The trees are then cut up into portable sections, and piled up into heaps and burnt. The grass, hoed by his wife and children (who together constitute a household) are also piled up into heaps, covered with earth and left to smoulder. The heaps or piles (*mathuthu*) of ashes and burnt soil have the ‘inorganic elements’ on which the very life of the maize or sorghum depend; or, as Livingstone simply put it: they ‘fertilize the ground’. These heaps were placed four to six feet apart, and varied in size. After planting maize or sorghum on the heaps, the household then planted pumpkins, cucumbers and various kinds of beans. Inter-cropping seems to have been the norm. When the maize had reached a height of six inches the field was hoed, and all the weeds again collected into heaps and covered with earth.



Fig. 3.3 Typical village in Southern Malawi: set in a clearing within *Brachystegia* woodland circa 1950

Source: D. Arnall, Nyasaland Information Department

The earth was generally scraped, or hoed, very lightly (*ku-sosa*), Buchanan noting that the ground had hardly been loosened even to a depth of six inches (Livingstone 1865: 101; Buchanan 1885: 118–121).

After the gardens (or fields) had been farmed for two or three years, and the soils were tending to yield a poor return, people felt it necessary, wrote Duff MacDonal, to open up new gardens in the woodland (1882: i/177).

This method of shifting cultivation is usually referred to as *visoso* (in Bemba, *chitemene*, see Allan 1965); it has been described as a way of winning abundant harvests without a great deal of time and effort (Potter 1987: 11). But as MacDonal concluded, this method ‘of manuring the ground by burning the trees on it, makes sad havoc of the beautiful woods’ (1882: i/146).

It is important to note, of course, that the trees were essentially coppiced, and that this allowed for the quick regeneration of the *Brachystegia* woodlands when the garden was abandoned. Indeed, most of the common trees of *Brachystegia* woodland coppice easily.

There is evidence to suggest that shifting cultivation was being replaced by a more labour intensive bush-fallow system towards the end of the nineteenth century (Boserup 1965: 29–31; Vaughan 1982: 355). New gardens (*mphanje*) were therefore cultivated either in old gardens now fallow (*tsala*), or in areas of bush or regenerate woodland (*chire*), rather than in more mature *Brachystegia* woodland (*thengo*). This form of cultivation often involved deep hoeing (*ku-chitipula*). It is, however, rather misleading to view mound (*mathuthu*) cultivation and shifting cultivation (*visoso*) as two distinct forms of agriculture (Mulwafu 2011: 24–25), as *mathuthu* cultivation was intrinsic to slash-and-burn agriculture.

Equally it is debatable whether the mounds (*mathuthu*) were specifically a form of soil conservation, either in fact, or as a conscious strategy on the part of the African cultivators, given the fact that after two or three years, with declining fertility, the gardens would be abandoned. The plots would then revert back to *Brachystegia* woodland. Neither the woodlands nor the soils were viewed as a scarce resource in need of ‘conservation’.

As a form of rotation, shifting cultivation was a viable form of agriculture, but as Buchanan recognized, it was only possible with a low population density and extensive tracts of *Brachystegia* woodland, otherwise it would ‘have to be changed’ (1885: 117).

But agricultural production in the Shire Highlands in the nineteenth century was much more complex and diversified than this account of shifting cultivation suggests. Agriculture was marked by a distinction between two fields of operation; that associated with upland gardens (*munda*), which depended upon the annual rains and was the focus of shifting patterns of cultivation; and that associated with *dimba* gardens, which were cultivated in low-lying areas or near streams. *Dimba* gardens were utilized not only for vegetable production but also for growing rice and double-cropping maize (Vaughan 1978a: 4).

The primary cereals grown in the Shire Highlands and discussed by early writers were maize (*chimanga*), sorghum (*mapira*), rice (*mpunga*) and various kinds of millets. Although maize was introduced into Africa by the Portuguese around the end of the sixteenth century, and probably reached the people of the Shire Highlands via Yao traders, it is evident that by the end of the nineteenth century it was extensively cultivated in the region. The term *chimanga*, of course, derives from *manga*, which refers to the coast, or, as Scott suggests, to ‘the place where riches came from’ (1929: 267; Werner 1906: 177; McCann 2005: 34). Buchanan writes that in the Shire Highlands, maize, on which people chiefly depended as

a staple, was ‘grown extensively and thrives luxuriantly’ (1885: 118). He also writes of the sweet potato (*mbatata*) being an important crop, the cuttings being planted on long mounds or ridges; that pumpkins (*dzungu*) was found ‘by the cartload’ and that cassava (*chinangwa*) was grown in every village. Introduced to Africa from Central America at the end of the eighteenth century, cassava, Buchanan noted, formed a ‘good stand-by’ for men engaged in portage (*ntengtenga*), as it could easily be roasted in the ashes of a fire. Cassava was, in fact, a vital crop in that it required little attention and was drought-resistant. Interestingly, although ground-nuts (*ntedza*) were grown extensively in the lower Shire Valley, Buchanan suggests that they tended not to be grown in the Highlands. In contrast tobacco (*fodya*) was widely cultivated either within the village environs or in dimba gardens. It was grown both for home consumption and for trade (1885: 125–126; Werner 1906: 178). Numerous kinds of beans were recognized and cultivated, those of particular significance being *nandolo* (*Cajanus cajan*), *mwanda* (*Phaseolus vulgaris*), *mayemba* (*P. lunatus*), *nseula* (*Vigna unguiculata*) and *nzama* (*Voandzeia subterranea*).

Although maize was extensively planted in the Shire Highlands towards the end of the nineteenth century, *mapira* (*Sorghum bicolor*) and various millets, especially finger millet *mawere* (*Eleusine coracana*) (used especially for beer-making), and bulrush millet, *machewere* (*Pennisetum americanum*) were still important cereals. Both sorghum and the millets involved less labour input than maize, and were more adapted to the drier regions of the Shire Highlands. Buchanan noted that sorghum had the advantages over maize in being more easily converted into flour, and in growing on ‘shingly soil’ that would not support maize (1885: 122).

All cultivation was done by means of locally-made hoes, usually with a short wooden handle made from the durable wood of the *napini* tree (*Terminalia sericea*). Buchanan noted the local custom of communal hoeing, which he suggested was ‘common and widespread’, payment being made by the liberal offering of beer (*mowa*) at the end of the day’s work—a beer feast (*chijao*) in fact (1885: 140). Livingstone had also noted that ‘all the people of the village turn out to labour in the fields’—although it is difficult to assess to what degree this was a common practice, or whether it was primarily instigated by the territorial chiefs (1865: 101). Even so, contrary to what many scholars have implied, communal hoeing parties were still being organized in the Dowa hills in the late 1930s (Berry and Petty 1992: 62–87).

It is of interest to note that while during the colonial period, African agriculture tended to be denigrated and dismissed as ‘primitive’; in contrast, Bishop MacKenzie had reported to Livingstone around 1861: ‘When telling people in England what were my object(ives) in going to Africa, I stated that among other things, I meant to teach these people agriculture, but I now see that they know far more about it than I do’ (Livingstone 1865: 394).

As we have noted earlier, Livingstone described the Mang’anja of the Shire Highlands as an industrious people, for they were not only involved in agricultural production but also, in addition, had developed many craft industries—in the production of iron, basket-making, cotton-spinning, the making of clay pots (especially by older women), salt-making, and the making of bark-cloth. Later, John Buchanan was to affirm this positive characterization of the Shire Highland’s social economy, stressing that the people of the Highlands were industrious and not ‘lazy’ (Livingstone 1865: 101; Buchanan 1885: 127).

It seems likely that the production of iron, bark-cloth, salt, pots, and in certain places cotton, were all widely disseminated skills. So that most villages had their specialists in those tasks—or, at least, through barter, most people had easy access to those goods (Vaughan 1978a: 4). It is, therefore, somewhat misleading to portray the economy of the Shire Highlands as one purely of subsistence agriculture, even though, to an important degree, each village community was economically self-sufficient.

The Mang’anja, as their ethnic name suggests, were renowned for their iron-smelting and metallurgy. As Livingstone wrote: ‘Iron ore was dug out of the hills, and its manufacture is the staple trade of the Southern (Shire) Highlands. Each village has its smelting-house, its charcoal burners and blacksmiths. They make good axes, spears, needles, arrowheads, bracelets and anklets’ (1865: 103)—as well, of course, as hoes.

The iron furnace or kiln (*nganjō*) was built of clay, the bellows made from goat’s skin, the working anvil comprised a large flat stone, and the charcoal was made largely from the wood of the *msuku* tree (*Uapaca kirki-ana*), although other hardwoods were often used (Buchanan 1885: 132).

Iron-smelting was a highly skilled and difficult operation, and like the hunting of the larger mammals, was an extremely risky affair. It was therefore steeped in ritual prohibitions. The iron-smelter (*mfundi*) must remain ‘cool’ throughout the smelting process. He must not therefore have sexual relations the night prior to the smelting, nor during the period of the smelting operation itself, which may take several weeks. As with

hunting, offerings must be made to the spirits of the ancestors (*mizimu ya makolo*), and special medicines used to protect both the *mfundi* and the smelting process from witchcraft (*ufiti*) and other evil influences.

Iron-smelting in the Shire Highlands during the nineteenth century was, therefore a very similar activity to that of hunting in being a specialist occupation among men, undertaken on a part-time basis, mainly during the dry season (July–September) (Morris 1998: 110–111). Thus, as MacDonald emphasized, iron-smelters and blacksmiths also engaged in agricultural work during the rainy season (1882: 36). Iron-smelting and blacksmithing, like hunting, was also a highly organized activity, involving the close cooperation of several men.

Although the iron industry was carried on mostly by Mang'anja men, who appear to have been the main iron-workers of the region, the Yao also had a tradition of iron-smelting. For among the Yao there was a specific clan, the Wachisi (*chisyano*, iron) who specialized in iron-smelting, and as blacksmiths they were renowned for their wealth and held in great esteem (Abdallah 1973: 23–24). But given the Yaos' increasing involvement in the ivory and slave trade, during the nineteenth century they became—or at least the men did during the dry season—much more involved in long-distance travel than did either the Nyanja or Mang'anja. As Livingstone observed, although the Mang'anja were quite as involved as the Yao with regard to slave trading, the Mang'anja 'had less enterprise, and were much more fond of the home pursuits of spinning, weaving, smelting iron and cultivating the soil than of foreign travel' (1865: 392).

The Mang'anja were also involved in the spinning and weaving of cotton, which was considered 'emphatically men's work' (Werner 1906: 195). Livingstone indeed writes of cotton being cultivated at almost every village, and describes the three varieties of cotton that were grown, one of which, *thonje kadja*, *Gossypium* sp. was indigenous to the country. The cloth made was considered to be of excellent quality (1865: 102). But cotton production and cotton spinning seems to have been largely confined to the Lower Shire Valley. There was, however, a lively trade and exchange between the cotton goods produced in the Lower Shire Valley, and the hoes and other iron products manufactured in the Highlands.

With the introduction of machine-made metal hoes and English calico towards the end of the nineteenth century, both iron-smelting and cotton weaving as local industries went into decline. They soon came to be described as 'dead arts' by the Blantyre missionaries.

Basket-making as a craft continued to thrive, however, and was still flourishing on tea-estates in the 1950s. Another occupation reserved to men, weaving was largely confined to the production of two main types of basket, both made from plaited strips of split bamboo: the large basket (*mtanga*) for carrying provisions, and the small, shallow, round basket (*nsengwa*) that was used as a plate (Werner 1906: 198–199; Stannus 1922: 342).

Two other craft industries were important in the Shire Highlands during the nineteenth century: both focussed around women—pottery and salt-making. The making of clay pots was undertaken mainly by older women. The moulding (*ku-umba*) was done entirely by hand, without the aid of a wheel or any other device. As with iron-smelting, the firing of the pots was surrounded by ritual prohibitions. Many kinds of pots were produced, and they were usually covered with graphite or iron-oxide, or given decorative patterns (Werner 1906: 205; Stannus 1922: 342).

Also an important craft industry, salt-making was focussed mainly around Lake Chilwa. Largely the task of older women, it too, like smelting, hunting and pot-making, involved certain ritual prohibitions. The salt (*chidulo*) was made either from sedges, *chetsa* (*Cyperus alternifolius*) or certain aquatic plants such as *kakombwe* (*Pistia stratiotes*), or from saline earth near the lake. Mainly a dry season activity, each village appears to have had an older woman who generally made enough salt to satisfy the needs of the kin group. But salt was a favourite article of commerce, and often given as tribute to the territorial chief (Werner 1906: 207; Williamson 1956; Vaughan 1978a: 5).

Finally, a brief note may be made with regard to the making of bark cloth, which was still being used as clothing in the nineteenth century. Buchanan suggests that although the bark of the baobab tree, *mlambe* (*Adonsonia digitata*) was sometimes made into cloth, it was the ubiquitous tree *njombo* (*Brachystegia longifolia*) that was mainly used in the making of bark cloth (*chiwondo*). In a complex process, the bark was stripped, soaked in a stream for several days, and then beaten and dried. Abdallah writes that in the past the wearing of bark cloth among the Yao was viewed as inferior to the wearing of animal skins, specifically that of the lion, leopard and serval, which were worn exclusively by senior men and territorial chiefs (1973: 12–13). Bark cloth was also made into blankets, for it consisted of material that was soft, pliable and warm (Buchanan 1885: 47–48; Stannus 1922: 344).

During the nineteenth century, with the introduction of calico into the economy, bark-cloth rapidly fell into disuse, although the bark was still commonly employed in the making of dovecots, and the small pens that housed chickens. These domestic birds were common denizens of the village setting. But generally speaking, apart from chickens and goats, and the occasional sheep and pig, the people of the Shire Highlands kept few livestock.

Leaving aside the long-distance trade in ivory and slaves, which introduced calico, beads and flintlock guns into the region, what struck early travellers like Livingstone was the ubiquity of local trade or barter (*malo-nda*). Chickens, calico, hoes, pots, baskets, medicines, meat from wild animals, salt, tobacco, foodstuffs (especially dried fish), all seem to have been freely exchanged by individuals from different village communities. Calico seems to have been used as a medium of exchange, Buchanan noting that in the Shire Highlands three chickens could be obtained for one yard of calico (1885: 29).

Socio-economic life in the Shire Highlands during the nineteenth century was typical of a situation where hoe agriculture, largely focussed around a group of matrilineally related women, was combined, in a dialectical or complementary fashion, with hunting, iron-smelting, fishing and trade focussed around men. Politically, it was a situation where there was an incipient development of state systems in the form of chiefdoms, based on the control of long-distance trade goods, especially guns, and the assertion of political sovereignty over specific territories.

Although we shall discuss gender issues relating to agriculture later in the study, it is worth noting here that the evidence from the pre-colonial era suggests that social life in the Shire Highlands was structured around an explicit gender division. With women being mainly engaged in agricultural work, in the processing and cooking of food and basic child care, while men were away for long periods, especially during the dry season, actively employed in fishing in Lake Chilwa, hunting in the *Brachystegia* woodland, iron-smelting, or, as with the Yao especially, engaged in long-distance trade. The gender division was thus an important organizing principle. Given these complementary roles, and the importance of matrilineal kinship within the village community, the position of women among the Yao, Mang'anja and Nyanja was 'in no way inferior to that of the man' (Werner 1906: 148).

The important role played by women in the subsistence sphere is perhaps best described by Duff MacDonald: 'The wife may be described

as performing nearly the whole of ploughing (hoeing) and sowing, the whole of reaping and in-gathering of the crop, the whole of the milling, the whole of the brewing, and the whole of the cooking, including the carrying of fire (wood) and water' (1882: i/138).

But given the rituals of obeisance and submission expressed by a woman towards her husband (or visiting males) in public, and the enormous contribution that women made towards agricultural production, MacDonald was led to suggest that Yao women in the Shire Highlands were treated no better than 'beasts of burden' and that they held an 'inferior position' to that of men (1882: i/35).

Elsewhere I have tried to counter this negative portrait of gender relations in the nineteenth century, suggesting that among the matrilineal peoples in what is now Malawi, women historically had a great deal of power and autonomy within the domain of subsistence agriculture and the village community. They organized their own rituals, particularly the girl's initiation ceremony (*chinamwali*); women were often village headmen; and they had a great deal of autonomy within the family-household (*banja*), which was essentially a matrifocal unit, marriage being uxorilocal (Morris 1998: 57): In terms of agriculture it was the *banja*, or family-household that was the primary productive unit.

A clear distinction has to be made, of course, between the gender relations within the domain of the territorial chief, where domestic slavery and patriarchy were firmly established—entailing the exploitation of women—and where harsh, even brutal, penalties may have been dispensed for any sexual transgression or misdemeanour, and gender relations within the village community. Within the village context, gender equality was clearly evident, the woman having a great deal of autonomy with regard to her own life and activities (cf. Chanock 1998: 165).

4 THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

Early writings on the Shire Highlands tend to have a rather political slant or bias: understandable for a missionary–traveller like Livingstone. Details of local territorial 'chiefs' therefore have prominence in the texts. Even the classical historical studies of the Chewa and Yao (Ntara 1973; Abdallah 1973), though largely based on oral traditions, are essentially political narratives. There is, therefore, a stress on the important chiefs and on the founding ancestors of the 'dynasty', on clan (*pfuko*) relationships that had political salience, and on the religious ideologies associated with the various territorial chiefs, who had

important rain-making functions. But social life in the Shire Highlands in the nineteenth century was not all about the territorial chiefs and their internecine conflicts, even if the ivory and slave trade had a profound impact on people's social existence and livelihood.

Social life in the Shire Highlands during the nineteenth century can best be viewed as existing, as it were, on four distinct levels, with respect to four different and encompassing spheres of social ecology. These were: that of the territorial chief, the *mwinidziko* (the owner or guardian of the country) who held political sovereignty over a particular territory or tract of land; that of the village headman who, as *mwininudzi* (guardian of the village) had jurisdiction over a particular village community and its land holdings, a village being essentially a matrilineal kin group together with in-marrying male affines; that of the *mwinimbumba* (the guardian or owner of the *mbumba* or sororate group) usually a senior male, often the mother's brother (*malume*) within the matrilineal group (the *mbumba* generally formed a distinct hamlet within the village community); and, finally, the family-household (*banja*), a matrifocal unit identified with a house (*nyumba*), which, as earlier indicated, was the main productive unit within the subsistence sphere. The family-household was closely identified with particular cultivated areas or gardens.

We discuss each of these four social ecological domains below, each of which can be identified with a particular area of land and a specific 'owner' or guardian. But let us begin with the issue of land.

There have, of course, been many studies discussing land tenure in Malawi—mostly within a legalistic framework (Lampport-Stokes 1970; Brietzke 1973). Such discussions inevitably pre-suppose the existence of a state, or at least some form of political (coercive) authority, as evident among the early chiefdoms of Northern Zambezia discussed above. But details of customary land tenure tend to be rather vague and general. Two examples will suffice.

To the African villager, 'No man can own land. It belongs to some divine being and individuals may only occupy and use the land. What grows on it can be used and the house on it can be owned, but the land itself is never owned' (Lampport-Stokes 1970: 60).

In customary 'law' (sic),

Land is viewed as a gift from god to communities for their subsistence. It belongs to lineages. Chiefs exercise trusteeship over the land; they cannot claim ownership of it. When land is allocated to persons they acquire user

rights and not ownership. While products of the land can be sold, the land itself cannot be sold because it belongs not just to present users but future generations as well (Kishindo 2004: 214).

During the nineteenth century much of the Shire Highlands was covered with *Brachystegia* woodland. The land between Blantyre and Chiradzulu Mountain, the southern and western escarpments, and large parts of the Thuchila plain, for example, were covered with woodland and largely uninhabited. Thus Buchanan writes of the Shire Highland as ‘well-wooded’ (1885: 41). Even 50 years ago, as I know from my own botanical excursions, not only were the slopes of Zomba, Chiradzulu and Mulanje Mountains still clothed with *Brachystegia* woodland, but also those of the mountains and hills close to Blantyre—specifically, Bangwe, Soche, Ndiranda, Malabvi, Michiru and Mpingwe, as well as much of the Thyoto escarpment. All these mountains also had extensive patches of evergreen forests.

Brachystegia woodland, for the matrilineal peoples of the Shire Highlands, were the creation (*cholengedwe*) of the supreme spirit (*mulungu*); they therefore belonged to the community as a whole. In essence, the land and its woodlands belonged to no one and everyone. No persons, chiefs or otherwise, had individual property rights over the land, whether with regard to the trees, animals, plants generally (whether for food or medicines), fungi, insects, or even termite mounds. For, in general terms there was free access to everyone for all the basic necessities of human life. Thus the idea of ‘permanent property in land scarcely existed’ (Werner 1906: 271). What essentially pertained was that people, either individually or collectively, could make specific claims on the land (*dziko*); either land for cultivation, or with regard to specific resources of the woodland environment (*thengo*). This seems to have occurred in three distinct ways.

Firstly, territorial chiefs, having available coercive power and ritual sanctions, could claim and assert political sovereignty over certain tracts of land. Such tracts would include not only several villages, but extensive woodlands, and possibly hill forests. The territories of these chiefdoms were usually well-defined, with recognizable boundaries, although such boundaries and the power of the chiefs was always shifting. Known as *mwinidziko*, guardian of the land (*dziko*, country, land), a territorial chief’s relationship to the land was political and ritual, rather than economic. He did not ‘own’ the land as exclusive private property, as this concept is

understood with respect to the capitalist market economy. We discuss the social role of the territorial chief—the chiefdoms—in more detail below.

Secondly, a given tract of land that came to be inhabited by a particular group of matrilineally related people—whether in the territory of an existing territorial chief or in untouched woodland—in time came to be recognized as belonging to the kin group as a village community. They came to be known as the ‘original’ occupants of the land. The village (*mudzi*) referred to both the land and its people. As the nearby woodland generally held the graves of the ancestors (*amanda*, spirits of the grave), the land essentially belonged to the village community—the matrilineal kin group—as a whole, including the spirits of the ancestors (*mizimu ya makolo*) and future children, as well as living persons. Rights to land for cultivation were thus only usufruct allotted through the village headman and the community.

Finally, any individual was freely able to claim as property for their own immediate or future use, any aspect or resource of the woodland environment. This was done by making their mark of sign (*chizindikiro*, from *ku-zindikira*, to recognize) on a particular area of land for cultivation (discussed above), or on a specific woodland resource. An individual was thus able to claim it as property for their own personal use. This may entail the marking of a particular tree—to be utilized later in the making of bark-cloth, or for building materials; or it may involve a particular termite mound, whether for its flying termites (*inswa*)—which are an important food resource (Morris 2004: 57–63)—or for the various edible fungi: (*Termitomyces* spp) which grow in such locations. But people only had usufruct rights to such termite hills. Thus any animals, wild foods, medicinal plants (*mankhwala*) building materials, thatching grass or firewood (*nkhuni*) gathered from the *Brachystegia* woodland belong to the individual person who did the gathering. Or, with regards to a communal hunt (*uzimba*) to the persons involved, the sharing of the meat being under the control of the *mwini uzimba* (or *mwini liwamba*),—the owner or guardian of the hunt (Morris 1998: 91–93).

In a helpful discussion of land tenure in Malawi, W. Chipeta (1971) tends to interpret customary ‘law’ in terms of the Western categories of private, common and public land usage. For example, ‘private’ with regards to the ‘family’ holdings of cultivated land (downplaying the importance of matrilineal kinship); ‘common’ in terms of people’s free access to woodland resources; and, finally, ‘public’ in relation to such communal land as

village graveyards (*manda*) and religious shrines (which, of course, are not really public at all, but communal).

It hardly needs saying that the laws of trespass, in the sense of completely denying peoples access to land, was entirely unknown to the people of the Shire Highlands, even though they respected other people's property and the privacy of the family-household (*banja*). Even so, territorial chiefs, and to some extent the village headmen, could affirm some degree of control over land with regards to the movements and settlement of people who were from outside the territory or kin group.

Two points, however, need to be made in this context: The first is that, rights to land and property, and even free access to resources, was always mediated by social relations, and by people's membership of specific social groups. This has long been emphasized by social anthropologists. As Martin Chanock expressed it: it was a person's 'group standing which gave them access to land and consequently their concern was with maintaining their position linked to other persons rather than with rights to land' *per se* (1998: 231). Secondly, it has been argued that the very concept of 'customary *law*' was largely the product of the colonial imagination, which was unable to envisage any kind of social order without a system of 'laws' or explicit rules, upheld by chiefs with some degree of political authority (Chanock 1998: 3–10).

Let me now turn to the four social ecological groups aforementioned, namely the chiefdom, the village community, the sororate group and the family-household. We will discuss each in turn.

4.1 *The Chiefdom (Ufumu)*

It is a moot point as to what degree any part of Northern Zambezia, and the Shire Highlands in particular, can, as a social landscape, be described as a completely 'decentralized' society during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, given the ubiquity of elephants, guns and the ivory trade. That is, as consisting only of the kin-based society, as the Tonga and Nyanja have been so described (Van Velsen 1964; Vaughan 1978a: 2), living in village communities without any chiefs having wider territorial sovereignty. But certainly towards the end of the nineteenth century the Shire Highlands, like the lower Shire Valley and other parts of Northern Zambezia, held expansive chiefdoms under the control of a territorial chief (*mfumu*).

The term *mfumu* in Chinyanja is a general concept referring both to the territorial chief and to the local village headman. As during the nineteenth century the distinction between the village headman and the territorial chief was always a shifting one, in that any village headmen given the control of guns and sufficient social acumen—for a ‘chief who has no people is no chief’ (Mitchell 1956: 109)—could claim wider territorial sovereignty. Nevertheless a clear political distinction has to be made between the territorial chief and the local village headman. The territorial chief was associated with a much larger village, with its own court (*mphala*) and armed retainers. It was usually described as a town (*mzinda*) as distinct from the village (*mudzi*). The territorial chief was thus described not only as the ‘owner’ or guardian of the territory (*mwini dziko*) (Yao, *asyene chilambo*), but also as owner of the town (*mwini mzinda*), which often consisted of several hundred people. Almost by definition, the territorial chief, whatever ethnic affiliation, was implicated in the long-distance trade of slaves and ivory, and thus had ready access to guns, powder and calico.

Having both political (coercive) and ritual authority, the chief tended to assert control over, and to restrict access, to anyone travelling through his territory who might be engaged in long-distance trade, or in the hunting of elephants. Chiefs usually claimed the ‘ground tusk’ of any elephant killed in their territory, as well as claiming the monopoly of leopard, serval and lion skins (which they used as clothing). They also claimed as their own the feathers of the *nkulu kulu*, the Livingstone’s turaco. Its red wing-feathers being woven into a red headband worn only by chiefs (MacDonald 1882: i/157; Rangeley 1948: 24).

The chiefdom usually consisted of between 30 and 100 or more villages—‘congeries of almost autonomous villages’ as Clyde Mitchell expressed it—and the chief’s territory covered around a hundred square miles. The extent of the territory and the chief’s political influence was, however, highly variable. The village headmen (or sub-chiefs), who had varying degrees of authority, were expected to pay tribute (*ku perekamtulo*) to the territorial chief. The tribute was usually in the form of garden produce, salt, or the meat of such mammals as the kudu (*ngoma*), hartebeest (*ngondo*) and eland (*ntchefu*); or sometimes, it appears, in the form of communal labour in the chief’s garden (*munda wa chiweta*) (MacDonald 1882: 157; Rangeley 1948: 52–53).

The territorial chief invariably had several wives, and during the nineteenth century domestic slavery was a well-established social institution. Although intrinsically linked with the slave trade, domestic slavery was

in fact a distinct institution, one essentially associated with the territorial chief and his close associates. The slaves (*akapola*), most of whom were women, had certain rights and freedoms, though extremely limited. Slaves were obtained either through capture, or to redeem a debt, or were people who simply lacked any 'kith or kin' or means of subsistence, and thus voluntarily became a slave in order to survive. As a form of servitude, domestic slavery involved forced labour, and was anything but benign. The slave was viewed as a resource or commodity—or as MacDonald expressed it: 'a profitable investment' (1882: I/167). Hence it was invariably linked to the slave trade (On domestic slavery see Stannus 1922: 280; Chanock 1998: 160–171; McCracken 2012: 24–25.)

The slave trade involved the transport of slaves to the coastal markets as commodities. It has to be recognized, however, that the ivory and slave trade were also intrinsically linked, for it was often the slaves who carried the ivory to the coast. It is also worth noting that ivory often had a higher value in trade terms than did a person. For while a large tusk of ivory was valued at 60 yards of cloth (calico), a slave fetched between 40 and 56 yards of calico, a young unmarried woman being more highly valued than a man (Hanna 1956: 19; Abdallah 1973: 31). Through involvement in the ivory and slave trade the territorial chief not only had a supply of imported cloth to distribute to his followers, but also domestic slaves, mostly women, who were able to cultivate extensive plantations, often of commercial crops.

The possession of muzzle-loading guns and gunpowder was intrinsic to the chief's authority, and should not be undervalued (cf. McCracken 2012: 28). Domestic slavery thus entailed hierarchical relations that were akin to patron–client relations—the territorial chief offering political protection in exchange for servitude. Indeed it has been described by John Kandawire as 'feudal' (1979: 11; White 1987: 49). In a later discussion, however, McCracken emphasizes the 'culture of violence' and the possession of guns that was entailed in the creation of both Yao—and Kololo—chiefdoms (2012: 32). (The Makololo chiefdoms were formed around the 1870s when a handful of porters left behind by Livingstone, and being armed with guns, made themselves rulers over the Mang'anja in the Lower Shire Valley [see Rangeley 1959; MacMillan 1975]).

The territorial chief also performed several ritual functions. He was responsible, for example, for the ritual firing of the *Brachystegia* woodland during the dry season. As an act of respect towards the ancestral spirits, and in terms of a cyclic cosmology, the ritual burning was viewed

as essential for the regular provision of rain (*mvula*). It was on the annual rains that subsistence agriculture depended, and thus the well-being of the people within the chiefdom. More negatively, the chief also controlled and employed the renowned trial by poison ordeal—the drinking of a poison made from the bark of the *mwabvi* tree (*Erythrophleum suaveolens*), common in riparian forest. This was done in order to ascertain, it was believed, the identity of a malevolent witch (*mfiti*) in the community (on the *mwabvi* ordeal see MacDonald 1882: 1/204; Williamson 1975: 108; Morris 1996a: 162–166).

It is important to recognize that in the religious cosmology of the people of the Shire Highlands a close association pertained between the deity (*mulungu*), the spirits of the ancestors (*mizimu ya makolo*), especially those of the chiefs, the evergreen forests that clothed the higher mountains of the Highlands, and the territorial chiefs. For as the guardians of the territory—as both a social and ecological domain—the chiefs were centrally and vitally concerned with the provision of rain and with the health and well-being of the people. Drawing on the seminal writings of Father Matthew Schoffeleers, I have discussed this religious cosmology at some length elsewhere (2000: 175–219). I shall focus here only on some of the main themes specifically related to the Shire Highlands and the ritual functions of the territorial chiefs.

In the religious culture of the matrilineal peoples of the Shire Highlands the deity or supreme spirit (*mulungu*) seems to have been remote from the everyday life and concerns of the people. The conception of the deity as an ‘otiose’ being was, however, a little overdrawn by the early writers. But it seems evident that a clear distinction was made in the nineteenth century between the supreme deity and the ancestral spirits (*mizimu*), and that, as Buchanan recorded, the deity was largely forgotten during times of prosperity (1885: 146).

The deity was described under a variety of names and attributes; all have associations with such themes as power, nurturance and creation, with the sky and the heavens, and with the provision of rain. Among the Lomwe, for example, *namalenga* denoted a shadowy, all-powerful deity that transcended the ancestral spirits, and was associated with communal concerns relating to epidemics and droughts. The term was derived from the verb *ku-lenga*, the act of wonder and creation, the heavens or firmament being described as *mlengalenga*. The term *mphambe* for the supreme being also meant thunder or the rains, and thunder may indeed be referred to as the ‘words of god’ (*mau a mulungu*). Likewise, *chiuta* the ‘great bow’ has allusions to the rainbow, Scott interpreting its meaning as implying

the active power of the deity as manifested in thunder, lightning and the provision of rain. In contrast, another term for the deity, *Mlezi*, god as the sustainer, denotes a being that nourishes (*ku-leza*) the earth and all things (Scott 1929: 91; Morris 2000: 185–189).

It was the primary ritual function of the territorial chief to make offerings (*nsembe*), usually consisting of beer, calico and maize or sorghum flour (*ufa*) to the supreme spirit, mainly through the mediation of the ancestral spirits associated with a particular territory. Such ancestral spirits were essentially viewed as having their abodes in the evergreen forests that clothed the mountains of the Shire Highlands. As MacDonald expressed it: ‘The spirit of an old chief may have a whole mountain for his residence, but he dwells chiefly on the cloudy summit’ (1882: i/60).

MacDonald writes that the ‘god of Mount Socte’ was Kankhomba, a deceased Nyanja chief, whose spirit as the ‘local deity’ received the supplications of the Yao chief Kapeni (1882: i/70). *Nsembe* was made by the territorial chiefs on behalf of the whole community within the chiefdom, and prayers offered for rain as well as freedom from infectious diseases. Often, communication with the mountain spirit would be facilitated by a spirit-medium, sometimes the chief’s wife, but usually an unmarried woman who would be considered the ‘wife’ of the ancestral spirit. A shrine (*kachisi*) was often placed within the forest on the summit of the mountain, and there offerings were made (*kutsira nsembe*) to the spirits of the chiefly ancestors.

In her valuable study Alice Werner indicated that rain ‘deities’ and rain shrines were associated with most of the hills and mountains of the Shire Highlands—near Mloza crater on Mulanje (Chief Chipoka), as well as on Malabvi, Michiru, Mpingwe, Thyolo and Ndirande Mountains during the late nineteenth century (1906: 46–61). The early observations of MacDonald and Werner have been confirmed by more recently collected oral traditions which often describe such mountains as Soche, Michiru and Michesi as being a ‘mountain of spirits’ (*Ndi phiri la mizimu*) (Soka 1953: 28–29; Morris 2000: 193). Namilongo hill near Zomba has likewise been described as a ‘rain shrine’, specially associated with the Mang’anja chief Chisunzi (White 1987: 21).

4.2 *The Village Community (Mudzi)*

In an important sense, the people of the Shire Highlands during the nineteenth century—the Yao, Nyanja, Mang’anja and the incoming Lomwe—were by theory, tradition and customary practices, matrilineal people. Matrilineal descent was an important organizing principle of their social

life. Village communities therefore, were invariably centred on a group of matrilineally related women under the guardianship of a senior relative, usually an elder brother (*mwini mbumba*), and residence was mainly uxorilocal. All married men in the village were therefore outsiders, or 'foreigners' as Elias Mandala rather misleadingly described them (1990: 22), although the headman usually had his own wife residing with him (described as *chitengwa*).

In pre-colonial times, social identity not only focussed on ethnic affiliation but also on a person's clan membership. Matrilineal clans were usually denoted by the terms *pfuko* or *mfunda* (Yao, *lukosyo*) and in the past were strictly exogamous units. The tendency of some historians to treat matrilineal clans—such as Phiri, Mbewe, Mwali, Milanzi, Banda, Nkhoma, and their Lomwe equivalents—as if they were autonomous groups of people is thus quite obfuscating. Although an important form of social identity, clans were dispersed over a wide area, and did not have any corporate functions, either economic or ritual, and were not related to any land holdings. But the matrilineal clans played an important role in historical traditions, as well as in the politics of the early pre-colonial chiefdoms. Clan membership in the past also enabled people to establish substantive relationships, interpreted as kinship, with people in distant places. It thus facilitated the movement of people over a wide area (Ntara 1973; Nurse 1978; White 1987: 98–99; Morris 1998: 18–21).

For the people of the Shire Highlands it was neither the chiefdom nor clan membership that was the key focus of their social identity. This was because the basic local unit, in terms of both residence and social organization was the village community (*mudzi*). Mitchell, at the end of the colonial period, was to describe the village as the 'key concept in Yao thought' and as the fundamental unit in their social structure (1956: 2–3). The term *mudzi* refers both to the village as a physical entity, consisting of usually between 15 and 60 huts (or households), and as a human community, with a strong sense of social identity. In the nineteenth century there were elaborate communal rituals which symbolized the unity of the village community, such rituals being focussed around initiation rites (*chinamwali*) and commemorative ceremonies (*bona*) for the dead.

The village headman (*mfumu*) was a key figure in the community, having both ritual and political authority, although his coercive powers, compared with that of the territorial chief, were rather limited. Ideally, the disposition of the village headman must be that of a guardian—amiable, unassertive, generous, non-aggressive, always striving to keep peace and

harmony within the village setting with which he was closely identified. Ideally, then, he should be a male mother (*mai wamwamuna*).

His personality therefore contrasted with that of the territorial chief, and to some extent that expected of the in-marrying male affines, who were associated with fierceness, hunting, sexual potency and aggressive behaviour, well expressed in the Nyau rituals of the Chewa and Mang'anja. A woman, however, might also be a village headman or chief (*mfumu*, Yao *mwenye*), and many early writers from Gamitto onwards, mention meeting among the Chewa, Yao and Mang'anja village 'headmen' who were women (Morris 1998: 24).

The social unity of the village and its underlying matrilineage (or sororate groups) was premised on the notion that they belonged to the same breast (*bere*) or derived from one womb (*dibaliro*). The verb *ku-bala* means 'to bear children or fruit' and *Chibale* (sing. *Mbale*) is a general term for kinship or a kin relationship in the widest sense. The founding ancestors of the group were known as *makolo* (Yao, *likolo*), and although no differentiation was made in relation to gender, in fact, with regard to the people of the Shire Highlands, *kholo* always had connotations of 'mother of the village' or the founding ancestress (cf. Bruwer 1948: 185 on the Chewa). But such an ancestress was never named, and the *makolo* are always conceived of as collective ancestors, as the dead (*Amanda*, of the graveyard) or as spirits of the ancestors (*mizimu ya makolo*). Such ancestors were associated with the wooded areas where their graves are situated (*manda*), and with the earth, being spoken of as *anthaka* (*Nthaka*, earth, soil). Through sacrifices and offerings, the spirits of the ancestors were kept quiet and content, but they made their presence known, especially in dreams and through spirit-possession rituals. Importantly, there was a reciprocal and on-going relationship between the living community in the village and the dead ancestors (*makolo*). As with the territorial spirits, libations and offerings (*nsembe*) were made to the village ancestral spirits. The offerings were made at a specially constructed shrine (*kachisi*), usually in a forested thicket (*msitu*) at the edge of the village, sometimes in the wooded graveyard (*manda*), or in wooded ravine associated with the spirits. The shrines usually had a small grass fence around them; often, however, they consisted only of one or two clay pots buried in the ground at the foot of a custard apple tree *mposa* (*Annona senegatensis*) or the *msolo* tree (*Pseudolachnostylis maprouneifolia*). All wooded areas associated with the spirits of the dead, including the

wooded graveyards within the village environs, were considered, in a sense, sacred. Within the sacred woodlands animals were not hunted or killed, nor firewood collected, nor fires made, and anyone entering these areas had to be in a ritually ‘cool’ condition.

As with the montane shrines associated with the territorial chiefs, offerings made at the village *kachisi*, normally consisted of meat (chicken), maize or millet flour, and beer (especially). From the evidence of the early missionaries, such as MacDonald or Hetherwick (1902: 93), as well as from oral traditions, it is clear that in the past almost every village in the Shire Highlands had a communal shrine or ‘prayer tree’ associated with the village headman, and the local spirits (*mizimu ya makolo*) were the focus of communal rites (For extensive discussion on the ancestral spirits see Morris 2000: 221–235.)

Always at the centre of the village there was a communal open space (*bwalo*), often in front of the headman’s house, where meetings were held, disputes discussed and resolved (through *mlandu* [see below for a full description of this procedure]), and public events relating to initiation rituals were conducted.

To what extent the village community, as a matrilineage, was a corporate group, collectively holding property rights in land, is a debatable issue. But certainly, there was a close relationship between the village community and the land under cultivation within its territory, for the boundaries of the village were often clearly demarcated, and the village headman was largely responsible for the allocation of gardens. But, in essence, however, authority within the village was shared between the village headman and the older women in the village, many of whom would be his sisters and constitute his own *mbumba*, or sorarate group.

Within the village community, focussed as it was on subsistence agriculture and matrilineal kinship, there was generally an egalitarian ethos, with an important emphasis on peace (*ntendere*) and harmony (*cholingana*) within the village. There is a Chewa saying:

‘*Chibale n’kuyenderana mowa m’kumverana*’

‘Kinship is to visit each other and to drink beer together’.

Social life within the village community was therefore characterized by a culture of the ‘commons’, with an emphasis on usufruct rights, not on the logic of the market with its competitive, individualistic and profit-making ethos (Ricoverti 2013: 29–54). And, as earlier discussed, gender relationships within the village domain were largely egalitarian

and complementary, contrasting with the patriarchy and domestic slavery associated with the territorial chiefs.

But as we noted earlier, matrilineal kinship was strongly associated in the Shire Highlands with a socio-economic context in which the women were the main cultivators, and the men were away for long periods during the dry season, engaged in fishing, iron-smelting, hunting and, with the Yao especially, trading activities. As Mandala was later to write: 'Male mobility was an integral feature of the Mang'anja matrilineal system' (1990: 22), as it was for the Yao, Nyanja and Lomwe.

To conclude this discussion of the village community it is worth noting that disputes or conflicts within the village were usually resolved by the headman through the procedure of *mlandu*. This took place, as said, in the centre of the village (*bwalo*) and was often a protracted affair sometimes taking several days, for an attempt was usually made to reach a decision or agreement that was acceptable, however reluctantly, by both sides of the dispute. It involved a procedure somewhere between consensus and confrontation. There is the question, however, as to what extent this emphasis on communal solidarity and reconciliation, and on the village as a moral community—as expressed, for example, by Levi-Mumba—was not, in fact, an idealization of tribal life in the nineteenth century (Chanock 1998: 134).

4.3 *The Sororate Group (Mbumba)*

Although the village headman (*mfumu*), if a man, was the 'owner' or guardian of his own sororate group (*mwini mbumba*), it was evident that within any village community several distinct sororate groups were also recognized. Thus, during the nineteenth century, and even at the present time, a village may be divided into several distinct hamlets, each associated with a particular matrilineage or sororate group. The group was localized as a hamlet, within the village. The *mbumba* was essentially a group of sisters and their children under the care of their elder brother or maternal uncle, or even under the care of an elderly woman within the kin group. Indeed, Mandala, writing of the Mang'anja of the Lower Shire Valley, describes the *mwini mbumba* as a senior woman (1990: 23).

Not a corporate group in an economic sense, the *mbumba* was nevertheless a fundamental social group within the village community, based specifically on mutual aid, extended cooperation and support between siblings, specifically a group of sisters. The relationship between siblings,

including siblings of the opposite sex (*ulongo*), was very close among all the matrilineal communities of the Shire Highlands. Indeed it has been suggested that the relationship between brother and sister was more lasting and implied a 'far deeper affection' than that between husband and wife (Lawson 1949: 186). In fact, among such matrilineal people marriage was fragile and divorce common.

The symbolic potency of the *mbumba* concept was, of course, utilized by the first president of Malawi, Hastings Kamuzu Banda, himself a Chewa from Kasungu. He organized all women in Malawi as his *mbumba*, and large contingents of women always attended his political rallies, dressed in gaily coloured skirts that carried his portrait. Malawi was thus conceptualized as a village community, all the womenfolk being his sisters, within Banda himself their guardian (*mwini mbumba*) (Lwanda 1993: 21; Forster 1994: 491).

4.4 *The Family-Household (Banja)*

The basic production unit of the peoples of the Shire Highlands was the *banja*, the family-household, focussed around a woman, her present husband and her children, together perhaps, with her elderly mother. The term refers to both the residential unit, the homestead enclosing the family house (*nyumba*) and the family grouping itself. Elias Mandala described the *banja* family-household as 'socially incoherent and impermanent' (1990: 50). But it had at its core the matri-centric family of a woman and her children, supported by her siblings. Husbands were not necessarily permanent members. The *banja* was a commensal unit, with a woman normally having her own kitchen and fire, as well as having complete control of her own granary (*nkhokwe*). It was customary for the in-marrying male affine to build the house in his wife's village, the woman only having rights to land within the village community. Men were also expected to clear the land if initially under *Brachystegia* woodland, and so prepare the ground for cultivation. Although women were mainly responsible for domestic work—pounding the maize, collecting firewood and water, preparing the food and cooking—as well as caring for the younger children, agricultural tasks were to a large degree shared between a woman and her husband. Even so, in this regard, there seems to have been some variation with regard to different ethnic communities. For, as we noted earlier, Yao men, deeply involved in trade, seem to have been less involved in agricultural work than the Mang'anja. Nevertheless, to an important

degree it was women who were ‘the real owners and chief activators of the soil’ as an early observer put it (Mandala 1990: 52). This was affirmed by Alpers who, referring to the Yao and Lomwe of the nineteenth century, wrote: ‘It seems indisputable that the most productive members of the agricultural economy were the women, upon whose labour the fabric of society was constructed’ (1975: 30).

The ownership of gardens within the village environs—both of upland forming plots (*munda*) and of *dimba* gardens—as well as their cultivation was thus largely under the control of women and the family-household. Although data is not available for the nineteenth century, drawing on studies undertaken in the Dowa hills in the 1930s, where shifting cultivation was still being practised, it is probable that the average land-holding (crop area) of an individual family-household (*banja*) in the Shire Highlands, was between two and three acres (0.8–1.2 ha) (Berry and Petty 1992: 69).

Social life in the Shire Highlands during the nineteenth century therefore entailed the *coexistence* of hierarchical forms of domination and relations of extreme social inequality, focussed around the chiefdom—the territorial chief; and egalitarian relations and a communal ethos centred on the village community. It is misleading, however, to view ‘hierarchy’ simply as an encompassing ‘ideology’, for this tends to deny the concrete reality of domestic slavery, and the hierarchical power relationships that were intrinsic to the ritual and coercive authority of the territorial chiefs (cf. Kandawire 1979: 40–41).

In the next chapter I specifically turn to the politics of the Shire Highlands, and, in particular, focus on the emergence of the Yao chiefdoms towards the end of the nineteenth century and their eventual demise with the foundation of the colonial state (1891–1897) under Harry Johnston.

Harry Johnston and the Yao Chiefdoms

I PROLOGUE

The Shire Highlands during the latter part of the nineteenth century has usually been described as a land of turmoil—characterized by economic insecurity, social disruption and ecological dislocation. The reasons given for this tragic state of affairs are manifold: the ravages of the expanding slave trade; the internecine conflicts between various Yao chiefdoms, or ‘warlords’ as Landeg White describes them (1987: 85), who were deeply implicated in this trade; the periodic incursions of Maseko Ngoni raiding parties into the highlands; and, related to those disruptions, the recurrent famines, particularly the one recounted by the early missionaries that occurred between 1861 and 1863. Then, finally, from the 1880s onwards, came the alienation of large tracts of land to European settlers and planters. The plight of the common people of the Shire Highlands during these decades can only be imagined. It is not my intention in this chapter to dwell on the ‘cycles of violence’ that enveloped Northern Zambezia, and the Shire Highlands in particular, in the latter part of the nineteenth century. This has been well described by John McCracken (2012: 25–37), who highlights the profound social, economic and political changes that occurred prior to the establishment of the colonial state in what became the Nyasaland protectorate. I shall concentrate instead on three topics; the rise and fall of the Yao chiefdoms, the foundation of the colonial state under Harry Johnston’s administration, focussing especially on issues relating to the various land claims by European Settlers and planters, and

finally, in conclusion, will offer a brief discussion on the founding of the Zomba Botanic Garden.

2 THE RISE AND FALL OF THE YAO CHIEFDOMS

The history of the Yaos and the ivory trade in the nineteenth century has been superbly described by Edward Alpers in his classic study *Ivory and Trade in East Central Africa* (1975). I have no wish to recapitulate this work here, but will focus instead on the Yao chiefdoms that emerged in the Shire Highlands towards the end of the nineteenth century.

During the eighteenth century in what is now Northern Mozambique, the Yao, specifically the men, became actively involved in the international trade in ivory. Hunting thus became increasingly important among the Yaos, although elephant hunting was not organized in specialist guilds or hunting fraternities—as it was among the Bisa, Makua and Lomwe. It was rather, as Alpers suggests, centred on the political structure of a chiefdom (1975: 17). A symbiotic relationship thus emerged between a local territorial chief and roving groups of professional elephant hunters. The hunting of elephants, as I have described elsewhere, was a complex and highly ritualized enterprise (Morris 1998: 117). By the end of the eighteenth century the Yao also became implicated in the slave trade, the slaves (*akapola*) procured being mainly Nyanja, Bisa, Nsenga and Mang'anga. As noted previously, in relation to such chiefdoms, some of the slaves were employed as domestic workers, some were porters for carrying ivory tusks and some were sold as slaves at the coast—referred to as *mbani*. From the trade in ivory and slaves the Yao chiefs obtained muzzle-loading guns and gunpowder, beads, various coloured cloths and coconut oil. Several of these chiefs acquired large quantities of wealth, and they used such wealth to expand their village communities into trading entrepôts or small towns (*mzinda*, Yao *mzinda*), attracting people from other local communities, as well as acquiring further slaves (K. Phiri 1975: 146). The transition from an earlier regional trade in mainly subsistence goods into one involving ivory and then slaves, has thus been viewed as a 'major watershed' in Yao history. For most of the eighteenth century the Yao came to dominate the Ivory Trade between Northern Zambezia and the coast, specifically, to Mozambique Island (Abdallah 1973: 29–31; Alpers 1975: 97).

Around the middle of the nineteenth century Yao groups began to move into what is now Malawi. The reason for this exodus from Mozambique is far from clear, but famine conditions, internal dissension, and conflict with

the Makua and Lomwe peoples may all have been important contributory factors. The ivory and slave trade was then at its zenith, and the Yao chiefs, possessing guns, quickly came to establish political and economic dominance over both the southern lakeshore and the Shire Highlands. Various chiefdoms were established throughout the two regions, the Yao chiefs often using clan affiliations in making their initial contacts with Nyanja and Mang'anja chiefs. Chief Malemia, for example, settled near the Nyanja chief Nyani, as both belonged to the Mwale clan (Stannus 1922: 232; Vaughan 1978a: 8). Thus, not only is it suggested that the Shire Highlands was politically 'decentralized' in the early nineteenth century—although the Nyanja and Mang'anja had their own chiefs such as Nyani, Kankhomba and Kamunga, many of whom were implicated in the ivory/slave trade—but that a state of 'peaceful co-existence' initially pertained between the Nyanja and Mang'anja and the Yao 'invaders' (Jhala 1980: 2–3; McCracken 2012: 27). But certainly, given that they had ready access to guns and had long been deeply involved in the ivory and slave trade, the Yao chiefs quickly asserted their political authority in the Shire Highlands as a 'trading elite'.

Along the southern lakeshore the chiefdoms that came to have prominence towards the end of the nineteenth century were those of Mponda (on the river Shire north of Mangochi), Makanjila (on the south-eastern lakeshore), Jalasi (on Mangochi Mountain) and Liwonde (on the Upper Shire) (K. Phiri 1984: 58–61). Numerous petty states or chiefdoms were also established in the Shire Highlands around the same time, and it is quite misleading to describe the region as politically 'decentralized'. The most important of these chiefdoms were the following: Malemia (*Domasi*), Mlumbe (*Zomba*), Kawinga (*Chikala*), Mpama (*Chiradzulu*), Kapeni and Somba (in the Blantyre district) and Matapwiri, Mkanda and Chikumba (in different parts of the Mulanje region). They had various tribal and clan affiliations (MacDonald 1882: 1/32; Mitchell 1956: 25). We have described above the nature of these chiefdoms. What must be stressed is that all of these chiefs were deeply implicated in the international trade in ivory and slaves—during the late nineteenth century Quelimane became the main focus of this trade as it was closer to the Shire Highlands—and therefore had access to guns, and thus had coercive power. But this was combined with an attempt to maintain territorial sovereignty, through both the accumulation of people, including chattel slaves, most of whom were women, and by drawing on the ritual powers of the ancestral spirits, including those of the earlier Mang'anja chiefs, such as Kankhomba. Yao

chiefdoms thus combined political, ritual and economic power, and it is limiting to view the chiefs simply as a 'trading elite' or 'commercial entrepreneurs'.

As Buchanan stressed, the various chiefdoms were 'independent of one another' (1885: 99), and there was often open conflict between them—long before the colonial state was established. Early writers record the long-standing feuds between Kawinga and Malemia chiefdoms in the area north of Zomba, and between Chikumba and Mkanda in the Mulanje district. There was equal antagonism between Mponda and Makanjila for control of the ivory and slave trade in the region of the southern lakeshore (MacDonald 1882: 2/236; Stannus 1922: 233; Mitchell 1956: 30; White 1987: 79).

These conflicts were not only over the control of the lucrative ivory and slave trade but also over territorial sovereignty, particularly in relation to the control of people, including slaves. The Yao chiefs often complained that rival chiefdoms were taking away 'their' people. There is also a certain paradox for while the *mzinda* of the chiefs often led to a concentration of people, many seeking safety and protection therein, the ravages of the slave trade itself, and the incursions of the Ngoni, led to the depopulation of other areas of the Shire Highlands, and, as earlier noted, many Yao, Nyanja and Mang'anja took refuge in the higher slopes of the mountains of the region.

It is important to recognize, of course, that the Yao chiefdoms, like most political chiefdoms and states, were multi-ethnic, and that not only Nyanja and Mang'anja but also many Yao were taken into slavery. There is thus a need to make a distinction between the Yao chiefs, along with their various retainers, who had been deeply influenced by the culture of the Coastal Arabs, many embracing Islam, and the Yao commoners. These commoners, together with people of other ethnic groups, were their political subjects.

Given the ravages of the slave trade, well described by Livingstone and many other early missionaries, it is not surprising that the Shire Highlands during the latter part of the nineteenth century was depicted as a place of widespread chaos, destruction and fear. As David Williams described the impact of the slave trade: 'Vast areas were devastated and societies terrorized, and most people found themselves in a situation worse than they had been when the perennial threat of starvation and disease ... had put their lives at continual risk' (1978: 31). One early historian described the

situation in the Shire Highlands in the 1860s as one of ‘war, famine and pestilence’ (Anderson-Morshead 1897: 30).

Although the Shire Highlands during the nineteenth century may have been something of a ‘conflict zone’ some scholars have suggested that it is important not to exaggerate the political turmoil and social disruption of the period (McCracken 1968: 102). It is, however, quite misleading to interpret this political scenario as one involving inter-tribal warfare, that is as a ‘war’ between the Yao and Mang’anja (Anderson-Morshead 1897: 31; Jhala 1980: 3). For neither of these ethnic communities, nor the clans, were organized as political systems: the political conflicts of the nineteenth century centred around conflicts between the various chiefdoms, the ‘rival warlords’, as they vied with each other for the control of the ivory and slave trade and for territorial sovereignty (White 1987: 79).

The power of the Yao chiefdoms, like that of the early Maravi ‘states’ was intrinsically bound-up with the hunting of the elephant and the ivory trade—augmented during the nineteenth century by the expansion of the slave trade. But the power of the various chiefdoms came to an abrupt end in the 1890s with the establishment of the colonial state under Harry Johnston.

Much has been written on the early history of the Nyasaland protectorate, and the establishment of colonial rule during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Roland Oliver graphically described the lineaments of this decade by the apt phrase: ‘King Johnston over the Zambezi’ (1957: 197–244). For Harry Johnston played a key role in establishing British political sovereignty over much of Northern Zambezia, including what became known as the Nyasaland protectorate. Appointed the British Consul to Mozambique in November 1888, during the next two years, well supported by John Buchanan and Alfred Sharpe, Johnston secured political treaties with many chiefs throughout the region. As noted previously, Buchanan in particular, through these treaties, declared the Lower Shire Valley and the Shire Highlands—‘The Makalolo, Yao and Machinga countries’—a British protectorate (Baker 1970: 14–15). These treaties were made partly to check the slave trade, which had been highlighted by Livingstone and the ill-fated universities mission to Central Africa, and partly to forestall Portuguese claims to the Shire Highlands. The Shire Highlands was deemed to come under the British sphere of influence, given that the Church of Scotland mission had been established in Blantyre (in 1876), that the African Lakes Company, established in 1878, had already become deeply involved in the ivory trade—as the most profitable export

(MacMillan 1975: 73)—and the fact that several planters, including, of course, Buchanan, had established coffee and tobacco plantations in the Zomba, Blantyre and Mulanje districts.

In February 1891 Johnston was formally appointed to be Her Majesty's Commissioner and Consul General of those territories under the British sphere of influence north of the Zambezi. His formal instructions on establishing a protectorate over the chiefs of the region, which Johnston named 'British Central Africa', were as follows: 'To advise those Chiefs on their external relations with each other and with foreigners, not interfering unduly with their internal administration; to secure peace and order; and by every legitimate means in your power, to check the slave trade' (Hanna 1956: 183).

Johnston was thus entrusted to the setting-up of a complete government administration and to bringing law and order to the country. But as Desmond Phiri remarked, the 'job description' implied some kind of autonomy for individual chiefs, and that, in their 'tribal affairs', they were to be left alone (Baker 1970: 16; D. Phiri 2004: 213).

Johnston's administration was subsidized financially by Cecil Rhodes and the British South Africa Company, the Chartered Company who were clearly intent in gaining control of the whole of the Northern Zambezi region, especially with regard to mineral rights. The Blantyre missionaries, however, warmly supported and rejoiced in the formal assumption of British suzerainty over the Shire Highlands (Hanna 1956: 145).

Harry Johnston was an extraordinary man. More than anyone else he was responsible for the creation of the Nyasaland protectorate, and, in a sense, he laid the institutional foundations of the modern state of Malawi. A tablet in Poling Church, near Arundel, where Johnston is buried, reads as follows: 'In memory of Sir Harry Johnston G.C.M.G., K.C.B., D.Sc., Administrator, Soldier, Explorer, Naturalist, Author and Painter 1858–1927'.

Johnston was multi-talented and something of a 'walking encyclopaedia'. He was a keen naturalist and one of the founder members (in 1903) of the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire, a fine painter who illustrated all of his own books, and a very able administrator. A keen linguist, he spoke several languages fluently, and it was his knowledge of Portuguese that led initially to his appointment as the British Consul to Mozambique. Even in his early twenties he had travelled widely throughout Africa and had already conversed at length with such luminaries of Empire as Herbert Kitchener (of Khartoum), Henry Morton

Stanley (who famously discovered Livingstone) and John Kirk, who was a member of Livingstone's Zambezi expedition and who had become Consul General at Zanzibar. When he was appointed Commissioner of British Central Africa Johnston was only 33 years of age.

Yet, talented though he was, Johnston hardly struck anyone as a charismatic figure. Short in stature, dapper and effete—he seems to have been almost terrified of cockroaches!—rather fastidious—he always dressed impeccably for dinner, even when camping in the bush—Johnston also had a high-pitched squeaky voice. But he had unbounded physical and mental energy, a creative intelligence and was absolutely brimming with self-confidence. As his biographer noted, by nature an ascetic, Johnston 'loved the panoply of power' with which he had been bestowed (Oliver 1957: 257). As chief Mponda asked the missionary, Archdeacon William P. Johnson: 'Who is this little man that comes and talks with authority?' (1924: 202).

In the early years of his administration Harry Johnston went around in a straw hat adorned with white, yellow and black ribbons. These colours, he felt, symbolized the unity and cooperation of the three races, European, Asian and African, upon which the political regime was to be built (Johnston 1923: 262; Oliver 1957: 197). This seems laudable until one realises the kind of relationships that Johnston actually envisaged, given his imperial ambitions. As he put it in a letter to Percy Anderson at the Foreign Office (October 1893): Africa 'must be ruled by whites, developed by Indians and worked by blacks' (Hanna 1956: 227).

Though not a racist—his biographer highlights Johnston's anti-racialist propaganda (Oliver 1957: 351)—Johnston was certainly a cultural imperialist. Ironically, he stressed the importance of anthropology as the 'best corrective' of intolerance, cruelty, sentimentality and racial arrogance (1912: 32), and described himself as an 'anthropologist'. But, nevertheless, he seems to have expressed a very low opinion of the intellect and capabilities of African people. In his encyclopaedic study *British Central Africa* (1897)—which despite the frequent outbursts of cultural arrogance is a truly magisterial work—Johnston wrote the following telling note: 'The fact is that it takes at least three generations before any clear appreciation of the principles of morality, truth, gratitude and honour can penetrate the intellect and curb the instincts of the negro' (1897: 202).

That African peoples of the Shire Highlands had their own forms of social life and their own codes of morality—independent of European 'civilization'—seems to have been lost on Johnston. This was written, of

course, notwithstanding the fact that Mungo Chisuse was producing the missionary magazine *Life and Work in British Central Africa*; that many of the African deacons of the Blantyre Mission, like Stephen Kundecha, Joseph Bismarck and John Gray Kufa, were then responsible for mission outposts and churches; and that Johnston's own work included an essay by Harry Kambwiri Matecheta on the useful trees of the protectorate (1897: 227–232). Interestingly this essay has notes by the young Matcheta on the ecology and uses of around 90 different trees. Andrew Ross has written perceptively on the contrasting attitudes towards African peoples of Johnston, and the two key figures in the development of the Blantyre Mission in the 1890s, namely Alexander Hetherwick and David Clement Scott (Ross 1966, 1975). Indeed in a perceptive essay on Johnston's 'evolutionism' and his social Darwinian credo, Mapuranga (1977) has emphasized Johnston's negative attitude towards African people, and the complex, contradictory and rather crude views on the subject of race that he often expressed.

Johnston established the headquarters of his administration at Zomba, some 50 miles north of the Blantyre Mission, enlarging the residency that had been built by the Buchanan brothers. Nearby, Alexander Whyte created a botanic garden. Johnston wrote lyrically about Zomba as the location of his government. 'You could not have a lovelier place to live in; magnificent scenery, fertile soil, cool climate, a mountain torrent tumbling through the grounds, hanging forests, mighty grey crags' (Oliver 1957: 202).

Significantly in his design for the first postage stamps (and coat of arms) for 'British Central Africa' Johnston depicted two African labourers with pick and shovel, the motto 'light in darkness' and a coffee tree (Johnston 1923: 308; Oliver 1957: 288). Unfortunately, as we shall explore below, the coffee industry collapsed at the end of the nineteenth century, and cotton, tobacco and tea became the mainstays of the plantation economy.

It did not take Johnston long to establish 'law and order' over British Central Africa, and the Shire Highlands in particular. Between 1891 and 1895, to establish British sovereignty over the region, Johnston conducted 'one little war after another'—as Hanna succinctly described his campaign. Fundamentally a military campaign, with two gun boats on Lake Malawi and supported by around 200 Sikh soldiers, Johnston's method in relation to the Yao chiefs has been described as one that was simple: 'treaty or compulsion, your money or your life' (Stokes 1966: 371). With regard to the southern lakeshore and the Shire Highlands, Johnston's military

campaign was essentially concerned with the subjugation of any Yao chief who resisted the hegemony of the embryonic colonial state. Johnston's strategy has been well described as 'aggressive imperialism'. It was centrally concerned with reducing the powers of the Yao chiefs. Although Johnston thought of himself as 'finishing' Livingstone's work in putting an end to the 'slave trade' (1923: 331), many scholars have suggested that this was a 'mere excuse' for plunder and bullying, and that Johnston had 'come to rule' (D. Phiri 2004: 213–214).

It is beyond the scope of the present study to discuss Johnston's military campaigns which have been critically described elsewhere (Hanna 1956: 183–201; Oliver 1957: 197–244; Stokes 1966). But a brief note may be made of Johnston's relationship to four Yao chiefs in the Shire Highlands who resisted the colonial state—namely, Chikumbu, Kawinga, Matapwiri and Mkanda.

In a paper written in 1891 on the slave trade, Johnston wrote the following on chief Chikumbu 'Tshikumbu, who after being for ten years a roving bandit living on the plunder of the missionary caravans between Blantyre and the Upper Shire has at last settled down on Mount Mulanje to a steady career of slave-trading' (Mitchell 1956: 29).

What particularly troubled Johnston was that having settled on the Southern Slopes of Mulanje Mountain, in the country of the Nyanja chief Chipoka, Chikumbu had begun to harass the few British coffee planters who had also settled in the same district. Although the planters had apparently paid 'relatively large sums' to chief Chikumbu for the land, he continued to exact further payments from them (Johnston 1897: 99).

Chikumbu was the first Yao chief that Johnston sought to subdue. He did so with a force of Sikh soldiers under Captain Cecil Maguire, who later in the same year (1891) was killed while attempting to subjugate chief Makanjila on the Eastern shores of Lake Malawi. Johnston thought of Chikumbu as one of a list of Yao chiefs that would need to be induced or compelled to give up the slave trade before the protectorate could become a reality. But the missionaries associated with the Blantyre Mission were highly critical of Johnston's handling of the dispute between Chikumbu and the Mulanje planters, especially his tendency to resort to punitive and military action without any attempt to compromise. The Reverend Robert Cleland of the Mulanje mission—who was the first European to climb Mulanje Mountain in December 1888—had already established close relations with Chikumbu, and had won his respect and friendship. In contrast to Johnston, the Blantyre missionaries, especially David Clement Scott,

felt that African societies had something of value that could be harnessed, and were ‘constitutional’ people who generally settled disputes through a *mlandu*, according to specific traditions (Ross 1966: 336). Although Johnston, compared with most of his European contemporaries, was far more sympathetic towards African culture, he never attempted to engage through *mlandu* with the Yao chiefs. Given their associations with the slave trade Johnston simply dismissed them as ‘inveterate slavers’ who ‘robbed, raided and carried into captivity’ many unfortunate people in order to ‘satisfy the greed and lust of the Yao race’—the Yao chiefs in particular (Mitchell 1956: 29).

More sympathetic towards the Yaos, Scott felt that relations with chief Chikumbu could ‘without much difficulty have been settled by *mlandu*’ (Life and Work: August 1891, Ross 1966: 336–342).

Described by Johnston as one of the most powerful of the Yao chiefs, chief Kawinga lived on Chikala Mountain to the north-west of Lake Chilwa. He thus commanded ‘a great slave route to the coast’ (Mitchell 1956: 29). According to Buchanan, in contrast to chief Malemia at Domasi, Kawinga was never well-disposed towards the British, and there was often conflict between the two Yao chiefs (1885: 101). In June 1891, Buchanan visited Kawinga in his mountain stronghold. He obtained from the chief his assent to a treaty that would allow British nationals to travel freely through the country, and that he and his subordinates would refrain from engaging in the slave trade. As Kawinga appears to have resumed his slave-trading activities, a few months later Johnston deemed it necessary to despatch a small expeditionary force led by Captain Maguire against Kawinga. Buchanan accompanied the expedition. The attack on chief Kawinga’s *mzinda* was only partially successful, and several of the protectorate troops were killed. But Kawinga was unwilling to prolong the conflict and sued for peace. In terms of a new treaty, Kawinga agreed to accept the sovereignty of the Queen, to pay taxes to the protectorate government, to obtain licences for the guns they possessed and to renounce the slave trade (Johnston 1897: 103; Hanna 1956: 189).

Chief Kawinga found it difficult, however, to give up his involvement with the lucrative slave trade, particularly as it enabled him to procure guns and calico. In 1895, therefore, apparently in alliance with the Yao chiefs Zarafi and Matapwiri, Kawinga made an attempt to ‘drive the white people out of the Shire Highlands’ (D. Phiri 2004: 217). He began to make raids on the villages of the Yao chief, Malemia, who had long been on friendly terms with Buchanan and the Scottish missionaries, and on

the unarmed mission station at Domasi. A substation of Blantyre Mission, Domasi Mission was in the territory of chief Malemia. But the combined forces of Sikh soldiers from the protectorate garrison, Tonga labourers under the employ of two planters Hynde and Stark, who had an estate at Songani and who joined the affray, and men loyal to chief Malemia, together completely defeated Kawinga's insurrection. The following year, Kawinga appears to have helped Johnston in his campaign against chief Zarafi (Johnston 1897: 129–132).

A government fort was later established on the slopes of Chikala Mountain to forestall the eastward movement of slaves.

Chief Matapwiri is the only Yao chief from the Shire Highlands who is mentioned in Johnston's autobiography (1923: 321). Johnston considered him a 'very powerful' chief, who had created a great deal of trouble for the protectorate by sending out raiding parties from time to time to rob carriers and carry away slaves. Matapwiri's main stronghold was on the south-east side of Mulanje Mountain, and much of his territory lay in Mozambique. He had already alienated the Portuguese by kidnapping and transporting as slaves some of the people belonging to a Jesuit Catholic Mission across the border. In 1893 Johnston complained that Matapwiri regularly—about once a month—sent out armed raiding parties who took slaves and harassed caravans—whether of the Blantyre Mission, the Buchanan brothers or the administration. In September 1895, Johnston despatched a military expedition under Major Edwards against Matapwiri (and his young relative Nthiramanja), and the Yao chief was thoroughly routed and forced to surrender unconditionally. Johnston noted that most of Matapwiri's subjects were Aलो (Lomwe) people. It was, however, a campaign characterized by extensive looting, and a great deal of brutality, many women and children being killed in the affray (Johnston 1897: 133–134; Hanna 1956: 199; McCracken 2012: 61).

The territory of chief Mkanda lay close to Chiradzula Mountain, extending towards Mulanje. MacDonald described him as a chief who 'dealt largely in slaves' and was hostile towards the Blantyre Mission. At the time of MacDonald's visit he was anticipating an attack from chief Chikumbu, a rival chief (1882: 2/235–236). As Mkanda had attacked the Church of Scotland Mission in Mulanje, and according to Johnston was continually kidnapping women for the slave trade, in 1895 Johnston sent a detachment of a hundred Sikhs, under Major Edwards, 'to bring Mkanda to his senses'—as Johnston with some jubilation put it (1897: 120). This finally put an end to Yao hegemony in the Mulanje District.

To curb the slave trade between the Shire Highlands and Quelimane, the Johnston administration built two forts: Fort Anderson, named after Johnston's father-in-law, on the south-western side of Mulanje Mountain, and Fort Lister, between Mulanje and Michesi Mountains.

By 1897 the power of the Yao chiefdoms had been thoroughly broken. All the chiefs came to accept in varying degrees the absolute sovereignty of the British Colonial state. This implied taking no further part in the slave trade, giving British subjects freedom of movement in their domains, having no dealings with any other European state and encouraging their people (subjects) to pay taxes and to take out gun licences. In return they were to receive a government subsidy. Eventually, during the colonial period, they became incorporated into the colonial administration as native authorities.

The question whether the majority of the peoples of the Shire Highlands welcomed the colonial administration as a harbinger of peace and security—as distinct from the Yao chiefs who fought in defence of their vested interests in the ivory and slave trade, which was the source of their power—is, to say the least, a debatable issue (Hanna 1956: 228).

3 JOHNSTON'S ADMINISTRATION

The history of Johnston's administration of British Central Africa 1891–1897, has been well documented by Colin Baker (1970). Besides establishing British sovereignty over the territory by means of a series of rather primitive military campaigns, and creating a viable administrative structure in terms of a modern state, Johnston devoted his energies to two other primary tasks. One was to make a thorough survey of the Shire Highlands (in particular) and to sort out and adjudicate the various 'land-claims' made by European settlers. The other was to construct a viable road system for the protectorate, one capable of carrying wheeled traffic. I discuss each of these tasks in turn.

With the establishment of the Blantyre Mission in 1876, and especially during the 1880s, not only was the Shire Highlands invaded by many travellers and big game hunters—such as Alfred Sharpe—but by numerous European settlers who acquired large tracts of land by various means. Only two days after his arrival at Chiromo in July 1891, Johnston therefore issued a circular declaring that no further purchases of land from local chiefs would be recognized unless they had received his sanction (Hanna 1956: 229). He therefore, aided by Alfred Sharpe (who was also a

trained lawyer) and the surveyor called Bertram Sclater, began to work out a feasible land policy for the protectorate, as well as examining the various 'land claims' that had been made by European settlers—whether planters, traders or missionaries—in the Shire Highlands. This was no easy task as can be judged from the following extract from a letter Johnston sent to Lord Rosebery (October 1892): 'There are claimants whose demands it would be impossible for me to satisfy to the full unless I handed over to them thirty, forty or fifty square miles of territory, with all the native inhabitants as their serfs, with exclusive mining rights, road-making rights, and in some cases a right to exclude all other Europeans from the land' (FO 84/2197; Oliver 1957: 220).

For a few pounds' worth of trade goods, Johnston wrote, such as flintlock guns, gunpowder and several yards of cloth, a chief had often been induced to give vast areas of land to some European pioneer or speculative planter. For example, the African Lakes Company claimed around 140,000 acres (around 225 square miles, 583 square km) of prime land in the Mulanje district, together with an agreement claiming all mineral rights—including a clause demanding a fortnights unpaid labour each year from every able-bodied male resident on the estate—in return for the Company's protection. All this was obtained via a gift to the local chief consisting of two muzzle-loading guns and several yards of calico—the total value of which according to Johnston, being around £2 13s. The Blantyre Mission also laid claim to the whole of the upper plateau of Mulanje Mountain because they declared that 'one of the missionaries (Robert Cleland) was the first white man to ascend the mountain'. Neither of these land claims was sanctioned by Johnston (Hanna 1956: 230).

With respect specifically to the Shire Highlands, Johnston's method of land settlement entailed a visit to the location of each claim, an interrogation of the chief who had made the 'sale' to ascertain whether he understood what he was doing and that he had the requisite authority to make the transaction, and, finally, whether the 'price' paid was a reasonable one (Oliver 1957: 221; Ross 1975: 89).

After some bargaining and negotiation between the commissioner and the claimant, if the claim was considered sound, then Johnston offered security of life in the form of an official 'Certificate of Claim'. A realistic valuation of the land was taken to be between a penny and threepence an acre, a yard of calico being valued at that time at around threepence or fourpence. Johnston has been credited with being more humane and just than most European administrators of the nineteenth century, and

although he was very keen to encourage European planters and traders and the plantation economy, he was always cognizant of the rights of African people. As he wrote: ‘It must be borne in mind that the negro is a man, with a man’s rights; above all, that he was the owner of the country before we came, and deserves, nay, is entitled to, a share in the land, commensurate with his needs’ (1897: 183).

He therefore declared that the main objects of his scrutiny into the land claims were: ‘Firstly, to protect the rights of the natives, to see that their villages and plantations are not disturbed, and that sufficient space is left for their expansion; secondly, to discourage land speculation; and, thirdly, to secure the rights of the crown in such a way that the crown shall profit by the development of the country’ (Hanna 1956: 231; Pachai 1978: 35). All Certificates of Claim, therefore, had a proviso regarding mineral rights, and stipulated that the crown (government) could reclaim any land needed for the development of roads, railways and other public utilities (Oliver 1957: 221).

One of the features in most of the certificates was a clause protecting the rights of Africans then residing on the estates. This included a non-disturbance clause which read as follows: ‘That no native village or plantation existing at the time of this Certificate on the estate shall be disturbed or removed without the consent in writing of Her Majesty’s Commissioner ... No natives shall make other and new villages or plantations on the said estate without the prior consent of the proprietor’ (Pachai 1978: 41).

Given that the claimants had been given the land as ‘freehold’, that is as exclusive private property, the history of land tenure in Nyasaland, and that of the private estates in particular (which we explore in the next chapter), is a ‘telling commentary’ (as Pachai puts it) on the weakness of this ‘non-disturbance’ clause. For although Johnston’s intentions were admirable, it hardly granted any real practical safeguards to the African people living on these private estates. In fact, it would have been difficult to define the locations and boundaries of the ‘plantations’—the cultivated areas—given the widespread practice of shifting cultivation in the nineteenth century (Pachai 1978: 41).

Drawing on Bridglal Pachai’s seminal work, it appears that around 37 ‘Certificates of Claim’ were issued by Johnston with respect to the Shire Highlands (see Table 4.1).

The total area of land alienated as freehold to European settlers in 1894 amounted to around 905,758 acres (1458 square miles, 3776 square km).

Table 4.1 Certificates of Claim issued for the Shire Highlands

<i>Owner</i>	<i>Estate</i>	<i>Acreage</i>	
E. C. Sharrer	Kapimbi	68,582	363,044
	Chelombo	112,586	
	Chulo	153,298	
	Kubula	28,578	
Harry E. Pettitt	Mudi	70	81,378
	Naperi	308	
	Naazi	81,000	
Buchanan Brothers	Michiru	3065	171,759
	Lunzu	10,240	
	Mlungusi	42,476	
	Malosa	7760	
	Chiradzulu	48,789	
	Namaluzi/Zoa	59,429	
Church of Scotland Mission	Blantyre	1551	3553
	Mbulumbuzi	409	
	Sakata	483	
	Domasi	610	
	Mulanje	500	
African Lakes Company	Mandala	6940	44,623
	Kumpata	23,040	
	Midima	13,803	
	Namonde	840	
Thomas Hastings Kasimir Steblecki	Mombezi	2944	13,266
	Makungwa	2701	
	Ntonda	965	
	Cholo	9600	
James Lindsey K. B. Bradshaw Kumtaja Jane Moir James Rankin Horace Waller Johnathan Duncan	Limbe	4740	
	Kada	2000	
	Chilingani	37,947	
	Mount Soche	2380	
	Ntichiti	4423	
	Chiradzulu	5441	
	Upper Mudi	740	
Alexander L. Bruce	Likulezi	5200	159,890
	Magomero	154,690	
A. C. Simpson	Gomba	5130	7630
	Thuchila	2500	
	Total	905,758 acres (1458 square miles)	
	Shire Highlands	2800 square miles = 52 % of land area alienated	

This constituted around 52 % of the total land area of the Shire Highlands (some 2800 square miles, 7252 square km). With respect to the protectorate as a whole, some 15 % of the total land area was alienated as freehold land.

It is significant that only one ‘Certificate of Claim’ was given to an African, some 37,000 acres (around 59 square miles, 153 square km) of land West of Blantyre to an enterprising elephant hunter and entrepreneur who was known as Kumtaja. Owner of a two-storey brickhouse in Blantyre, Kumtaja had followed Buchanan and had gone into coffee planting in a ‘big way’, soon having around 1000 acres under coffee. Experiencing financial difficulties, however, Kumtaja—or chief Kumtaja as he was often described—sold most of his land to various European planters and missionaries. The evangelist Joseph Booth brought some 26,537 acres (around 42 square miles, 109 square km) from Kumtaja at the cost of around £40 (1750 yards of calico), and in 1893 established the Zambezi Industrial Mission on land at Mitsidi (Pachai 1978: 32; Langworthy 1996: 35).

All the other land claims in the Shire Highlands involved European settlers—whether newly arrived planters, the African Lakes Company or the Blantyre Mission. Some of these claims to land holdings entailed huge tracts of land. The influential planter-trader Eugene Sharrer, for example, owned four estates stretching over several districts. His total land holdings amounted to some 363,000 acres (around 580 square miles, 1502 square km). John Buchanan, as noted earlier, acquired over 170,000 acres (around 276 square miles, 715 square km), while the Magomero estate belonging to Alexander L. Bruce (which as we shall explore below, featured prominently in the Chilembwe rising of 1915) consisted of 154,000 acres (around 250 square miles, 647 square km). All this represented a kind of ‘land-grabbing’ on a grand scale, as Johnston himself inadvertently admitted when he wrote: ‘The proclamation of the British Protectorate had been followed by a wholesale grabbing of land, or, where it is not fair to describe the acquisition of land as “grabbing”, at any rate huge tracts had been bought for a disproportionate amount from the Natives’ (1897: 107).

Johnston’s attempt to resolve the issue of the European ‘land claims’ was complex and highly problematic. For in giving the European planters, traders and missionaries considerable grants in what amounted to ‘freehold land’ (as private property) Johnston tacitly assumed that the chiefs had a right to exercise a prerogative unknown in native customary law—that of alienating land in perpetuity’ (Hanna 1956: 233). For, as

many scholars have suggested, African chiefs—whether territorial chiefs or village headmen—were not in fact ‘owners’ of the land—at least, not in the Western (capitalist) understanding of the term as implying exclusive ownership of land as private property. The chiefs were only the guardians or custodians of the land, and, as we explored earlier, people in the Shire Highlands only had usufruct rights to land and woodland resources. Land was held in ‘common’ (Ricoverti 2013: 29–54).

This was later acknowledged by a government report into Nyasaland tenure (1920) which noted that with respect to African Societies: ‘There is no absolute ownership of land by the individual, but this is regarded as belonging to the community and a portion is allotted to the individual for his personal use by the head of the particular community to which he belongs’ (Hanna 1956: 233).

When chiefs in the Shire Highlands accepted guns and calico from European Settlers, they clearly felt that they were giving them in exchange for usufruct rights to the land, not absolute ownership of it. In fact, it is doubtful if they had any conception of ‘selling’ land as a commodity. As Alexander Hetherwick cogently expressed it: ‘Apart from the question as to whether the chief was entitled to dispose in this way with any part of his territory, which he undoubtedly held only on behalf of his people, there is no doubt that he (the chief) did not realise or understand what he was doing—in many cases believing that he was granting only leave to plant not making over a freehold of the estate in perpetuity’ (1931: 85).

On the other hand, European settlers, whether traders, missionaries or planters, steeped in Western notions of landed property, thought that in making the payments they were actually ‘buying’ the land from the chiefs as their own exclusive private property. Hence the misunderstandings between chief Chikumba and the European planters in the Mulanje district that erupted around 1891. The planters thought they had bought the land from the chief in 1890, and were therefore bitterly resentful when the chief demanded further payments in the following year. But, as we have noted, Johnston tended to side with the planters and dismissed Chikumbu as a ‘roving bandit’ (Ross 1975: 89).

The issue of ‘land claims’ and its problematic nature was succinctly expressed by Robert Boeder: ‘Land sales in the early days were based on mutual misunderstanding between African chiefs and Europeans: the Europeans thinking chiefs had absolute rights of land ownership, the chiefs thinking Europeans would act like Africans in their land dealings, and their relationship with people on the land’ (1984: 19).

The tendency of some Malawian scholars to dismiss and ridicule the chiefs of the nineteenth century for being ignorant, gullible and naïve (or even being drunk when making the land transaction!) is quite misplaced. It shows a lack of historical sensibility. For in the nineteenth century land was perceived as plentiful. In terms of economic values then expressed, one could buy a slave for a mere 40 yards of calico, in monetary terms, for only 17 shillings. And, most important, the chiefs, who were no buffoons, clearly felt that they were granting to the Europeans only usufruct rights to land—not selling the land as exclusive private property. As said, it is doubtful if they understood such a conception. The chiefs would probably have agreed with the French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon that landed property was a form of theft. Landeg White has stressed two important factors in understanding the chief's motivations in these land transactions. One is the fact that much of the Shire Highlands in the 1880s was covered in *Brachystegia* woodland, and thus most of the land involved was unpopulated and largely uncultivated. The other was that the chiefs, whether Mang'anja or Yao, felt that through the land transactions they were making political allies in their conflicts not only with regard to the Maseko Ngoni raiding parties, but in relation to 'rival warlords'—other Yao chiefs especially (White 1987: 79). It is also of interest that Frank Ingles, who owned a haulage business in Mulanje, long ago suggested to me (August 1978), that many of the early planters, like his own grandfather James Ingles, often cemented land transactions by marrying a daughter of the local chief.

Johnston's administration seems to have provoked the ire of both the planting community and the Blantyre Missionaries. Johnston was clearly pro-settler, writing that without the enterprise and capital of European planters and traders, British Central Africa would be of 'no value' and that African people of the protectorate would 'relapse' into barbarism (1897: 183). This certainly indicates his very negative attitude towards African people, noted above, and his marked cultural arrogance.

Yet, Johnston could also be quite critical of European planters, suggesting that they viewed African people simply as chattel 'who must be compelled to work for them whenever they require it' (FO 2/106; Ross 1975: 92). Not surprisingly, many in the planting community resented Johnston, considering him an 'irresponsible autocrat' and his administration 'oppressive'. They clearly felt that their own interests would be better served if they came under the rule of the chartered company—Rhodes' British South African company, a private, land-grabbing corporation who

simply viewed Africans as landless proletarians (*Central African Planter*: March 1896).

The planters, however, were particularly supportive of the introduction of the hut tax—originally of six shillings, but later reduced to three shillings—the effect of which would be to force local people to engage in wage labour or in market transactions. And Johnston, a confirmed statist, was explicit that in order to receive protection from the colonial state, African people in the Shire Highlands would have to pay hut-tax (*msonkho*). As Hanna expressed it: ‘If the natives were to receive protection from the administration, it seemed to Johnston only fair that they should render in return some contribution to its support’ (1956: 241).

The administration thus allowed the European landowners to pay their tenants hut tax, for they could then claim a month’s work from the tenant, a claim that could be enforced by the government and its agencies (Ross 1975: 93).

Recognizing that Johnston had in fact legalized the ‘land claims’ as freehold land, that is as private property, the missionaries, on the other hand, feared that the estate tenants would be reduced to being serfs on their own land—or what was once their land (*Life and Work*: September 1894; Ross 1975: 93).

They sensed that the European planters would come to regard the African residents on their private estates simply as a pool of labour and that they would be coerced, gently or otherwise, into working for the planters. The missionaries were already receiving, as early as 1892, complaints from Africans indicating that European estate owners were destroying their crops, or even their grain-stores, if they did not work as and when required by the European planters. The latter, as owners of the estate, were insistent that rent should be paid in the form of labour. Under capitalism, of course, anyone using land or property belonging to the land-owner is obliged to pay rent. For the planters this rent should be paid in labour. The situation was made worse by the fact that the peak period of demand for labour by the European planters—the early rains—coincided with the time when the Africans themselves were deeply involved in their own subsistence cultivations. The ‘non-disturbance’ clause of the ‘Certificates of Claim’ proved to be, in practice, totally ineffective. David Clement Scott was firmly of the opinion that if European planters took control of the land they would in essence ‘practically enslave the native population’ (*Life and Work*: December 1894; Ross 1966: 344, 1975: 92–94). Ironically, Scott praised the business acumen and agricultural skills of the Buchanan

brothers and Eugene Sharrer (Stuart-Mogg 2004: 32), even though they were the biggest land owners in the Shire Highlands, owning, between them, some 860 square miles (around 2227 square km) of land.

As I shall explore in Chap. 5, this strategy on the part of the European planters, of demanding rent in the form of labour, became systematized as the *thangata* system. It was a system bitterly resented and hardly understood by the African peoples of the Shire Highlands.

When Johnston wrote that one of the land settlements was ‘to completely free the natives from any dependency on the White settler, by restoring to them the inalienable occupancy of their villages and plantations’ (1897: 113)—this was wishful thinking, to say the least! In truth, and in practice, this was very far from what actually happened in the coming decades when colonial rule was firmly established. Bridglal Pachai opines that Johnston may have done better to have granted the European settlers only conditional ‘leasehold’ rather than unfettered ‘freehold’ tenure (1978: 47). But this is not in the nature of capitalist development which, ever since the enclosures, has been intrinsically linked to the notion of private property in land.

The Blantyre missionaries, according to Alfred Sharpe, formed a kind of ‘opposition party’ against Johnston’s administration (F/O 2/67; Ross 1975: 86). There was also, it appears, a good deal of antipathy between David Clement Scott (1853–1907), the mystical Christian missionary, and Harry Johnston, a secularist and evolutionary naturalist. The antipathy was amplified by the fact that the Blantyre missionaries tended to look upon Johnston as simply the paid ‘agent’ of Cecil Rhodes and his chartered company. Yet Scott and Johnston had a great deal in common. Both were ‘Renaissance men’ and enthusiastic linguists—Scott’s *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of the Mang’anja Language*, first published in 1892, is a *tour de force*—and both were typical nineteenth-century imperialists intent on making British Central Africa a part of the British Empire (Ross 1975; Stuart-Mogg 2004). Both were also visionaries. Scott’s vision was the building of the Blantyre Church. A project that employed around 2000 workers between 1888 and 1891, it has long been recognized as a remarkable achievement. In contrast, Johnston’s vision was to be the architect of a modern colonial-state.

The outcome of Johnston’s land policy was, of course, the division of the country, including the Shire Highlands, into three distinctive forms of land tenure. These were: freehold land, largely taken up by private estates, mostly in the Shire Highlands; crown or public land, about 10 % of the

total land surface, which included land used for public buildings and, later, forest reserves and wildlife sanctuaries; and finally, African trust land, later described as land under 'customary law'. This land, comprising around 87 % of the country, was land controlled and administered by the colonial state, and held as crown land in trust for the use and benefit of the African people. Later grants of leasehold were given to individuals with regard to both public and African trust land, and, with leases up to 99 years they virtually came to be regarded as private land (H. Lamport-Stokes 1970: 76; Chipeta 1971: 25; Pachai 1978: 174; Kandawire 1979: 65–66).

But with regard to the Shire Highlands, it may be recalled, the land was roughly equally divided between trust land and private land owned by Europeans, on which Africans living on the land had the status of tenants.

The other task that Johnston set for his administration, one that was to have important environmental and economic consequences, was the construction of a viable road system, specifically in relation to the Shire Highlands. To undertake this project Johnston appointed Bertram Sclater, son of his close friend Philip Sclater, Secretary of the Zoological Society of London. Sclater spent only two years in British Central Africa, 1891–1893, as the surveyor in charge of the road-building project. He sadly died of the dreaded blackwater fever only four years later in a Zanzibar hospital (Baker 1970: 24). It is worth noting that Johnston himself survived several bouts of blackwater fever during his time in the protectorate.

In the nineteenth century the Shire Highlands was a land of footpaths—as it still is in rural areas. The whole landscape was covered with a myriad of footpaths, linking village communities, meandering through cultivations, traversing the woodland environment, the main footpaths in the hilly areas being along the ridges. Unlike in Britain and the United States where under private property laws people have no access to huge swathes of the countryside—I was threatened at gunpoint from entering one tract of land near Colorado Springs!—people in the Shire Highlands walked freely over the landscape, usually along well-beaten tracks. Henry Drummond, who journeyed through the Shire Highlands in the early 1880s, was much impressed with the network of paths that linked the various village communities. As he wrote: 'Probably no country in the world, civilized or uncivilized, is better supplied with paths than this unmapped continent. Every village is connected with some other village, every tribe with the next tribe, every state (i.e. chiefdom), with its neighbour, and therefore with all the rest. The explorer's business is simply to select from this network of tracks, keep a general direction, and hold on his way'.

He goes on to suggest that these veritable footpaths are ‘never over a foot in breadth, beaten as hard as adamant, and rutted beneath the level of the forest by centuries of nature traffic. As a rule these footpaths are marvellously direct’.

Each footpath may have its deviations, due to a rock boulder or fallen tree, but ‘these deflections are not meaningless. Each has some history—a history dating back perhaps (many) years’ (Drummond 1889: 32–35; Baker 1970: 46).

This type of communication network, Johnston recognized, was completely inadequate to meet the needs of the modern state, especially given the increased volume of trade goods that was being transported at the end of the nineteenth century—between the Lower Shire Valley and the Shire Highlands, as well as across the Highlands, by administrators, planters, traders, especially the African Lakes Company, and missionaries. It was therefore deemed necessary to build an extensive and viable road system. Until the last decades of the nineteenth century the Shire Highlands therefore really had no road system in the modern sense, in terms of tracks suitable for wheeled transport.

According to Colin Baker two salient criteria or factors were employed in the design and construction of the road system in the 1890s.

Firstly, there was the need to link the Shire Highlands with the Shire Valley, for it was via the River Shire that essential goods were imported, and such commodities as ivory, rubber and coffee exported abroad. The first road into the Shire Highlands was, in fact, the road from Katunga, near present-day Chikwawa, to Blantyre, which from the 1870s had been the headquarters of the Church of Scotland Mission, as well as the African Lakes Company at Mandala. It was the route that Livingstone had taken into the Highlands. Initially made by Robert Laws and John Buchanan, under the direction of James Stewart—who was a civil engineer—this road, however, was little more than a rough track. Covering a distance of around 26 miles (about 42 km), the track involved a climb of some 3000 feet (914 m) from the Shire Valley to the Highlands. Bertram Sclater made many improvements to this road, which essentially followed the watershed between the Mwampanzi and Likabula Rivers. Besides Katunga, road links were also made to three other ‘supply points’ on the Shire River—at Liwonde, Mpimbi and Chiromo. Given the problems of river navigation through the elephant marsh above Chiromo, Johnston preferred Chiromo to Katunga as the main supply depot for the protectorate. Roads were therefore built linking Chiromo to both Blantyre and Mulanje via Zoa,

following roughly the river valleys, respectively, of the Thuchila and the Ruo. In the 1890s Mpimbi came to be described as the ‘port of Zomba’. With the building of the railway from Beira to the Shire Highlands during the colonial period, both Chiromo and Katunga ceased to function as thriving trading depots—specifically with regard to river transport.

Secondly, Johnston’s road system was not only concerned with linking Blantyre to the administrative centre of Zomba, and both to the River Shire, but it also had a political significance in linking Zomba to the military forts that had been established at Fort Anderson (Mulanje), Fort Lister (between Mulanje and Michesi Mountains) and Fort Chikala (to the north of Lake Chilwa). These were built specifically to control the slave trade. Thus roads were built across the Thuchila Plain between Zomba and Mulanje, around the Western slopes of Mulanje Mountain linking Fort Lister and Fort Anderson, and north of Zomba to Fort Chikala via Domasi. The road system in the Shire Highlands that Johnston established was therefore motivated, as Baker emphasized, by commercial, administrative and military factors, as well as by physical geography (Baker 1971a).

By the end of 1896 Johnston’s administration had constructed some 390 miles (628 km) of road suitable for wheeled traffic (Johnston 1897: 149).

4 ZOMBA BOTANIC GARDEN

To conclude this chapter we may briefly discuss another project associated with Johnston’s administration—the foundation of the Zomba Botanic Garden.

An enthusiastic and pioneering artist-naturalist himself, Johnston appointed to his original staff, as head of the ‘scientific’ department another experienced naturalist, Alexander Whyte. Then aged 60, Whyte was a fellow of the Zoological Society of London, and had for many years been a planter in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). He came to British Central Africa in 1891, and in October that same year climbed Mulanje Mountain, specifically to the Litchenya Plateau. There he discovered, and later described in the *Transaction of the Linnean Society of London* (1894) the famous Mulanje Cedar *Nkungudza* (*Widdringtonia cupressoides*), a tree that was originally named after him (Baker 1970: 25; Chapman 1995: 1).

Between 1891 and 1895 Whyte made some outstanding zoological and botanical collections, as did John Kirk and John Buchanan before him. But Whyte is also renowned for developing the grounds of the Zomba

residency into a botanic garden, with the help, of course, of around a dozen skilled African workers. From its earliest days the botanic garden had a dual function, both as an ornamental garden and as an experimental plot for the development of economic crops. Situated at 3000 feet (914 m) above sea level, on the west bank of the Mulunguzi River, the botanic garden had formal terraced lawns, attractive flower beds, a few specimens of tree ferns (*Cyathea gregei*) and avenues of cypress trees (*Cupressus* spp.), as well as holding Harry Johnston's famous menagerie of wild animals and birds—his 'collection of pets', as he described it—serval, leopard, vervet monkey, guinea fowl and crowned cranes (1923: 292).

The botanic garden in its early years was largely engaged in growing the seeds of economic or ornamental plants that Whyte had obtained from the botanic gardens of Kew and Zanzibar, and Whyte soon demonstrated that many tropical and subtropical plants flourished in the Zomba setting. Mango trees (*Mangifera indica*), for example, were planted, and within a few years had become well established. Among other important trees and shrubs that were planted in the botanic garden, and seemed to thrive there, were the following: the avocado pear (*Persea americana*), a native of Central America; Kanjedza, the wild date palm (*Phoenix reclinata*), that was common in gathering forest throughout the Highlands; the flame tree or flamboyant (*Delonix regia*), a native of Madagascar; Pride of the Cape (*Baobabia galpinii*), a scrambling shrub common in Southern Africa; Pride of India (*Lagerstroemia indica*), originally from China, but planted as an ornamental tree throughout the tropics; the silky oak (*Grevillea robusta*), a fast-growing evergreen tree from Australia; the white cypress-pine (*Callitris glauca*), also a native of Australia; the jacaranda (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*), a native of South America; and, finally, the Mexican cypress (*Cupressus lusitanica*) (MNA/A5/1/1). Many of these trees came to be widely cultivated beyond Zomba, and soon became an intrinsic and colourful part of the Shire Highland landscape.

There were, however, three plants, initially cultivated in the Zomba botanic garden that were heralded as having great economic potential. These were: ginger (*Zingiber officinalis*), a perennial herb native of tropical Asia; the sisal hemp khonje (*Agave sisalana*), a succulent plant from Mexico and the source of an important fibre; and the scandent shrub *mpila* (*Landophia kirkii*), which was indigenous to the country, though confined to high rainfall areas, and widely known as the

rubber vine. The introduction of these plants to the European planting community as a commercial crop was not entirely a success, although the early records indicated that they did in fact flourish in the Zomba botanic garden. Planters in the Blantyre, Thyolo and Mulanje districts took up the planting (or collecting) of the rubber vine as an export crop, and sisal became a viable commercial crop in certain parts of the Shire Highlands, but it cannot be said that these crops ever truly flourished in an economic sense. Experimental planting of some potentially economic crops proved, however, a failure. Little progress was made with the growing of pepper (*Piper nigrum*), and attempts to introduce cacao, the cocoa tree (*Theobroma cacao*), to the Shire Highlands also failed. It was concluded that the climate of the country proved to be unsuitable for the cultivation of cocoa. One plant, however, the Himalayan raspberry (*Rubus ellipticus*) which had been 'liberally distributed among planters' later became naturalized, and is now regarded as a noxious 'weed' in the forestry plantations of Zomba and Mulanje Mountains, or what remains of them.

Above the residency a small acreage of Mulanje Cedar was planted, and its encouraging growth suggested that these trees would indeed flourish at an altitude of 3000 feet (914 m), although a decade later some 3000 blue gums (*Eucalyptus paniculata*) were planted in areas where the Mulanje cedar had apparently failed to get established (MNA/A/5/1/1).

In 1901 John McClounie, who succeeded Whyte as forester and head of the scientific department, listed the 128 economic and ornamental plants to be found in the botanic garden. But within a few years the garden came to be neglected, and the report of the Forestry and Botanical Department for 1907, recorded that it had fallen into a 'disreputable condition'. Given its small acreage, and the unsuitability of the soil for many crops, the residency garden ceased to be employed for agricultural experiments, and throughout the colonial period was maintained purely as an ornamental botanic garden. With a rapidly expanding agricultural department, agricultural experiments were later established elsewhere, specifically at Makoka and Bvumbwe.

In 1983 a valuable listing was made of the trees, shrubs and woody climbers to be found in the botanic garden. Around 130 species were represented in the garden, some of which, like the Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*) and the indigenous red mahogany *mbawa* (*Khaya nyasica*) may well have been planted by Whyte. The geographical origins of these plants are recorded in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Geographical origins of plants represented in Zomba Botanic Garden

<i>Origin</i>	%
Indigenous	36
Rest of Africa	6
Europe	3
Asia	19
Australasia	7
Americas	29
	100

Edwards and Darwin 1983

Finally, it is worth noting that Harry Johnston, after serving as commissioner in Uganda for two years (1899–1901), seems to have retired from government service at the early age of 43. Apparently he had become too outspoken and lacked the diplomatic skills to be employed by the Foreign Office! After failed attempts to become a Liberal MP, Johnston settled down to life as a scholarly recluse, writing novels, histories of Africa and race relations, a book on British mammals and an encyclopaedic comparative study of Bantu languages (Oliver 1957: 338–357; McKay 1970).

The Plantation Economy

I PROLOGUE

This chapter focusses on the plantation economy that developed in the Shire Highlands in the early years of the twentieth century.

After discussing the rise and fall of the European coffee industry and the early export trade in ivory, rubber and beeswax, it will examine the dilemmas facing the colonial administration in their endeavours to develop the protectorate's economy. The colonial state attempted to support, and mediate between, three conflicting interest groups: the European settlers eager to develop a plantation economy; the interests of mining companies in South Africa—in particular—who sought to recruit migrant labour (which entailed the protectorate being conceived as simply a 'labour reserve'); and, finally, the local Africans as a developing peasantry, whose interests the colonial state were pledged to uphold and respect.

I then turn to discuss two important events or factors that, in a sense, enabled the development of a plantation economy in the Shire Highlands—the influx of Lomwe people into the Highlands in the early years of the twentieth century, and the consolidation of a system of forced labour rent, widely known as the *thangata* system. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the two main crops that were the staple of plantation agriculture in the Shire Highlands during the early colonial period—cotton and tobacco.

2 THE EARLY EXPORT TRADE 1891–1915

Both Harry Johnston and John Buchanan were inveterate optimists. As we outlined in the last chapter, Johnston facilitated the alienation of almost a million acres of prime land in the Shire Highlands as private property to a small group of European planters, traders and missionaries. In fact, in the 1890s there were only around 300 Europeans, mostly British—119 of them of Scottish origin—in the whole of British Central Africa (Johnston 1897: 147). Yet Johnston clearly felt, somewhat optimistically, that the ‘non-disturbance’ clause, with regard to the land claim’s certificates, would safeguard the rights and interests of the African people living on the estates. Such a clause, however, as we shall explore below, lacked any real substance, and became something of a dead letter.

On the other hand, Buchanan was equally optimistic with respect to the establishment of a European colony in the Shire Highlands and clearly had a vision of a land dominated by a plantation economy (White 1987: 71). As Buchanan wrote:

I feel justified in saying that, commercially, Nyasaland has a bright future before it. We have the backbone of commerce in coffee, cocoa, rubber, tobacco, cotton, cinchona, and it may be, tea and sugar, and in an already organized trade in oilseeds fibres, grain, hides, beeswax etc not to speak of the ivory trade (Buchanan 1893: 253; Pachai 1978: 68).

But as we noted in Chap. 3, Buchanan himself was closely identified with the coffee industry at the close of the nineteenth century, and, as White put it, ‘preached the virtues of coffee’ (1987: 81). In his optimism Buchanan had indeed declared that he could see no reason why ‘an estate of over 2000 acres under coffee in the Shire Highlands should not yield a clear profit of £2000 yearly’ (1885: 54).

Coffee was introduced into the Shire Highlands through the efforts of Jonathan Duncan, who brought the first coffee plants from the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh, when he joined Buchanan at the Blantyre mission in 1878 as an horticulturist. Of the three plants of *Coffea arabica* brought out by Duncan, two died, but one survived in the mission garden. Two years later a small crop of about a thousand beans was taken from the parent tree, and from these a small coffee garden was established at the Blantyre mission in 1883. Cattle manure and wood ashes were used in the initial planting of the coffee seedlings (*Central African Planter* January 1896).

During the next decade, coffee gardens were established by enterprising planters throughout the Shire Highlands; by, for example, the Buchanan brothers on the Mulunguzi estate in Zomba, by Henry Brown on Thornwood and John Muir on Lauderdale—both estates close to Mulanje mountain—and by Jonathan Duncan himself on his own Mudi estate in Blantyre. Work on the coffee estates was largely undertaken by Tonga and Ngoni migrant workers, who were paid from four to six shillings a month. Although coffee yields varied according to the amount of rainfall, the fertility of the soil, and the manner in which it was produced, the general yield seems to have been between 10 and 15 hundredweight per acre (a hundredweight measured 112 lb [50.8 kg]).

Several African agriculturalists also established coffee plantations—George Chokabwiro, Kumtaja and David Livingstone in the Blantyre district, Paton Somanje—encouraged by Buchanan—in the Zomba district (Johnston 1897: 162; Pachai 1978: 52).

By the end of the nineteenth century Blantyre was being described as the ‘headquarters’ of the coffee industry, and around 10,000 acres (4000 ha) were under coffee, spread over a hundred plantations (MNA/NSB 3/13/1; Buchanan 1895: 20; Baker 1971b: 92). Coffee seems to have especially flourished in the Mulanje, Mpemba and Namadzi districts.

As we noted earlier, the coat of arms that Harry Johnston designed for British Central Africa included the image of a flourishing coffee tree, and by the end of the nineteenth century coffee constituted around 80 % of the protectorate’s exports. While some five tons of coffee had been exported in 1889, by 1900 a thousand tons were being exported, via the Shire/Zambezi river system. It was valued at around £60,000. By then some 17,000 acres of coffee had been planted in the Shire Highlands, almost exclusively on European estates (Baker 1971b: 92).

Unfortunately, the settler dream of a plantation economy focussed around coffee, which Buchanan had so fervently anticipated, came to an abrupt end at the turn of the twentieth century. For during the latter part of the nineteenth-century Brazil had greatly expanded its coffee industry, and between 1895 and 1900 Brazil’s coffee exports had virtually doubled. With a glut on the world market, the price of coffee dropped sharply and this adversely affected the European planters in the Shire Highlands. But the decline of the protectorate’s coffee industry was aggravated by a number of local factors. These were the general low quality of the coffee, due to a lack of fertilizer, and the adverse conditions of a prolonged dry season; the severe drought conditions of 1899–1900; and a certain

amount of pest infestation. Indeed both C.B. Garnett and James Biscoe have argued that the decline of the coffee industry was largely due to insect pests, particularly that of the coffee stem borer—a longicorn beetle (*Anthores leuconotus*) (Garnett 1950: 2; Morris 2004: 137). The planters, of course, tended to ascribed the decline of the coffee industry in the early years of the twentieth century to labour shortages in the Shire Highlands (Krishnamurthy 1972: 393).

By the outbreak of the first world war, coffee plantations had largely been abandoned, and coffee ceased to be of any real importance as an export crop (Baker 1971b: 92; Pachai 1973b: 157). The annual report of the Department of Agriculture for 1912 thus declared: ‘The coffee industry in Nyasaland is a dying industry as planters prefer cotton and tobacco with their surer and quicker returns’ (Garnett 1950:4).

The coffee industry seems to have reached its zenith around 1900, and from then on ceased to be important as a plantation crop in the Shire Highlands.

The decline of the coffee industry at the turn of the century led, according to one scholar, to a ‘frenzy of anxiety’ among European planters (McCracken 2012: 82). They therefore turned to the cultivation of three export crops that eventually became the mainstay of the colonial period—cotton, tobacco and tea. We discuss each of these crops below.

Several other commodities were important at the end of the nineteenth century with regard to the export trade from the Shire Highlands. These were ivory, wild rubber, strophanthus and beeswax. They formed part of a ‘collecting economy’ focussed around the African Lakes Company, and the various Indian traders who had moved into the Shire Highlands during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Such traders settled mainly in Zomba, Blantyre, Limbe and Mulanje.

When David Livingstone journeyed up the River Shire in 1859, the Elephant Marsh above Chiromo was inhabited by vast herds of elephants. Livingstone counted 800 elephants in sight at once (1865: 92). At that period the Luangwa Valley was also a region where elephants were plentiful, and as I have described elsewhere (Morris 2006b) the rise and fall of political chiefdoms in Northern Zambezia was intrinsically connected with the ivory trade.

At the end of the nineteenth century elephants still frequented the Shire Highlands in small numbers, moving into the region from the Shire Valley, or from Mozambique, being especially noted in the Chikala hills and on the Thuchila plain (Duff 1903: 140–165). Inevitably, in the early

1890s ivory became an important item of export, and the various conflicts that arose between the African Lakes Company, who became deeply involved in the ivory trade, and local chiefdoms—especially those of the Makololo in the Lower Shire Valley—were related to the control of this trade. In its heyday, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the ivory trade accounted for around 80 % of the total exports from the protectorate, valued, in 1891, as £5500. Even so, it was suspected that much more ivory was being transported illegally to the coast. Indeed, Colin Baker suggested that one of the reasons for capturing slaves was to provide human portage for the ivory that was conveyed from the interior—the Shire Highlands—to the coastal ports. During the period 1891–1904 around 80 tons (80,000 kg) of ivory was exported from British Central Africa, valued at around £50,000. Taking 60 lb (approx 27 kg) per pair of tusks as an average, this amounts to around 3000 elephants killed. Indeed Livingstone had earlier estimated that the amount of ivory taken to the world market from South Central Africa indicated that around 30,000 elephants were killed annually (1865: 197; Baker 1971b: 91; Morris 2006a: 31). Given this indiscriminate destruction of the elephant population of the region, the ivory trade soon went into decline, although small amounts, never exceeding five tons, continued to be exported throughout the colonial period.

For a brief period at the end of the nineteenth century the collection of wild rubber, strophanthus and beeswax also became important exports. The wild rubber was obtained from the latex of the scandent shrub or liane *mpila* (*Landolphia kirki*), and around 1900, 60 tons of rubber was exported from the protectorate. Valued at £13,000 it formed 17 % of all exports. It was mainly collected from Nkhata Bay and the Lower Shire Valley rather than from the Shire Highlands. Attempts were made by the African Lakes Company to establish rubber plantations at Chitakali estate in the Mulanje district, but with little success. By the outbreak of the First World War, rubber, like ivory and cotton, had ceased to be significant in the country's export trade (Baker 1971b: 93–94).

The collection of *mkombe* (*Strophanthus kombe*) was also short-lived. *Strophanthus* is a woody liane, the seeds of, which were commonly used locally as an arrow poison but proved to be commercially important as medicinal drug in the treatment of heart disease (Morris 1996a: 221). Around 16 tons of strophanthus was collected and exported in 1906, valued at £8000. Finally, beeswax was largely collected—along with honey—by local Africans and sold to Asian traders. In 1891 the first beeswax was

exported, and like strophanthus, reached an export peak around 1906, with the export of 58 tons (£6000) of beeswax. Although both commodities continued to be exported throughout the colonial period their relative importance as exports declined substantially, to be overtaken completely by the export of cotton and tobacco. By the 1920s these two crops (discussed in Sects. 5 and 6) contributed around 90 % of Nyasaland's total export trade (Baker 1971b: 96–97).

3 THE COLONIAL ECONOMY

Following Ayn Rand there has been a lamentable tendency in recent years to describe capitalist entrepreneurs as the 'wealth creators'. This perspective ignores completely not only land—the natural world—but also the importance of human labour in the production of wealth. One wonders what Adam Smith and Karl Marx would have thought about this one-sided approach?

In the Shire Highlands, however, during the colonial period, both land and human labour were key political issues, endlessly debated by both European planters and the colonial government. Not only coffee and blackwater fever, but also their 'labour supply' was therefore a recurrent topic of discussion in the pages of the *Central African Planter* (1895–1896).

Many scholars have written on the 'contradictions' and 'vacillations' inherent in the economic policies of the colonial state in the early years of the twentieth century. In effect, the colonial government—established of course at Zomba in the Shire Highlands—attempted both to serve, and to mediate between, three very different and conflicting interest groups—the European planters in the Shire Highlands (especially), local African people as a developing peasantry, and the interests of 'big business'. The last, associated with the expansion of the mining industry, included capitalist interests in both Southern Rhodesia and South Africa, who sought an ample supply of labour to work the mines. With regard to the Shire Highlands in particular, there was, therefore, an inherent 'structure of contradiction' in the policies of the colonial state which attempted both to encourage economic development through support of the European plantation economy, and at the same time, wished to safeguard the land rights and interests of African people, consonant with the notion that the colonial state was a 'protectorate' (Krishnamurthy 1972: 398; Kandawire 1979: 68).

Throughout the early colonial period there was therefore often a ‘confused debate’ within the legislative council with respect to these three very contrasting forms of economy or export production. Established in 1907, the legislative council included as non-official members several European planters, as well as a missionary, Alexander Hetherwick, who was viewed as representing African interests. With seats on this council, European planters therefore had a direct and important influence on all government decisions. But, as McCracken suggests, ‘European farmers were challenged from within the government by both supporters of peasant agriculture, and by those who believed that Nyasaland’s most valuable economic function would be as a supplier of labour for the more developed economies of the south’ (2012: 83; Vail 1983: 50).

Eventually a kind of tripartite division emerged within colonial Nyasaland, focussed around, respectively, labour immigration outside the protectorate, petty-commodity production by African peasants within, and a plantation economy geared to the interests of European planters and landowners—mainly in the Shire Highlands. The northern region—which came to be described as the ‘dead north’—was largely conceived as a labour reserve. Thus, during the 1930s around half of adult men were absent from the region, mainly working in the gold mines of Southern Rhodesia and the South African rand. As early as 1903, in fact, the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA), as a recruiting agency began operating in Nyasaland (Vail 1983: 45; McCracken 2012: 178–181). In contrast, peasant agriculture was promoted and developed in other areas of Nyasaland, particularly in the Shire Valley (with respect to cotton growing) and in the Kasungu–Lilongwe plain (with the development of the tobacco industry in the 1930s) (McCracken 2012: 197–205). The history of the Shire Highlands was, however, very different from other regions of Nyasaland, given the extensive alienation of land to European settlers, and government support for the plantation economy that was largely under the control of European landowners. It is beyond the scope of the present study to discuss extensively patterns of labour migration and its social impact in Nyasaland (on labour migration in the later colonial period see Miller 2013). This chapter concentrates on the plantation economy that developed in the Shire Highlands during the early colonial period.

Around half the total land area of the Shire Highlands—almost a million acres—was alienated as private property at the end of the nineteenth century. What is noteworthy is the fact that much of this land was owned by only three planters—Eugene Sharrer, John Buchanan and Alexander Low

Bruce. At the turn of the twentieth century their land holdings became consolidated into three commercial enterprises, namely, the British Central Africa Company, Blantyre and East Africa Limited and A.L. Bruce Estates Limited. All three companies were to play an important part in the history of the Shire Highlands, and, in particular, in the development of plantation agriculture. Between them these three enterprises owned around 634,000 acres of land, that is, 1000 square miles (2600 square km), some 35 % of the total land area of the Shire Highlands. It will be useful to discuss each company in turn.

Eugene Sharrer was of German origin—a ‘British subject of German descent’ is how Johnston describes him (1897: 77). He was a highly enterprising planter, trader and land-speculator, who, in competition with the African Lakes Company, ran a flotilla of steamboats on the River Shire, as well as establishing a chain of trading stores in the Shire Highlands. These came to be known as the ‘Kabula Stores’. In addition, Sharrer acquired, in the Zomba, Blantyre and Thyolo districts around 290,000 acres of land (110,000 ha; some 467 square miles) which was later consolidated in 1902 as the holding company, British Central Africa Company. Sharrer was also a pioneer coffee planter, as well as being deeply involved later in the construction of the railway system that linked the Shire Highlands to the Lower Shire Valley (Kandawire 1979: 52–53).

As we have discussed earlier, John Buchanan, assisted by his two brothers David and Robert, was an inveterate speculator in land, and, like Sharrer, owned vast tracts of land in the Zomba, Blantyre and Thyolo districts—tracts that amounted to around 170,000 acres. During the 1890s all three brothers died—apparently of the dreaded blackwater fever—and at the turn of the century their estates came on the market. In the course of 1901 a company was formed by an enterprising group of Scottish landowners. With its headquarters in Edinburgh, it was designated Blantyre and East Africa Limited, with Robert S Hynde as its general manager. Hynde, like Buchanan, initially came to British Central Africa, as a Church of Scotland missionary and was stationed for a number of years at Domasi mission. But he soon became involved in agricultural production with his partner, Ross Stark, who was married to Hynde’s sister, Margaret. Hynde became publisher and editor of the *Central African Planter* as well as the owner of an estate in the vicinity of Songani, north of Zomba. On this estate Hynde and Stark pioneered, through tenant labour, the commercial production of fire-cured tobacco. As manager of Blantyre and East Africa Limited (1901–1918), and as editor of the *Central African Planter*, which later

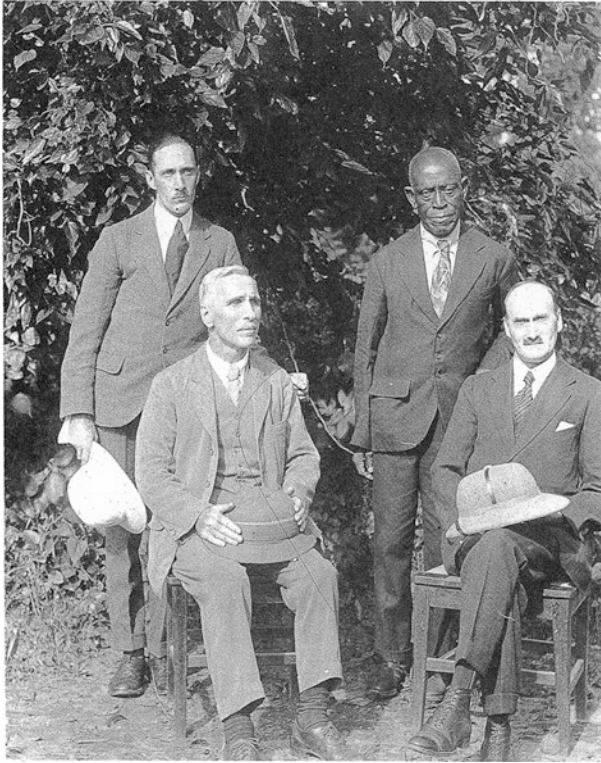


Fig. 5.1 Founders of Blantyre and East Africa Limited: Alan Stark, Robert Hynde and Ross Stark, together with the African planter, Joseph Bismarck, circa 1925
Source: Society of Malawi Library. Reproduced by permission of the Society of Malawi Library

became the *Nyasaland Times* (in 1907), this ‘pugnacious Scot’ (as Hynde has been described), became a well-known and outspoken critic of the colonial state. Throughout his life, in fact, Hynde, through his newspaper, supported and promoted the views and aspirations of the European planting community. He was a fervent and constant critic of any government policy that he deemed to adversely affect planting interests. But Blantyre and East Africa Limited not only combined the estates of the Buchanan brothers with those of Hynde and Stark, but also incorporated Lauderdale estate, which had pioneered the growing of tea in British Central Africa.

First opened by Henry Brown in 1891 for the African Lakes Company, Lauderdale was transferred three years later to John Moir, before becoming a part of the holdings of Blantyre and East Africa Limited (*Central African Planter* October 1895).

As the African Lakes Company was viewed as the leading enterprise in the development of trade and commerce in Nyasaland, so Blantyre and East Africa Limited came to be described as the ‘leading representative of Scottish enterprise in the planting world of Nyasaland’ (Capenny 1904: 373). Its land holdings in the Shire Highlands at the turn of the century (1901) are outlined in Table 5.1.

It can be seen from Table 5.1 that only a very small part of this vast acreage was in fact cultivated in terms of plantation crops—some 2 % (3140 acres, just over 1200 ha) out of a total land area of over 150,000 acres (some 250 square miles, 640 square km). The main crops produced, whether by wage labour or tenant cultivation, were coffee, cotton and tobacco. Much of this land was still covered with *Brachystegia* woodland—Zoa estate still had extensive tracts of woodland in the 1950s—but it also supported a substantial African population, living in villages with a headman (*mfumu*), and engaged in subsistence agriculture. As tenants they were viewed by the planters—the European estate managers employed by BEA Ltd—as a potential source of labour. But during the last decade of the nineteenth century many of the plantation workers were, in fact, Tonga or Ngoni migrants from the northern parts of the protectorate. Many had long been employed as porters or agricultural labourers for the African Lakes Company, and in 1897 it was estimated, as earlier noted, that around 5000 Tonga men were working for European planters like Buchanan and Hynde and Stark, or for the African Lakes Company in the Shire Highlands. They usually worked in terms of a six-month contract, and were paid a monthly wage of between three and six shillings (McCracken 2012: 83–85).

It was estimated that the total production of all the BEA Ltd estates in 1901 amounted to 75 tons of coffee, 160 of cotton and 90 of tobacco. All three crops were grown throughout the Shire Highlands, although cotton seems to have flourished especially around Chiradzulu and north of Zomba, and tea (some 50 acres) was grown only on Lauderdale estate in Mulanje (Capenny 1904).

The enterprising and redoubtable John Buchanan was also associated with the A.L. Bruce Estates. For it was Buchanan who negotiated, on behalf of the Edinburgh millionaire Alexander Low Bruce (who was

Table 5.1 Blantyre and East Africa Ltd holdings (Capenny 1904)

<i>Estate</i>	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>Area under cultivation</i>	<i>Acreage of crops grown</i>			
			<i>Coffee</i>	<i>Cotton</i>	<i>Tobacco</i>	<i>Tea</i>
Chikala						
Lingoni	200	150	–	140	20	–
Newington	640	100	–	150	50	–
Likwenu	250	70	–	70	30	–
Zomba						
Mlungusi	42000	101	200	60	100	–
Chirunga		213		90		–
Namiwawa		90	–	100	–	–
Likangala		61	40	20	–	–
Songani	1796	230	–	200	80	–
Malosa	7750	–	–	120	50	–
Namadzi						
Gala	2020	230	50	70	10	–
Namiwawa	2033	220	–	–	–	–
Naiwale			20	70	30	–
Namasi	640	–	–	–	–	–
Inchgordon		–	–	60	60	–
Blantyre						
Michiru	3000	193	100	50	30	–
Lunzu	5600	202	100	100	60	–
Nangafui		200	80	100	–	–
Chiradzullu	32,000	78	30	100	10	–
Thyolo						
Bandanga	820	165	80	30	–	–
Pamula	2000	208	–	–	–	–
Kwakwasi	1830	–	–	70	50	–
Ukumbu		150	–	50	–	–
Cholo	29,000	–	–	–	–	–
Zoa	19,709	–	–	–	–	–
Mulanje						
Lauderdale	1163	226	100	30	30	50
Likabula	372	–	–	–	–	–
Totals	152,823	2887	800	1680	610	50

married to Livingstone's favourite daughter Agnes) the 'purchase' of his estates in the Shire Highlands. These were the Likulezi Estate on the north-western slopes of Mulanje mountain (some 7448 acres) and a huge tract of land of some 169,000 acres (272 square miles; 684 square km) to the north-east of Chiradzulu mountain, which Bruce named Magomero

Estate, after the location of the ill-fated universities Mission to Central Africa (1861–1862). Buchanan purchased this land from the Yao chief Mpama who was based at Chiradzulu (White 1987: 78).

Bruce died in 1893, and it was his son, Alexander Livingstone Bruce, who eventually became the owner of the A.L. Bruce Estates, as well as an influential member of the Nyasaland Legislative Council. It was on the Magomero Estate that the renowned Chilembwe rising took place in January 1915, at a time when William Jarvis Livingstone was manager of the estate. We discuss the revolt of John Chilembwe in Chap. 6, specifically as it relates to cotton production and the *thangata* system—the labour rent that was then in full swing.

It has to be recalled that the Nyasaland protectorate, including the Shire Highlands, was (and is) a land-locked country, located several hundred miles from the East African coast. In the early colonial period the transport of goods to and from the Lower Shire Valley, as well as across the Shire Highlands, was therefore carried out by a system of porters carrying headloads (*ntengatenga*). It was a system of transport that was slow, unreliable, and, generally, rather inefficient and expensive (Vail 1983: 42). The export of agricultural produce was therefore always costly and problematic, until the construction of the railway system to the coast (Beira), which was finally completed in the 1920s. Privately owned, the railway came to have a monopoly with regard to all import and export traffic of goods. Around the same time there was also a revolution in motor transport in the protectorate, terminating the large-scale use of *ntengatenga* labourers (Vail 1983: 55; McCracken 2012: 173).

Besides improvements in transport, two other important factors need to be considered in relation to the development of the plantation economy in the Shire Highlands, and these are intrinsically inter-related: the influx of Lomwe immigrants into the Shire Highlands in the early years of the twentieth century; and the consolidation of the *thangata* system of enforced labour rent. We discuss below each of these factors in turn.

4 THE LOMWE INFLUX AND THE *THANGATA* SYSTEM

In what has been described as ‘one of the greatest population movements in the history of Southern Africa’, from the end of the nineteenth century many thousands of Lomwe people moved into the Shire Highlands from neighbouring Mozambique (Boeder 1984: 1). They settled mainly in the Chiradzulu, Thyolo and Mulanje districts, and virtually became the

‘backbone’ of the plantation labour force. The population of the Mulanje district in 1904 was estimated at 30,000 people, consisting mainly of Nyanja and Yao, with some recently settled Lomwe immigrants from Mozambique. The Lomwe were then described as a ‘low-caste tribe’, ignorant and ‘dirty in their habits’, but as being ‘good cultivators of the soil’ (MNA/NSM 1/11/1). Thirty years later, when the population of the Mulanje district had risen to 134,000, Lomwe comprised 70 % of the population (92,736) and, according to the District Commissioner, Bob Keppel-Compton, had completely transformed the face of the district (MNA/NSM 3/1/10; Boeder 1984: 31).

During the colonial period the Nguru, as the Lomwe were then called, were usually described in terms of very negative stereotypes—as shiftless, timid, bestial and wild (Boeder 1980a: 6; 1984: 18). Even worthy scholars like Shepperson and Price seem to express this negativity, for in writing of the events of the 1890s they wrote: ‘Immigrants from neighbouring Portuguese territories, the Nguru, in search of land and loot, added to the general disturbance’ (1958: 11) and they go on to describe the Lomwe as ‘violent, vacillating, lumpen-proletarians’ (402).

Perhaps the most negative portrait of the Lomwe, however, was that of L.S. Norman, a tobacco planter from Mikolongwe, who in a letter on the deforestation of the Shire Highlands described them as follows: ‘One error lay in allowing really over-whelming hordes of immigrants to settle here Now they have almost eaten up both soil and timber. They came as locusts in a swarm to eat everything as locust they must return (from) whence they came’ (*Nyasaland Times* November 1935).

There were probably groups of Lomwe people living in the Shire Highlands throughout the nineteenth century, or perhaps even earlier, for the Universities Mission to Central Africa encountered several Nguru (Lomwe) villages (Bennett and Ylvisaker 1971: 227). But the main influx of Lomwe into the region began in the 1890s. During that decade, European planters in the Shire Highlands like Buchanan, as well as the African Lakes Company, had initially relied mainly on Ngoni and Tonga as agricultural labourers and porters. But around 1892, R.S. Hynde of the Domasi Mission began making trips into Mozambique to recruit Lomwe labour to work on his Songani estate, which he owned jointly with his brother-in-law Ross Stark. As Hynde wrote in 1893, the Wakololo (Lomwe) from the region east of Lake Chilwa ‘have begun to come in for work ... the first (time) we ever had a labour supply from that district’ (Life and Work, March 1893, Galligan 1975: 109).

During the next two decades large numbers of Lomwe immigrants came to settle in the Shire Highlands. Between 1900 and 1903, for example, between 15,000 and 30,000 Lomwe came into the Chiradzulu and Blantyre districts alone, and it was estimated that by around 1920 some 100,000 Lomwe had settled in the Shire Highlands (Shepperson and Price 1958: 192). Thus in many parts of the Shire Highlands—particularly in the Thyolo, Chiradzulu and Mulanje districts—the Lomwe came to outnumber the Yao and Nyanja. Indeed, the Shire Highlands was even described as ‘Anguruland’ (Baker 1961: 41–42).

The European planters of the Shire Highlands made a determined effort to recruit Lomwe as agricultural labourers, and one Blantyre firm, the Walker Brothers, enjoyed a concession from the Companhia da Zambesia monopoly in Portuguese East Africa to bring a large number of Lomwe into the Shire Highlands, specifically for the purposes of hiring them out to transport companies and to the European planters. But many of the Lomwe immigrants died en route through lack of food, and many balked at the labour contract and returned to Mozambique. A graphic article appeared in the *Central African Times* (July 1900), edited by Hynde, condemning the hardships and suffering of the Lomwe on ‘the Anguru road’ (Galligan 1975: 114; Boeder 1984: 14).

Another important factor, as recorded by Lewis Bandawe, was that the Blantyre mission, under Alexander Hetherwick, had established mission stations in Mozambique around 1896, some 40 miles east of Lake Chilwa. In charge of these missions were such African evangelists and teachers as Wilson Malunga, James Mllanga and John Gray Kufa (Bandawe 1971: 34–35).

Although European planters certainly made an effort to induce, or at least encourage, the Lomwe to come into the protectorate in order to take up work on the plantations, this was not the main factor behind the Lomwe influx into the Shire Highlands. As Galligan emphasised: ‘they came of their own volition’ (1975: 114), The main reasons behind the Lomwe immigration, as Bandawe highlighted, was that there was ‘famine in the country’ (Mozambique) and that the Portuguese authorities had inflicted much ‘hardships and cruelty’ upon the Lomwe people. Many were therefore ‘compelled to leave their country against their own will’ (Bandawe 1971: 44–47). Towards the end of the nineteenth century the chartered ‘Companhia de Niassa’ had come to administer the Lomwe territory on behalf of the Portuguese government, and they did so in semi-feudal fashion and with ‘remarkable brutality’. The Lomwe therefore

began to seek asylum in the Shire Highlands. As Galligan succinctly put it: the Lomwe immigration: ‘resulted from the demands and abuses of the feudal system imposed and administered by the chartered companies of Portuguese East Africa’ (1975: 115).

The influx of the Lomwe was therefore mainly due to ‘cyclic famine and brutal suppression’, the Lomwe clearly feeling that the more benign, if paternalistic, regime to be found in the Shire Highlands was preferable to that of Portuguese East Africa (Stuart-Mogg 1999: 110). Indeed, the main motivation behind the influx was the search for land, security and wider economic opportunities by the Lomwe themselves (Kayira and Banda 2013: 43).

The Lomwe were subdivided into various ethnic or dialectical groups—the Makua, Mihavani, Kokhola, and Thakwani for example (Soka 1953: 5–6; Boeder 1984: 3). From my own experiences, many people on Zoa estate in the 1950s tended to describe their own ethnic affiliation (*mtundu*) as Kokhola rather than as Lomwe.

The Lomwe moved into the Shire Highlands not so much as individuals or as a ‘family’ party, but rather as small kin groups. Though some may have settled on unoccupied land, most came under the suzerainty of Yao or Mang’anja chiefs, or they settled on the private estates of the European planters—who, as I have continually stressed, owned around half the land of the Shire Highlands. Much of their land was then still under *Brachystegia* woodland.

Given that the Lomwe were essentially refugees, the territorial chiefs, mostly Yao, gave the Lomwe immigrants land and protection in return for their labour, and the Lomwe were often described as their slaves (*akapola*). Through their labour the Yao chiefs, as well as many local headmen, often produced cotton or surplus maize as a cash crop, and thus enhanced their own political status.

The European planters of the Shire Highlands then beginning to grow cotton and tobacco as plantation crops, and in need of labour were, of course, only too eager to encourage the Lomwe immigrants to settle on their estates. The influx of the Lomwe refugees has indeed been described as a ‘windfall’ for the European planters. Enticing the Lomwe to settle on their estates, the planters could then claim rent in the form of *thangata* labour. The planters were evidently given government support in the development of the plantation economy for in 1912 the colonial state forbade the Lomwe immigrants from any further settlement on Crown (trust) land, thereby forcing them to reside on estate land (CO 525/42;

Galligan 1975: 122). It is doubtful whether the plantation economy in the Shire Highlands would ever have developed without the influx of Lomwe immigrants and the establishment of the *thangata* system (see below). As Bhila put it: ‘Lomwe immigrants arrived at the most opportune time for the European planters (1976: 43; Vail 1983: 50). This was clearly recognized by the colonial government, for the governor, Sir William Manning wrote to the colonial office in London as follows:

It will therefore be seen that the Anguru immigration came most opportunely. It populated vacant spaces, it enhanced the protectorate’s revenue, and most important of all, it has provided a ready and permanent labour supply for the extension of European enterprise.

And again:

The immigration of the Anguru has however solved this most serious problem (the protectorate’s labour supply) and without Anguru immigration, I am confident that the extensions of plantations in the Shire Highlands would not have been possible and no European would have ventured to have risked capital where labour supply was only existent when it was least required. This opinion is not entirely my own but is practically the unanimous expression of planters with whom I have discussed the problem (CO 525/44; Manning to Colonial Office, February 1912; Galligan 1975: 119; Bhila 1976: 42).

Like his predecessors, Johnston and Sharpe, Manning was decidedly in favour of the European plantation economy, and saw the Lomwe influx as greatly to the benefit of the protectorate, by increasing hut tax for the government and the labour supply for the European planters. The main concern of the planters however, was to induce the African labourers, specifically the Lomwe, to work for them during the rainy season, when, of course, subsistence cultivators were usually engaged in tending their own gardens (Galligan 1975: 117). This inducement was largely achieved by the introduction and implementation of a type of forced labour rent, *thangata*.

The *thangata* system, which flourished throughout the colonial period in Nyasaland—in spite of government concerns and misgivings—has been the subject of numerous critical studies (eg Pachai 1974, 1978: 83–134; Kandawire 1979; Baker 1993: 11–45). It has usually been described under the heading ‘The Problem of Africans on Private Estates’, although the

problem was not with the African tenants but with the ‘tenant system’ itself. For it was an oppressive institution that connoted a relationship of conflict, as Kandawire stressed, between European planters and the Africans living on what was deemed to be private estates, geared specifically to plantation agriculture. The tenancy implied that ‘no money was collected but the residents were compelled to work for two months, one month’s work being counted against tax and another month’s against rent’ (Krishnamurthy 1972: 395; Kandawire 1979: 10). It was a system that not only implied a form of forced labour, but was one that was open to abuse by the European planters. Indeed the cruelty of the *thangata* system depended to a large degree on the social attitudes of the estate owners or managers (Boeder 1984: 19).

The concept *thangata* comes from the verb *ku-thangata* (to help or assist) and refers to a process of give-and-take, and to reciprocal and voluntary cooperation between kin, affines and neighbours (Kandawire 1979: 11). It seems specifically to have involved the custom of reciprocal exchange between a chief and his people. As Joseph Bismarck described it:

The chief would kill fowls and goats, and make a lot of food, and prepare everything ready (then) everyone would turn out to *thangata*. And when they came the chief would offer them beer and say ‘now come to the garden and give me your labour’. And then they went to the garden and started hoeing.

The people would engage in communal hoeing for the chief during the morning. The afternoon and evening were spent on beer drinking, feasting, dancing and other festivities. Bismarck considered it a ‘good thing’—as he expressed it to the commission of enquiry into the Chilembwe rebellion—and quite different from the *thangata* on the European estates which, in his opinion, was a form of ‘compulsory work’ and ‘slavery’ (CO 525/66 July 1915; Pachai 1978: 103).

It is quite clear, however, that European planters saw the *thangata* system, as practiced on their private estates, as simply an extension of the customary—though hierarchical—relations that existed between the territorial chief and his subjects in the pre-colonial context (Pachai 1978: 116). The European planters seem to have conceived of themselves as surrogate territorial chiefs. The Africans living on their estates were therefore viewed not only as tenants and labourers (employees) but also as political subjects. The relationship between the European planter and his African

tenants has therefore been described as a ‘patron–client’ relationship or as akin to the ‘semi-feudal’ system that then existed in Portuguese East Africa (Shepperson and Price 1958: 192; Boeder 1984: 20).

Thus the Lomwe, having escaped the brutalities of the Portuguese administration in Mozambique, found themselves ‘entrapped’ or encapsulated into the *thangata* system in the Shire Highlands (Vail 1983: 51).

The essential elements of the *thangata* system were initially formulated at the end of the nineteenth century by Hynde and Stark, the leading figures of Blantyre and East Africa Ltd. In 1900 the government gazette brought to the attention of the European landowners the non-disturbance clause that inhered in their ‘certificates of claim’ relating to their landholdings. Blantyre and East Africa therefore sought to consolidate the tenancy relationship by initiating contractual and written agreements between themselves and the chiefs and headmen on their estates, particularly those in the Thyolo district. As earlier indicated Blantyre and East Africa Ltd at that time owned around 152,000 acres of land in the Shire Highlands. The agreement stipulated that people living on the estates would be obliged to work for two months during the rainy season, or at other specified times, in lieu of rent. In return they were allowed to change their village and garden sites, and to enjoy ‘various privileges as tenants’. But they could only cut timber in designated areas and could not build new houses, open up new gardens, or admit newcomers without the prior permission of the estate owners. The company also agreed to pay the taxes of the estate tenants—then at around three shillings—with regard to the first month worked, and to pay normal wages for the second. Any breaches of the agreement by the tenant could lead to their eviction from the estate. According to one scholar the agreement seemed satisfactory to all parties and to be essentially fair: ‘residence, tax, and a month’s wages in exchange for two months labour and agreement not to work for other employers’ (Baker 1993: 12–13; Pachai 1978: 85–86).

This is not how it was viewed by Africans living on the estates nor by the colonial administration. For in a famous judgement the Chief Judge of Nyasaland, Joseph Nunan declared that the written tenancy agreements initiated by Blantyre and East Africa Ltd were ‘exceedingly unfair and one-sided’. For the company had not really observed the ‘non-disturbance clause’ which gave the original residents on the estate some security—Nunan emphasized that such rights were vested in the village community and that each family would need around eight acres of land—and that they were unable to prove that the tenants were not the original occupants of

the land. Blantyre and East Africa were therefore, Nunan declared, not entitled to compel the African residents on the estates to work for them. Nunan even suggested that the Africans on private estates were worse off than medieval serfs in Europe, for the latter, in being bound to the soil, had at least some security of tenure (Pachai 1978: 56; Baker 1993: 12).

An ardent catholic as well as the vice-consul, Joseph Nunan was only 28 years old, but he was extremely talented and highly energetic. He was therefore asked by the governor Alfred Sharpe to chair the land commission of 1903. The commission in its findings recommended that each male tax-paying resident on an estate should be allotted eight acres of land, and given security of tenure, and that every tenant was required to pay an annual rent of four shillings to the landlord or else face eviction. But realizing that compulsory labour service was open to all sorts of abuse the commission recommended that rent should be paid in cash, and that the tenant should be free to work for anyone they please. Needless to say, given the opposition of the European planters, the Land Ordinance of 1904 was never enforced, for the planters always insisted that rent be paid in the form of labour (Pachai 1978: 88–89; Baker 1993: 16–17).

Over the years, as we shall note below, several ordinances and commissions were enacted in order to regulate the relationship between the European landlords/planters and the African tenants living on their estates, for the government clearly had qualms about this relationship. But always, it seems, the *thangata* system was upheld and fortified. This was partly due to the fact that government policy was deeply influenced by the planting community—for the planters, unlike the Africans, had members on the legislative council—and partly because the government were deeply committed to supporting and encouraging the development of the plantation economy. In fact, the political situation during the early colonial period, specifically in the Shire Highlands, could well be described as a ‘plantocracy’. It is of interest to note that the priority given to the plantation economy—the estate sector—was continued in the post-colonial government under Kamuzu Banda.

The *thangata* system of tenant labour was clearly open to abuse, especially as the planters—or the estate managers—could rule their ‘fiefdoms’ almost anyway they pleased. A rule unto themselves, George Mwase complained that the planters often held ‘courts of their own’, evicting people from their estates pretty well as they liked. And if the African tenants took their complaints to the *boma* (government), the district administrators tended to be ‘biased’ towards the European planters (Mwase 1967: 30–31; Boeder 1984: 19).

Although theoretically a tenant could pay rent in cash, this was actively discouraged, for the planters always demanded labour—particularly during the wet season. Payments for labour were made in terms of a thirty-day ticket, viewed as representing a month's labour (this was still the common practice in the 1950s), but often African tenants did around six weeks of labour for only one month's pay. Wages were also sometimes paid in the form of tobacco, although the Africans themselves much preferred cash, as this enabled them to buy commodities they needed from a local store. Tenants also complained bitterly that they were paid extremely low prices for the crops that they sold to the estate owners, whether food crops like maize and beans, or cash crops like tobacco and cotton. In fact, the planting community actively opposed many of the measures taken by the government to encourage the cultivation of cotton and tobacco by African peasant farmers (Krishnamurthy 1972: 386; Pachai 1978: 102).

It is therefore significant to note, as many scholars have stressed that both the Lomwe and the *thangata* system itself were deeply implicated in the Chilembwe rising of January 1915. For it was the Lomwe who were chiefly involved in the rebellion, and the 'real cause' of the rebellion (as Mwase (1967: 29) expressed it) was the social grievances and general discontent associated with the *thangata* system. We discuss the Chilembwe rising in Chap. 6, but first it may be helpful to discuss the two main crops which were essentially the 'mainstay' of the plantation economy—as well as becoming important cash crops for the African peasantry—cotton and tobacco.

5 COTTON

As we discussed in Chap. 3, there is a long tradition among the people of the Shire Highlands, going back many centuries, of engaging in trading activities—in the trade or barter of a variety of subsistence goods and commodities. Those included many varieties of foodstuffs, especially dried fish, salt, meat, metal hoes and axes, tobacco, chickens and cotton goods. Cotton, in fact, was often used as a means of exchange and payment. On the Buchanan estates, for example, in the early colonial period, around eight yards of cloth was considered suitable payment for a months' agricultural work (Amachinga Yao Traditions, K. Phiri et al. 1977).

It is hardly surprising then, with the imposition of an annual hut tax in the 1890s—it was eventually set at three shillings—and the development of the plantation economy in the Shire Highlands, that local Africans began producing food crops for sale to European planters,

traders and missionaries. Large amounts of maize, millet, cassava and beans were therefore grown for sale in the Blantyre township, and the fertile Chiradzulu district came to be described as the ‘granary’ of the Shire Highlands. In the year 1907 around 500 tons of maize was sold by African growers, and, as we noted earlier, vegetable production for the Blantyre market—especially cabbages, tomatoes and potatoes (grown in *dimba* gardens)—became a flourishing enterprise (NSB 3/13/1. Blantyre District Book 1907; McCracken 2012: 89).

The cultivation of cotton and the weaving of cotton cloth was an integral part of the Shire Highlands economy throughout the nineteenth century. Cloth was an important item of trade, and, as noted, was often used as a measure of value and a medium of exchange. In the 1890s around two yards of calico was considered to be worth one shilling in English currency. During the 1860s Livingstone recorded that cotton was grown in almost every village—though he was probably referring mainly to the Shire Valley—and that the cotton gardens were between one and three acres in size. He wrote that two varieties of cotton were found in the country, one foreign, the other native.

The *thonje manga*, the foreign cotton, the name showing that it was been introduced, is of excellent quality’, he wrote, while, ‘The *thonje cadja* (*kagi*), or indigenous cotton, is of shorter staple and feels in the hand like wool. This kind is planted every season in the Highlands; yet, because it makes stronger cloth, many of the people prefer it to the foreign cloth (Livingstone 1865: 102; Bennett and Ylvisakar 1971: 60).

A decade later John Buchanan recorded that it was a common sight to see both younger and older men on the Shire spinning cotton into thread—for cotton weaving seems to have been confined to the menfolk (1885: 127).

Cotton (*thonje*) is an annual or perennial shrub belonging to the Malvaceae family. Many varieties are recognized, but two types introduced to Nyasaland are perhaps the most salient, *Gossypium barbadense*, probably introduced from Brazil, and *G. hirsutum*, an American type introduced at the end of the nineteenth century (Pike and Rimmington 1965: 185–186).

During Livingstone’s time—contrary to the impression gained—most of the cotton production was probably in the Shire Valley, rather than in the Shire Highlands. But cotton seems to have been cultivated in the low-lying, drier regions of the Shire Highlands, particularly around Lake

Chilwa, and in the Chiradzulu, Phalombe and Mulanje districts. Indeed the agriculturalist John Killick once remarked to me that ‘altitude’ was the critical factor in the cultivation of cotton. For it does not flourish well over 3000 feet (914 m), and seems to prefer rich black clay soils (*makande*).

While at the end of the nineteenth century imported calico from Britain had completely undermined the local cotton industry in the Shire Highlands (and that of the Lower Shire Valley) paradoxically, there was an increasing demand for raw cotton by the Lancashire cotton mills. As early as the 1890s some effort had been made by European planters in the Shire Highlands to plant cotton as an export crop. Planters such as Buchanan, Hynde and Sharrer had already begun to introduce varieties of Egyptian and American cotton on their estates. These seem to have grown well. In 1896 cotton from Sharrer’s Namitembo estate had been forwarded to Kew for an opinion, and the response was that the cotton was ‘woolly, clean and bright’, though a good deal discoloured by insect stains. The first recorded export of cotton was in 1893 when 400 lb of cotton was exported, most of it grown by European planters in the Blantyre district (Terry 1962: 59; Pachai 1973b: 164).

But the boost to the cotton industry in Nyasaland came in 1902 with the foundation in Manchester of the British Cotton Growing Association, a quasi-government body with links to the colonial office. The object of the Association was to encourage the cultivation of raw cotton throughout the British Empire, both in order to meet the demands of the Lancashire cotton mills, and to free the British cotton industry from its dependence on the United States for its cotton supplies. The association, therefore, began to advance capital against growing crops to enable European planters in the protectorate—particularly in the Shire Highlands—to invest in cotton production. Many planters took up this offer. While in 1901 only 60 acres were under cotton, by 1904 this had increased substantially to 22,000 acres. By 1905, 400 tons of cotton was exported, representing 12 % of all exports.

During the same period the colonial administration made efforts to encourage the cultivation of cotton by Africans on crown (trust) lands, distributing Egyptian seed to potential growers. That same year (1905) cultivation of cotton by African peasants had spread throughout the Shire Highlands—with some 2207 acres under cotton (Terry 1962: 60; Baker 1971b: 96).

In the Mulanje district cotton growing first began in 1904, when the energetic collector, Hector Duff, who by his own admission was a ‘reac-

tionary' (1932: 29), distributed cotton seed free of charge. By 1912 some 250 tons of cotton was being produced by African growers in the district, although, significantly in the initial stages, it was largely the Yao chiefs who obtained the seeds, employing Lomwe immigrants to cultivate the cotton for them (Boeder 1984: 24; McCracken 2012: 90).

The colonial administration made every effort, as indicated, to encourage the expansion of cotton growing among African peasant farmers. It thus established demonstration plots, issued leaflets in Chinyanja advising Africans on suitable methods of cotton cultivation, distributed selected seeds—the American upland variety in the Shire Highlands, the Egyptian variety in the Lower Shire Valley—and created a system of permanent markets. During the next decade (around 1914) cotton markets were established at Namiwawa, Likhabela and Thuchila in the Shire Highlands. Cotton was purchased from the African growers either by the African Lakes Company or by licensed buyers on behalf of the British Cotton Growing Association.

In 1910 the Cotton Ordinance was enacted to regulate the cultivation, harvesting and sale of the cotton crop by African peasants, and the Agricultural Department took over monitoring its production. The cultivation of cotton on crown (trust) lands was therefore very tightly controlled by the colonial administration (Terry 1962: 63–67). It was recognized, of course, that the introduction of cotton as a cash crop would be a good way of raising the local tax revenue.

But the cultivation of cotton had its problems, for, as with all export crops—coffee included—there could be perplexing fluctuations on the world market, which could lead to wide variations in the price paid to the local producers. The administration therefore attempted to adopt a policy involving a fixed price for the cotton. Inevitably this tended to be on the low side, and given the sometimes high quality of the Nyasaland cotton crop, this often led, as Megan Vaughan suggests, to the surplus price being taken by the European companies or individuals who were designated the official cotton buyers (1982: 362). In fact, the colonial state established cotton markets precisely in order to break up the cartel that 'white estate owners had established to purchase African-grown cotton at knock-down prices'—as Leroy Vail puts it (1983: 48).

The African peasant farmers also had periodic droughts to contend with, as well as the numerous insect pests that are associated with the cotton plant and often cause severe damage. I have discussed such insect pests more fully elsewhere, but four insect pests are particularly note-

worthy: the cotton stainers *kamatowa* (*Dysdercus* spp); the elegant grasshopper *nunkhadala* (*Zonocerus elegans*); the harvester termite *nthusi*; (*Hodotermes mossambicus*), and the larvae of Noctuidae moths, variously known as bollworms *mbozi* (Morris 2004: 125–130). Such insects could cause severe crop losses. For this reason, throughout the colonial period the Agricultural Department regulated the planting and uprooting (and burning) of the cotton plant, in order to prevent further insect infestation.

It must be recognized that cotton is a highly labour-intensive crop, and follows roughly the same cycle as the main food crops in the Shire Highlands, millet, sorghum and maize. The cultivation of the cotton was done entirely by hand. The seeds were sown, some three feet apart, in the early part of the rainy season, around November, the land having been hoed into ridges. The seedlings were later thinned out, and the plants weeded. Pests such as stainer bugs or bollworms were removed by hand, and the crop harvested during the early dry season, usually June to July. As each plant may have 40–50 bolls, harvesting the cotton was also labour-intensive. The yield of cotton per acre varied according to climate, soils and type of cotton, but could be anywhere between 700 and 1500 lb (320–680 kg) of seed cotton (MacMillan 1956: 400; White 1987: 113).

African peasants in the Shire Highlands adopted the cultivation of cotton when and where it was deemed feasible, for as Vaughan suggests they were not averse to cash-crop production itself ‘as long as the labour requirements of the crop (were) not too onerous, or were compensated by a sufficiently high price for the first priority of peasant farmers was, and is, the attainment of food security’ (1982: 363).

In May 1905 the ‘cotton expert’ Samuel Simpson arrived in Nyasaland to advise European planters in the Shire Highlands on cotton growing. It appears that he was extremely alarmed and disgruntled at what he found with regard to the plantation economy. For most of the cotton plantations of the European settlers were in a deplorable state, in that, hoping to make a quick profit at a time of rising cotton prices, they have over-reached themselves, planting up large acreages in a highly inefficient manner. Most of the planters, Simpson commented, had ‘no experience in agricultural work whatsoever!’ He therefore advised the British Cotton Growing Association that they should stop supporting the European planters with generous loans, but instead provide African peasants with reliable seeds and viable marketing facilities. This was eventually adopted by the colonial government, who, as earlier noted, were keen to encourage cotton-growing among African peasant farmers, especially in the Lower Shire Valley.

By 1914 the Lower Shire Valley had become the leading cotton-producing region of the protectorate and cotton ginneries were established at Chiromo and Port Herald (Nsanje) (CO 525/65; Pachai 1973b: 165; McCracken 2012: 90).

A key figure in the development of cotton-growing within the European planting community, who at the turn of the twentieth century were eager to find a suitable export crop to replace coffee, was the manager of Alexander L. Bruce's Magomero estate, William Jervis Livingstone. Appointed manager in 1893, Livingstone was by all accounts a man with a violent temper and a rather aggressive temperament, as well as having a marked antipathy towards African people. But like John Buchanan he was a highly practical man and a dedicated agriculturalist, and, as McCracken suggests, made an important contribution to the development of cotton growing in the country (2012: 91; D. Livingstone 2003: 26).

In 1903 samples of Egyptian cotton grown on the Magomero estate were sent by Livingstone to the African Lakes Company for consideration. Their report was favourable: the colour and quality of the cotton fibre was declared to be 'good', and it was valued at 6 d per pound—enough for a handsome profit. Experimenting with both American upland and Egyptian varieties of cotton, Livingstone developed a hybrid cotton which he named Nyasaland Upland, and by 1908 this highly enterprising planter had around 1000 acres (400 ha) under cotton on the Magomero estate. Employing several European assistants, and opening up around sixteen different cotton plantations—the largest was 500 acres—each linked with a particular village community (of Lomwe tenants), the total land area under cotton in 1914, just prior to the Chilembwe rebellion, amount to 5000 acres (2000 ha). The labour on the cotton plantations was organized through the *thangata* system, and the ginned cotton was taken to the railway siding at Luchenza by ox cart (White 1987: 108–111).

Other European planters in the Shire Highlands quickly made use of the Nyasaland Upland variety of cotton. By 1912 some 23,337 acres were under cotton production, 80 % of the cotton being grown on European estates. It is worth noting, however, that European planters often bought raw cotton from their African tenants, or even from African cotton growers on crown land, who, in turn, often employed as ganyu labour, recent Lomwe immigrants. By then, cotton had become the main export crop, representing about half the total exports. But during the next two decades cotton declined as a plantation crop, and by the outbreak of the Second World War, cotton was almost exclusively grown as a cash crop by African

peasant farmers, especially in the Lower Shire Valley (Pachai 1978: 184; White 1987: 109; McCracken 2012: 91).

6 TOBACCO

As with cotton, tobacco was widely cultivated throughout the Shire Highlands in the pre-colonial period, both for local consumption and for trade. The tobacco plant *fodya* (*Nicotiana tabacum* or *N. rustica*) is a native of tropical America, and belongs to the Solanaceae family (which includes also the tomato and potato). It was probably introduced into the Zambezi region by the Arabs or Portuguese many centuries ago. In his travels through Northern Zambezia, Livingstone frequently encountered tobacco gardens and noted that tobacco was an important item of trade. The local variety, known as *labu* (*Nicotiana rustica*), a yellow-flowered aromatic herb, was traditionally sold in the form of compact plaits or coils, weighing about a pound. It has a small leaf with a high nicotine content, and a strong aroma, reminiscent of Turkish tobacco. It is still cultivated in Malawi, although during the Banda era a determined effort was made to eradicate *labu* tobacco, on the grounds that it spread tobacco disease.

In his pioneering account of the people of the Shire Highlands, John Buchanan recorded—in the 1880s—that the cultivation of tobacco ‘holds an important place in every garden’. The young tobacco plants were raised under the eaves of their huts, and at the outset of the rains were planted out on raised mounds within the village, or into the fine black soil in some ‘low-lying spot where soil is moist’ (*dimba*). When the plants had grown six or seven leaves they were usually topped, allowing no more to grow. The leaves were cured by spreading them on the roof of huts, letting them have the dew during the night and hot sun during the day. When cured, the leaves were plaited into a belt (Buchanan 1885: 126).

As with coffee, the pioneer in cultivating tobacco as a commercial crop for export was John Buchanan. Having brought in seeds of Virginia tobacco for experimental purposes, Buchanan, along with his brothers, during the early 1890s cultivated tobacco on his Michiru estate in Blantyre, and on Chilunga estate close to Zomba. In 1893 the first parcel of tobacco weighing around 40 lb (18 kg) was sent for auction to London. This had been described as a ‘historic occasion’—as the first export of tobacco from the protectorate. But most of Buchanan’s tobacco was sold in the Shire Highlands, as locally-manufactured cigarettes and cigars (Antill 1945: 50; Matthews and Wilshaw 1992: 27). Tobacco was grown around the same time by Henry Brown

on his Thornwood estate in Mulanje, and locally-made cigarettes, cigars and pipe tobacco were displayed at the Mulanje agricultural show in 1898 (Pachai 1973b: 162; B. Lamport-Stokes 1992: 21).

The other pioneers in the development of tobacco as a commercial crop were Robert Hynde and Ross Stark on their Malosa and Songani estates north of Zomba. Around 1893 they realized that locally-cultivated *labu* tobacco was unsuited for European consumption, and they therefore imported tobacco seed from a company in Virginia. They had also observed how local Africans cured *labu* by smoking the tobacco in their huts, hanging the leaves, perhaps for many weeks, in the rafters of the hut, and they adopted this method with great success. Even so, the tobacco produced was described as 'rough and ready' by one early observer.

In 1901, as earlier noted, Blantyre and East Africa Ltd was established, combining the estates of the Buchanan Brothers with those of Hynde and Stark, Robert S Hynde becoming the general manager of the company. They therefore initiated the growing of fire-cured Virginia tobacco on many of their estates in the Shire Highlands—some 14 estates in the Zomba, Namadzi, Blantyre, Thyolo and Mulanje districts, totaling around 600 acres under tobacco (Capenny 1904). Most of the fire-cured tobacco produced was packed as consignments in hessian bales, and found its way to tobacco manufacturers in South Africa, via the port of Chinde. To support their ventures Blantyre and East Africa Limited invited two American tobacco specialists from Virginia to supervise the cultivation and curing of the tobacco crop on their Songani estate, as well as giving advice on the growing and curing of fire-cured tobacco (Matthews and Wilshaw 1992: 31).

Blantyre and East Africa Ltd, in the name of Hynde and Stark, can rightly be accredited as having pioneered the first tenant scheme of tobacco farming in Nyasaland. Under the scheme the crops were grown by the African tenants in their own garden plots not by wage labour on tobacco plantations. The tenant was given seed by the European landowner/planter, and the cultivation and curing of the fire-cured tobacco was undertaken by the tenant, who then sold the tobacco to the estate. The well-known agronomist Stephen Carr described this form of tenant farming to me as a kind of 'share-cropping' in which the tenant—who did all the work—only received about one-third of the value of the crop. But Africans on neighbouring crown (trust) land were also encouraged to crop tobacco via this system, which seems to have been widely adopted by more enterprising Africans in the Shire Highlands. For it provided

them with a ready source of cash income, while allowing them to retain some degree of control over their own labour, as well as enabling them to work within the vicinity of their own household and kin group. In 1906 Blantyre and East Africa sent samples of dark fire-cured tobacco to tobacco brokers in London and received very favourable reports (Matthews and Wilshaw 1992: 31).

In the first decade of the twentieth century not only Blantyre and East Africa, but many other companies and planters became increasingly engaged in the cultivation of tobacco as an export crop, including both the African Lakes Company and Sharrer's British Central Africa Company. In 1904 nearly 60,000 lb of tobacco was exported from the protectorate, mostly produced by African tenant farmers working on private estates in the Shire Highlands (Matthews and Wilshaw 1992: 33).

Around 1908 a number of significant developments occurred in relation to the expanding tobacco industry. The Shire Highlands railway was opened up in that year, making for easy access to the Zambezi waterway leading to the coast, and this greatly facilitated the export of all agricultural produce, but specifically cotton and tobacco. At this time, too, the Imperial Tobacco Company established a factory and buying station at Limbe, close to the headquarters of the British Central Africa Company. This company had been instrumental in inducing the Imperial Tobacco Company to send out a tobacco expert—one A.W. Boyd from Richmond, Virginia—to advise on the cultivation, curing and marketing of tobacco. Boyd not only recommended the building of a factory close to the railway at Limbe, but also encouraged European planters to grow flue-cured tobacco. By that time there were around 119 flue-curing tobacco barns in the Shire Highlands and nearly 2000 acres under tobacco cultivation (Antill 1945: 51; Pachai 1973b: 163).

In 1908 the export value of tobacco £9239 was well behind that of coffee and cotton, but by 1911 tobacco exports were valued at £42,627. During the next decade there was a great expansion of the tobacco industry in the Shire Highlands, and, given the high monetary value of tobacco as an export crop, tobacco came to replace cotton as the main plantation crop. By 1921 around 2500 tons of tobacco was being exported from Nyasaland, valued at £300,000, most of it produced in the Shire Highlands (Baker 1971b: 95; McCracken 2012: 93).

There are many varieties of tobacco but with respect to the Shire Highlands and the present study three main types are worth briefly outlining—the dark fire-cured, the flue-cured Virginia and burley tobacco.

The *dark fire-cured tobacco*, pioneered by Hynde and Stark at the end of the nineteenth century, was a type of Western Tobacco that originated in North Kentucky. It was essentially cured, like *labu* tobacco, by being hung over fires within a hut, or in a specially-built oven. The tobacco produced was of dark colouration, and with a heavy, smoky aroma. The seeds of this tobacco were sown in August in specially prepared nurseries, well-watered, and the seedlings planted out in the early rains. They were usually planted as small plots within the maize garden, but never inter-cropped. Although initially grown by tenant farmers on the private estates of European planters, during the colonial period, especially from the 1920s onwards, dark fire-cured tobacco came to be grown by Africans on crown (African trust) land. It was grown mainly in the Phalombe region and on the Thuchila plain, as well as in the drier parts of the Blantyre district, such as Lunzu or near Malabvi hill. In the Blantyre district in the 1920s there were 1302 Africans growing fire-cured tobacco on crown land, compared with 734 growing tobacco as tenants on private estates. The average yield seems to have been around 250 lb of tobacco per acre, and tobacco gardens were between one and two acres (MNA/NSB 7/1/1). But importantly, fire-cured tobacco was also widely cultivated as a plantation crop, in the early years of the twentieth century. Used as a pipe tobacco, it was mainly exported to the West African market.

Blue-cured Virginia tobacco was almost exclusively grown in the Shire Highlands, as a plantation crop on European estates. The reason for this is that the brick barns in which the tobacco was cured involved a high capital investment. The tobacco leaves were essentially dried by means of hot air conducted through metal pipes (flues) that heat the barn.

All tobacco seed is exceedingly small, and it is said that a teaspoonful of seed is sufficient to plant around half an acre of tobacco. As with dark fire-cured tobacco, the seeds were sown in specially prepared nurseries, and tobacco planting began in the early rains when the seedlings reached a height of around six or seven inches. They were then planted out on contoured ridges, about three feet apart. The ground was often ploughed or prepared around June or July when it was still moist, the tobacco tending to flourish on red or sandy loam soils. The amount of nitrogen seems to be a key factor in the production of fire-cured tobacco, and an experienced tobacco farmer, Peter Murray, informed me that tobacco does not grow well on land after the growing of legumes such as soya or groundnuts.

The reaping of the tobacco leaves between January and March was from the bottom up, and they were hung in the barn to dry for around

seven days. The curing of the tobacco was a complex, intricate drying process, during which the green leaves were turned into a rich lemon-yellow. Hence, flue-cured tobacco came to be described as the 'golden weed'. As a monocrop, the land under flue-cured tobacco was usually cultivated in a rotational cycle, alternating with either fallow or a maize crop—as exemplified on A.M. Henderson's Chiwale estate in the Thyolo district (*Nyasaland Farmer and Forester* 6/3–7, 1962; Matthews and Wilshaw 1992: 15).

The European planters always endeavoured to conserve tracts of *Brachystegia* woodland on their estates as a source of firewood, needed in the heating of the tobacco barns. Often, this was a source of conflict with their African tenants who viewed the woodland as a common resource.

As indicated above, throughout the early colonial period, flue-cured tobacco in the Shire Highlands was grown exclusively on European estates, and by the 1920s large amounts of tobacco were being exported to the United Kingdom for the manufacture of English-style cigarettes (Baker 1971b: 95).

Burley tobacco is an American type of tobacco from Kentucky. It has large juicy leaves and is air-cured under shade by hanging the leaves in racks, in open grass-thatched barns—a slow drying process. This form of tobacco only came into prominence towards the end of the colonial period, and was largely utilized in the making of American-style Marlboro cigarettes. During the post-colonial period Burley tobacco became the main type of tobacco produced in Malawi, including the Shire Highlands, and it was grown almost exclusively on estates.

As with cotton, tobacco is beset with a large number of insect pests. It is, however, of interest that the *Malawi Tobacco Handbook* (Matthews and Wilshaw 1992) makes no mention at all of insect pests on tobacco, apart from an advertisement by the company 'Antipest'. Yet throughout the colonial period insects were viewed by European planters as a serious problem, particularly the white fly (*Bemesia tabaci*) which transmits a disease locally known as 'leaf cure' or 'cabbaging', and the tobacco beetle (*Lasioderma serricornis*). The latter species is a tiny reddish brown beetle (HB 2–4 mm) that feeds on stored tobacco as well as other stored products, and can cause serious losses. During the colonial period, infestations of these beetles were so alarming that the agricultural department often decreed the destruction of several tons of tobacco in order to eradicate the beetle. The government entomologist Colin Smee, recommended that all tobacco should be uprooted and destroyed at the end of the season in order to control insect pests. Those particularly troublesome

on growing tobacco included: *mbozi*, the ‘tobacco budworm’, the caterpillar of a small moth (*Helicoverpa armigera*); *nunkhadala*, the elegant grasshopper (*Zonocerus elegans*); and *nsabwe*, the tobacco aphid (*Myzus persicae*) (MNA/A3/2/267; Morris 2004: 139–140).

Until the 1920s almost all protectorate tobacco was grown in the Shire Highlands, mainly as a plantation crop on European estates, or via the tenant-production of dark fire-cured tobacco. During the 1920s, however, there was a decline in the growing of fire-cured tobacco as a plantation crop in the Shire Highlands, and this coincided with an enormous expansion of tobacco production in the central region of Nyasaland, specifically land north of Lilongwe. Three European planters are recognized as having pioneered the development of tobacco production beyond the Shire Highlands, namely Ignaco Conforzi, Andrew F. Barron and Roy Wallace. With regard to tobacco they almost formed a ‘planting aristocracy’. All three men had originally been successful as tobacco farmers in the Shire Highlands.

An Italian immigrant, son of a landowner, and with a diploma in agriculture, Ignaco Conforzi, came to Nyasaland in 1907. Originally employed by Blantyre and East Africa Limited as a manager on their estates at Njuli and Lunzu, Conforzi pioneered the practice of planting tobacco early in the rainy season. He soon came to acquire his own tobacco estate in the Thyolo district, as well as establishing himself as a successful tobacco buyer. By the end of the 1920s he had 4000 acres of freehold land, and several thousand acres of leasehold in the central region. Through the tenant farming system Conforzi grew both fire-cured and sun-cured tobacco on his estates. Around the same time this enterprising planter switched from tobacco to tea on his Thyolo estates (estates amounting to over 2000 acres) and thus also became a pioneer in the production of tea (on the history of tea in the Shire Highlands see Chap. 7) (Pachai 1973a: 163; Matthews and Wilshaw 1992: 36; McCracken 2012: 196).

Andrew Barron and Roy Wallace were close friends, and both owned tobacco estates in the Namadzi district. Barron came to Nyasaland in 1913 as an assistant to the American tobacco expert A.W. Boyd, and soon became the sole owner of Makoka estate, while Wallace, arriving around the same time, became owner of an adjacent estate at Thondwe. The two men were both keen game hunters, and often spent time together during the dry season hunting in the then ‘wild’ country north of Lilongwe. As tobacco farmers they recognized the potential of the rich soils of the Lilongwe–Kasungu region for tobacco growing. Around 1920 they therefore obtained an area of land as leasehold north of Lilongwe, and initially

began growing flue-cured tobacco as a plantation crop. But, like Hynde and Stark in an earlier decade, they soon switched to the ‘tenant farming’ of fire-cured tobacco. This involved providing seedlings and technical advice to African growers—on both estate and crown land—in exchange for the exclusive right to purchase their tobacco crop. The system was popular among African peasants in the central region as it provided an important source of cash income and they retained control over their own agricultural work. It has rather been adjudged as a rather exploitative system, in that tobacco buying was a rather ‘lucrative business’ (Antill 1945: 56). The African growers received 2 d per pound for the tobacco crop then produced, while the re-handled product was worth 6 d per pound in Limbe. In 1926, 880 tons of tobacco were produced for Barron alone by tenant farmers in the Lilongwe district. Nonetheless, the experience of African tenant farmers growing tobacco in the central region during the 1920s have been compared favourably with that of tenants working under the *thangata* system on private estates in the Shire Highlands (Antill 1945: 53–54; Matthews and Wilshaw 1992: 33–34; McCracken 2012: 171).

In 1926 the government established the Native Tobacco Board to regulate and monitor the production and marketing of tobacco—mainly with regard to production on crown land. Significantly, the board did not encourage the production of fire-cured tobacco by African farmers in the Shire Highlands—deeming that the climate was less suitable, and that there was a ‘dearth’ of firewood in the Highlands (Antill 1945: 58–59). But nevertheless the production of dark fire-cured tobacco by African peasant farmers—on both crown land and tenants on private estates—continued through much of the colonial period, in spite of the price fluctuations in tobacco. Indeed, in 1927, some 1817 tons of dark fire-cured tobacco was being produced on crown (trust) land in the Shire Highlands (Matthews and Wilshaw 1992: 37).

But by the end of the 1920s, however, the centre of gravity of tobacco production had shifted away from the Shire Highlands and the plantation economy, and came to focus on the production of tobacco by African growers on crown (trust) land in the central region. Nonetheless, tobacco production continued to play an important part in the economy of the Shire Highlands throughout the colonial period—whether as a plantation crop, through tenant farming on private estates, or as an important cash crop for peasant farmers on crown estates.

We turn now to the Chilembwe rising of January 1915 and its aftermath, for this rebellion has an important and iconic significance in the history of Malawi, and the Shire Highlands in particular.

The Chilembwe Rebellion

I PROLOGUE

The short-lived rebellion against colonial rule that took place in January 1915, widely described as the Chilembwe rising, has been the subject of a welter of books and critical studies, and varied interpretations regarding its historical significance. The most important of these studies was undoubtedly George Shepperson and Thomas Price's classical study of the revolt *Independent African* (1958)—a biography of the Rev. John Chilembwe, but, as its sub-title denoted, a study essentially of the 'origins, setting and significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915'. It is beyond the scope of the present study to discuss this rebellion at length, even though Chilembwe has become a heroic and iconic figure in the history of Malawi. In fact, his image is now depicted on Malawi's bank notes, having replaced that of Kamuzu Banda. I shall focus, rather, on the more economic aspects of the rebellion, specifically the relationship of the revolt to the *thangata* system—which George Mwase (1967: 29) intimated was the 'real cause' of the rebellion—and the links between Chilembwe and the emerging class of African planters and agrarian entrepreneurs.

(For important studies and reflections on the Chilembwe rising besides those of Shepperson and Price, see Mwase 1967; Pachai 1971, 1973b: 214–224; Rotberg 1971; White 1987: 120–145; D. Phiri 1999; McCracken 2012: 127–146).

Fig. 6.1 John Chilembwe as a young man, circa 1897
Source: *African American National Baptist Convention Magazine*, David Stuart-Mogg collection. Reproduced with permission



The Chilembwe rebellion was certainly short-lived. On the night of 23 January 1915 three European planters in the employ of Alexander L. Bruce, men who worked on his Magomero estate in the Chiradzulu district, were tragically killed by a small group of armed ‘rebels’ under the leadership and orders of John Chilembwe. Only 11 days later Chilembwe himself was killed, and within a fortnight the revolt had been completely suppressed by the combined forces of the King’s African Rifles (KAR), the colonial police, and armed groups of European planters who formed the Mikolongwe section of the Nyasaland Volunteer Reserve. In an act of severe reprisal by the government, by the end of March 36 rebels involved in the revolt had been executed, either by public hanging or by firing squad, and around 300 Africans imprisoned—anyone, it seems, associated in any way with Chilembwe and the rebellion.

What was significant about the rising, however, was that it was essentially a localized affair—centred in the Magomero estate in the heart of the Shire Highlands—and was focussed almost entirely around the personality and strivings of one man—the Rev. John Chilembwe.

In this chapter I explore separately the various aspects of Chilembwe's rising. After describing John Chilembwe's early life and the important influence of his mentor, the Baptist missionary Joseph Booth, I discuss in Sect. 3 the foundation of the Providence Industrial Mission.

I specifically focus on the relationship between John Chilembwe and the A.L. Bruce Magomero estate, whose management imposed on the local people—Chilembwe's neighbours, most of whom were recent Lomwe immigrants—the *thangata* system in its most oppressive form. Chilembwe identified with the social and economic grievances of the Magomero tenants who worked as agricultural labourers on the cotton plantations. Such grievances have therefore been described as one of the primary causes of the Chilembwe rising.

I then turn in Sect. 4 to a discussion of the African planters and traders who were prominent in the Shire Highlands in the early years of the twentieth century. Many of these African planters, as an emerging petty bourgeois class, were close associates of John Chilembwe, and were among the main 'ringleaders' of the revolt. Their own discontents were also an important factor in the rising.

In Sect. 5 I outline the main events of the Chilembwe rebellion, and focus on four motivating factors with regard to the rebellion: the evangelist's growing hostility towards the European planters of the Chiradzulu district and the colonial state; his debts and lack of funding; his declining health; and his opposition to the First World War, and subsequent fears of deportation.

Finally, in Sect. 6 I discuss the many interpretations of the Chilembwe rising that have been proposed, both by African witnesses to the Commission of Inquiry into the revolt, and by later scholars.

2 JOHN CHILEMBWE AND HIS MENTOR

John Chilembwe was born around 1871 near Sangano hill, about five miles east of the Chiradzulu *boma* (District headquarters). He was of mixed tribal background, his father being a Yao, and his mother Mang'anja, but Chilembwe always seems to have considered himself a Yao. It has been suggested that his name Chilembwe is derived from that of the

roan antelope. After some early schooling at Chilomoni near Blantyre, Chilembwe met in 1892 the radical Baptist missionary Joseph Booth, who was some 20 years his senior. Chilembwe became Booth's cook, confidante, the devoted guardian and carer of Booth's 9-year-old daughter Emily—Booth had recently become a widower—as well as his interpreter of African culture. Booth had a deep and lasting influence on Chilembwe, who became one of his first converts to Christianity, along with David Livingstone and Gordon Mathaka (Shepperson and Price 1958: 42–58; Langworthy 1996: 32–39; D. Phiri 1999: 1–4).

Coming to the Shire Highlands in 1892, Joseph Booth (1851–1932) was an extraordinary man. Though a Christian pacifist with a visionary temperament, he was also independent-minded, assertive and enterprising, and was highly critical of established institutions, both political and religious. He was particularly critical of the Church of Scotland Blantyre missionaries, comparing their affluent lifestyle unfavourably with that of African peasants, and, in turn, the Blantyre Presbyterians deeply resented Booth's intrusion into what they considered their own sphere of influence. For, as a Baptist with unorthodox religious ideas, Booth came to establish his own Christian mission very close to Blantyre (Shepperson and Price 1958: 32–34; Langworthy 1996: 53–56).

But what was more alarming, both to the colonial administration and the Church of Scotland missionaries, was that Booth expressed a 'dangerous' egalitarian spirit and was a determined advocate of racial equality, as well as being fundamentally opposed to the colonial state. As Langworthy wrote, this 'maverick' missionary was 'a passionate advocate of individual rights, social justice, racial equality, and peace', as well as a radical opponent of the colonial state—although this concern for human welfare, Langworthy noted, did not extend to his own family (1996: 13; Boeder 1980b: 3).

Equally Important Booth was a confirmed advocate of the need to establish a self-supporting industrial mission, and, as earlier noted, he quickly acquired a large tract of land at Mitsidi some five miles west of Blantyre. Booth seems to have maintained good personal relations with the Commissioner, Harry Johnston, who agreed to Booth's purchase of some 26,537 acres of land (about 42 square miles, 107 square km) from the African big-game hunter and entrepreneur, Kumtaja. The cost was some 1750 yards of calico, valued at £40—less than 3 d per acre. Mitsidi became the headquarters of the Zambezi Industrial mission, and, employing around 400 workers, mostly Tonga and Ngoni migrants, Booth soon

established a large acreage of coffee. A year later (1893) Booth acquired another large estate at the headwaters of the Likhubula stream. An area of land—mostly covered with *Brachystegia* woodland—of around 50,000 acres. Adjacent to Mitsidi, it became the location of a second mission—the Nyasa Industrial mission (Boeder 1980: 3; Booth 1996: 79; Langworthy 1996: 35–41).

Having managed to ‘wrangle’ (as Boeder puts it) some £30,000 from Baptist missionary societies and businessmen, Booth enticed many missionary-educated Africans away from the Blantyre mission by offering them what was then considered exorbitant wages. Hetherwick, in particular, complained that they were given as much as 18 shillings a month, whereas the normal rate in the 1890s was only around three shillings a month. But significantly Booth paid his own African labourers in calico, worth only two shillings and sixpence per month—actually less than the wage paid by other European planters (Shepperson and Price 1958: 34; Boeder 1980: 6; Booth 1996: 79).

But, as Robert Boeder has stressed, Booth was a ‘bundle of contradictions’ and there seems to have been a wide gulf between the egalitarian ideology that Booth so fervently preached and his own practices. Indeed Boeder accused the Baptist missionary of sheer ‘hypocrisy’, in that while Booth castigated European planters for their ‘land-snatching’ he himself was guilty of one of the ‘greatest land grabs’ in the history of Nyasaland (Boeder 1980b: 3; Booth 1996: 13; but cf. Boeder 1983; Langworthy 1996: 36).

Although Booth continually expressed anti-colonial sentiments, it is rather ironic that one of the few Europeans with whom he established cordial relations was the arch-imperialist Harry Johnston! In fact, it is suggested that Johnston was quite happy to allow Booth to acquire large tracts of land near Blantyre, in order to thwart the efforts of the Church of Scotland missionaries in Blantyre—particularly Scott and Hetherwick, with whom Johnston had a strained and difficult relationship. As Boeder put it; in their constant opposition to the Blantyre missionaries Johnston and Booth made ‘strange bedfellows’ (1980b: 14).

In 1896 Booth—who has been well described as a ‘religious hitchhiker’ (Shepperson and Price 1958: 19)—on a visit to Natal with his protégé Gordon Mathaka, established the African Christian Union. The following year, he published in the United States a seminal tract entitled significantly *Africa for the Africans* (1897/1996). It outlined the colonial situation in Africa, was critical of the partition of Africa by European states and

their plans to 'drain the wealth of Africa' and to exploit African labour. It advocated the formation of the African Christian Union. Such a union, Booth contended, had three essential aims: to spread the Christian gospel throughout the African continent; to establish what he termed 'Industrial Missions'; and finally, to restore Africa to the African. This would entail both the restoration of African lands to the African people, encourage their own self-government, and attract the 'Negro' (African Americans) to their 'fatherland'—Africa.

The industrial missions, on which Booth placed much emphasis, were to be self-managed by educated Africans, and to be largely focussed on agricultural and industrial production. As he expressed it, one of the aims of the union was 'to initiate or develop the culture of tea, coffee, cocoa, sugar etc. and to establish profitable mining and other industries or manufacturers' (1996: 91).

Booth clearly envisaged the industrial missions as proto-capitalist enterprises, each mission comprising around 1000 acres, and employing several hundred labourers in agricultural production, men (or women) who would be paid the basic three shillings a month in wages as rural proletarians (Booth 1996: 30). The Industrial Missions seem not so very different from that of the European estates in the Shire Highlands, apart from the fact that Booth felt that the missions would largely be under the control of educated Africans, and that Europeans would only serve as mentors, or to offer professional guidance. The industrial missions, he argued, would eventually become self-supporting. The African planter Joseph Bismarck in a letter to the *Central African Planter* (March 1987) expressed deep scepticism towards Booth's 'Africa for the African' project; in that it was not only impractical but might well lead to yet another form of exploitation of 'us poor Bantu' (Boeder 1980b: 8).

Like Buchanan, Booth clearly had great hopes for establishing a plantation economy based on the cultivation of coffee, which, he felt, would raise an annual profit of between £10 and £20 per acre (Booth 1996: 47). Alas! All his industrial missions proved to be, in economic terms, complete failures. This was partly due to the fact that few educated Africans trusted Booth—he soon alienated Gordon Mathaka and he seems to have quarrelled with almost all his erstwhile African 'disciples' (Boeder 1980: 1); and partly due to the collapse of the coffee industry in the Shire Highlands, and the fact that most of his economic schemes were based upon 'shaky assumptions and proved to be unworkable' (Langworthy 1996: 89, for

further discussions of the African Christian Union see Shepperson and Price 1958: 70–81; Langworthy 1996: 77–92).

In that same year (1897) Booth accompanied John Chilembwe to the United States, and for two years Chilembwe studied theology at the Virginia Theological Seminary in Lynchburg, a college which was affiliated to the National (Negro) Baptist Convention. Befriended by Dr Lewis Jordan, the Baptist Convention's secretary, Chilembwe's education was largely funded by various groups of African-American Baptists. While in the United States he not only received an education, but as Mungo Chisuse put it in his testimony to the Commission of Inquiry into the rebellion, he also learned a lot about race relations in the United States, particularly issues relating to racial discrimination, the movement for abolition of slavery and the freedom of 'coloured peoples' (D. Phiri 1999: 12).

There has been a great deal of debate regarding the precise nature of the relationship between John Chilembwe and his mentor Booth, especially after the African evangelist had returned to Nyasaland in 1900 (But it is worth noting that Booth was eventually declared a prohibited migrant in 1905, and prevented from returning to Nyasaland). Their relationship certainly became more distant, although whether this stemmed from an actual disagreement or quarrel is none too clear. Certainly, Chilembwe stopped regarding Booth as his 'master', but nevertheless he always seems to have regarded Booth as a respected father-figure (Shepperson and Price 1958: 147, 538; Boeder 1983: 14–15; Langworthy 1996: 174–176; D. Phiri 1990: 10).

But one thing is indisputable, namely, that Booth had a profound influence on Chilembwe; with respect to his religious affiliation—as an evangelist within the Baptist church; with regard to his egalitarian and proto-nationalist politics; and, finally, in acknowledging Booth's emphasis on the need to establish an Industrial Mission. Small wonder that the Commission of Inquiry into the 1915 rebellion, suggested that the 'political notions imbibed by Chilembwe from Joseph Booth' was one of the principal causes of the uprising (CO 525/66; Shepperson and Price 1958: 356–357).

It is nevertheless worth noting the inherent contradiction in Booth's radical politics, which Chilembwe certainly 'imbibed': namely, between a strident egalitarianism, and a strong advocacy of a hierarchical plantation economy set within a proto-capitalist society, albeit independent of European control.

3 THE PROVIDENCE INDUSTRIAL MISSION AND THE *THANGATA* SYSTEM

Sometime in 1900 John Chilembwe returned to Nyasaland as an ordained Christian Minister. Supported and funded by the National (Negro) Baptist Convention, he bought 93 acres of land at Mbombwe in the Chiradzulu district at the cost of £25. There he established the Ajawa (Yao) Providence Industrial Mission, the tribal adjective being later discarded. Chilembwe soon built a thatched church and a schoolhouse, and began to put into practice what he had learned from Joseph Booth and the theological college in Virginia. It involved combining the teaching of the Christian gospel, reinforced through educational provision, and the establishment of an industrial mission.

Chilembwe was soon joined by two African-American (Negro) Baptist missionaries from the United States, the Rev. Landon N. Cheek and Miss Emma B Delany who for some five years up to 1906 assisted Chilembwe, with the continuing support of the National Baptist Convention (Shepperson and Price 1958: 133–142).

By 1910 Chilembwe had around 800 church members, mostly Lomwe (Nguru) migrants, many of whom had settled on the neighbouring A.L. Bruce estate at Magomero. Desmond Phiri suggests that Chilembwe had a ‘magnetic personality’ (1999: 17), and the evangelist not only conducted open-air baptisms and preached the Christian gospel but appears in his sermons to have strongly advocated, like Booth, racial equality.

Embracing European culture Chilembwe—like Kamuzu Banda in a later era—always dressed in formal European clothes. He wore a smart suit and bow tie, and insisted that educated African women should dress ‘like a lady’. His wife Ida, whom he married on his return from the United States, was of mixed ancestry, her mother a Makololo from the Lower Shire Valley, her father a Portuguese man. But in photographs taken of the couple by his friend Mungo Chisuse, she is always depicted smartly dressed in a typical Edwardian frock (Shepperson and Price 1958: 86).

Chilembwe clearly saw his mission as having a ‘civilizing’ influence; and he emphasized in his sermons the importance of self-reliance, cleanliness, respectability, hard work and sobriety, and what is now described as ‘family values’ (D. Phiri 1999: 12). As George Mwase expressed it: Chilembwe wished to see his fellow Africans ‘educated and civilized’. To this end ‘He was always sober, he hated any kind of drink, and abhorred the power of alcohol he advised headmen to keep their villages nice and clean telling

them that was the key to civilization, also the key to a good healthy (life), he often said he liked to see his countrymen work hard and prosper in their undertakings, also to see them smart, such as Negro fellows he had seen in America' (1967: 27).

Chilembwe seemed the embodiment of the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism (Kaluwa 1975).

By 1912 Chilembwe had established seven schools in the Mulanje and Chiradzulu districts, with more than 900 pupils, as well as an outstation in Portuguese East Africa. He also built a large and impressive brick church with a corrugated roof, clearly modelled on David Clement Scott's Blantyre Mission church. It is significant that 'agriculture' was included in the school curriculum (Shepperson and Price 1958: 171–172; Stuart-Mogg 2010: 14–16).

To augment his income Chilembwe became a licensed elephant hunter, employed a gun-bearer, and made frequent trips into Mozambique in order to obtain ivory, which was then a lucrative commodity—to the extent that Hetherwick complained that Chilembwe's long hunting safaris (*ulendo*) often led to the neglect of his mission work (Shepperson and Price 1958: 176; D. Phiri 1999: 22).

In founding the Providence Industrial Mission as an *industrial* mission, Chilembwe, following Booth's example, not only engaged in Christian evangelism and in educational work, but was also deeply involved in establishing an agricultural estate. Employing (mainly) local Lomwe as agricultural labourers—as did the European planters—Chilembwe is reported to have established at Mbombwe experimental plots of such cash crops as cotton, pepper, coffee, rubber, chillies, and even (apparently) tea, although the annual rainfall of the Chiradzulu district is only 35–40 inches (Shepperson and Price 1958: 141; White 1987: 123).

It has been suggested that until 1914 government officials and European missionaries alike regarded Chilembwe with some favour (Rotberg in Mwase 1967: xxi). He was also widely respected among an emerging class of African planters and entrepreneurs, besides having a substantial following with respect to his own church congregation—mainly the Lomwe who had recently settled in the Chiradzulu district.

It is hardly surprising therefore that Chilembwe was one of a number of mission-educated African planters and businessmen who, in 1909 in Blantyre, established the Native's Industrial Union. It was the African equivalent of the European Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture. The Union (and the African Industrial Society formed two years later)

included such men as Joseph Bismarck, Mungo Chisuse, Duncan Njilima, John Gray Kufa, Gordon and Hugh Mathaka, Peter Mlelemba and Harry Kambwiri Matecheta. Virtually an African ‘Who’s Who’ for the Shire Highlands, several of these men were later to lose their lives in the rebellion of 1915. All had begun to challenge the assumptions of the European planters regarding white racial supremacy (Pachai 1971: 125; D. Phiri 1999: 31; McCracken 2012: 133).

We discuss some of these African planters below, but what is evident is that by 1914 Chilembwe was not only deeply involved with the Lomwe people who had settled on the Magomero estate of Alexander Livingstone Bruce but also had established close contact with a group of educated African planters and entrepreneurs who have been variously described as ‘marginal men’ or as an emerging African ‘petty bourgeoisie’ (Shepperson and Price 1958: 400–402).

In an important sense, then, Chilembwe had come to identify with, and to express the discontents and the social grievances of two very different African constituents—the Lomwe immigrants associated with his mission church, and the African planters and entrepreneurs like John Gray Kufa, Duncan Njilima and Gordon Mathaka, who were his close friends and planting associates. As McCracken expressed it: ‘It is in the precarious alliance established by these most wretched and exploited of Malawi’s inhabitants (the Lomwe) with sections of the Southern Provinces emergent African bourgeoisie that the origins of the rising can be found’ (2012: 128).

It was John Chilembwe who forged this alliance and instigated the rebellion. We discuss each of these aspects in turn.

As we mentioned in the last chapter, the Magomero estate of Alexander Livingstone Bruce was a vast tract of land of some 169,000 (272 square miles) to the north-east of Chiradzulu Mountain. It was thus but a short distance—some eight miles—from Chilembwe’s Mbombwe mission. When Bruce took over the estate in the early 1890s, the estate consisted mainly of *Brachystegia* woodland, was largely uninhabited, and there was an abundance of wild animals, specifically kudu, wildebeest, zebra, sable and bushbuck, with the occasional lion and herd of elephants. At this time, as Bruce explained to the Commission of Inquiry into the rebellion, there was only around 40 huts on the whole estate.

With the influx of Lomwe immigrants into the Shire Highlands in the first decade of the twentieth century (discussed above) many came to settle in the Chiradzulu district, both on Crown (African trust) land and

on the vast Magomero estate. The Lomwe refugees were certainly happy to settle on the A.L. Bruce estate, for there was an abundance of good land, water, firewood and wild animals (for meat)—all vital for subsistence agriculturists. Thus between 1900 and 1914 around 5000 new huts were built on the Magomero estate, providing the Bruce estate with a permanent and substantial labour force of around 3000 workers. Under the general manager William Jervis Livingstone, appointed in 1893, the Lomwe were settled in villages under Yao headmen, mostly veterans of the King's African Rifles (White 1987: 90–91).

As on other European estates in the Shire Highlands, the Magomero estate manager instituted the *thangata* system, which required every tenant on the estate to work two months each year, one month to pay their hut tax, one month *thangata* for the estate owner. Although often described as a rather benign system, labour rent was usually imposed during the rainy season—and thus the tenant's own gardens were often neglected at the most critical time of the year. In addition, severe tenancy restrictions were also imposed by the landowner, in that the cutting of timber for houses was often curtailed and the hunting of wild game prohibited (Shepperson and Price 1958: 225; D. Phiri 1999: 41).

By all accounts the general manager of Magomero estate, familiarly known as 'Willie' Livingstone, administered the *thangata* regime on the estate with a remarkable degree of harshness and brutality. As we have earlier noted, with the collapse of the coffee industry, Magomero estate, under Livingstone's enterprising management, was then chiefly devoted to cotton-growing. In 1914 the estate had around 5000 acres under cotton, and cotton is a very labour intensive crop. The abuses of the *thangata* system under Livingstone's management were many and various. Workers often received as wages not cash, but rolls of tobacco; to obtain their tax certificates they often worked twelve or thirteen weeks not the stipulated one month, the month's *thangata* was often extended to five weeks, and widows and single women were also forced to perform *thangata*; if a worker failed to complete a day's task it was discounted, and no credit was given for the time worked; the Yao chiefs and estate rangers toured the villages checking on absentees or on those people who had failed to fulfil their *thangata* obligations; and, finally, defaulters were often beaten by means of a whip made of hippopotamus hide (*chikoti*) or their huts burned.

Livingstone or 'Listonia' to the local people—thus became a figure of 'terror' and alarm on the Magomero estate, and depicted as a *mkango*

(lion). As White well expressed it: as a theory *thangata* was oppressive; in practice on Magomero estate it was arbitrary, unsystematic and often brutal (Shepperson and Price 1958: 228; Mwase 1967: 29; White 1987: 111–120; McCracken 2012: 130–131).

Many of Chilembwe's congregation worked on the Magomero estate, whether they were Nyanja or Lomwe tenants or Yao *capitaos* (African foremen). At this time, it is worth noting, the African population of Magomero estate consisted of 660 Yaos, 2174 Nyanja and 2072 Lomwe families (households) (D. Phiri 1999: 45).

What brought Chilembwe into direct conflict with the Magomero estate was that Bruce specifically refused to allow schools or churches of the Providence Industrial Mission to be built on his private estate. Several churches, however, appear to have been secretly built on the estate around 1912—Mwase avers that permission had been granted to erect such prayer-houses—but on discovery they were wantonly destroyed by Livingstone the general manager. Without any consultation or reference being made to Chilembwe, the churches were simply burnt to the ground. Something like an on-going 'feud' therefore developed between Livingstone, the general manager of the Magomero estate, and Chilembwe, although one can hardly interpret the rebellion as simply a clash of personalities (Mwase 1967: 30; D. Phiri 1999: 45–46; McCracken 2012: 133).

But one thing seems evident, namely, that many of the Magomero tenants, especially the recently settled Lomwe villagers, came to view Chilembwe as a 'fitting spokesman' for their various complaints. As Bridglal Pachai expressed it: Chilembwe took on the 'mantle of guardian' of the African tenants and labourers on the estates of the Chiradzulu district, defending their interests and integrity, and articulating their many grievances—especially in relation to the *thangata* system, and the beatings and insults they had to regularly endure. As Harry Kambwiri Matecheta indicated and stressed to the Commission of Inquiry into the rebellion, 'these things gave him (Chilembwe) great grief indeed' (CO 525/66; Pachai 1971: 123; White 1987: 127).

Much has been written on the character of William Jervis Livingstone, given that his beheading made him into a central figure in the Chilembwe rising. A distant relative to David Livingstone, he was, as earlier noted, a talented and pioneering agriculturist. But he also had a volatile temper, and as early as 1901 he was convicted and fined £5 by the Zomba high court for assaulting an African prisoner in Zomba Jail (White 1987: 83). Landeg White has written a sympathetic portrait of Livingstone,

noting his general insecurity as the manager of Magomero, for the major discussions were taken by the owner of the estate Alexander L. Bruce, his failure to acquire land for himself, and the fact that his outbursts of brutality often contrasted with the many acts of personal generosity that he often extended towards Africans (White 1987: 127–129). But one trait that seemed to characterize Livingstone—and this he no doubt shared with other European planters of the Shire Highlands: a marked antipathy towards progressive African planters, the African ‘petty bourgeoisie’ who dressed and acted like Europeans (Pachai 1971: 120, for further studies of William J. Livingstone see Stuart-Mogg 1997: 52; D. Livingstone 2003; McCracken 2012: 131).

It is to this class of African planters and entrepreneurs that we now turn, for Chilembwe also articulated both his own and their grievances and discontents with regard to both the colonial state and the European planting community. Indeed Mwase contended that Chilembwe revolted not so much against the colonial government, but rather against European planters and traders, and other ‘White Settlers’ (1967: 29).

4 AFRICAN PLANTERS AND THEIR DISCONTENTS

At the end of the nineteenth century, even before Chilembwe returned from America in 1900, a number of enterprising Africans, mostly educated at the Blantyre mission, had begun to establish themselves as independent planters and traders. They began cultivating export crops such as coffee or tobacco, often on freehold land, employing *ganyu* or wage labour. We noted in Chap. 4 the redoubtable big-game hunter and trader Kumtaja who sold a large portion of his estate near Blantyre to Joseph Booth, enabling the evangelist to establish the Zambezi Industrial Mission at Mitsidi. According to Lewis Bandawe, Kumtaja, was a Mang’anja who established a coffee estate at the back of Michiru Mountain, and became one of the richest men in Blantyre. But with the sudden collapse of the coffee industry at the close of the nineteenth century Kumtaja ran into debt and was declare bankrupt. Unusually enterprising, he then established himself as a local village headman, married several wives, and gathered around him a substantial local following. Supported by Robert Hynde, the general manager of Blantyre and East Africa Ltd, he later came to be recognized as a ‘native authority’ within the Blantyre district—as chief Ntaja (Bandawe 1971: 60).

At the end of the nineteenth century many kinds of businesses began to flourish among enterprising Africans throughout the Shire Highlands—whether agrarian estates, trading stores or timber merchants. Such ‘petty capitalists’, especially African commercial farmers, were usually frowned upon by the colonial government and actively opposed by most—but not all—European planters. Two pioneering African planters are, however, worth noting here, Paton Somanje and Joseph Bismarck.

Paton Somanje was a Yao from Mozambique who came into the Shire Highlands with his father around 1870. He originally worked as a clerk and as head *capitao* for the Buchanan brothers, working on their Mulunguzi estate in the 1880s. Encouraged by John Buchanan, Somanje acquired a 200-acre estate near Zomba, and on his estate cultivated fire-cured tobacco and cotton as well as fruit and vegetables which were sold in Zomba Township. His estate seems to have been highly successful Somanje employing several full-time labourers as well as *ganyu* workers. He also owned a small trading store on the estate. As a Church of Scotland elder, lacking any close kin, Somanje adopted the patriarchal ethos of the church, and seems to have been successful in passing on his inheritance intact to his immediate children (Bandawe 1971: 60; Vaughan 1978a: 11–12; McCracken 2012: 97).

The father-in-law of the Lomwe scholar Lewis Bandawe, Joseph Bismarck (circa 1859–1935) was born near Quelimane, and from an early age he was deeply involved in agricultural work. His father and kin were quite wealthy subsistence farmers, owning many chickens, goats, sheep and cattle, and having plantations of coconut, oranges and mangoes, as well as a vegetable garden. It was his duty, Bismarck recorded in his biography ‘always to help looking after these plantations and the gathering of the products’ (1969: 49).

Bismarck arrived in the Shire Highlands in the late 1870s, attaching himself, around the age of 20, to the Church of Scotland Mission at Blantyre. In 1879 he joined John Buchanan when the first mission station was established at Zomba, working as a teacher in the first school. After almost two years spent training as a teacher at the Lovedale Institute in South Africa, at the behest of the Blantyre Mission, Bismarck ‘made a profession of Christianity’—as he put it (1969: 50). Encouraged and befriended by both David Clement Scott and Alexander Hetherwick, Bismarck in 1884 became a teacher at the newly established Domasi Mission, north of Zomba. At this time, Bismarck often acted as a political

(and perceptive) mediator in the disputes between the Yao chiefs Malemia and Kawinga and the emerging colonial administration.

Although one of the original elders of the Church of Scotland Mission, Bismarck left the mission in 1891, after some disagreements, and began to work for various European settlers—as an agent for Eugene Sharrer’s Zambezi Traffic Company, and as a coffee planter with James Lindsay on the Chigamula estate belonging to the same company. He also worked for some years for Hynde and Stark on their Songani estate, producing fire-cured tobacco. Bismarck thus had wide experience, both as a teacher and as an agriculturist, when he came to establish his own Namwili estate in 1895. The freehold estate of around 50 acres was situated four miles from the Blantyre mission on the Katunga (Chikwawa) road. The price he paid the colonial administration for the land was five shillings an acre (*Central African Planter*, May 1896), and in 1899 he increased the size of his estate, buying the adjoining hundred acres for around £30 (1969: 54).

On the Namwili estate Bismarck grew tobacco and cotton, as well as bananas, pineapples, sweet potatoes, sugar cane and various pulses and spices. He also had a small trading store on his estate, and a large herd of cattle, selling butter, milk and ghee to European planters and missionaries and to the Indian traders who had begun to settle in Blantyre. He also had a carpentry shop at Namwili, where a variety of furniture was made by both Bismarck himself and by a number of carpenters that he trained and employed. Bandawe, who married Bismarck’s daughter Grace in 1913, recorded in his memoir that vendors from Bismarck’s estate were a common sight in Blantyre’s market and town, selling a variety of fruits and vegetables. He noted that Bismarck made quite a lot of money from the sale of his agricultural products (Bandawe 1971: 60–61).

A man of intelligence and integrity, and multi-talented, and a close friend of Scott, Bismarck later re-joined the Church of Scotland mission as a teacher and evangelist, while continuing his agricultural pursuits. He was a key African witness at the Commission of Inquiry into the Chilembwe rebellion, and, as we noted in the last chapter, he strongly emphasized the iniquities and abuses that were inherent in the *thangata* system. Although a close friend of Chilembwe and John Gray Kufa, Bismarck, like Mungo Chisuse, explicitly refused to join the uprising (Bandawe 1971: 62; Ross 1973: 207; McCracken 2008: 8).

Many other Africans of the Shire Highlands, besides Somanje and Bismarck, established themselves as independent planters and businessmen in the early years of the twentieth century. For example Donald Malota, a

former mission teacher and ivory hunter, had an estate of over 100 acres at Nguludi, and grew coffee and bananas, as well as having a substantial acreage of maize as a cash crop, while Peter Mlelemba (aka Haya Peters), an enterprising trader in Blantyre, had the Nangafuwe estate near Ndirande. But what is especially significant is that many of Chilembwe's close confidants, men who were deeply involved in the Chilembwe rising, were in fact African planters and petty capitalists, owning agrarian estates or trading stores in the Chiradzulu district. As Pachai succinctly expressed it: 'Most of the ringleaders in the rising owned private property, did cash crop farming or had small stores' (Pachai 1973b: 219). It may be useful to discuss briefly three of these 'ringleaders'—John Gray Kufa, Gordon Mathaka and Duncan Njilima.

A key figure in Bandawe's memoirs, John Gray Kufa (Mapantha) was born near Chinde at the mouth of the Zambezi, probably of Sena tribal background. In 1890 he came to the Shire Highlands, and was baptized by the Church of Scotland mission in Blantyre. Intelligent and warm-hearted, Kufa was considered one of the ablest and most trusted of their converts. Along with Harry Kambwiri Matecheta and Mungo Chisuse, he was therefore 'ordained' in 1894 as one of the first African deacons of the Church. Having obtained a high mark of 90 % in a medical examination, Kufa came to be looked upon by the Blantyre missionaries as the 'prototype African doctor', (Shepperson and Price 1958: 85). He was therefore sent by the mission in 1896 to Murumbu hill east of Lake Chilwa in Portuguese East Africa as a teacher and Christian evangelist. While there, Kufa established a medical dispensary, treating numerous Lomwe patients with European medicines for a wide variety of ailments. Recalled to Blantyre in 1900, after the Portuguese had forcibly acquired Lomwe country, Kufa became a medical assistant at the mission hospital (Bandawe 1971: 35–36; McCracken 2012: 118).

In the first decade of the twentieth century, as discussed in the last chapter, given the hardships and cruelties inflicted by the Portuguese authorities, many Lomwe people came into the Shire Highlands, and large numbers settled close to where Kufa had his estate at Nsoni, some fifteen miles from Blantyre (Bandawe 1971: 45). For at Nsoni around the turn of the century, Kufa had acquired some 140 acres of freehold land, and had set himself up as a small estate owner. He had his own brick house with a fine veranda (*khonde*)—at that time a mark of social standing—and employed over 20 labourers under his own *capitao*—one Lemeck of Mwandama village. On his estate Kufa cultivated 27 acres of cotton, 50

acres of tobacco and some 12 acres of maize as a cash crop. He also had cattle, sheep and goats as livestock and an orchard of fruit trees. Kufa combined being a small property owner—one of the new African ‘petty bourgeoisie’ while also being, prior to the Chilembwe rising, employed as a medical assistant in the nearby Magomero estate of Alexander L. Bruce (Shepperson and Price 1958: 243–245; White 1987: 124).

The Yao, Gordon Mathaka, as we noted earlier, was an early protégé of Joseph Booth, and thus a close friend and associate of John Chilembwe. He accompanied Booth to Zululand in 1896, and like Chilembwe, was closely involved with Booth’s African Christian Union, and his project ‘Africa for the African’. Trained by Booth as a Christian evangelist, Mathaka soon became disillusioned with his religious mentor—they parted, it seems, ‘somewhat acrimoniously’—and Mathaka became an independent Baptist preacher. Described by Booth’s daughter Emily as ‘tall, handsome and debonair’ Mathaka seems to have had a magnetic personality and was a very charismatic preacher (Langworthy 1996: 39).

By the turn of the century, however, Mathaka, along with his younger brother Hugh, had come to own an estate of 250 acres at Nsoni, employing around 50 workers. Combining Christianity (evangelism) and commerce (as petty capitalists) they were producing on the estate—around 1910—three tons of maize and just over four tons of tobacco. In addition the Mathaka brothers owned several trading stores and a large herd of cattle, and were thus quite prosperous and well-established commercial farmers (White 1987: 124).

Duncan Njilima, who played a prominent role in the Chilembwe rising, was an elder brother of Gordon and Hugh Mathaka—though they had different fathers. Like his brothers, he was what Pachai described as a ‘progressive businessman’ (1973b: 134), for he owned 125 acres of land at Nsoni, as well as a trading store and several livestock. The Negro missionary the Rev. Landon Cheek, impressed by Njilima, took the latter’s two sons, Matthew and Frederick, to the United States in 1907 for their further education (Pachai 1973b: 134).

As with Chilembwe and Kufa, Njilima and his family lived in an impressive brick house with a veranda at Nsoni, a house blessed with fine furniture, a bath, a sewing machine, and books—all to be later looted by the European planters of the Nyasaland Volunteer Reserve in 1915 (Shepperson and Price 1958: 246–247).

All the African planters and traders of the Chiradzulu district—Chilembwe, Kufa, the Mathaka brothers and Duncan Njilima—were committed Christians,

well-educated, concerned with establishing an ‘African Industrial Society’ (in 1911) that would promote the interests of agricultural producers like themselves, and, by the economy of the day, fairly wealthy African petty capitalists. They were also well-travelled; Chilembwe had spent time studying in the United States, while Njilima had taught for some time at Blantyre mission and had been to Rhodesia and South Africa (Shepperson and Price 1958: 246–247).

These African planters, as Shepperson and Price suggested, felt a ‘strong sense of frustration’ with respect to the economic restrictions and social humiliations they continually had to endure in their efforts to adopt a European way of life (1958: 247). Besides their inability to obtain freehold land and credit, their grievances seems to have focussed on two issues—the fact that the colonial government was decidedly biased towards European planters, who appeared to be a law unto themselves, taking on the mantle of a territorial chief or feudal lord on their private estates (Mwase 1967: 31; White 1987: 129), and the fact that Africans were never treated as equals but always had to show deference towards Europeans, and were often subjected to verbal and even physical abuse. Racism, it seems, was intrinsic to the colonial order.

With respect to the first issue, African planters, for example—unlike their European counterparts—were prevented, by the discriminatory policies of the colonial government, from signing the labour-tax certificates of their employees. This severely handicapped their ability to attract workers (White 1984: 520; McCracken 2012: 138).

With regard to the second issue much has been written on what may be described as the ‘symbolism’ of the hat, an issue that was particularly well articulated by Joseph Bismarck in his evidence to the Commission of Inquiry into the Chilembwe rising. This related to the fact that every African in the Shire Highlands was ‘obliged to take off his hat for any European, whether government official or not’, and anyone failing to do so was verbally abused or even physically assaulted by the European. Indeed, the European planters in the Shire Highlands in contrast to the Blantyre missionaries, often resorted to using the hippopotamus-hide whip (*chikoti*), especially on their recalcitrant labourers (Bandawe 1971: 71). Thus, Bismarck recalled being ordered to remove his hat when he encountered a European planter in Blantyre one day. He was accosted with the words: ‘Take off your hat, you baboon (*nyani*)’. As wearing a hat and dressing in European clothes was felt by African planters like Bismarck (and Chilembwe) to be a mark of respectability, and an outward sign of

being ‘civilized’ (educated) they deeply resented this strident denial of their essential equality with Europeans. In a dignified manner, Bismarck responded with the words: ‘I am not an *nyani* but an educated and free man’ (D. Phiri 1999: 37; McCracken 2012: 139).

It seems that not only William Livingstone but the majority of European planters expressed a marked antipathy and resentment towards any African who dressed like a European—particularly in wearing a hat and shoes—and who acted towards a European in terms of equality and independence, and thus having ideas ‘above their station’. When meeting a well-dressed African William Livingstone is reputed to have used the derogatory expression ‘*kapolo wandani*’—‘Whose slave are you’, and the injunction ‘*chotsa chipewa*’ (remove the hat) was commonly employed by Europeans before they would speak to Africans (Shepperson and Price 1958: 227; Pachai 1971: 120–121; Shepperson 1972: 410). Even in the late colonial period, in the 1950s, this injunction was still widely employed by European planters and government officials before discoursing with Africans.

Couple with the discontents and grievances associated with the *thangata* system on the Magomero estate, which Chilembwe clearly felt and articulated, the resentments and frustrations expressed by African planters such as Bismarck, Kufa and Njilima, were certainly important motivating factors in the armed rebellion that erupted in the Chiradzulu district in January 1915. It is to this rebellion that we now turn.

5 THE REBELLION

The Chilembwe rising of January 1915 was in no sense a widespread revolutionary upheaval against colonial rule, nor even a ‘Native rising’ as Hetherwick insisted (1931: 214). For compared with the Matabele rebellion of 1896 in Rhodesia, and the Maji-Maji revolt against German rule between 1905 and 1906 in what became Tanzania (in which many thousands of Africans lost their lives) the Chilembwe revolt was a relatively minor and short-lived affair (Shepperson and Price 1958: 399). But it was more than just a local affray, although the events of the uprising were focussed mainly on the Chiradzulu district in the Shire Highlands. It cannot therefore be understood simply in terms of a dispute, or ‘vendetta’ or a ‘personal feud’ between Chilembwe and the general manager of the Magomero estate, William Livingstone (Shepperson and Price 1958: 410; White 1987: 127).

Why a well-educated Baptist minister and evangelist, and an enterprising petty capitalist, a person who was clearly widely respected in the community, should have instigated and organized an armed revolt against colonial rule in Nyasaland is a question that numerous scholars have long pondered. It is, in fact, a question that has long perplexed students of the rebellion, and many and varied interpretations of the Chilembwe rising have been offered by scholars (Shepperson and Price 1958: 399–437; Ransford 1966: 220–236; Pachai 1971; Rotberg 1971).

Among the many factors, socio-economic and psychological, that may have salience in understanding Chilembwe's revolt against colonial rule, the following have been widely discussed by earlier scholars.

Firstly, by around 1912 it seems evident that Chilembwe had developed an intense bitterness, if not outright hostility, towards Europeans, particularly the planters of the Chiradzulu district. This was related to the worsening of relations between Chilembwe and the Magomero estate, which, in turn, was related to the increasingly oppressive and arbitrary nature of the *thangata* system that was being imposed upon local African tenants—both Lomwe and Nyanja—by the estate management. This also entailed curtailment of the tenant's personal liberties to cut timber and hunt wild animals on the estate. As many of the tenants were members of Chilembwe's own congregation, this meant, as earlier suggested, that the evangelist came to personally identify with, and to express their social and economic grievances. Chilembwe's bitterness was intensified in 1912 when Livingstone, following the policy of the A.L. Bruce estates, burnt down two of Chilembwe's mission churches on the Magomero estate. All this was coupled, of course, with Chilembwe's resentment of the abusive treatment meted out to Africans, and the complete lack of respect that was generally shown towards African people, himself included, by the European planters. This ran completely counter to Chilembwe's strong belief in racial equality that he had 'imbibed' from Joseph Booth (Shepperson and Price 1958: 223–226; Rotberg 1971: 137).

Secondly, it is evident that in the years prior to the revolt that Chilembwe was experiencing serious financial difficulties. As early as 1908 Chilembwe had borrowed £50 from the Blantyre businessman Peter Mlelemba (Haya Peters) in order to open a store on his Mbombwe estate, Mlelemba was a shrewd entrepreneur who had diverse commercial interests—as an elephant-hunter engaged in the ivory trade, as a timber merchant, and as owner of Nangafuwe estate near Ndirande, where he grew chillies and tobacco and ran a small trading store.

Having studied at the Zambezi Industrial Mission at Mitsidi and having been a founder-member of the Native's Industrial Union (in 1909) Mlelemba knew Chilembwe quite well, and they were apparently close friends. Nevertheless, Mlelemba was a hard businessman, and harried Chilembwe relentlessly for the repayment of the loan (which accrued high interest) and even, in 1913, threatened to take Chilembwe to court to regain his money. As Rotberg indicated, Chilembwe was never free from 'his worries about money'. Such anxieties were certainly increased for Chilembwe by the incurring of heavy debts to build his large, impressive church, and to alleviate the distress of his followers by buying food during the famine conditions of 1913—debts that amounted to several hundred pounds.

This meant, of course, that Chilembwe did not have enough funds to obtain a gun-licence, and thus was unable to shoot wild game (for meat) and elephants for their ivory—which had been an important source of income for him in the past.

It is hardly surprising, then, that Chilembwe was continually writing to the National (Negro) Baptist Convention in the United States, appealing for funds, and that his last letter to them (in October 1914) was almost one of desperation. He described himself as 'penniless' and pleaded to his sponsors 'to send us something to sustain our lives' (Shepperson and Price 1958: 232–233; Rotberg 1971: 152–155; White 1987: 132).

Thirdly, although Chilembwe was only in his early forties, he had for several years not been in good health. From about 1909 he had experienced chest pains, and was suffering from acute attacks of asthma. He wrote to Peter Mlelemba in 1911 complaining of asthma, indicating that he had tried both European and African medicines without any real success. As he was also beset with failing eyesight, Chilembwe was clearly psychologically troubled by his deteriorating health. But it is hardly credible to view his serious personal afflictions as the primary motivation for instigating the rebellion. At his death Chilembwe seems to have been in a rather emaciated condition (Rotberg 1971: 158–159).

Finally, the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 seems to have had a profound impact on Chilembwe's overall disposition. He had earlier complained about the employment of African soldiers (*askari*) in far-off campaigns, military actions that had little significance for Africans of the Nyasa region. The Kings African Rifles (KAR), we may note, had been formed in 1902, and most of the recruits were Yao. In 1908 many were posted to Somaliland, taking part in a military campaign against the

so-called 'Mad Mullah'. There, around 150 soldiers from Nyasaland had been killed in action (Shepperson and Price 1958: 143; Pachai 1971: 123).

Chilembwe, like his mentor Joseph Booth, was vehemently against such imperial ventures. But what particularly disturbed Chilembwe was the battle against the Germans at Karonga in September 1914 in which over 100 Africans lost their lives—fighting for both sides in the conflict, in a war that had little relevance or meaning to them. This conflict prompted Chilembwe to write a letter to the *Nyasaland Times* in November 1914. It was entitled 'The Voice of African Natives in the Present War'. Although opposed to the involvement of African people in what was a European war, Chilembwe nevertheless emphasized that the natives of Nyasaland had always been loyal to the government. He noted, too, that in times of peace the government supported only the interests of the Europeans, and that Africans suffered nothing but 'humiliation'; while, in contrast, now at war, Africans were being asked 'to share hardships and shed our blood in equality'. He thus concluded: 'Let the rich men, bankers, titled men, storekeepers, farmers and landlords go to war and get shot. Instead the poor Africans, who have nothing to own in this present world, who in death leave only a long line of widows and orphans in utter want and dire distress, are invited to die in a cause which is not theirs'. He signed the letter on 'behalf of his countrymen' (Shepperson and Price 1958: 234–235).

Needless to say, the colonial government, seemingly afraid of a 'native insurrection', censored the issue of the *Nyasaland Times* containing Chilembwe's letter. Although the letter does not actually indicate or imply any plan or conspiracy to overthrow the colonial government, the governor George Smith began to make plans to arrest Chilembwe and deport him to the Seychelles. Such plans evidently came to Chilembwe's notice. His fear of an arrest, or an attack by government forces on his mission, seems to have triggered the insurrection in January 1915 (Pachai 1971: 129).

These four factors—Chilembwe's growing hostility towards European planters and the colonial state, his debts and lack of funding, his chronic asthma and failing eyesight, and his strident opposition to the war—all seem to have been important, as motivating factors, in inducing Chilembwe to stage an armed insurrection against the colonial state.

Yet even as early as July 1914 there were rumours afoot that Chilembwe was organizing a rebellion. The Montford Marist fathers at the Nguludi Catholic Mission, only some eight miles from Mbombwe, had reported that Chilembwe was planning a rising to the administration—a catechist

of the mission having told Bishop Auneau that a member of Chilembwe's church had warned him of impending massacre of Europeans. But, given the secrecy surrounding the revolt, the colonial administration could find no evidence to support the rumour (Reijnaerts et al. 1997: 139).

Lewis Bandawe also recorded that plans were being made for rebellion in November 1914, and that Chilembwe attempted to solicit the support of such elders of the Blantyre Mission as Harry Kambwiri Matecheta, Joseph Bismarck and Mungo Chisuse (a printer and photographer at the mission). But all three men, Bandawe reported, considered such an insurrection a foolish thing to do, given the powers of the colonial state. They reported the matter, however, to Dr Hetherwick, but Hetherwick, who knew Chilembwe well, considered him too intelligent and benevolent to ever contemplate an armed uprising (Bandawe 1971: 67).

Chilembwe also approached his friend the Rev. Stephen Kundecha of the Domasi Mission, and Pastor Kalinde Morrison Malinki, a pioneer Seventh-Day Adventist at Malamulo Mission in the Thyolo district. Both men, however, also refused to have anything to do with Chilembwe's plans for some kind of armed insurrection against colonial rule (D. Phiri 1999: 50).

Towards the end of 1914 Chilembwe began to make plans for the rebellion and gathered around him a number of kindred spirits, or what Desmond Phiri refers to as 'propaganda men' (1999: 50–51). They included his close friends and fellow planters John Gray Kufa, Gordon and Hugh Mathaka, and Duncan Njilima (discussed above) as well as two Christian evangelists with strong millennial tendencies—David Kaduya of Migowi and Simon Kadawere of Zomba, the latter being closely associated with the Church of Christ Mission at Namiwawa. Also described as among the 'ringleaders' or as 'captains' of the revolt, were Chilembwe's own nephew Stephen Mkulichi and Wilson Zimba, a Tonga from the Lakeshore who had been for many years a storekeeper on the Magomero estate. Men such as George Masangano, Wallace Kampingo, Yotam Lifeyu and Barnett Kadangwe were also involved in the revolt.

What is significant is that almost all of these 'rebels' were committed evangelical Christians, elders of churches that embraced 'Ethiopianism'—a term that implied religious autonomy and political independence. They also strongly affirmed the values of commercial enterprise, sobriety, hard work and full racial equality. Like Chilembwe himself, they were not specifically anti-European—whether in terms of European culture or people—but rather stridently opposed to the gross injustices of the colonial

state. At their final meeting at Mbombwe Church, which only the elders attended, they concluded, according to George Mwase, that they would follow the example of the American abolitionist John Brown and thus 'strike a blow and die' (1967: 36; Cole-King 2001: 18).

The Chilembwe rebellion—not as planned but as it actually happened—essentially consisted of armed groups of men, under Chilembwe's overall command, attacking Europeans in four different locations in the Shire Highlands. These were: The headquarters of the A.L. Bruce estates at Magomero; the nearby Mwanje estate; the African Lakes Company in Blantyre; and the Catholic Mission at Nguludi. The uprising itself has been extensively and vividly described elsewhere (Shepperson and Price 1958: 267–319; White 1987: 135–145; D. Phiri 1999: 61–74). Here we may simply outline the main events of the rebellion.

On the night of Saturday 23 January 1915 three columns of armed men, all enthusiastic followers of the Rev. John Chilembwe, set out from Mbombwe Mission.

One group, armed with spears, and led by Wilson Zimba, went directly to Magomero estate, some eight miles away. Around 9 p.m. they entered the house of William Livingstone and his wife, who were entertaining friends for the weekend. Livingstone was immediately speared, and as he lay dying, and in the presence of his wife Kathy, his head was severed from his body. Another planter living nearby, Duncan MacCormick, hearing the disturbance, came to his aid, only to be fatally speared. None of the women and children of Magomero, on Chilembwe's orders, were in any way molested or harmed, and no looting took place. The head of Livingstone, which appeared to have had great symbolic significance for the rebels, was carried back to Mbombwe church in a 'triumphant procession', accompanied by the singing of Christian hymns.

But significantly, one of the guests, Mrs. Agnes MacDonald, managed to escape with the assistance of a trusted servant, and, given help, eventually made her way back to Zomba. Thus early on the Sunday morning the government in Zomba already had news of the attack on Magomero and the uprising, and quickly made plans to quell the rebellion.

On that same Sunday morning (the 24th) the Rev. John Chilembwe held his usual Sunday service at Mbombwe Church, during which Livingstone's head was displayed, rather gruesomely on a pole before the African congregation. During the service they were informed that the 'Kingdom of God was at hand' (Shepperson and Price 1958: 269–272; White 1987: 137–138; Stuart-Mogg 1997: 50).

On the same Saturday evening, the 23rd, another armed group of rebels attacked planters on the nearby Mwanje estate. This was a subdivision of A.L. Bruce's Magomero estate. They badly injured the section manager John Robertson, who managed to escape with his wife through the cotton fields, but the rebels killed his stock manager Robert Ferguson. His body was left in the house, which the rebels then fired. Ferguson apparently had been one of the planters instrumental in the destruction of one of Chilembwe's churches (Shepperson and Price 1958: 274–276; White 1987: 136).

The third column, consisting of a small army under the leadership of David Kaduya and Stephen Mkulich, attacked the headquarters of the African Lakes Company at Mandala in Blantyre, some fifteen miles from Mbombwe. Its main objective was to secure firearms and ammunition to further the scope of the rebellion. Although some telegraph wires were cut, and the rebels in their hasty retreat managed to seize a few rifles and ammunition, the raid on the Mandala Store proved to be a failure. John Gray Kufa apparently failed to join the uprising with an armed contingent from Nsoni, and four of the rebels were taken prisoner. After a summary trial they were executed by firing squad the next day (Shepperson and Price 1958: 279–282; D. Phiri 1999: 71–72).

The final episode—as it were—of the Chilembwe rising was the attack on Nguludi Catholic Mission on the following Tuesday (January 26th). Whether this was a part of Chilembwe's original plan is uncertain, but an armed group of about 50 rebels, led by Wallace Kampingo, and fleeing it appears from Mbombwe, seriously injured one of the priests Father Swelsen (who survived the multiple stab wounds) and set fire to the mission. The reason for this attack, it has been suggested, was the pervasive anti-Catholic sentiments expressed by the independent Baptists, given the fact that the Catholic Church strongly supported the colonial government and were opposed to any form of Ethiopianism—independent African churches (Reijnaerts et al. 1997: 141; D. Phiri 1999: 79).

After the initial attacks, Chilembwe spent some days not in rallying his troops—then in disarray—as a military leader, but rather meditating by himself on the summit of Chilimankhanje hill. The hill was about a mile from Mbombwe mission. Eventually he was persuaded, given the defeat of his 'battalions' (as Mwase described Chilembwe's armed groups), to leave the hill and seek refuge in Mozambique, a territory he knew well from his hunting trips.

On the Sunday after the initial attacks, Chilembwe wrote a letter to the German colonial authorities in East Africa, seeking support for his rebellion. He gave the letter to Yotam Bango, an Nyungwe (Chikunda) from the Zambezi Valley, who was Stephen Mkulichi's cook, with instructions to deliver it to the German authorities at Tunduru. Chilembwe, of course, never received the reply to the letter. The writing of this letter may have been an act of desperation, but as Britain was then at war with Germany, it was considered by the colonial government as an act of treason. Chilembwe's letter to the Germans clearly embarrassed supporters of the Chilembwe rising like George Mwase, for Germany's record as a colonial power in East Africa was hardly something to be recommended (Shepperson and Price 1958: 255–257; Mwase 1967: 59–66; Cole-King 2001).

The rebellion itself, as indicated, was relatively short-lived, and without any serious loss of life; only three planters killed, and two men seriously injured. It failed, however, to invoke any widespread support. The intended attack on European planters in the Chiradzulu and Mulanje districts, all living on isolated estates, failed to take place; and the support that Chilembwe expected from Filipino Chinyama in Ntcheu and Simon Kadawere in Zomba, both radical African Baptist preachers, never materialized, for the local insurrections of both these Christian evangelists were quickly suppressed by the colonial government, with the crucial support of the African chiefs. Both men were given a quick trial and executed—Chinyama by firing squad, Kadawere by hanging (D. Phiri 1999: 73–74).

Although some of the Yao *capitaos* on the Magomero estate identified with the uprising, what is striking is that none of the Yao chiefs in the Shire Highlands supported the rebellion. Most of the Yao chiefs in the Chiradzulu and Mulanje districts had in fact embraced Islam—both as a religion and culture—and viewed the African planters—the ‘marginal men’ such as Kufa, Njilima and Chilembwe—as seriously challenging their own political hegemony, particularly with regard to the issue of labour. The Yao chiefs therefore tended to form an ‘informal alliance’ with both the European planters like Livingstone and the colonial state. The chiefs established mosques in their own villages—there was even a mosque at Mkanje on the A.L. Bruce estate—and they often complained that Chilembwe's Christian followers rarely showed them any respect. The Yao chiefs, in the aftermath of the rebellion, always insisted that they never supported Chilembwe or the uprising (Shepperson and Price 1958: 401; Pachai 1973b: 220; White 1984: 521).

In a matter of days the uprising was over, and, as White makes clear, the reprisals began (1987: 140). The combined forces of the King's African Rifles (KAR) and a group of local European planters who formed the Mikolongwe section of the Nyasaland Volunteer Reserve (see Charlton 1993), began their 'hunt' throughout the Zomba, Chiradzulu and Mulanje districts, to discover the whereabouts of the rebels, the 'freedom fighters' as Phiri describes them (1999: 78). Mounted on motor cycles and well-equipped with rifles and ammunition, the Mikolongwe Volunteer Reserve had something of the zeal of a 'posse' in the days of the old Wild West—as Shepperson and Price graphically expressed it (1958: 283). There was also an image of the American frontier in that a 'Notice' was issued immediately after the Magomero attack offering a reward of £20 for the capture—dead or alive?—of the rebels. It specifically listed such men as John Chilembwe, John Gray (Kufa), Wilson (Zimba), David Kaduya, Duncan Njilima, Thomas Lulanga and Hugh Mathaka. All, of course, African planters and/or Christian evangelists.

On the Tuesday (January 26th) Mbombwe mission was captured by the Volunteer Reserve and askaris, and Chilembwe's church razed to the ground, although, given its solid structure, lots of dynamite had to be employed to accomplish this task (D. Phiri 1999: 78, see photographs in Shepperson and Price 1958: 311).

The planters of the Volunteer Reserve then turned their attention to their main 'target'—the African planters and traders at Nsoni, who they viewed as 'ring-leaders' of the revolt. At Nsoni they burnt down and looted the houses and property of John Gray Kufa, Duncan Njilima and the Mathaka brothers, and within a matter of days they had killed or captured all the rebels. Those captured were given summary trials and executed immediately. David Kaduya was caught near Chikomwe estate and shot in front of the workers. Stephen Mkulichich was shot dead near Lake Chilwa, and his body left to be eaten by hyenas. John Gray Kufa, Duncan Njilima and Wilson Zimba were eventually captured, their whereabouts betrayed by local Africans. Taken to Blantyre, they were publicly hanged there in mid-February.

John Chilembwe meanwhile had headed towards Macheмба hill near Migowi. Near there, on 3 February, he was tracked down by a small party of askari, and shot in a skirmish, along with his nephew Morris Chilembwe. John Chilembwe's body was taken to Mulanje *boma* where it was identified. He was quickly buried in an unmarked grave somewhere on Esparanza estate, about two miles from the *boma*. His passing has been the

subject of much speculation and mystification, Chilembwe, it is alleged, having escaped into Mozambique, or even returned to the United States (Shepperson and Price 1958: 299–317; White 1987: 140–145; Stuart-Mogg 1997: 53–57; D. Phiri 1999: 87–88).

The Chilembwe rising was thus completely crushed, and in an act of severe reprisal some 36 rebels were executed, either shot or hanged, and several hundred men associated with Chilembwe or the rebellion, were flogged and imprisoned. Given the rewards offered, a ‘large crop’ of informers came forth to arrest or give information on the whereabouts of suspected rebels. They thus displayed their own political loyalty to the colonial administration (White 1987: 140).

6 INTERPRETING THE REBELLION

In April 1915 soon after the rebellion, the Nyasaland government set up a commission of enquiry to report on the origins, causes and objectives of the ‘Native rising in the Shire Highlands’.

The commission consisted of three colonial administrators together with Archdeacon Glossop of Likoma, a high Anglican missionary, and a representative of the European planting community, Claude Metcalfe, the general manager of the British Central African Company. There were no Africans on the commission, although many Africans were called as witnesses. The commission, in terms of reference, was not only invited to examine the causes and objectives of the rebellion, but also to report upon the ‘alleged grievances’ of the natives that they may have been conducive to the rising, and on the effects of ‘mission teaching’ on the ‘Native mind and character’ (CO 525/66; D. Phiri 1999: 90–99).

Reporting in January 1916, the commission suggested that the primary objective of the rising was, as they put it: ‘the extermination or expulsion of the European population, and the setting up of a Native state or theocracy of which John Chilembwe was to be the head’.

The Commission provided little evidence for what Rotberg described as a ‘locally acceptable stereotype’, and many scholars have questioned whether the rising can be understood in such simplistic terms. Though Chilembwe had a striking personality he never struck anyone as a political operator, and his methods and the scale of his operations hardly matched such an imperialistic objective (Rotberg 1971: 138).

As to the causes of the rebellion, the Commission highlighted two essential themes: the socio-economic conditions on the Magomero estate, and the influence of Joseph Booth and the radical Protestant sects.

With respect to the first of these causes the commission emphasized the 'unfriendly relations' between John Chilembwe and the manager of Magomera estate, virtually making William Livingstone into a 'scapegoat' for the rising. The report advanced the opinion that Livingstone's treatment of local Africans 'was often unduly harsh' and the general management of the estate 'unsatisfactory'. They concluded, therefore, that 'the treatment of labour and the system of tenancy on the Bruce estates (labourers and tenants being practically inter-changeable terms) were in several respects illegal and oppressive'—and thus were directly conducive to the rising. But they did not feel that there was evidence of any 'general Native grievance'. Nevertheless, they recommended that the government should re-examine the whole system of tenancy—the *thangata* system—so as to give Africans, particularly 'progressive Natives' some security of land tenure.

With respect to the second cause of the uprising, relating to Booth's influence and the independent African churches—as well as the Church of Christ and Seventh-Day Baptist missions—the Commission clearly felt that certain of their doctrines, implicitly their emphasis on racial equality, had tended to 'unsettle the native mind' and to have sowed the 'seeds of racial animosity'. They therefore recommended that the government take measures to control independent African churches and to censor any religious literature relating to the millennialism of the watch-tower movement, and to Ethiopianism.

Over the years many scholars have offered interpretations of the Chilembwe rebellion, but as Shepperson recorded, even at the time of the Commission, many literate Africans, mostly elders of the Blantyre mission, in their statements to the Commission offered their own interpretations of the rising.

For example, Robertson Namate, a Yao clerk and an elder of the Church of Scotland mission in Zomba, suggested to the Commission that the Chilembwe episode was not a general 'native rising' but rather a localized affair, for it was only Africans of Magomero and the Chiradzulu district that had risen up in arms. The cause of this trouble was a 'total misunderstanding' between the estate management at Magomero and their African tenants. But instead of taking their grievances to the *boma*,

the tenants, Namate suggested, looked to Chilembwe for their deliverance (Shepperson 1972: 410).

The rebellion therefore has often been viewed as a rather localized affair, linked to the harsh labour conditions of the Magomero estate, and due to a 'vendetta' or to the 'unrelenting animosity' between Chilembwe and the manager of the estate, William Livingstone. Hence the significance of the symbolism, expressed in the display in the Mbombwe church, of the planter's severed head (Shepperson and Price 1958: 409–410; Ransford 1966: 228).

But if the uprising was a purely local affair why did Chilembwe write a letter to the German authorities in East African requesting support, and why did one of his armed columns specifically attack the African Lakes Company depot in Blantyre, in the hope of acquiring a cache of arms for a wider and more protracted struggle?

Equally importantly, the social and economic grievances that Chilembwe expressed were not unique to the Africans of Magomero and the Chiradzulu district but were general throughout the Shire Highlands. These grievances were well articulated by many of the African witnesses who came before the commission, especially Stephen Kundecha, Harry Kambwiri Matecheta and Joseph Bismarck. The grievances they expressed were many and varied. The following may be noted. They voiced the grievances that were specifically related to the rights of African tenants on private estates, as highlighted above with respect to the *thangata* system. Africans on the private estates could not understand why they had to pay rent in the form of labour, while Africans living nearby on crown land did not. They complained also of the restrictions placed on them with respect to the gathering of timber from the estate woodland in order to construct houses, and the general prohibition on the hunting of wild animals. They—local people—considered such woodland resources, according to the African witnesses, to be common property. Harry Kambwiri Matecheta suggested to the commission that while the colonial government had indeed suppressed the slave-trade, through the *thangata* system the Europeans had, in substance, introduced a new system of slavery. Such witnesses also highlighted the fact that the Nyasaland government had failed to take seriously African grievances, ignoring their many petitions, and even failed to translate state laws and government rulings into African languages, so that they could be understood by local people. Finally, as indicated above, the Blantyre mission elders like Kundecha and Bismarck, strongly emphasized people's resentment at the lack of respect shown by

Europeans, especially planters, towards Africans—both in forcing Africans to remove their hats (the ‘*chotsa chipewa*’ syndrome) as well as the physical abuse that Africans also had to endure (Shepperson 1972: 410–411).

The Chilembwe rebellion may well be described, therefore, as a general uprising, even though it was restricted mainly to the Chiradzulu district of the Shire Highlands.

Many scholars have stressed the fact that the main ‘ringleaders’ of the rebellion were all, like Chilembwe himself, prominent African planters and traders of the Chiradzulu district—men like Njilima, the Mathaka brothers and John Gray Kufa. But Mwase implied that Chilembwe and his planting associates had no intention of rebelling against the colonial government, but only wished to draw attention to, and to highlight, their many grievances against the colonial state, and particularly against the European planting community. It was the inequalities of the plantation economy and the lack of respect shown towards the African people—both the educated elite and the tenant labourers—Mwase insisted, that was the ‘real cause’ of the rebellion. He thus implied that the Chilembwe revolt was more of a symbolic gesture than an actual rebellion, Chilembwe and his associates wishing to emulate the American abolitionist John Brown at Harper’s Ferry and thus to ‘Strike a blow and die’ (Mwase 1967: 29–36).

Facing arrest and deportation, and aware that an armed rising had little chance of success against the colonial state and its armed forces, Chilembwe, it is suggested, looked upon himself as a self-conscious ‘martyr’ in the cause of African freedom and independence, rather than the future head of an African theocracy (Shepperson and Price 1958: 239). His ‘army’ in fact, seemed to possess only spears and bows and arrows.

This fatalistic view of Chilembwe’s motivations is, however, difficult to prove, and it has been suggested that the rebellion was not really a planned ‘conspiracy’ but only a series of panic moves. No way to strike a symbolic blow (Pachai 1973b: 223). Yet Stephen Mkulichi’s younger brother, Andrew, also a nephew of Chilembwe, reported that his uncle was often heard saying: ‘I hear the crying of my Africans. My people are destroyed through lack of knowledge. It is better for me to die than live’. This would suggest, as Rotberg writes, that Chilembwe ‘courted martyrdom, not a kingdom’ and acted only out of despair (Shepperson and Price 1958: 472; Rotberg 1971: 142).

Although Shepperson and Price are critical of the over-emphasis on the socio-economic aspects of the Chilembwe rising, to the neglect of other factors (discussed below), the iniquities and abuses of the *thangata*

system and the resentments and frustrations felt by an emerging class of African planters and entrepreneurs were, nevertheless, key causal factors in provoking the Chilembwe rebellion. The rebellion, in fact, cannot really be understood independently of the plantation economy. But there was also a religious and a political aspect to the Chilembwe rising, invoking two questions that have long been discussed by students of the rebellion. These are: Was the Chilembwe rising a millennial movement, with the evangelist a kind of prophetic figure? Or was it an embryonic form of nationalism, Chilembwe thus being an early patriot?

In the early years of the twentieth century, given Booth's remarkable influence on aspiring African evangelists, millenarian ideas circulated throughout Northern Zambezia. Essentially derived from the writings of the American Christian fundamentalist Charles Taze Russell, the watch-tower movement, widely known as *Kitawala*, together with the Seventh-Day Adventists, preached the immanent second coming of Jesus Christ, and the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. The watch-tower movement, which in a later decade took the name Jehovah's Witnesses, was fundamentally opposed to all secular forms of government.

One of the best-known of Booth's disciples in the early colonial period was the charismatic preacher, Elliott Kamwana. He reputedly baptized 10,000 of his followers, mostly among his own people, the Tonga of the Chinteche district. Fervently preaching the doctrine of the Second Advent, Kamwana in September 1914 was held in political detention in Mulanje. From there he appears to have corresponded with Chilembwe. A pacifist, like his mentor, Kamwana refused—like Bismarck and Kundera—to participate in the uprising (Chakanza 1998: 25). Chilembwe was therefore certainly familiar with the millenarian teachings of the watch-tower movement, and two of his close associates, David Kaduya and Duncan Njilima, were both Christian evangelists with strong millenarian tendencies and expectations (McCracken 2012: 138). But Shepperson and Price deny that Chilembwe was ever an adherent of the watch-tower movement. Although having an impressive personality, Chilembwe, they wrote was no 'prophet' or 'messiah' figure, and that his teachings never deviated from that of an independent Baptist missionary (1958: 430).

Finally, we may pose the question: was Chilembwe a proto-nationalist, and thus a founding ancestor of the Malawi Nation-State? In his rather colourful account of the Chilembwe rising, Oliver Ransford described Chilembwe as a 'black Keir Hardie' and his rebellion an expression of 'enigmatic atavism' (1966: 227–236). Chilembwe was a Christian evangelist

and though he preached racial equality he was no socialist. Nor can the uprising be described as 'atavistic'. Chilembwe never advocated a return to a 'tribal' way of life, and the people involved in the rebellion were of diverse ethnic affiliations—Yao, Ngoni, Nyanja, Tonga and Lomwe. As one African described Chilembwe: 'he was not of one tribe, but for all tribes' (Shepperson and Price 1958: 409).

The rebels were also of diverse economic backgrounds, including Yao capitaos, Lomwe immigrants and other agricultural labourers/tenants, as well as Chilembwe's petty bourgeois associates such as Kufa and Njilima. Having little truck with African religious beliefs and social customs, such as matriliney and initiations (*chinamwali*), Chilembwe advocated not a subsistence economy (see Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999) but petty capitalism, with an emphasis on trading enterprises and commercial (plantation) agriculture, focussed specifically around the growing of cotton and tobacco. Hence Chilembwe and his associates were viewed as potential competitors by the European planters of the Chiradzulu district.

Chilembwe and his close associates—the alleged 'ringleaders' of the revolt—thus came to represent the 'new men' (as they have been described)—an African petty bourgeoisie who expressed an 'inter-tribal' outlook, and put an emphasis on African leadership, the establishment of independent African Protestant churches (or sects), European education and commercial enterprise. Thus the Chilembwe rising in its ethos was future-orientated, *not* atavistic, and represented African strivings and hopes—specifically Chilembwe's strivings and hopes—for a better, more equal world, a 'new way of life' (Shepperson and Price 1958: 411).

Whether this constituted a form of nationalism is debatable, especially as the rallying call 'Africa for the Africans' implies a pan-African ideology. But nevertheless an incipient form of nationalism was expressed in Chilembwe's letter to the *Nyasaland Times* in November 1914, for Chilembwe speaks of fellow Africans as 'countrymen' and writes of Nyasaland's interests and institutions (Shepperson and Price 1958: 234–235).

In fact Nyasaland is a far more accurate description of the current nation-state than is the present name 'Malawi'. For Malawi tends to express Chewa ethnic hegemony (although the early Malawi states were probably multi-ethnic), as many of the ethnic communities in Malawi—Tumbuka, Ngonde, Lomwe, Yao, Ngoni, Tonga and Sena—were never a part of the early Marawi states (chiefdoms).

As many scholars have suggested, Chilembwe's rebellion was a response to colonial oppression, particularly with respect to the alienation of much

of the land of the Shire Highlands to European planters, and to a deep sense of racial injustice. Although it may have had an element of ‘Christian utopianism’ the rebellion essentially was a ‘struggle for freedom’ and for African independence (White 1987: 130; D. Phiri 1999: 94–97; McCracken 2012: 140).

But in its ideology Chilembwe’s rebellion expressed two contrasting political traditions: a radical egalitarianism derived from Joseph Booth, whose message ‘Africa for the African’ reflected a working-class Nonconformist Christian tradition; and a petty capitalist orientation derived more from the American Negro Baptists, which but put an emphasis on private property in land, the employment of wage labour, and on trading enterprises and commercial (plantation) agriculture (White 1987: 130).

It is worth noting, in concluding this chapter, that in the 1930s the Christian legacy of the Rev John Chilembwe was re-affirmed with the re-establishment of the Providence Industrial Mission under the Baptist evangelist, Dr Daniel Malekebu. An early member of Chilembwe’s church, and having qualified as a medical doctor in the United States, Malekebu returned to the Chiradzulu district in 1926. He took over the leadership of the mission over many decades, as well as being a key figure in the Chiradzulu Native Association in the 1930s (D. Phiri 1999: 97).

The Chilembwe rising has been described as marking the ‘end of the old era’ (Pachai 1973b: 224). In fact, to the contrary, the rebellion led to the strengthening of the colonial state, with increased surveillance of the African population, and specifically, the re-formulation and consolidation of the *thangata* system. We discuss this in the rise of the tea industry in the next chapter with respect to the Thyolo and Mulanje districts of the Shire Highlands.

A History of the Tea Estates

I PROLOGUE

In the aftermath of the Chilembwe rebellion three important developments impacted upon the social ecology of the Shire Highlands—the construction of a railway link from the Shire Highlands to the port of Beira, the consolidation of the *thangata* system, and the development of the tea industry in the Thyolo and Mulanje districts in the late 1920s. This present chapter will focus on the latter subject—the early history of tea planting in the Shire Highlands. The chapter is prefaced by two related topics; a brief account of the building of the trans-Zambezi railway and its socio-economic implications (Sect. 2), and the re-affirmation of the *thangata* system by the protectorate government that culminated in the Natives on Private Estates Ordinance of 1928 (Sect. 3). In Sect. 4 we discuss the early history of tea planting in the Mulanje foothills, focussing on the pioneering efforts of Henry Brown of Thornwood Estate. Section 5 outlines the origins of three tea estates in the Thyolo district—Magombwa, Mboma and Naming’omba—each associated with a pioneer tea planter, namely, Arthur Westrop, Ignaco Conforzi and Malcolm Barrow. Section 6 briefly describes the ecology and the production of tea in colonial Nyasaland, largely based on my own experiences as a tea planter (1958–1964), and the chapter concludes with a brief resumé of the tea industry during the 1930s.

2 THE TRANS-ZAMBEZI RAILWAY

As we discussed briefly in earlier chapters, during the early colonial period the transport of goods to and from the Shire Highlands, particularly the export of agricultural produce, was by means of head portage (*ntengatenga*) and by river transport via the Shire–Zambezi waterway to Chinde at the mouth of the Zambezi river. The river steamers however always had difficulty in navigating the River Shire above Port Herald (Nsanje), because of its fluctuating depth and obstructions due to aquatic vegetation. Thus in 1908 the first railway was built between Blantyre and the Lower Shire, significantly by a private company, Eugene Sharrer's Shire Highlands Railway Company. Nyasaland was therefore unique among colonial states in Africa, in having a privately run railway system. This had initially involved the Nyasaland government giving the company around 360,000 acres of land in Shire Highlands by way of subsidy.

In 1915 a new line linking Port Herald with Chindio on the north bank of the Zambezi had been built by the Central African Railway Company, while seven years later in the Trans-Zambezia Company constructed a railway line linking the southern bank of the Zambezi with the port of Beira on the Mozambique coast. For around a decade goods to and from the Shire Highlands were ferried across the Zambezi river at Chindio, until that is, the opening of the famous bridge over the Zambezi river in January 1935. The bridge, costing more than £2 million to build, was over two miles long (Pachai 1973b: 148–151; Nkana 1999).

Much controversy has always surrounded the building of the Blantyre to Beira railway, as it entailed an enormous financial burden on the Nyasaland government, for the protectorate not only contributed substantially to the building of the Trans-Zambezi railway, but was also made responsible for safeguarding the interest payments on the loans made to the private railway companies.

The reason for building the Trans-Zambezi railway from the Shire Highlands to the port of Beira—rather than opting for an alternative and much shorter route from Blantyre to the coastal port of Quelimane—was due mainly to its strategic role in the politics of empire. For as Leroy Vail has cogently detailed, the railway scheme was important in consolidating British commercial interests in the region, and was instrumental in the 'game of commercial imperialism' (Vail 1977a: 370; McCracken 2012: 174).

Given the financial burden imposed on the Nyasaland government in the building of Blantyre to Beira railway, the protectorate during the

inter-war years had a few resources available to devote to African education, or to medical services, or to the development of a peasant-based agricultural economy (Vail 1977: 373). In fact, the building of the railway had little immediate impact on the Nyasaland agricultural economy. But as it was privately owned, and thus geared to the generation of profit, freight charges for agricultural produce always tended to be extremely high. During the 1930s, for example, Nyasaland tobacco—then still a key export crop—cost 97 d per pound to be transported from Limbe to Beira, while Rhodesia tobacco was being transported the same distance, from Salisbury to Beira, at only 17 d per pound. That is, transport costs for tobacco farmers in Nyasaland were more than five times higher than those incurred by the Southern Rhodesian planters (Vail 1977: 387; McCracken 2012: 174). Indeed, Vail emphasized that the Nyasaland government during the inter-war years, was continually faced with an acute ‘dilemma’—namely, between the desire to have the railway system functioning for the benefit of Nyasaland—specifically the European planters and the African peasant agriculturalists—or the need to have the railways run profitably (1977: 385). Needless to say, the administration, given the imperial constraints, tended to put the profits of the railway companies before the general interest of the people of the Shire Highlands, and thus Nyasaland became, as Vail puts it, ‘a colony of the railway interests’ (1977: 375).

Also important of course, as McCracken stressed, was the development of motor transport in the early 1920s especially the growing use of lorries which completely replaced ox-carts and head portorage. This led to a ‘revolution’ in the transport of agricultural produce, particularly tobacco and tea. The development of motor transport and the opening of the railway from Blantyre to Beira were certainly important factors in the development of the tea industry in the Mulanje and Thyolo districts (McCracken 2012: 173).

During the 1920s the Shire Highlands was beset with a series of prolonged droughts and thus seasonal food shortages—locally known as *njala*. Most Africans, therefore, became deeply concerned with a basic struggle for survival, even though, in the Shire Highlands many peasant cultivators had become involved in the production of dark-fired tobacco—whether as independent farmers on crown land or as tenants on private estates. Indeed, McCracken describes the early 1920s as ‘one of the most miserable periods in the colonial history of Malawi’ (2012: 188).

Coupled with the restrictions on the colonial administration, highlighted above, it is hardly surprising that Nyasaland during the 1920s came to be described by the colonial secretary Leo Amery as the ‘Cinderella’ of

the African colonies. Vail concluded that the development of the Blantyre to Beira railway had a distorting impact on the Nyasaland economy during the inter-war years, in that it tended to encourage not the development of an independent African peasantry, but rather labour migration to the mines of South Africa. Nyasaland thus became, according to Vail, a 'labour reserve' for the South African mining interests. There was great material poverty in Nyasaland during the inter war years; Vail describes its colonial history as one entailing the 'making of an imperial slum' (Vail 1975, 1977; but cf. McCracken 2012: 4).

3 THE *THANGATA* SYSTEM REVAMPED

The report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Chilembwe rising, published in January 1916, clearly expressed the view that the tenant system (*thangata*), as practised on private European estates, was highly problematic, if not actually illegal; that it was, in fact, a key factor in causing the rebellion. They therefore recommended the abolition of work in lieu of rent, that fair and equitable rents be established, and that the tenant be given reasonable notice to quit the estate, and even then, eviction could only be carried out through a court order. In order to meet the recommendations of the report the government therefore introduced, in 1917, the Native Rents (Private Estates) Ordinance.

The Ordinance virtually abolished the *thangata* system, ruling that Africans who had been resident on an estate for more than 20 years should pay no rent, and that those who were obligated to pay rent as tenants should not be compelled to work for the landlord in-lieu of payment. The rent payable was to be determined by the government and this entitled the African tenant to a site for his hut and sufficient available land to grow food crops. No tenant was to be forcibly removed from the land without the giving of a six-month notice served through the district resident. At the time of the ordinance (1917) annual rent in the Shire Highlands was fixed at six shillings. The 1917 ordinance therefore effectively made the *thangata* system—as widely practiced—illegal. In fact, had it been legally enforced, the *thangata* system would have ceased to exist in Nyasaland. This would have had profound consequences, as McCracken noted, for the subsequent history of landlord–tenant relations throughout the Shire Highlands (Kandawire 1979: 17; Pachai 1978: 105; Baker 1993: 28; McCracken 2012: 146).

However, a number of problems arose with respect to the ordinance. Only a fraction of the land owned by European settlers, particularly with

regard to the three large estate holdings—those of Blantyre and East Africa Ltd (107,000 acres), the British Central African Company (350,000 acres) and the A.L. Bruce Estates Ltd (168,000 acres)—was in fact under commercial cultivation, either of cotton or tobacco. Most estates contained village communities, with extensive subsistence cultivations, as well as large tracts of *Brachystegia* woodland. Moreover, it was virtually impossible to distinguish between the original occupants of the land, and more recent tenants, particularly the Lomwe immigrants from Mozambique. But what was crucial was that the European planting community dismissed the ordinance as vague and impractical, and continued to employ their tenants as labourers on their estates. Unlike the government, the planters made no attempt to separate the employer–employee relationship from that between the landowner and his tenant. As far as the European planters were concerned, the only reason for having Africans on their land was as a supply of labour, as rural proletarians, and they insisted that rents should be paid in the form of labour—specifically during the planting season. Led by Robert S Hynde of Blantyre and East Africa Ltd and proprietor of the pro-settler newspaper *The Nyasaland Times*, and Alexander Livingston Bruce (who was a member of the Legislative Council), the estate owners threatened to evict their tenants in large numbers unless they were allowed to employ African labour through the *thangata* system. Faced with the prospect of having to settle hundreds of African tenants on crown land, the government backed down, for the crown lands in the Blantyre and Zomba districts were already proving insufficient to support a growing population. Between 1904 and 1920, for example, the population of Blantyre district had risen from 87,000 to 156,000, while the population of the Zomba district had increased from 46,000 to 102,000. A large proportion of the African population in the Shire Highlands were, of course, living on private estates (Pachai 1978: 105–108; White 1987: 152; Baker 1993: 29; McCracken 2012: 246). As the 1917 ordinance seems to have been virtually ignored by the European planters, they therefore urged the government to appoint a special commission to look into the whole issue of land and its occupancy.

Significantly, in 1919, prior to the commission, the British Central Africa Company began organizing a scheme whereby new European settlers were brought out to Nyasaland as potential landowners. About 50 ex-Army officers were initially recruited as salaried employees on a three-year contract, and then sold sections of the companies' large land holdings, particularly within the Limbe–Mikolongwe–Thyolo triangle.

They bought the land for £2 or £3 per acre. These new European estates ranged from a hundred to a thousand acres, and were dedicated largely to tobacco farming.

However, with no real experience in tropical agriculture, guilty of ‘playing at farming’ and interested only in a quick profit—and given the economic constraints during the inter-war years, particularly the drastic slump in tobacco prices in 1928—most of the European tobacco planters failed completely in their economic venture. Many farms were abandoned, and between 1931 and 1945 the number of European tobacco farms—for tobacco had replaced cotton as the main plantation crop—in the Shire Highlands declined from 127 to 36. Robin Palmer, who demonstrates very little sympathy for the European tobacco farmers, described the British Central Africa settlement scheme as a ‘comprehensive failure’ (1985a: 221–223).

Nevertheless, many European tobacco estates survived the depression years, and some successful planters became prominent in settler politics during the 1930s—men such as E.C. Peterkins (Msiwika estate, 995 acres) L.J. Rumsey (Kamponje estate, 1612 acres) and A.M. Henderson (Chiwale estate, 949 acres) (Pachai 1978: 108; Chidzero 1981; McCracken 2012: 162).

The commission of inquiry into land issues in Nyasaland, set up in 1920, consisted of a small coterie of European planters and government officials. It was chaired by a local judge Edward Jackson. The commission included B.S. Lilley, the lands officer, R.S. Hynde, the editor of *‘The Nyasaland Times’* and the Rev. Alexander Hetherwick, who was invariably viewed as representing the interests of African people. The terms of reference of the commission was to report on existing laws and policy relating to land tenure, and specifically on the status of African tenants living on private estates.

In its report the commission acknowledged that the 1917 Native Rents ordinance had singularly failed to introduce tenancy by rent payment only. It thus accepted the fact that on most of the European estates: ‘The native is still only the tenant of his landlord as long as he is also an employee. As soon as a native tenant declines to work for a specified period for his landlord he can be given the prescribed notice to quit. No reason for the notice need be given’ (Jackson Report 1921: 14; Pachai 1978: 109).

The commission essentially affirmed this state of affairs and thus sought to legalize the existing *thangata* system, and to specify more clearly the rights and obligations of the landlords and tenants. They therefore recommended the repeal of the Native Rents ordinance of 1917, and the legal recognition of the principle of ‘labour tenancy’, that is, the *thangata* system as it had developed in the Shire Highlands since the end of the nineteenth century.

Although there were no Africans on the commission, and apart from Hetherwick, none of the members of the commission had any real understanding of African social life, the commission nevertheless sought to locate the origins of the *thangata* system in African socio-cultural life. As John Kandawire emphasized the commission drew parallels between the relations of an African chief towards villagers in his domain and the relationship between European landlords and their African tenants. As the report of the commission argued, the labour contract

Seems to have had a foundation in the conditions of a purely native life under which the member of a village community worked for a certain period in the gardens on his chief, the latter assuming towards the former a responsibility which has its parallel in the relation of the best European landlords towards their native tenants today. The practice was known from the beginning by the native word '*thangata*' meaning 'to assist' (Jackson Report 1921: 15; Kandawire 1979: 18).

But, as Joseph Bismarck stressed before the commission of inquiry into the Chilembwe rising, this interpretation was quite misplaced. For although the estate owners liked to conceive of themselves a political patrons or surrogate chiefs with regard to their tenants, the *thangata* system was essentially an economic system, a mode of forced labour. Bismarck described it as a new form of slavery and Kandawire seems to concur (Pachai 1978: 103; Kandawire 1979: 19). It is indeed noteworthy that when the Nyasaland government introduced the District Administration (Natives) Ordinance in 1912, as a form of direct rule, it deliberately excluded the Shire Highlands from the Ordinance, so as not to undermine the absolute authority of the European landlord with respect to their estates (Kandawire 1979: 78; Palmer 1985a: 217; Ross 2009: 21).

The land commission, siding with the European planters, did not envisage how the *thangata* system could be abolished; nor did it feel that the system itself was morally 'objectionable', so long as it was fair to the African tenant, acceptable to the European landlord, and regulated by state law. What the commission certainly accepted was that labour—stipulated as two months a year at a time required by the landowner—was the only form of rent that was acceptable to the estate owners with respect to their tenants. Thus one can only conclude that it was the powerful political influence that the estate owners were able to exert over the protectorate government that enabled item to resist any changes to the *thangata* system. Indeed, as Simon Myambo cogently argued, a 'symbiotic' relationship existed between the

protectorate government and the European planters such that priority was always given to the interests of the settlers over both African planters and the emerging African peasantry, particularly in the early colonial period (1973: 20). One important recommendation expressed by the commission, no doubt reflecting the positive influence of Hetherwick, was that the government should make every effort to acquire (or reclaim), either by exchange or purchase, areas of private land in the Shire Highlands for the relocation (or re-alignment) of African tenants (Baker 1993: 31).

In 1924 Charles Bowring was appointed governor, and, like many of the earlier administrators, he cleaved to the view that the future economic prosperity of the protectorate depended on the development of plantation agriculture on European estates. He described himself as a ‘firm believer in the system of resident labour on estates both in the interests of the European settler and the native labourer’. Small wonder that Bowring was described by one senior administrator as ‘completely in the pocket of the local planters’—specifically the large landowners such as Blantyre and East Africa Ltd and the A.L. Bruce Estates. He was certainly not in favour of small European-owned farms, nor African planters cultivating cash crops on freehold estates (CO 525/119; Pachai 1978: 115–117).

After lengthy negotiations with the Nyasaland Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce (which represented the interests of the European planting community) and the Colonial Office, in 1928 the Nyasaland government introduced ‘The Natives on Private Estate Ordinance’. The ordinance, upholding the *thangata* system, completely repealed the Native Rents Ordinance of 1917, and appeared to make the understanding of *thangata* voluntary, in that a tenant could choose to pay money rent, or offer to grow cash crops, or to work for the estate owner. The rent payable was to be determined by a District Rent Board, and was to be not less than two months’ wages—then around six shillings. In return for (labour) rent, the tenant was entitled to a site and materials for the building of a hut, and sufficient land in order to grow food crops necessary for the maintenance of himself and his family. The importance of matrilineal kinship in the social life of the people of the Shire Highlands was hardly recognized by the administration. No estate resident could grow economic crops on their estate—such as cotton and tobacco—without the written consent of the landowner, and then had the option of selling the produce to the landowner at the current market price. He could thereby secure a rebate of the whole of his rent. If the landlord failed to offer work, or opportunities for growing commercial crops, the estate resident or tenant could live

on the estate rent-free. Eviction from the estate was permitted for any rent default, and the landlord had a statutory right to evict 10 % of resident Africans every five years, while the government had a duty to find land for those evicted. With respect to the rights of women, and the customary pattern of uxori-local residence, it was assumed that the estate landlord had complete rights to control the number of tenants on their land (Pachai 1978: 119–122; Chidzero 1981: 11; Baker 1993: 34–35).

The 1928 ordinance, which was to regulate landlord–tenant relations in the Shire Highlands for the next two decades, was an attempt on the part of the government to control or alleviate the conflict that was inherent in the *thangata* system. It attempted, as Kandawire suggested, to promote two quite ‘antithetical’ ends; to facilitate the effective exploitation of African labour on private European estates through the *thangata* system, while at the same time attempting to serve as the trustee and guardian of African interests and aspirations (Kandawire 1979: 30). Colin Baker summed up succinctly the government position: ‘So long as estate agriculture contributed so massively to the nation’s economic wealth through employment and exports, the government was deeply reluctant to do anything which would decrease the supply of labour upon which that wealth depended. The government wanted Africans to work on private estates’ (1993: 45).

Throughout the colonial period the *thangata* system was a source of conflict between landlords and tenants, and a focus of discontent. This often revolved around the issue of economic crops, for many Africans on private estates had become deeply involved in the production of cash crops, whether maize for local consumption or, more importantly, tobacco. The estate owners assumed that the 1928 ordinance permitted them to take the tenant’s tobacco in-lieu of rent. The government, however, was insistent that *thangata* tobacco was to be paid for at the current market price. Invariably, the landlords attempted to pay lower prices for the estate tobacco than what was the norm for the tobacco grown on crown land (McCracken 2012: 169).

The consolidation of the *thangata* system, which gave the planters access to cheap labour, along with improvements in motor transport and the construction of the trans-Zambezi railway, were all crucial factors in the development of the tea industry in the Mulanje and Thyolo districts in the 1920s. Indeed, it has been stressed that the building of the railway from Blantyre to Beira gave ‘the first real stimulus to Malawi’s industry’. The impact of the railway, therefore, was not wholly negative (Tea Association 1974: 17). We may turn now to the early history of the tea estates.

4 THE EARLY HISTORY OF TEA IN NYASALAND

Tea has been cultivated and used as a beverage in China and Japan for several thousand years, and it was from China that tea was first introduced into Europe around the seventeenth century. In the mid-nineteenth century it began to be grown as a plantation crop in India, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Java. Belonging to the family Theaceae, tea (*chayi*) is an evergreen tree that may grow to a height of around 30 feet (9 m), but under cultivation it is always cut back to a spreading bush of around four feet (1.2 m). There are many varieties (*jat*) of tea, but two main types are generally recognized: the early Chinese variety *Camellia sinensis* var. *sinensis*, distinguished by its squat, straggling habit, comparatively small, light green leaves and an abundant flower and seed production; and the Indian (or Assam) variety, *Camellia sinensis* var. *assamica*, characterized by its larger, dark green leaves and taller growth habit. Both varieties hybridise easily. The Chinese variety is generally hardier though less productive than the Indian variety. The tea plant normally grows to a great age, and when I worked on Zoa estate in the early 1960s the ‘local’ tea, planted in 1926, was still flourishing (MacMillan 1956: 336; Hutson 1978: 40).

Tea was first brought to Nyasaland in 1878, when the new gardener at the Blantyre Mission, Jonathan Duncan, arrived with three coffee plants and one tea plant from the Edinburgh Botanic gardens. A decade later, in 1888, Dr Walter Elmslie of the Livingstonia Mission of the Free Church of Scotland brought out a consignment of tea seed from the same botanic garden. These were given to Duncan who planted them in the Blantyre Mission garden. Two tea tree plants, it seems, survived and one of them could still be seen growing at the mission in the 1970s. As Westrop remarked, they must have been a pretty hardy strain, given the limited rainfall in Blantyre, and the general lack of winter rains—the ‘Chiperonis’—which so bless the mountains of Thyolo and Mulanje (Westrop 1964: 273).

Around the same time (1886–1888) tea seeds were also sent to John Moir, then manager of the African Lakes Company, based at Mandala in Blantyre. Apparently, Moir, familiarly known as ‘Mandala’ on account of wearing spectacles, had ordered from Kew Gardens several economic plants including tea seed. But whether those were ever sent, or ever arrived in British Central Africa remains a mystery (Hadlow 1934: 3).

According to the Rev. J.A. Smith of Mulanje mission, writing in 1912, the real pioneer in the growing of tea in Nyasaland was Henry Brown (1850–1925) of Thornwood estate, Mulanje. Born in a remote part of

Scotland, Brown had worked in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) for some 18 years as a coffee planter, before coming to what was then British Central Africa in 1891. By then an experienced planter, he came to work on the Lauderdale estate of the African Lakes Company, growing coffee and tobacco. Smith recorded that while walking one day through the Blantyre mission garden Brown observed the two surviving tea bushes with some seed on them, gathered around 20 seeds and took them back to Mulanje. He planted half the seeds in his Thornwood estate, which he had recently bought from the African Lakes Company, and generously gave the other half to his friend John Moir, who planted them on his Lauderdale estate, near his bungalow close to the Mlosa crater. First opened up by Brown for the African Lakes Company, Lauderdale was later transferred to Moir, who acquired the estate of some 4200 acres when the company was re-organized in 1893. According to his brother, Fred, Moir became an independent planter, receiving a 'considerable tract of land from the company in recognition of his valuable services' (Moir 1923: 177; *Life and Work in Nyasaland*, December 1912; Hadlow 1934: 4). In 1901 the Lauderdale estate became a part of the holdings of Blantyre and East Africa Ltd.

Henry Brown was an extraordinary man. Known as Mlanghi (adviser or mentor) and an excellent agriculturalist, he was also impatient, hot-tempered and tenacious, and always in conflict with the colonial administration. He was severely rebuked by the Commissioner Harry Johnston, not only for the strident and nonchalant way that he made claims to land, but for the discourtesy even rudeness, that he usually showed towards government officials. But he was also, it seems, an affable person, well regarded by his African tenants, and, like most tea planters, a keen big game hunter.

Around the turn of the century Henry Brown became the proprietor of several land holdings in the Mulanje district, including the estate of Thornwood (1126 acres), Dunraven (300 acres) and Swazi (600 acres), as well as the Machinjira estate in Portuguese East Africa which he was never able to develop. He also owned two cottages on Litchenya plateau, 'Pioneer' and 'Aralon', getting into trouble around 1912 with the Forest Department for illegally grazing cattle on Mulanje plateau (for an illuminating discussion of Henry Brown see B. Lamport-Stokes 1992).

Brown's wife, Mary Ann, always known as 'Ma' Brown, seems also to have been a formidable character. Rather pious and extremely knowledgeable about tea, she lived a frugal existence and survived her husband (who died in 1925) by another two decades. Many apocryphal stories circulated among the planting community with regard to 'Ma' Brown, especially

her vehement opposition to alcohol, and the devious ways in which her husband Henry managed to obtain his needed supply of whisky (Westrop 1964: 274; Glanville 1978). Indeed the pioneer Thyolo tea-planter Arthur Westrop was to write: ‘The mature tea in Nyasaland had apparently been almost all derived from one source and the pioneer grower of tea and the producer of tea seed was a famous old lady “Ma” Brown’ (Westrop 1964: 24).

Nevertheless one can but agree with the Rev. Smith that the ‘real pioneer’ of tea in Nyasaland was undoubtedly Henry Brown who

‘For many years persevered through sunshine and storm to make the (tea) industry a success.’ ‘Ma’ Brown would certainly have agreed. (Life and Work in Nyasaland December 1912; Hadlow 1934: 5, 1960: 22)

By the close of the nineteenth century a tentative beginning had been made in the planting of tea in Nyasaland. In Mulanje, small tea gardens began to replace the coffee plantations on both Lauderdale and Thornwood estates. In 1904 there were over 200 acres of tea at Thornwood and 50 at Lauderdale, and tea first figured among the Nyasaland exports—with around four tons of tea being exported at a value of £40 (Hadlow 1934: 2; Baker 1971b: 96).

Around the same time Bloomfield Bradshaw had planted around half an acre of tea on his Lujeri estate—initially without much success. Equally significant the Buchanan brothers had established a small plantation of tea on their Zomba estate, while Eugene Sharrer of the British Central Africa Company had planted young tea from Ceylon on his estates at Limbe, Thyolo and Michiru. Tea was even tried on the slopes of Zomba Mountain. None of these early planting ventures, however, proved a success given the limited rainfall in the Zomba and Blantyre districts, and at the turn of the twentieth century tea plantations were confined to the southern foothills of Mulanje Mountain (Hadlow 1934: 5–7, 1960: 25).

In September 1898 Henry Brown exhibited a small-sample of home-made tea at a local agricultural show in Mulanje and as expected, won the first prize. The tea was made without the aid of machinery, being simply hand-rolled and fired over a charcoal burner. The general opinion with regard to the taste of the tea was that it was ‘awful’. However, in 1904, Blantyre and East Africa had placed an advertisement in *The Central African Times* which read: ‘Lauderdale tea is a pure tea of excellent quality and flavour at 2/- per lb’.

In 1908 samples of tea were sent from Mulanje to the Imperial Institute in London, who reported that the teas contained around 3.5 per cent caffeine (on par with that contained in Indian teas) but that it was difficult to judge the aroma of the tea as it had been packed along with tobacco! (Hadlow 1934: 12–13, 1960: 24).

The early tea plantings derived from seed from Thornwood estate came to be known as the ‘Ma’ Brown ‘local’ *jat*, and for several years no further tea seed could be obtained as there was a restriction on importing any seed from India, Ceylon or Natal due to the fear of introducing the coffee leaf disease (*Hemileia vastatrix*) into Nyasaland (Hadlow 1934: 6, 1960: 23).

Something may be said about the socio-economic conditions of the Mulanje (Manje) district at the turn of the century, for the fledgling tea industry emerged within a context of radical change and social complexity. As we discussed in Chap. 4 the alienation of land to European planters was by no means smooth and straightforward. In 1891 a serious dispute broke out between the local Yao chief Chikumba and the European planters—which was resolved only by the sending of a punitive, military expedition from Zomba, consisting of a large force of Sikh soldiers under Captain Cecil Maguire. According to J.B. Ferrier, Chief Chikumba, who died in 1928, always remained openly hostile to European planters. Indeed throughout the early part of the twentieth-century African chiefs in their meetings with the District Resident, always voiced the complaint that the European planters had appropriated their land, or, as it was then expressed, they had ‘eaten’ it (MNA Manje District Book 1910–1913).

At the close of the nineteenth century given the relatively sparse human population, wildlife was abundant in the Mulanje district. Eland were comparatively common, especially on the Thuchila plain, and so were many species of antelope—bushbuck, reedbuck, waterbuck and hartebeest. Between 1904 and 1907 around 50 leopards were trapped on the El Dorado and Lauderdale estates. El Dorado was an estate of around 500 acres owned by George Garden, a man who made a remarkable collection of early photographs. Along with Henry Brown and John Moir, Garden was an early pioneer in the growing of tea in Mulanje. But it was not only leopards taking estate livestock that were troublesome; in 1909 an invasion of locusts caused serious famine in some areas of the Mulanje district.

Equally important was the influx of Lomwe—described then as Anguru—people into the Mulanje district in the early decades of the twentieth century—as we discussed in Chap. 5. The immigration of the Lomwe into the Mulanje district was openly encouraged by both the government

administration and the European planters. The Lomwe rarely formed their own villages—although there were a few Lomwe (Anguru) chiefs such as Lewetere and Nampungwe—but rather attached themselves to existing Nyanja or Yao chiefs, and were often described as ‘*akapolo*’ (slaves). But as one administrator described, the labour they performed for the chief—in return for protection—was menial rather than oppressive. As much of the land in the Mulanje district was owned by European planters, most of the Lomwe became de-facto tenants on European estates.

By 1930 the Lomwe population in the Mulanje District had increased to 92,000, outnumbering both the Yao and Nyanja ethnic communities (42,000) (MNA Mulanje District Book 1929–1938).

Equally important was the influx of Asian traders into the Mulanje district, mostly Muslims. Not only involved in petty retail trade, many, such as Mahomed Hussein, Osman Adam and Mussa Jussah became successful wholesale merchants, buying tobacco and maize (in particular) from local peasant cultivators. Local Africans often complained to the District Resident that they were given low prices for their produce—making it difficult for them to pay their six shillings poll tax—and that the Asian traders often paid them in cloth and salt rather than cash. Around 1912 there were around 40 Asian trading stores in the Mulanje district, and almost every estate was associated with a particular trading store and market. By the late 1930s there were some 126 Asian trading stores in 48 separate locations in the district (MNA Mulanje District Book 1929–1938).

It is of interest to note that there was an extremely high turnover of district administrators in the early colonial period, and that many were given nicknames by local people that were far from complimentary: Nanyambha (stop doing something), Nyalugwe (leopard) and Chitedze (the buffalo bean that causes intense itching)! It is also noteworthy that many of the early European planters were married to African women—the marriage often being sanctified at the Church of Scotland mission, for there was, in Mulanje in the early colonial period, a close relationship between the planters and the mission. For example, James Ingles, W.P. Ronaldson, James S Millar, J.B. Ferrier and ‘Bwana James’ Aitcheson all had African wives. Frank Ingles, who was the grandson of the early planter James Ingles, a Scot from Aberdeen, suggested to me that marriage between the European Planter and a local African woman sometimes sealed a land claim with a local chief. A successful Anglo-African businessman, Frank Ingles was married to one of the daughters of J.B. Ferrier (1885–1957).

Born in Wales, Ferrier came to Nyasaland in 1904, initially working on the Lauderdale estate of Blantyre and East Africa Ltd, growing chillies and tobacco. He eventually bought Venture estate (300 acres) which was next to the Nalipriri estate of 'Bwana James' Aitcheson (1875–1962). A close friend of James S. Millar (1875–1946). Ferrier, according to Ingles, failed to get permission from the colonial government to build a tea factory on his estate because he had an African wife.

Ingles also suggested to me that while the children derived from a relationship between an Asian trader and a local African woman were invariably absorbed into the father's community, becoming a Muslim and learning Asian culture, the children of the European planters did not 'fit in' (as he put it) to the European planting community. They were viewed as 'coloureds' and most became, like Ingles himself initially, factory mechanics, starting as 'spanner boys' (Ingles 1978). In 1929 Henry Ashcroft formed the Anglo-African Association, specifically aimed at promoting the well-being of 'coloured' peoples—who had been 'left to endure and suffer social hardships'. The association came to stress their distinctiveness as a racial community. Ingles knew Ashcroft well, but was opposed to this approach, and resigned from the association. (On the Anglo-African community in the 1930s see Lee 2008.)

What must be recognized, of course, is that although there were many estates in the Mulanje district owned and managed by European planters, most of them on freehold land, only a few estates were engaged in the production of tea in the first decade of the twentieth century. But even those like El Dorado, Thornwood and Lauderdale, which pioneered the growing of tea, were also involved in the growing of other commercial crops. On the Mulanje estates, besides tea, were grown tobacco, rubber and chillies, and in the drier outlying areas, cotton—on such estates as Likulezi of the A.L. Bruce estates (7448 acres) and the Thuchila estate of the African Lakes Company (1200 acres).

It hardly needs emphasizing that in spite of the large influx of Lomwe into the district, labour was always a serious problem for the early planters in Mulanje. For during the early rains, when tea pluckers were most needed to cope with the flush of tea, the estate tenants themselves were more concerned with cultivating their own subsistence crops.

In 1920 the District Resident in Mulanje described the relationship between the European planters and the African labourer as follows: 'The Planters endeavour to obtain from the native the maximum amount of work for a minimum wage; the native, on the other hand, uses every

device to do as little work as possible for the small remuneration which he receives' (MNA S1/1040/19; Palmer 1985a: 235).

This is alleged to have been a common problem—given the low wages—on tea estates and tobacco farms in the Shire Highlands throughout the colonial period.

We may turn now to the Thyolo (Cholo) district, where tea was first planted in 1908 on the Bandanga estate. The estate, of around 5000 acres, was then part of Blantyre and East Africa holdings. Tea seeds were therefore obtained by the estate manager, a Mr H.R. Cox, from Lauderdale estate. That same year tea was also planted on the Mudi estate, between Limbe and Blantyre, but given its location the tea did not thrive there, and the crop was eventually abandoned. But benefitting from the winter rains, the 'chiperonis' (named after the mountain in Mozambique), Thyolo was different, and the tea at Bandanga flourished.

The planting of tea in Thyolo in 1908 has been described as a major 'step forward' in the development of the emerging tea industry. But it was not until the 1920s that any real development of the tea crop took place, with respect to both the Mulanje and Thyolo districts, even though Blantyre and East Africa Ltd had substantially increased its tea acreage in Mulanje by 1908—to over a thousand acres—and had built a small tea factory on Lauderdale (Hutson 1978: 43). It is to this development of the tea industry that we can now turn.

5 THE EARLY PIONEERS

Given that the cultivation of tea requires substantial capital investment, and that the protectorate government was pledged to supporting a plantation economy in the Shire Highlands, the tea industry from its inception was the preserve of European planters. Many of the early tea estates, like Thornwood estate, were family concerns, and had their origins in the vision and enterprise of a single individual pioneer. It may be useful, therefore, to describe the origins of three tea estates in the Thyolo district—each of which was intimately associated with the life and work of an agricultural pioneer, namely Arthur Westrop, Ignaco Conforzi and Malcolm Barrow. Along with William Tait-Bowie, and each in their own way, these three men were the real pioneers in the development of the tea industry in the Shire Highlands. There estates, respectively, were Magombwa, Mboma and Naming'omba.

5.1 *Magombwa Estate*

Born in Bridgnorth, Arthur Westrop (1893–1965), attended an agricultural college as a young man, and trained both as an entomologist and as an agricultural chemist. He worked for much of his early life for a fertilizer company, travelling widely in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), India and Malaysia. The notion expressed—implicitly—by some scholars that Nyasaland tea planters were a bunch of conceited ex-public school boys, lacking in any real knowledge of agriculture, anti-intellectual and completely resistant to change is, to say the least, something of a caricature. Even so, it was a view expressed to me by the director of tea research Rex Ellis (1978) with regard to certain tea planters! But it was certainly untrue of Arthur Westrop who had a deep knowledge of tropical agriculture, particularly the cultivation of tea and rubber.

In 1923, when on home leave, Westrop attended a Scout Wood Badge course at Gilwell Park, and got into an argument with the camp chief Rodney Wood over the identification of a nesting blue tit. The two men struck up an immediate friendship, for both were keen naturalists, and they were to remain close friends for the next 40 years (Happold 2011: 90–93). Wood, in his early years, had worked on a cotton estate near Chiromo and—almost as a kind of retreat from the oppressive heat of the Lower Shire Valley—had bought himself a small estate in the cool Thyolo highlands. This was Magombwa estate. Here Wood spent most of the early 1920s growing and harvesting tobacco.

In 1927 Wood invited Westrop to visit him in Nyasaland, giving his friend a glowing report of the many types of fruit grown on his Magombwa estate, for example, lemon, pineapple, mango, avocado, passion fruit, orange, bananas and papaya. Impressed, the outcome was that Westrop bought the Magombwa estate from his friend in 1929. At that time, like almost all European estates in the Thyolo district, Magombwa was essentially a tobacco farm, and the only estate growing tea commercially was Bandanga.

A small estate of only around 450 acres, Magombwa was situated to the southeast of Thyolo Mountain at an altitude of 3000 feet (915 m), and had an average rainfall of around 55 inches (1400 mm). Given his experiences of tea estates in India and Ceylon, Westrop recognized that this rainfall was marginal for tea, but Wood had never recorded an entirely dry month. Westrop therefore considered the growing of tea a feasible project, especially as, in 1928, there was a drastic fall in tobacco prices. After the initial plantings of the ‘Ma’ Brown’s ‘local’ tea, Westrop left

the management of Magombwa estate to his friend Robert Harper, who owned a small tobacco estate Mwalampanda about two miles away, and returned to Malaysia (Westrop 1964: 18–41).

When Westrop arrived in the Thyolo highlands in 1927, much of the region was still covered with moist *Brachystegia* woodland, especially near Thyolo Mountain and on the Thyolo escarpment. The Thyolo district was thus a mosaic of woodland and cultivated land, and although there had been a large influx of Lomwe people into the highlands, it was still relatively sparsely populated. The population of the district at that time was estimated to be about 34,000, in around 300 villages. Apart from Chief Bvumbwe, who was an Ngoni, all the chiefs of the Thyolo district were recorded as being of Mang'anja origin. Most of the land in the highland area was privately owned by European planters or companies, and consisted mainly of individual estates growing tobacco or rubber. All the people living within the domains of the two chiefs close to Thyolo *boma*, namely Chimaliro and Nchilamwela, were tenants on private estates (MNA Cholo District Book 1907, NSE 1/12/1).

In contrast to Mulanje, Thyolo was outside the influence of the Church of Scotland mission, but at the turn of the century two important missions had been established in the Thyolo district—at Malamulo and Mtambanyama. Established by Joseph Booth in 1907, and consisting of around 2000 acres, Malamulo was a Seventh-Day Adventist mission. It was originally called Plainfield mission. In contrast Mtambanyama was the location of the Nyasa Industrial mission, a Baptist mission. It was established in 1898 with some 320 acres and was close to Westrop's estate. What was significant about both these missions was that they placed a great deal of emphasis on the teaching of agricultural methods, established extensive vegetable gardens and orchards, and in the early colonial period as *industrial* missions were deeply involved in the cultivation of cotton and coffee. As the years passed they abandoned commercial agriculture and focussed more on their evangelical work and in the provision of medical care (Langworthy 1996). At the same time the European planters in Thyolo, by stages, gave up the cultivation of coffee, cotton and tobacco, and by the end of the 1920s had switched to the production of tea.

During the 1930s Westrop continued to work in Malaysia as a director of a fertilizer company, and, as graphically described in his memoirs, he spent the war years in Changi Jail. He thus did not return to Nyasaland until 1947, when he took over the management of the Magombwa estate. He formed a small tea company, Magombe Ltd—the term *gombe* being

derived from the Chinyanja for a 'river bank' (plural *magombe*)—and soon had over 300 acres under tea, selling his leaf to Cholo Highlands Tea Estates Ltd, who had tea factories at Mianga and Makwasa estates (Westrop 1964).

With respect to his tea estate Westrop had two main enthusiasms—although he was also deeply involved in scouting activities and was a keen and pioneer wildlife cine-photographer. These were, as I recall from my visits to Magombwa during the years 1958–1961, his 'garden city' and his penchant for 'shade trees'.

As Magombwa was a small estate—most of it under tea—Westrop was not deeply involved in *thangata* labour. But like other Thyolo estates he was keen to establish a more permanent labour force by provision of estate housing (known as *chitando*). He was, however, deeply averse to the regimented labour 'lines' of brick houses with corrugated tin roofs, as found on the larger estates. So he positioned his own *zithando* houses on a more open plan, more akin to a village setting, and built them with tiled roofs—as houses with metal roofs became unbearably hot. Although they were only small, two-roomed brick houses, such estate accommodation was markedly better than most mud and thatch huts that were then the usual living quarters of most Africans in the Shire Highlands (1964: 256–259).

Given his background Westrop was also a great advocate of both fertilizers and shade trees. The renowned 'Ma' Brown, it was said, had 'no use for such new-fangled ideas as artificial fertilizers' (275), but Westrop never questioned their importance in increasing tea yields, particularly by combining inputs of nitrogen, phosphates and potash (1964: 243). But drawing on his own experiences in India Westrop was also a strong advocate of 'green manures' and shade trees in the tea gardens, particularly leguminous trees such as the attractive, flat-crowed *chikwani*; (*Albizia gummifera/ adiantbifolia*) and *Gliricidia maculata*. Though Westrop was always sceptical of the 'tea expert' Archie Forbes, subsequent research has indicated that shade trees in tea tend to reduce tea yields when fertilizers are used (Westrop 1964: 248–249; Palmer-Jones 1974: 225).

What was striking about Arthur Westrop was that he was always concerned with encouraging a sense of trust between European planters and African workers, and he was almost unique among tea planters in Nyasaland during the colonial period in addressing his estate workers with the polite term '*bambo*' (father) rather than 'boy' or the more impersonal '*uwe*' (you).

In 1934 at the request of the Director of Agriculture, Westrop wrote a report on his observations of the emerging tea industry in the Shire Highlands. There were then over 10,000 acres of mature tea in bearing, much of it in the Thyolo district having been planted on contour terraces—much to his approval. Westrop emphasized the importance of ‘green manure’ trees, expressed his scepticism of the common practice of ‘clean pruning’, highlighted the problems of *thangata* labour—noting that on some estates on wet days no labour at all turned up for work, and stressed that the ‘profitable position’ of the Nyasaland tea industry was due entirely to the international Tea Regulation Scheme that has been introduced in 1933. Westrop thus concluded that the growing of tea in the Shire Highlands—especially in Mulanje and Thyolo—had great potential (MNA/A2/94/7).

5.2 *Mboma Estate*

The Italian planter and businessman Ignaco Conforzi (1885-) had a personality that contrasted markedly with that of the genial and liberal Westrop, for he was essentially an ‘empire’-builder. Forceful, incisive, enterprising, at times inflexible, often ruthless, and so gifted with entrepreneurial skills that he was described as a ‘legend’ even in his own lifetime, Conforzi was the ‘enfant terrible’ of settler agriculture (McCracken 2008: 19). At the time of independence Kamuzu Banda, then Minister of Agriculture, severely rebuked Conforzi for his profiteering—only later to emulate the Italian in becoming the owner of several tobacco estates that employed tenant labour, like Conforzi, to generate a handsome profit! (McCracken 2008: 19–20.)

Born in a small town in Italy, 40 miles north-east of Rome, and the son of an aristocratic landowner, Conforzi, like Westrop, attended an agricultural college as a young man. As briefly noted in Chap. 5, he came to Nyasaland in 1907, and was originally employed by Blantyre and East Africa Ltd as a tobacco planter on their Njuli and Lunza estates. Like Westrop, Conforzi was much better qualified than most European planters of the early colonial period, who had little real knowledge of agriculture. As an Italian national, McCracken emphasized that Conforzi was always juggling with his ‘multiple identities’—as a European, a planter, an Italian, a Catholic and as a native of a particular region of Italy (2008: 5). But, of course, not only Conforzi, but all humans, in all cultures, have social identities that are multiple, shifting and relational. He was particularly astute in manipulating his social ties. Thus, during the 1930s, as the

Italian consul in Nyasaland, he was an ardent supporter of fascism; in his later years he was awarded a C.B.E., a Commander of the British Empire and highly respected tea planter (McCracken 2008: 14–19).

Working for Blantyre and East Africa Ltd on their tobacco estates, Conforzi revolutionized the growing of flue-cured tobacco by introducing the early planting of the tobacco seedlings. By 1909 he had left the company and bought an estate in the Thyolo district, as well as establishing himself as a successful tobacco-buyer. During the 1920s, in competition with Roy Wallace and Andrew Barron, he had acquired 4000 acres of freehold land and several thousand acres of leasehold in the Lilongwe district. There, he established a lucrative tenant farming system whereby thousands of African tenants produced fire-cured tobacco for sale to the estate owners—Conforzi and his agents. By the end of the 1920s Dr Conforzi (as he came to be known) was purchasing around half the tobacco grown in the Central Region—whether by tenants on private estates, or peasant farmers on African trust land. By 1937 he had opened the first tobacco factory in Lilongwe (Matthews and Wilshaw 1992: 36; McCracken 2008: 9).

During the 1920s Conforzi grew fire-cured tobacco by plantation labour on his Thyolo estates, as well as establishing several olive groves. But with the collapse of tobacco prices in 1928 Conforzi, along with other tobacco farmers in the Thyolo highlands, switched to tea, obtaining stumps from the Mulanje tea estates. Over the years he had acquired extensive lands in the Thyolo district, amounting to around 8000 acres (3200 ha), which was generally known as the Mboma estate. But Mboma actually consisted of a complex of eight estates, including, for example, Glengarry estate (2499 acres) and Mwalanthunzi estate (1701 acres). Each estate was under the management of an expatriate European, Conforzi invariably recruiting Italian compatriots in what amounted to a patron–client network. By 1935 Conforzi had 2350 acres under tea in the Thyolo district—making him the largest independent producer of tea in the Shire Highlands, on par with that of Blantyre and East Africa Ltd who, by 1935, had established around 3000 acres of tea in the Thyolo and Mulanje districts. But ever-enterprising, in 1934 Conforzi had encouraged peasant farmers in the Masambanjati area to grow coffee as a cash crop, two years later buying over 1200 lb of the crop (MNA Cholo District Book 1933–1937).

By 1935 Conforzi had also built a modern tea factory on the Mboma estate, which constituted along with its dairy farm, vegetable gardens and medical facilities, almost a self-contained community, dominated by expatriate Italian tea planters and artisans.

In 1939 Conforzi, in a wise move, converted his extensive holdings and agricultural interests into a British-based company I. Conforzi (Tea and Tobacco) Ltd, but it always remained very much a family-based company, under Conforzi's overall control (McCracken 2008: 12).

5.3 *Naming'omba Estate*

Situated between Conforzi's estate and Thyolo Mountain, at an elevation of 3750 feet (1143 m) Naming'omba estate was bought by Malcolm Barrow (1900–1973) when he arrived in Nyasaland in 1927. He had only recently graduated from the University of Cambridge. Comprising around 5000 acres which was then mostly under *Brachystegia* woodland, Barrow bought the land from F.B. McMaster at around £3 per acre. Originally a tobacco estate, with the collapse of the tobacco prices Naming'omba was quickly converted from a tobacco farm to a tea estate, Barrow obtaining seed directly from India. By 1929 Barrow had planted around 450 acres of tea. He apparently invested around £60,000 in the estate, which in those days was a phenomenal sum of money, well beyond the reach of the most planters—the annual salary of the governor was only £2500! Naming'omba rapidly became the leading tea estate in Thyolo. Westrop, visiting the estate in 1934, described it as 'the show estate of the district, where the Barrows had built a fine house—the first with modern sanitation that I had seen in the country' (Westrop 1964: 57; Palmer 1985a: 219).

Around 1934 Barrow bought the neighbouring estates of Mandimwe and Namabinzi, thus substantially increasing the tea acreage, as well as constructing a modern tea factory at Naming'omba. He then consolidated his holdings by establishing the company Nyasa Tea Estates Ltd with himself as Managing Director. Thus, like Conforzi, he kept Naming'omba estate as very much a family concern.

Responding to 'imperial demands' towards the end of the 1930s Barrow established a large acreage of tung (*Vernicia fordii*) on his Naming'omba estate, and by 1940 he had 1549 acres of tea and 1227 acres of tung, as well as around 500 acres of blue gum afforestation. In 1942, 100 tons of tung oil was produced at the Naming'omba mill, while tea production had reached the figure of 1,000,000 lb of made tea (Najira 1973: 4–6).

Malcolm Barrow was to play an important role in the development of the tea industry in Nyasaland, especially as chairman of both the Tea Association and the Tea Research Foundation, as well as being the first Chairman of the Nyasaland Society on its foundation in 1946. He was later to become a

prominent settler politician, a member of the legislative council from 1941 to 1953, and a staunch supporter of the federal government. He served for a brief period under Roy Welensky as Deputy Prime Minister of the short-lived Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

Towards the end of the 1920s there was therefore a marked expansion of tea planting and tea production in both the Thyolo and Mulanje districts. We discuss below the leading company, Blantyre and East Africa Ltd, but a brief note here on the early history of one Mulanje tea estate may be useful.

5.4 *Ruo Estate*

The history of Ruo estate is focussed on Dr Pelham Wykesmith who at the turn of the century worked with his wife as a medical doctor at Chiromo in the Lower Shire Valley. Convalescing in the cooler environment of the Shire Highlands after a severe bout of malaria, Wykesmith became friendly with Henry and 'Ma' Brown in Mulanje. In 1910 the Wykesmiths bought 3124 acres (1265 ha) of land close to the Ruo River from Henry Brown—Ruo estate. Situated at 2200 feet (671 m) the estate had an annual rainfall of around 84 inches (2130 mm). It proved to be good, prime land for tea, with adequate rainfall, and in 1911 a limited company was formed, the Ruo Estates Ltd, with Dr Wykesmith as Managing Director. Unfortunately Wykesmith died the following year of blackwater fever—he was buried on the estate—and Mr A.W. Shinn became the General Manager of the company. It was a post Shinn held for 28 years. At that time—around 1912—the estate comprised 148 acres of rubber, 20 acres of chillies, 74 acres of tobacco and some 247 acres (100 ha) of tea (Lupton 1996: 2–6).

In 1916 a tea factory was built on Ruo estate, and in 1920 the company bought Likanga estate (518 acres), which had over 200 acres of high-yielding tea. To avoid the inherent difficulties of transporting the tea crop from Likanga to the Ruo factory, in 1926 a further, new factory was built on Likanga estate. In 1936 the company purchased Litchenya estate (1024 acres), adjacent to Likanga, but by then had discontinued the production of tobacco. By 1940, when Shinn retired, Ruo estates had 1250 acres (506 ha) under tea, which were yielding around 1100 lb of tea per acre. Significantly, like Naming'omba estate, Ruo estate by 1940 had established extensive blue gum plantations (around 700 acres) as fuel for the factory production of the tea (Lupton 1996: 6–11).

Nearly all the tea estates of the Shire Highlands had their beginnings in the latter part of the 1920s. Nchima estate in the Thyolo district, for example, was originally opened-up in 1910 by Henry Gardiner, the grandfather of the renowned agriculturalist Rolf Gardiner. In the early period it was dedicated to the growing of tobacco and rubber, the first tea garden being established in 1927. In 1932 a tea factory was built that used hydro-electric power, and by 1935 Nchima estate had 600 acres under tea.

Sayama estate in the Mulanje district began planting tea at the same time. The estate (of some 1747 acres) belonged to James S. Millar, who originally bought it from John Tennant of Luchenza in 1918, when coffee production had failed. Millar had earlier been a marine engineer working on Zambezi paddle steamers, and was familiarly known as ‘Mbawa’, given his apparent enthusiasm for the red mahogany tree (*Khaya nyasica*). Millar uprooted the coffee on Sayama estate, and initially cultivated chillies and tobacco—until, that is, the collapse of tobacco prices. He then turned, like other tobacco growers, to the production of tea, initially planting some 50 acres of tea in 1927. By 1935, Sayama estate had 450 acres of tea, sending its leaf to nearby Lauderdale estate for manufacture (BEA archives, Lauderdale estate, *Review of the Tea Industry* 1965).

By 1935 the tea industry in the Shire Highlands had been firmly established. There existed around 34 estates, growing (mainly) tea—each estate averaging around 500 acres of tea—and the total acreage of tea in the Shire Highlands amounted to 17,698 acres. Thyolo and Mulanje districts had roughly equivalent acreages—Thyolo (8844 acres), Mulanje (8854 acres). See Tables 7.1 and 7.2 and Fig. 7.1.

We may turn now to a discussion of the ecology and production of tea during the colonial period.

6 THE ECOLOGY AND PRODUCTION OF TEA

The climate of the Shire Highlands is described in Chap. 2. The important feature for tea growers is that from May until July, in some districts, the cold dry season is punctuated by long spells of rain and cold mists. The occurrence of these winter rains in June and July was one of the key factors in the development of tea estates in the Thyolo Highlands and along the southern foothills of Mulanje Mountain, as well as of Zoa estate which is situated on the Nankungu ridge some 30 miles south of Thyolo boma. The estates of the Mulanje district are mainly situated between 2000 feet

Table 7.1 Mulanje tea estates (circa 1935)

<i>Owner</i>	<i>Estate</i>	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>Acreage under tea</i>
Blantyre and East Africa Ltd	Lauderdale	4200	969
	Limbuli	2809	604
	Glenorchy	500	486
Ruo Estates	Ruo	3124	555
	Likanga	518	465
	Litchenya	1024	250
Chisambo Estates Ltd	Chisambo	492	450
J. Lyons and Co	Lujeri	2000	1134
	Bloomfield	429	
Mrs Henry Brown	Thornwood	1126	920
	Dunraven	300	
	Swazi	600	
African Lakes Company	Chitakali	1536	531
George Garden	El Dorado	1076	600
Mini-Mini Tea Syndicate	Mini-Mini	678	525
James S. Millar	Sayama	1747	453
H.B. Morton	Esperanza	500	350
A.J. Storey	Likhubula	372	300
Mrs Daisy Woodward	Chingozi	355	200
Mrs E.D. Royle	Nkongoloni	500	62
	Total acreage under tea		8854

(Minimini estate) and 2500 feet (Glenorchy estate), while those in the Thyolo highlands are generally between 3000 and 4000 feet above sea level. Very little tea is produced during these winter months, but the light rains are sufficient to enable the tea bushes to survive the hot dry season that lasts from August until October, until the break of the rains. The average rainfall of the two areas is detailed in Table 7.3.

It has to be recognized that although both the tea-growing regions have ample rainfall in most years, there are extremely wide variations in the annual rainfall figures, both as to the location, and according to the year and season. For example, Mwalathunzi estate (Thyolo) and Limbuli estate (Mulanje) both often receive around 90 inches of rainfall a year, while some of the estates in the Thyolo highlands, especially those at some distance from Thyolo mountain, sometimes receive less than 50 inches of rainfall. The rainfall figures for two years from Zoa estate will illustrate this

Table 7.2 Thyolo tea estates (circa 1935)

<i>Owner</i>	<i>Estate</i>	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>Acreage under tea</i>
Cholo Highlands Ltd	Makwasa	–	400
	Namirene	4000	450
	Mwalampanda	1111	350
I. Conforzi	Mboma	8041	2350
Nyasa Tea Estates Ltd	Naming'omba	4975	1008
British Central Africa Ltd	Mindali	2010	450
	Chisunga	1754	400
Cholo and Michiru Tea and Tobacco Estates Ltd	Nchima	13,000	601
Gotha Estates Ltd	Wampanzi	4100	400
	Nsikiidzi	1000	250
Blantyre and East Africa Ltd	Bandanga	5229	525
	Zoa	19,760	340
	Mwalandusi	2968	40
MacLean Kay	Satemwa	1536	450
A.R. Westrop	Magombwa	450	275
A.C. Price	Sambankhanga	500	400
Milango Tea and Tung Plantations Ltd	Milango	–	150
W.H. Timke	Kasambereka	874	–
R. Sharpe	Nasonia	2417	–
H.N. Percival	Mkhami	–	–
R.B. Usher	Lujenda	1050	–
R.S. Harper	Kachimanga	–	–
G. Dalton	Chimwenya	1203	5
	Total acreage under tea		8844
	Total acreage Shire Highlands		17,698 acres

Hadlow 1934: 18–19; Palmer 1985b: 238–239

seasonal and annual variation (Table 7.4). The average rainfall over a five year period at Zoa (1956–1960) was 42.61 inches (1082 mm) which was certainly considered marginal for the growing of tea.

Ideally, tea requires an acid soil, gently sloping land and ample rainfall. Early observers often remarked on the fertile soils of the Mulanje and Thyolo district. For example, J. McClounie of the scientific department in Zomba, wrote in 1901 that the soil on Henry Brown's Thornwood estate was 'deep, of rich reddish-chocolate colour, apparently suited to the cultivation of tea' (Hadlow 1934: 10). Mainly derived from gneiss



Fig. 7.1 Limbuli tea estate, Mulanje

Source: Brian Morris

and schist rock formations, the soils of the tea-growing areas of the Shire Highlands are variable, but consist essentially of brown to red sandy clay soils. One soil scientist recorded that the Nyasaland tea soils had a reasonable amount of phosphate (P) and potash (K) but were extremely variable with respect to the amount of nitrogen (N)—all these being viewed as the essential nutrients for the production of tea (Cutting 1956; Pike and Rimmington 1965: 85).

Most of the tea gardens that were opened-up in the Thyolo highlands and along the Southern slopes of Mulanje Mountain probably involved the clearing of a rich moist *Brachystegia* woodland that included many evergreen trees and epiphytic herbs.

When clearing an area of woodland to plant tea, great effort was always made, in order to avoid the fungus disease *Armillaria*, to remove all the roots of the existing indigenous trees. This always entailed a great deal of hard work and labour. The land was staked-out, contour-banded and holes (*dzenje*) dug—some six inches square and around eighteen inches deep. The spacing of the tea was usually 4 × 4 feet, giving around 2700 tea bushes per acre.

Table 7.3 Average rainfall in Mulanje and Thyolo

	<i>Rain (inches)</i>	
	<i>Mimosa estate Mulanje 2140 feet</i>	<i>Nchima estate Thyolo 2690 feet</i>
November	5.53	2.45
December	11.08	11.22
January	9.83	8.94
February	10.62	7.38
March	12.01	8.23
April	6.46	4.59
Wet Season total	55.53	42.81
May	2.07	1.06
June	1.98	0.90
July	2.32	1.26
Cold Dry Season total	6.37	3.22
August	1.30	0.73
September	1.06	0.35
October	1.55	0.73
Hot Dry Season Total	3.91	1.81
Total rainfall	65.81 (1671 mm)	47.84 (1215 mm)

Palmer-Jones 1974: 14–15

At the beginning of the rains the tea seedlings, in the form of two-year old ‘stumps’, were planted into these pits, having been grown from seed in shaded nurseries. The nurseries were invariably situated in a valley area (*dambo*) or near streams. The seeds were usually taken from seed gardens, although throughout the colonial period efforts were made to obtain seeds from Assam or Ceylon to replace the ‘Ma’ Brown local tea, which had a smaller leaf and were not as high-yielding as the ‘Indian’ *jat*. Many tea estates, like Magombwa and Zoa estates, therefore, tended to have both types of tea.

Labour on the tea estates was always organized in the form of work groups of around 20 or more, named after and under the authority and supervision of a *capitao* (*kapitawo*)—the term being derived from the Portuguese for a foreman or overseer. Each estate had two distinct spheres of activity—the ‘field’ (relating to the tea gardens) and the ‘factory’, each with a head *capitao*. The head *capitao* always worked in close cooperation with the European manager or field assistant in the setting of work tasks—for labour was usually

Table 7.4 Zoa tea estate rainfall

	<i>Rain (inches)</i> <i>Zoa tea estate, 3000 feet</i>	
	<i>1950–1951</i>	<i>1951–1952</i>
November	1.22	6.27
December	5.40	13.00
January	17.27	12.69
February	4.24	18.37
March	1.74	3.32
April	1.9	5.31
Wet Season total	31.77	58.96
May	1.26	1.94
June	2.60	0.65
July	0.82	1.06
Cold Dry Season total	4.68	3.65
August	4.53	Nil
September	0.04	0.72
October	4.53	1.19
Hot Dry Season total	9.10	1.91
Total rainfall	45.55 (1156 mm)	64.52 (1639 mm)

BEA Archives, Lauderdale estate. Zoa, Annual Reports 1950–1960

organized in terms of a ‘piecework’ system. This involved the setting of a ‘task’ (*nchito*)—whether the number of tea bushes to be pruned, the amount of tea to be plucked, or a given area of land to be hoed. The task entailed was usually marked by a marker or ‘flag’ (*mbendera*), to be later checked for satisfactory completion.

Work on the tea estate always began at daybreak, with assembly at the estate office (*bwalo*), work being allotted to each *capitao* with regard to the day’s work schedule, and the tasks specified by the European planter in consultation with the *capitao*. There was always a sense in which the ‘task’ was negotiated. The three main field tasks—outside nursery work—were plucking, pruning and weeding.

The plucking of the tea was both the most important and the most expensive activity of tea production. In contrast to South Asia, where women are invariably the main pluckers, in the Shire Highlands during the colonial period, it was always men who gathered the leaf. The crop itself consists of the young green shoots of the tea bush, and a strong insistence

was always made that pluckers should only take two leaves and a bud, but that they should also remove any ‘*banjhi*’ (dormant) leaves and endeavour to keep the tea bush flat, like a table (*tebulo*). The tea leaves were gathered in bambo baskets, made on the estate, which held about 40 lb. It was always stressed that great care should be made not to bruise or compress, and thus overheat, the tea leaf. At intervals during the day—usually midday or late afternoon—the leaf that the pluckers had gathered was weighed—at a veritable ritual described as ‘scale’ (*sikelo*). Usually the daily task consisted of plucking 25 or 30 lb, and any surplus leaf was calculated as an extra payment. The tea gardens were usually plucked on a five- or seven-day cycle, and during the height of the rainy season, in late December and early January, the tea factory usually worked non-stop.

The leaf was taken from the field to the factory in hessian bags, by means of a lorry, and there the tea was subjected to a complex manufacturing process (see below).

At the end of the rainy season, around April, the pruning of the tea bushes began. This task again was a task confined to men, many of whom were highly skilled. The wooden-handled and curved pruning knife was about twelve inches long: it was always kept razor sharp. The pruning of the tea was done on a four-year cycle, the tea bush being ‘deep’ pruned every four years, interspersed with a lighter prune described as a ‘skiff’. The validity of ‘deep’ pruning, when the tea bush was reduced to a skeleton of branches, was hotly debated among tea planters throughout the colonial period. But in later years a straight ‘cut across’ came to be recommended by the Tea Research Foundation and was generally adopted by all estates (Palmer-Jones 1974: 216; Moxham 2003: 244).

The weeding of the tea gardens, particularly during the rainy season, was chiefly undertaken by women, often as casual (*ganyu*) labour. The traditional hoes were of Portuguese origin—T-shaped with a relatively short wooden handle, some 30 inches long. This meant that the women had to bend low when using these heavy implements—but neither they—nor men—could be enticed into using a longer hoe handle. The task varied according to the type of hoeing—whether it involved light hoeing (*ku-pala*) or more deep cultivation (*ku-tipula*). In contrast to men, the women worked in unison, often collectively chatting and singing while they hoed the tea fields (Moxham 2003: 221).

The application of artificial fertilizers—mainly a mixture known as ‘NPK’—nitrogen, phosphate and potash—became increasingly important during the colonial period. It was applied to the tea bushes in September, mainly by women assisted by young children.

During the dry season the men, particularly those living more permanently in the estate housing (*zithando*), were mainly engaged in the repair and maintenance of the dirt roads on the estate, and in the cutting of firewood—which was the essential fuel (energy source) for most of the tea factories in the Shire Highlands.

At the height of the plucking season an estate of 500 acres generally employed up to 300 men and around 50 women, as well as a number of clerks, builders, carpenters and watchmen, and about 60 men working in the factory or on other sundry tasks. Children were often employed in nurseries for light work. All estates tended to have a small medical centre and employed a ‘dispenser’ (of medicines).

In the early colonial period many tea estates consisted essentially of three domains—the tea gardens (or tobacco cultivations); the land occupied by village communities and their cultivations—from which *thangata* labour was drawn—and the tracts of *Brachystegia* woodland, which were the source of firewood. But with the expansion of tea gardens and the increase of the human population on private estates in both the Thyolo and Mulanje district, the tea companies increasingly devoted large areas of the estate to blue gum (*Eucalyptus* sp.) plantations as a source of fuel. It is of interest that while local people considered *Brachystegia* and other indigenous trees as a common resource, they viewed blue gums quite differently (as personal property); although the illegal cutting of blue gums was always a source of contention among the planting community.

The field labour on most estates came from both neighbouring crown land and from the estate itself, and an estate usually employed a number of ‘rangers’ who toured the villages on the estate checking that people had performed their *thangata* obligations. But as the production of tea is highly labour-intensive, and as there was often an acute shortage of labour, particularly during the plucking season, labour was often recruited from outside the Thyolo and Mulanje districts. Such workers were housed in the *zithando*, the estate accommodation that the tea companies began to establish throughout the 1930s in an endeavour to create a more permanent and stable labour force (Palmer 1986: 110–111).

To return now to the production of tea. After collection by lorry and delivery at the factory, the green leaf underwent a complex process in its transformation into ‘made tea’. The leaf was initially spread as thinly and evenly as possible on withering ‘tats’ made of hessian, situated in the upper levels of the tea factory. Some ten or twenty hours later, usually overnight, the ‘withered’ leaf was twisted and broken by means of ‘rollers’—rotating machines which moved in a circular fashion

against a metal table. The broken leaf was then placed on metal trays in a cool, moist environment. There the process of fermentation took place, turning the colour of the tea leaf from green to a rich coppery brown. Fermentation lasted from 40 to 120 minutes, after which the leaf was fed into a tea drier; the tea, passing through a chamber of hot air, then becoming the familiar ‘black’ tea. Finally, through a complex process of winnowing and sifting, the tea was ‘sorted’ into various grades. These grades carried exotic names—based on ancient Chinese grading—such as ‘orange pekoe’, ‘broken orange pekoe’, ‘souchong’ and ‘orange fan-nings’. It was generally agreed that about 5 lb of green leaf was required for each pound of black tea produced.

In a later period new forms of machinery were introduced to replace the ‘withering’ and ‘rolling’ of the ‘orthodox’ form of tea manufacture that was generally practiced during the colonial period (Palmer-Jones 1974: 8–11; Tea Association 1974).

Tea gardens during the colonial era usually produced between 400 and 1000 lb of tea per acre.

What is significant to note is that, in marked contrast to coffee, cotton and tobacco, the tea gardens were relatively free of pests and diseases—apart from attacks of the *Armillaria* fungus and the occasional outbreaks of red spider mite. (On the insect pests of tea see Morris 2004: 133–136.)

Wages on the tea estate were paid by means of a 26-day ‘ticket’ (*tikiti*), which allowed a certain flexibility for the individual workers on the estate. For men could work intermittently, or even take several months to complete their ticket, or several men (or women) could combine and use/share the same ticket (unknown to the European planter) and thus free up time for the cultivation of their own gardens—whether on the estate or on crown land, whether for subsistence farming, or for the cultivation of cash crops. Payments were made weekly, on a Friday. But on each working day every estate worker was given a midday meal, consisting of a plate of maize porridge (*nsima*) and haricot beans, *mbwanda* (*Phaseolus vulgaris*), and occasionally, in extreme wet or cold conditions, they were given a drink of hot, sweet tea (*chayi*). The daily ration was familiarly known as *posho*—a term not of chinyanja origin.

Task work usually lasted five or six hours, and was generally completed by midday. During the 1930s unskilled workers earned six or seven shillings a month (per ticket), while pruners and skilled factory workers could earn up to ten shillings (per ticket) (Palmer 1986: 112).

All tea estates tended to possess a herd of cattle, for the provision of meat, milk and butter, principally for the European planters. The cattle either

browsed in nearby woodland, or were stall-fed with grasses such as *nsejere* (*Pennisetum purpureum*), and the man in charge of the herd, the *mbusa*, was often of Ngoni origin.

Throughout much of the colonial period tea gardens were planted with shade trees, particularly the trees *Albizia adianthifolia*, *Grevillea robusta* and *Gliricidia maculata*, with the *Grevillia*, in particular, being also used as a windbreak along estate roads. But, as earlier noted, the practice of growing tea under shade was later shown by the Tea Research Foundation—especially the researches of Rex Ellis—to be detrimental to the quality and yield of tea when artificial fertilizers were used. At the end of the colonial period, therefore, most tea estates removed virtually all the shade trees from the tea gardens (Tea Association 1974: 40; Ellis 1978: 2).

Throughout the colonial period the social life of the European planters largely centred on the sports ‘club’. Two clubs were formed in the 1920s relating to the tea estates: one at Thyolo near Satemwa estate (an estate started by MacLean Kay in 1924), the other at Mulanje close to the Boma. These clubs were exclusive to Europeans and they provided the planters with a venue for social relaxation (replete with an ample supply of alcohol); for sporting activities, particularly golf and tennis; and for meetings of the various planters’ associations. At the club there was invariably extensive discussion of planting techniques and labour issues, and apocryphal stories often circulated regarding the (alleged) gullibility and laziness of their African workers. As Roy Moxham expressed it: the tea planters tended to behave like an English squire, and most ‘treated their African labour with condescending affection’ (2003: 231). Adult men were always addressed by planters as ‘boys’.

This section is based primarily on Blantyre and East Africa archives, Lauderdale estate, and my own experiences as a tea planter working on Zoa estate (Thyolo) and Limbuli estate (Mulanje) at the end of the colonial period (1958–1964). For further interesting reflections on life and work on tea estates at this period see Westrop 1964: 215–225; Moxham 2003: 219–247.

7 CONCLUSION: THE TEA INDUSTRY ESTABLISHED

The emergence and the viability of the Nyasaland tea industry in the late 1920s has been ascribed to three key factors, namely: the building of the Blantyre to Beira railway which enabled planters to export their tea via Luchenza Siding; the protection offered by the International

Tea Regulation Scheme (which Westrop stressed); and the fact that the tea plantations were able to ‘tap and exploit cheap Lomwe labour’ (Vail 1977, 1983: 50–51; Palmer 1985b, 1986: 108).

As earlier noted, the development of the plantation economy was not only linked to the *thangata* system, but to the influx of Lomwe people into the Shire Highlands in the early decades of the twentieth century. Many became tenants on the private estates of the European planters, particularly in the Thyolo district. There, two-thirds of the land was privately owned, including most of the better-watered slopes of Thyolo Mountain.

Given the existence of the *thangata* system, almost sanctified by the 1928 legislation, the tea industry in the Shire Highlands emerged, as Robin Palmer cogently put it, ‘in a context of long-standing conflict between landlord and tenant’ (1986: 107). Labour relations on the tea estates were therefore complex and always fraught with tension.

Like all economic enterprises the tea estates in the Shire Highlands were dependent on human labour, and, as with tea plantations throughout the world, were highly labour-intensive—as we have stressed. Moreover, the demand for labour fluctuated seasonally, and labour was mainly required in the period from December to April when 80 % of the tea crop was plucked and manufactured. But this period was not only a time of heavy rainfall, which made tea-plucking sometimes an onerous task, but it was a time when the African workers themselves were deeply engaged in agricultural activities on their own account, whether as tenants on private estates or as independent cultivators on crown (trust) land.

In a seminal paper Robin Palmer (1986) has written at some length on the complex and strained relations that existed between tea planters and their workers throughout the colonial period. Some salient points may be noted: Firstly; the planters were able, particularly in the Thyolo district where there was a dearth of crown land, to demand through the *thangata* system, labour during the rainy season—when it was most needed. This was resented by the tenant workers, and sowed the seeds of serious discontent. Secondly; a ‘shortage of labour’ during the plucking season was a constant refrain among tea planters, and towards the end of the 1930s such shortages became acute, with some tea gardens going unplucked. This led to the loss of ‘some thousands of lb of tea’ (MNA/NSE 5/1/5; Palmer 1986: 117). Thirdly; in order to attract labour, tea companies found it essential to improve working conditions on their estates by providing better housing and other amenities—such as supplementing daily rations with fish or sugar, and issuing pluckers with waterproofs to protect

them from the inclement weather (Palmer 1986: 115). Finally; Palmer emphasized that African workers on the tea estates, the majority Lomwe, were far from being hopeless victims of the *thangata* system and the low-wage economy, but always endeavoured to maintain their autonomy and to advance their own interests. This involved forms of passive ‘resistance’; being uncooperative in meeting their *thangata* obligations, often being ‘absent’ or reluctant to take-up continuous employment, or moving to work on other estates, particularly if the European planter treated them harshly or unfairly, and thus showed them a lack of respect (*ulemu*) (Palmer 1986: 118–120). No wonder labour in Nyasaland was likened by planters to the weather—erratic and unpredictable.

The important point, of course, was that African workers on the tea estates (both men and women) were not only concerned with securing paid employment—in order to meet social obligations and to buy necessary household goods—but were also concerned with the cultivation of their own small holdings. It was the latter that they depended for their basic livelihood. Life for plantation workers was thus a delicate balancing act between two spheres of economic activity. The European planters and the estate workers had very contrasting objectives. The paramount concern of the planters was an adequate supply of labour over whom they had some degree of control, although they were reluctant to do anything that might alienate potential workers. The paramount concern of the estate worker was to find satisfying employment, even if low-paid, while at the same time endeavouring to retain access to land and a degree of food security via their own agricultural work.

It has been suggested that there is a natural tendency for tea plantations—given that the minimum economic unit for a plantation with a factory is 500 acres and that capital in the building of a factory was extremely high (around £10,000)—to be quickly transformed from a family-based estate into a large, well-capitalized company (Tait-Bowie 1927; Palmer 1985b: 219). As we have noted above, Ruo estate in Mulanje and Naming’omba estate in Thyolo, both soon became limited companies, and in 1925 the famous catering firm J. Lyons and Co bought Lujeri estate (2000 acres) from the Italian entrepreneur, A.H. Sabbatini. But in many ways the undoubted pioneer in establishing a British-based, well-capitalized tea company in the Shire Highlands was Blantyre and East Africa Ltd—although its economic activities were certainly more diverse.

As we have discussed in earlier chapters, Blantyre and East Africa Ltd was formed in 1901, largely through the initiatives of Robert S. Hynde

and Ross Stark. Around the turn of the century the company pioneered the growing of fire-cured tobacco through tenant labour on its Zomba estates, and around the same time the Lauderdale estate was at the centre of the development of tea production in Mulanje. In 1908 the company initiated the growing of tea in the Thyolo district, on its Bandanga estate, and by 1918 Blantyre and East Africa had 800 acres under tea. In 1926 the company purchased Glenorchy estate which at that period had 100 acres under tea, although it was mainly involved in the cultivation of tobacco, chillies, bananas and pineapples. Around the same time both Zoa estate and Limbuli estate were opened up for tea.

Zoa estate consisted of some 19,760 acres of land, described then as 'very hilly and broken country'. Most of the estate was covered with *Brachystegia* woodland, with only a few scattered villages in the valleys of the Chinyenyedi and Lisuli streams, which ran into the Ruo River. In 1926 and 1927 'local' 'Ma' Brown tea was planted on the Nankungu ridge, and in 1934 a tea factory was built at an estimated cost of £5900. That same year it was discovered that both the factory and the tea gardens lay outside the boundaries of Zoa estate—and the estate boundaries therefore had to be re-adjusted. In the 1930s the population of Zoa estate was around 2500 people, half of whom were children. Around 60 % of the labour force at Zoa in the 1930s were estate tenants (from the villages of Mitepila, Kamba and Chipoo), 25 % from crown land (from the nearby village of Khuguwe, Mussa and Mwanya), while 15 % were transient workers from Mozambique and housed in the estate *zithando*. In the same period Zoa estate employed around 400 workers, 25 % of whom were children (BEA archives Lauderdale estate, Annual Reports Zoa estate).

In contrast on Limbali—judging from old maps—the tea gardens were established on land that had originally been the site of village communities and their cultivations. In a later period there were continually disputes over land, particularly with respect to the headman of Ntalika village.

In 1925 Blantyre and East Africa had established a modern tea factory at Lauderdale, and by the early 1930s had 2400 acres under tea on five estates (BEA Archives, Lauderdale estate).

In the 1920s William Tait-Bowie (1876–1949) became the General Manager of Blantyre and East Africa Ltd. After studying law at both Edinburgh and Oxford Universities—he held a doctorate in the subject—Tait-Bowie first came to Nyasaland in 1899. But after three years he left for Malaysia where he spent the next decade. Returning to Nyasaland in 1913, he was to spend the next 30 years as one of the leading figures in the development of the

Nyasaland tea industry. Describing himself as a ‘planter’ he was by all accounts an amiable man, familiarly known to planters as ‘Bob’. For many years he was a member of the Legislative Council. In an article written in 1927 on the prospects of tea planting in the Thyolo and Mulanje districts Tait-Bowie was to write the following: ‘In the early years of development progress was slow and capital short. In fact, much of the capital sunk into the tea gardens was obtained from the profit of such cash crops as tobacco. Planters lived frugally, worked hard and banked their money in the ground’ (1927: 49). He estimated that the capital necessary to establish a viable estate, to plant and bring into bearing 500 acres of tea, and to erect and equip a factory would be around £20,000. He suggested that with a yield of around 400 lb per acre, a profit could be made of £2500, or better than 12 % of the capital invested.

Along with Malcolm Barrow, Tait-Bowie became a leading figure in the Nyasaland Tea Association, founded in 1934. The association replaced the earlier Nyasaland Tea Research Association, established in 1929. Together with the Mulanje Planters’ Association and the Cholo Settlers’ Association (which mainly reflected the interests of the newly established Thyolo tobacco farmers) the Tea Association represented the interest and expressed the concerns—both economic and political—of the tea-planting community as a whole. Although there was no internal market for tea, and the quality of the Nyasaland teas was often—rather unfairly—denigrated (both were inherent and intractable drawbacks in the marketing of the tea) the planters’ associations were primarily concerned—apart from the International Tea Restrictions and the high rail tariffs—with two basic issues, namely land (*thangata*) and labour.

As to be expected, the planters heartedly approved of the 1928 Natives on Private Estates Ordinance, and even influenced its framing. Even further, they seem to have come to some agreement with the protectorate government in that the state would not introduce any laws or regulations that might hamper or infringe upon the development of the tea industry (MNA/A2/94/7; Nyasaland Tea Association 1928–1938).

The minutes of the planters’ meetings also express a deep concern over the fact that the government was actively promoting the development of tobacco farming among Africans in the Shire Highlands. This, they felt, would have a serious and adverse impact on the availability of labour for work on the tea estates. Not only the European tobacco farmers, but also the tea companies and individual tea planters were generally ‘hostile to government support for peasant producers and its tolerance of labour migration, both of which were deemed to threaten their uncertain supply

of labour' (Palmer 1985a: 228). Needless to say, the planting community in the Shire Highlands were always fiercely opposed to labour migration from the protectorate, whether to Rhodesian farms or the South African mines (Myambo 1973: 14–15).

The irony was that the development of tea plantations in both the Thyolo and Mulanje districts tended to stimulate and encourage local peasant production, whether of foodstuffs for sale locally, or of tobacco. Indeed Arthur Schwarz, in a later period Chairman of the Tea Association, expressed to me (in 1978), not only the virtues of the *thangata* system as a source of labour, but the crucial importance of the tea industry in the development of the Shire Highlands economy during the colonial period. But certainly, as Simon Myambo (1973) argued, the European planters were not only hostile to African planters like Bismarck and the Mathaka brothers, but did their utmost to discourage the development of what came to be described as smallholder agriculture.

To conclude, we can but affirm that by 1940 the tea industry, as it came to be called, was well and truly established in the Shire Highlands. Around 40 tea estates in the Thyolo and Mulanje districts were producing tea, totalling 18,257 acres, and employing around 20,000 estate workers (Read 1969, later in the study we shall discuss further the Shire Highlands tea estates, for the 1953 disturbances were largely related to the *thangata* system and land issues).

Conservation Mania in Colonial Malawi

I PROLOGUE

In recent decades academic discourses on ecology and nature conservation have tended to gravitate towards extremes. This essentially stems from an extreme reaction to Cartesian Metaphysics and the ethos of capitalism—which many have viewed as the dominant ideology within Western culture. Entailing a radical ontological dualism between humans and nature, this ideology evinces an anthropocentric ethic, extols the technological mastery of nature, and tends to view the natural world simply as a commodity or resource for commercial profit. Three extreme reactions to this ideology may be noted.

Firstly, in reaction to the dominant ethos, there has been a tendency to regard all non-Western people, whether hunter-gatherers, tribal people living in tropical forests, or African peasants, as proto-ecologists, exhibiting both an ecological sensibility and a conservation ethic, or even as living in complete ‘harmony’ with nature. The missionary Duff MacDonal, for example, has been described as exemplifying this particular romantic ‘mindset’ (Mulwafu 2011: 15).

Secondly, given the ubiquity of the Cartesian ethos, colonial foresters and agriculturalists in Nyasaland have invariably been interpreted as state functionaries, ever-eager to promote European commercial interests. There may be some truth in this, but as we shall explore below, the motivations of such foresters as John Clements and Paul Topham were rather more complex.

Thirdly, in reaction to the Cartesian ethic some philosophers and deep ecologists have shifted to an even further extreme—in a rather misanthropic direction. They have suggested that humans, rather than being proto-ecologists, are, in fact, inherently destructive beings, that humans are ‘parasites’ and ‘aliens’ on earth. With respect to the natural world, humans are thus depicted as ‘*Homo rapiens*’ (Gray 2002: 151). Human interactions with nature have therefore been viewed as always essentially negative and destructive, involving a loss of biodiversity and the ‘depredation’ of the environment, Cultural landscapes are then invariably described as ‘degraded’ land forms. With King Midas everything he touched turned to gold: for some ecologists every human encounter with the natural world, at least in a productive sense, is retrogressive and deleterious in terms of the integrity of biotic systems.

There is a need to avoid these extreme reactions. For people in the Shire Highlands during the colonial period neither lived in harmony with nature as exemplary nature conservationists, nor were they simply destructive agents, whose environmental practices inevitably led to the ‘degradation’ of the natural landscape.

It is important, too, not to set up a radical dichotomy between European culture (equated with Cartesian science and capitalism) and African ‘traditional’ society. Wapu Mulwafu, for example, writes of the imposition of colonial rule in Nyasaland in these terms: ‘Traditional value systems, which treated resources as belonging to the community and being subject to individual responsibility to care were replaced with capitalist values emphasizing profit and selfish attitudes’ (2011: 55).

This is altogether too stark a dichotomy. It neglects to mention that the very chiefs who were the guardians of the rain shrines were also deeply implicated in the slave and ivory trade and coercive politics, and that many Africans in the Shire Highlands, for example John Chilembwe and Gordon Mathaka, warmly embraced two vital aspects of European colonial culture—Christianity and the capitalist market economy.

Nevertheless, it is important to retain the distinction, implied in the above quotation, between a *subsistence* perspective, which emphasizes the essential continuity between humans and nature, a moral economy, with an ideology of the ‘commons’, and the *capitalist* economy (and ethos) which entails an emphasis on capital accumulation and economic growth, the ideology of private property, and the treatment not only of nature, but labour and all aspects of human life as a commodity, and a potential source of profit (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999; Ricoveri 2013).

This chapter is focussed on the deep concern that the colonial government in Nyasaland expressed with regard to the conservation of natural resources during the inter-war years. This concern for conservation has been described as a ‘mania’, given its scope and intensity. Yet it was rather low-key when compared with the almost obsessive interest in conservation and environmental issues that is evident in present-day Malawi.

During the colonial period conservation efforts focussed around three domains—the preservation of wildlife (essentially game animals); the protection of the forest environment (essentially the declining *Brachystegia* woodlands); and soil conservation. I discuss below each of these domains in turn.

The chapter begins with a discussion of hunting, which was an important socio-economic activity among both Europeans and Africans during the colonial period. This leads on to an examination of the decline in the number of game animals in the Shire Highlands during the early decades of the twentieth century, and the reasons for this decline. We then turn (in Sect. 3) to discuss the early efforts made by the colonial government in wildlife conservation, stressing that the game regulations were less concerned with conservation per se than with restricting the hunting of the larger game animals to Europeans, who alone could afford the game licences. Such regulations made the traditional African methods of hunting—with the aid of fire and dogs—essentially illegal.

As a kind of interlude I then offer some reflections (in Sect. 4) on the origins of a conservation ethic in Nyasaland during the 1930s—as this was related to the philosophy of ecological holism, developed in South Africa; the impact of the ‘dust-bowl’ phenomenon in the United States; and the establishment in 1924 of the Imperial Forestry Institute in Oxford.

We then turn specifically to the issue of forest conservation, focussing on the writings of the pioneer ecologist John Clements. In response to the widespread deforestation of the Shire Highlands in the early decades of the twentieth century, the colonial government in the 1920s established a forestry department, with Clements the first conservator of forests. I discuss in turn the three initiatives relating to forest conservation promoted by Clements, namely the creation of forest reserves and legislation relating to forest protection; the development of commercial forest plantations, especially pines and other afforestation programmes; and, finally (in Sect. 6) the village forest areas.

In the final section of the chapter I discuss the beginnings of what eventually became a veritable crusade by the colonial government to promote soil conservation. In this the key figure was Paul Topham, another

pioneer ecologist, who was appointed the protectorate's 'soil erosion officer' in 1936. The discussion is focussed around the following: the concerns expressed by Topham and the colonial administration with regard to soil conservation in the Shire Highlands; the soil-conservation measures that Topham proposed to counter this erosion—specifically ridge cultivation and contour bunds; the opposition to these conservation measures that was expressed by local people; and, finally, the decision made by the colonial government that good agricultural practices, particularly soil conservation, must be made 'compulsory' through state legislation. Such a coercive approach to conservation gave rise, as we shall explore in the next chapter, to serious conflicts between the colonial government and the African people of the Shire highlands, which came to be known as the *Nkhondo ya mitumbira*—the 'war of the ridges'.

2 HUNTING AND WILDLIFE IN THE SHIRE HIGHLANDS

When European missionaries, planters and big game hunters began settling in the Shire Highlands in the 1880s they found the country teeming with wildlife—specifically the larger mammals. John Buchanan, for example—a key figure in the present study—called the Shire Highlands a 'delightful' country, and while on a journey from Blantyre to Mulanje across the Thuchila plain in May 1884, recorded many observations of game animals (*nyama*). He mentions elephant, rhinoceros, kudu and several other species of antelope (Buchanan 1885: 156–160). It is doubtful, however, if the giraffe ever occurred in the Shire Highlands (Ansell and Dowsett 1988: 76).

Likewise Henry Drummond, who travelled through the Shire Highlands in the early 1880s, was most impressed by the abundance of wild mammals in the vicinity of Lake Chilwa. Although a Scottish divine (theologian) and very conscious of the moral superiority of the 'white man' (1889: 105) Drummond was also a keen big game hunter. He wrote of the game animals around Lake Chilwa: 'Nowhere else in Africa did I see such splendid herds of the larger animals as here. The zebra was especially abundant' (1889: 30).

He continued: 'Central Africa is the finest hunting country in the world. Here are the elephant, the buffalo, the lion, the leopard, the rhinoceros, the hippopotamus, the giraffe, the hyena, the eland, the zebra and the endless species of small deer and antelope' (1889: 106). He also noted the ubiquity of traps, snares and game pits set by local Africans in order to obtain the highly valued meat (*nyama*).

A decade later Harry Johnston was to describe the Zomba district as ‘swarming with lions’ (1923: 294) and on a ten-day safari (*ulendo*) to the South-east of Lake Chilwa in September 1895 Duncan McAlpine (who worked on one of the Zomba tobacco estates that later became Blantyre and East Africa Ltd) reported a wealth of fauna that he had ‘bagged’ on his short trip. They included hartebeest (*ngondo*) (once widespread throughout the Shire Highlands), oribi (*chowe*), reedbuck (*mphoyo*), eland (*mphal-apala*), hippopotamus (*mvuu*) (apparently common during the rainy season), and the rare blue wildebeest (*nyumbu*), as well as many geese, ducks and guinea fowl. McAlpine’s hunting expedition, armed with .303 rifles, employed around 50 local Africans as trackers, guides and porters (*Central African Planter* 1/4: 55–56, 1895).

Throughout the colonial period the hunting of wild animals was an important economic and ritual activity among both Europeans and Africans. I have elsewhere, at some length, discussed the cultural traditions relating to hunting among the matrilineal peoples of Malawi; specifically during the colonial period. There I outlined the two main forms of subsistence hunting—hunting by solitary hunters and small groups, and the highly ritualized communal hunt (*uzimba*, *kauni*). I emphasized the importance of dogs and the use of fire, the empirical skills of the African hunters, and the fact that the communal hunt was not some wild, primitive and ‘barbaric’ method of hunting (as depicted by some European planters) but was, rather, a highly organized affair. Under the control of a senior man, as the ‘guardian’ of the hunt (*mwini wa uzimba*), it was the focus of numerous ritual prohibitions involving a group of men and young boys, equipped with spears, bows and arrows and Knobkerries. The communal hunt, as I suggested in my book *The Power of Animals* (1998: 112), was akin to iron-smelting in being essentially a rite of creative transformation in the provision of meat for the local village community, for the meat was invariably shared among all the participants. During the colonial period hunting (along with fishing) and subsistence hoe agriculture (based on a group of matrilineally related women) tended to form two complementary domains that historically constituted the socio-economic life of the African people of the Shire Highlands. Mulwafu (2011: 52) emphasizes that hunting was a complex activity that played a vital role in the social economy of African societies, and that people of the Shire Highlands combined the activities of hunting and agriculture, thus echoing what I discussed at some length in my earlier study (1998: 61–119).

Such subsistence hunting, whether individual or communal, was, of course, very different from the hunting fraternities associated with the territorial chiefs, and which were focussed specifically on the hunting of the elephant and the ivory trade, as discussed earlier in the study.

European hunting in Central Africa, and specifically in the Shire Highlands, contrasted markedly with African hunting in being very much an individualistic enterprise, its *raison d'être* focussed around 'sport' and the acquisition of 'trophies'. Such European hunting essentially went through three distinct phases (MacKenzie 1987).

In the first phase, European hunting was largely undertaken by solitary hunters and adventurers. It was purely commercial and driven by the export of ivory and animal skins. The reticent and stoical Alfred Sharpe, for example, was a typical adventurer and wanderer. After qualifying as a lawyer, and spending a short time in Fiji—where he failed miserably as a colonial planter—Sharpe came to Central Africa in 1887, aged 34. He spent the next two years as a professional elephant hunter, hunting mainly in the Luangwa valley. After a chance encounter with Harry Johnston in the Lower Shire Valley while out hunting waterbuck, Sharpe became the British Consul in Central Africa (in 1889), and eventually the first governor of Nyasaland. But he never lost his interest in hunting and whenever the opportunity arose went on long expeditions, mainly to hunt elephants. He was widely recognized as an intrepid and 'mighty hunter' (Duff 1932: 124; Baker 1972: 15; Boeder 1980c: 11–15).

The second phase of European hunting in Central Africa began in the early days of colonial rule, when it was viewed as a 'subsidy' in the pursuit of other goals, specifically to 'finance' administrative control, mission work, or settlement with respect to the plantation economy. The African Lakes Company, for example, founded in 1878, with John and Fred Moir as joint managers, specifically aimed to fulfil Livingstone's dreams of combining Christianity and commerce in the development of Central Africa. But although the Moir brothers initially hoped to run a profitable export business in the Shire Highlands, exporting such agricultural products as sugar, cotton, and coffee, as well as provisioning the European missions they were forced, as Hugh MacMillan writes, 'to rely upon ivory as their most profitable export' (1975: 73). Indeed, it was the hunting of the elephant, and the export of ivory, that kept the company in business, and led, as we noted earlier, to conflict with the Makololo chiefs in the Lower Shire Valley, whose own wealth and power depended entirely on the ivory trade.

The missionaries, too, relied on hunting in the initial stages of settlement to supplement their activities, and to draw in local support by the provision of meat. The memoirs of many early missionaries make it clear that hunting was important in their social life, and for the success of their missionary endeavours. Thus missionaries were welcome less for the scriptures they brought than for the gun, and to be a successful missionary in Central Africa it helped to be a successful hunter. Many missionaries in the Shire Highlands, therefore, had gun licences, and hunted wild game during the dry season (Fraser 1923: 65–66; MacKenzie 1987: 46; Morris 2006a: 132).

Hunting, and the provision of meat for the local population, also played an important part in the role of the colonial administrator. The regular excursion (*ulendo*) they made around the district for which they were responsible, was both a political inspection and a hunting trip. A taste for hunting, Sharpe wrote, was a 'valuable asset' for a colonial district official, for it enabled him, through providing meat, to come into personal contact with local chiefs and people. He thus came to have knowledge of his 'dominion' and of the 'character' of the native peoples (Boeder 1980c: 16).

With the establishment of colonial rule, European hunting in the Shire Highlands, and Central Africa more generally, entered its final phase. It became elaborated as a ritual 'hunt', as distinct from the more prosaic hunting of the earlier period. Thus, during the colonial period the hunting of the larger game animals became an exclusively European occupation, undertaken during the dry season and clothed with ideology and ritual. It became intrinsically linked with natural history pursuits, with the collection of 'trophies' and 'record bags', with the moral conception of 'sportsmanship' and with the notion that hunting was conducive to the development of 'character' and 'manliness'. It also became, for Europeans, a potent symbol of 'white dominance' (MacKenzie 1987: 50).

Within the context of the Shire Highlands, hunting among Europeans during the colonial period, was practically a universal dry-season activity, widely engaged in by planters, missionaries and colonial administrators alike. As the noted administrator Hector Duff, who was stationed at Mulanje at the end of the nineteenth century, recalled, the hunting of game animals was 'universally practised', and he opined that Nyasaland afforded 'probably the finest sport obtainable in Africa today' (1903: 140). It is worth noting that, as in medieval Europe, the ritual hunt was not restricted to men; the European women who indulged were taking part as co-members of what constituted as aristocratic (racial) elite. This is clearly illustrated in the early photographs of the pioneer tea planter George

Garden—mentioned in the last chapter—for many depict women, dressed in a hunting tunic and a sun ‘topi’, carrying a rifle and standing over a recently killed sable or eland (Morris 2006a: 125).

Almost every planter’s house during the colonial period thus had a veranda adorned with various ‘trophies’, the horns of mammals such as eland, hartebeest, kudu, buffalo, duiker, reedbuck, waterbuck and sable antelope. I remember well, in August 1960, being proudly shown the various ‘trophies’ that bedecked the veranda of the Chimpeni House, Zomba, by an early settler and tobacco planter Geoffrey Thorneycroft. ‘Thorney’, as he was known to his friends, had lost a leg in the First World War. Yet he continued to be an active hunting enthusiast, and he it was who had shot around Lake Chilwa most of the mammals whose horns and heads he showed me.

Of crucial importance in the understanding of European hunting in the Shire Highlands during the colonial period is the mystique that generally surrounded the notion of ‘*ulendo*’—the hunting safari. Derived from the verb *ku-enda*, to go, walk or move (*mlendo*, traveller, visitor), the term *ulendo* generally signified a journey. The memoirs of many missionaries and colonial administrators include a chapter devoted to ‘the *ulendo*’—to their dry season (August to October) sojourns in the ‘bush’ (the *Brachystegia* or *miombo* woodland). Hector Duff, for example, recorded that few European men who had lived in Nyasaland could hear the expression ‘*ulendo*’ without experiencing, he writes, ‘A quick instinctive remembrance of the varied scenes and incidents of African travel—of tents struck by moonlight, and pitched again in sunset glow, of fresh, sweet mornings and long hunting in quiet dambos, of cosy camps in deep mimosa woods, and of the darkness and strange noises of the forest night’ (1903: 166–167).

Such expeditions were often undertaken by a lone European hunter—whether planter, administrator or missionary—who was accompanied by a loyal gun-bearer, personal servants, and an entourage of porters, between ten and 40 *ntengatenga* men, depending on how many days were to be spent hunting. Usually a *ulendo* lasted from seven to ten days.

Like Drummond and McAlpine, Duff recorded that game animals were plentiful in the Shire Highlands at the close of the nineteenth century, especially on the Thuchila plain. In the Mulanje district notebook of 1904, Duff has a note on the ‘game statistics’ of the district, with maps indicating the ‘good hunting grounds’ of the European planters living in Mulanje—planters like George Garden and Henry Brown. The main hunting areas indicated were Mt manyama (heart of the game animal), north-west of Mount Mauze, Chimombo’s village near where

the Phalombe river enters Lake Chilwa, and Tamanda and Milambi in the Thuchila river basin near Mlombo hill. In these areas, Duff records hartebeest, reedbuck, elephant, blue wildebeest and kudu, as well as smaller antelopes like the grey duiker and oribi. With respect to the Shire Highlands more generally, Duff noted that hartebeest was the ‘commonest antelope’, that sable antelope was ‘still abundant’, the highlands being ‘full of them’; that buffalo and elephant were frequent around the Chikala hills; that eland were ‘fairly common’ and that four rhinoceros had been killed in the Zomba district between 1898 and 1903. Reedbuck was ‘everywhere plentiful’ and bushbuck and Klipspringer common in the hill areas. Of the carnivores, Duff noted that the wild dog, hyena, leopard and lion were all common (Duff 1903: 140–165).

Neither impala and nyala were common in the Shire Highlands, and there is a questionable record of the roan antelope being shot near Namadzi in 1902 (Duff 1903: 153; Ansell and Dowsett 1988: 85).

Within only a few decades many of the larger game animals of the Shire Highlands had been eradicated, and there was a serious decline in the mammalian fauna. This decline has been cogently discussed in seminal essays by G.D. Hayes (1972) and Cornell Dudley (1979); three factors seem to have been responsible.

Firstly, the ‘population explosion’ that occurred in the Shire Highlands with the opening up of the European estates and the large influx of Lomwe people into the Highlands, as discussed in earlier chapters. The Lomwe settled mainly in the Chiradzulu, Thyolo and Mulanje districts.

Secondly, the increasing availability of firearms, specifically muzzle-loaders, among African hunters. For with the development of breach-loading guns (rifles) in the latter part of the nineteenth century, muzzle-loading guns were deemed antiquated, and they were shipped to Africa in a veritable expanding ‘arms-trade’. Thus Duff MacDonal was to write that ‘men go around generally with guns’ and that the country was ‘full of flint muskets marked the Tower’ (1882: 1/19).

And finally, as indicated, the fact that hunting was the favourite pastime of European settlers in the Shire Highlands—whether administrators, missionaries or planters. G.D. Hayes was adamant that the decline of the larger mammals could not be blamed solely on local African people, for he stressed that the country was ‘teeming with wild animals’ before the arrival of Europeans (1972: 22–24). Hayes was not alone in stressing the negative impact of European hunting on the game population. Hector Duff, while emphasizing the destructive aspects of African

hunting, nevertheless suggested that game was often in abundance near local villages, while once there was European settlement, game animals soon disappeared (1932: 141). Likewise, S.S. Murray noted, significantly, that in 1932 ‘game is still fairly plentiful in Nyasaland, except in districts that have been thickly populated with Europeans’ (1932: 327), and this applied specifically to the Shire Highlands.

The opening up of land to European estates, the substantial increase in the African population, and the intensive hunting of the larger mammals by both European and African hunters, meant that game animals quickly disappeared from the Shire Highlands. By 1930 practically all the larger game animals had been eradicated. With respect to the Zomba district, Murray noted ‘with the exception of baboons on the slopes of the mountain, bushbuck on the plateau, and the occasional leopard and lion, there is very little game of any kind in the district’ (1932: 163). For the Chiradzulu district, both the District Book (1910–1913) and Murray’s *Handbook* (1932) recorded that there was ‘very little game left’, apart from some kudu near Magomero and a few antelopes in the Chiradzulu mountain forest reserve. For the Thyolo district, which formerly had a ‘good reputation’ for game, intensive European cultivation and the opening-up of tea and tobacco estates, had resulted, Murray noted, in there being ‘practically no game left’. Game animals had long disappeared from the Blantyre district (Murray 1932: 173–183).

Thus by the 1930s the only location in the Shire Highlands where game animals were still plentiful, was on the Thuchila plain in the Mulanje district. The diary of the tobacco planter W.P. Ronaldson, who owned Kunguo estate near Thuchila, gives a good indication both how regular and important hunting was for European planters during the dry season, and of the relative abundance of game animals on the Thuchila plain in the early 1930s. Married to a local African woman, a talented wildlife artist and a cultured man, Ronaldson recorded, over a threemonth period in 1932, shooting waterbuck, oribi, grey duiker, kudu and hartebeest (Ronaldson papers, Society of Malawi library). But within a decade, hunting pressure and the increasing human population, and thus the cultivation of the area, led to the demise of the larger antelopes, even on the Thuchila plain. By the outbreak of the Second World War almost all the larger mammals of the Shire Highlands, apart from vervet monkeys, baboons and bushpig, had thus been eradicated (MNA/NSB 3/13; NSE 1/22; Murray 1932: 161–183; Morris 2006a: 80–83).

3 WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

The abundance of wildlife in the Shire Highlands as well as that of the Lower Shire Valley at the end of the nineteenth century, has been attributed to local Africans—specifically the Mang’anja—loss of control over nature, resulting from the devastation and desolation caused by the slave trade, coupled with the chaos and instability that followed the famine (*chaola*) of 1862–1863 when the rains failed over two seasons (Mandala 1990: 74–78). Around the turn of the century, beginning with Johnston’s administration of 1891, further disruption to the local economy and the land was caused by the alienation of vast tracts of land to European settlers and companies. As we discussed in Chap. 4, almost one million acres, representing around 52 % of the total land area of the Shire Highlands, was granted in freehold to European traders, missionaries and planters. This was accompanied by a large influx of Lomwe people into the Shire Highlands, who settled in the districts of Mulanje, Thyolo and Chiradzulu, mainly as plantation workers.

It was in this context that the colonial government established the first game laws and ‘game reserves’—cognizant of the fact that there had been a serious decline in the number of game animals in the Shire Highlands. But the term ‘conservation mania’ to describe these measures (Vaughan 1978b) is something of a misnomer, for the colonial administration was not concerned with wildlife conservation per se, but rather, with a much more limited conception—that of game preservation. And for Europeans in the Shire Highlands at the turn of the century ‘game’ had a more restricted meaning even than the cognate term in Chewa (Nyanja), *nyama*; it applied only to the larger mammals, the hunting of which was considered ‘sport’.

Following, it seems, the perspectives of Kjekshus (1977) and Vail (1977b). Megan Vaughan’s contention that the government had a policy of ‘carving out game reserves in populous areas’ (1978: 9) is also somewhat misleading. For what the early game regulations of British Central Africa (1897) were in essence concerned with was to restrict the hunting of larger game animals only to Europeans, who alone could afford game licences. Only two ‘game reserves’ were in fact specified in the first game ordinance—the elephant marsh near Chiromo and Lake Chilwa—both popular duck-shooting areas for Europeans. Neither of these was a wildlife ‘reserve’ or ‘conservation area’ in the true sense, for those possessing the appropriate licences could freely hunt there. Both soon lost their status as ‘game reserves’.

The animals species specified in the 1897 game schedule were all ungulates—elephant, blue wildebeest, rhinoceros, zebra, buffalo, eland, warthog, bushpig and around 19 species of antelope. According to the game regulations, a £25 licence enabled a person to shoot 25 specified species—including elephant, rhinoceros, blue wildebeest and giraffe—in any part of the protectorate. A £3 licence specifically excluded these four species. Outside of private land and the two game reserves, a person was free to ‘kill, hunt or capture’ any wild animal—which included the carnivores and smaller mammals like the porcupine, baboon, vervet monkey and pangolin, which were not considered ‘game’. There were severe penalties for those who contravened the regulations, that is, the hunting of the larger game animals—the ungulates—without a licence. The regulations therefore were essentially concerned with restricting the hunting of game animals—particularly the elephant, which was the prime economic resource—to the European population. They were not in the least concerned with the ‘conservation’ of animal life, as Vaughan suggests. Needless to say, such game regulations found little support or sympathy among the African communities of the Shire Highlands, who felt that their basic rights and freedoms were being denied them—as indeed they were (Morris 2006a: 123–126).

The game ordinances of 1902, 1911 and 1926 all followed a similar pattern, essentially restricting the hunting of the larger mammals to Europeans, specifically those who possessed a game licence. Indeed, hunting became the exclusive right of Europeans who could afford the licence—although a £1 licence could be issued to local African hunters at the discretion of the District Resident in order to protect crops from the depredations of wild animals. The 1926 game ordinance specifically forbade, except with the written permission of the District Resident, the hunting of game animals by means of traps, nets, snares, poison and pitfalls, and it expressly prohibited the use of fire and dogs in the hunting of game animals. The ordinance thus outlawed all the traditional methods of hunting animals for food, particularly, the communal hunt (*uzimba*), and of protecting crops from the depredations of wildlife, and there were stringent penalties—imprisonment with hard labour—for anyone contravening the Act (Morris 2006a: 128).

As I have discussed elsewhere there was much controversy around the 1926 game ordinance, which was fervently opposed by many missionaries and planters, though for very different reasons. The opposition to the ordinance centred on the following four issues:

1. It was felt that there was a strong association between game animals and the presence of tsetse fly, which had increased its range in the early decades of colonial rule, particularly in the central region. This had led to the loss of livestock through the disease *nagana* and to several serious outbreaks of sleeping sickness.
2. The missionaries stressed that the government protection of game, and the restrictions on the traditional methods of hunting had a detrimental effect on the well-being of local people, both in terms of nutrition (a lack of meat) and in crop losses from wild animals (specifically with respect to baboons, elephants, vervet monkeys, and bushpig). They also stressed the heavy toll on human life exacted by carnivores, particularly leopard and lion, as well as by elephants (Morris 2009 [1995]: 300–306).
3. It was felt that the economic progress of the country was being retarded by the protection of game animals, and some missionaries suggested that it would be better for the protectorate if the larger mammals were completely eradicated.
4. The European planters in the Shire Highlands, particularly as represented by Robert Hynde and by the Nyasaland's Planters' Association, were opposed to the game ordinance for reasons very different from that of the missionaries. Their opposition was not because the planters came from a social class that was less concerned with hunting, as Vaughan suggests (1978b: 10)—for many planters had their origins in British upper classes, and most were avid hunters. It was rather because they felt that they should have unrestricted access to the game animals on their private estates. Like the English aristocracy they deemed such animals to be their private property and resented having to pay the government the £5 game licence in order to shoot game on what they felt was their own private domain (MNA/51/1721/23; Morris 2006a: 129–132).

The main outcome of the 1926 game ordinance was to establish three game sanctuaries—Lengwe, Thangadzi and Kasungu—which offered complete protection for the wildlife within their boundaries, and to make hunting outside these reserves the exclusive right of Europeans who alone could afford the game licence. Subsistence hunting by local people was thus deemed illegal.

Much of the initiative for implementing the 1926 game licence came from the promptings of Rodney Wood, a keen naturalist and big game

hunter, then owner of Magombwa estate in the Thyolo district (see the last chapter) and a close friend of the governor Charles Bowring. It is significant that no game reserves were established in the Shire Highlands—but one of the first things that Wood did when he became the protectorate game warden in 1929 was to formally declare Chidiamphiri island in Lake Chilwa (the name means ‘eat the puff adder’) a game reserve. The small island was uninhabited, covered in dense bush, and was used by local Nyanja as a rain shrine. It was reported to be ‘swarming’ with pythons: and it was estimated that there were at least 200 of them on the island, which has an area of 2.6 square km. It was reported that one European while out duck shooting on Lake Chilwa, had bagged 17 duck and 2 geese in one day, and had shot 8 python (MNA/6FT 1/2/3). Noting that local belief associated the python with the rain spirits (*mizimu*)—see (Morris 2000: 197–199)—Wood was determined to protect them, and in 1930 Chidiamphiri was proclaimed a game reserve. By 1934 when the District resident in Zomba made a journey to the island on foot—for Lake Chilwa was then almost dry—he reported that the pythons had left the island, and saw only one (MNA/NN 1/61). When I visited Chidiamphiri in February 1991 with John Wilson, a fishing community had long been established on the island, which is rich in phosphates, and hence supports dense vegetation, and much of it was under maize cultivation. It had long been de-gazelled as a game reserve.

During the 1930s the game reserves came under the auspices of the district administrations, and went hard-in-hand with crop protection measures, and a determined effort to control, if not to eradicate, all the larger mammals outside the reserves. The game reserves in the lower Shire Valley (Thangadzi, Lengwe) and the central region (Kasungu, Nkhatakota) were almost abandoned by the various administrations, and became largely a no-man’s land. They had few staff, and there was no serious effort to enforce wildlife legislation, the various administrations always giving priority to the protection of crops from wildlife depredations. The game reserves were frequented only by subsistence hunters—‘poachers’—and by the occasional person travelling across the country (Morris 2006a: 138).

In the Shire Highlands crop protection largely concentrated on the depredations of four mammals that were still common and widespread, found wherever there were rocky hillsides or *Brachystegia* woodland to give them refuge—baboons, porcupines, vervet monkeys and the bushpig. Essentially, the baboons and monkeys raided the gardens during the day, the other two species at night, the bushpig often creating havoc in sweet potato plots.

Indeed early writers have described village communities and groups of baboons of being in a state of ‘war’ (*nkhondo*) throughout the planting season. During the colonial period these four mammals caused serious crop losses in the Shire Highlands, and throughout the Nyasaland protectorate. Most of the crop protection from the depredations of wild animals was, however, undertaken by local people themselves, rather than by crop protection officers employed by the district administrations (on wildlife depredations in colonial Malawi see Morris 2009 [1995]: 300–311).

We may turn now to the wider aspects of conservation in colonial Malawi, specifically as related to the protection of the forest (woodland) environment and soil conservation.

4 THE ORIGINS OF THE CONSERVATION ETHIC IN NYASALAND

It is somewhat misleading to equate nature conservation with ‘state intrusions’ into the socio-economic life of peasant communities (Mulwafu 2011: 60). In fact, both the ecological sensibility and the conservation ethic that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century was embraced by people and collectivities from right across the political spectrum. Ecology and conservation cannot therefore be identified with authoritarian politics, whether reflected in the ecological holism of Jan Christian Smuts and John Phillips in South Africa, the resource conservation movement in the United States that was associated with Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot, or the environmental politics of the national socialists (fascists) in Germany in the 1930s—as Mulwafu’s later discussion indicates (2011: 78–80), see Bramwell 1989; Hays 1959; Beinart 2003).

Indeed, there have been many forms of radical ecology, going back to the nineteenth century, that have expressed an organic worldview and a conservation ethic, and which were libertarian, anti-capitalist and critical of all forms of hierarchy and political domination (Merchant 1992; Morris 2012).

The emergence of a conservation ethic and movement in Nyasaland during the 1930s, as Mulwafu has cogently explored (2011: 59–80), was largely due to three, mainly external factors, which we may briefly outline in turn—the ecological holism that developed in South Africa, the dust-bowl syndrome, and the establishment of the Imperial Forestry Institute at Oxford in 1924.

4.1 *Ecological Holism*

The ecological holism that developed in South Africa drew both on the writings of Jan Christian Smuts and John Phillips, and on the ideology of resource management that had been pioneered in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. This ideology was pro-capitalist and utilitarian, emphasized the rational and efficient use of natural resources, and promoted the employment of eco-technocrats to advise governments on the ‘wise use’ of such resources (Nash 1990: 73–104). It also tended to adopt the theories of the American grassland ecologist Frederick Clements (1916) and his concept of ecological succession—the notion of successive stages in the development of plant communities in a particular region, and their eventual culmination in a specific ‘climax community’. This climax was viewed by Clements as akin to an ‘organic entity’, a ‘superorganism’.

In the same period—the 1920s—Jan Smuts introduced the concept of ‘holism’ into ecological theory. But given his racist Afrikaner politics, Smuts tended to envisage an ecological society as a form of organic ‘holism’ that implied national–ecological divisions along racial lines—even though this was not explicit in his seminal work in philosophy *Holism and Evolution* (1926). A critique of Smut’s holism and the concept of a plant community as an ‘organism’ was developed among many radical ecologists in the 1930s. These included Lancelot Hogben, a Marxist biologist who taught at the University of Cape Town, and Arthur Tansley, a talented ecologist who pioneered the concept of ‘eco-system’ (Tansley 1952: 82).

Ecological holism as espoused by conservationists in South Africa certainly had an important influence on the emergence of a conservation ethic in Nyasaland during the inter-war years (Mulwafu 2011: 78; see Worster 1977: 205–220; Golley 1993: 8–34; Anker 2001; Foster 2009: 157–159).

4.2 *The Dust-Bowl Syndrome*

The second important factor in the development of an ecological sensibility and a concern for conservation in colonial Nyasaland, was the social and ecological disaster that occurred in the United States during the 1930s—known familiarly as the ‘dust bowl’ experience. Centred on the Southern Great Plains, and accompanied by an economic depression, the great storms of swirling dust that then erupted, especially in the states of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, is described as darkening the sky, destroying wheat and cotton crops, obliterating fence lines, as well as leading to drifts of loose, dry soil

up to 20 feet high. In 1934 one great storm is recorded as having deposited around twelve million tons of plains dust on the city of Chicago. Credited as having been caused by a combination of a severe drought and intensive capitalist agriculture, the ‘dust bowl’ was described as the culmination of a number of ‘grassland follies’ (Worster 1992: 93–105).

Much has been written on the ‘dust bowl’ itself, as well as its influence on conservation ideas and land-use practices in the United States. It certainly evoked considerable, anxiety and soul-searching among American ecologists, as well as among government officials, for it was perceived as a national disaster. In 1935 the United States Conservation Service was established, with the ecologist Hugh Bennett as its first director. Long involved in conservation issues and something of a ‘crusader’, Bennett has been described as the ‘father of soil conservation’. He was also the author of a seminal text on the subject in which he indicted the American people for never having learned to love the landscape, treating it simply as a resource for financial gain (1939: 14; Nash 1990: 134–139).

Two other books published in that era came to stress the ubiquity of soil erosion as a world-wide problem, as well as viewing it as largely due to human mismanagement of the natural environment: Paul Sear’s *Deserts on the March* (1935) (which expressed a rather apocalyptic scenario) and Jacks and Whyte’s *The Rape of the Earth* (1939). The latter study was a comparative study of soil erosion, and included chapters on both South Africa and tropical Africa.

The importance of the ‘dust bowl’ phenomenon in the development of a ‘conservation consciousness’ in Nyasaland in the 1930s, especially through the mediating influence of the colonial office in London, cannot, Mulwafu suggests, be ‘over-emphasized’ (2011: 66–68; Beinart and Coates 1995: 51–52).

4.3 *The Imperial Forestry Institute*

The final factor in the development of a conservation ethic in Nyasaland during the inter-war years, highlighted by Mulwafu, was the establishment of the Imperial Forestry Institute at Oxford University in 1924. Its *raison d’être* was forestry research and the provision of theories and ideas to colonial governments on the conservation of natural resources—particularly forests within the empire. It thus offered courses to colonial foresters on systematic botany, tropical silviculture, soil science, colonial land-tenure and forest management. The first director of the institute was Robert S. Troup, who

had served as a forest officer in both Burma and India before becoming Professor of Forestry at Oxford University in 1920. A great advocate of scientific forestry, Troup was widely acclaimed both for his monumental study, *Silviculture of Indian Trees* (1921) and for his outstanding services to the advancement of forestry all over the empire (Mulwafu 2011: 76).

Also attached to the institute was Joseph Burt Davy, the outstanding systematic botanist. Burt Davy made a brief expedition to Nyasaland in 1929 to study the forest flora, and compiled (with A.C. Hoyle) the first *Check List of the Forest Trees and Shrubs of the Nyasaland Protectorate* (1936). This was published by the Imperial Forestry Institute. The check list includes a description of ‘some forest types’ in Nyasaland by Paul Topham, a list of ‘exotics’, as well as the local names of the trees and shrubs. Burt Davy remained as head of the Department of Systematic Botany until his death in 1940, becoming a pioneer in the development of tropical forest botany and ecology.

Given the influences of both Troup and Burt Davy it has been rightly suggested that it was the training courses and research activities of the Imperial Forestry Institute, rather than the ‘dust bowl’ episode itself, that ‘sowed the early seeds of conservation’ in Nyasaland (Mulwafu 2011: 75–76). The two key figures who acted as ‘torchbearers’ in the development of a conservation ethic in Nyasaland were the foresters John B. Clements and Paul Topham. Both had attended courses at the Imperial Forestry Institute. As we shall explore below Clement became the first Conservator of Forests—the title is significant—in 1927 and was chiefly concerned with land-use issues and forest conservation, while Topham became the first Soil Erosion Officer (in 1937) and was prominent throughout the 1930s in encouraging and implementing soil-conservation measures throughout the protectorate.

4.4 *Forest Conservation*

Although from the earliest days of colonial rule there was a concern on the part of the colonial administration for the preservation—if not the conservation—of wildlife, it is also apparent that there was an equal concern for forest conservation. What is equally evident, however, from the writings of early missionaries and colonial administrators, is that Europeans generally were highly critical and disdainful, not only of African religious culture, but also of African agriculture—as then practised—and of other environmental practices. As noted above, African hunting, whether by means of traps, snares, dogs or fire, was treated with derision and contempt,

and was essentially legally proscribed by the colonial government. Local agriculture practices, particularly shifting cultivation (*visoso*) were, likewise, the subject of constant criticism, partly due to the lack of knowledge of the dynamics of shifting cultivation, and partly out of cultural arrogance. Harry Johnston, for example, as we earlier noted, considered shifting cultivation to be ‘ruinous’ to the further development of the country. He described this form of husbandry in the following words: ‘The natives make clearings for their plantations. They cut down the trees, leave them to dry, and then set fire to them and sow their crops amongst the fertilizing ashes. The same type of forest never grows again. It is replaced by grass or by a growth of scrubby trees—trees of a kind which can to a greater extent resist the annual scorching of the bush fires. Besides this wanton destruction of forest for the growing of food crops The annual bush fires play a considerable and (if unchecked) an increasing part in deforesting the country’ (Johnston 1897: 37).

Johnston seemed unaware that *Brachystegia* woodland is a fire-adapted eco-system, resilient and with a capacity for regeneration, but he feared that with increasing deforestation of the Shire Highlands there would be a ‘diminution in rainfall’ and thus the eventual desiccation of the landscape. He also suggested that with rare exceptions, Africans had ‘no idea of manuring the ground’ and that a lack of private property—a ‘fixity of tenure’—was detrimental to the development of settled agriculture (1897: 424–425).

Mulwafu described the situation at the end of the nineteenth century in similar terms: ‘Both written and oral accounts suggest that some form of degradation had taken place before the arrival of Europeans. African farming systems, particularly shifting cultivation and slash and burn, resulted in long-term deforestation or desiccation of the country’ (2011: 49).

It is well to recall that prior to the advent of the Johnston Administration in 1891, the human population of the Shire Highlands was relatively sparse and much of the Highlands was covered by *Brachystegia* woodland.

The deforestation of the Shire Highlands was largely the result of two factors—besides that of settled government and thus an end to both the slave trade and the Ngoni intrusions into the Highlands. The first was the alienation of large tracts of land to European companies and planters, as discussed in Chap. 5. This entailed the development of a plantation economy and commercial agriculture, particularly the production of cotton, tobacco and tea. Secondly, there was a large influx of Lomwe migrants into the Shire Highlands—again discussed earlier. In 1921 the number of Lomwe in the country was around 120,776; by 1931 this figure had doubled to 235,616,

most of them concentrated in the Mulanje, Thyolo and Chiradzulu districts (Boeder 1984: 31). There they established village communities, and cleared the *Brachystegia* woodland in order to grow a variety of crops, initially through ‘shifting cultivation’. The result of these two factors was extensive and inevitable deforestation—of *Brachystegia* or *miombo* woodland—throughout the Shire Highlands. This caused concern, almost alarm, among both European planters and the colonial administration.

But two points need to be made initially with respect to this deforestation: Firstly, what the deforestation entailed was a radical transformation of the Shire Highlands landscape, and it is somewhat misleading to describe this transformation as necessarily implying the ‘destruction’, ‘degradation’ or ‘despoliation’ of the natural environment. Unless, of course, one considers all human interactions with nature, and all cultural landscapes—tea gardens, blue gum plantations and all cultivated land—as implying a form of ‘degradation’. It is, then, important to guard against what has been described as the ‘glib polemics of environmental despair’ though the over-use of the concept ‘degradation’ (Beinart and Coates 1995: 52).

In fact, much has been written in recent years critiquing the widespread thesis—described as a ‘master narrative’—that views the interactions between people and the environment in Africa, and specifically population increase, as leading inevitably to the ‘over-exploitation’ of the land, deforestation, increasing drought, the loss of biodiversity and the general ‘degradation’ of the African environment (See McCann 1999: 3–4; Bassett and Crummev 2003: 8–11).

Secondly, it is important to recognize, as I have discussed elsewhere, that the *Brachystegia* woodland was an intrinsic part of the socio-economic life of the African people of the Shire Highlands. Indeed there was a complex inter-relationship or dialectic between the woodland (*thengo*) and the village (*mudzi*) environments that not only constituted their social economy, but was expressed both in their rituals and symbolic life (Morris 1998: 126–132, 2000). Historians often ignore or bypass the woodland environment (e.g. Pike 1968; Pachai 1973b; Mandala 1990), but one needs to stress that it was a vital aspect of the economic life—the livelihood—of the people of the Shire Highlands. We may note the following:

- Firewood from the woodland was not only used for cooking purposes, but for such vital activities as beer-brewing, the smoking of fish, iron-smelting and pot-making.

- The woodland was a source of building materials and thatching grass for the construction of houses, as well as for the making of many household goods and artefacts—such as pestle and mortar (for pounding maize and other cereals), materials for traps and snares, baskets, mats, beehives, the granary (for storing the maize) and household furniture.
- The woodland was an important source of wild foods—the fruits of more than 70 different kinds of tree—those of the wild custard apple, *mposa* (*Annona senegalensis*) and the wild loquat, *msuku* (*Uapaca kirkiana*) being particularly well-liked; around 70 different kinds of edible mushrooms (*bowa*)—especially of the genera *Cantharellus* and *Termitomyces*; and many wild herbs that were gathered by women for relish (*ndiwo*) (Williamson 1975; Morris 1987, 2009: 105–142).
- The bark, leaves and roots of numerous plants that were gathered from the woodland as medicine (*maukhwala*) and utilized for a variety of ailments and social purposes. Around 500 medicinal plants have been recorded, mainly from the Shire Highlands, and mostly derived from the woodland environment (Morris 1996a, 2009: 93–104).
- Finally, we may note the importance of the woodland for the hunting of wild game, for the grazing of domestic animals, especially the goat, and the collection of edible caterpillars (*mbozi*) (Morris 1998, 2004: 76–90).

The deforestation of the Shire Highlands thus made a far deeper impact on the socio-economic life of the African peoples of the Highlands than it did on the European missionaries and planters. Nevertheless, the devastation of the country, the Shire Highlands in particular, became a primary concern of the colonial administration, especially from the 1920s onwards.

Until around 1920 the ‘forest division’ was a part of the Department of Agriculture, and consisted of only one European and very few staff. Owing to this shortage of staff, the work in the forestry division prior to 1920 was limited, largely confined to the exploitation of Mulanje cedar for timber requirements—mainly conducted by the Public Works Department; the establishment of trial plots and small plantations of various exotic species, mainly gums and pines; and the issuing of licences for the cutting of what was then considered the three most important local timbers—*mbawa* (*Khaya nyasica*), *mwenya* (*Adina microcephala*), and *mlombwa* (*Pterocarpus angolensis*). Only one forest reserve existed—that of Zomba Mountain, covering 10 square miles, which had been proclaimed in 1913 (MNA/51/583/26).



Fig. 8.1 Chinyenyedi Valley, Thyolo, showing pawpaw and bananas
Source: Brian Morris



Fig. 8.2 Typical village scene near Phalombe with mango trees
Source: Brian Morris

In 1920 John Burton Clements (1892–1976) joined the colonial service in Nyasaland as a forest officer, having recently completed a BSc degree in forestry at the University of Edinburgh. Enterprising and engaging, Clements became Chief Forest Officer for the protectorate in 1922, and quickly moved forestry out of the Agriculture Department. In 1929 an independent Forestry Department was established with Clements the first Chief Conservator of Forests. Keen on the outdoors and an accomplished botanist, Clements established a small but highly active department based at Zomba, and lived with his family high up on the slopes of Zomba Mountain. He was apparently known as ‘Nkhuni Joe’, owing to the fact that he was associated with the issuing of firewood (*nkhuni*) permits. His writings reflect an ecological sensibility—unusual at the time—and Clements became a key figure in the development of a conservation ethic in Nyasaland during the inter-war years. As Mulwafu writes: Clements ‘believed firmly in the rational and effective use of land resources and worked hard to protect the rich forest resources of the territory until his retirement in 1946’ (2011: 72). Clements thus spent 26 years in Nyasaland, 17 as Chief Conservator of Forests, and on his retirement was awarded an O.B.E. for his services to forestry. He died in 1976 aged 84 (Mulwafu 2011: 71–72; Baker 2012: 29).

In his various writings John Clements, like Harry Johnston before him, always expressed a concern and an interest in the dynamics of shifting cultivation, and recognized the fact that it inevitably led to widespread deforestation. Following the theories of his namesake Frederic Clements and his studies of grassland ecology, Clements felt that if left undisturbed there would be a ‘natural succession’ of forest vegetation until it reached a ‘climax’ type, consonant with the soil and climate of a particular region. As he wrote: ‘If, in Nyasaland, the interference of man could be eliminated, there would be further succession of the vegetation in many regions e.g. closed forest would develop in the place of deciduous woodland, and in some parts evergreen forest types would gradually develop’ (1937: 2).

But Clements recognized that the deciduous—the *Brachystegia*—woodlands of Nyasaland, including the Shire Highlands, had long been subject to human ‘interference’ (as he expressed it) through varying patterns of shifting cultivations and through frequent forest fires. But he recognized that shifting cultivation, slash and burn agriculture, was in fact a form of ‘fallow’ farming, in that it allowed land to rest for periods ‘so as to allow natural vegetation to do the work of giving back fertility to the soil’. He thus emphasized that a supply of decaying plant remains

(organic matter) was essential in maintaining soil fertility, and that a continuous cropping of maize leads to the exhaustion of the soil. But he also emphasized that with increasing population the 'fallow system' of shifting agriculture became increasingly difficult to maintain. There was thus an urgent need in the Shire Highlands to develop an alternative system of agriculture (1937: 3; MNA/51/583/26).

Although *Brachystegia* woodland was severely damaged by intense fires, Clements also recognized that fires did not in fact destroy the woodland, and that there was evidence that fires 'actually promote the growth of seedlings and suckers by charring the seed and enabling it to germinate and by removing competing vegetation and grasses. Its power of coppicing from stumps and growing from underground roots and stumps is amazing—a complete adaptation to conditions on the Central African Plateaux, where there is a combination of annual fires, relatively low temperatures during the long dry season, and a regime of shifting cultivation by the human population' (1953: 20).

Clements thus recognized the 'remarkable coppicing power' of the *Brachystegia* woodland, and the fact that it was not a 'natural' woodland but rather was a 'fire climax' or 'plagioclimax', a plant community that has been formed and maintained by continuous human agency—specifically the annual fires and the patterns of shifting cultivation. Thus the *Brachystegia* woodland was an anthropogenetic landscape and floristically complex. Not only does the woodland vary according to local and specific factors such as altitude, rainfall, drainage and soil types, but the woodland was a 'patchwork mosaic', in that each 'plot' has its own individual history due to the impact of human agency (Morris 2009 [1970]: 55–56; Bassett and Crummev 2003: 6–7). That *Brachystegia* woodland was historically an anthropogenetic landscape was certainly recognized by Clements.

In a series of lectures on 'Land use in Nyasaland' given at Jeanes Training Centre, Domasi, Clements clearly indicated what he considered the key priorities in 'land planning' which he felt should be implemented by the colonial government. Briefly, these were the following: to conduct scientific research into vegetation types—the various 'plant communities' of Nyasaland and their associated soil profiles; the protection of stream banks and riparian forests; the creation of forest resources on all the hills and mountains of the protectorate, which Clements felt were crucial 'watersheds and catchment areas'; the improved management of

agricultural land, through progressive crop husbanding (mixed farming, composting, crop rotation) and soil conservation; a check on the annual bush fires through a policy of ‘early controlled burning’; and, finally, the advocacy of village forest areas under the authority of village headman (Clements 1937).

Here we may focus the discussion on three issues relating to forest conservation—the creation of forest reserves and the legislation relating to forest protection; the development of commercial forest plantations; and (in Sect. 5) the politics of village forest areas.

It is worth noting, of course, that in the 1920s the Forestry Department was a relatively small department, consisting of only five Europeans based in Zomba, supported by 24 African foresters and 76 forest guards. Essentially, each district of the Shire Highlands had one forester and around three or four forest guards (MNA/51/901/29). The foresters had been given a three-month training course in forestry at Zomba, and it is of interest that the men were chosen with respect to their character and influence in the local community, rather than being English-speaking Africans who had been educated at the Scottish missions (Topham and Townsend 1937: 13).

Table 8.1 Forest Reserves established in the Shire Highlands during the 1920s

<i>District</i>	<i>Reserve</i>	<i>Year of proclamation</i>	<i>Area (square miles)</i>
Zomba	Zomba Mt	1913	10
	Malosa	1924	25
Chiradzulu	Chiradzulu Mt	1924	2
Blantyre	Ndirande	1922	7
	Kanjedza	1922	1
	Soche	1922	1½
	Chigamula	1925	2
	Malabvi	1927	1¼
Cholo (Thyolo)	Cholomani	1929	8
	Chulo Mt	1923	24
Mulanje	Thuchila	1925	13
	Mulanje Mt	1927	150
	Michese	1929	26
Total (13 forest reserves)			271 square miles

Forest reserves in the Shire Highlands (MNA/51/583/26)

4.5 Forest Reserves

During the 1920s the Forestry Department established through government legislation, prompted by Clements, 33 forest reserves throughout the Nyasaland protectorate, with a total area of approximately 2547 square miles. The forest reserves were primarily established for the ‘conservation of water supplies’, but it was also suggested that they prevented soil erosion on the hills, afforded a sanctuary for game animals, and enable the conservation of certain trees that had, durable and valuable timber—trees such as *mkongomwa* (*Azelia quanzensis*), *mkalati* (*Burkea africana*), *muula* (*Parinari curatellifolia*), *mlombwa* (*Pterocarpus angolensis*) and *mwanga* (*Afromosia angolensis*). Clements was always to stress that the primary purpose for establishing forest reserves was not only the protection of the hill forests, especially the evergreen ‘cloud’ forests that clothed the summits of almost every hill over 5000 feet (1524 m) but the fact that the hills constituted vital water-catchment areas. He opined that the destruction of the hill forests would lead inevitably to the drying-up of streams during the dry season (1937: 5).

Equally important in the conservation of the hill forests—the *Brachystegia* woodland that covered the slopes of the hills—was the practice of controlled early burning that Clements strongly advocated. This meant the partial burning of the forest undergrowth soon after the end of the rains. If done carefully and with patience, Clements suggested, this would encourage the re-growth of trees and shrubs, as well as enhancing soil structure (1937: 12; Topham 1937: 4). Local people, of course, had long been practising the ritual early burning of the woodland (Schoffeleers 1971; Morris 2000: 183). The early burning of the forest reserves (woodlands) seems, however, to have been neglected in the later colonial period.

Table 8.1 shows the Forest Reserves established in the Shire Highlands during the 1920s.

The establishment of the reserves in the Shire Highlands was by no means straightforward or unproblematic, for the slopes of many of the hills had already been extensively cultivated, or, as with Malabvi hill, the evergreen forests had long been utilized by local people as a source of timber. By the 1920s, for example, there was very little *Brachystegia* woodland left in the Chiradzulu district, which had experienced a large influx of Lomwe migrants. Shifting cultivation was still in evidence, and Chiradzulu Mountain itself, as a declared forest reserve, had been almost ‘completely denuded of forest’ by the local people (MNA/51/846/27; F2/1/1).

Table 8.2 Village forest areas in the Shire Highlands in 1936

<i>District</i>	<i>Number of village forest areas</i>	<i>Acreage</i>
Zomba	114	5324
Chiradzulu	205	3017
Blantyre	452	11,232
Thyolo	119	3476
Mulanje	257	10,978
Total	1147	34,027

Average size of village forest area 29.6 acres (MNA/*Annual Report of Forestry Department* 1936)

The declaration of Soche Mountain as a forest reserve was even more problematic, for Chief Somba had a well-established village high on the slopes of the mountain. The village held the graves of his ancestors, cultivations that extended almost to the summit of the mountain, and large plantations of bananas. The re-settlement of the people of Somba's village to other parts of the Shire Highlands proved to be problematic and controversial. Not only were the villagers themselves reluctant to move, but there was conflict even within the colonial administration itself—with Clements, concerned with ecological issues, particularly with the maintenance of water-supplies within Blantyre township, eager to establish a forest reserve, being at odds with the Blantyre resident R.H. Murray, who was concerned with the well-being of the people being evicted from the proposed Soche Mountain forest reserve. All this in the years 1923–1924 when the human population of the Blantyre district was already being viewed by the administration as too 'congested' with respect to the available land (MNA/51/1989/23).

Along with the creation of designated forest reserves Clements and the administration were also concerned to give complete protection to stream banks, and particularly to the riparian forests that were then characteristic of watercourses throughout the Shire Highlands. Legislation was therefore passed forbidding any cultivation within eight yards of a stream bank. Clements rationale was not only the fact that these riparian tracts contained valuable timber trees—particularly the *mbawa* (*Khaya nyasica*) and *mwenya* (*Adina microcephala*)—but that the shade of the trees protected the stream water from excessive evaporation, and the trees themselves prevented the stream bank from

collapse during the rainy season (1937: 7). It is significant therefore that legislation was also passed forbidding the cutting of all timber trees, such as *mbawa*, *mwenya* and *mlombwa* (*Pterocarpus angolensis*) except under licence.

4.6 Afforestation

From the earliest years of the colonial administration the forestry (or scientific) division of the Department of Agriculture had implemented various afforestation projects, as well as establishing several experimental trials with respect to a wide variety of exotic trees. Between 1902 and 1906, mainly through the initiative of John McClounie, the ‘government forester’ some 240 acres of Mulanje cedar, *mkunguza* (*Widdringtonia cupressoides*)—or ‘Mlanje cypress’ as it was then called—was planted on Zomba plateau, as well as a small acreage on the Mulanje plateau itself. By 1923, after more than a decade, cedar plantations amounted to 410 acres on Zomba plateau, in spite of attacks by *Armillaria* fungus and areas destroyed by bush fires.

By this time the commercial exploitation of the cedar forests on Mulanje Mountain was well under way, for the wood of the cedar was highly valued, being pleasantly aromatic, termite resistant, and an excellent construction timber. The cedar logs were cut by pit sawyers on the plateau, and the sawn timber headloaded down the mountain by local porters. By 1932 sawn timber from Fort Lister cedar forests had reached 23,150 cubic feet, with a further 18,270 cubic feet coming from the Litchenya forests. The exploitation of the Mulanje cedar forests continued throughout the colonial period, and it is still an important, if problematic, industry (MNA/51/2716/22; Chapman 1995: 30–34).

At the turn of the century, following in the footsteps of the early Blantyre missionaries, the forestry division began experimenting with the planting of a variety of Australian gum trees, *bulugamu* (*Eucalyptus* spp.). Establishing experimental plots on plantations at Chigamula, Zomba and Chichiri near Blantyre, around 30 species of Eucalyptus were introduced by the Forestry Department into Nyasaland. The main species were the blue gum (*E. globulus*), lemon-scented gum (*E. citriodora*), grey gum (*E. saligna*) and the red gum (*E. rostrata*). Useful both for building purposes, especially roofing poles (*mitanda*) and as firewood (*nkhuni*) gum trees soon became widely planted, not only by European estates—firewood was essential for the production of tobacco and tea—but also by local

African farmers. Although fast-growing, up to 15 feet in three years, gum trees were not wholly suitable for the production of saw timber owing to their tendency to split easily after felling. They also had a reputation for desiccating the landscape. Indeed it was tobacco farmers and the tea estates, rather than the Forestry Department, that were most enthusiastic with regard to the development and expansion of gum plantations. By the 1930s Eucalyptus plantations, large and small, were a common feature of the Shire Highlands landscape.

The Forestry Department in the 1920s under Clements, also experimental with the cultivation, and thus the introduction to Nyasaland, of many other exotic trees. These included not only coniferous trees such as the deodar (*Cedrus deodora*), the cypress pine (*Callitris calcarata*), the Mexican cypress (*Cupressus lusitanica*) and several species of the genus *Pinus*, but also such trees as the Indian laburnum (*Cassia fistula*), toon (*Toona ciliata*), Persian lilac (*Melia azedarach*) and the tung-oil tree (*Aleurites fordii*).

For many years the Forestry Department struggled to establish pine plantations in the Shire Highlands. Clements was particularly keen to establish pine plantations for reasons that he was later to discuss at length, primarily the general shortage of easily-available 'softwoods' in Nyasaland. What commended pines as a plantation crop was that the timber was strong and durable, yet relatively light in weight and easily worked, that they were a ready source of pulpwood, that they naturally occurred as large forests in the temperate zones, and, finally, that they could thrive on poorer soils. Throughout the early decades of the colonial period, and especially around 1923, shortly after Clements became Chief Forestry Officer, a wide variety of *Pinus* species were planted in experimental trials. But these experiments tended to be 'repeated failures'. The seedlings of all the pines became yellow in colour, and eventually died, either in the nursery beds or in the plantations soon after being planted (Clements 1941: 7). But in the late 1920s Clements and the Forestry Department recognized the importance of mycorrhizal fungi in the healthy growth of pines, and so introduced mycorrhiza-infected soils into the nurseries. Thereafter, extensive pine plantations were soon established on Zomba plateau, and on the Chambe and Sombani plateau at Mulanje Mountain, as well as elsewhere. The plantations consisted mainly of stands of three species, namely *Pinus patula*, *P. radiata* and *P. taeda*. All three species of pine were natives of the warm temperate altitudes of Mexico and California (Clements 1941: 10).

We may turn now to the third of Clements's projects in relation to forest conservation, the establishment of communal forest areas in Nyasaland, the Shire Highlands in particular.

5 VILLAGE FOREST AREAS

As a forester Clements recognized that an adequate supply of poles, firewood, and other forest products was essential for 'the happiness of people' (as he put it) (1937: 9). In 1926 the Village Forest Area Scheme was therefore established, its *raison d'être* being to provide each village community with a sustainable yield of forest products—the emphasis being on the provision of useful timber. The village forest areas were to be selected by the village headman, in consultation with the District Resident and the district forester, and it was generally recognized that these communal forests would be situated either on hill slopes or on land with poor soils, the principle of selection being that it would be land 'unsuitable for agriculture'. The village forests were to be clearly demarcated, and to be under the sole authority of the village headman, whose authority was backed by state legislation. The headman was to be responsible for the management of the communal forest. This would involve: ensuring that the boundaries of the village forest areas were hoed each year, the early controlled burning of the woodland, and the 'thinning' of the trees to reduce competition and thus ensure the maximum growth of trees suitable for poles and timber. The headman was also to encourage the planting of such exotics as gum trees (*Eucalyptus* spp.) and *Cedrela toona* (*sedereya*, *Toona ciliata*), the seedlings being provided by the Forestry Department via the district nurseries.

The concerted efforts of the district administrations, the assistant conservator of forests Ross Townsend, and the many African foresters, meant that by the end of 1934, some 2872 village forest areas had been allocated, covering around 158,194 acres of *Brachystegia* woodland, though in many areas, especially in the Shire Highlands many villages had no communal forests (Clements 1935, 1937: 9–10; Topham and Townsend 1937).

Table 8.2 lists the village forest areas in the Shire Highlands in 1936.

Two years later the assistant director of agriculture, A.J. Hornby, reported that there were 284 village forest areas in the Zomba district with a total acreage of 8675 acres. The average village forest area consisted of some 30 acres of woodland, but, significantly, 57 % of villages in the district had no recognized communal forest (MNA/N52 1/13/1).

It has been suggested that the village forest area scheme was a great ‘success’ in that there was a ‘spirit of cooperation’ between the foresters and the village headman, a simplicity about the scheme and the rules to regulate it, and that the controlled burning of the woodland had led to very positive ‘results’. Equally important, management control had been vested in the village headman, not in the territorial chiefs, and they had been given firm assurances by the district resident with respect to the security of the communal forest areas. This implied that the village headman and not the state had control over the woodland resources (Probyn 1997: 8–10; Mulwafu 2011: 112).

The protection of *Brachystegia* woodland from further deforestation via the community forests was combined with an equal emphasis by the Forestry Department on afforestation—encouraging local people to establish plantations of useful exotic trees such as blue gums and *Cedrela*. In 1927, for example, some 21,300 blue gums (*E. saligna*) and 40,000 *Cedrela* seedlings were issued to people in the Chiradzulu district, the seedlings having been grown in forestry nurseries. The population of the district was then around 64,000, and by all accounts such afforestation schemes were ‘popular’ among most village communities (MNA/NSD 2/1/1; *Annual Report Chiradzulu District* 1927).

It is significant that a project similar to that of the village forest area scheme was being promoted by the Forestry Department in Malawi, some 60 years later as ‘participatory forestry’, involving the co-management (by the state and local communities) of village forest areas (Probyn 1997).

Although the village forest area scheme was heralded as a ‘success’ in the 1930s, in fact it never materialized as a viable conservation project, even Clements admitting that progress in the implementation of the scheme had been ‘disappointing’.

There were a number of reasons for the decline in the viability of the village forest areas. Firstly, the people of the Shire Highlands looked upon the *Brachystegia* woodland as common land: they therefore tended to ignore, or even resent, the rules and restrictions with regard to forest conservation, whether in respect to the state forest reserves or the village forest areas. They felt they should be free to collect firewood, or to cut timber, specifically indigenous hardwoods, for the construction of their houses, or for the making of various household goods. The idea of ‘thinning’ the *Brachystegia* woodland seemed to local people rather bewildering, in that they did not view the woodland exclusively through the eyes of a commercial forester. The woodland undergrowth, in fact, was an important

source of medicinal plants, particularly the roots of shrubby herbs belonging to the family *Vitaceae*, which were useless either as timber or firewood (Morris 2009: 69–92). The people of the Shire Highlands particularly disliked the rules relating to the protection of stream banks, for local people had for many years been cultivating *dimba* gardens close to streams and the riparian tracts. Chief Nsabwe of the Thyolo district, for example, then recognized as a ‘Native Authority’, bitterly complained that people were not allowed to open-up *dimba* gardens near streams, especially at a time when they were experiencing hardships due to the depredations of locusts (MNA/NSE 1/9/2).

The administration responded by punishing any person committing offences under the 1926 forest ordinance, and in 1927 there were 288 convictions under the ordinance, which rose to 1169 in 1935 (MNA/Reports of the Forestry Department 1926–1952).

Secondly, the village headmen clearly felt the precise demarcation of the woodland as communal forest areas, supervised by the district resident and the Forestry Department, was essentially a form of land alienation. They feared that such land would become state property like the forest reserves. The majority of the headmen therefore expressed little sustained commitment to the project, and, in any case, they possessed little real power within the village community. Eventually, both the local communities and the village headmen (*mfumu*)—who was sometimes a senior woman—and the Forestry Department itself, lost interest in maintaining the village forest areas.

Finally, due to the population density of the Shire Highlands many villages had no communal forest areas, and there was also, with increasing population, continual encroachment by people into the *Brachystegia* woodland, converting more and more of the landscape into farmland and habitations. It has also been suggested that in the Shire Highlands, given employment opportunities in Blantyre and on the European estates, many young people tended to lose interest in the dynamics of village communal life, and the village forest areas in particular (Probyn 1997: 10; Mulwafu 2011: 112).

Although Clements was clearly an important and pioneering figure in the development of an ecological sensibility and a conservation ethic in colonial Malawi, he also expressed, as Mulwafu highlighted, two rather limiting perspectives.

The first is that, like most of his European contemporaries, whether government officials, planters or Christian missionaries, Clements had a very negative perception of African agriculture. He considered African people ignorant, wasteful and inefficient with respect to the use of natural resources. As he clearly put it: ‘It is universally recognized that, left to

himself, the African will destroy his environment before he will learn conservation and that such an event would be a catastrophe causing untold misery' (MNA/A/547/1/5; Mulwafu 2011: 65).

Witnessing the initial deforestation of the Shire Highlands under the impact of slash and burn cultivation—mainly of *mawere*, finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*)—by the incoming migrants from Mozambique, Clements was oblivious to the fact that African people had their own forms of conservation, and their own complex modes of creatively adapting to a continually changing, and rather unpredictable, natural environment.

Secondly, Clements placed a great deal of emphasis on education and extension work in his advocacy of soil and forest conservation—even writing, with Paul Topham, a small manual entitled *Madzi ndi Nthaka* (water and soil). Yet like a later generation of concerned environmentalists—such as William Ophuls and Rudolf Bahro—Clements felt that the only way that an ecological crisis in Nyasaland could be averted was by means of explicit state intervention. As he put it: although an ecological approach to the problems of soil erosion is to be recommended 'present erosion must be checked and new erosion must be obviated, and the work is likely to entail administrative measures of a *drastic nature*' (MNA/A3/2/162; Mulwafu 2011: 63).

This clearly indicated the kind of coercive approach to soil-conservation issues, and the rather draconian measures that the colonial government was later to employ in the post-war years, in what was then deemed to be an impending ecological crisis. But to conclude this present chapter we may briefly discuss the politics of soil conservation as it emerged during the 1930s, leaving to the next chapter a wider discussion of the protests around what came to be known as *malimidwe* (agriculture) in the post-war years.

6 SOIL CONSERVATION

In a Nyasaland government circular entitled 'Land Control and Development', derived from the minutes of the Native Welfare Committee in 1936, it was suggested that in order to increase the prosperity, health standards and general well-being of the people of the protectorate, two important measures had to be taken.

The first was the need for the careful planning and control in the use of land. This would entail the protection of major catchments and watersheds by the creation of forest reserves, the protection of stream banks, riparian tracts and steep slopes, and finally, the maintenance of village forest areas. These three forms of forest conservation we have discussed above.

The second measure involved the ‘improvement of agriculture’. It was recognized by the Welfare Committee that with the increase and concentration of human population, specifically in the Shire Highlands, that the various forms of shifting cultivation practised in the past were no longer a viable option for local people. In consequence, there had to be a marked improvement in agricultural methods. This would involve both the maintenance of soil fertility by means of composting, the use of animal manure, mulching and systems of crop rotation; and soil conservation by means of terracing, bunding and contour planting. The minutes also mention: a check on further immigration into the territory, opening-up unused lands by the provision of boreholes, the control of bush fires, and the possible redistribution of the human population (Topham and Townsend 1937: 17–20; MNA/51/559/31).

It is of interest that no mention is made of inter-cropping, or the planting of legumes that enhance fertility of the soil—both common practices among African farmers. As Frank Debenham remarked: inter-cropping was a sound agricultural practice: Europeans had something to learn from Africans about crop husbandry, and so they may have to retract some of their earlier denunciations of African agriculture (1955: 198). Even so, there was a suggestion in the minutes of the Welfare Committee that every effort should be made through propaganda to make Africans ‘conservation-minded’.

Until the 1930s soil erosion was not perceived by the colonial state as a major issue, nor even by most farmers whether European planters growing cotton or tobacco, or African subsistence agriculturists. But during this decade two factors in particular alerted the administration to soil erosion as an environmental problem, the dust-bowl phenomenon in the United States (discussed above) and the fact that shifting cultivation (*visoso*), which involved mound-cultivation (*mathuthu*) was still being widely practised in the Shire Highlands, particularly in the Chiradzulu and Thyolo districts. This form of cultivation was viewed by the Department of Agriculture as inherently prone to soil erosion, although some scholars have described mound-cultivation as in itself a form of soil conservation—which is debatable (Mulwafu 2011: 24).

Surveys of soil erosion in Nyasaland had already indicated widespread concern at the general lack of conservation measures. In the 1920s, for example, A.J. Hornby, an agricultural chemist and Assistant Director of Agriculture, conducted surveys into soil erosion on both European tobacco estates and African trust land. He reported that there had been

an enormous loss of soil fertility on all the cultivated slopes of the Shire Highlands due to soil erosion, and, given the fact that agriculture was the main economic activity in Nyasaland, he emphasized the need to ‘adopt all measures which are economically possible to prevent the loss of soil capital’ (Hornby 1924b: 10–16).

Although Hornby recognized that a considerable amount of soil erosion was taking place, he also emphasized that various measures had already been adopted by both European tobacco planters and many African farmers to control soil erosion on cultivated lands—by planting crops on terraced ridges, and by the construction of contour bunds and drains. Hornby was especially concerned to encourage African tobacco growers to plant their tobacco on terraced ridges (*mizere*) rather than on mounds (*mathuthu*) which he believed were more susceptible to soil erosion (Hornby 1924b; Mulwafu 2011: 122; McCracken 2012: 208).

Hornby’s concerns were shared by the Rhodesian irrigation engineer, P.H. Haviland, who made a survey of soil erosion in Nyasaland in September 1930, mostly visiting European cotton and tobacco estates in the Zomba, Thyolo and Mulanje districts. As Mulwafu records, he presented a rather gloomy picture of soil erosion on these private estates, observing sheet erosion on those estates with sandy-loam soils, as well as gully erosion. Many European estate owners and planters, he reported, expressed an ‘antipathy’ towards any form of soil conservation, and, on the whole, did not use ‘any methods to control soil erosion’. He also noted that there was a general lack of knowledge regarding the causes and effects of soil erosion ‘in the minds of the majority of planters’. Even so, some planters, especially on the tea estates of Thyolo and Mulanje, had begun to construct contour ridges and drains in an effort to prevent erosion., Haviland himself recommended ‘ridge terracing’ as the most economic means of preventing the loss of soil on cultivated lands, as well as the construction of storm drains to control run-off water and the planting of vegetation to prevent gully erosion (Haviland 1930; MNA/A3/2/227; Mulwafu 2011: 122–124).

All these conservation measures were later adopted by most European tobacco farmers and the tea planters—at least on their own plantations.

But another important factor in the emergence of soil conservation as a key concern of the colonial administration was the appointment of Paul Topham as the government’s Soil Erosion Officer in 1936. In October 1935, the Colonial Advisory Council on Agriculture, meeting in London, recommended the appointment of a full-time Soil Erosion Officer in

each of the East African colonies. Thus Topham was seconded from the Forestry Department to become the ‘Soil Erosion Officer’ for the protectorate (McCracken 2012: 208).

Born in India, Topham came to Nyasaland in 1926, after completing a BA degree in forestry at Cambridge University. During the following decade he attended several training courses at the Imperial Forestry Institute in Oxford, studying systematic botany, forest ecology, forest management and soil erosion, and in 1933 obtained a BSc degree in forestry. As part of the degree he wrote a thesis on the forest flora of Nyasaland. This forms the basis of his introduction—on the forest types of the protectorate—to the first checklist of the forest trees and shrubs of Nyasaland (Burt-Davy et al. 1936: 7–25) a pioneering effort singularly ignored by later scholars. Shortly after taking up the post as ‘Soil Erosion Officer’ Topham, in early 1937, went on a short study tour to the United States. There he met the Director of the United States Soil Conservation Service, Hugh Bennett, and visited some of the areas affected by the ‘dust-bowl’ phenomenon. These experiences certainly influenced, both practically and intellectually, Topham’s approach to soil erosion in Nyasaland (Mulwafu 2011: 69–70).

During the next three years (1936–1939) he travelled widely throughout Nyasaland, especially in the Shire Highlands. He studied the vegetation types and soil profiles of the country, became acquainted with the main agricultural problems facing the protectorate, initiated training courses in forestry and soil conservation, and conducted several field experiments comparing the various forms of soil conservation. A trained forester as well as a pioneer ecologist, Topham, like Clements, was a strong and insistent advocate of forest reserves—the protection of stream banks, the experimental planting of exotic trees and afforestation programmes, the annual controlled burning of the *Brachystegia* woodlands and the development and support of communal village forest areas (Topham and Townsend 1937).

When in the United States Topham had imbibed the theory of plant succession and climax vegetation advocated by Frederick Clements, a theory then favourable among ecologists. But Topham realized, like his colleague John Clements, that it was difficult to apply this theory to the *Brachystegia* woodland that covered much of Nyasaland, especially the Shire Highlands. With respect to such woodland there was no simple correlation between the forest vegetation and the physiography and soil types within a specific landscape. As he wrote: ‘The patchwork of soils of various ages and their correlation with vegetation presents very serious difficulties in accepting monocl意思 and climax theories of succession. Useful data of

‘what might have been’ without fire or mankind, are generally unobtainable and can only be of academic interest as far as forests are concerned. A polyclimax philosophy, recognizing also that succession has almost everywhere been deflected is of more practical value’ (MNA/F2/1/1; *Annual Report of the Forestry Dept* 1935).

These ideas, along with Topham’s concern for the protection of the forests (woodlands) and the development of a sustainable agricultural economy, were critical in his ‘conservation crusade’ of the late 1930s (Mulwafu 2011: 70).

In his survey of the Shire Highlands landscape, Topham was clearly troubled by the extent of soil erosion that he observed, especially in the Chiradzulu district and in the hilly areas of Thyolo, south of Masambanjati. Expressing ‘grave concern’ at this state of affairs, Topham stressed that soil erosion was a ‘major problem’ throughout much of the Shire Highlands. He thus highlighted the ‘urgency’ of the need for a sustained programme of soil conservation (MNA/N51/2/4).

In a memorandum on the practical measures needed for the control of soil erosion Topham emphasized, from his own field experiments, that land cultivated under contour ridge terracing was much less prone to soil erosion than cropland under mound (*mathuthu*) cultivation. He therefore came to strongly advocate, and to implement through the auspices of the ‘Native Authorities’ the construction of contour ridges (*mizere, mitumbira*) and bunds on all cultivated land. Topham recognized of course, long before anthropologists, that ridge terracing could be problematic, and could lead to increased erosion at the field boundary, which could then become gullies. Such boundaries therefore needed protection through contour drains. He recognized, too, as a rather ‘mechanical method’ ridge terracing was only one ‘aspect’ of a comprehensive soil-conservation strategy, which would also include composting, the use of manures, mulching, the burial of plant residues and crop rotation (MNA/51/66/36).

What is also evident from Topham’s surveys of the Shire Highlands in the late 1930s is that mound cultivation had, to a large extent, been abandoned in many areas and that not only European planters but also many African subsistence agriculturists were growing crops by means of ridge cultivation (*mitumbira*) as well as planting many crops, especially bananas, along the contour. Local African farmers not only embraced with alacrity the growing of cash crops, such as tobacco, cotton, maize and groundnuts, and the planting of useful exotic trees—such as

Cedrela, *Cassia* spp. and blue gums—but they also acknowledged the importance of soil conservation on land that was now subject to permanent cultivation.

Topham observed that although mound cultivation was still being widely practised in the Chiradzulu district—which, of course, included the A.L. Bruce estates—the hoeing of ridges across the hill slopes was increasingly being adopted—independent of government pressure. Ridge cultivation and contour planting was even described as an ‘old native custom’, especially among the Ngoni. Topham suggested that ‘The main cause of the change is that the natives find that they usually get better crops from gardens hoed as ridges than from mounds’.

It is of interest also to note that the Seventh-Day Adventist Mission at Malamulo had long been encouraging local people to adopt ridge cultivation (MNA/51/66/36; A3/2/227).

Although many African subsistence farmers in both the Chiradzulu and Thyolo districts—most of whom were women—seem to have readily adopted ridge cultivation there was a deep reluctance to engage in the construction of more elaborate box ridging, contour bunds and intricate storm drains—given the increased labour that this would involve.

Early opposition to Topham’s soil-conservation measures seems to have been well articulated by two native authorities in African trust land in Southern Thyolo—Chief Nsabwe and Chief Ntondeza. The area between Masambanjati and Thekerani had seen a large influx of Lomwe migrants in the early decades of the twentieth century, especially after 1920. Although maize was an important crop, and a surplus was often sold to nearby tea estates and the Mang’anja people of the Lower Shire Valley, given declining soil fertility on some of the steep slopes, cassava and sorghum had become staple crops. The people of the area possessed few livestock, mainly chickens and goats; dried fish from the Shire Valley being an important source of protein.

Although many of the gardens in Southern Thyolo had crops cultivated on ridges, when Topham discussed with Chief Ntondeza the need to make a ruling enforcing soil-conservation measures on the land within his jurisdiction, the chief strongly opposed this, and for two basic reasons: Firstly, the extra labour that this would inevitably entail, for reasons that were not entirely obvious to local people, as the bunds needed constant attention. Secondly, the fact that such ruling would imply a degree of ‘compulsion’, an unwelcome intrusion, the Chief felt, into people’s own economic life and activities. The chief was not against soil conservation, specifically ridge cultivation; only its enforcement by the colonial state.

Topham was in a quandary. Although sympathetic to African people, and widely admired as an enlightened forester by his European contemporaries, Topham clearly felt that given the ubiquity and serious nature of soil erosion, some kind of state intervention was necessary, and in the long term conducive to people's well-being. At an informal meeting in April 1938, comprising Topham, the Assistant Conservator of Forests Ross Townsend, and the two experienced Agricultural Officers of the Thyolo and Zomba districts, namely A.P.S. Forbes and E. Lawrence, it seems to have been generally agreed that soil-conservation measures, and good agricultural practices more generally, must be made 'compulsory' and that this would involve consistent state intervention. As Topham wrote with respect to a soil-conservation policy document: 'there is no escaping the fact that the erosion problem needs dealing with quickly and on an enormous scale (the) best way to do so is by mass education and compulsion on a very few simple points' (MNA/N51/2/4).

The early planting of crops, protection of stream banks and steep slopes, and the construction of contour ridges and bunds, was therefore to be imposed on the local people of the Shire Highlands, and Nyasaland generally. Although the majority of people in the Thyolo district complied with the conservation order, Topham nevertheless complained to the District Commissioner Thyolo that the native authorities—Chiefs Nsawbwe and Ntondeza in particular—were not enforcing the construction of ridges. He also opined that any person refusing to comply with the soil-conservation order should be 'prosecuted and heavily punished' (MNA/N51/2/4; McCracken 2012: 209).

It was therefore in the late 1930s and largely on Topham's initiative—who was no doubt mindful of the 'dust-bowl' experience in the United States—that a state-interventionist approach to soil conservation was firmly established, one that increasingly implied coercive methods. During the 1950s, as we shall explore in the next chapter, this led to increasing conflict between the colonial state and the African people—the peasantry—of the Shire Highlands, in what came to be described as the *Nkhonda ya mitumbira*—the 'war of the ridges'. In the next chapter we shall also return to the perennial issue of *thangata*, and its relation to the political economy of the Shire Highlands in the post-war years.

The Post-War Years

I PROLOGUE

In this, the final chapter, we focus on the relationship between land and people in the Shire Highlands during the post-war years—the final decades of the colonial era. This period was characterized by two contrasting, but closely inter-related themes—an economic boom that led to the period being described as an ‘age of development’, and widespread civil unrest as African people of the Shire Highlands expressed their opposition to the *thangata* system on private European estates and the soil-conservation measures that were being imposed in rather draconian fashion by the colonial state, through the Department of Agriculture. Both discontents related to the issue of land and its usage.

In the next section we focus on the ‘economic boom’ of the post-war years and the development strategies initiated by Geoffrey Colby, governor of Nyasaland from 1948 to 1956. These years involved the expansion of the tea industry, a diversification of the plantation economy, though neither sisal nor tung were a success as a commercial crop, and the ‘cash crop boom’ that focussed essentially on three crops—tobacco, maize and groundnuts—and which benefitted both the European planters and the African peasantry. Intent not only to increase the productivity of African agriculture, and to establish state control over the marketing of cash crops, Colby—along with the Director of Agriculture, Richard Kettlewell—was also keen to completely transform the African land tenure system.

This could be achieved, they felt, through the promotion of a class of progressive yeoman farmers. Section 2 concludes with a discussion of the Master Farmers Scheme.

In 1949 a serious famine occurred throughout the Shire Highlands, being particularly severe in the Blantyre district. Around 200 people are reported to have died of starvation during the famine. Section 3 is devoted to an account of this disaster. After an initial discussion of the ‘explosive growth’ of the Blantyre–Limbe townships during the post-war tobacco ‘boom’ we outline the events surrounding the famine, the important distinction between periodic famines (*chaola*) and seasonal hunger (*njala*)—which was almost a perennial event among many subsistence cultivators—and the impact which the famine had on the social life of the people of the Shire Highlands. We discuss, in particular, European interpretations of the famine. The famine tended to be viewed by the government in Neo-Malthusian fashion, as the result of population increase combined with the expansion of cash crops (such as tobacco) and poor husbandry on the part of African peasants. We conclude the section with an account of labour migration from Nyasaland, which may have increased due to the impact of the famine. What was particularly significant about the famine was that it confirmed Colby’s and the Department of Agriculture’s views of an impending ecological crisis, and thus their resolve to develop African agriculture through state intervention, with respect to both agricultural practices and soil conservation.

Recognizing the general social unrest at the end of the Second World War, the Nyasaland government in 1946 appointed Sidney Abrahams to report on land legislation, and particularly, on the position of African tenants on private European Estates. Section 4 is devoted to Abrahams’s report and its impact, for, as Dr Banda later remarked, this report certainly ‘pricked’ the conscience of the Nyasaland government (Baker 1993: 179).

What the Abrahams report recommended as a solution to the ‘land problem’ was that the government should acquire from the large European landowners all the tracts of land that they owned that were ‘undeveloped’, and thereby, through re-settlement schemes, ease the congestion of people on African trust land. Abrahams also felt that such land acquisitions would completely undermine the *thangata* system, and thus, as he put it, ‘emancipate’ the tenants. In this section we discuss at some length the government’s land acquisitions with respect to the three land-holding companies—The British Central Africa Company, A.L. Bruce Estates Ltd, and Blantyre and East Africa Ltd.

The remainder of the chapter—Sects. 5, 6 and 7—concentrates on the general discontent and unrest expressed by the rural people of the Shire Highlands throughout the post-war period. This unrest centred almost exclusively on land issues, specifically opposition to the *thangata* system and to the government's harsh soil-conservation strategy. This discontent was particularly evident during the 1950s when federation was imposed on the people of Nyasaland.

In Sect. 5 we discuss the severe disturbances in Thyolo in August and September 1953, which were focussed specifically on the *thangata* system. For several months people refused to comply with their *thangata* (labour rent) obligations, or to work on the tea estates. Homes and the courthouses of moderate chiefs were burnt down, and in the whole of the Thyolo district there was a general atmosphere of disorder, distrust and disaffection, completely disrupting the tea plantation economy.

In Sect. 6 we describe the disturbances in Southern Thyolo that relate to the imposition by the Department of Agriculture of soil-conservation measures on African trust land. We focus specifically on the events that surround the personality and actions of the radical evangelist Wilfred Gudu and his Ana wa Mulungu church.

The final section deals with the Domasi rebellion, which took place in the dry season of 1953 when hundreds of peasant cultivators in the Domasi district, north of Zomba, refused to construct contour bunds—as stipulated by the National Resources Board. In essence it was a radical response to one aspect—but a key aspect—of the Domasi Community Development Scheme. What happened was that when the District Commissioner for Domasi, T.D. Thomson, attempted to retain three chiefs for not enforcing the soil-conservation rules, a large crowd attacked the Domasi *boma* and in the resulting affray three people were killed.

We conclude the section, and the book, with a short reflection on Dr Banda's development strategy.

2 ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS

At the end of the Second World War, Robin Palmer wrote, 'Many parts of Africa were seething with unrest in both town and country' (1986: 121). The Shire Highlands was no exception, the general discontent and unrest among the African peoples of the Highlands, mostly subsistence agriculturalists, focussed on two environmental issues that we have broached in earlier chapters—the *thangata* system and the soil-erosion measures that were mostly imposed on the rural populace by the colonial state.

But the post-war years, from 1945 until the proclamation of political independence in 1964, have also been described as the ‘age of development’. For it was during these years that there was a marked expansion of the tea industry in the Thyolo and Mulanje districts, and a ‘cash crop boom’ in the Shire Highlands that benefitted both the European planters and the African peasantry (McCracken 2012: 246).

The political unrest and the economic development that took place within the protectorate were, of course closely intertwined, and a key figure in both scenarios was Geoffrey Colby, Governor of Nyasaland from 1948 to 1956.

Born in 1901, Geoffrey Colby was educated at the University of Cambridge, and joined the colonial administrative service at the age of 24. He spent his early career as a colonial administrator in Nigeria—over 20 years—before becoming the Governor of Nyasaland in 1948. Described as the ‘Development Governor’, and as laying the economic foundations for the future Malawi state (Baker 1994), Colby, it is suggested, personified the qualities of leadership, hierarchy, devotion to the British Empire, public service, and an ‘unruffled reaction to emergencies’ (Baker 1993: 65). He was by all accounts a passionate advocate of economic development, and was convinced of the need and the virtues of state intervention in the economic and social life of the people of Nyasaland in order, he felt, that they should enjoy greater prosperity and a better standard of living. He is succinctly described by McCracken: ‘Large in stature and generous of heart, Colby was a natural autocrat, very hard working, decisive in judgement, and unwilling to countenance alternative views’ (2012: 242). He was certainly a man full of energy and vision.

Between 1948 and 1956 Colby set about improving public services throughout the protectorate, building roads, houses, hospitals and schools. Determined to increase the production of cash crops by African farmers, Colby extended government control over the marketing of such cash crops—specifically tobacco and groundnuts. Colby thus doubled the size, and vastly increased the scope and powers, of the Department of Agriculture. In particular, he established a network of agricultural experimental stations throughout the protectorate (Kettlewell 1964: 260–261; Baker 1993: 65–67; McCracken 2012: 242–243).

2.1 *Two Issues that Particularly Troubled Colby*

One was the question of the *thangata* system. Colby was acutely aware of the underlying and widespread social tensions, discontents and conflicts with respect to the position of African tenants on private estates, especially

in the Shire Highlands. The other concern that the new governor expressed was the development of African agriculture, and like Topham and Clements before him, such development was intrinsically linked by Colby to the advocacy and implementation of soil-conservation measures. In this Colby was ably supported by Richard ‘Dick’ Kettlewell who became the Director of Agriculture in 1951.

It is clear from Kettlewell’s reminiscences that Colby was deeply concerned with the development of agriculture, specifying five key objectives: an increase in the production of food crops, highlighted by the famine of 1949; increasing the quality and output of cash crops, such as tobacco, cotton and groundnuts; creating a fair and dependable marketing system through the establishment of state marketing boards; a complete reorganization of the local land-tenure system (based as it was on matrilineal kinship); and, finally, the implementation of an extensive soil-conservation programme. It is equally clear, as Kettlewell wrote, that the government under Colby concluded that for soil-conservation measures to be effective, a degree of ‘compulsion was essential and justified in the interests of the present and future generations for which it was then responsible’ (Kettlewell 1964: 260–263).

We discuss what came to be known as the ‘*Nkhondo ya mitumbira*’—the ‘war of the ridges’ later in the chapter.

In the immediate post-war years there was a marked increase in the acreage of tea in the Thyolo and Mulanje districts. In 1940 the overall acreage of tea stood at 18,691 acres, but within a decade the average had increased to 23,000 acres, an increase of more than 4000 acres. During that same period, with the planting of high-yielding ‘Indian’ *jats*, the yield per acre had also increased from around 700 lb of made tea per acre to close to 1000 lb per acre. By the 1940s planters had ceased to plant the ‘local’ Ma Brown *jat*. By 1960 the tea industry was responsible for 40 % of the protectorate’s export earnings, employing as rural proletarians around 45,000 workers in the Thyolo and Mulanje districts. The value of tea exports was then estimated to be around £3 million (Harler 1950; *Times Review of the Nyasaland Tea Industry* 1965).

The tea industry seems to have flourished in the immediate post-war years, yet judging by estate reports and the minutes of the Mulanje Planters’ Association, the tea planters continued to be troubled by a number of besetting problems. The most critical of these was a shortage of labour during the early part of the rainy season—when most needed—which seems to have been particularly acute in the Thyolo district. Although the tea companies recognized the need to improve working conditions,

particularly housing, they were very reluctant to increase wages—in the late 1940s around seven shillings for a monthly ticket (the daily plucking task was then set at 30 lb)—even though everyone was aware that many young men were leaving the Shire Highlands in order to seek higher wages in South Africa or the Rhodesias. Mulanje planters, such as John Ramsden of Lujeri estate, even pleaded with the District Commissioner not to put pressure on the Lomwe migrant workers from Mozambique with regard to tax payments as this might deter them from working in the Mulanje district (Mulanje Planters' Association minutes 1951–1955).

The shortage of labour was also linked to the fact that many tenants on the tea estates during the 1940s were not only refusing to pay their hut tax, but also refusing to meet their tenancy obligations, which involved working one month for the landlord in lieu of rent. What is especially significant was that some tea planters were not at all keen to receive rent in the form of a cash payment, largely derived from the selling of cash crops. As the manager of Zoa estate, George Dow informed the village headman resident on the estate at one meeting (June 1943): 'The company did not want cash rents: they wanted work', and if the tenants were uncooperative, rent payments, he intimated, might have to be increased (BEA archives, Lauderdale estate, Zoa reports). Small wonder that increasing resentment with regard to the *thangata* system came to be expressed, not only on Zoa, but on estates throughout the Shire Highlands around 1950 (We return to the *thangata* issue below).

Prior to this period several European companies and planters had attempted to extend and diversify their holdings, with regards to the planting of such crops as soya bean (*Glycine max*), sisal, rubber, coffee and tung. Take, for example, sisal. Around the turn of the century the agricultural department, eager to promote commercial crops, had distributed several thousand sisal plants free of charge to planters. By 1905 around 200 acres of sisal had been planted in the Blantyre district. But the real pioneer in sisal production was the amiable, talented and ever-resourceful Italian entrepreneur Alberto Sabbatini. In the early 1920s Sabbatini had established several sisal estates in the drier parts of the Shire Highlands—specifically on his Makandi estate near Tuchila as well as a large estate of 12,000 acres on the Thyolo escarpment between Sankhulani and Chiromo.

Sisal (*khonje* [fibre], *Agave sisalana*) is a native of Mexico. It is a hardy plant with large, succulent leaves that thrives in hot, dry conditions and is extremely drought-resistant. But it hardly flourished in the colder or wetter parts of the Shire Highlands. On his Sankhulani estate, however, Sabbatini

established a factory to process the fibre, powered by a hydro-electric scheme on the Ruo River. During the 1930s around 9000 tons of sisal hemp was being exported from Nyasaland, mostly from Sabbatini's sisal estates. But production on these estates was never a commercial success, given the low prices for the hemp and the high freight charges. Sabbatini eventually incurred a personal loss of £50,000. It is all somewhat ironic, for Sabbatini originally owned Lujeri estate (1420 acres) in the Mulanje district. However, in 1925 he sold this estate to J. Lyons Ltd for £25,000, apparently feeling that there was no future in the production of tea, focusing his energies instead on what he thought was the 'ideal crop' for the Shire Highlands—sisal!

Sabbatini is still warmly remembered today, specifically for building a unique, rather extravagant 'castle' on his Mapanga estate (17,000 acres) north of Limbe—an estate which, during the 1920s, was devoted primarily to the growing of tobacco (Baker 1971b: 100; Sabbatini 1987; McCracken 2012: 197).

2.2 *The Very Different Story of Tung*

At the instigation of the colonial government, during the 1930s the Department of Agriculture began experimenting with the planting of two species of tung oil tree, *Aleurites fordii* and *A. montana*. Originating in China, both were small trees of the family Euphorbiaceae, whose fruits were a valuable source of oil, mainly in the making of paints and varnish. An average tung tree produced up to 150 nuts, yielding around 35 % oil. The tung tree required at least 40 inches (101 cm) of rainfall per annum, and a cool season of around four months for optimum growth and the ripening of the fruit. It seemed to thrive best in the Shire Highlands at an altitude of around 4000 feet (1219 m) (MNA/A3/2/285; MacMillan 1956: 379; Pike and Rimmington 1965: 184).

Intent on diversifying crops tung was quickly adopted by European estates as a plantation crop. Initially, the plantations consisted mainly of *Aleurites fordii* generally planted at a spacing of 24 feet by 24 feet, giving around 75 trees per acre. The weeding of the plantations and the harvesting of the nuts was undertaken largely by women as *ganya* labour. Naming'omba estate in Thyolo, the Nalipiri estate of 'Bwana' Aitcheson in Mulanje, and, particularly, the various estates of Blantyre and East Africa Ltd—at Zoa and several estates in the Zomba district—were among those which quickly established extensive tung plantations. In fact, tung

plantations became, like blue gums, a familiar sight in many parts of the Shire Highlands in the 1950s, including the foothills of Zomba Mountain, at Naisi, close to the township. In 1941 Naming'omba tea estate, under Malcolm Barrow, established the first tung-oil factory, and during the war years tung production flourished as it was a valuable commodity with a guaranteed market and a stable price within the British imperial context. In 1951 around 18,000 acres were under tung, almost all in the Zomba, Thyolo and Mulanje districts, and some 250 tons of tung oil was exported, valued at £64,000. But by the early 1960s the price of tung oil had dropped steeply on the open market, and many tung plantations were eventually abandoned. Those at Zoa became a source of firewood, both for the estate factory and for local women (MNA/A3/2/285; Baker 1971b: 105; Najira 1973: 5).

These transformations in the 1950 constituted what Bridglal Pachai described as the 'post-war economic boom' (1978: 135). This involved, in particular, an increase in the price of tobacco on the world market and thus an expansion of tobacco farming, especially through tenant farming in the central region of the protectorate, less so in the Shire Highlands.

However, the introduction of the tobacco ordinance in 1948 allowed the governor Colby, in consultation with the Department of Agriculture, to determine the price paid for tobacco by the Native Tobacco Board to African tobacco farmers. This invariably entailed a wide margin between the tobacco prices obtained on the Limbe auction floor and those paid to growers. Equally significantly, Colby was determined to increase the yield and the quality of the tobacco produced by African growers, and therefore introduced a system of registration, ensuring that only those considered 'fit and proper' would be allowed to grow tobacco. This implied, of course, that the colonial state came to play an extremely interventionist role in the social economy of the country—in relation to the production of crops, the marketing of agricultural commodities, and, as we explore below, in soil-conservation measures. As a result, the growing of tobacco by independent African farmers in the Shire Highlands was actively discouraged, especially after the famine of 1949, with some 2000 families being refused registration in 1955, in the hope that they would concentrate on the growing of food crops (McCracken 2012: 249–251).

Nevertheless, in the Shire Highlands during the 1950s, tobacco farming was a thriving enterprise, on both European estates and on the African trust land. The main tobacco-growing areas were Phalombe, Tuchila (Namalenga), and parts of the Zomba and Chiradzulu districts—where

the focus was on the cultivation of dark fire-cured tobacco—all under licence and the supervision of the agricultural department. In the Zomba district, for example, in the late 1950s, there were some 2000 registered African growers, the average tobacco garden being around 0.72 acres, producing around 200 lb of tobacco per acre. This contrasted with the Mulanje district where there were over 5000 tobacco growers.

Scattered also throughout the Shire Highlands were the European estates growing either flue-cured tobacco, as among the Greek farmers of the Namadzi district, or dark fire-cured tobacco, mainly through ‘tenant’ cultivation. On the European estate of the Magomero, for example, there were 211 tenants growing tobacco in 1959, each cultivating between 0.7 and 1.5 acres, and producing an average of 240 lb of tobacco per acre (MNA/7/6/8; Agricultural Survey, Zomba 1955–1963). With respect to the Shire Highlands as a whole, European farms produced between 200 and 600 lb of tobacco per acre (average 364 lb).

There seems to have been acute competition—even animosity—between European planters with respect to tenant labour, for during the growing season there was quite a bit of ‘hijacking’ of the tobacco given to an estate tenant, but which was then sold to another European and rival planter (MNA/1/6/8F; Agricultural Survey, Zomba 1955–1963; Baker 2012: 364).

During the post-war years then, tobacco was produced in the Shire Highlands in three distinct ways—on European estates through the employment of wage labour—this applied especially to the production of flue-cured tobacco; on estates through the tenant system, pioneered by Hynde and Stark at the beginning of the twentieth century, in which African tenants grew and processed the tobacco, which was then sold to the landlord, a portion of the crop being taken as rent payment; and, finally, by independent African tobacco farmers on African trust land—though under licence and government supervision. Interestingly, in many *dimba* gardens the local ‘*labu*’ tobacco was still being grown for local consumption (MNA/7/6/8F; Agricultural Survey, Zomba 1955–1963).

Noteworthy, too, is the fact that tobacco was viewed as a ‘male crop’ and the registered growers were invariably men—assumed by the administration to be the head of the ‘family’. This bias against women did much to undermine their economic role within the family, and led, as Barbara Rogers later put it, to the ‘suppression of matriliney’ (1980: 129–138).

Two other crops that were implicated in the post-war ‘cash crop boom’ were maize and groundnuts. Both these crops had long been cultivated in northern Zambesia, and throughout the colonial period surplus maize

was widely marketed as a cash crop. During the early colonial period, as we earlier noted, Chiradzulu district was known as the ‘grain bin’ of the region, supplying maize both to the European estates and to the growing urban population of Blantyre. Indeed, European tea estates and tobacco farms depended on the surplus maize grown by African peasant farmers in order to provide the daily meal—or *posho*—to their agricultural workers. In his annual report for 1937 the District Commissioner for Thyolo Major S.J. Pegler, for example, recorded that maize was produced in abundance by local ‘natives’ and that it always found a ‘ready sale amongst the planters as food for their labour’ (MNA/NSE 5/1/5).

Asian traders often served as ‘middlemen’ in buying local maize for the tea planters of Thyolo and Mulanje, who in the 1930s usually paid the rate of a penny for 3 lb of maize. The usual *posho* ration for an agricultural labourer was 2 lb of *mgaiwa* (whole grain flour) together with beans and salt, per day (BEA archives, Lauderdale estate).

The maize (*Zea mays*), grown by local African peasants in the Shire Highlands, mainly between 2000 and 4000 feet, was usually of the flint variety known as *chimanga chamkolo* (maize of the ancestors), which was viewed as resistant to weevil (*nanka fumbwe*) infestation during storage in the grain bins (*nkhokwe*). Villagers usually produced around 800 lb of maize per acre of cultivated land. During the 1950s, maize became an important export crop and at the time of independence 24,000 tons were exported, valued at £3 million (Baker 1971b: 106).

A native of Brazil, the groundnut (*mtedza*, *Arachis hypogaea*) has been grown in what is now Malawi from a very early period, having been introduced, it is suggested, by Yao traders in the early nineteenth century. Cultivated in ridges, often as a monocrop, the pounded nuts of the legume are widely used in the making of many forms of relish (*ndiwo*). Several varieties are recognized, and the normal yield of groundnuts was 1500 lb per acre, of unshelled nuts. Throughout the colonial period, groundnuts were mainly produced on village lands for local consumption, or for local exchange, rarely as an export crop. But during Colby’s tenure the growing of groundnuts as a cash crop for export was greatly encouraged and expanded, a guaranteed price being offered by the Farmers Marketing Board. Thus, in 1952 around 6000 tons of groundnuts were exported, value at £150,000—a good deal more than had been exported throughout the whole colonial period (Baker 1971b: 105).

But Colby was not only concerned with increasing the quality and output of cash crops—whether through European estates or by local peasant

cultivation—tea, tobacco, cotton, tung and groundnuts being the principal crops involved—but also in completely transforming the land-tenure system of the protectorate.

With respect to the Shire Highlands this tenure system—as we have discussed earlier—was focussed on a matrilineal kinship system which gave a group of matrilineally related women, under the guardianship of a maternal uncle (often the village headman) or elder brother, the main rights to land. Indeed, women tended to be the main food producers, although during the rainy season agricultural work was largely shared with her husband. Women were especially concerned with the harvesting, processing and storage of the food crops.

Colby, along with his Director of Agriculture, Richard Kettlewell, was deeply opposed to this form of land tenure. Not only did these two men express a very negative attitude towards subsistence farming—equating it with shifting agriculture and viewing it as static and environmentally destructive—but they also felt the existing ‘traditional’ land tenure system inhibited the ‘progressive’ development of agriculture. They contended that under a system of uxorilocal residence (*chikamwini*) a man had no security of tenure and therefore was reluctant to invest either capital or labour in his land holdings (Pachai 1978: 148) As Kettlewell expressed it:

What incentive can there be for a progressive farmer who wishes to invest money and labour in his land and pass it on to his son, if tradition insists that he abandons his right and that of his son to the use of it when his marriage comes to an end with death or divorce? Some form of heritable security seems essential (1964: 263).

Or, as Kettlewell put it elsewhere: ‘There is no doubt that this (matrilineal) system, by removing the man’s personal interest and responsibility in the land he cultivates, is one of the greatest stumbling blocks to agricultural progress’. It was therefore adjudged a ‘pernicious obstacle’ to agricultural development (Kettlewell 1955: 2; McCracken 2012: 320). What was needed, Kettlewell insisted, was an ‘agrarian revolution’—the establishment of a system of private property, along with the promotion of capitalist agriculture through African ‘progressive’ farmers, Kettlewell gave the impression that he thought African agriculture was purely subsistence-based, and that market trade was a novelty introduced by the colonial administration. Subsistence agriculture and a moral economy does not imply, of course, that local communities (villages) still less households

(families) are self-sufficient entities, either in terms of food crops or in terms of basic household goods. It simply means that production and marketing are geared primarily to the provision of basic needs and human livelihood—subsistence—rather than to the generation of profits—as in a capitalist economy (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999). Scholars as different as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Fernand Braudel both made an important distinction between a market economy and global capitalism. Thus when Kettlewell wrote that Europeans introduced tobacco and cotton to the protectorate, and ‘taught Africans to grow them’ (1964: 259), he showed little historical sensibility. For, as we discussed in Chap. 2 African people of the Shire Highlands were growing and exchanging cotton and tobacco in the pre-colonial period, and villages were not economic isolates, for there was a flourishing trade in such important items as mats, salt, iron goods, pots, cotton cloth and dried fish, as well as various food crops. Indeed, as Kings Phiri long ago indicated, there was a thriving system of market exchanges in the northern Zambezia region that went back at least to the sixteenth century (Phiri 1975: 110; Morris 2006a: 30).

The radical transformation of the land-tenure system, both Colby and Kettlewell felt, could best be achieved by the promotion of an elite class of African ‘yeoman’ farmers, via what came to be known as the ‘Master Farmers Scheme’. This scheme seems to have been essentially the brain-child of Richard Kettlewell. By 1959 Kettlewell had amassed wide experience as an agriculturalist. He had studied for a B.Sc. in agriculture at the University of Reading in the 1920s, then obtained a postgraduate diploma in agricultural science at the University of Cambridge. After a year studying tropical agriculture in Trinidad, Kettlewell first came to Nyasaland in 1934 as a District Agricultural Officer. He worked for a while under the experienced agriculturalist, E.E. ‘Teddie’ Lawrence, who, in the 1930s, had advocated the inter-cropping of cotton with maize or bulrush millet, and who—at least in the early period—had emphasized his ‘faith in the judgement of the peasantry’—given the complexity of agricultural practices in Nyasaland (Mandala 1990: 201).

Like Clements, Kettlewell had a great love of the outdoors, and over the next decade, while working as a young energetic agricultural officer in the Zomba, Dowa and Dedza districts, he spent many days on ‘*ulendo*’. As he wrote: ‘I must have walked between two and three thousand miles, most of them only in the company of Africans from whom I learned the language and a basic understanding of their way of life and the problems of improving it’ (Baker 2012: 65).

Noteworthy also is the fact that Kettlewell was a key member, along with the pioneer ethnobotanist Jessie (Barker) Williamson, of the important Nyasaland Nutrition Survey of 1938–1939 in the Khotakota district, Kettlewell conducting much of the agricultural research (Berry and Petty 1992).

During the Second World War Kettlewell served with the military in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), returning to Nyasaland in 1943. On becoming the Director of Agriculture in 1951 Kettlewell became, Mulwafu suggests, the person most ‘closely associated with and responsible for the highly controversial *malimidwe* policies’—the strenuous and often coercive crusade to promote soil conservation (Mulwafu 2011: 71).

The Master Farmers Scheme which Kettlewell promoted in the 1950s was specifically designed to create a class of ‘yeoman’—capitalist farmers, who as exemplars to others, would spearhead the radical transformation of African agriculture, including the land-tenure system. First proposed in 1946, it essentially envisaged the enclosure of the ‘commons’, the development of capitalist agriculture and the eventual establishment of private property in land. The scheme was executed in earnest in the early 1950s, for the disastrous famine of 1949 (discussed below) had proved to Kettlewell, and the colonial administration generally, the ineffectiveness of peasant production (Mandala 1990: 216; Kalinga 1993: 369).

To be registered as a ‘master farmer’ through the Department of Agriculture, a number of conditions were specified. Firstly, the scattered, fragmented holdings of the typical subsistence farmer had to be consolidated into a single block of land of not less than 10 acres—although in some circumstances, as in the congested Shire Highlands, smaller holdings were considered, but never less than four acres. Secondly, the farmer must adopt good farming practices. This entailed, in particular, observing all soil-conservation rules such as ridge cultivation (*misere*) and the construction of bunds (*migula*, *milambala*), as well as adopting a crop-rotation system. In the recommended four-year cycle, at least one-third of the consolidated holdings had to be under a leguminous crop or a grass fallow. Thirdly, the prospective farmer was encouraged to combine food and cash crops, grow timber and fruit trees, and plant vegetables on the holdings, as well as embrace livestock husbandry and manuring. The master farmers were to receive technical advice from agricultural extension workers (*mlangizi*), along with cash loans to purchase livestock, artificial fertilizers and capital equipment, and bonus payments were introduced to encourage the ‘progressive’ farmer to adopt practices which were in ‘conformity with prescribed conditions’ (MNA/DCT 3/1/1; Department of Agriculture Circular 1953; Vaughan 1987: 151–152; Kalinga 1993: 370–371).

The aim of the Master Farmers Scheme was to enhance the long-term productivity on African trust land, and by degrees to completely transform local agricultural practices, the land-tenure system in particular. If accomplished, this crusade would involve the master farmers taking and enclosing land from the more ‘conservative’ subsistence farmers (or peasantry), employing some of them as *ganyu* agricultural labourers, while driving the rest into the towns or to work on European estates, though it was unclear how the emerging landless class would find work in the country (Kalinga 1993: 372–373; Mandala 2005: 139). The scheme essentially implied the ‘enclosure of the commons’.

In 1959 it was estimated that there were 745 master farmers in the protectorate, working on 8409 acres by improved methods (Pike and Rimmington 1965: 177), hardly a success story. Many of the Africans who became master farmers were enterprising village headmen, or were civil servants, or men who already held substantial property. But the Master Farmers Scheme had only a ‘limited success’, for the progressive farmers often provoked resentment among their village neighbours, that sometimes led to accusations of ‘witchcraft’ (*ufiti*), and, coming at a time when the Central African Federation was being established, the master farmers were often accused of being ‘stooges’ of the colonial government. In some rural areas the Nyasaland African Congress actively led a campaign against progressive farmers. When Kamuzu Banda became Minister of Natural Resources in September 1961 he abolished the Master Farmers’ Scheme.

Rather ironically, despite the abusive remarks that Banda often made about Kettlewell, the two men had much in common, both being staunch advocates of capitalist farming, Banda even exploiting tenants on his numerous tobacco estates as cheap agricultural labour! Thus only eight years later—in 1969—Banda initiated a scheme very similar to that of the Master Farmers Scheme, to encourage the development of a class of individual progressive farmers. These were known as *achikumbe* (*mchikumbe*, a great cultivator). Such farmers were given ready access to credit facilities, favoured treatment by the agricultural extension services, and encouraged to act as ‘middlemen’ between ordinary peasants and the Farmer’s Marketing Board. Though supported by Banda, the *achikumbe* scheme was viewed by ordinary peasants as unfair in principle, and politically motivated—and it was thus generally ignored. In any case, Banda was always eager to support the estate sector of the economy rather than peasant agriculture (Vail 1983: 74–75).

3 THE FAMINE OF 1949

One of the outcomes of the cash crop ‘boom’ of the post-war years, particularly the rise in the price of the tobacco crop, was the ‘explosive growth’ of Blantyre township. This contrasted with the more leisurely expansion of the protectorate capital at Zomba. From its inception in the 1870s Blantyre had fulfilled David Livingstone’s dream of combining Christianity and commerce. The Church of Scotland had pioneered urban settlement in Blantyre, while the African Lakes Company had established its headquarters at Mandala, and the rival trading company of Eugene Sharrer—the renowned land speculator and entrepreneur (see below)—was based at Kabula (McCracken 2012: 285–286).

During the 1930s Limbe, some five miles from Blantyre had become, with the creation of the Tobacco Auctions, the centre of the tobacco industry. Here the tobacco crop was sold, already graded by the grower, packed in bales and despatched by train from Limbe station for export (Matthews and Wilshaw 1992: 39). Limbe was also the headquarters of the Nyasaland (Shire) Railway Company, which had its major workshops in the town, the majority of its employees being housed on nearby Mpingwe hill. These two developments led to a large influx of Indian traders into Limbe.

In 1945 there were around 13,000 people living in the Blantyre-Limbe townships, of whom around 500 were Europeans and 1000 Asians—mostly Indian traders. In an important sense Blantyre-Limbe became the commercial capital of Nyasaland, specifically the Shire Highlands, and was closely tied to the European plantation economy. Indeed, around half of the Blantyre district was owned by Europeans as private estates, and Blantyre-Limbe essentially provided a manufacturing and servicing industry for the European estates—both the tobacco estates and the tea estates of Thyolo and Mulanje.

Blantyre itself was racially segregated, with Asians living mainly in a crowded central location, while Europeans resided in the more leafy suburbs of Nyambadwe, Kabula and the aptly named Sunnyside—living in spacious bungalows, with servant quarters and landscaped gardens. No Africans resided in the township, except as domestic servants; they lived in a number of quasi-villages or peri-urban settlements on the fringes of Blantyre-Limbe townships. Such settlements were located around the foothills of Ndirande, Soche and Michiru mountains, and on Mpingwe hill. Here women cultivated maize and a variety of other crops, while most

men worked in the town, travelling daily into the township. In the 1950s it was estimated that around 3000 people—variously identified as Mang'anja, Yao, Lomwe and Ngoni—had made their homes in the vicinity of Ndirande Mountain. By 1956 the total population of Blantyre–Limbe had increased fourfold within a decade, and had reached close to 55,000 people (Bettison 1958; Vaughan 1987: 21–22; McCracken 2012: 286–292).

What emerged within the urban context of Blantyre–Limbe was a number of 'native industries' (as it was then described), ranging from women brewing and selling beer, to a variety of petty traders selling *dimba* vegetables, fruits (such as pineapple, pawpaw and bananas) and meat. African entrepreneurs, men such as Lali Labani and Lawrence Makata, came to have an increasing impact on urban life, whether as haulage contractors, brick-makers or timber merchants. In 1953 self-made African businessmen, many educated through the Blantyre mission, formed the African Chamber of Commerce—a challenge to the economic hegemony of the Asian traders and European commercial and planting interests (McCracken 2012: 294–299).

The catastrophic outbreak of famine in 1949 seems to have affected the Shire Highlands, although serious food shortages also occurred along the Dedza lakeshore and at Port Herald (Nsanje) in the Lower Shire Valley. The main famine area, however, seems to have been in the Blantyre district, especially around Lunzu and Lirangwe to the north of Blantyre township. The year 1947 in the Shire Highlands had been the 'year of the locust'. Many crops had been destroyed and few granaries were full. The rainy season 1948–1949 began well, it seems, but at the end of December the rains completely ceased. In January, usually the wettest month, almost no rain fell at all. The drought had serious consequences for food production in the Shire Highlands, and the government immediately declared a state of emergency. Local people resorted to rain rituals, making offerings (*kut-sira nsembe*) to the ancestral spirits (*mizimu ya makolo*), and some men, especially brick-makers, were accused of being witches (*afiti*) in that they were alleged, through powerful medicines, to have bound or tied the rains (*kumanga mvula*) to the detriment of communal well-being (Morris 2000: 207). But, according to Megan Vaughan's illuminating study of the 1949 famine, the consensus seems to have been that the lack of rains was an act of god (*mulungu*) and therefore 'could not be attributed to human action or the anger of the ancestors' (1987: 30).

It was not until the following year—January 1950—that the full impact of the famine became evident. In spite of government relief efforts under

Colby, around 200 people are recorded as dying of starvation. But as Vaughan emphasized, oral accounts suggest that many more people died, especially young children and elderly folk, than came to the notice of the colonial authorities. Also, countless people must have succumbed to diseases—malaria, dysentery, tuberculosis, measles—as a result of the lack of food (Vaughan 1987: 47; McCracken 2012: 253, for a brief but excellent discussion of the famine see White 1987: 205–209).

Scholars have long made a distinction between local seasonal hunger (*njala*) and famines (*chaola*—although this term has largely fallen into disuse). But setting up a radical dichotomy between the two concepts, in terms of two contrasting representations of time (Mandala 2005) seems somewhat misleading; for both *njala* and periodic famines are unique events, and both are related to the failure of the seasonal hydrological cycle—from a human perspective.

Outbreaks of famine in the Shire Highlands have been relatively infrequent events. Two outbreaks are noteworthy. In 1861–1863, at a time when the Universities Mission to Central Africa was based at Magomero, a serious drought struck the Shire Highlands. It severely disrupted agriculture and caused massive famine. But, as we discussed earlier, this was a time—the late nineteenth century—of acute political dislocation throughout the Shire Highlands, due to the Yao invasion and the intrusion and ravages of the slave trade.

Another famine occurred in the years 1922–1923, which was particularly disruptive in the Chiradzulu district and the Lower Shire Valley. It was known as ‘*Mwamthota*’ or ‘*Kherekhe*’—the latter term being derived from the name of the agricultural officer N.D. Clegg who organized famine relief at Chiromo. The famine, according to Mandala, had a strong impact on the social structure of the Lower Shire Valley, initiating cotton production as a new ‘way of life’ in the valley. It also led to many Mang’anja moving into the Shire Highlands, never to return (Mandala 1990: 177–178, 2005: 71).

During the 1949 famine in the Shire Highlands, many people almost reverted to a hunter-gathering existence—attempting to survive by trapping birds, capturing edible insects and small mammals, and searching for what has been described as ‘famine foods’. These include several varieties of wild yam (*mpama wam’thengo*, *Dioscorea* spp.); wild beans such as *chitedze* (*Mucuna pruriens*) and *kalongonda* (*Stizolobium aterrimum*); tubers of ground orchids (*chanaka*, *Disa* spp., *Salyprium* spp.); the roots of the water lily (*chikolwa*, *Nymphaea caerulea*); and the edible fruits of

many trees—particularly *bwemba* (*Tamarindus indica*), *msuku* (*Uapaca kirkiana*), *mpoza* (*Annona senegalensis*) and *mtbudzu* (*Flacourtia indica*), as well as the leaves of many wild herbs (Williamson 1975).

Seasonal hunger, familiarly known as *njala*, which becomes acute in the early part of the rains (December–February), when many households had used up existing stocks of food, seems to have been common among many subsistence cultivators in the Shire Highlands throughout the colonial period. Its impact was variable: from year to year, between village communities in different parts of the highlands, and even between households in the same village. It seems, nevertheless, to have had a ubiquitous presence. Vaughan remarks that for some communities, food shortages at the *njala* season were almost an ‘annual event’ (1987: 29). Likewise, Elias Mandala, who in his earlier study (1990) barely mentions *njala* (seasonal hunger), later writes of people in the Lower Shire Valley as being ‘perennially hungry’ (2005: 171).

What has to be recognized, of course, is that life for African subsistence farmers in the Shire Highlands has always been one that was fragile and precarious, given that the very viability of agriculture, and thus basic livelihood, was ultimately dependent upon the amount and timing of the annual rainfall. Small wonder, as Vaughan affirmed, that religious ideology and chiefly authority in pre-colonial Southern Malawi was firmly based on rain-making powers—a veritable indication of ‘the ultimate vulnerability of the entire (social) system to natural disasters’ (1987: 54; cf. Schoffeleers 1972b; Rangeley 1963; Morris 2000: 191–219).

In order, therefore, to achieve some degree of economic security African subsistence agriculturalists in the Shire Highlands adopted certain forms of farm husbandry that would give them a degree of immunity from serious hunger (*njala*). For example: if at all possible African peasants cultivated small plots dispersed within the village lands, including a *dimba* garden near a stream or in a low-lying area (*dambo*). Inter-cropping was the norm, and in every garden (*munda*) high yielding crops such as maize (*chimanga*) and groundnuts (*ntedza*) were combined with drought-resistant crops, specifically sorghum (*mapira*), pigeon pea (*nandolo*) and certain varieties of cassava (*chinangwa*). As Vaughan succinctly expressed it: peasants farmers always attempted to make ‘the best use of the resources available and to minimize risks’ (1987: 115). Farmers also not only combined food and cash crops (such as tobacco and cotton), but were also deeply involved in selling surplus food crops in local markets—in order to obtain money for taxes, cloth, soap, hoes, salt or for foodstuffs that they themselves were lacking. Even an elderly woman, living alone, would

market some of the food crops she produced in order to obtain certain other basic necessities. As Vaughan well expressed it: ‘Subsistence in Southern Malawi had long been predicated on some degree of exchange’; most people in the Shire Highlands were dependent on the market for a ‘large part of their subsistence needs’ (Vaughan 1987: 155).

Equally important, most people were also engaged, to some degree, in paid labour—whether as wage labourers on tobacco farms or tea estates, or simply as local agricultural *ganyu* workers within the village context. Throughout the colonial period young men forsook their home villages (and their wives) to work as migrant labourers in the South African mines or in the Rhodesias. They usually kept in close contact with their family household by means of remittances. At the time of the famine it was estimated that each migrant labourer remitted around £9 per annum to his family (Vaughan 1987: 128).

Thus, a typical African household in the Shire Highlands during the post-war years depended upon intensive crop husbandry during the rainy seasons, the marketing of both food and cash crops, and some engagement with paid labour in order to meet their basic subsistence needs. Equally important were the various forms of ‘native industries’ aforementioned, which developed in these years, especially in the vicinity of the Blantyre–Limbe township. African people in the Shire Highlands were not subsistence farmers in any narrow sense; nor was *njala* very far from their door.

The social history of the 1949 famine in the Shire Highlands has been well described by Megan Vaughan (1987) in her seminal study. I have no wish to simply recapitulate her work here: but it may be useful to highlight a number of key themes that emerge from her analysis of the famine. It was hardly unexpected that Kettlewell and the government administration generally, as well as the majority of the European planters—as represented by the settler newspaper the *Nyasaland Times*—tended to interpret the famine in terms of neo-Malthusian theory. They saw a direct link between population pressure and the famine. Although population figures are often unreliable the estimated population of the Shire Highlands around 1950 was as shown in Table 9.1.

Many parts of the Shire Highlands were thus adjudged by the colonial administration to be highly congested—overpopulated—principally as a result of the large influx of Lomwe people into the region. The population was thus deemed to be beyond the carrying capacity of the land—as reflected in declining crop yields and an increasing shortage of land per household. As the Director of Agriculture expressed it in a memo (May 1946):

Table 9.1 The estimated population of the Shire Highlands around 1950

<i>District</i>	<i>Area (sq miles)</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Population density (per sq mile)</i>
Zomba	2723	271,000	100
Blantyre	1880	280,000	149
Thyolo	773	133,000	209
Mulanje	1291	273,000	211
Total	6667	957,000	144 average

Pike and Rimmington 1965: 220

‘The rapid increase in population and the expansion of the area devoted to economic crops, combined with the steady loss of soil fertility, can only lead eventually to a failure to produce sufficient food to feed the population’ (MNA/MP 35/26; Vaughan 1987: 67).

Population pressure, an expansion of cash crops (such as tobacco), and poor husbandry on the part of the African cultivator, would inevitably lead, the Department of Agriculture felt, to an ecological crisis. This scenario was even more strikingly expressed a decade earlier by the General Manager of the British Central Africa Company, Kaye Nicol. In a memo (October 1933) he wrote: ‘If the natives of this country are left to their own devices they will *starve themselves* in a very few years—soil erosion, deforestation, poor husbandry, and complete disregard for soil fertility will completely impoverish the land of this country’ (MNA/A3/2/156; Vaughan 1987: 64).

This widely held view was echoed by the Travers Lacey’s report into emigrant labour published in 1936. The report suggested that the ‘devastation’ to the thickly populated areas of the Shire Highlands—through ‘deforestation, soil erosion and soil exhaustion caused by bad methods of cultivation’—would inevitably lead to much of the country being ‘unable to carry any population at all’ (Lacey 1936: 22).

Vaughan emphasized that this Neo-Malthusian theory—which implied that the famine was due to ecological deterioration brought about by population pressure and destructive African farming practices—was highly popular amongst colonial officials both in the districts and in the Department of Agriculture (1987: 50).

But this theory is hardly tenable. The concept of ‘carrying capacity’ is itself highly problematic for the productivity of the land in the Shire Highlands was not only highly variable, but depended to an important degree on the level of labour (energy) input. The depiction of African agriculture by European planters and colonial administrators was also highly suspect and prejudiced, for they took no account at all of human agency, and of the ability of African people, through their agricultural practices and social systems to ‘adapt, adjust to, and survive changing circumstances’ (Vaughan 1987: 69).

A second alternative explanation of the 1949 famine was particularly well expressed by European planters, who resented the fact that the colonial government had increasingly encouraged and supported independent African tobacco farming on trust land. This was the ‘substitution’ theory, which stressed that the shift towards tobacco production and the growing of export crops had been to the detriment of food production, and thus was largely responsible for the famine. There is an element of truth in this interpretation of the famine, as Vaughan admits, for tobacco production certainly did compete with food production with respect to limited family labour. But the actual situation was far more complex, for many people who suffered from the famine grew no tobacco, while successful African tobacco farmers were generally self-sufficient in food, as were African entrepreneurs and those teachers and civil servants who had invested in land or established business enterprises (Vaughan 1987: 85–86).

The 1949 famine had, of course, a deep impact on the social life of the people of the Shire Highlands—the government prohibited the brewing of beer by local women, people quickly sold their livestock—specifically goats and chickens, petty thefts of food became more common; and there was a steep rise in the price of maize (Vaughan 1987: 31–38). But Vaughan was particularly concerned with situating the famine within the socio-economic history of the Shire Highlands, particularly the impact of the food crisis on gender relations and on family and kinship structures.

As we have discussed in Chap. 3, social life in the Shire Highlands during the colonial period was centred on three basic social institutions—the village community (*mudzi*) under the authority of a chief (*mfumu*), usually a man who married virilocally; the family-household (*banja*), the primary economy unit; and a group of matrilineally related women or sororate group (*mbumba*). All three institutions were put under considerable strain during the famine.

One crucial feature of the famine was that many men, who usually married uxorilocally, left their spouses to seek food elsewhere, often travelling great distances, sometimes never returning. Village headmen therefore, although they themselves were generally self-sufficient in food in having above-average land holdings, found it difficult to maintain the integrity of the village community—give the ‘mass migration of men from their villages’ (as Vaughan described it) (1987: 123).

Although the family household was the basic productive unit among the subsistence agriculturalists of the Shire Highlands, divorce was easily obtained, and marriage ties were often ephemeral and fragile. Under famine conditions this family unit was increasingly ‘pulled asunder’, as men deserted their wives in a search for food. In oral accounts, and in pounding songs, women were often highly critical of the men who had abandoned them in a time of need, and sometimes cynical about marriage, for it was felt that it was the duty of the husband (*mwamuna wanga*, my man) to find food for his wife and immediate family in times of crisis. Only marriages that were ‘good and strong’ survived the famine (Vaughan 1987: 32–35; White 1987: 209).

The group of matrilineally related women or sororate group (*mbumba*), usually, as earlier noted, under the guardianship or protection of a maternal uncle or elder brother, was not an economic unit in a productive sense. But the women of the *mbumba*, essentially a coterie of sisters, were closely involved with each other in terms of an ethos of sharing and mutual aid. They co-operated in the harvesting of crops, collection of mushrooms from the woodlands, and in brewing beer, and, significantly, they usually ate together with their children (*chidyerano*) completely separate from their husbands and menfolk. Although each woman cultivated her own garden, and had her own granary (*nkhoekwe*), the custom of communal eating meant that in practice a good deal of sharing took place. As Vaughan emphasized: ‘If a woman had been ill, if her husband had died or left, or if she had a large number of young children, she might find herself unable to produce enough food. In such a case her relatives, and especially her sisters, were likely to share some of their food with her, and usually this sharing took place at the stage of eating’ (1987: 55).

What seems evident is that, although during the early days of the famine food sharing between mothers and daughters and amongst sisters was still widely practised, as the famine wore on available food in the *mbumba* tended more and more to come from husbands and male kin—through wage employment or the result of men’s journeys to other

areas (Vaughan 1987: 137). A final theme worth noting is that the 1949 famine seems to have increased labour migration from the Shire Highlands, in spite of government restrictions.

Throughout the early part of the twentieth century, as many scholars have stressed, the colonial government struggled to establish an economic system that would maintain the colonial state as a viable entity. At different period the colonial administration put emphasis on one or other of three economic sectors—the European plantation economy, the peasant production of cash crops (especially cotton and tobacco) and the system of labour migration outside the country (Vail 1983; McCracken 1983, 2012: 83; Vaughan 1987: 78). The latter was always an intrinsic part of the socio-economic life of Africans in the Shire Highlands throughout the colonial period.

Table 9.2 shows the average percentage exodus of males over the age of 18 from the Shire Highlands around the time of the famine.

The *Department of Labour Report* for 1948 recorded that in the Southern Province as a whole around 6.4 % of adult men were absent as migrant workers—either working in the Rhodesias or the South African mines (Vaughan 1987: 103).

Both European planters and Church of Scotland missionaries had long been opposed to the emigration of young men from the protectorate—though for very different reasons. The planters, of course, were concerned with being able to draw upon a supply of labour, and estate owners always attempted to prevent their male tenants from emigrating. Much has been written by scholars on the issue of labour migration from the Nyasaland protectorate—whether or not it exacerbated rural poverty in the country: whether societies with matrilineal kinship systems, such as the Lomwe, Yao and Mang’anja, were ‘well adapted’ to high labour emigration; whether or

Table 9.2 Exodus of males over the age of 18 from the Shire Highlands during the 1949 famine

<i>District</i>	<i>Average (%)</i>
Zomba	4.2
Chiradzulu	11.5
Blantyre	6.0
Thyolo	3.4
Mulanje	5.9

not it retarded the development of African agriculture; or to what degree labour migration had a positive impact on the economy of the Shire Highlands with regard to the remittances sent to family-households and in providing capital and thus business opportunities for returning Africans as entrepreneurs or petty traders (Lacey 1936; Sanderson 1961; Boeder 1973; White 1987: 222–232; McCracken 2012: 256–260).

In 1974, following a plane crash in which many Malawians returning from the South African mines were killed, labour migration to both South Africa and the Rhodesias was severely curtailed. This accident happened to coincide with complaints from the tea companies in Mulanje and Thyolo regarding a shortage of labour. Henceforth, men were encouraged to take up employment either on the tea estates or on the tobacco estates in the Kasungu and Michinji districts, many of which were owned by President Kamuzu Banda and his entourage—at much lower wages than migrants were receiving in South Africa. Emphasizing that many rural households benefitted directly from labour migration in terms of capital and goods, McCracken concluded that ‘If there was one thing worse than working in South Africa, it was being deprived of the opportunity of doing so’ (White 1987: 232; McCracken 2012: 260).

But what was particularly significant about the 1949 famine was that it confirmed Colby’s and the Department of Agriculture’s neo-Malthusian views on an impending ecological crisis. It thus strengthened their resolve to develop African agriculture, through the Master Farmers Scheme, and through the implementation of soil-conservation measures by means of greater government intervention (Vaughan 1987: 148).

4 THE ABRAHAMS REPORT AND THE LAND ACQUISITIONS

Towards the close of the Second World War (1943–1945) there were severe political disturbances in both the Blantyre and Thyolo districts, when African tenants were given eviction orders by several European estates—*notices to quit the land*.

The main culprit was the British Central Africa Company, which, together with another estate, attempted to evict 1250 tenants from their estates. Faced with the daunting prospect of having to re-settle this large number of people—totalling with their families over 5000 people—on already congested land in the Thyolo district, the government eventually persuaded them to evict only 120 families. This was done through the

‘political and tactful handling’ of the District Commissioner for Thyolo, H.V. MacDonald, who noted the bitterness and grievances felt by the estate tenants (Palmer 1986: 122; Baker 1993: 43).

These disturbances greatly troubled the Nyasaland government. In 1946 they therefore appointed the distinguished colonial official and ex-Chief Justice of Tanganyika, Sir Sidney Abrahams, to review all legislation relating to land issues in Nyasaland, and to report especially on the position of African tenants on European private estates, most of which were in the Shire Highlands.

Abrahams spent July to September 1946 on a one-man mission of enquiry, travelling widely throughout Nyasaland and collecting evidence from a wide variety of individuals, including African chiefs and members of the Nyasaland African Congress (Baker 1993: 47).

An astute lawyer Abrahams quickly recognized—and detailed in his report—that the basic problem was that there was an inherent conflict between European and African conceptions of land tenure. On the one hand, following European (capitalist) conceptions of private (freehold) land, European estate owners believed that they should have the right to rent, especially in the form of labour, and to select their own tenants and to evict them from the estate if they neglected their rent obligations or became troublesome.

On the other hand, African tenants, viewing land as communal property over which people only had usufruct rights, wanted and believed that they should have the right, just like fellow Africans on trust land, to live and work on the land without having to pay rent. They resented such rent payments, especially in the form of labour, and wished to live in security according to African customary law. They also wanted to be able to freely select their own employer, and to sell their cash crops to whom they pleased. Abrahams thus concluded that there was a deep conflict of interests over land between Europeans and Africans which simply could not be resolved by statutory means (Pachai 1978: 129–132; Baker 1993: 47–48).

In his report Abrahams explicitly outlined ‘three problems’ that he felt had to be faced and resolved with regard to land issues in Nyasaland. These were: the economic problem of the relief of congestion on African trust land; the political problem of responding to the deep sense of grievance that Africans expressed, in that European estate owners were holding large tracts of undeveloped land while Africans were suffering from acute ‘land hunger’; and, finally, the problem of ‘emancipating’ (as Abrahams put it) the tenants residing on European private estates from the deeply unpopular *thangata* system (Baker 1993: 49).

Although Abrahams admitted that his report was based only on the ‘general impressions’ that he had acquired in touring the country, he nevertheless recommended that the government should attempt to obtain from European estate owners all those parts of their estates which were fully occupied by tenants, as well as all tracts of undeveloped land—then mostly under *Brachystegia* woodland. All Africans remaining on estate land, he suggested, should then enter into a form of contract with the estate owners in which they would agree to work for a certain period. The outcome, as McCracken contended, would be that ‘tenant status and thus *thangata* would be effectively abolished’ (2012: 307). Equally important, Abrahams suggested that if estate owners refused to negotiate, then the *compulsory* purchase of the estate by the government would be employed as a last resort. But one thing that the Abrahams report certainly *did* highlight was that there was a ‘strong feeling of injustice’ felt among the tenants on private estates (MNA/Report of the Land Commission 1946; Tangri 1975: 264; Pachai 1978: 132).

The government warmly accepted the report as a ‘clear sighted and helpful survey’ of the land question; in contrast Malcolm Barrow, representing settler interests, suggested that Abrahams’s report was an ‘airy-fairy’ and ‘mischievous’ document that did nothing to solve the difficult problems relating to land (Pachai 1978: 133; Baker 1993: 52; McCracken 2012: 306). With respect to the ‘land issue’ there was clearly a clash of interests between the colonial government and the European planting community. This effected negotiations between them throughout the 1950s.

Immediately Geoffrey Colby became Governor of the Nyasaland protectorate in 1948, he used the Land Planning Committee—a body that had been set up a year earlier—to set in motion various initiatives in order to implement the land reforms recommended by the Abrahams report. These were, essentially, the need to tackle the problem of congestion on African Trust land, and the abolition of the *thangata* system, both of which could be achieved, Colby felt, through the large-scale acquisition of undeveloped land belonging to the European private estates.

Although Colby recognized that the European-owned estates contributed significantly to the wealth of the country, especially through the growing of tea, tobacco and tung, he also recognized that several companies owned huge tracts of land, much of it completely undeveloped. Zoa estate, for example, one of Blantyre and East Africa’s estates in the Thyolo district, consisted of an area of land 19,760 acres in extent. Yet in the 1940s the estate had only 380 acres under tea, 100 acres under tung, and

some 12 acres of blue gum plantations (BEA archive, Lauderdale estate, Zoa reports). The remainder of the land consisted of scattered villages and their cultivations and extensive tracts of *Brachystegia* woodland in which wild animals were still common (Morris 1964).

Colby clearly felt that if the government could acquire these huge undeveloped areas of estate land, this would not only undermine the *thangata* system, but allow the resettlement of people from the more congested areas of the Shire Highlands. It was estimated that in some areas of the highlands the population density was around 400 people to the square mile (Baker 1993: 62). He was particularly concerned with three companies—which we briefly discussed in Chap. 5—the British Central Africa Company, the A.L. Bruce Estates, and Blantyre and East Africa Ltd. Between them these three companies owned vast tracts of the Shire Highlands (and beyond) amounting to over 600,000 acres (around 1000 square miles, 2500 square km). It is noteworthy that the Land Planning Committee included not only government administrators and representatives of the African Lakes Company and the Livingstonia and Blantyre missions, but the general managers of these three companies, respectively, Kaye Nicol, J. Sibbald and William Tait Bowie. Along with Malcolm Barrow, these three men represented the interests of the European estates and the planting community more generally, and certainly played an important role in the negotiations with government regarding the land sales and the *thangata* system—forcing a number of concessions and curtailing the more radical reforms that Abrahams had clearly envisaged. Needless to say, there were no Africans on the planning committee (Baker 1993: 52–53; McCracken 2012: 307).

In their initial deliberations the Land Planning Committee recommended the purchase by government of 545,857 acres (221,000 ha) of the protectorate's private land holdings, most of which was in the Shire Highlands—some 75 % (407,844 acres, 165,000 ha). Table 9.3 shows the recommended government purchases of private estate lands in the Shire Highlands.

In discussing these land sales it may be useful to focus on the three aforementioned companies, the British Central Africa Company, A.L. Bruce Estates, and Blantyre and East Africa Ltd, for they were the great land-owners of the Shire Highlands, and had the most protracted negotiations with the colonial state.

Colby recognized at the outset that he was likely to have the greatest difficulty, in regard to the land sales, with the British Central Africa Company—partly because of the size and location of its land holdings—of

Table 9.3 Recommended government purchases of private estate lands in the Shire Highlands

<i>District</i>	<i>Acreage</i>
Zomba	235,502
Blantyre	103,592
Thyolo	33,538
Mulanje	35,212
Total	407,844 acres

Baker 1993: 58

around 300,000 acres—most of which was undeveloped; and partly because of the negative and recalcitrant attitude of its General Manager, Kaye Nicol, both towards the government and towards his African tenants—and this, for Colby, was a potential source of serious political unrest (Baker 1993: 80).

The British Central Africa Company had its origins at the end of the nineteenth century, and, as we have earlier discussed, was largely associated with the German trader, land speculator and highly enterprising entrepreneur, Eugene Sharrer, who founded the company in 1902. Initially, the company concentrated on trading—through the Kabula Stores—and on water transport, but by the 1920s British Central Africa Company had come to focus mainly on plantation agriculture. It became the largest landowner in the Shire Highlands, owning 329,353 acres of freehold land, mainly in the Blantyre and Thyolo district, but including Chingale estate (130,000 acres) in the rain shadow west of Zomba, as well as estates in the Shire Valley such as Kupimbi estate (68,000 acres) and Chelumbe estate (150,000 acres) (Vaughan 1987: 61; Baker 1993: 81).

The company focussed on the production of cotton, sisal and tobacco, but its estates were rather mismanaged, an emphasis being put on sisal and cotton when they were ceasing to be viable as a plantation crop, rather than on the more lucrative tobacco. Some of its estates were hardly developed at all. The company always seemed to have had financial difficulties, and during the 1920s its estates in the Blantyre and Thyolo districts saw the ‘uncontrolled’ influx of a large number of Lomwe migrants from Mozambique, often settling on land that was later regarded as suitable for tea production. By 1935, however, the company had established around 950 acres of tea on their Mindali (2010 acres) and Chisunga (1754 acres) estates. Yet in 1947 only 6430 acres of their 329,354 acres (1332 square km) of land had been developed as company plantations (around 2 % of their holdings) while around 11,000 acres were leased to

other European planters. Thus large sections of the 300,000 acres of land in the Blantyre and Thyolo districts that were owned by the company were in fact being cultivated largely by African tenants (Baker 1993: 84).

But the relationship of the company, under Kaye Nicol, towards its African tenants was hardly congenial or cooperative. The company continually attempted to evict tenants from their estates, thus invoking a sense of insecurity among the tenants and a growing resentment towards the *thangata* system, and even refused to allow tenants to grow cash crops as a rebate for rents—as was the common practice on other estates. The company showed very little regard for the welfare of its tenants, and their estate managers, it was reported, tended to have a rather ‘unsympathetic and aggressive attitude’ towards Africans generally (Baker 1993: 62).

In spite of Colby’s insistence, the directors of British Central Africa, and their General Manager, Nicol, were initially very reluctant to sell their Thyolo estates to government. But they were only too willing to be rid of their Chingale estate, west of Zomba. During the inter-war years the company had leased parts of the estate to European tobacco farmers, but all had failed, and in 1949 an attempt to auction the estate was also unsuccessful. They therefore entered into negotiations with Colby who was eventually forced to pay a price of 12/6 per acre for Chingale estate.

The estate in 1948 became the focus of a resettlement scheme. Originally most of the inhabitants on the estate had been Mang’anja or Yao, but the majority of people who came to Chingale during the re-settlement scheme were Lomwe. Many of the villages became polyethnic through inter-marriages. The later history of the Chingale estate after the re-settlement scheme has been well described by John Kandawire, specifically in terms of local conflicts over land, and the complex relationship that developed between village headmen aspiring to government recognition and an emergent class of African entrepreneurs and petty traders (1979: 91–138).

Eventually in June 1955, after long protracted negotiations, even involving the colonial secretary, Oliver Lyttelton, an agreement was reached whereby the government purchased from the British Central Africa Company around 48,750 acres of land in the Thyolo district that was then occupied by African tenants. The price paid was £1 per acre, much to the satisfaction of the company (Baker 1993: 149; McCracken 2012: 334).

As we discussed in Chap. 6, the A.L. Bruce Estates at Magomero in the Chiradzulu district had long been a focus of discontent among the African peasantry. Like the British Central Africa Company, throughout the 1930s A.L. Bruce Estates Ltd was in financial difficulty, and its owner, A.L. Bruce,

to stay in business, had to accept a large bank overdraft and loans to cover his accumulated losses of more than £60,000 (White 1987: 171).

In 1928 largely through the initiative of the General Manager, Captain Kincaid-Smith, the Magomero Estate switched to the planting of dark-fired tobacco through tenant farming. Within four years the company had abandoned all its cotton plantations. Pioneered by Hynde and Stork at the turn of the century, dark-fired tobacco could—as Kincaid-Smith himself conceded

be very successfully grown by the individual native without a great deal of European supervision or expense or elaborate buildings ... with such an attractive and lucrative method of earning money, the native remaining his own master, and working when he felt inclined to do so, with an army of eager buyers ready to buy his product ... the rot has set in (MNA/COM 2/3/1. Memorandum to enquiry into the tobacco industry 1938; White 1987: 171).

Much happier growing cotton or flue-cured tobacco by plantation labour rather than tenant farming, problems soon emerged between the manager of Magomero estate and the African tenant-farmers growing dark-fired tobacco. In many ways like his predecessor, William J. Livingstone, Captain Kincaid-Smith was a large, bluff and rather aggressive individual, disliked by his fellow European planters, and expressing an ‘intense hatred’ towards his African tenants. The District Commissioner of Chiradzulu, K. Barnes, described him as a ‘menace to the district’ (White 1987: 172). But, like William Livingstone, he made one important contribution to the Nyasaland economy; he negotiated a contract with the United Africa Company to supply dark-fired tobacco to the West African market. Thus, tobacco production through tenant farming began to flourish on Magomero estate, the average African grower producing 120 lb of cured tobacco for sale to Kincaid-Smith in lieu of *thangata* rent (White 1987: 172; McCracken 2012: 254).

The first problem was that many of the African tobacco growers often sold their tobacco crop to buyers outside the estate—much to the chagrin of Kincaid-Smith. In 1937 this led to serious disturbances on the estate as Kincaid-Smith attempted to aggressively curb this practice.

The second was that Kincaid-Smith introduced a deferred credit system whereby tenants were given a signed ‘chit’ when they handed in their tobacco, on the understanding that they would be paid when the tobacco

crop and been graded and sold. Unfortunately, and seemingly characteristically, Kincaid-Smith rarely honoured these 'chits'. He even complained that the African tenants were planting too much maize at the expense of the *thangata* tobacco. Equally significantly, he withheld the wages of some of his European staff and was soon in debt to almost everyone in the district. Severe disturbances at Magomero at the outbreak of the Second World War were just too much for the government: the governor transferred Kincaid-Smith to an army posting in Nairobi, where he would be 'out of harm's way'. J. Sibbald took over as manager of the Magomero estate in 1939, and the *thangata* system though not abolished, was no longer enforced on the estate (White 1987: 195–198).

As the end of the Second World War, faced with mounting debts, A.L. Bruce, the owner of Magomero estate, decided to sell the estate(s). In 1945 he offered the complete estate—of some 167,794 acres (68,000 ha)—to the government, and although the governor Edmund Richards was keen to buy, the offer of five shillings an acre was rejected by the Bruce estates. During the next five years, largely unbeknown to the government, A.L. Bruce sold over half the estate—some 92,794 acres—to 17 private individuals and companies, at around £2 per acre. These new private European estates were situated in the more fertile and well-watered sections of the Magomero estate. The lion's share, a block of land of 40,000 acres south of the Namadzi river, was bought by the Thyolo planter and entrepreneur, Ignaco Conforzi, who there started to plant coffee and tobacco, as well as maize for his Thyolo tea estates. Some of these transactions involved members of the government's own Land Planning Committee, such as Malcolm Barrow, who bought 2250 acres at Chimwalira for the Nyasa Tea Estates and used it for cattle ranching. Lujeri Tea Estates likewise acquired a combination of estates—some 3000 acres—for growing maize with which to feed the labour on their tea estates in Mulanje—something that Colby came to insist upon after the 1949 famine. Finally, among the larger holdings, Chikomwe Farms bought two plots of land totalling 12,000 acres (White 1987: 209–211; Baker 1993: 90).

The remainder of the Magomero estate, the less fertile eastern part, consisting of some 75,000 acres of varied terrain, was offered, finally, to the government, who purchased it in 1952 at 12/6 per acre. With respect to this land the government decided to initiate a land re-settlement scheme. This would involve the re-settlement on the land of the displaced tenants from the privately owned land in the Thyolo and Chiradzulu districts—around 3000 people. Significantly, following suggestions made by

Judge Joseph Nunan in 1903 (Baker 1993: 4), people were re-settled on eight-acre plots, centred on a man as the head of the family, and expected to follow a four-year crop rotation system, as well as observing the regulations relating to soil conservation.

The officer-in-charge of the re-settlement scheme was Eric Emtage. An amiable and cultured man, Emtage had come to Nyasaland in 1923, aged just 21, to work for British Central Africa. Having spent 25 years in the Shire Highlands, he was a man of wide experience, having been engaged in the production of dark-fired tobacco (near Lunzu), as well as being a tea planter for many years in Mulanje, for the Ruo estates (obituary, *Society of Malawi Journal* 4/1: 87–88, 1995). It is evident from his reminiscences and from government reports—graphically described by Landeg White—that the re-settlement scheme did not develop according to plan. The African settlers—all experienced subsistence cultivators—did what they thought best in order to adapt to the new environmental conditions, abandoning the cropping schedule, and concentrating on the cultivation of cassava, sweet potato and sorghum—particularly as ‘insurance’ crops. Interestingly, White quotes Emtage, who in his retirement argued that the Lomwe devotion to the pigeon-pea [*nandolo*, *Cajanus cajan*] had ‘saved the life of that land’ (White 1987: 211–216; Mulwafu 2011: 159–160).

Blantyre and East Africa Ltd, as we have discussed in earlier chapters, was one of the pioneering agricultural enterprises in Nyasaland. Formed in 1901 it was also one of the largest landowners in the Shire Highlands with estates in the Zomba, Blantyre, Thyolo and Mulanje districts, as well as holding land in the Chikwawa district. Its total land holdings in the Shire Highlands amounted to around 150,000 acres (60,000 ha). Throughout the 1930s the company established tea estates in the Thyolo and Mulanje districts—Lauderdale (the earliest), Limbuli, Glenorchy, Bandanga and Zoa—while continuing to produce tobacco—and other crops—through tenant farming on several estates that stretched from Domasi to the Chiradzulu district. The tobacco estates in the 1940s were managed by T.W. ‘Bill’ Williamson, who lived in Zomba, residing in John Buchanan’s old house at Mulunguzi, close to the secretariat. Williamson was devoted to Blantyre and East Africa Ltd, and presided over the establishment of tobacco nurseries on the various estates in the Zomba and Chiradzulu districts. Tobacco seedlings were grown there and given freely to African tobacco farmers, who produced and then sold the tobacco crop to the company. The tenants were required to pay *thangata* rent each year, and this was deducted from the monies the tobacco grower—the tenant—received

from the sale of the tobacco crop to the European planter—employed by Blantyre and East Africa Ltd. Flue-cured tobacco was also grown on some of the Zomba estates, and, as earlier noted, in the 1940s under Williamson's supervision many of the Zomba estates were also planted with tung trees (Baker 2012: 363–364).

It has been stressed that Blantyre and East Africa only developed a mere 35,000 acres of the company's vast holdings, although it has to be recognized that most of its estates in the Zomba and Chiradzulu districts were in fact *productive*, in the sense of being devoted to the cultivation of tobacco through tenant farming. This was the same system adopted by Barron and Wallace, and later by President Banda and his coterie, in the Mchinji, Lilongwe and Kasungu districts. But Blantyre and East Africa tended to maintain the tenant production of tobacco (and earlier cotton) as 'sidelines' in lieu of *thangata*, and thus, by focussing on tea production, did little to develop its vast holdings, as well as refusing to sell any of its land until after the Second World War (White 1987: 170).

The General Manager of Blantyre and East Africa, William Tait Bowie, who was a long standing member of the legislative council, was by all accounts an intelligent, genial and warm-hearted man, and seems to have got on well with the governor, Geoffrey Colby. Unfortunately, Tait Bowie died in 1949, and negotiations between the government and Blantyre and East Africa regarding the sale of the company's extensive land holdings became rather strained and protracted—though much less so than Colby's relations with Kaye Nicol and the British Central Africa Company. The land sales concerned two very different locations in the Shire Highlands—Zoa estate in the Thyolo district, and the various estates in the Zomba and Chiradzulu districts.

The sale of the vast Zoa estate, aside from the land retained by the company in the vicinity of the tea and tung plantations, and 100 acres at Tekerani, took place in 1955, shortly after the disturbances in the Thyolo district. It was offered to the government by the company at £1 per acre. The government, however, made an agricultural and 'user' survey of the Zoa estate, and its report was highly negative. The report described the estate as an area of 'steep hills and valleys' and noted that much of the area was covered with *Brachystegia* woodland, especially near Minkwe hill, chiefly of *tsamba* (*Brachystegia* spp.) and *musuku* (*Uapaca kirikiana*), with a few scattered *mlombwa* (*Pterocarpus angolensis*), and *mbawa* (*Khaya nyasica*) along the riparian tracts—both being important timber trees. The report noted that there were village communities in the alluvial 'valley bottoms',

with intensive cultivations, mainly of cassava (*chinangwa*) and pigeon pea (*nandolo*). But the survey report also highlighted that much of the woodland was being ‘destroyed by Lomwe methods of shifting cultivation’ and that ‘at present the inhabitants are felling trees and opening gardens with a wanton and deplorable enthusiasm.’ In the light of this report, the government considered the land on Zoa estate ‘for all practical purposes valueless’ and thus offered to pay the company only two shillings per acre for the land.

Understandably, the Assistant General Manager of Blantyre and East Africa, Harold McKay, writing on behalf of the company, considered this offer of two shillings per acre ‘ridiculous’ and derisory, that the survey report was biased and misleading, and that, as the land was clearly unsuitable for any ‘re-settlement’ scheme, and thus did not fit Colby’s political agenda, the government was simply attempting to acquire the Zoa land ‘for as little as they can’. It appears a compromise was eventually reached—and that most of Zoa land was acquired by government at 12/6 per acre (BEA archives, Lauderdale estate, Zoa files).

During 1949–1950 Blantyre and East Africa also negotiated the sale to government of their other land holdings—specifically in the Zomba, Chiradzulu and Blantyre districts, as well as their estates in the Lower Shire Valley. The estates in the Shire Highlands included Ntonda (8000 acres), Chiradzulu (12,000 acres), Michiru (2000 acres) and Lunzu (5648 acres) in the Blantyre district, and numerous estates in the Zomba district. The agreed price for these estates was 12/6 per acre, although £3 per acre was paid for Mbeza estate (1186 acres) near Zomba. As the company had, for over 40 years, been purchasing tobacco on their estates from tenants, they requested the government that they should be allowed to continue this practice—continuing to buy tobacco from these lands. But the government under Colby, concerned to control the marketing of cash crops through State Marketing Boards, refused. Significantly, the government were also reluctant to allow Blantyre and East Africa to sell small plots of land near Zomba to African planters and entrepreneurs (BEA archives, Lauderdale estate, Zomba estates file).

Although the land acquisitions obtained by government, largely from the three major landowning companies—as initiated by Colby—were certainly significant, this did not entail an end to the *thangata* system, nor did it completely alleviate the grievances and the general discontent of the people of the Shire Highlands—especially in the Thyolo district.

5 THE 1953 DISTURBANCES IN THYOLO

It had long been recognized by the colonial government that the potential for conflict and political unrest was inherent in the land problem, and by purchasing around 300,000 acres of private land in the Shire Highlands Colby made some attempt—or at least hoped—to reduce the scope of the problem. But the land acquisitions in themselves did little to reduce the discontents of the people of the Shire Highlands, nor did it put an end to the *thangata* system.

In 1950 Colby set up a committee to consider ways in which the 1928 Africans on Private Estates Ordinance could be amended. Significantly the committee included the general managers of the two biggest land-owning companies—the British Central Africa Company (A.C. Dixon) and Blantyre and East Africa Limited (N.W. Raynor). Unlike the Land Planning Committee, however, the committee to look into the issue of *thangata* did at least include three Africans: Ellerton Mposa, Lewis Bandawe and Chief Chimombo. In its report the committee recommended a reduction in the eviction of tenants—who were to be evicted only for rent default or misconduct, or for essential ‘development’; and advocated that adequate notice should always be given for any evictions. The committee also expressed concern at the growing number of African planters who were cultivating ‘excessive acreages’ using paid *ganyu* labour as this would inevitably lead, the committee felt, to increased congestion or deprive other tenants of land.

The committee’s recommendations were largely incorporated into the 1952 Africans on Private Estates Ordinance, with the addition that the annual rent should be fixed at three times the minimum monthly wage. In 1952 this amounted to £2 12s 6d—a massive increase in relation to past rent. Such a rent obligation could be met either with a cash payment or by working on the estate in lieu of rent—but not by growing cash crops. The ordinance also seemed to imply that tenants had limited access to estate woodlands, and that there could, therefore, be restrictions on the cutting of timber for household purposes or trade, or the collection of firewood by local women resident on the estate (Pachai 1978: 138; Baker 1993: 93–96). In essence, nothing had really changed; the *thangata* system remained intact: Africans on private land were deemed tenants and had to pay an annual rent, either in cash or in the form of labour; and if they defaulted they were liable to be evicted from estate land.

During 1952–1953, even before the 1952 Ordinance became law, the General Manager of the British Central Africa Company, A.C. Dixon,

decided to ‘turn the screw on his tenants’ (as Robin Palmer graphically expressed it). In September 1952 he issued an estate circular in Chinyanja demanding immediately from his tenants the £2 12s 6d in rent, which was a massive increase from the earlier rent obligations of 20 shillings, and was tantamount to a demand for three months forced labour. Africans on the Thyolo estates of the British Central Africa Company refused to pay the higher rate of *thangata*, or even to work on their estates. They began to express their opposition not only to the company’s rangers but to the nearby Chief Bvumbwe, and to a local elder of the Independent Church of God. When the Thyolo District Commissioner, H.V. McDonald, attempted to intervene and mediate, Dixon, the General Manager responded by demanding government support in the eviction of over 3600 of the company’s tenants. Coming at a time when the Central African Federation was about to be imposed on the people of Nyasaland—much to Colby’s dismay—such *thangata* demands only heightened people’s fears of losing their land, of further land alienation to Europeans (McCracken 2012: 309–310).

African discontents over the land issue and *thangata* had not only been highlighted by Abrahams’s report, but had been constantly voiced by the Nyasaland African Congress since the mid-1940s. Encouraged by local Congress Party members, many of whom were estate tenants, it was announced that the ‘day of rents’ had passed, that the British Central Africa Company no longer held legal rights to the land, which in reality belonged to the African people of the Thyolo district. People thus began to resist any attempt at the enforced eviction of tenants, large crowds often gathering to thwart the efforts of the District Commissioner to issue eviction notices.

These disturbances spread to other estates in the Shire Highlands, the Thyolo district in particular. Tenants refused to meet their *thangata* (labour rent) obligations, or even to pay their taxes, and there was widespread trespass on estate lands. Women went into undeveloped land, cutting down trees, opening up cultivations and freely collecting firewood—demonstrating by their actions that these lands now belonged to local people (Tangri 1975: 263–266; Palmer 1986: 122–123; McCracken 2012: 309–310).

It is against this tense background of opposition to the *thangata* system and the accompanying rural discontent, that the Thyolo riots of August 1953 must be understood. It is generally recognized that the disturbances in the Thyolo district had their origins in an incident that took place on the Mangunda estate of John Tennett and Sons on 18 August 1953; but

equally important is the fact that only a few days earlier one of the managers of the British Central Africa Company, H.H. Percival, had stripped naked a woman he had caught collecting firewood on his estate. Taken together, these two incidents triggered widespread disturbances throughout the Thyolo district (McCracken 2012: 311).

John Tennett was a well-known, and among Europeans a well-respected tobacco farmer and entrepreneur. Born in Yorkshire, he had come to Nyasaland in 1902, aged just 20, to work as an engineer for the African Lakes Company. For some eight years he worked as a marine engineer on a riverboat steamer plying between Chinde, at the mouth of the River Zambezi, and the Shire River. On one of these trips to Chikwawa to buy cotton, Tennett decided to visit the Shire Highlands. The outcome was that he decided in 1920 to settle down and to buy land in the Highlands. He acquired land from the British Central Africa Company—at around four or five shillings an acre—in two quite separate locations—at Gomba (6000 acres) north of Chiromo where he focussed on cotton growing and cattle husbandry, and near Luchenza, between Thyolo and Mulanje.

At Luchenza Tennett acquired around 9000 acres (3600 ha), comprising, as they came to be developed, several separate estates. Notable among them were Luchenza estate (1576 acres), Mangunda estate (2000 acres) and Mikombo estate (3000 acres). In the early 1920s the Luchenza area was relatively sparsely populated with people; but with the influx of Lomwe people from Mozambique (discussed in Chap. 5), encouraged by Tennett to settle on his land, Tennett began developing his estates. He employed several European managers, concentrating mainly on tobacco production, but also planting rubber and blue gums—the latter as firewood for the production of fire-cured tobacco. In addition, he possessed several herds of cattle. At the end of the First World War Tennett also bought three American Packard lorries, and pioneered the transport of tea from the Mulanje and Thyolo tea estates to the railway siding at Luchenza, as well as the factory machinery for the expanding tea estates.

During the depression years of the early 1930s there was a serious slump in tobacco prices, and Tennett was not only forced, on one occasion to destroy 200 tons of tobacco—as he could not cover the high storage costs—but also to mortgage his estates. But, according to his eldest son Basil, Tennett, though a quiet man, had great determination and an indomitable spirit, and therefore decided to focus his energies on developing and expanding his haulage and transport business. Not until the end of the Second World War did Tennett manage to recover his mortgages

and his land from the banks. But, ever-resourceful, Tennett, in the late 1930s planted around 80 acres of citrus trees, bought from the Transvaal, grafting them on to local lemon trees (*ndimu*, *Citrus × limon*). By the late 1940s Tennett has established flourishing citrus orange groves at Luchenza, particularly on his Mangunda estate (Tennett 1978).

Three points are worth noting about the indomitable John Tennett. The first is that, like many of his European contemporaries, Tennett was an avid big-game hunter. A close friend of W.P. Ronaldson, Tennett often spent several weeks during the dry season (September–October) on hunting trips, especially to the Lower Shire Valley. His house at Luchenza, as I remember, was filled with hunting trophies. Secondly, although the viability of tobacco farming on his Luchenza estates—which flourished in the 1920s—depended entirely on Lomwe tenant labour, Tennett, again like many of his European contemporaries, always spoke of the Lomwe people with a certain contempt. As Tennett put it in a letter to the District Commissioner in Thyolo (November 1935):

The whole of my land has been deforested by these Anguru (Lomwe) and there is not a single indigenous tree left apart from those growing on the bank of the streams, the cutting of which I have forbidden. In a very short period the fertility of this land will either have been exhausted or washed away and will become a desert. These Anguru will then move of their own accord just like locusts, and will possibly go back to Portuguese territory whence they came (MNA/5/1/4/1; White 1987: 192).

Tennett seemed unaware that the development of his tobacco estates and citrus plantations was entirely dependent upon the labour of these ‘locusts’. Finally, Tennett, it is alleged, was intensely disliked by many of his tenants, both on account of his harshness towards his African labour, and the fact that he had, like Dixon of the British Central Africa Company, continually attempted to evict many Africans from his estates, even some who were long-standing tenants (Tangri 1975: 266).

In 1946 John Tennett’s eldest son Basil returned to Nyasaland—having spent the war years in Britain—and in 1952 Tennett’s business interests were incorporated as a limited company, John Tennett and Sons. Basil Tennett eventually became the managing director of the company, his father taking a back-seat. In 1950 Tennett sold the unprofitable Gomba estate to the government at five shillings an acre. Given the rise in the cost of living over the past 40 years, Tennett, in essence, sold the land at a loss (Tennett 1978).

In the early 1950s a great deal of thieving of the citrus oranges began to take place on Tennett's Mangunda estate. It was estimated that around half the annual crop was being stolen. In spite of the installation of around a dozen rangers to guard the orange plantations, and making continual complaints to the Thyolo police, thefts of oranges continued to take place. The police, however, suggested that if the company could catch the thieves they would be only too willing to prosecute them. Prior to the 1950s the theft of oranges (or any other crop) was virtually unknown.

Thus it was that on the evening of 18 August 1953, on learning that men carrying empty sacks had been observed on one of the estate roads, that an ambush was set to catch the thieves. It consisted of Basil Tennett, his brother Desmond, two friends and three African employees. They encountered five or six Africans, each carrying a sack of oranges, who, on being confronted dropped the bags and ran off amongst the nearby trees. Two of these men, however, were captured after a struggle, but on learning that a large crowd of armed Africans had gathered along the road, the Tennett's, anticipating trouble, decided to let the two men go free. The five bags of oranges were then loaded on to a small truck, and the party drove back to the estate offices.

Unfortunately, some Africans witnessing the affray in the dim light of evening, mistook the bags of oranges for the bodies of the two men whom they thought had been killed in the affray. And, as Arthur Westrop recorded, they raised the cry of '*chifwamba*'. This is the widespread notion that some Europeans are 'cannibals'—for human flesh was widely thought to be the most powerful of the chizimba medicines (Westrop 1964: 348–349; Morris 2009: 265; on *chifwamba* see Shepperson and Price 1958: 10; Chidzero 1981: 14; Vaughan 1987: 41).

The prevalence of the *chifwamba* beliefs at that time, is evidence of the social distance that had arisen between the European planters and their African tenants, most of whom were Lomwe. As McCracken aptly puts it; 'there could be no better metaphor for the fear-ridden character of social relationships in the Shire Highlands' (Boeder 1984: 78; McCracken 2012: 170).

What seemed to be a relatively trivial incident of orange stealing, quickly turned, given the *chifwamba* rumours into widespread unrest and hostility towards the Tennett family. On the following day, 19 August, a large crowd of mainly Lomwe people, armed with spears, bows and arrows and knobkerries, gathered at Tennett's house near Luchenza, demanding the bodies of the two men who they believed had been killed. By all accounts it was a

rather ‘ugly’ confrontation; the District Commissioner, R.D. Martin, read the ‘Riot Act’ in Chinyanja (which only a few heard), tear gas was used, and when the police attempted to disperse the crowd, two shots were fired, one accidentally injuring an African in the crowd, who later died in hospital. The following day, 20 August, Africans came to vent their anger at Europeans generally, and around 6000 Africans came to surround the Thyolo *boma*, demanding the release of a village headman Ngamwane, who had been arrested as one of the leading agitators at Luchenza. Eventually, he was released on bail and the crowd dispersed (Westrop 1964: 350; Rotberg 1965: 259–260; Boeder 1984: 78).

Riots and disturbances then erupted throughout the Shire Highlands, but particularly in the Thyolo district, completely disrupting the tea plantation economy. In the neighbourhood of Thyolo trees were felled and many of the main roads were blocked; telephone wires were cut and there were widespread acts of vandalism; workers went on strike on many of the tea estates throughout the district; an armed gang caused extensive damage to the factory and manager’s house on Makwasa estate; the homes and courthouses of many moderate chiefs such as Chief Ntondeza and Chief Chimombo were burnt down; and even the Seventh-Day Adventist Mission at Malamulo came under siege. At the end of August a group of armed Africans attempted to depose Chief Chitera. They stoned the police and, in the affray, the police killed two protestors as well as seriously wounding two more. For several weeks in the Thyolo district there was a widespread atmosphere of disaffection and disorder (Westrop 1964: 359–360; Rotberg 1965: 259–261; Tangri 1975: 266; McCracken 2012: 311). However, the Thyolo riots were relatively short-lived, and by the end of September Africans began drifting back to work on the tea estates.

The Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in the Southern Region of Nyasaland in August 1953, appointed by Colby, only reported on the first three days of the disturbances, and did not concern itself with the underlying causes. But there was no doubt, as Colby’s government clearly recognized, that the ‘disturbances were fundamentally the result of land grievances, among them a dislike of the tenant system (then) in force’—as the *Report of the Nyasaland Protectorate for 1953* put it (Baker 1993: 98). In fact, the Colby government explicitly put the blame for the 1953 disturbances in Thyolo on the *thangata* system—the resentment Africans felt with respect to the large tracts of undeveloped land on many private European estates, and the insecurity of tenants frequently threatened with eviction (Palmer 1986: 124). Identified as equally important as a

causal factor was the imposition of the Central African Federation—which Colby seems to have opposed—in August 1953. As Palmer emphasized, there is little doubt that ‘widespread opposition to the Federation throughout Nyasaland served to fan the flames of disaffection’ (1986: 125).

Needless to say, while European landowners and most planters in the Shire Highlands during the colonial period warmly supported closer union with the Rhodesias—for example, William Tait Bowie, L.J. Ramsey, Arthur Westrop and Malcolm Barrow—the majority of African people were vehemently opposed to the Federation. They felt that it would inevitably lead to Europeans taking more land. Not surprisingly, during the 1950s in the Shire Highlands hostility towards the *thangata* system and opposition against the Central African Federation were closely intertwined.

6 THE CONSERVATION CRUSADE IN THYOLO

The ‘violent disturbances’ and the civil unrest that erupted in the Shire Highlands during the 1950s were not only related to the widespread opposition against the Federation and long-standing disaffection with regard to the *thangata* system. They were also related to the deep resentment that many Africans expressed towards the agricultural rules that were being harshly imposed by the Colby administration, specifically through the Department of Agriculture headed by Richard Kettlewell.

As discussed in Chap. 8, throughout the late 1930s a conservation ethic had been developed, mainly by Topham and Clements, in response to what was then perceived as an ecological crisis, specifically related to ‘soil erosion’. It was felt by these ecological pioneers that there was a lack of knowledge on the part of Africans on how to deal with soil erosion—given their earlier reliance on shifting agriculture—and this led Topham and district officials from the late 1930s onwards to strongly advocate the need for soil conservation. It was especially necessary, Topham stressed in the hilly areas of the Thyolo and Chiradzulu districts. The Department of Agriculture therefore drafted a set of agricultural rules which embraced ridge cultivation (*misere*) and the construction of contour bunds (*milambala*); the adoption of a system of crop rotation; the preparation and hoeing of gardens at the correct time; burying all weeds and garden trash; protecting stream banks and hill forests; and, finally, storing grain efficiently—as advocated by the Department of Agriculture (MNA/A3/2/227).

It is evident, however, that many Africans recognized the need for soil-conservation measures, and complied voluntarily in the construction of

contour ridges and the burying of last year's trash as a green manure. In 1941 the District Commissioner of Chiradzulu reported that 80 % of gardens in the district had adopted contour ridges (*mizere, mitumbira*), instead of mound cultivation (*mathuthu*) (Boeder 1984: 75). Likewise, the Thyolo Soil Conservation Officer, J.M. Howlett, reported in the same year that ridge cultivation was being widely practised in the Chinyenyedi valley by African subsistence farmers. Most were recent Lomwe immigrants to the area (MNA/NSE 1/3/1).

Nevertheless, it is clear from Paul Topham's discussions with N.A. Ntondeza of the Thyolo district—when Topham was Chief Erosion Officer (in September 1937)—that the chief, though not opposed to ridge cultivation, was cognizant of the extra labour that the construction of bunds would entail, and deeply opposed to the 'compulsory interference' of the government into people's agricultural work and routines (MNA/A3/2/227).

However, during Colby's administration (1948–1956), eager to both increase agricultural productivity—especially food production after the 1949 famine—and to curb soil erosion (perceived as leading to an ecological disaster) there was a marked intensification of state intervention into peasant farming. The chief architect was the Director of Agriculture, Richard Kettlewell, who has been described as 'fanatical' in his desire to impose soil-conservation measures. These measures came to be known as *malimidwe*, which simply means farming or cultivation, but in the 1950s the term came to signify the coercive and oppressive government enforcement of the agricultural rules.

Such rules not only related to soil conservation but to all aspects of agricultural production—early preparation of the gardens, when to plant the various crops, the burying of crop residues, and the burning of specific cash crops at the end of the season in order to prevent the spread of crop diseases. The implementation of these agricultural rules and conservation measures has been described as 'draconian' for the failure to comply with the rules led to the uprooting of crops, heavy fines or to several months' imprisonment. During the 1950s, at a time when the Federation was being imposed, Africans throughout Nyasaland, in the Shire Highlands especially, became extremely angry and embittered against the colonial administration with respect to the *malimidwe* rules. This led to social protests throughout the Shire Highlands (Boeder 1984: 76; Mulwafu 2011: 143–154; McCracken 2012: 318–320).

It is worth noting that the Director of Agriculture prior to Kettlewell, P.B. Garnett, did not believe that any real progress in African agriculture could be achieved by mass legislation and state intervention. He felt rather that the rate of development was highly dependent upon the attitudes and the goodwill of the people themselves. But this approach was not heeded by Colby, who was deeply committed to the state control of peasant agriculture (McCracken 2012: 250).

The main reasons for the people's strong opposition to the government's soil-conservation strategy was that it involved a great deal of extra labour, particularly by women, and particularly during the dry season when people tended to have more leisure time, and were often engaged in conducting initiation rites or other local festivities. Equally, given the time and labour involved in the construction of bunds (*milambala*), and though acknowledging the fact that this *might* help to control soil erosion, people, nevertheless, generally felt that the practical benefits hardly matched the amount of labour involved. But the primary reason for people's aversion to Kettlewell's *malimidwe* rules, was that it often involved—on the part of the Department of Agriculture's advisory staff—coercion and intimidation, as well as a high degree of control over people's time and agricultural activities. Finally, as Abrahams recognized, the people of the Shire Highlands had a communal sense of property. They therefore opposed the creation of forest reserves, feeling that it restricted their use of woodland resources, to the benefit of Europeans. They opposed especially the attempt by the Colby government to monitor their agricultural activities and control their relationship to the land that they cultivated. As Wapu Mulwafu described the basic peasant outlook: 'The land and other natural resources were seen as theirs, over which they had unbridled control. But the introduction of new conservation laws appeared to have taken away their traditional rights of ownerships and control' (2011: 151–153).

Conflicts over land and the resistance of the people of the Shire Highlands to the government's *malimidwe* strategy—which was more of a political 'crusade' than a conservation 'song' (Mulwafu)—thus became a characteristic feature of peasant–state relations throughout the 1950s. The conservation strategy, represented, as Mulwafu stressed, an unprecedented interference with both local autonomy and people's control over scarce resources—both land and labour (2011: 143).

With respect to the soil-conservation rules, there was less intrusion by the government on European estates, even though there was a considerable amount of soil erosion on many of them. This had less to do with

a ‘racialized environmental policy’ (as Mulwafu contends) than with the plain fact that European estates were private property, over which the colonial state has little jurisdiction. As Mulwafu noted; ‘Estate owners were largely left to themselves and used the land in any way they wanted.’ The colonial government, through the Natural Resources Board, thus lacked both the capacity and the practical will to enforce soil-conservation measures on private European estates (Mulwafu 2011: 125–142). On private estates, therefore, rural protest focussed more on the *thangata* system, which African tenants increasingly refused to acknowledge, and often attempted to undermine.

Peasant resistance to Kettlewell’s conservation crusade was widespread throughout the Shire Highlands, but three locations are often highlighted in the literature as a foci of rural discontent and protest—Chiradzulu, Thyolo and Domasi.

When Eric Emtage (described above), as the re-settlement officer in the Chiradzulu district, attempted to introduce contour ridging and bunding in the dry season of 1953, both he and his *capitaos* were heckled and derided. Only the support and intervention of the elderly Yao chief, Mpama, kept the protests against the *malimidwe* within reasonable bounds. Not surprisingly, given Chief Mpama’s support for the government initiatives, his house and court were later burnt down, mainly by Lomwe protestors (White 1987: 220; McCracken 2012: 312, on other revolts and protests in the Chiradzulu district see Mulwafu 2011: 157–163).

There were widespread protests against soil conservation throughout the Thyolo district in the 1950s; in fact, such protests went back to the late 1930s. For Paul Topham always complained—as did the agricultural officer for Thyolo, A.P. Forbes—that Chief Nsabwe and Chief Ntondeza never expressed any real support, still less enthusiasm, for the erosion-prevention projects in the Masambanjati and Chinyenyedi areas, or for the protection of forest reserves (MNA/NSE 1/2/2).

Rural protests against soil conservation in the Thyolo district—the *Nkhondo ya milambala* (the War of the Bunds) as it was sometimes known—tends to be particularly associated with the charismatic figure of Wilfred Gudu, whom Bob Boeder described as the ‘lightning rod of discontent’ in the Thyolo district for much of the later colonial period (1984: 75). Born around 1890 at Machiringa village near Malamulo, Wilfred Gudu (Good) early in life became a student at the Seventh-Day Adventist Mission. This was a rather puritanical religious sect, strictly vegetarian, and opposed to polygamy, smoking, coffee and beer-drinking, as well as to

many aspects of local culture. In 1911 Gudu became a full church member, and for a while was a primary school teacher at one of the mission schools near Malabvi. There, it is said, Gudu became mentally ill, spending several weeks wandering naked in the bush.

But he soon broke with the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and in 1935, having been ‘caught by the spirit of Jehovah’, thus claiming to be divinely inspired, Gudu established his own church at Kaponda village near Molere. It was known as *Ana a Mulungu*, the children of God (not ‘sons’ of God as Mulwafu mistranslates it). He took the name of his new church from the book of Matthew, Chap. 5, Verse 9: ‘Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God’ (Chakanza 1998: 65).

At Kaponda village, Gudu built a brick house, and formed a closed religious community which he called *Zion ya Jehovah*, consisting of about 60 members, devotees of Gudu, mostly Lomwe people. It was a self-contained community, combining agricultural work in communal gardens, with various artisan trades—carpentry, pottery, shoe-making, cloth-weaving and building. As Boeder remarked, the village community entailed a unique combination of industrial activity and religious piety in the best traditions of the Scottish Presbyterian Missions in Nyasaland (1982: 7).

William Bithrey, who was the Commissioner for Police in Zomba, and the author of an introduction to Chinyanja, and who knew Gudu well, described the evangelist as an intelligent and well-educated person, constantly studying the Bible, and with a concern for equity and justice. But as a truculent personality, Gudu came into conflict with almost everyone outside his own religious community. He soon came into conflict with local Lomwe people near Molere over land, claiming that he ‘owned’ a large tract of land at Kaponda village—his claim was disputed—notwithstanding the fact that according to Mang’anja (and Lomwe) customary law no man could own land—whether or not divinely inspired.

Gudu may have been influenced by the watch-tower movement, and he possessed one of their religious tracts ‘Who Shall Rule the World?’ For Gudu the answer was self-evident, it was God: and he saw himself as the messenger or prophet of God, as the Second Jesus Christ (Chakanza 1998: 69–70). He thus refused to recognize the political authority not only of the colonial government, but also of the local chiefs—the ‘traditional authorities’. It is alleged that he deeply despised and ridiculed Chief Ntondeza, who was both a Kololo and uneducated. Gudu also expressed anti-European sentiments, and was particularly dismissive of local European planters. This did not stop him from selling maize to nearby tea estates,

maize produced, of course, not by himself, but by a coterie of women devotees. He was regarded as antagonistic to other Christian missions.

Having failed to get government support in his land disputes, or in his own bid to become a recognized chief (*mfumu*), Gudu, in August 1937, wrote a letter to the District Commissioner in Thyolo, Major S.G. Pegler, indicating that he and his Christian ‘followers’ would henceforth not pay tax to the ‘British Kingdom’ (MNA/1A/14/3; Boeder 1982: 9). Apparently God had come to Gudu in a dream, and told him that it was time to completely separate from Europeans, that he Wilfred Gudu was now the government, and that all taxpayers were ‘sons of evil’. In February 1938 Gudu was charged with not paying his government taxes, found guilty, and sentenced, along with some of his followers, to three months’ imprisonment with hard labour. He was to spend several years in prison, to be finally released in March 1942, when he returned to Zion ya Jehovah near Molere.

In this early period there is no mention of Gudu being opposed to agricultural rules, but a decade later, around 1952, Gudu again came into prominence, and attracted the attention of the colonial government’ this time for refusing to construct contour ridges and bunds on his land at Molere. Gudu was hardly unique in resisting the Department of Agriculture’s efforts to counter soil erosion in the hilly areas of Southern Thyolo, but he justified and sanctified his protest by reference to the Biblical injunction that ‘the waters of the earth shall run free’ (Westrop 1964: 30).

Colonial administrators and tea planters like Westrop thought of Gudu as a religious ‘fanatic’ and ‘egotist’, which was to some extent a valid depiction. There then arose a protracted and acrimonious confrontation between Gudu and the colonial government, represented in particular by Roger Royle, the Agricultural Officer for Thyolo. A genial man, born in Nyasaland, and a talented and experienced agriculturalist, Royle was later to become the director of one of Dr Banda’s pet projects—the Smallholder Tea Authority.

When Gudu adamantly refused to construct contour ridges and bunds on his land at Molere, Royle, together with members of the Natural Resource Board, and employing contract labourers, marked out and constructed the bunds. They then presented the evangelist with a bill of around £11, the money that had been spent on the work. When Gudu destroyed the bunds and refused to pay the money—significantly claiming that his land was private property and beyond state jurisdiction—he was charged with various agricultural offences and sentenced to three months

imprisonment. When he was released from prison Gudu was forbidden to cultivate his land at Molere, and went to live at Brumbwe near Limbe. He died in March 1963 at Zion ya Jehovah.

The tendency of scholars to depict Wilfred Gudu as a ‘proto-nationalist’ or even as a ‘Mang’anja nationalist’ seems somewhat misjudged. For Gudu was essentially a religious teacher and evangelist who believed he was a prophet of God. He was thus vehemently opposed to all state laws which he viewed as fundamentally unjust. And rather than being a unique religious figure, Gudu was a typical exemplar of Weber’s charismatic authority. It is doubtful if he would have been treated less harshly by the Banda regime, given the persecution, violence and cold-blooded murders that were meted out to members of the watch-tower movement—the Jehovah’s Witnesses—during the 1970s (Hodges 1976; Fiedler 1996; for important discussion of Gudu’s life and political theology see Boeder 1982, 1984: 39–43; Chakanza 1998: 58–99; Mulwafu 2011: 169–179).

7 THE DOMASI REBELLION

The disturbances at Domasi, north of Zomba, in August and September 1953 were far more serious than those at Molere, for good reasons.

In 1949 the colonial state established the Domasi Community Development Scheme, a four-year well-funded project designed to foster rural development in the widest sense. It concentrated on issues of local government, the district economy and land usage, and health—particularly in relation to bilharzia and malaria. But a particular emphasis was placed on ‘soil conservation’ within the Domasi district. The man in charge of the scheme was the District Commissioner for Domasi, T.D. Thomson, an intelligent and cultured man, a lawyer by training, and who, like Bithrey, had published an introduction to Chinyanja, being fluent in the language. But, as Mulwafu has noted, Thomson, like Colby was deeply committed to the implementation of conservation ideals (2011: 198).

The Domasi district had a population of around 15,000 people, most of whom were Yao together with some Nyanja and Lomwe. It had a high population density of around 500 people per square mile, and Thomson noted that ‘people talk of land hunger’ (1955: 45).

In his report of the scheme, Thomson described African husbandry in quite negative terms. He noted the following: there was no organized marketing of crops, although in 1953 a market for dried cassava and beans had been recently established; with a ‘psychological background’ of shifting

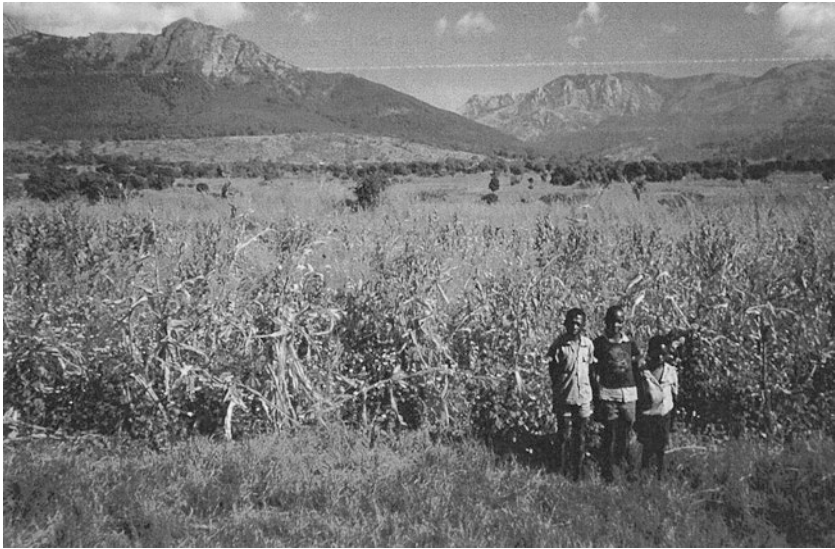


Fig. 9.1 Domasi Valley near Zomba, where political disturbances took place in 1953

Source: Brian Morris

cultivation there was little in the way of ridge cultivation; there was no early planting of crops—both garden preparation and planting being usually delayed until late in the season; land holdings were dispersed and fragmented, and apart from cassava, there was no ‘pure-stand’ planting of crops; and, finally, there was no planned crop rotation. Thomson noted, too, that there were serious crop losses from the depredations of bush pig and baboon, and that the average yield of maize in a good season was around 800 lb per acre (Thomson 1955: 39–48).

Thomson aimed to rectify what he considered were limitations in the agricultural economy of the district, through the implementation of the rules drawn up by the Natural Resources Board. But his particular focus was on soil conservation, and in 1950 a comprehensive programme was begun to establish ‘contour bunding’ throughout the district. The marking of the bunds was carried out by a team using road-tracers, the bunds being placed at three foot vertical intervals. Local people were then expected to construct the bunds, and to bring their planting ridges to conform to the contour bunds. Any delay or

refusal to construct the bunds was viewed as a breach of the conservation legislation and in 1951 there were 213 convictions for offences against these conservation rules.

Thomson, of course, recognized that soil conservation, especially bunding, was unpopular with local people, in that it meant a lot of extra work to construct and maintain the bunds, and that the bunding took a lot of land out of cultivation—around 10 %. Nevertheless, Thomson, a forceful and energetic administrator, was determined to enforce the soil-conservation measures, and many people were fined or made to perform public works for up to two months if they offended against the rules (Thomson 1955: 41–42).

Coming at a time when the Federation was being imposed, the implementation of the *malimidwe* rules was closely identified with the Federation. A widespread rebellion against these rules therefore erupted in the Domasi district during the dry season of 1953.

In his excellent study Wapu Mulwafu has described this rebellion, which has tended to be overlooked by other scholars (e.g. Baker 1993; McCracken 2012), at some length, focussing on the nature of the disturbances, and the reason why the peasants of the Domasi district strongly resisted the impositions of the colonial state (2011: 201–210).

Given the zeal, stridency and energy with which Thomson conducted his task and the magnitude of the peasant resistance, conflict seemed almost inevitable. As Mulwafu noted, Thomson worked relentlessly towards getting African compliance with the implementation of the conservation scheme. Thus, when he visited the villages Kapichi and Ng’ombe in Chief Malemia’s area, and found that only a few people had undertaken conservation measures in their gardens, Thomson immediately sent for the chief and detained him at the Domasi *boma*. News of the chief’s detention soon spread far and wide, and this angered and embittered many people in the Malemia domain who were opposed to the soil-conservation measures. The village headmen of Kapichi and Ng’ombe travelled to Domasi to check on the condition of their chief, and they were also detained. Fearing that Thomson was intending to take the men to court for trial, a large crowd gathered at the Domasi *boma* armed with bows and arrows, and spears. People began hurling sticks and stones at the district offices, breaking windows and injuring some of the government staff, and demanding the release of the chiefs. Thomson called the Zomba police for assistance, and in the ensuing affray there were three fatal casualties, one of whom was the village headman Ng’ombe (Mulwafu 2011: 204).

Mulwafu has explored the various factors that led to the Domasi rebellion; the peasant's deep-rooted grievances against the colonial state, their fervent opposition to the 'Federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland' and the anti-colonial sentiments expressed by many members of the Nyasaland African Congress who were associated with Domasi. He noted, too, the very practical reasons why local people opposed the Soil Conservation Scheme; namely, that it involved a lot of extra work to be undertaken during the dry season which was traditionally a time of Yao initiations and leisure activities; that the bunds took around 10 % of the land out of cultivation, and, finally, that the fragmentation of land holdings was done for very good ecological reasons (Mulwafu 2011: 207–209).

Of course, the primary reason that the people of the Domasi district rebelled against Thomson's soil-conservation scheme was that it was seen as an attack on their autonomy and their livelihood—for people wanted to retain their freedom to decide where to farm, how to organize their fields, and what crops to plant. To view Western agricultural science and local people's empirical knowledge as somehow 'incompatible' is, however, quite misleading. Both have their validity, and both have their limitations, and there has long been a mutual influence between these two forms of empirical knowledge (Mulwafu 2011: 206–207). The same could be said with regard to the relationship between medical science (biomedicine) and folk herbalism—for diseases, of course, are also a part of the human environment (Morris 1996a: 66–102).

By the end of September 1953, six people had been killed in the Shire Highlands during demonstrations—specifically against the *thangata* system and against the draconian imposition of the agricultural—*malimidwe*—rules.

This outburst of violence and loss of life greatly troubled the Nyasaland African Congress; through their president, James Chinyama, who was a successful African planter, they cancelled their programme of non-cooperation with the colonial government (Rotberg 1965: 262).

To conclude this chapter it is worth noting that when Dr Banda became Minister of Natural Resources in 1961, he did not repudiate the need for soil conservation, nor what he described as the 'modern methods of land use'. Thus in the 'Land and Protection Ordinance' of June 1962 he re-affirmed the validity of agricultural reforms in Nyasaland, in relation to such matters as soil erosion and agricultural regulations—'*malimidwe*'—including ridging, planting and harvesting. But this would be achieved, he wrote, through 'education and persuasion as opposed to coercion'. In the same year, Banda introduced another bill 'Africans on Private

Estates' (May 1962). Banda made no secret of the fact that he admired Abrahams's report, and abhorred the *thangata* system. The bill, therefore, essentially abolished *thangata*. Henceforth, European estates had to employ wage labour. He did not, however, proscribe the tenant system—which he later came to utilize on his own tobacco estates. As Colin Baker indicated, in terms of a development strategy for Nyasaland, Banda followed in the footsteps of Geoffrey Colby (MNA/1/9/6F 17550; Forest Policy 1961–1962; Pachai 1978: 149–150; Baker 2014: 14).

Conclusion

The fact that the world—the Earth—exists and has powers to act independently of humans, and that the human species is a relative late-comer in the history of life on earth, has led some academic philosophers to suggest, in nihilistic fashion, that the world is inherently hostile to humans, that it is not a home and that it has no meaning for humans.

This is patently untrue. For humans, like all other organisms, including humble bacteria, are in constant *interaction* with the world of nature; the world is therefore inherently meaningful to them, even if at times it may have a negative impact on their well-being. As many scholars have emphasized, for humans—and for all living things—there are indeed ‘signs of meaning’ in the universe.

Environmental history, as envisaged by Donald Worster and many other scholars, seeks to explore the relationship between history (time) and the environment (nature); that is, it is a scholarly inquiry into the complex, diverse—and meaningful—interactions between people as social beings and the natural world in which they live. It is, therefore, fundamentally concerned with ‘mutual relationships’—specifically between human societies and what the pioneer ecologist Arthur Tansley described as ecosystems, with respect to which humans are an intrinsic part. Whatever some philosophers may think, this earth is indeed a home for humans, as it is for many other life forms.

As a contribution to environmental history this present study has explored the history of the Shire Highlands landscape in Southern Malawi, from the late nineteenth century to the end of the colonial period, and it focussed on the complex inter-relationship between the people of these highlands—both Africans and Europeans—and the natural world, specifically the land and its biota.

In contrast to the Malawian scholar Elias Mandala, the study focussed not only on ‘cyclical time’, as expressed in the changing seasons and the agricultural cycle, and the ‘arrow of time’, as reflected in a sequence of unique events—I cover, for example, the Chilembwe rising of 1915 and the famine of 1946 as events—but also on time as a ‘historical process’. I thus discussed, in the study, several transformations. These include, for example, the declining patterns of shifting agriculture; the rise and fall of the Yeo chiefdoms during the nineteenth century, and the subsequent decline of the ivory and slave trade; the origins and evolution of the colonial state; and, finally, the large influx of Lomwe people into the highlands at the turn of the twentieth century.

But the study was especially concerned with two historical processes; the development of a plantation economy in the highlands, and the clashes which occurred between the colonial state, bent on the conservation of wildlife, forests and the soil, and the rural population—the African peasants who were largely engaged in subsistence agriculture.

The development of a plantation economy in the Shire Highlands in the early decades of the twentieth century was discussed at length in Chap. 5. This development involved several interdependent factors, namely, the alienation of large tracts of land in the highlands to European companies and individual planters; the influx of Lomwe people into the highlands, who came to provide an important source of estate labour; the development and consolidation of a system of forced labour rent, widely known as ‘*thangata*’; and, finally, the continued support of the colonial state. In the early colonial period, cotton and tobacco were the main plantation crops, and I discussed the ecology and production of both crops.

It is significant that the discussion of the Chilembwe rebellion in 1915 (in Chap. 6) emphasized that the rebellion was mainly focussed around land issues. For John Chilembwe closely identified with the Lomwe tenants working on the cotton estates of Magomero, who were experiencing the *thangata* system in its most brutal and oppressive form, as well as being closely associated with an emerging class of African planters. As petty capitalists, these planters, experiencing racial harassment and economic

restrictions, developed, as the study indicated, a strong antipathy towards both the colonial state and the European planters. Many, in fact, were ‘ringleaders’ in the revolt.

During the 1930s there was a further development of the plantation economy in the Thyolo and Mulanje districts with the expansion of the tea industry. Discussed at length in Chap. 7, the history of the tea estates centred specifically on issues relating to land and labour, and to the ecology of tea production.

While the first part of the study outlined the early history of the Shire Highlands and the development and expansion of the plantation economy, the second part was mainly concerned with what some historians have described as ‘conservation mania’ on the part of the colonial administration. The colonial state, as I discussed, expressed three concerns. The first was a serious decline in the wildlife population—specifically the larger game animals. But the conservation measures implemented by the government in the early decades of the twentieth century essentially prohibited subsistence hunting by Africans, restricting, through the game regulations, the hunting of game animals to the European elite—whether missionaries, administrators or planters.

The second concern was forest conservation, for the growth of human population and the expansion of plantation agriculture had led, by the 1930s, to the widespread deforestation of the Shire Highlands. This led to the creation of government forest reserves, and to tracts of *Brachystegia* woodland being demarcated as village forest areas.

Finally, in the aftermath of the ‘dust bowl’ phenomenon in the United States, the colonial government made a determined effort to introduce and promote soil-conservation programmes.

All three forms of state-sponsored conservation—of wildlife, woodlands and soil—as the study details in Chap. 8, seem to have been resented and at times even strongly resisted, by the African peoples of the Shire Highlands, concerned as they were with their own basic livelihood.

In the post-war years, the subject of the final chapter, growing opposition to the iniquities of the *thangata* system (which some European estates and planters rigidly enforced), and to the soil-conservation measures (which were being imposed by the colonial government in almost draconian fashion), led to widespread discontent throughout the Shire Highlands. The study closes with a detailed account of the ‘disturbances’ that erupted in 1953 in the Thyolo and Domasi districts, at a time when a Federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland was being imposed on the people of the protectorate, by the British government.

Overall, the study, following in the footsteps of Worster and other environmental historians, has attempted to portray the relationship between the people of the Shire Highlands, both Africans and Europeans, and the natural world in all its complexity. In particular, it has concentrated on issues concerning land—its soils, its vegetation and its wildlife—and the agrarian transformations that took place in the early years of the twentieth century.

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