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Imagined Communities: The British Planter in Nyasaland, 1890 - 1940

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“Imagined Communities: The British Planter in Nyasaland, 1890-1940”

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**Thesis submitted to the
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Abstract

The planters' Legacy in Nyasaland

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This thesis examines concepts of British settler identity and how it developed across trans-national bounds. Between the 19th and 20th centuries, the rise of industrialization and developments in transportation, mass communication and print media fueled a new wave of settler movements from Britain. As settlers spread to different continents, their identity as Britons was challenged in new ways. From this, a unique subgroup of settlers developed, known as planters. In this thesis, I examine the planter community that developed in the small South Central African country of Nyasaland, now Malawi. By examining Nyasaland's settler community as a case study, I show how the planters drew inspiration from other planting communities across the empire to develop an identity that strengthened their hold over the region. Though the planters failed in their attempt to create their imagined community, this thesis will show how they attempted to contribute to the trans-national planting class and how that shaped their perceived dominance over the African population.

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List of Abbreviations

ALC	Africa Lakes Company
BCA	British Central Africa
BCAP	British Central African Protectorate
BSAC	British South Africa Company
CAP	Central African Planter

Chapter One - Introduction

The term “planter”, and subsequently “plantation” in regards to an individual or group of individuals and their organization, was an established and tested concept developed in the 16th and 17th centuries. While subjugating the Gaels, in Ulster Ireland, the term “plantation” was used to describe a type of barrier between Britons and the Gaels. Plantations, as historian David Armitage proposed, were areas that separated the civilized Britons and the more barbaric Gaels. As he stated, “the Ulster plantation provided a buffer zone of civility and stability between the Gaels in Ireland and those in Scotland.”¹ The “planters” who lived and worked the Ulster plantation came to be seen, as David Armitage noted, as a new race of Britons. A planter became not only a cultivator of agricultural products, but also a builder of civilization and the British spirit on a global scale encouraging the expansion of the Anglo-World.² Indeed, by the 19th century, planters could be found throughout the British Empire from the Atlantic to the Pacific becoming the backbone to the British overseas markets.

Britain, up to the end of the 18th century and indeed well into the 19th century, remained a predominantly land-based society and most wealth and influence was derived from the land and those who owned it. In that respect the planter, as a distinct type of settler, has yet to be fully investigated as being part of their own class. There are many similarities and differences between the traditional settler and planter. Settlers are more often than not seen as the agents of

¹ David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 58.

² The term “Anglo-World” is best defined by James Belich in his groundbreaking work, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Belich observes that “such entities as the Anglo-World were politically divided and sub-global, yet transnational. Intercontinental far-flung. They comprised a shifting, varied, but interconnected melange of partners and subjects. Transfers of things, thoughts and people, lubricated by shared language and culture,” pg. 49.

expansionism, moving from their own countries to a new one with the intentions of establishing a permanent English foothold in the region.³ Planters, on the other hand, are a unique sub-group of settlers within the broader study of colonialism. They are the members of the community most responsible for experimenting with different cultivable crops and establishing agricultural exports. Planters were also the majority holders of land and land utilization. The historian John McCracken noted the difference between settler and planter, describing the latter as one who, “seeks to control the environment and produce as many crops as possible.”⁴ The two are linked through their mutual understanding of being immigrants to a new land sharing the same culture and language, but not the same identity.

The current historiography explores planters through the lens of each individual colony in which they were found, be it the land owning aristocracy in the southern United States or the sugar planters of West Indies. Research is largely focused on the “Planter Class” in the Americas, which conjures images of southern cotton plantations, slaves and large mansion-style houses. This image is too narrow however, as planters developed estates and plantations in different climates and biospheres and employed different techniques for cultivating their markets. In fact, they believed they were part of a global English Planter community that shared common traits and interests as well as a mutual understanding of their position and political power. In his renowned book on the formation of nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues communities separated by large distances can still form strong ties to each other through print media.⁵ This idea would become the basis of planter success.

³ Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 9.

⁴ John McCracken, *A History of Malawi: 1859-1966* (New York: James Currey, 2013), 12.

⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016), 7.

Anderson stated that, “an imagined political community is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. ‘Imagined’ because the members will never know most of their fellow comrades, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”⁶ Though Anderson is discussing “nationalism”, in that nation is linked to an idea of community that is territorially limited but is sovereign over that territory and contiguous, his idea can also be linked to transnationalism. Settler societies in tropical colonies like Africa are interesting in that they are an exception to traditional ideas of colonialism, where settler populations numbered in the hundreds of thousands or even millions. Roger Southall in his work on liberation movements in Africa stated that European communities in Africa fought back against decolonization, “they showed a marked capacity for independent capitalist development and because of that had evolved advanced class formations, making them reluctant to decolonization.”⁷ My work is focused on empires, which are not spatially limited or contiguous, but rather trans-national and trans-territorial. However it is linked through shared culture, language and identity. This was especially true for the planter community that settled the area in Central Africa, known then as the Nyasaland Protectorate.

Due in part to being a later addition to the colonial possessions of Britain, the Nyasaland planters had the benefit of looking to other colonies for inspiration. The planter community of this region saw themselves as the culmination of all the best traits of the planter class, and because of that felt as though they were impervious to change. This thesis will utilize the concepts developed by Anderson of an “imagined community” to explore the planter community which developed in Nyasaland between 1880 and 1964. How did they create their own identity

⁶ Ibid, 7.

⁷ Roger Southall, *Liberation Movements in Power: Party and State in Southern Africa* (New York: Boydell and Brewer, 2013), 17.

while maintaining connections to Britain? How did they organize and orient their community to correspond with the ideals of the Anglo-World and Britishness? And lastly, how did the community view and utilize the land and people around them for their gain?

Focusing on this small European community, which never numbered more than two thousand individuals, presents an interesting case study of how community and identity are formed. Though small in numbers, the planters were able to acquire, whether through treaty or force, millions of acres of the most fertile land in the region and in doing so wielded a vast amount of power. This narrative is not unique to Nyasaland. In fact, in other colonies such as Kenya or Ceylon, planters also exhibited this common spatial trait. The formula, passed down since the earliest imaginings of the planter class in the 16th century, was simple; control of the land and economy will translate into profits and power. On its own, Nyasaland is a small piece to the larger puzzle of the British Empire, however when looking at the conception of the “planter” and their transnational communities, Nyasaland shines brighter than most. The Nyasaland planters faced many of the same challenges as other colonial possessions, as McCracken laid out, “they battled high transportation costs, irregular international prices, and often exploitative marketing systems and damage from drought and pests.”⁸

Through the use of improved technologies in transportation, mass communication and print media however, the transnational planter community for the first time was able to connect and stay connected no matter what part of the world they were in. With improved transportation they were able to travel and relocate wherever new opportunities arose. Movements of ideas and people defined this period, and Nyasaland served as the perfect opportunity to expand the ideals of the British planters. What makes Nyasaland stand out, above other African planter colonies, was that even after the country gained independence in 1964, many of the planter estates

⁸ John McCracken, *A History of Malawi: 1859-1966* (New York: James Currey, 2013), 5.

managed to continue operations and were allowed to maintain their way of life under the new government.

This thesis will examine the Nyasaland planters as agents of an ideology that was in development since the 16th century and carried through to the 20th century, and well into the present. It will also examine how the planters sought to build their identity in Nyasaland and create a planters' utopia in the region. Though the planters sought to create this community in Central Africa, their hopes ultimately failed. The community they tried to develop never took hold and suffered from debilitating economic failures that often drove out many of the younger, less experienced planters. Eventually the dream of community, developed by and built for planters, would be replaced as individual estates were bought out and consolidated by larger corporations. Although the legacy of the planter has largely been forgotten, there are still descendants of the original planter families trying to continue their ancestors' dreams in modern-day Malawi.

Historiography:

Within the broad study of British Imperial history, more specifically the study of the "British World", the historiography has been focused largely on cultural histories and the "End of Empire." According to Tamson Pietsch, the study of the British World can be described as, "mapped by ideas and emotions, by networks and exchange, and by specific sites of empire, they pointed to the imagined, material, and local British worlds that reflected their lived experiences of the globalizing connections of the period."⁹ Within the historiography of the British World,

⁹ Tamson, Pietsch. "Rethinking the British World," *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 52, no. 2 (2013), pp. 441.

Africa is a controversial topic in that its colonization took place during a period of British efforts to rejuvenate expansionist policies while simultaneously being associated with the decline and eventual end of the African slave trade. During a period known as the “Scramble for Africa”, Britain obtained control over much of Eastern and Southern Africa, stretching from Egypt all the way to South Africa, as well as portions of West Africa.

This period was the beginning of a fresh wave of settler migrations seeking to cultivate the “free” land of Africa. Due, in part, to trends that originated in the 17th century and culminated during the 19th century, as James Belich described, “from the global process of territorial expansion of gunpowder empires, the culmination in mass settlement, and the evolution of capitalism, culminating in industrialisation.”¹⁰ Nyasaland was one of the many regions colonized by the British which ultimately became an economic burden. A circle of booms and busts in agricultural enterprises kept the planters from being able to make the profits they had hoped for. Though the colony only remained under British control for seventy years, it was not inevitable that independence would occur and for the planters, this idea was especially true.

This presented the British people who migrated to the “new lands” with the difficult task of developing a new identity, one which could tie the British metropole with her overseas territories and colonies. Britishness took on new meanings as settlers embarking to far flung worlds desired to maintain their British spirit. Nyasaland was one of the many regions colonized by the British in Africa which became home to a small population of European traders, missionaries and planters. For the planters their identity and connection to one another was an important part of their rise during this period. Though planters had been around since the 16th

¹⁰ James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: the Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

century, the planters of the 18th and 19th centuries were far more connected than at any time before. David Armitage examined the early formation of the planter in his comprehensive book, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*. Armitage explores the early formation of the British imperial mentality as England, Scotland and Wales were brought under the same flag. One of the first instances of cooperation between Scotland and England, and the birth of the “planter” as a distinct form of “settler”, was the conquering of the Gaels and the “plantings” of Ireland.¹¹

Ulster, as King James I had intended, was to be a joint venture between his Scottish and English subjects, designed to be a unifying experience. The Ulster plantation and those who inhabited it were to be, as Armitage referred, a new “race of Britons, whose legal identities as Scots or English would be supplemented and, for their children, replaced for a new ethnic Britishness.”¹² These early planters were referred to as “Undertakers” and developed the first imaginings of how plantations and estates were to be conceptualized. Armitage explained that the plantation provided zones of “civility and stability” between the barbaric Gaels and the civilized British.¹³ He goes on to explain that this idea became the purpose of the plantation moving forward: “the Ulster Plantation provided a common pursuit for schemes of civilization as a pan-British enterprise.”¹⁴

Not only was the plantation seen as an area in which the planter could live in relative luxury in a “hostile” place, it also provided different classes of potential planters with an opportunity of acquiring land and wealth. Armitage noted the majority of the planters from Scotland were, “Lowland gentry and aristocracy who brought followers with them to settle the

¹¹ Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 60.

¹² *Ibid.*, 57.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

land.”¹⁵ The planters of Scotland and England were granted relatively equal land grants, some 81,000 acres for each, which would result in the planter ideology that land equaled profits. Apart from Britain’s expansion of the plantation into the Americas, namely the Virginia Colony, Ulster was seen as the first endeavor for profitable migration and settlement.

There was fear in England that Scotland’s settlement in Ulster had the potential to rival the economy of the English. If Scotland opened Ireland up as their primary market, it could have led to a Scottish kingdom capable of rivaling that of the English on the island. The plantation economy that was arising in the British colonies was seen as a powerful and influential system. Armitage quoted a merchant, John Cary, who wrote about the plantation economy and its effect: “I take England and all its Plantations to be one great body, those being so many limbs and counties belonging to it.”¹⁶ Though this was written as a way of showing it was England whose economy would overtake all, it clearly states the importance of plantations and subsequently those who owned them.

Owning land was the primary source of power in the landed aristocracy of Britain. Those who owned land were in government and were in the elite echelon of their class. Land was a major factor in the formation of British identity as both Armitage and Linda Colley have argued. Colley in her book, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, discusses how identity in Britain took on different meanings as the empire grew, and new peoples were granted access to land. As new lands were opened by the growing number of migrants from the British Isles, so too were the number of those belonging to the new class of landed elite. As Colley points out, “the strength and vitality of an empire is due to the new aristocracy from the periphery.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid., 58.

¹⁶ Ibid., 163.

¹⁷ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 1992), 167.

It was from this new aristocracy that the planters arose and were primarily made up of Welsh, Scottish and Irish. In truth, as members of these groups began owning land in and out of Britain, a new sense of a United Kingdom took hold. Membership in the empire was linked to advancement in one's caste, as Colley pointed out, "different classes and interest groups came to see this newly invented nation as a usable resource, as a focus of loyalty which would cater to their own needs and ambitions."¹⁸ For the planters, their ambition was to expand their local control of land and labor in order to increase profits. This was what Colley referred to as the "cult of commerce". Land directly affected profits and power; the more land a planter had the more they were able to penetrate political circles and increase profits.

Access to land meant more than trade in British society as Colley notes, "in terms of wealth, status and power, men of trade in this society came a long way behind men of land."¹⁹ For planters this was especially true. However, they also sought to combine their considerable ownership of land with profitable trade in agricultural goods. Consolidation of land under one owner was their primary means of advancement. Many planters found their way into the House of Commons or as local government officials. Colley noted that between 1714 and 1867 nearly seventy-five percent of the members of the House of Commons was made up of landed elites.²⁰ By holding government posts, the planter class was able to develop a horizontal structure, forming a community that tried to replicate these conditions in the empire, by lobbying and developing connections with local colonial administrations.

As Colley and Armitage have argued, this new globalized identity was the beginning of the 19th and 20th century migration movements from Britain. What developed was a new world identity, a "British-World." Belich described this community's mentality as being part of an

¹⁸ Ibid., 59.

¹⁹ Ibid., 65.

²⁰ Ibid., 65.

Anglo-World, which he defined as, “politically divided and sub-global, yet transnational. Far-flung, they comprised a shifting, varied, but interconnected melange of partners and subjects. Transfers of things, thoughts and people, lubricated by shared language and culture.”²¹ In his groundbreaking book, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939*, Belich broke down the systems of British expansion and the shaping of the Anglo-World on the backs of settlers.

According to Belich, the Anglo-World is, “politically divided but culturally and economically united intercontinentally.”²² The role of settlers was to expand the metropole of their homeland globally, which he claims is “the reproduction of one’s own society.”²³ Britons migrated from Britain, as agents of expansionism, in the millions between 1815 and 1930 to the Americas, Australia and Africa. A common bond between the settler societies that developed was the development of agricultural exports, such as beef cattle, wheat, sugar, coffee and tea. The cause of much of this migration was the promise of agricultural opportunities, which Belich describes as evolving through boom and bust cycles. Booms are defined as increasing a community's economic dynamism, while busts are defined as a rapid decrease in a community's economy. The planter community in Nyasaland would experience numerous booms and busts, first with the coffee industry then with tobacco and lastly with tea.

Though Belich described an Anglo-World, authors Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich in their book, *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity*, proposed a variation of this idea which they referred to as the “British-World.” The British-World, as they described it, “at its core were neo-Britains where migrants found they could transfer into societies with familiar cultural

²¹ James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 49.

²² *Ibid.*, 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1.

values. As transoceanic and trans-continental travel and communications improved, so this world became more intricately interconnected and selfdefining.”²⁴

They argued that the British-World can be examined through three “vectors”: diaspora, culture and identity. Diaspora they argued was the intentional migration of Britons in order to seek settlement and to better their lots elsewhere. During the 19th and 20th centuries Britons left the home island to seek lucrative opportunities elsewhere in the empire. The mass migration presented a unique issue within British society in terms of identity. With such an expansive and growing empire the need for information became crucial. Bridge and Fedorowich argue the dispersion of information was the only way for sprouting colonies to persuade their fellow Britons to try their luck at starting anew. As they wrote, “access to information about the new colonies was crucial to prospective emigrants eager to make an informed judgement. Information concerning the availability of land, climatic conditions and job prospects helped to sustain the growing tide of migrants to imperial destinations.”²⁵

Migrants enjoyed, with relative ease, assimilation into British communities spread across the empire-commonwealth. The authors employ the term “diaspora” to help examine British migrants in the 19th and 20th century as a way to dispel the myth that emigration had a single character. They stated that this new diaspora can be broken down into two phases. In the first phase, migration from 1880 to 1940, “migrants from the British Isles to the British Empire were in general reinforcing an existing wider British world and were on the whole assimilated into it.”²⁶ Phase two can be defined as less overseas settlement and more diaspora. These migrants did not experience alienation or exile from the metropole or from their new host culture. They go on

²⁴ Carl Bridge, and Kent Fedorowich, *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), 3.

²⁵ Ibid., 4.

²⁶ Ibid., 18.

to explain the conditions that were supportive to this idea, noting that “they were part of a British mass movement, not merely fragments of cosmopolitan flows.”²⁷ Millions of Britons between 1880 and 1940 were dispersed among the empire, and like the settlers who were forming new identities, the government attempted to encourage this “British-World” ideology.

The British government passed the British Nationality Act of 1914 as a means to provide a sense of equality amongst native born Britons and those being born within the commonwealth. The authors go on to explain this was also a way to construct this British-World, as “it defined British citizens to include any person born within his majesty's dominions and allegiances and provided them with a perfect free market for their labour and skills anywhere in the British Empire.”²⁸ This act however did not grant non-whites citizenship. This provided British citizens overseas with a way to stay connected with their British identity while keeping the races separated. This was especially encouraging for the planter as they would often leave one colony for another as opportunities arose. Nyasaland would be one destination to which planters would migrate from other dominions; a perfect example being Henry Brown, a coffee planter who left Ceylon for Nyasaland due to the promising coffee industry in the late 1890's.

Most important to the building of the British-World and the formation of transnational planter communities was the flow of information, be it newspapers, journals or otherwise. In his book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson argued that the print culture revolution that took place in the 15th century was one of the pillars supporting the spread of European empires and identity. Anderson explained the relationship between old world and new world ideologies as a battle between mass communication and cosmology.

²⁷ Ibid., 18.

²⁸ Ibid., 20.

Anderson attributes this to changes in literacy rates. As more people learned how to read scripture, language shifted from being in the hands of a select privileged few to the many. This changed concepts of ontological truth, as people became more capable of individual thought. Christian societies have been centered around monarchs who held the power of scriptural truth; mass literacy made that power harder to wield. Anderson noted the development of print culture was key to the shift from scriptural truth resulting in the growth of individualism, as it led “to the generation of wholly new ideas, where horizontal-secular communities became possible.”²⁹

By 1600 it is estimated that over 200,000,000 books had been printed, which inspired Francis Bacon to write that printing, “had changed the appearance and state of the world.”³⁰ The introduction of print on a mass scale laid the foundation for national self-consciousness to expand at a new rate. The change can be seen in three distinct areas; first it developed a unified field of communication and exchange; second it created its own form of antiquity which was central to the subjectivity of the nation; and lastly it created languages of power as certain languages were printed more than others.³¹ Rooted in this was the unification of language creating a connection of national consciousness to all parts of a globalized empire.

What was created out of this unified language was what Anderson refers to as an “imagined community.” He defines an imagined community as both inherently sovereign and limited, and national-awakening as the creation of nations where they do not exist.³² He goes on to explain that communities are to be defined in the style they are imagined to be. For the global planter community each continent they were found on took different appearances, be it the American or Afro-Asian communities, but they were all connected with one ideology.

²⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016), 36.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

³² *Ibid.*, 7.

Community, as defined by Anderson, is a partnership of ideas, “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail, the nation (or community) is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”³³

In his book, *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System 1876-1922*, Simon Potter commented on Anderson’s perspective of interconnected national consciousness in regards to the formation of the press. He called this linked globalization of information the Imperial Press System. He noted that as immigrants left Britain for distant shores they brought with them their unique print-culture, “English-Speaking migrants brought British press traditions with them and British newspapers and periodicals continued to be imported and read by settlers.”³⁴ Settlers moving to distant colonies, with no conception of their place within the empire, wanted to ensure their connection to Britain in order to retain their national identity. Over time the settlers began forming communities with their own identities and communicating with other settler communities.

Communities built around lines of communication began an interchange that built and expanded British overseas markets, and created new classes of settlers. Potter noted this interchange that expanded the economy. “As each colony was integrated into a single market through the building of roads and railways and the construction of overland telegraph lines,” Potter observed, “news could travel with ease helping create a new sense of national community.”³⁵ Before 1860, information traveling around the empire took months, however after the expansion of transportation and communication systems, information could travel in hours or

³³ Ibid., 7.

³⁴ Simon Potter, *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System 1876-1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 13.

³⁵ Ibid., 15.

even minutes. Not only did this help develop colonial economies, it also helped to foster colonial identity and hegemony.

For the global planter community, communication between the colonies was crucial to their economic vitality. For the planters in Nyasaland this was especially true. During their early efforts testing the soil and climate, coffee was being pushed by every colony to try and combat the expansion of Brazil's coffee industry. The early planter newspaper, the *Central African Planter* (CAP), was collecting articles and statements from communities, such as Ceylon, in order to gather the best seeds and cultivation practices to inform Nyasaland planters. They also used their paper to facilitate trade and develop industries that other colonies did not have in order to diversify the British market. The CAP also reprinted articles from Britain, allowing the planters to maintain their connection to home.

Much further research is needed on the history of the planter community in Nyasaland as much of the historiography is largely repeating or expanding on the issues of the environment, land, wealth, labor and trade and has neglected the extensive study of the planters and their community in Nyasaland and transnationally. What the research has done well is setting Nyasaland in comparison with other African colonies, such as Kenya and the Rhodesias, in how they handled labor and the uses of the land. This thesis will seek to build upon the idea that there was a global planter community and that this community developed a sense of camaraderie which stayed connected and developed its own power structure. Planters in Nyasaland were conscious of this global community and used it to develop the region's agricultural economy, which also helped them to remain in the country even after independence.

Outline of Thesis:

This thesis is broken into an introduction, three substantive chapters, each with two subsections, and a conclusion/epilogue. Chapter one is the introduction, which situates the Nyasaland planters within a global planter community using Benedict Anderson's conceptual framework of an "imagined community". It also reviews some of the relevant secondary historical literature pertaining to the "Anglo" or "British World" and to British colonialism in Central Africa/Nyasaland. Chapter two, section one, will examine the world the planter was a part of and the networks and connections that made their spread possible. Central to the theme of this thesis is the development of a unique planter identity and how they saw themselves belonging to a distinct community. Concepts such as globalization, Britishness and communication will be examined as they are crucial components to this thesis. At the heart of all these themes is settler colonialism, and more specifically planter colonialism. While settlers went to establish new roots in a foreign land, planters were driven by aspirations of economic fortune and ideas of adventure. Planter colonialism is often broken down into three stages; the pioneering stage where Europeans first began to explore and secure a region; settlement stage after pioneers send reports back to their home country providing a steady flow of immigrants with propaganda about the region for settlement; and lastly, the community stage as the newly established community began to build infrastructure and cultivate newly established agricultural products for export.

Section two will focus on how concepts such as globalization were manifested in the planter community of Nyasaland. In Nyasaland the pioneering stage began with numerous Scottish Presbyterian missions. This included the Free Church of Scotland Mission, which established a station in Livingstonia. The missions were crucial as they were the first to

experiment with crops. They brought with them botanists, such as John Buchanan, who tested the plants in the climate to see how well they would perform. Important to this was the flow of information from print culture which facilitated the spread of ideas. Planters relied heavily on this as it helped strengthen community bonds and informed planters from different regions of the empire about how the market was fairing and about changes in government policy. They were aware of their role in the globalized system of the empire and the British World which helped them in the large-scale acquisition of land. This was especially true in the Shire Highlands region of Nyasaland.

Chapter three will focus on the establishment of the plantation economy, and how the planters struggled to adapt to the environment and their issues with land and labor. Section one examines the early years in the region, between 1890 and 1900, when more planters began establishing plantations throughout Nyasaland. Coffee growing was heavily encouraged by the British Government who saw Brazil's growing coffee export sector as a danger to the empire's industry. Tobacco would also be tested and would be found to be well suited for the environment. Propaganda on coffee growing in Central Africa provided the spark that encouraged a whole generation of aspiring planters to move there. However, by 1920 due to many conditions, coffee would fail as a lucrative cash crop and tea would be introduced on a wide scale. Loss of the coffee, as well as losses in tea and other industries, caused a crisis of identity amongst the planter class. Central to the development of the region was overcoming the fact that the country is landlocked. With no access to ports and no road systems other than African walking trails, the flow of information and goods was limited to rivers which were difficult to navigate.

Section two will focus on how the planters struggled to control and obtain local labor. Issues over labor and land would come to dominate government policy and intervention, as well

as the planters' relationship with the government. One of the pillars to the planter identity was their acquisition of the most cultivable land in the regions they occupied. In Nyasaland, the majority of plantations were found near Zomba and the Zomba Plateau. Millions of acres were consolidated under private estates and companies under treaty or force. Land directly equals power in British society, and the planters were the majority holders of land. The local government saw issues with the massive acreages being "claimed" and laws were enacted to apply pressure for change. From 1895 on through to the 1950's, the thirteen individuals who served as governor of Nyasaland launched multiple land and labor commissions to investigate how planters acquired land and how they used local labor. The planter class, from its inception in the 16th century to the 20th century, used their control over the land to wield a tremendous amount of power over government policy when it interfered with their activities and affairs. Each commission that investigated the Nyasaland planters had individual planters? on the investigatory board. Control over the land defined the planter class and in Nyasaland the planters were able to stave off government interference until the 1950's and 1960's.

Chapter four will focus on the development of the community and how the planters connected with their fellow comrades in the region, while also connecting with the larger global planter community. Section one examines the creation of the community that developed there. Benedict Anderson described communities like the global planter class as "imagined" because, "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail, it is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship, ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible."³⁶ Indeed, the planters in Nyasaland formed this comradeship not only with their fellow settlers in the region, but also with the planter communities that had developed across the Anglo-World. One way these communities communicated with one another was through agricultural journals and

³⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7

newspapers. This network of information fostered a global sense of brotherhood, as Gary Magee and Andrew Thompson state, “social networks created links between individuals and groups, these links in turn facilitated the movement of commodities, money, information and people across colonial borders.”³⁷ Print culture also helped the planters to stay connected to Britain, which was very important to them, since they believed that staying connected with “home” was their only way to remain civilized. In Nyasaland, planter R. S. Hynde founded the *Central African Planter*, a newspaper which gave a voice to the European planter community in the region. His paper acted as the “voice” of the planters. The paper has continued publication under the name *The Daily Times*.

Section two will examine why community building was important to the planters in the region. In order to create a broader sense of regional comradeship and competition, the different planter towns and companies formed their own sports teams, such as the Blantyre Rifle Team, which competed with teams from the Africa Lakes Company. Though sports teams and other social clubs were important to planter identity, the formation of planter associations were seen as the foundation for which planter identity gained power. These organizations were pivotal for expressing the planters’ concerns to the government, and gave them the ability to lobby and persuade the government to act for their benefit.

The conclusion and epilogue will briefly detail the legacy of the planter community in Malawi after independence. Through the 1940s and into the early 1950’s the planter community had declined dramatically. Struggling to adjust the market after the Great Depression, the planting community was largely replaced and their estates were consolidated by corporations or the remnants of planters with enough capital to purchase abandoned estates. Though it seemed

³⁷ Gary B Magee, and Andrew S. Thompson. *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c.1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 46.

that the planters dream for a settler governed plantation colony had failed, there was a last ditch effort to make a stand. In 1953 the Central African Federation was formed between Nyasaland and the Rhodesias, forming a massive settler controlled region in South Central Africa. The goal of the federation was to become an independent country, governed by the white settlers. However, after riots had broken out in Nyasaland resulting in the Nyasaland Emergency, the federation and the planters last hope collapsed. In 1964 Malawi became an independent nation, and by the late 1980s and early 1990s large international corporations had finished acquiring the vast majority of planters' estates.

Chapter Two: Planters and the British World, the Case for the Nyasaland Planter

Community

Section One: Community, Networks and Connections of the British World

Nyasaland is a region of which most individuals have little to no knowledge, outside of the annals of British Imperial history. The country in South-Central Africa became home to Britons whose empire took on newly imagined characteristics. At its height in the 20th century, the empire extended from the metropole center of London west to the Americas, south to Africa and east to Asia, India and Australia, and controlled more than 13.01 million square miles of the earth's landmass and ruled over four hundred million people.³⁸ Between 1815 and 1914 more

³⁸ Abby Rogers, "The 10 Greatest Empires in the History of the World," *Business Insider*, Nov 9, 2011, <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.businessinsider.com/the-10-greatest-empires-in-history-2011-9%3famp>.

than 22,126,047 Britons left the British Isles seeking opportunities throughout the empire.³⁹ It was during this period of rapid expansion in the 18th and 19th century marked by the largest movement of people in the country's history, that Nyasaland was claimed as a British protectorate.

What occurred in Nyasaland was not unique to the colonial experience of the 19th and 20th centuries. Like other settlements in Africa or Asia, the region became home to a small group of colonists, mostly traders, missionaries, farmers and planters who left their homes seeking better opportunities. These settlements that dotted the landscape became independent vestiges of British culture; what Benedict Anderson referred to as "imagined communities." Anderson describes imagined communities as limited in terms of boundary, sovereign in its authority over the boundaries it falls in, and as community in that it creates a horizontal and deep camaraderie. He goes on to describe how these communities took on their imagined state, noting that "nationalism is not the awakening of national self-consciousness, it invents nations where they do not exist and are distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness but by the style in which they are imagined."⁴⁰ Though he was discussing nationalism, his argument can be applied to transnational communities that, while separated from the metropole, maintained important elements of British culture within the region they inhabited.

The 19th and 20th centuries are periods that were marked by emigration across the continents, but they were also marked by the height of industrialization. Faster means of oceanic transportation, better means of oceanic navigation, the formation of newspapers, foreign presses and telegraph lines meant that the imperial metropole of the British Empire could keep her colonies, protectorates and settlements in a tight web. This interconnectedness of settlements was

³⁹ John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System 1830-1970* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 47.

⁴⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

enhanced by industrialization and the growing globalized market. One of the great driving forces of Britain's empire was the ever-expanding need to support this market. As John Darwin noted, "the struggle was to enter new hinterlands, open new markets and create new commodity trades."⁴¹

Expanding along these lines, Britain developed a highly sophisticated globalized British "World." The process of globalization, the foundations of which began in the 15th century, took on a new meaning during this stage in colonial history. The speed at which it spread, as explained by historian Andrew Thompson, cannot be overstated: "the process compressed space and time accelerating the interdependence of societies with the rapid advances in communications, which transformed the speed and lowered the cost of human travel, correspondence and conversation."⁴² With the advent of steam power, and subsequently steamships and railroads, the time it took to transport goods and people fell. The price to transport freight dropped by ninety percent, the transatlantic voyage went from taking thirty days to a mere ten and the trip to Australia dropped from three months to one.⁴³

It is easy to understand then, how a small landlocked country in South-Central Africa could be overlooked when examining the highly globalized British World. Nyasaland is long and narrow, 520 miles in length of which 360 miles are taken up by Lake Nyasa and between 50 and 100 miles in width.⁴⁴ The population never numbering more than eight thousand and controlling millions of acres of land, the European presence in the region lasted over seventy years, from

⁴¹ John Darwin, *The Empire Project*, 113.

⁴² Gary Bryan Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c. 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2.

⁴³ Tamson Pietsch, "Rethinking the British World," *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 52, no. 2 (April 2013), 450.

⁴⁴ Charles Ponsonby, "Nyasaland," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. 74, No. 3839 (June 18th, 1926), 735.

1891 to 1964. In a 1926 address to an assembly on the “Dominions and Colonies”, Charles Ponsonby, Managing Director of the British Central Africa Company (BCAC), stated the intentions of the British settlement in Nyasaland. He said: “it is an old romantic story, we found that we were of some use to civilization, and we had to stay!”⁴⁵ Seeing themselves as bringers of civilization wherever they went provided the migrants of the empire with a shared mission and ideology.

Globalization and migration walked hand in hand during the 19th and 20th centuries and helped create new definitions of transnationalism. What this transnationalism meant for the migrating Britons was that even though they lived and identified with the region they moved to, they still felt and stayed connected with Britain. Migration to Africa, India or Australia were pivotal to this process, as Kent Fedorwich and Andrew Thompson examined. They described, “waves of emigrants helped to integrate large portions of the world materially, intellectually, culturally and politically, but engendered new, more transnational, ways of thinking.”⁴⁶ In truth, what was created was a world mapped by shared ideas and networks of exchange developing a new sense of Britishness.

Developing a sense of shared “Britishness” was an essential part of Britain's success in developing colonies across the globe. Linda Colley, one of the great historians of British nationalism and consciousness, spoke about the developing ideology of British commercial “peripheries” and their connections to the metropole. These peripheries were links of supply that led back to London providing a transfer of goods for protection and stability. To Colley, one of the hypothetical bridges that connected Britain’s colonies together was free trade, “the broad commercial community was a vital source of stability, it was a cult of commerce which became

⁴⁵ Ibid., 736.

⁴⁶ Kent Fedorowich and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire Migration and Identity in the British World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 6.

an increasingly important part of being British.”⁴⁷ Developing ideology amongst colonists in this period was not a passive endeavor. Indeed, to many newly settled Britons they were no longer just members of a global empire; rather they were actively developing their own ideas of “Britishness” in their new worlds.

Part of this new sense of Britishness was the newly adopted idea of partnerships, rather than subjects. This was not intended to replace the power of the government, rather it was meant to reaffirm their shared participation in the empire, while also seeking to improve upon the usefulness of colonies. Thompson pointed out this relationship, noting that “many colonists were aware of a living and enduring connection to home, the nationalism they espoused was based upon notions of cooperation, partnership and mutualism.”⁴⁸ This relationship created a feeling of “brotherhood” amongst metropole Britons and settlers of the greater British world. It created a unique identity of both thought and feeling. As quoted by James Bryce at the 1903 Allied Colonial Universities Conference, “it was a like attachment to those glorious traditions which linked us to the past, a like devotion to those ideas which we have to pursue in the future.”⁴⁹ The ideals which took hold amongst Britons included the continued desire for free trade and freedom.

Not all settlers and colonies were the same however, in fact different continents were sites of different forms of colonial enterprise. A colony can be viewed as an imagined political entity, similar to Anderson's idea of imagined communities, as Lorenzo Veracini stated, a “colony is both a political body that is dominated by an exogenous agency and [an] exogenous entity that reproduces itself in a given environment.”⁵⁰ Colonies however did not reproduce themselves in the same manner across the different spaces that they developed. In fact, four

⁴⁷ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 2003), 61.

⁴⁸ Magee and Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation*, 31.

⁴⁹ Pietsch, “Rethinking the British World,” 453.

⁵⁰ Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 3.

distinct forms of colonialism developed during this heightened period of interchange known as, settler, indirect, direct and hybrid colonialism. Matthew Lange, James Mahoney and Matthias Hau define them all as being, “concentrated geographically and temporally.”⁵¹

Settler colonialism was common in places like the Americas and Australia, where defined borders, political hierarchy and organization developed. Colonies that developed there became home to millions of Britons who migrate to and settle in permanently. The type of settlers who inhabited a colony was not the only thing that affected how a colony functioned. It also depended on the type of colonial control the British chose to apply. In tropical regions, such as Africa or Asia, colonies were formed under *direct* or *indirect colonialism*. What set indirect colonialism apart from other forms of metropole control was that it entailed a minimal transfer of institutional agents from Britain. Mathew Lange explains that where there existed precolonial rulers, “the British would more than likely favor indirect colonialism, allowing precolonial leaders to maintain political and legal power, while also requiring them to pay taxes.”⁵² This meant that the British government did not have to exhibit direct authority over the region, rather they could assign governors to oversee the day-to-day administration of the colony.

Direct colonialism, found in colonies like the West Indies, can be defined as, “unified, bureaucratically organized and of territory-wide reach.”⁵³ The British metropole maintained direct control over the governance of these colonies. Regions under indirect or direct colonialism shared many similarities. One common feature was they did not play host to large-scale or permanent European populations, due mostly to poor climatic conditions or diseases such as malaria. A specific form of “colony” sprouted out of regions under direct and indirect

⁵¹ Matthew Lange, James Mahoney, and Matthias Vom Hau, “Colonialism and Development: A Comparative Analysis of Spanish and British Colonies,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 111, no. 5 (2006), 1427.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1427.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1427.

colonialism and were known as *plantation colonies*. A defining trait amongst plantation colonies was the formation of a landed elite who monopolized both the land and crops. An example of this was the West Indian sugar plantations of Barbados or Jamaica, where small European populations utilized slave labor to produce sugar. After Britain banned the African slave trade in 1807 and abolished slavery in 1833, however, plantation colonies had to turn to indentured or imported labor to produce agricultural products.

In colonies such as Nyasaland, organized through means of indirect rule, these elites identified collectively as planters, were the dominant force and were able to exert control over land, labor and government with the intention of benefitting their personal needs, not the needs of the indigenous communities with whom they shared the region. Commonly found amongst most, if not all, indirect rule colonies was the ability of elites to control state institutions and monopolize the free market. The elites formed “agricultural monopsonies” which helped them obtain and retain control of their lands with adverse effects on the colony. As Lange describes, “elites gained huge rents by underpaying peasants for their produce, this in turn, promoted an unproductive economic elite, weak peasant production, and the preeminence of dysfunctional markets.”⁵⁴ These colonies did not experience any sustained long term economic growth or development, often going through phases of uncertainty.

These systems encouraged the migration of different classes of settlers to make the arduous journey to different regions throughout the empire. This phenomenon is difficult to trace however, as Veracini states, “not all migrations are settler migrations and not all colonialisms are settler colonialisms; both move across space and often end up permanently residing in a new

⁵⁴ Matthew Lange, James Mahoney, and Matthias Vom Hau, “Colonialism and Development: A Comparative Analysis of Spanish and British Colonies,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 111, no. 5 (2006), 1443.

location.”⁵⁵ Indeed, the difference between laboring words such as colonist, settler, immigrant and emigrant would be debated in British newspapers and periodicals throughout the period. Belich captures the essence of this debate, noting that “in Britain, settler had connotations of a higher status than emigrant; like colonists, settlers were distinct from sojourners, slaves or convicts and initially even from lower-class free emigrants.”⁵⁶ Where the term “settler” bears a feeling of permanence, recreating one’s home society, migrants tended to move to pre-existing and already established settlements.

Another staunch difference is how a settler came into being. Veracini states that settlers were forged out of conquest and only ceased to be settlers once they became the majority in a new land. He goes on to state that settlers, due to their permanence, expanded the metropole while it remains distinct, “colonialism is driven by an expanding metropole that remains permanently distinct from it, as settlers by definition, stay in a specific contradistinction, colonial sojourners-administrators, missionaries, military, entrepreneurs and adventurers- return home.”⁵⁷ There was another group however which had different motivations for leaving Britain than settlers or migrants. Unlike settlers or migrants, this group, mostly Scottish and Irish in origin, who left seeking economic fortune in the agricultural sector, were commonly known as Planters.

Planters were primarily agriculturalists and were focused on expanding the empire’s export market and growing their wealth and status through land acquisition. In Nyasaland, for example, between individual planters and corporations, millions of acres of land in the highland regions were owned. Though their impact on the global market shaped the modern world’s trade networks and crop research, they made up a small percentage of settlers during this period. There were never more than a few hundred to a few thousand in these regions, and in Nyasaland, they

⁵⁵ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 3.

⁵⁶ Pietsch, “Rethinking the British World,” 150.

⁵⁷ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 6.

never numbered more than 1,200. The goal of planters was threefold; acquisition of land, subsequent domination of foreign markets, and profits. As Erika Rappaport stated, “British markets never seemed capacious enough, and planters felt compelled to conquer vast new colonial and foreign markets.”⁵⁸ Unlike settlers and migrants who left to seek permanent settlement in a new host country, planters would make routine trips back home leaving their plantations in the hands of managers.

There were many different classes of settlers such as the planter, trader, farmer, entrepreneur, missionary, shopkeeper and many others. Though they were different in their goals, they were similar in that they utilized the new systems that were developed during this heightened period of industrialization and globalization to spread far and wide. They were cemented together in their shared space as agents of the imperial metropole, as Rappaport states, “business, family connections, politics, and religion, as well as gender, class, and racial ideology, helped cement far-flung commercial and consuming communities, as did fiscal, land and other state policies.”⁵⁹ Holding together an empire that spanned the globe required more than just new technologies being developed however.

These “neo-Britons”, as they are often called, were a new class of settlers that were able to transfer to new areas with familiar cultural and social values. Neo-British communities were held together by their mutually shared values, in what is referred to as “culture glue.”⁶⁰ The most important part of the glue that held the empire together was the integration of print media. Anderson stated print culture was the foundation from which transnational empires were built. He stated this was done in three distinct ways, “first it created unified fields of exchange and

⁵⁸ Erika Diane Rappaport, *A Thirst for Empire: How Tea Shaped the Modern World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2019), 8.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁰ Pietsch, “Rethinking the British World,” 442.

communication, second it gave language a unique subjectiveness and lastly it created languages of power.”⁶¹ What Anderson meant by a subjective and powerful language was that wherever a settler went they would be met by someone who looked and spoke similarly to themselves, and that language would encompass the earth. Thompson summarized this concept perfectly: “these networks bound people together, nurturing as well as reflecting a sense of shared cultural, religious or ideological commitment and purpose amongst their members.”⁶²

As Neo-Britons spread far and wide, so too did their networks of language and culture. English speaking settlers in the 19th and 20th century brought with them the press traditions from Britain, as Simon Porter discussed in his scholarship on the imperial press system, “an embryonic imperial press system had emerged, based on strong similarities and links between the press in Britain and the Dominions.”⁶³ This interconnected media system produced a rapid interchange of information, new ideas of what colonialism was and who was participating in its spread. It meant communities of this period had unique access to information that no other period of colonialism had: “improved communications to their metropolises and their shared language, which meant relatively rapid and easy transmission of the new economic and political doctrines being produced around the world.”⁶⁴ Planters especially would find use in print media, forming agricultural magazines and gazettes providing new planters with the information required to begin their cultivation.

Before the advent of the press system however, moving to colonies was seen as degrading and meant only for criminals in the 1780’s. Charles Buller summarized this idea by noting: “it was little more than shoveling out your paupers to where they might die, without shocking their

⁶¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 45.

⁶² Magee and Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation*, 27.

⁶³ Porter, *News and the British World*, 3.

⁶⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 51.

betters.”⁶⁵ The negative connotations of being a settler was mostly because of the Australian colonies, having been started by British convicts. By the mid-19th century however, membership to this newly defined British World was not exclusive to the individually wealthy or criminals. In fact, this period like no time before saw those of the middle class voluntarily leaving the shores of Britain for opportunities in the new dominions. Anderson points out the background of these settlers: “armies of middle-class metropolitans, not least Scotsmen, functionaries, schoolmasters, merchants and planters set out over the realm.”⁶⁶ In order to develop and encourage this, the media and its networks were the most useful tool.

Print media was used by both the imperial government, private companies and colonial communities as a means of propagating further settlement efforts. In fact, manipulation of the media for the encouragement of settlers was most certainly a vector of power according to Anderson. A key component to 19th and 20th century imperialism was the promotion of information about “market and settlement” opportunities wherever possible.⁶⁷ Crucially important to the encouragement of potential planters to leave voluntarily was the promise of fertile lands and abundant resources. In discussing this concept, James Belich stated: “Anglophones wanted to move into rich, climatically benign and largely empty lands with fertile and abundant natural resources.”⁶⁸ Those lands were found, to varying degrees, in places like Australia, Africa, India and America.

At the end of the American Revolution and the loss of the American colonies, Britain lost the great potential of fertile land the American west had to offer. By 1788 colonies had been founded in Australia, mostly started by convicts, providing an alternative settler destination. The

⁶⁵ Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 146.

⁶⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 92.

⁶⁷ Magee and Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation*, 8.

⁶⁸ Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 7.

population there in the 1780's was 1,000, but after the revolution that number skyrocketed to 12,000 by 1810, over 1.25 million by 1860, and expanding to well over 4 million by 1890.⁶⁹ Australia had the promise of rich fertile farmland that was ripe for British planters and settlers. In the mid-1800's, Africa was also becoming opened up to settlers, and was often compared to Australia in terms of the continent's potential. Scott Elliot, a colonist who had traveled to Australia and settled in Africa, commented on this, claiming that: "a second Australia can be formed in Africa."⁷⁰ Though Africa would never fulfill the promise of another Australia, mostly because of climatic conditions and tropical diseases, European settlements started to dot the African landscape at a faster pace.

Propagating a call to adventure and opportunity in tropical worlds, like Africa and Australia, required a new level of identity integration. The number of published materials grew significantly from 1820 on through to the 20th century. The goal of this, whether conscious or unconscious, was to develop a sense of kinship as the "increasing speed and efficiency which furnished these materials were despatched became the fulcrum of transnational family and kinship networks, facilitating the augmentation, melding and dispersal of information flows."⁷¹ Kinship in the British World, and the media networks that connected settlers to the empire, was a useful tool in the expansion of the globalized empire. Britishness was in fact a globalizing phenomenon and it gave settlers a claim to both material and moral support from the metropole, as an article from the *Nelson Examiner* asserted:

⁶⁹ Ibid., 82.

⁷⁰ Scott Elliot, "Africa as a Field for Colonial Enterprise," *The Central African Planter*, September, 1896.

⁷¹ Kent Fedorowich, *Empire, Migration and Identity in the British World* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2013), 11.

We feel it is our best claim as a community, that we are part and parcel of the Great British Empire, our sympathy with its glory, our interest in the splendour of its name is not to be distinguished by a change in hemisphere or oceans intervening.⁷²

Kinship was indeed a strong unifying force which transcended borders and continents. Planters would often refer to each other, in print, as “our fellow brother planters.”

Once they were established in new regions settlers and planters were quick to recreate the British press system in their colony. Not only were settler papers created as a means for connecting settler communities together, it was also a strong force in creating an “imagined” empire. Alan Lester noted the importance of settler papers: “settler newspapers became a channel through which the metropolitan reading public created an imagined geographic empire.”⁷³ These papers introduced the metropole to places they may never have heard of before, creating a sense of exploration and adventure, encouraging more Britons to follow suit. For planters trying to develop tropical regions, publicity was their main means of enticing more Britons to join them in creating an interconnected agriculturalist world. Erika Rappaport commented on this idea: “planters had acquired a tremendous faith in publicity and they were convinced that with enough money, drive and local knowledge, propaganda could make markets anywhere.”⁷⁴ The clear targets in the 19th and 20th century were the developing colonies of Africa.

Africa, nicknamed the “Dark Continent” by contemporaries, was a wild and hostile environment for Europeans. It was filled with tropical diseases like malaria, and wildlife, such as alligators, which devastated early settlement attempts. Black Water Fever was the major killer of

⁷² Alan Lester, “British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire,” *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 54, no. 1 (2002), 31.

⁷³ Alan Lester, “British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire,” *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 54, no. 1 (2002), 32.

⁷⁴ Erika Diane Rappaport, *A Thirst for Empire: How Tea Shaped the Modern World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2019), 220.

European settlers. The disease is a more deadly form of malaria ranging in mortality from 40% amongst first time sufferers, to 50% amongst those who caught it a second time and 75% for a third and so on.⁷⁵ Crocodiles were another killer of Europeans, as Harry Johnston commented on in the early efforts in Nyasaland: “the crocodile would rush up to the very bank of the river and seize people heedlessly standing near the water’s edge; several of our Indian soldiers were killed this way until the river bank was guarded by a palisade.”⁷⁶ At the time though these dangers did not stop the rising tide of Europeans set on creating a capitalist community on the continent.

Before the Scramble in 1885, Britain saw Africa as having little potential with a population of barely fifty two thousand in 1850 between the three colonies of Sierra Leone, Gambia and the Gold Coast. The goal in Africa, originally, was the annihilation of the African slave trade, which began with the passing of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. In 1865, the House of Commons established a committee to discuss whether or not to maintain colonies in West Africa and came to realize three issues: “first the need to sustain the settlements of Christian Africans around Freetown of Sierra Leone, second to suppress the slave trade and third to stimulate legitimate trade in order to finance the administration of British forts and settlements.”⁷⁷ By the 1880’s however, the number of British African colonies increased tremendously in eastern and southern Africa, incorporating Kenya, Uganda, Nyasaland, North and South Rhodesia, as well as Nigeria in west Africa.⁷⁸

The “Scramble for Africa” involved many of Europe’s great empires including Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Spain and Portugal. The motivation for Britain securing indirect

⁷⁵ Harry Johnston, *British Central Africa: An Attempt to Give Some Account of a Portion of the Territories Under British Influence North of the Zambesi* (London: Methuen & Co, 1897), 180.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 355.

⁷⁷ Michael. Havinden and David Meredith, *Colonialism and Development: Britain and Its Tropical Colonies* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 26.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

control over much of North, East, Central and Southern Africa is described well by Michael Havinden and David Meredith as, “a precise mixture of commercial, financial, social, strategic and power-political forces.”⁷⁹ Possibly the most important of these motivations was the control of the Suez Canal and sources and tributaries of the Nile River. Control over both the Canal and the Nile gave Britain a monopoly over the trade routes to India and the Pacific as well as opening up the interior of Africa to further exploration and expansion of commercial trade.

Cecil Rhodes, a staunch imperialist and owner of mineral mines in the colonies that bore his name, had the dream of connecting all of Britain’s African colonies together via a railway that stretched from Cairo in Egypt down to the Cape in South Africa. The purpose of such a venture was to connect the many small European planter and trading communities that sprang up post scramble. Central Africa would be opened up however not by commercial figures like Rhodes, but rather by the attempts of Christian Missionaries and adventurers like David Livingstone. For the Secretary of State for the Colonies at the time, Joseph Chamberlain, colonial policy was economic by nature in order to sustain the new growth that developed at the end of the scramble. As he proclaimed at the time: “it is not enough to occupy certain spaces of the world's surface unless you can make the best of them, unless you are willing to develop them; We are landlords of a great estate and it is the duty of a landlord to develop it.”⁸⁰ The responsibility for this great development would land on the British settlers; this is especially true for the planters in Nyasaland.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 71.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 87.

Section 2: Pioneering Planters: The Expansion of the Planter Community in Nyasaland

It is impossible to begin any story about the British planters in Nyasaland without discussing the early Scottish Presbyterian Missions and their pioneers. Their push into the region and the establishing of missions in the Shire Highlands, at places like Blantyre and Zomba, began the process of colonization and subjugation in the region. They helped solidify the position of Europeans, providing the necessary surveys and environmental studies that would be used to entice the minds of experienced and amateur planters to come and settle the area. Due in part to the early missions, planters arrived in Nyasaland with, as R.S. Hynde wrote in the *Central African Planter*, “a vision of the future.”⁸¹

The famed Scottish missionary turned explorer, David Livingstone, was the first to explore the region of what would become Nyasaland. The Portuguese exploration by Dr. Jose Lacerda in Northeastern Rhodesia, which would become a British territory in 1890, set in motion a new wave of British exploration in the area as well. Having heard of a region with “flowing waters and great trees beyond the desert,”⁸² Livingstone was determined to put together an expedition to find it. He was financed and joined by explorer and big game hunter, William Cotton Oswell, and the two discovered the Upper Zambezi River. In 1855, during the second Zambezi expedition, Livingstone and his companions, Dr. John Kirk, Charles Livingstone, Thomas Baines and Richard Thornton discovered the Shire River, Lake Nyasa and Luangwa.⁸³

Livingstone’s second Zambezi expedition, and the letters that resulted from it, sparked the interest of the British people, mostly Scottish, which began the process of future colonization

⁸¹ R.S. Hynde, “A Retrospect,” *The Central African Planter*, September, 1895.

⁸² Harry Johnston, *Britain across the Seas: Africa, a History and Description of the British Empire in Africa* (London: National Societies Depository, 1909), 199.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 201.

of the region. In 1865 Livingstone described the scenery of the Shire Highlands, the region that would later be heavily settled by British planters, as, “delightfully well-watered, the clear cool gushing streams are very numerous.”⁸⁴ Along with this expedition came the Universities Mission to Central Africa, led by Bishop C. F. Mackenzie. Before the second expedition left in 1860, Livingstone made an appeal to the University of Cambridge to found a mission in the Shire Highlands as part of his plan to bring the natives “Christianity and civilization through commerce.”⁸⁵ The mission, and expedition, failed however due to a combination of Yao slave-raiding, indigenous violence and the death of Bishop Mackenzie after he contracted “jungle” fever.

In 1864 the expedition was recalled, but Livingstone would return again in 1866. He would go on to discover the Chambezi River in 1867, but in May of 1873 Livingstone died in the village of Chitambo in what is today, Zambia. His death would bring with it a renewed interest in Central Africa amongst his kin in Scotland. Livingstone’s legacy helped create the Central Africa Protectorate, as Henry Johnston stated, “by the glamour of his achievements and the strength of his appeals.”⁸⁶ Indeed, notice of his death reached Scotland and the Livingstonia Mission of the United Free Church of Scotland was formed by explorer James Stewart. Stewart was a follower of Livingstone and his belief that Nyasaland should become an industrial colony, that is a settlement to develop and trade natural resources for the imperial market, but also to spread Christianity and put an end to the slave trade. Livingstone, before his death, made it clear how he believed Nyasaland was to be settled:

⁸⁴ Brian Morris, *Environmental History Of Southern Malawi: Land and People of the Shire Highlands* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 49.

⁸⁵ John McCracken, *A History of Malawi: 1859-1966* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2013), 38.

⁸⁶ Harry Johnston, *Britain across the Seas: Africa, a History and Description of the British Empire in Africa* (London: National Societies Depository, 1909), 203.

The promotion of commerce ought to be specially attended to as this, more speedily than anything else, demolishes the sense of isolation which heathenism engenders, and makes the tribes feel them mutually dependent on, and mutually beneficial to, each other. Involving the preparation of the raw materials of European manufactures in Africa, for by that means we may not only put a stop to the slave-trade, but introduce the African family into the body corporate of nations, no one member of which can suffer without the others suffering with it.⁸⁷

Stewart gathered a committee of Scottish businessmen, politicians and scholars to finance a new expedition under the pretense to establish an industrial mission called Livingstonia.

The mission was led by E. D. Young and he was accompanied by Dr. Robert Laws and five artisans, as well as bringing the first steamer to sail on Lake Nyasa, the *Ilala*.⁸⁸ The *Ilala* was not without purpose, as it was Livingstone's belief that in order to form and sustain an industrial settlement in Malawi, it would have to be done mostly by steamers on the lakes and rivers, due to the region being landlocked. Though the mission faced many challenges, mostly from disease, they established Livingstonia at Bandawe. Young's party was not the only exhibition to establish a mission in Nyasaland. Three hundred and twenty two miles south of Bandawe, the Church of Scotland Mission was being established at a site that would be called Blantyre.

The site was surveyed in 1875 by Henry Henderson, an expert pioneer with experience from Australia. He explored the highland regions around Lake Nyasa, but was resolved to extend his survey to the Shire Highlands. He fixed on the site of Blantyre because it was believed to be an excellent site for settlement. As noted by the *Handbook of Nyasaland*, "it possessed all the requirements for healthy European settlement."⁸⁹ The requirements that Henderson sought were later detailed by Scott Elliot, an explorer and expert surveyor who studied all the climates in East and Central Africa. Elliot believed that Nyasaland was meant to be settled in one of two

⁸⁷ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 39.

⁸⁸ Stephen Samuel Murray, *A Handbook of Nyasaland* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1932), 239.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.

methods, either through Indian methods of pure exploitation of the land or an Australian method meant for extended settlement. Elliot, in a news column in the *Central African Planter*, wrote:

A second Australia can be formed in Africa, but only in places in which Europeans can maintain full bodily health and vigour, places in which they can bring their wives and children, and in which they can work with their own hands. They form a literal expansion of England. The leading climate of the colony zone, 3,000 feet, is fairly dry and a certain amount of cold air at night. It includes the Shire Highlands and a large part of Central Africa. The important products possible in such places are palm oil, cocoa, cotton, sugar and coffee.⁹⁰

To realize this potential, the mission was accompanied by two expert agriculturalists, Jonathan Duncan and John Buchanan, as well as the African Lakes Company (ALC). The ALC was a trading company formed in response to Livingstone's appeal to end the slave trade and establish legitimate trade and commerce in the region.

John Buchanan would branch off and form his own mission at Zomba in 1878, forty four miles north of Blantyre. Jonathan Duncan was the first to begin experimenting with coffee plants he brought with him, which would be referred to as the "historic coffee-plant" - coffee plants from the Royal Botanical Gardens of Edinburgh.⁹¹ Duncan discussed this in an article he wrote in 1896: "the late Mr. Henry Henderson, of the Blantyre Mission, brought from home in 1879 fifty-six pounds of Liberian Coffee seed which I had the pleasure of showing only seven grew to maturity."⁹² In the same year the Moir brothers, John and Fred, took up management of the Africa Lakes Company and established themselves at Mandala House. The Moirs established the first trading stations at the north end of Lake Nyasa. After three years, the coffee planted by Duncan was distributed to all three locations. As Hynde noted: "at the end of three years the

⁹⁰ Scott Elliot, "Africa as a Field for Colonial Enterprise," *The Central African Planter*, September, 1896.

⁹¹ R.S. Hynde, "A Retrospect," *The Central African Planter* (September, 1895).

⁹² Johnathan Duncan, "The Introduction of Coffee into B.C.A.," *The Central African Planter*, January, 1896.

maiden crop of the first coffee-plants was sown and the plants distributed, part being sent to Blantyre, part sold to the A.L.C and planted at Mandala and the last sent to Zomba.”⁹³

Many more missions would follow suit such as the Zambesi Industrial Mission, the South African General Mission, Nyasas Industrial Baptist Mission, the White Fathers, the Baptist Industrial Mission of Scotland and Montforts Marist Fathers Mission. Livingstonia and Blantyre however, were the first to establish relations with local African communities, which planters such as Buchanan would use to acquire land grants discussed in another section. The missions were important for the formation of the major districts that planters would inhabit, such as Blantyre. The highlands were well suited for Europeans to settle, especially Scottish planters who saw Nyasaland as “resembling more than anything the Highlands of Scotland.”⁹⁴ Many of the planters who would begin arriving between 1880 and 1895 were following in the footsteps of Livingstone when he said, addressing Cambridge undergraduates, “I have opened the door, I leave it to you to see no one closes it after me.”⁹⁵

The early planters of Nyasaland were a determined and resourceful group of individuals. As word got out about the country’s cheap land and abundant labor supply, the European population grew from 57 in 1891 to 314 by 1901 and to 1,838 in 1936, a mix between planters and traders.⁹⁶ In Nyasaland the planters gathered in tight knit societies forming their own newspaper, *Central African Planter*, where they expressed their concerns and ideas. As John Buchanan stated: “Livingstone showed that this new country was no mere desert, but well

⁹³ R.S. Hynde, “A Retrospect,” *The Central African Planter*, September, 1895.

⁹⁴ Charles Ponsonby, “Nyasaland,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. 74, No. 3839 (June 18th, 1926), 734.

⁹⁵ Horace Waller, *The Title-Deeds to Nyasa-Land* (London: William Clowes and Son, 1887), 2.

⁹⁶ Colonial Office, *Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Financial Position and Further Development of Nyasaland* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1938), 16.

wooded and watered land, capable of being turned to good account.”⁹⁷ The chief concern for the early planters (1880-1895) was the production of coffee and making it the main cash crop.

This period of early exploration and settlement is what is often referred to as the “pioneering” stage. Pioneers had the responsibility of developing and preparing a region for further settlement. As Carl Bridge described, “pioneers set forth in creating social as well as economic and political infrastructures modelled on Britain.”⁹⁸ Planter pioneers were the first to open and clear portions of land, oftentimes isolated and alone. John Weatherstone, a planter from Ceylon, wrote about the early struggles pioneers faced:

Pioneers led lonely lives. Frequent ill health, complete isolation, and nothing more than a candle or lamp to light the long evenings, was the lot of every man concerned with the early stages of opening the jungle.⁹⁹

Though this account was from a planter in Ceylon, the pioneering stage and the struggles they encountered were shared amongst other planting communities all over the world. Among the many tasks pioneers set forth to accomplish was the acquisition of land, through treaty or otherwise.

Harry Johnston and John Buchanan were the two most responsible for acquiring land in the Shire Highlands. As will be discussed in subsequent sections, Johnston and Buchanan were able to make treaties with local Yao tribes in order to acquire approximately a million acres of land and distribute it amongst the early planters, three hundred in all, by 1895.¹⁰⁰ Much of the

⁹⁷ John Buchanan, *The Shire Highlands (East Central Africa) as Colony and Mission*, (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1895), 40.

⁹⁸ Bridge and Fedorowich, *The British World*, 22.

⁹⁹ John Weatherstone *The Early British Tea and Coffee Planters and Their Way of Life: 1825-1900*, (London: Quiller Press Ltd, 1986), 69.

¹⁰⁰ Morris, *Environmental History Of Southern Malawi*, 118.

million acres would be put under coffee as it was seen as the most profitable crop. John Buchanan noted, “commercially, Nyasaland has a bright future before it. We have the backbone of commerce in coffee.”¹⁰¹ The promise of a strong industry in coffee enticed many planters to begin moving to the country. Planters from other colonies such as Ceylon, India, Malaya, Java and even the West Indies would purchase land and try their hand in Nyasaland’s growing economy.

Encouraging planters to make the arduous journey to Central Africa was no small task. Indeed, for many newly emerging colonies like Nyasaland the use of literature sent back to the metropole was of extreme importance. This literature, referred to as “booster literature” was utilized by pioneers to, as James Belich explains, “encourage the maximum possible levels of investment and migration to raise the value of their own property and guard against the possibility that they had thrown away their lives and fortunes.”¹⁰² Booster literature was anything from books, pamphlets, newspapers, journal articles, lectures and advertisements which were sent from the overseas region back to Britain.¹⁰³ Some of the earliest examples of this type of literature were Harry Johnston’s book *British Central Africa* written in 1897, John Buchanan’s *The Shire Highlands* written in 1885, and R. S. Hynde’s *Central African Planter* newspaper published in 1895.

Harry Johnston often sent back booster literature commenting on the future of Nyasaland stating: “Nyasaland ought to become another Brazil for the wealth of tropical produce it is fitted to yield under cultivation.”¹⁰⁴ By the 1880’s and into the early 1890’s, Brazil was pushing its way into the coffee trade and Britain needed its colonies to try and expand the markets. The trade in

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 118.

¹⁰² Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 184.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 152.

¹⁰⁴ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 75.

coffee had been impacted by a decrease of about 1,000,000 cwts.¹⁰⁵ Nyasaland was seen as one of the best possible regions to expand the market under British control. The London Chamber of Commerce stated Nyasaland was a region of great interest in an article from 1896:

British Central Africa is one of the new territories which attention is being given by the British Planter. It is thought that here, both tobacco and coffee can be cultivated with a large measure of commercial success. The view of the chamber is, that if the colonists get to work in suitable climate and soil, and adopt the best methods of curing tobacco and coffee, there is no reason to be advanced against the chance of their succeeding well.¹⁰⁶

Buchanan was determined to make Nyasaland a successful contributing colony to the British market. In 1883 John and his brother David, who arrived to begin helping his brother's estate, began testing sugar at his Mulungusi estate in Zomba, in order to test the region's capabilities of cultivation.

By 1885 the gardens at the Blantyre mission began cultivating a variety of fruits such as orange, lemon, fig, pomegranate, peach, guave, apricot, nectarine, custard-apple and granadillas, in order to see which would bear fruit in the climate and soil.¹⁰⁷ As new crops were cultivated and tested more planters began making their way into the country. Robert Buchanan, another of John's brothers, came into the country and commented on the small but growing size of the community: "one could almost count the Europeans engaged in planting on the fingers of one's hand and the chief stations were Blantyre and Mandala, Chirazulo, Zomba and Domasi."¹⁰⁸ By 1889 many of the bigger estate holders were making their beginnings, especially after the defeat and subjugation of the Yao tribes and Arab slave traders by Johnston and the formal declaration of the Nyasaland Protectorate.

¹⁰⁵ R.S. Hynde, "The Duty on Coffee," *The Central African Planter*, May 6th, 1896.

¹⁰⁶ Produce World, "London Chamber of Commerce," *The Central African Planter*, May, 1896.

¹⁰⁷ R.S. Hynde, "A Retrospect," *The Central African Planter*, September, 1895.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

For Johnston, his expeditions in the north against the slave traders and Yao tribes and the declaration of a protectorate meant the planters of Nyasaland would flourish. One of the motivating factors for Johnston was the establishment of the plantation economy. He wrote:

It would almost seem as though the welfare of this Protectorate will be first founded on its coffee plantations. Our favourable conditions are the suitable climate, the just sufficient rain supply, the enormous extent of virgin soil, and the relative abundance and cheapness of native labour.¹⁰⁹

Johnston's vision was prophetic. Between 1889 and 1895 the planter population steadily grew after the announcement of British imperial protection. In his C.A.P article about the early pioneers, Hynde laid out the quickly growing population and coffee cultivation after the protectorate was declared:

In 1889-90 Mr. Robert Cleland was frequently at Mlanje arranging for the opening of his station there. Mr. Duncan started his estate at Upper Mudi early in 1890. In 1891 there were several arrivals. Mr. Bradshaw passed up the river and settled Mlanje where Mr. Brown of Ceylon had preceded him. Mr. Brown opened up for the Africa Lakes Company what is now Mr. Moir's Lauderdale Estate. Mr. Hastings arrived and took up land at Chiradzulo while numerous other purchases were completed and ratified. Mr. Adamson, now at Cholo, arrived shortly after Mr. Hastings. Coffee is being planted in all directions.¹¹⁰

The Buchanan brothers set their goal at planting a million coffee plants, however it was Mr. Eugene Sharrer, who owned large swathes of land in the Shire Valley, who had the most land for coffee.

Mr. Sharrer was one of the early pioneers and a very prominent planter in Nyasaland. He arrived in the early 1880's with Buchanan and Johnston and by the early 1890s he owned well

¹⁰⁹ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 77.

¹¹⁰ R.S. Hynde, "With Regards to Outsiders," *The Central African Planter*, September, 1895.

over 372,000 acres of land in Zomba, Blantyre, Thyolo and Liwonde.¹¹¹ He was also instrumental in helping develop the best systems of planting coffee in the region. There was a growing debate amongst pioneer planters as to the correct way of planting and to which other colonies they should look for comparison. Hynde explained this concept in the C.A.P, where he wrote:

Every intelligent planter will endeavour to learn as much as possible about the methods pursued in different countries and the reasons for these methods, at the same time endeavouring to gauge the probabilities of a new method being applicable to his own estate. The road to success in coffee planting is not a plain one and nothing so puzzles a beginner as the multiplicity of opinions seemingly contradicting each other.¹¹²

The methods for which the planters were gauging their success were referred to as the Mysore and Ceylon methods. The Ceylon methods called for rapid deforestation and burning of the fallen timber to clear an area for the opening of an estate. However, this system was seen as wasteful and damaging to the long term prospects of cultivation. The Mysore method was to partially cut down trees around an estate and to allow the timber to die down gradually, a system which planters agreed yielded more over time.

The importance of shade was also advanced in the discussion of these systems. The Nyasaland planters agreed in stating that, “its shade we want.”¹¹³ They largely blamed the crippled coffee industry on the lack of shading techniques in places like Ceylon. As Hynde explained: “undoubtedly it seems shade was at least one of the main factors crippling the coffee industry. In Ceylon itself, the value of shade is now recognised and is advised in case of any renewed attempts to resuscitate the dying coffee planting industry on the island.”¹¹⁴ In Mysore,

¹¹¹ Owen J. M. Kalinga and Cynthia A. Crosby, *Historical Dictionary of Malawi* (Lanham MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2001), 426.

¹¹² R.S. Hynde, “Coffee Planting in Mysore,” *The Central African Planter*, September, 1895.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

however, most estates were employing shading techniques to great avail. After developing the system of shading, the average yield per acre was at $3\frac{3}{4}$ cwts and a good estate of 200 or so acres would expect a reasonable profit from 1,500 to 2,000 pounds a year.¹¹⁵ Noted in the C.A.P, Hynde stated that: “by adopting the best methods of cultivation, it ought to be possible to master the conditions of coffee planting here as to place it on a permanent basis.”¹¹⁶

The Limbi Estate would be one of the first to begin importing trees of different species to test shading in order to master the methods of cultivation. Planters were also importing coffee beans of different varieties, such as *Coffea Stemophylla* from Sierra Leone, Maragogipe Coffee from Brazil introduced by Thomas Christy, Liberian Arabica from Liberia, the Inhambane Variety from East Africa and Liberian coffee introduced by Simpson at his Chiromo Estate and by Buchanan at Zomba.¹¹⁷ The planter pioneers were carving out of the landscape their plantations and planting, almost universally, coffee. Buchanan commented:

Roughly speaking, there are at this moment 6,000 acres under coffee in Nyasaland spread over something like 100 plantations. By 1897 it is very probable that the export of coffee will reach an aggregate of 24,000 cwt. It is calculated that a plantation of 200 acres including say 1000 acres more or less of land, may be brought into bearing in its third year for about 2,000 pounds, though 2,500 would be a safer estimate.¹¹⁸

The prospects of succeeding in Nyasaland attracted planters and companies from other coffee growing colonies to try their hand, such as Henry Brown and Mr. Carson from Ceylon.

Due to a combination of factors, from competition from the Brazilian coffee exports to the rampant coffee leaf disease, Ceylon planters took an interest in Nyasaland as their coffee

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ R.S. Hynde, “Ceylon and Nyasaland,” *The Central African Planter*, October, 1895.

¹¹⁷ R. H. Elliot, “Varieties of Coffee,” *The Central African Planter*, September, 1895.

¹¹⁸ John Buchanan, “Coffee: Its Positions and Prospects,” *The Central African Planter*, October, 1895.

industry slumped into decline. Henry Brown went to Nyasaland in 1891 leaving behind his estate in Ceylon where he was also a coffee planter. He was hired by the Africa Lakes Company to open the Lauderdale Estate. Mr. Moir bought the Lauderdale estate some three years later and Brown moved his interests to Mulanje. Brown not only grew coffee, in fact he was well known as the foremost pioneer in the cultivation of tea: “for some years tea was looked upon as a hobby of Mr. Henry Brown of Mulanje, but everything points that he is the pioneer of what will ultimately become an important minor cultivation in Nyasaland.”¹¹⁹ Carson opened the Nyasaland Coffee Company. The company was put under the Ceylon Joint Stock Ordinance. The company had a capital of 700,000 Indian Rupees and was formed, according to the C.A.P, as follows:

Acquiring from Mr. J. H. Carson of Ganamotava Estate, Haputale Ceylon, two blocks of forest land comprising some 3,500 acres which Mr. Carson acquired during his recent visit to B. C. A which land the company intends to plant coffee¹²⁰

The big differences between Nyasaland and Ceylon, as far as the planters were concerned, was the unsatisfactory state of labor and how isolated the estates were.

Though there were many struggles, more booster literature left Nyasaland and circulated throughout the empire, and the population began to expand. In 1891 there were only fifty-seven planters, merchants and traders in the region; however as more booster literature left the region that number swelled to over three hundred by 1900. The pioneer planters also grew the country's economy from an export of seven thousand pounds in 1890 to well over one hundred thousand

¹¹⁹ Barbara Lamport-Stokes, “Henry Brown, Planter,” *The Society of Malawi Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (1992): 1-68.

¹²⁰ R.S. Hynde, “Nyasaland Coffee Company Ltd.,” *The Central African Planter*, September, 1895.

pounds by 1900.¹²¹ Though coffee would not be the staple crop they thought it to be, it continued growing with varying degrees of success.

To the early pioneer planters of Nyasaland, the country was seen as possessing all the necessary traits needed for a planting community to succeed. It had a climate conducive to the cultivation of staple crops, most notably coffee, the environment in the highlands was not as harsh as other tropical regions, there was a plentiful amount of land and sources of labor and they had the backing of their government. The pioneers paved the way for the 20th century and were tried, tested and prepared to continue growing their ventures. As Henry Brown stated: “Nyasaland planters are a hard-headed, stubborn lot of men, above taking the advice of anybody. In fact, they are a queer lot, who are not very particular about the veracity of the statements they make; it is said to be the effect of the African climate.”¹²²

Chapter 3: Land and Labor: The Planters Attempt to Create Their Imagined Community

Section One: Acquiring the Land for Paradise

¹²¹ C. A. Baker, "Nyasaland, The History of Its Export Trade," *The Nyasaland Journal*, Vol. 15, no. 1 (January 1962), 8.

¹²² Barbara Lamport-Stokes, "Henry Brown, Planter," *The Society of Malawi Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (1992), 7.

To the Britons indoctrinated into the belief that power and profits were derived from land ownership, land was seen as being a path forward to social, political and economic advancement. Linda Colley commented on this ideology stating that landed ownership not trade was the means to status, “in terms of wealth, status and power, men of trade in this society came a long way behind men of land.”¹²³ Though Colley is discussing the late 18th and early 19th century landed elite and the differences between trade and commodity wealth and land wealth, it is easy to make the connection to the rise of the 19th and 20th century planters. During this period of heightened expansion, land became available in quantities that was never before experienced. Men with little chance of economic or social growth in Britain left seeking possibilities elsewhere in the growing empire.

In the 19th and 20th centuries as planters made their way into the harsh environments in the tropics like India, the Pacific and Africa, conversations were had on where best to settle ground for future agricultural estates in those regions. What they came to find was that in highland regions where the climates were mild enough and with sustainable water, estates could be established and be lucrative. This formed a type of spatial identity that was unique to planters as lands acquired in tropical and equatorial lands required specific traits in order to survive. In 1951, R. R. Rawson commented on this in the journal, *Economic Geography*: “white communities are practicable in tropical and equatorial lands at altitudes 3500 ft and above, conditions being best between 3000 and 6000 ft.”¹²⁴ In Nyasaland, planters established themselves along that set parameter, an example being the estates established in the Shire Highlands with an elevation of around 3200ft.

¹²³ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 1992), 65.

¹²⁴ R. R. Rawson, “Emigration to British East and Central Africa,” *Economic Geography*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Jan, 1951), 67.

Land in Nyasaland was seen as being very abundant with large tracts of land ripe for settlement and cultivation. In the early years of settlement (1885 to 1895), the British planters and missionaries were able to acquire hundreds of thousands of acres from local chiefs with little expense. Booster literature coming out of the region was keen to capitalize on the abundance of cheap land. The reports going back to the metropole often depicted the region as being perfect for extended European settlement and venture. Harry Johnson in his report, *The First Three Years of Administration*, discussed colonization in the highland region and its benefits:

In these regions I really believe that Europeans might retain good health, and even rear children without much, if any, deterioration of race. This is a well watered region, with a delicious climate, and fertile soil, and almost uninhabited by natives. The climate is perfect as regards temperature, very bracing and there is a good deal of the soil which might be cultivated with European vegetables and the balance is grass-land, affording excellent pasturage for horses, cattle and sheep.¹²⁵

For the Europeans in the tropics, mild climates, usually compared to Scotland, were preferred along with the ability to stay separated from the local Africans in order to stay exclusive and “pure”.

During a lecture at the Joint East African Trade and Information Office, Charles Ponsonby, then acting Managing Director of the British Central Africa Company, discussed the physical layout of the country and why it was perfect for European ventures:

The country most suitable for European settlement is to be found in the Angonliland Highlands and Shire Highlands. These highlands resemble more than anything the highlands of Scotland, and while the climate is hot and clammy during the rains from December to March, from April to November it is perfect

¹²⁵ Henry Hamilton Johnston, *Report by Commissioner Johnston of the First Three Years Administration of the Eastern Portion of British Central Africa* (London: Harrison and Sons March 31, 1894).

and you have the combination of the scenery of Scotland and the climate of the Riviera.¹²⁶

The discussion of Nyasaland being comparable to Scotland was an important part of the early efforts to attract planters to move there. It also stood as a great point of pride amongst the early planters, most of whom were Scotsman, as Alfred Sharpe stated in an interview with the *Scotman* Newspaper: “British Central Africa and the Shire Highlands is, as yet, the solitary instance of a successful agricultural colony in the tropics. The work has not yet been done by borrowed capital, nearly all done by Scotsman with their own small capital.”¹²⁷ These reports were meant to encourage and excite individuals to grow the colony’s population and economy.

Belich described this phenomenon as being part of a complex, often describing these areas as developing a “paradise complex.” It portrayed new lands as biblical lands or Canaan, Lands of Goshen, and Gardens of Eden, and invoked secular paradises too: “El Dorado, ripe for plunder.”¹²⁸ Henry Brown commented on this very concept when discussing the agricultural possibilities of Nyasaland: “our lands are exceedingly fertile and they only want time and money to turn B.C.A into an agricultural Eldorado.”¹²⁹ Making these utopian and biblical connections was a strong encouraging force to light a spark of curiosity and in most cases emigration.

Between 1887 and 1891, while Johnston was in the northern regions of the country fighting Arab slave traders, John Buchanan was made acting consul. While under his consulship, he registered around a million acres of land to himself, the British Central Africa Company

¹²⁶ Charles Ponsonby, “Nyasaland,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. 74, No. 3839 (June 18th, 1929), 736.

¹²⁷ “Mr Sharpe on B.C.A,” *Central African Planter*, December 1895.

¹²⁸ James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-world, 1783-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 154.

¹²⁹ “Letters to the Editor: The Agricultural Controversy,” *Central African Times*, May 23rd, 1903.

(BCA), A.L. Bruce, the Blantyre and East Africa Company (B&EA) and the Moirs.¹³⁰ The land was either “purchased” or treaties were made to acquire the land, usually through the trading of materials for the land. When Johnston returned he commented on the situation, stating that: it was a wholesale grabbing of land, huge tracts had been bought for disproportionate amounts from the natives.”¹³¹ In 1891 Johnston asked the planting community, some 237, to submit land claims to him and whilst he investigated them no more land could be purchased.¹³²

In 1892, Harry Johnston, the then acting Commissioner of the region, launched a commission to inquire into the matters of land ownership by Europeans. The total area of the protectorate, found by the commission, was approximately 25,161,924 acres of land, 3,705,255 acres of which were being held for freehold owners.¹³³ In 1894, as planters were beginning to move to Nyasaland in larger numbers, the total amount of land alienated to Europeans was 905,758 acres.¹³⁴ Much of the lands purchased were undocumented, in some cases done by handshake, leading the government to launch other commissions in the 1920’s. The government commission appointed by Johnston found that: “There appears to be substantial support for the view of many of the native chiefs that they never sold or in any way transferred their land to Europeans.”¹³⁵ The land in question was mostly in the Shire Highlands where roughly 52% of cultivable land was in control of the planters and Africa Lakes Company, which amounted to approximately 15% of land in the whole of the Protectorate.¹³⁶

¹³⁰ Colin Baker, *Seeds of Trouble: Government Policy and Land Rights in Nyasaland, 1946-1964* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1993), 5.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³³ Stephen Samuel Murray, *A Handbook of Nyasaland* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1932), 186.

¹³⁴ Morris, *Environmental History Of Southern Malawi*, 104.

¹³⁵ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 77.

¹³⁶ Morris, *Environmental History Of Southern Malawi*, 106.

In total twenty five individuals controlled the majority of land in the Shire Highlands, the top three being Sharrer (363,044 acres), Buchanan Brothers (171,759 acres) and Alexander Bruce (159,890).¹³⁷ Many of the land deals between African chiefs and planters were done with handshakes or the trade of goods in exchange. One exchange was brought into question after an African chief was questioned by Johnston. In 1892, land claimed by Henry Brown was brought into question by Johnston's commission. Their lead witness was Mivamibuler, a subchief in Mabuka's country who said:

Mr. Brown came here one day and asked for leave to build a house and plant coffee. I said "this country belongs to the queen." Mr. Brown said "I don't want to buy the country, I only want to build a small house and plant coffee." Then he gave us two kegs of powder, one piece of red cloth, one piece of handkerchiefs and three packets of pink beads. Together with seven night caps, I never signed any papers.¹³⁸

Most of the deals done between the African chiefs and the early pioneer planters and missionaries were conducted in similar fashion. Certificates of Claims, such as the ones obtained by planters like Brown, went unobstructed and often overlooked as long as they met the bare minimum of criteria, described as: "any lengthy occupation combined with considerable cultivation or the erection of buildings constituted a good claim, even if unsupported by properly executed documents."¹³⁹ As Johnston himself would later write, "the proclamation of the British protectorate had been followed by a wholesale grabbing of land."¹⁴⁰

The treaties were often struck in mutual misunderstanding between the parties as African chiefs expected that the planters would act in similar fashion to the indigenous people in their

¹³⁷ Ibid., 105.

¹³⁸ Henry Brown, "*H. Brown Papers*," Society of Malawi Archives, The Mandala House, 1948.

¹³⁹ Stephen Samuel Murray, *A Handbook of Nyasaland* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1932), 186.

¹⁴⁰ Morris, *Environmental History Of Southern Malawi*, 106.

treatment of the land, and the planters believed that chiefs had absolute authority over the land to make sales. In order to fix this, Johnston and his administration looked into and at times rejected land claims for lack of evidence. In the case of Henry Brown and his land claims, he received a letter from Johnston's office stating the following:

All persons claiming land within the said limits, whether by purchase, lease, or otherwise, will send in to H. M. Commissioner with full particulars of their claims together with all documents and evidence upon which such claims are based, accompanied by sketch maps showing distinctly the position, extent and boundaries of such claims.¹⁴¹

In this instance Brown provided sufficient evidence to his land claim in Chopoka, however, at another land claim in Momboora, his claims would be rejected. In 1892 he was sent a letter stating his rejection: "this country is Government property that H. M. Commissioner has not given you permission to open up the land and so far your claim is recognised by nobody but yourself."¹⁴²

Claim refusals against planters, as well as a newly imposed tax on settled vs unsettled lands, began to cause animosity amongst the planters towards Johnston. Planters began seeing Johnston as a: "perfectly absolute autocrat" putting on the land, "an upset price of 5s per acre on land in settled districts, and 2s 6d per acre in outlying districts, where one cannot hope to escape being murdered by the natives."¹⁴³ The fear caused by the moves made by Johnston gave rise to the desire to have him replaced by an administration more amenable to the needs of the planters, rather than to the needs of the Africans. Their only hope, according to the planters, was for either the chartered company (British South Africa Company) to intervene or for the home government to take direct control of the territory. In one article a planter stated the position bluntly:

¹⁴¹ Henry Brown, "*H. Brown Papers*," Society of Malawi Archives, The Mandala House, 1891.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ The Critic, "Nyasaland. (Continued)," *The Central African Planter*, March, 1896.

The hope of the white population of Nyasaland is that they may come under the rule of the Chartered Company (the British South Africa Company), for as things exist at present they are dependent for legislation and justice upon a caprice of an irresponsible autocrat, they are ground down by heavy taxation for no other purpose than to support an oppressive administration. What is wanted in British Central Africa is that the home government should take a firm hold of things and once and for all bring the natives to their senses, open up the country and put an end to Johnson's tenure. The people should be given every encouragement to develop their estates.¹⁴⁴

By the end of 1896 Johnston would be recalled and the British South Africa Company would buy out the Africa Lakes Company, seizing large swathes of land, and giving governance to the company. Hyde wrote a powerful statement attacking the administration seeing it as acting against the commercial community:

The B.C.A Administration has not encouraged the development of its territory nor has it been over mindful of the interests of the residents in it. The administration so far as promoting the welfare and advancement of British Central Africa has been, we regret to say, a failure. This is no small degree due to the rule of autocracy inaugurated by Commissioner Johnston, that is a disease that kills every effort and every attempt or private enterprise.¹⁴⁵

It would not be until 1907 that direct control of the colony would be returned to British Commissioners, and with it, new laws were introduced concerning the state of land and plantations.

In an attempt to keep planters and large trading companies from acquiring more land, the government began establishing Crown Lands and Native Trust Lands in areas around private estates, namely in the Shire Highlands. More than 87% of the total land, both public and Native Trust, was controlled by the government; however planters were allowed to lease portions of this

¹⁴⁴ The Critic, "Nyasaland. (Continued)," *The Central African Planter*, March, 1896.

¹⁴⁵ R.S. Hyde, "Periodical," *The Central African Planter*, June, 1897.

land for upwards of 99 years, making this land more private than public.¹⁴⁶ Johnston remarked that planters saw the African natives as nothing more than “cattle” to be used, but he also knew that if the colony was to succeed it would do so on the back of the plantation economy.

Section Two: Planter and Labour Relations

The relationship between the planters and the native Africans in the region was precarious. Much like the political conflicts over land, labor would be at the center of discussions and arguments between the planters, missionaries and the government. Constant turmoil over the country’s labor supply would plague the region until independence in 1964, and at times stir fears over an African uprising. With the implementation of the *Thangata* labor system, based loosely off the native Malawians’ tribal labor system, and the planters imagined ideals of racial superiority, relations between the planters and Africans were tense.¹⁴⁷ Between being at odds with the government over their treatment of the indigenous tribes and the constant drain due to the migration of labor to the Rhodesias, the planters struggled to realize the dream they were promised of cheap and abundant reserves of labor.

As discussed in chapter two, the British World was a vast system of local, regional and continental networks of identity linking Britons together. At the heart of these interlocked networks was an idea of racial superiority that all Britons shared. Andrew Thompson speaks to this idea, when he writes “networks, after all, are specifically created to be exclusive and to

¹⁴⁶ Morris, *Environmental History Of Southern Malawi*, 111.

¹⁴⁷ *Thangata* was a system of forced labor, comparable to systems of sharecropping in the American South. In Nyasaland planters acquired land that was already occupied by local African tribes. Since their villages were on estate lands, planters used them as their preferred labor. Instead of providing pay, the planters gave them a choice; work or face eviction. Planters paid the established hut tax instead of paying their African laborers; African laborers worked in order to “pay off” the hut tax paid for by the planter.

promote the interests of insiders, if need be, at the expense of others.”¹⁴⁸ The planters followed in this tradition and created their own racially and socially exclusive group gaining their power through land acquisition and dominating indigenous groups who they viewed as their lessers. Unlike other periods in colonial history however, planters in the 19th and 20th century did not share the same level of racial exclusivity that they did in the 17th and 18th century.

Following the passing of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, the British Parliament outlawed the trade and use of slave labor in the British Empire. The passage of this act resulted in the systematic destruction of the slave trade and its proponents across the globe, mainly in Africa. This resulted in the ushering in of missionary movements aimed at educating and training Africans in developing their own economies. David Livingstone referenced this mission to train African tribes to be better prepared for economic development when he stated, “the promotion of commerce ought to be specially attended to as this demolishes the sense of isolation which heathenism engenders, and make tribes feel them mutually dependent on and mutually beneficial to each other.”¹⁴⁹ His statements and the corresponding wave of Scottish missionaries, sparked conflict with the planters over ideas of how best to utilize the African natives; planters believed they were meant to act as laborers and missionaries who believed they needed to be educated and Christianized in order to become contributing and self-sustaining subjects of the empire.

Planters had to adapt to changing concepts of labor, their relationship to it and to the missionaries responsible for education and training. The first Commissioner of Nyasaland, Harry Johnston, commented on how the missions’ and planters’ relationship affected his governance of the region, when he noted that he was, “frequently reviled by the Scottish Missionaries, who thought they were the government and by the planters, who thought they should be the

¹⁴⁸ Kent Fedorowich and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire, Migration and Identity in the British World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017) ,15.

¹⁴⁹ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 39.

government.”¹⁵⁰ As will be discussed later, the planters formed numerous “planter” associations with the intent of consolidating their voice and influence over government policies, usually geared towards land and labor issues.

One of the main reasons planters chose to settle in Nyasaland, apart from cheap and bountiful land, was the prospect that in Nyasaland a planter could return to the “old ways” with abundant and “cheap” labor reserves. In one of the earlier “booster” literature articles, written by Buchanan in 1895, the author commented on this idea of returning to the old way of things that the planters could expect in Nyasaland:

There are yet vast fields of labour untapped and as we advance and close in on the old order of things in Africa, the natural corollary is that tribes come to learn that the new state is better than the old.¹⁵¹

At first, this was a relatively obtainable goal in the region. In the early stages of settlement there was little if any regulatory body overseeing land acquisition and labor procurement, and even fewer questions raised over where and how labor was acquired. As the pioneering stage gave way to the more settled periods, planters came to find that labor was a lot less abundant than they had hoped. The lack of available labor was due to a multiple of factors from labor being drawn for the mines and farms in the Rhodesias, to the need for the transportation of goods and indigenous villages needing their own crops to be planted.

Keeping and maintaining a regular rotation of workers on plantations was affected by the wet and dry seasons. The indigenous tribes of Nyasaland, like their European counterparts, also cultivated the fields for their own settlements. Thus, their seasons for planting coincided with the

¹⁵⁰ Colin Baker, “Nyasaland’s Governors: A Baker’s Dozen,” *The Society of Malawi Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (2001), 30.

¹⁵¹ J. Buchanan, “Coffee: Its Position and Prospects,” *The Central African Planter*, October, 1895.

planters' need for labor. The labor supply was broken down into “two groups,” as described by Hynde:

Our labour supply may be divided into two classes- the local, Angoni, and Anguru supply which is available chiefly in the dry months from April to October; and the Atonga and Lake Nyasa supply (Yaos and Momera's Angoni) which is brought down chiefly for the wet season.¹⁵²

Another factor affecting labor was the mining and transportation industry. Most goods were transported via “human carriage” which placed a drain on the labor supply drastically. The chronic shortage of labor contributed to a shared belief among planters that the local Africans were simply lazy, often spending the majority of their time in “vegetation in their villages.”¹⁵³

Though the notion that indigenous Africans were “lazy” was a common complaint of the planters, the reality was that they did not want to pay sufficient wages to the Africans and thus had trouble finding abled-body labor. The priorities of the indigenous Africans however was to tend their own crops. In the beginning they had little need for money in their subsistence economy, so the draw to work on European estates was not as important to them. As the colonial economy started to grow however, and the consolidation of land by Europeans expanded, the need for wages also grew. African's needed wages to pay rent to European estate owners, where indigenous villages were present. As the demand for wages to pay rent grew, plants did not provide sufficient payment to meet those demands. Thus Africans began looking elsewhere to raise the appropriate money.

One place the indigenous Africans looked for employment was in the mines and farms of the Rhodesias and South Africa. By 1910 the issue had become so critical the planters urged the

¹⁵² R.S. Hynde, “The Labour Supply,” *The Central African Planter*, February, 1896.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

government to put an end to the competition over labor. Alfred Sharpe, the Governor at the time, responded with a move to end the exportation of African labor. The *London Standard* reported:

Representations have been made by the planters of Nyasaland to the Governor of that Protectorate regarding the emigration of Nyasa natives for the purpose of labour. In reply, Sir Alfred Sharpe stated he seeks to abolish the recruiting for places outside the Protectorate.¹⁵⁴

Local Africans were willing to leave Nyasaland for the Rhodesias for a variety of reasons. Griff Jones argues there were three primary reasons why labor left the region; first, because the market in the early years was still being established so wages were lower; second, the planters required a labor force that was skilled; and third, the planters wanted seasonal rather than permanent labor. Jones explained it like this:

They had three main issues. Firstly there was no industrial market, so the wages the planters could offer were lower than those further south. Secondly, they required disciplined labour, not the irregular attendance offered by the African living locally. Thirdly, they wanted not regular labour, but seasonal labour. Thus the planters were less able than the more variously occupied settlers in Southern Rhodesia to offer employment for the length of time required by the migrant native.¹⁵⁵

In order to fix the problem and allow the planters to have access to labor in order to develop the region's economy, the government had to develop a solution.

In order to help planters retain their labor supply, Johnston's administration instituted a hut tax at three shillings which was meant to force Africans into waged labor. Planters pushed this as the only way to ensure they would have the labor resources necessary. The issue was commented on in the C.A.P, with the author arguing that "natives should be compelled to work

¹⁵⁴ "Rhodesia," *London Standard*, April 29th, 1910.

¹⁵⁵ Griff Jones, *Britain and Nyasaland* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), 63.

by imposing a hut tax as is done in Natal.”¹⁵⁶ For Africans whose villages were within European estates, their hut tax would be paid by the planter and in return the local Africans would work. By 1897 the hut tax would be raised to six shillings, which would force Africans to “work two months instead of one to get the necessary cash.”¹⁵⁷

Planters received what was referred to as the “backbone” of the plantation labor supply at the beginning of the 20th century. The Lomwe people from Mozambique, part of Portuguese East Africa, flooded into Nyasaland. By 1935 the population of the Mulanje District went from 30,000 to more than 134,000 people. Of this, Lomwe people made up roughly 70% of them.¹⁵⁸ As more Lomwe made their way to Nyasaland, Crown Lands became too crowded. Planters began pushing the government for labor restrictions and Crown Land restrictions. The difference between migrant laborers and local African laborers became a common issue of tension between planters and their African counterparts, as well as making it difficult for the government to make laws regulating the planters’ treatment of Africans.

In 1912, Alfred Sharpe forbade the settlement of Lomwe on Crown Lands, lands owned and controlled by the British government, which meant if Lomwe wanted to live in Nyasaland they would almost be forced to live on planter estates. Governor Sir William Manning, Sharpe’s replacement later detailed the role the Lomwe played bluntly:

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 provided a ready and permanent labour supply for the extension of European enterprise.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ A Planter, “Nyasaland,” *The Central Africa Planter*, March, 1896.

¹⁵⁷ “Current Chat,” *The Central African Planter*, April, 1896.

¹⁵⁸ Morris, *Environmental History Of Southern Malawi*, 129.

¹⁵⁹ Manning to Colonial Office, February 1912, TNA CO 5525/44, as quoted in: Brian Morris, *Environmental History of Southern Malawi: Land and People of the Shire Highlands* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 132.

Manning made his commitment to the plantation economy of Nyasaland clear, and thus to the needs of the planter. The question of the implementation of *Thangata* however proved a constant point of contention between planters, Africans and the government. To the planters though, *Thangata* was a controlling aspect to their perceived dominance of the area, and a critical construct for their identity.

Thangata was an important tool which kept Africans and Europeans “separated” in terms of social class. Many of the planters who moved to Nyasaland were not members of the landed elite back in Britain and moving to the country gave them the opportunities to become part of upper class society. Thus the need to separate themselves from African natives was essential to maintaining their status. However as African laborers began working on European estates in the region more frequently and earning a wage, the gap between the two began to narrow. The introduction of the hut tax and more broadly defined wage labor, gave African societies a new sense of what money could provide, as documented by Griff Jones, a Nyasaland administrator in the last ten years before independence:

The African regarded cash differently from the planters, for they saw cash as capital by which goods would be produced for sale and the cash they earned was ploughed into the maintenance and development of the estate. A planter might say he could not afford a coat, his friends understood perfectly what he meant but this was incomprehensible to Africans, who only knew that he had received hundreds of pounds for his produce, and that this would buy many suits. The European who had spare cash would allocate it between consumption and investment; the Africans would devote it entirely to consumption. Thus an African may have often had more or better clothes than a European earning five times as much.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Griff Jones, *Britain and Nyasaland* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), 114.

This caused a great deal of resentment amongst the planters towards their African counterparts as they viewed themselves as racially superior.

The planters, and European community as a whole, did not believe that the native Africans were capable of being self-sufficient or being anything other than a source of labor. Johnston commented on this and what he believed this type of ideology would lead to:

The ideal of the average European planter in Tropical Africa would be a country where the black millions toil unremittingly for the benefit of the white man. Anything like free will as to whether they went to work or not, or any attempt at competing with the white man as regards education or skilled labour would not be tolerated. If allowed to govern this land in their own way, they would use their power too selfishly in the interests of the white man.¹⁶¹

Johnston would also go on to say that “due encouragement” should be shown to the planters and other economic activities as they were the ones providing capital development and without them the African would “relapse into their almost ape-like existence of fighting, feeding and breeding.”¹⁶² This racist mentality of racial superiority and giving in to the needs of the agricultural community gripped the country until independence in 1964.

Thangata was seen by outsiders, and by the Colonial Office, as being closely linked to slavery, or at the very least, a form of forced labor. It was highly exploitative and took advantage of the cultural differences between the European planters and the native Malawians over land rights. Essentially, *Thangata* meant Africans would work on the European estates for a specific amount of time and in lieu of wages, they were allowed to live on the estates. If they did not work the specified time, or wanted to quit and work for someone else, they would have to pay six

¹⁶¹ Harry Johnston, *British Central Africa: An Attempt to Give Some Account of a Portion of the Territories Under British Influence North of the Zambezi* (United Kingdom: E. Arnold, 1897), 182.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 183.

shillings in rent. Oftentimes the contracts specified that a laborer could not work anywhere else other than the said estate if they wished to continue living there and having their rent paid by the planter. As discussed earlier, the planters often acquired land on which African villages already existed, and thus either they agreed to work on the estates or they faced forced eviction.

Limiting the *Thangata* system, or the relationship between planter and laborer, was the central concern of a number of government commissions and ordinances. Johnston was the first to attempt this, but it would not be until Alfred Sharpe became governor that moves were made to limit the practice. Under Sharpe, the Land Ordinance of 1904 was enacted, which essentially gave Africans security of tenure, as well as eight acres of land to hoe and a rent of four shillings to the planter or face eviction. Judge Nunan, who presided over the 1904 commission, gave his opinion on the matter:

It appears to me to be exceedingly unfair and one-sided. The native surrender a freehold or claim of freehold, and receive a tenancy with the superadded condition that if they do not work for the landowner they are bound to pay six shillings, this is neither fair nor reasonable.¹⁶³

Planters did not accept the commission's finding readily. The Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, for example, had Hynde defend the planters' position.

During a hearing, in which Hynde called multiple witnesses and "experts", he outlined the planters' perspective on land rights and tenure and whether or not the Africans had right to it. In defending *Thangata* and the way it worked, Hynde had this to say:

The idea of a freehold in the ordinary sense was an absolutely foreign idea to the native, therefore he had no freehold rights to dispose of and that the agreement in question was merely a means of recording the fact that the native had given up his

¹⁶³ Colin Baker, *Seeds of Trouble: Government Policy and Land Rights in Nyasaland, 1946-1964* (London: British Academic Press, 1993), 13.

holding under the certificate of claim voluntarily and therefore entitled treatment as a tenant.¹⁶⁴

The court ruled against the planters however, essentially stating that rents should be lowered to three shillings and in order to evict “natives” from estate land the landowners had to prove the Africans were not original occupants of the land before certificates of claim were issued. The ordinance provided safety to Africans living and working on private estates, however the ordinance would not be brought into effect and the *Thangata* system continued.

In 1915 the conflict over *Thangata* and land rights boiled over in the form of an uprising, known as the Chilembwe Rebellion. The rebellion was inspired by a man named John Chilembwe, who led a small group of African laborers from the A. L. Bruce Magomero estates that killed three European planters.¹⁶⁵ Chilembwe was an educated pastor who was brought up in the Church of Scotland mission near the town of Blantyre. He would later become ordained as a minister after accompanying missionary Joseph Booth back to the United States. While in the United States, Chilembwe was enrolled into the Virginia Theological Seminary, supported by Dr. Lewis Jordan, who was the acting Secretary of the Afro-American National Baptist Convention.¹⁶⁶ Upon returning to Nyasaland, Chilembwe began the process of building the Providence Industrial Mission in Mbombwe and gathered a following of over 900 members. He would go on to build a church on the A. L. Bruce estates, which in 1913 was burned down by Bruce. This act added fuel to flames amongst Chilembwe’s followers as he preached for an end to British colonialism, African independence and the rising up of the “poor and exploited”.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ “High Court of British Central Africa: Supervisor of Native Affairs,” *The Central African Times*, May 9th, 1903.

¹⁶⁵ Morris, *Environmental History Of Southern Malawi*, 176.

¹⁶⁶ McCracken, *A History of Malawi: 1855-1966*, 132.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

To help with his image and his sermon, Chilembwe would often dress himself and his family in European style clothing, causing conflict with the planters' ideals of European dominance. Tensions boiled over in January of 1915 when Chilembwe organized an insurrection with the plan of storming the Africa Lakes Company headquarters at Blantyre in order to seize arms and munitions, while launching a simultaneous attack on the A.L. Bruce estates with the intention of killing all Europeans on the estate. The plan was partially successful, as they killed three Europeans on the Bruce estate among them the estate manager, William Jervis Livingston, who had his head removed and placed in Chilembwe's church for the following day's service. By January 25th, however, the rebellion was put down by the King's African Rifles, and Chilembwe who fled was spotted and shot to death on February 3rd.

The events that transpired caused the planting community to rethink their relationship with not only their African laborers, but also with the missions in the region. The planters would blame what took place on the teachings of "Ethiopianism", which was the idea that those with African ancestry would come to rule the world. They blamed the missions in the region for providing Africans the foundation for which to build their own religious and racial ideologies. An article in the *Nyasaland Times* summarized the planters' opinion on the matter and how they came to understand the rebellion's spark:

In the first place there is no doubt whatever that the so-called Ethiopianism is at the bottom of the movement. In a sense all Missions are responsible as it is due to the effect of ill-digested teaching on the native mind. There is no doubt that the teachings of Ethiopianism and such like doctrines are likely to be misapplied by natives and we have always held that to take natives to America or Europe was one of the worst things which could be done to them. While the whiteman can be trusted to use his reason, the native gets obsessed by one idea and if this idea leads to unlawful acts he is not likely to stop. Religious mania is responsible for much.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ "The Chilembwe Trouble," *Nyasaland Times*, February 4th, 1915.

Their comments came from a perceived place of racial cultural superiority, stating that the “natives” are incapable of individual thought and when they are educated in European customs, it acts as a catalyst to rebellious impulses. The planters would not have to wait long however before the government intervened and began a thorough investigation into the uprising.

After the rebellion was put down, and the rebels executed, the Nyasaland government established a commission to look into why the rebellion occurred. The commission was led by colonial administrators, but also included numerous representatives from the planting community and the British Central Africa Company, represented by the general manager, Clause Metcalfe. The *Thangata* system was noted as a “plausible” reason for why the rebellion occurred, though little would be done to put an end to it. In fact the *Thangata* system would be given new life in a different form. In 1917 an ordinance called the Natives Rents Ordinance was introduced. The ordinance virtually abolished the *Thangata* system, establishing paid rent in cash instead of rent for labor - a fixed rent determined by the government and a six month warning before evictions.¹⁶⁹

In 1919 however another commission, spurred on by the planters’ Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, reversed the 1917 ordinance stating: “labour is the only return for which estates will accept native tenants. No landlord can be compelled to accept them.”¹⁷⁰ Mlanje planters in 1919 began hoarding laborers, often allowing more to settle on their estates than they needed for work. In an exchange between planters it was reported that, “he would give labor passes to a thousand natives and out of that number he was always sure to have

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 186.

¹⁷⁰ Baker, *Seeds of Trouble*, 29.

workers.”¹⁷¹ The A. L. Bruce Estates was one organization that expanded their cultivated land and forced laborers into *Thangata* or threatened them with eviction. As noted by District Commissioner, A. H. Compton:

A L. Bruce Estates had acquired their Lukulezi Estate but development of this estate only took place on the northern side of the Tuchila and Kambenj's people continued to cultivate their garden on the southern side. After some years the Kambenje was informed that A. L. Bruce's land extended across the Tuchila and included his garden land and he was told that if he wanted to continue planting there he would have to pay rent. As there was no room for gardens elsewhere they had to pay rent or work “tangata” for their gardens. They will have to play the game, and work as the rest of our tenants do, if they come on to our land.¹⁷²

The government again gave into the planters and allowed the estates to continue using *Thangata*.

In 1928 the Colonial Office, in negotiations with the Nyasaland Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce as well as the newly formed Nyasaland Planters Association, formed the Natives on Private Estates Ordinance. The ordinance made *Thangata* legal but attempted to protect the African laborer, “to facilitate the effective exploitation of African interest and aspiration.”¹⁷³ *Thangata* would remain the central issue that the government used to try and limit the Nyasaland planters. The planters, however, having control of most of the governing councils and having organized strong planter lobby associations, were able to combat government incursions. The planters were so central to the colony's economy that the government simply could not intervene without risking the collapse of the colony. This effectively formed a “plantocracy” in Nyasaland that would not be changed until the Nyasaland Emergency in 1958.

¹⁷¹ Government of Nyasaland, “Mlanje Annual Report 1919-1920,” Malawi National Archives, Zomba, S1-1040-19.

¹⁷² “Natives on Private Estates” Zomba National Archives, Item No. NSMI/3/8.

¹⁷³ Morris, *Environmental History Of Southern Malawi*, 191.

Chapter Four: Testing the Imagined Community: Government Action and Economic

Decline

Section One: Building an Imagined Community

Developing settler communities in regions like Africa was no small task. To settlers and planters alike, the desire to replicate their home was important to their trans-national identities.

Communities that developed on the tropical continents were mostly centered around some form of commercial activity, be it the copper mines in Northern Rhodesia, coffee and tea in Ceylon and Nyasaland or farms in Australia. These communities developed around agricultural economies, what Belich referred to as “boom” towns. Boom towns, no matter where they began, shared common characteristics, as Belich explained: “the massive importation of goods, money, and people and the rapid creation of infrastructure.”¹⁷⁴ This chapter will show that while communal development took place in these boom towns, the planters mimicked the social, economic and political organizations of other planter communities in order to reinforce and strengthen the imagined ideals of their trans-national community.

To the European settlers, especially the planters, Africa appeared to be the next cradle of civilization. They imagined it as the region where a new “Neo-Britain” would form with planter and settler communities stretching across the landscape. Johnston, in his report on the first three years of his administration, commented on the idea of a racially superior European community developing in Central Africa:

¹⁷⁴ Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 87.

The practical conclusion to which we may arrive is this, that whilst the European has a great role to perform in Central Africa as ruler and teacher, it is probable that between the Zambesi and the Upper Nile he will be numbered by hundreds of thousands, and not by millions, at any rate for the next 200 or 300 years. After that, man may have acquired such control over the powers of nature, that the making of a climate healthy or the adaptation of the system to an unhealthy climate will be mere matters of physics. Then it may be that by the pressure caused by the over-people[ing] of other continents, Europeans may be compelled to adapt themselves in large numbers to the climate of Central Africa, and the true value of this vast extent of fertile lands, well watered and able to grow almost any form of food product will become manifest.¹⁷⁵

This example of booster literature discusses the concept of the European as the masters of the earth, meant to claim Africa and develop it for European interests. Though Johnston was speaking about all settlers, the planters thought of themselves as being the most appropriate agents to implement this imagined oasis.

Though the majority of planters in Nyasaland immigrated from Britain, mainly Scotland, some came from preexisting planter and settler communities like Ceylon, the West Indies, British Malaya and Australia. One planter, named S. Israel, was asked why he chose to leave Australia for Nyasaland:

Why did I choose this country in preference to others, as a field to invest capital and devote my time and labor? It was not from any desire to meet adventures, nor have I been cast by accident on this part of the African empire. I left beautiful Australia, tired of its chronic depressions, caused by bank failures, the low prices of produce, wool and wheat, etc. And as a colonial person can rarely settle down to life in crowded cities of the old world. I had to look around for new fields and pastures. I was impressed with the cheapness of land and labour, finding the quality of the soil to be quite what I desire, with good and certain rainfall.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Harry Johnston, *Report by Commissioner Johnston of the First Three Years Administration of the Eastern Portion of British Central Africa* (London: Harrison and Sons, St. Martins Lane, August, 1894), 34.

¹⁷⁶ S. Israel, "The Shire Highlands Through the Spectacles of a Newcomer," *The Central African Planter*, July, 1896.

It was due to articles like this and the increasing volume of booster literature circling throughout the British Empire that the community in Nyasaland began to grow larger year after year. Though never having a population over 2,000, the population grew from 51 in 1891 to upwards of 1,486 by 1920.¹⁷⁷ Planters like Israel came to Nyasaland predicated on the idea that there was an abundance of resources available, which meant relatively quick development. Belich describes this perfectly: “the faith in abundance, the importance of the conviction that nature’s bounty was inexhaustible; settlers envisaged an endless supply of land and raw materials, which could fuel endless booms.”¹⁷⁸

In Nyasaland the “boom” town centers were mostly in the south where the planter estates and trading hubs were located, such as Blantyre and Zomba and in the central region centered around Lilongwe. These towns became the cultural, social and economic hubs of the Nyasaland planter and trading communities. For the planters, developing these towns meant a form of civilized living could occur and a way to connect back to the lives they had at home. Also centered around the towns were the various social clubs and sports teams that developed, such as the Shire Highlands Shooting Club which regularly competed against clubs from Cholo and Zomba. There were also tennis matches between the different companies in the region, most played between the Africa Lakes Company and the British South Africa Company. These are a few examples, as there were also hunting clubs and golf clubs all developed in order to reinforce the settlers’ and planters’ identity as civilized Britons.

Though these clubs and teams were an important part of developing the community, the planter associations played the biggest role in the minds of the planters. By 1893 there were two competing planter associations in Nyasaland, the Shire Highlands Planters Association (SHPA)

¹⁷⁷ Stephen Samuel Murray, *A Handbook of Nyasaland* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1932), 242.

¹⁷⁸ Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 204.

and the Nyasaland Planters Association (NPA). The associations were chaired by competing planters, SHPA chaired by Eugene Sharrer and the NPA chaired by John Moir, competing over issues of commerce, transportation such as railroad contracts and labor. The formation of planter associations was seen as a way for planters to express their interests amongst each other, as John Moir made note: “seeing that planters did not come seeking advantages in the form of liberties, etc, but needed a field where all of us could deliberate on our interests.”¹⁷⁹

To the planters, the need for a unified voice to influence government action was a crucial part of their identity as part of the landowning class. The common thought amongst the planters was that their voice was not heard in the Nyasaland or British governments, since it was only a protectorate. Mr. Israel spoke to this fact in the *Central African Planter*, “this being a protectorate, unfortunately the European population has no voice in legislation.”¹⁸⁰ What was desired was a strong central foundation for the planters to press the government for action, and W. Hyde Wyatt thought it should be modelled off “the great planting association of Ceylon and India, to which every planter in this country owes everything as regards to his knowledge of coffee and all other branches of planting.”¹⁸¹ The conscious decision to model their association off other planter communities shows how deep this trans-national identity was.

By 1895 a few of the most prominent pioneer planters, among them being John, Jonathan and Robert Buchanan and T. M. Hastings, gathered the various planter associations together and unified them. In the association minutes recorded in the CAP, John stated the purpose of the association was, “the outcome of widespread desire on the part of the planters and merchants to form a united and strong association”; it was to be named the British Central Africa Chamber of

¹⁷⁹ John Moir, “The Two Associations,” *The Central African Planter*, January, 1896.

¹⁸⁰ S. Israel, “The Shire Highlands Through the Spectacles of a Newcomer,” *The Central African Planter*, July, 1896.

¹⁸¹ W. Hyde Wyatt, “Letters to the Editor: Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce,” *The Central African Planter*, November, 1895.

Agriculture and Commerce.¹⁸² At the first meeting they also laid out the parameters of how a planter could enter the association and how they were assigned votes:

A. Planters, B. landholders who possess not less than 1,000 acres C. proprietors or managers of commercial concerns and D. the representatives of said planters, landholders, and proprietors or managers of commercial concerns. Voting powers for planters and landholders, 50 acres and under 250 acres receive 1 votes, 250 acres to 300 acres 2 votes, 500 acres to 700 acres 3 votes, 750 acres to 1,000 acres 4 votes and 1,000 acres and upwards 5 votes.¹⁸³

The stipulation that one must own land to be a part of the association, and even that the more land one owned the more votes one controlled, signifies just how deep the concept of land ownership was to the identity of the planter. There was a clear hierarchy to the planting community that was heavily influenced by the old world views.

The mission of the association, as defined by the planters, was to: “guard our common interests, and... [pull] together to show others that union is strength.”¹⁸⁴ The idea was for the organization to act as a voice for the commercial interests of the region and to be the traders’ and planters’ channel of communication with the administration. However, for a few planters this combining of trader and planter interests was seen as taking away too much from their identity as planters. Though the planters did see themselves as “merchants” in a way, they saw the need for a planter-only association that would best serve their class as a whole. Wyatt Hyde, writing to the CAP, attacking the formation of the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, stated:

¹⁸² W. J. Dow, “Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce,” *The Central African Planter*, October, 1895.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ R.S. Hynde, “The New Chamber,” *The Central African Planter*, October, 1895.

That the new chamber may become of use to the community at large cannot be denied, but that it can take the place of a pure and simple Planters Association, I fail to see. In this country most planters are also traders, and it would of course suit them to have had our Association known as the Chamber instead of also being associated with a Planters Association. But what about the pure and simple planter? India and Ceylon have their Chambers of Commerce, but do they not also have their Planter's Associations?¹⁸⁵

John Moir, the original chair of the NPA, felt as Hyde did, that there was a need for a dedicated planters association. He made note of this desire, "I still hold that a single Planters Association is possible in the near future, and that we already suffer considerably for the want of it."¹⁸⁶ By 1925, their desire would come true with the formation of a new Nyasaland Planters Association.

It was to be the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, however, that was to take up the role of lobbying for government action in helping develop the region. The community was faced with a very serious problem in the early days. The issue was that Nyasaland was completely landlocked, with dirt trails and almost unnavigable waterways as the only means of getting in and out of the region. It was of great concern to the planters that a railway be built connecting the protectorate with the coast, as noted by the *African Review*, "one of the great questions before us is the linking of Central Africa with the sea, as no carriage can compete with water transport."¹⁸⁷ Planters urged the government and private corporations to begin construction of a railroad in order to solve the major issue of transportation through the region.

A London correspondent to the *Manchester Guardian* commented on the affect a rail line would have on the Nyasaland economy:

¹⁸⁵ Wyatt Hyde, "Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce," *The Central African Planter*, November, 1895.

¹⁸⁶ John Moir, "The Two Associations," *The Central African Planter*, January, 1896.

¹⁸⁷ Author?, "The Opening Up of Africa (From the African Review,)" *The Central African Planter*, June, 1896.

[A] line through the Shire Highlands is greatly desired in the interest of the Protectorate, as better means of communication and transport would give a great impetus to the development of the coffee plantations, which already produce some of the finest coffee that is placed on the London Market, and are capable of almost indefinite extension.¹⁸⁸

Expansion of the protectorate's market potential meant greater rates of return and would also solve other issues, such as labor. Trade in and out of the region was done via "human carriage," or on the backs of local Africans porters. They had to carry goods to river ports to be loaded on to the lake steamers. The process took months and planters saw the creation of a rail line as one of the only remedies: "turning now to the question of a remedy the first and most obvious solution is to do away with human carriage, the railway will do that."¹⁸⁹ The Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce spearheaded the efforts to gather support for the building of a railway.

By 1895, there were a few railway "schemes" being considered by the planters and the government. The main scheme was developed by the Africa Lakes Company, with 100,000 pounds of capital put towards it under the control of Eugene Sharrer in order to: "construct, equip and maintain a line of railway between Maperera on the Shire River and Blantyre."¹⁹⁰ Sharrer formed another company out of the ALC, known as the Shire Highlands Railway Company, to build the line, as he stated: "from Chiromo and following the valley of the Ruu, then branching into the valley of the Tuchila, then by the valley of the Luchenza on to Blantyre."¹⁹¹ Mr. Sharrer hired Grieve Macrone, a distinguished engineer from the Messrs Formans and McCail Company in Glasgow, to survey the route from Chiromo to Blantyre. The

¹⁸⁸ Author?, "Nyasaland Railway Schemes," *The Central African Planter*, May 6th, 1896.

¹⁸⁹ "The Labour Supply," *The Central African Planter*, February, 1896.

¹⁹⁰ "Shire Highland Railway (Nyasaland)," *The Central African Planter*, October, 1895.

¹⁹¹ "Extracts and Precise: B.C.A Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce," *The Central African Planter*, March, 1896.

proposed eighty-five mile stretch of line from Blantyre to Chiromo in order to connect the plantations in the Shire Highlands with the Shire River in the south. The Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce noted: “the route surveyed on behalf of the Africa Lakes Corporation Ltd. is the more suitable for the wants of the community.”¹⁹²

The line was going to cost approximately 2,000 pounds per mile, requiring about 200,000 pounds of capital in total. The survey also provided options for branching the line off to other regions to connect all the planters’ estates together. Another line presented by the Zambesi Railway Company was to run through Portuguese East Africa from the Ruvo to Quelimane. The line was to stretch almost 1,270 miles which would, as noted in the CAP:

connect and utilize the two splendid waterways of Lakes Tanganyika and Nyasa by one stretch of railway, and then to effect a junction with the point of Quelimane by a second stretch.¹⁹³

The Zambezi Company would need the cooperation of both the British and Portuguese governments by way of the Anglo-Portuguese Convention of 1891. The agreement stated: “if either England or Portugal neglected to construct the connecting stretch within its territory, the other should have the right to step in and do so.”¹⁹⁴

The matter was put towards the British government and at the Fourth Congress of the London Chamber of Commerce in 1900. Sir Bramton Gurdon, MP (Blantyre, BCA) spoke on behalf of the protectorate:

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ “The Opening Up of Africa (From the African Review),” *The Central African Planter*, June, 1896.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

Help us in the construction of a railway. We cannot do anything really without a railway. What I would like to see, I do not suppose I shall live to see, would be that we could take advantage of our treaty powers and take the strip of land which we have a right to take, through Portuguese territory to Quelimane, and have a railway laid down to the sea. That would be a fine development of the country, but for present we are content with a railway to Chiromo. If we could get a railway from Lake Nyasa to Chiromo, we could use the waterway and we could bridge over by means of our railway.¹⁹⁵

Moir, also in attendance and representing the Central Africa Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, stated that if the government were to help in this small regard it would greatly improve the protectorate's standing. There was a great deal of debate within the chamber regarding the use the railway would be put to, both by private and public companies. One chamber representative stated:

Is this British Central Africa a private concern of directors and others who, if they had the railway, would take the profits themselves, or is the country under British protection? (Mr. Moir responded by stating it is on behalf of the protectorate) I think your company should provide the railway, and not the British taxpayer.¹⁹⁶

Moir, Ewing (Blantyre Chamber) and Sir. Gurdon all argued that British Central Africa was a protectorate and thus as equal as other protectorates where the government was building railways, such as the Gold Coast and East African protectorates. Ewing addressed the chamber providing further argument why the railway would benefit the Nyasaland planter:

The protectorate of British Central Africa stands exactly in the same position as the Gold Coast Protectorate and East Africa Protectorates where Her Majesty's Government is at present making a railway. We are here at the request of the Chamber of Commerce of BCA, composed of planters and traders having wide and general interests in the colony. There is now a flourishing coffee plantation

¹⁹⁵ "Official Report, The Fourth Congress of Chambers of Commerce of the Empire," *The London Chamber of Commerce*, June, 1900.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 42.

and British settlers. What alone wants to develop further the Colony is the railway which we submit.¹⁹⁷

With the focus put on the planting community, and the idea that they alone could develop the economy for the empire, the resolution was carried with only four voting against. The importance of this did not escape the protectorate's administration, as even Johnston, usually a critic of the planting community, asserted that the railway would make Nyasaland, "as valuable as Ceylon."¹⁹⁸

The Foreign Office and the Treasury, both unwilling to become embroiled in risky colonial affairs risking tax payer money, contracted Sharrer's company to build it, thus leading to Nyasaland, out of all the tropical colonies, having a privately run railway system. The line was built from Blantyre to Zambezi. By 1922 another line, the Trans-Zambezia Railway, was constructed connecting Nyasaland to Cape Town linking it to the sea. This rail line made it only a 350-mile trip from the center of Nyasaland to the sea, taking only thirty-six hours. Upon the completion of the Shire Highlands and Central African Railways, "the total value of exports and imports increased by 177,500 pounds within two years of the completion of the Shire Highlands Railway, the following year the completion of the Central Africa Railway raised it to 230,700 pounds."¹⁹⁹

Though this may seem a clear victory for the planters, the Trans-Zambezia railway plunged the protectorate into debt and acted as a constant drain on the economy. The British Colonial Office, which took over the functions of the Foreign Office, decided to make an agreement with the Portuguese Government that Nyasaland would pay for the building of the

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 43.

¹⁹⁸ Robin Palmer, *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa* (Heinemann, University of California Press. Los Angeles, 1983), 367.

¹⁹⁹ Charles Ponsonby, "Nyasaland," *The Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. 74, No. 3839 (June 18th, 1926), 740.

railway. The imperial authorities “compelled” the Nyasaland government, as Robin Palmer stated, “to guarantee the interest at 6% of 1,200,000 pounds worth of debentures for twenty-five years.”²⁰⁰ Though this may have been done out of confusion between the Colonial Office, Treasury and Exchequer as to who would cover the costs, the result was that Nyasaland’s government had to use half of the economy’s revenue, over 250,000 pounds, to cover the costs.

This compromise caused a terrific uproar among the planter community. A flurry of letters and periodicals were sent to the *Nyasaland Times*, which replaced the *Central African Planter*, that the government had to do something. One such article stated the position of the planters bluntly:

The agreement seems to us to be entirely one-sided and we thus see the extraordinary position that we are to be taxed to construct a railway in a foreign country and for the benefit of a foreign chartered company. The worst feature, however, is that this burden of taxation for these railways in foreign territory will hamper us in developing our own country.²⁰¹

In response the government offered some ways in which Nyasaland could better pay for the railway, such as increasing taxes. The then acting governor, Rankine, wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Winston Churchill, pleading for a reduction in guarantees and annuities, arguing that raising taxes would cripple the protectorate: “native taxation is high enough in the present. Any increase in it would simply lead to the demand, which could not be resisted, for higher pay for agricultural labourers, which would fall on the European planters.”²⁰²

The Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce petitioned the government for some kind of favorable concessions, what was referred to as the Chinde Concessions. The Chamber asked for three things to be considered, as noted in the *Nyasaland Times*: “To maintain a healthy

²⁰⁰ Robin Palmer, *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 371.

²⁰¹ A Planter, “The Trans-Zambesia Railway,” *Nyasaland Times*, April 29th, 1920.

²⁰² Palmer, *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa*, 373.

competition in transport rates between Nyasaland and Beria, to prevent the Trans-Zambesia Railway from obtaining a monopoly, which would be detrimental to the development of the country and lastly to prevent vested interest in British Companies who had steamers on the river.”²⁰³ It was hoped that the imperial government would take the interests of the agricultural community to bear, as they were seen as the ones responsible for building and maintaining the economy of the country. The petition however did little to improve the situation. Freight costs were increased by the private rail lines and the Treasury was not eager to provide taxpayer money to pay for the debts incurred.

The Nyasaland government was also wary of the planting community however, during the post-World War One economic slump the imperial government encouraged Nyasaland to put most of its revenue into paying off the rail interests. As Nyasaland’s planters were reeling from an economy that now was based on just paying off debts and rising tax rates, the owner of the Trans-Zambezi railway, Libert Oury, proposed a plan to build a bridge connecting his railway with the Central African Railway. The government backed the plan believing it would benefit Nyasaland to have the railway connected; they also thought that Nyasaland should cover some of the costs. The planters again urged the government to act and not place the burden on them to pay for any more projects, as they stated it would, “cause financial chaos.”²⁰⁴ This time the planters’ petition worked, due to the loss of revenue through 1925, the Treasury allowed for the bridge project to be postponed.

However, by 1932 the situation had not gotten better. The railway interests in Nyasaland, the crippling revenue debt and the increase in freight costs choked any hope the planters had of developing a second Ceylon as Johnston had once dreamed. The planters referred to the situation

²⁰³ “Chinde Concession,” *Nyasaland Times*, May 27th, 1920.

²⁰⁴ Palmer, *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa* , 379.

as a “transport tyranny” and the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce sent more petitions to Whitehall. Nyasaland would increasingly be referred to as an “imperial slum.” Though the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce was originally successful in lobbying the government to act, even if it contracted to private companies for the building of the railroads, it shows that through their associations planters were able to exert some level of power over policy. Planter identity was linked to this concept of setting common interests and using their influence to sway government actions in their favor. In the case of the railways however, the planters failed to adequately persuade the government to intervene on their behalf.

Section Two: The Planter Economy: From Bust to Bust, 1895-1950

The story of Nyasaland’s colonial economy is a roller coaster ride of economic booms and busts. The planters dreamed of developing an economy that would drive the country from being a protectorate to a full-blown plantation colony, the likes of Ceylon or the West Indies. To planters, identity and economy were unarguably linked, as developing an economy was the only way planters had to truly participate in their trans-national community. In Nyasaland, however, the planters always seemed one step behind and began transitioning from one crop to another at the tail end of booms, usually right before the onset of bust years. The cycle of failure began with coffee in the 1890s when the British coffee market was being overcome by competition from Brazilian coffee. Then planters made the shift to tobacco and cotton in the early 1900s, but were hindered by competition with colonies that had already invested in those industries, and lastly to tea in the 1920s and onward when the planters found a small measure of success but were greatly impacted by the Great Depression. The responses to booms and busts went from hopefully

optimistic to denial and doom. What this shows, however, is that planters' identity was linked to the success or failure of their markets.

The early years of development, 1890 to 1900, were undeniably centered around coffee. Coffee was the planters' primary crop with more than 16,917 acres under cultivation by 1900.²⁰⁵ 1900 was also Nyasaland's best year in terms of coffee production, with the protectorate producing 2,148,160 pounds valued at well over 62,245 Pounds Sterling.²⁰⁶ Nyasaland coffee was developing so well that London coffee brokers commented, saying it was: "as good as the very best Ceylon coffee."²⁰⁷ In fact, Ceylon and India were the models on which the Nyasaland planters based their agricultural practices. John Buchanan even commented to that effect, "the general method of cultivation adopted is almost identical to Ceylon and India, the first planters obtaining their knowledge from well-known works of Indian and Ceylon men."²⁰⁸ In this early period of optimism, coffee production was a source of great pride amongst the planters, who compared themselves to colonies that they viewed as signifying the best attributes of the planter community, which shows their effort to participate in this collective identity.

Coffee was so important to planters that they often encouraged the government to prohibit the importation of coffee beans from certain locations. At the end of the 19th century Ceylon and Java were experiencing a spread of the coffee-leaf disease, *Hemileia vastatrix*. The planters petitioned the local government to stop any importation of coffee beans from the infected areas in order to protect their industry. Hyde Wyatt noted the prohibition was an inconvenience but a necessary one: "it is incumbent upon us to prevent the stamina of our coffee from running down and we ought to import the best seeds procurable, finding the seed most

²⁰⁵ Stephen Samuel Murray, *A Handbook of Nyasaland* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1932), 170.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁰⁷ "Nyasaland Coffee Company LD," *Central African Planters*, September, 1895.

²⁰⁸ John Buchanan, "Coffee: Its Position and Prospects," *Central African Planter*, October, 1895.

suitable to our soil and climate.”²⁰⁹ Beans would be imported from around the world, notably from Brazil which was a major competitor for the British coffee market.

Early planters also experimented with the cultivation of tobacco. The Buchanan brothers were the first planters to experiment with tobacco in 1895. John Buchanan brought in tobacco seeds from Virginia to test, and by 1893 the first parcel of forty pounds was sent to the London market.²¹⁰ Tobacco was looked at with mixed emotions by planters, as noted by the *Gazette*:

Buchanan Brothers tobacco industry is of great interest, but is it not a little premature? No one would rejoice more than ourselves if tobacco growing were to take its position as a staple industry, but this must be done by showing tobacco grown here will realize paying prices in the European market.²¹¹

Most tobacco being produced between 1890 and 1900 was for personal consumption by the planters. The tobacco industry moved relatively slowly in the Nyasaland market, gaining traction in 1906 with over 2,330 acres under cultivation.²¹² As Nyasaland was still seen as being in the development phase, assessments were optimistic that the country could be home to many cash crops.

In his “*Botanical Report on B.C.A.*,” Alex Whyte commented on the possibility of tobacco becoming a major crop in Nyasaland:

There is unlimited scope for the cultivation of this promising product. In Ceylon and many other British possessions this industry has made no headway, owing to

²⁰⁹ Hyde Wyatt, “Coffee Planting in the Shire Highlands,” *The Central African Planter*, November, 1895.

²¹⁰ Morris, *Environmental History Of Southern Malawi*, 142.

²¹¹ “The Gazette,” *The Central African Planter*, November, 1895.

²¹² Stephen Samuel Murray, *A Handbook of Nyasaland* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1932), 171.

the expense of labour and the scarcity of suitable land. Here the one is perhaps the cheapest in the world, and the other almost boundless. The natives have grown tobacco for their own use for many years.²¹³

Whyte's assessment turned out to be true. By 1900 the Blantyre and East Africa Ltd was established, and their primary focus was in the cultivation of tobacco. The company purchased and combined the estates of the Buchanan brothers with those of Hynde and Stark, Robert Hynde being the general manager.²¹⁴ Between their fourteen estates, stretched across Zomba, Namadzi, Blantyre, Thyolo and Mulanje, they had over 600 acres under cultivation.²¹⁵ By 1904 over 60,000 pounds of tobacco were exported, mostly by companies such as the African Lakes Company, British Central Africa Company and the Imperial Tobacco Company.

Tobacco showed promise and the planters saw it as an industry they hoped to grow further, as the *Scottish Geographical Magazine* stated, "although it is extremely difficult to name a product to which we should give a share of our attention yet on the whole we think tobacco is the one which offers the best prospects."²¹⁶ While tobacco was being considered, the coffee industry continued to expand as different varieties of coffee were being discussed and tested. Six "new coffees," as they were referred to, were being tested, such as Coffee *Stenophylla* from Sierra Leone, Maragogipe from Brazil, Liberian-Arabica from India, Inhambane from the East Coast of Africa and Liberian Coffee from Liberia. This crop experimentation further reinforced the idea that by looking outward, the planters were vested in the trans-national planter community.

By 1900, however, the optimistic outlook for Nyasaland being a plantation colony based on coffee crumbled. This marked a major turning point for the small community since coffee was

²¹³ Alex Whyte, "Botanical Report on B.C.A.," *The Central Africa Planter*, January, 1896.

²¹⁴ Morris, *Environmental History Of Southern Malawi*, 143.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

²¹⁶ "Africana: Colonial Enterprise," *The Central African Planter*, February, 1896.

so strongly linked to the planters identity. Nyasaland was not the only colony affected by the failure of coffee. By this time, the global coffee industry collapsed due to a few factors such as growing exports from Brazil as well as failed crops and abnormally dry seasons. Nyasaland planters were in a panic. Coffee prices fell from 100 shillings in 1897 to well under 55.²¹⁷ By 1902, coffee's value on the global market dropped by seventy-six percent and many planters responded with an outlook of doom. One noted: "we have failed to attract the attention of capitalists from other parts, we have likewise failed to produce any capitalists of our own."²¹⁸ Commissioner Sharpe, who was a strong supporter of the planter community, had to act and began making deals to export African laborers to mines in Rhodesia.

One planter summarized the position of Sharpe on the situation stating, "he thought that the export of coffee having declined year after year that there was very little hope of building up an export in that product as several plantations had been abandoned and opinion was not so hopeful."²¹⁹ Indeed, many plantations were to be abandoned, but for a few planters these were times to buckle down and weather the storm, as one planter expressed:

Is B.C.A played out? Because coffee has fallen on bad times, because over production in Brazil and bad seasons and labour troubles have brought the industry down, is that any reason why we should despair? That is not the temper of the British, and with a will coffee is being replaced; tobacco and cotton are being established as accessory industries; chillies are already an important article of export; and tobacco will soon take the place of the shortage in coffee. It is only the outsider who looks on who is inclined to despond.²²⁰

²¹⁷ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 82.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 82.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 83.

²²⁰ "Our Coffee", *Central African Times*, March 21st, 1903.

By 1911 tobacco exports had indeed replaced coffee, exporting over 2,146,615 pounds.²²¹ Cotton was also turned to as a possible alternative, though it never gained the traction of coffee or tobacco.

Cotton was a toss-up amongst the planters that remained after the “slump.” On one hand planters believed it “appeared to be the most promising,” and on the other, they believed, “the cotton-culture in B.C.A would not pay.”²²² In 1902, the British Cotton Growing Association (BCGA) was formed with the objective of encouraging British colonies to cultivate cotton. As the slump continued, many planters in the Shire Highlands were quick to take up offers from the BCGA. Tempted by the rising price of cotton on the market, Nyasaland planters jumped at the opportunity. From 1902-1903 there were only 580 acres of cotton under cultivation, by 1904, that number was expanded to well over 21,000 acres exporting 285,185 pounds.²²³ In 1905, the Colonial Office sent Samuel Simpson, known as the cotton expert, to Nyasaland to inspect the growing cotton economy. He noted that the Nyasaland plantations were in a “deplorable” state:

Coffee prices fell, crops failed, when suddenly tempted by the high price of cotton everyone rushed into big acreages under this product. All and sundry received large grants for putting in cotton and no discrimination as to the capabilities of applicants appeared to have been practiced. In a country like this at least 75 percent of the planters have no experience of agricultural work whatsoever.²²⁴

By 1905 however cotton was already on a downhill slide as planters grew too much cotton than could be sold.

²²¹ Stephen Samuel Murray, *A Handbook of Nyasaland* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1932), 171.

²²² Scott Elliot, “Africa as a Field for Colonial Enterprise,” *The Central African Planter*, February, 1896; Hyde Wyatt, “Cotton Culture,” *The Central African Planter*, June, 1896.

²²³ Stephen Samuel Murray, *A Handbook of Nyasaland* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1932), 171.

²²⁴ Simpson to the Colonial Office, 11 July 1906, TNA CO 525/13. As quoted in: McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 140.

Simpson again commented on the cotton situation in Nyasaland, “in many instances nothing remained but dead and dying remains of cotton plants.”²²⁵ Many planters attempted to remedy the situation, one being A. L. Bruce. Bruce worked alongside Simpson to develop a hybrid cotton plant, one more suited for the climate in Nyasaland. Known as Nyasaland Upland Cotton, this type of cotton propelled Nyasaland’s industry to great heights in exporting some 3,462,478 pounds in 1917.²²⁶ Though that would be the highest export year the country would experience due to the production of uniforms for the war, after that record high the industry experienced another slump, falling to well under a million pounds by 1920.

With the end of World War One, in order to maintain the economy of her colonies, Britain granted certain colonies an Imperial Preference. Imperial Preference was given to tobacco planters in Nyasaland.²²⁷ The preference helped lift the tobacco industry to a higher degree:

In 1919 a Preference of one-sixth of the duty was given, increased to one-quarter in 1925, so that the Empire leaf now pays a duty of 6/s per pound, against 8/s for foreign leaf. Tobacco succeeded coffee as a profitable crop about 1906. When preference was given in 1919 there were 9,386 acres under cultivation and the amount of tobacco exported was 4,340,000 pounds. In 1924, when 20,590 acres were under tobacco, the exports rose to 7,044,000 pounds.²²⁸

²²⁵ Ibid., 91.

²²⁶ Stephen Samuel Murray, *A Handbook of Nyasaland* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1932), 171.

²²⁷ Imperial Preference was a system of tariffs and free trade agreements between Britain and the overseas colonies. It granted colonies the ability to sell their goods within the empire at fixed rates, usually lower than established tariffs. Nyasaland was granted Imperial Preference on tobacco export during World War One.

²²⁸ Charles Ponsonby, “Nyasaland,” *The Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. 74, No. 3839 (June 18th, 1926), 740.

By 1926, the Imperial Tobacco Company had purchased over 1,150,000 pounds of tobacco from Mlanje alone, and required land in order to build a house for its manager near the trading station at Tuchilla due to the increase in purchasing.²²⁹

At the same time cotton and tobacco were being planted, tea was also being experimented with and would prove to be the country's primary crop. The earliest mention of tea cultivation was from 1878 when Johnathan Duncan brought with him one tea plant, which died. In the Blantyre Mission by 1889, tea was being tested again, "the tea bushes are doing extremely well; the gums have seeded and we now have plants from them."²³⁰ Though tea would not show up as an export until 1908, a few planters experimented with it in the early 1890s. In 1891, Henry Brown arrived in Nyasaland from Ceylon with the intent to grow coffee; he later became known as the father of tea in Nyasaland. Having noted that tea was starting to replace coffee in Ceylon, Brown purchased twenty tea seeds from the Blantyre Mission; ten to test at the Lauderdale Estate and the other ten on his Thornwood Estate.²³¹

Brown grew his tea acreage at Thornwood from six acres to twelve acres by 1909, but planters were already making note of tea's capabilities in the mid-1890s. Alex Whyte was one planter who wanted to have tea grown as a cash crop. He stated:

Tea of good varieties, Assam and China, has been introduced, but is not as yet cultivated to do well in some districts. It grows luxuriantly, and ought to do well in some districts. I see no reason why it should not become a profitable cultivation. I shall do all I can to introduce seeds and plants of the very best teas procurable.²³²

²²⁹ Central African Archives, Zomba National Archive. Item No. SI/1264/26.

²³⁰ "Editorial: The Central African Planter," *The Central African Planter*, September, 1895.

²³¹ G.G.S.J. Hadlow, "The History of Tea in Nyasaland: An Address Delivered to the Nyasaland Society," *The Nyasaland Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (January, 1960), 24.

²³² Alex Whyte, "Botanical Report on B.C.A.," *The Central African Planter*, January, 1896.

Author Westrop, who in 1927 purchased the Magombwa Estate of 450 acres for tea, commented on the early source of tea as coming from Henry Brown's wife. He said: "the mature tea in Nyasaland had apparently almost all derived from one source, the pioneer grower of tea and producer was a famous old lady named, Ma Brown."²³³ "Ma Brown," as she was called, was Henry Brown's wife who, upon his death in 1925, took over ownership of his estates and grew tea.

By 1905, as planters were reeling from the coffee bust, tea was being cultivated on 260 acres in Mulanje, mostly by Henry Brown.²³⁴ In 1911 the Lauderdale Estate was equipped with two water-powered Jackson rollers, one Venetian dryer and one Paragon dryer, for the drying of tea leaves.²³⁵ With tea factories being opened up by the Blantyre and East Africa Limited, production of tea went up to 2,593 acres, exporting more than 43,876 pounds.²³⁶ Crown Lands also started to become opened up for planters interested in planting tea, as noted in the Laws of Nyasaland, "the governor may grant leases for the purpose of growing tea."²³⁷ The tea industry, though growing slowly and only gaining traction after coffee and cotton failure, eventually grew to the heights planters once thought coffee would have.

Though the planters weathered the coffee slump with varying degrees of success, they were once again brought into despair during the Great Depression. With the sudden collapse of the world's economy and the drop in prices, Nyasaland's planters faced the worst bust in history. Prices for coffee, cotton, tea and tobacco fell and with it came the fall of the planter in

²³³ Arthur Westrop, *Green Gold: from South-East Asia to Central Africa; a Story of a Tea Estate in Malawi*, (Bulawayo: Cauldwell Cards, 1966), 24.

²³⁴ J.A. Hutson, "An Outline of the Early History of the Tea Industry in Malawi," *The Society of Malawi Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (January, 1978), 43.

²³⁵ Ibid., 43.

²³⁶ Stephen Samuel Murray, *A Handbook of Nyasaland* (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1932), 172.

²³⁷ Charles Griffin, *Ordinances of the Nyasaland Protectorate* (London: Steven and Sons Limited, 1913), 119-120.

Nyasaland. Between 1926 and 1945 the number of planters declined from around 324 to less than 170 and seventy-one estates, mostly located in the Shire Valley, were abandoned or given over to the government.²³⁸ This led to the demise of the individual planter estate class in Nyasaland. Unable to maintain their estates, planters either abandoned them or sold them to the big corporations. Robin Palmer summarized the situation best, “this decade witnessed a fundamental structural change in the history of white farming in Nyasaland, on the one hand, the virtual demise of the settler farm and on the other, the consolidation of a few large and relatively well capitalized company estates.”²³⁹

Though this period was marked with the demise of the planters’ dream of building a plantation colony in Nyasaland, the planters that remained expanded the tea industry to new heights. From 1930 to 1940 the total acreage of tea grew from 9,686 to almost 20,000 between Mulanje and Thyolo.²⁴⁰ Italian planter Ignaco Conforzi, like many other planters, switched from tobacco to tea following a slump in tobacco prices in 1929. He had acquired some 8,000 acres known as the Mbomba Estate. By 1935 he had well over 2,350 acres under tea in Thyolo and Mulanje.²⁴¹ Malcolm Barrow, another Thyolo planter, had 1,549 acres under tea at his Naming’omba Estate.²⁴² Barrow would also form the Nyasaland Tea Association and the Tea Research Foundation in order to protect the vested interests of the remaining planters in Nyasaland. The Ruo Estates in Mulanje, having built a tea factory in 1916, had by 1940 more

²³⁸ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 195.

²³⁹ Robin Palmer, “White Farmers in Malawi: Before and After the Depression,” *African Affairs* vol. 84, no. 335 (1985), 214.

²⁴⁰ J.A. Hutson, “An Outline of the Early History of the Tea Industry in Malawi,” *The Society of Malawi Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (January, 1978), 45.

²⁴¹ Morris, *Environmental History Of Southern Malawi*, 203.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 204.

than 1,250 acres under tea.²⁴³ The Sayama Estate, also in Mulanje, opened 450 acres of tea in 1935.²⁴⁴

By the end of the 1930s the tea industry was firmly established, having a total of thirty-four estates each averaging 500 acres of tea amounting to 17,698 acres.²⁴⁵ A number of companies in Mulanje experienced significant growth during this time, including the Blantyre and East Africa Ltd, which procured the Lauderdale, Limbuli and Glenorchy estates of 2,508 acres. A. E. Shinn/Ruo Estates Ltd had the Ruo and Likanga and Lichenya estates of 1,572 acres and J. Lyons and Co. Ltd of the Lujeri Group had 1,416 acres.²⁴⁶ In the Cholo district, Conforzi had multiple estates under his name forming the Mboma Group who owned 2,450 acres, between the Don and Ross/Cholo High Estate Ltd. Namireme, J. Scott/Cholo Highlands Tea Estates Ltd. Makwasa and R.S. Harper/Cholo Highlands Teas Estates Ltd Mwalampanda had 1,434 acres, M. P. Barrow/Nyasa Tea Estates Ltd. had a culmination of estates known as the Naming'omba Group at 1,271 acres and the C. King/British Central Africa Co. Ltd. at Mindali and Chisunga had 1,147.²⁴⁷

What the Nyasaland planters attempted with Nyasaland's economy was not a doomed venture in the beginning. There were high hopes that as long as the economy expanded Nyasaland's planters would join the ranks of the great planter communities in Ceylon and India. Fortunes, however, were not in their favor as they experienced far more busts than booms, and when a boom did take place the planters took to rapid expansion rather than a gradual adding of different products. In their haste to continue driving expansion and being active participants in

²⁴³ Ibid., 205.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 206.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 206.

²⁴⁶ Robin Palmer, "The Nyasaland Tea Industry in the Era of International Tea Restrictions, 1933-1950," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1985), 238.

²⁴⁷ Palmer, "The Nyasaland Tea Industry in the Era of International Tea Restrictions," 238.

their trans-national community they also hastened their own demise. Though tobacco, tea and cotton had taken over as the big three exports leading into the Great Depression, those industries were not firmly secured. They went into the depression on uneven footing and, due to prior busts, were not prepared. The remaining planters would slowly trickle down further, though a few prominent families, such as the Barrons, would remain, purchasing the abandoned estates of their fellow planters.

Conclusion/Epilogue: The planters' Legacy in Nyasaland

In the post-World War Two era, Nyasaland experienced a gradual climb out of the proverbial pit. Exports grew at a steady pace with tea becoming the number one export by 1960. Between 1945 and 1960 the value of agricultural produce, produced by both African peasants and European planters, went from 1,805,000 Pounds Sterling to well over 10,000,000 Pounds Sterling.²⁴⁸ By this time, with the collapse of the estate sector in the 1930s and early 1940s, the government passed legislative acts permitting African farmers to lease land and grow crops to export on the market. As tea became the cash crop of the remaining planters, tobacco became the cash crop for

²⁴⁸ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 246.

African peasant farmers. Between the two, planter tea production contributed to forty percent of Nyasaland's export while African tobacco contributed to nearly thirty-seven percent.²⁴⁹

Also occurring during this period of gradual growth, was the influx of white farmers into the region. Though little has been written about these white European farmers, they are themselves a distinctive group with different ambitions than the planters. Between 1921 and 1966, the number of Europeans grew from 1486 to 7395, many of whom considered themselves farmers as opposed to planters.²⁵⁰ They came, as McCracken made note: "as an influx of new settlers, most of them ex-servicemen, with some, if not too abundant a supply of capital."²⁵¹ As white farmers came into Nyasaland, relying on waged labor and small tracks, the planters' hegemony was reduced further.

This was also a period of increased recognition to the indigenous African population and the abolishment of the *Thangata* system. The Abrahams Report of 1946, written by Sir Sidney Abrahams, was the beginning of the end of the planting communities' grip over land and labor. The report stated: "Europeans are holding large tracts of undeveloped land while natives are suffering the acute pangs of land hunger."²⁵² What he suggested was that the government should purchase the land from the estate owners where there are large tracts of undeveloped land and grant the land to the resident tenants who wish to remain on those estates. This was met with a whirlwind of opposition from the planting community. The government attempted to purchase land from the planters, but the planters began selling off their undeveloped land to private buyers and leaving the less fertile land to be purchased by the government.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 247

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 272.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 162.

²⁵² Ibid., 307.

A.L. Bruce was the first to maneuver around government attempts at his land. In 1949 he sold off nearly 90,000 acres of his estates to private buyers, leaving 72,000 of the least fertile land of his estate to the government.²⁵³ Other planters and companies followed his lead, such as the British Central Africa Company who sold the government 130,000 acres of their Chingled Estates in the rain filled shadow of the Zomba Mountains.²⁵⁴ Conflicts between Europeans and Africans arose and racial divisions intensified, but all the planters were doing was buying time. In 1953 the planters saw one last chance at achieving their dream of a settler controlled Nyasaland and the continuation of their dominance in the region. This last hope was the creation of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, also called the Central African Federation (CAF), was created in 1953 between Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The goal of the Federation was to combine the three regions into one self-governing system, dominated by European settlers. A Federal Government was established in Salisbury in Rhodesia along with a parliament, made up of seventeen members from Southern Rhodesia, eleven from Northern Rhodesia and seven from Nyasaland.²⁵⁵ A new party was formed, known as the United Federal Party, founded and led by Sir Godfrey Huggins and later led by Roy Welensky. Nyasaland planters joined the party as well, notably Malcolm Barrow. The role of the government was to benefit the white European settlers, however not much else changed for Nyasaland. Though the region did experience some economic gain from the Federation, the Nyasaland African Congress began making moves for an independent African nation.

An event took place in 1959 that was a decisive turning point for the future of the federation, it was referred to as the Nyasaland Emergency. 1960 was the year that London was

²⁵³ Ibid., 308.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 308.

²⁵⁵ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 279.

going to announce whether the Central African Federation would be granted independence or not. Though not explicitly made public, the whispers amongst government officials was that the federation was going to be granted its' independence, and thus power of government would remain in the hands of the European population. In Nyasaland, the African community believed that power being in the hands of the Europeans would bring about the reallocation of land back to the settler and planter communities. The African community though gained help in the struggle when Dr. Hastings Banda returned from exile to head the African Congress.

Banda was a charismatic African political figure who fought for more African rights. Banda drew crowds in the thousands, many times up to 20,000.²⁵⁶ Banda pleaded with his followers to fight for freedom and pushed back against the federation. Nyasalands governor, Robert Armitage, grew increasingly nervous over Bandas' anti federation rhetoric. The Nyasaland government, in response to growing concerns over African nationalism, launched Operation Sunrise. The operation began on March 3rd and within a day 149 African nationalists were arrested, Banda was sent to Gwelo Prison.²⁵⁷ After the operation territorial troops killed around fifty Africans, resulting in African protests and strikes in Blantyre.²⁵⁸

By March 23rd, riots caused severe damage to twenty six bridges, ten of which were completely destroyed, seventy nine houses had been burned down and cars were burned.²⁵⁹ Resistance continued and as a result military and police forces were expanded, escalating the crisis further. Armitage, in the face of increasing violence, declared a state of emergency in Nyasaland. After the British government launched the Delvin Commision, and the apparent police state in Nyasaland was made public, the government ordered Bandas release fearing

²⁵⁶ John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014). 369

²⁵⁷ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 353

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 354.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 355.

further violence. With Banda released and back in Nyasaland, the fight for independence and the end to the federation was all but assured.

The man who spearheaded the advance towards independence, and putting an end to Nyasaland's participation in the settler-run government, was Banda. Banda was appointed Minister of Natural Resources in 1961. In 1962 Banda introduced the Africans on Private Estates Bill in order to end *Thangata* once and for all and break the estate's secure hold over the land. The idea behind the bill was to give estate owners two options, either sell their land to the government or farm all their uncultivated land through waged labor. Commenting on the bill's introduction, Banda stated:

My intention is to abolish *Thangata* altogether but I have drafted this bill to give them a chance to sell their land, wherever there are Africans, to the government so that the government can use that land the way it wants to.²⁶⁰

Though initially doing very little, Banda's bill was supported by the settlers and the Colonial Office. By 1961 the Colonial Office acquired a sum of 400,000 Pounds Sterling from the Treasury in order for the Nyasaland government to purchase the remaining estate land in the Shire Highlands. Between 1961 and 1963 more than 235,272 acres were purchased from planters in the Highlands and the remaining funds were used to relocate them.²⁶¹

Under the bill Africans on estates were permitted permanent residence. Though the settlers and planters originally thought this bill was confined to the southern province, Banda widened his scope to encompass the whole country. The Central Province Associate, led by settler representative Michael Blackwood and tobacco planter Bruce Barron, met with Banda and

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 393.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 393.

discussed different options. Agreements were not made until 1971, however, by then the last hopes of the planters were dashed. The Central African Federation dissolved in 1963 and by 1964 the Malawi National Party led by Banda took over governance. The new country of Malawi was formed. There were a few remaining planters in the Central Province and in the Shire Highlands, virtually all of whom were allowed to remain as part of deals struck with Banda.

Ignaco Conforzi, an Italian tobacco planter, had to give up to the government 35,000 acres in the Central Province but was allowed to keep his Shire Highlands estate; Barron had to give to the government nine of his twelve estates, but was able to keep the historic Mbabzi Tobacco Estate.²⁶² Banda allowed the remaining planters to retain their estates because the newly formed country needed a stable economy. He never stopped reforming the estate sector however. Today many of the estates, and the families of some of the original pioneers, still remain in Malawi. The issue over land rights is still a topic of constant debate. On June 29th, 2021, for example, the Lujeri Tea Estate in Mulanje had to give up a huge tract of land, to be distributed to five thousand Malawians. Executive Director of the Centre for Democracy and Economic Development, Sylvester Namiwa, commented on the victory, stating:

The courts have shown their independence by not siding with the oppressors with economic muscle and political connection. This energizes the people to fight on in order for the error that happened in the 1890's to be corrected. We expect all the estates to release all the idle land and make it accessible to the people. Locals should have stakes in the tea, macadamia, coffee and tungsten plantations. The British government should also publicly apologize for the inhumane treatment our ancestors suffered when they resisted land grabbing and the forced labor through the *Thangata* system on top of that the remnants should be compensated.²⁶³

²⁶² Ibid., 397.

²⁶³ Watipaso Mzungu, "Victory in Mulanje Land Struggle As Lujeri Tea Estate Distributes Encroached Land to 5,000 People," *Nyasa Times*, June 29, 2021.

The legacy of the planter lives on and continues to be a part of the Malawian people and their hopes to acquire the land that their ancestors lived on before colonial intervention.

Nyasaland was a relatively short lived colonial venture, seventy five years, but by no means insignificant. In that short period of time, the Nyasaland planters attempted to create their own planter community mimicking those that developed in the West Indies and Ceylon. They imagined a country developed and governed by them, where a plantation colony could thrive. Through quick acquisitions of land through treaties with indigenous Africans, the planters gained an overwhelming control of a large percentage of cultivable land. With control of the land, European planters built an economy based on cash crop estate agriculture and developed a planter community that was able to lobby the local government to act in their favor. Though they had lofty ambitions, they failed to create their imagined community and failed to truly participate in the trans-national planter community they tried so hard to emulate.

Their failure was brought about by many challenges, such as a lack of labour, more land than could be cultivated, disease, unfavorable market conditions and economic “busts”, all of which led to the gradual demise of the planter in Nyasaland. By 1950 most individual estates were sold to corporations or to the few remaining planters who were able to purchase the land, ending the time of the Nyasaland planter. Who were the “planters” though and how best can we define them? Erika Rappaport defined the planters of the 19th and 20 century best, when she stated: “planters relied on many new technologies that inspired globalization in the nineteenth century, including railway, clipper and steamship, telegraph, chain provision shop, cooperative society, newspaper, magazine and exhibition.”²⁶⁴ Planters were settlers that utilized a culmination

²⁶⁴ Erika Rappaport, *A Thirst for Empire: How Tea Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 9.

of technologies made prevalent through the Industrial Revolution in order to become a trans-national community, a community that is still trying to achieve their dream today.

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