

**PEASANTS, ECOLOGY AND THE STATE: FOOD SECURITY IN THE LAKE
CHILWA BASIN OF SOUTHERN MALAWI, 1891 – 1994**

By

Bryson Gwiyani Nkhoma

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Supervisor: Dr Clement Masakure
Co-Supervisors: Dr Cornelis Muller and Dr Anusa Daimon

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Dedications

In loving memory of my late father and mother who tirelessly worked hard to encourage me to aspire for education yet never lived to see the outcome of their encouragement.

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Abstract

This study explores the history of peasants' experiences in relation to state interventions into Malawi's rural food economy from 1891 to 1994. Using the case of the Lake Chilwa basin of southern Malawi, it investigates the extent to which peasants maintained food security in the face of political, economic and ecological changes during the period of study. Despite its political and economic power, the study contends, the state was not always all-powerful or monolithic in executing its food security interventions in the country. Nor did the peasants constantly express their agency in isolation from the state. Instead, the state-peasants relations were complex, dynamic and contested. Furthermore, while colonialism disrupted African economies, its impact on peasants' food security varied with place, time, gender and class, such that in some respects, it created an environment conducive for the maintenance of food security among the peasants. The study argues further that relations between the state and the peasants over matters of food did not occur in isolation from global changes. Nor were the relations simply 'acted upon' by international forces. While ecological changes and periodic droughts were critical for peasants' food security, their impacts in the Chilwa basin were accentuated largely by the political, economic and social circumstances of the times. This thesis, therefore, contributes to the burgeoning literature on food security, agriculture and ecology. This literature predominantly placed peasants' everyday experiences of food production and consumption at the forefront in the face of droughts, hunger and famine, but paid little attention to the interventions made by the state to complement or degrade pre-existing food security practices in rural Malawi.

Opsomming

Hierdie studie ondersoek die geskiedenis van kleinboere se ervarings met betrekking tot staatsintervensies in die landelike voedsel ekonomie in Malawi vanaf 1891 tot 1994. Deur gebruik te maak van die geval van Chilwa-meer in die suide van Malawi, ondersoek dit die mate waartoe kleinboere in landelike Malawi voedselsekuriteit onderhou het te midde van politieke, ekonomiese en ekologiese veranderinge gedurende die tydperk van die studie. Die vernaamste bewering van hierdie proefskrif is dat die staat, ondanks sy politieke en ekonomiese mag, nie almagtig of monolities was in die uitvoering van sy voedselbeveiligingsintervensies in die land nie. Die kleinboere het ook nie hul agentskap in isolasie van die staat beoefen nie. Inteendeel was staat en kleinboer verhoudings dinamies en betwis. Terwyl kolonialisme die Afrika-ekonomieë ontwig het, het die impak daarvan op boere se voedselsekuriteit gewissel van plek, tyd, gender en klas, en dit het in sommige opsigte 'n omgewing geskep wat voedselveiligheid onder kleinboere bevorder het. Dit dui verder daarop dat die verhoudings tussen die staat en die kleinboere rondom voedsel nie geïsoleerd van globale veranderinge plaasgevind het nie en interne rolspelers het ook nie slegs net daarop 'gereageer' nie. Terwyl ekologiese veranderinge en periodieke droogtes krities was vir kleinboere se voedselsekuriteit, is hulle impak in die Chilwa-meer grootliks beklemtoon deur die politiese, ekonomiese en sosiale omstandighede van die tyd. Deur hierdie argument te maak, dra die tesis by tot die ontluikende literatuur oor voedselsekuriteit, landbou en ekologie. Hierdie literatuur het kleinboere se alledaagse ervarings van voedselproduksie en verbruik te midde van droogtes, honger en hongersnood op die voorgrond geplaas, maar het min aandag gegee aan die intervensies wat deur die staat gemaak is om voorafbestaande praktyke van voedselsekuriteit in landelike Malawi te ondersteun of te komplimenteer.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADD	Agriculture Development Division
ADMARC	Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation
ADO	Agriculture Development Office
AEDC	Agricultural Extension Development Coordinator
AEDO	Agricultural Extension Development Officer
AIDS	Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome
APMB	Agricultural Produce and Marketing Board
B&EAC	British and East African Company
BCAC	British Central African Company
BCGA	British Cotton Growers Association
BSAC	British South African Company
CD&W	Colonial Development and Welfare
CDC	Colonial Development Corporation
DC	District Commissioner
DFID	Danish Fund for International Development
EPA	Extension Planning Area
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FMB	Farmers Marketing Board
GMB	Grain Marketing Board
GVH	Group Village Head
HIV	Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MCB	Maize Control Board

MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MNA	Malawi National Archives
MYP	Malawi Young Pioneers
NA	Native Authority
NAC	Nyasaland African Congress
NAMBOARD	National Maize Board
NCPP	National Cereals and Produce Board
NDW	Native Development and Welfare
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRDP	National Rural Development Programme
NSCM	National Seed Company of Malawi
OFC	Overseas Food Corporation
RDP	Rural Development Programme
SADCC	Southern Africa Development Coordinating Committee
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SMC	Scheme Management Committee
TA	Traditional Authority
UDF	United Democratic Front
UMCA	University Missions of Central Africa
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNO	United Nations Organisation
VH	Village Head
WB	World Bank
WNLA	Witwatersrand Native Labour Association
WFP	World Food Programme

WFS World Food Supplies

Glossary of Local Terms

Askaris	African soldiers during First and Second World War
Atsamunda	Colonial officials
Azungu	Europeans
Boma	District administration office
Calico	Piece of cloth
Capitao	African supervisor
Chikamwini	Husband staying at the wife's home in matrilineal society
Chinamwali	Female initiation ceremony
Chiomba lupsa	Early rains that come between end of August and early September
Chitemene	Shifting cultivation
Chitengwa	Wife staying at husband's home in matrilineal society
Dambo	Wetland
Dima	Paid communal work
Dimba	Small subsistence garden in Malawi
Ganyu	Casual work
Jando	Male initiation ceremony among the Yao people
Kakowa	White birds that often appeared in September predictive of good rains
Kwacha	Malawian currency
Lobola	Bride price
Malimidwe	Conservation agriculture
Mgaiwa	Unpounded milled maize meal
Mkoka lupsa	Second rains that comes between end of September and mid-October

Msimu	Thick porridge from maize meal
Mthandizi	Helper, term used to describe migration to Southern Rhodesia
Mulangizi	Agricultural extension worker
Munda	Garden or farm
Ndiwo	Relish or stew or side dish
Njala	Famine or hunger
Nkhokwe	Local granary
Thangata	Help
Tsempho	An ailment similar to kwashiorkor and marasmus
Wenela	Local term for Witwatersrand Native Labour Association

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Chapter One

Setting the Context: Peasants, Ecology, the State and Food Security in Malawian

History

1. Introduction and Historical Overview

This thesis explores the history of peasants in relation to state interventions in the rural food economy of Malawi from 1891 to 1994.¹ Using the case of the Lake Chilwa basin of southern Malawi, it investigates the extent to which peasants maintained food security in the face of political, economic and ecological changes during the period of study. The study specifically examines the various food security interventions that were executed by the state, the effects of the interventions on the affected peasants' food security, and the nature of the response given by the peasants from the Chilwa basin with regards to the interventions. It also demonstrates how the peasants survived, negotiated, resisted and adapted to the forces that affected their food security.

The study contends that, despite possessing political and economic power, the state was not always all-powerful or monolithic in executing its food security interventions in the country. Nor did the peasants constantly exercise their agency in isolation from the state. Instead, state-peasants relations were complex, dynamic and contested. Furthermore, while capitalism disrupted African economies, its impact varied with time, gender, class and social geography, and that, in some respects, it paradoxically created an environment conducive for

¹ In this thesis, I used the term peasants to describe African rural producers who use their own land largely to produce crops to meet subsistence needs. Ecology has been used here to refer to the natural environment and the interaction between human beings and this environment. I also used the term state to refer to the government while food security is used to describe the state of having sufficient food for an active and healthy life.

the maintenance of food security among the peasants. The state, however, faced challenges from most peasants who constantly resisted and negotiated the terms of their participation in the interventions. As noted by Fredrick Cooper and other scholars focusing on ‘tensions of empire,’ the state had to also deal with opposition from the settlers and other colonial officials who expressed reservations over some of its policies.² As in Zimbabwe, different classes of white settlers competed over existing natural resources throughout the colonial period.³ The thesis argues further that relations between the state and the peasants over matters of food did not occur in isolation from global changes. Nor were the relations between the peasants and the state in Malawi simply ‘acted upon’ by international forces. Rather, there existed intricate global and local interactions that shaped the landscape of food security among the peasants in rural Malawi.⁴ While ecological changes and periodic droughts affected the peasants’ food security, the thesis argues that their impacts in the Chilwa basin were accentuated largely by the political, economic and social circumstances of the times. Thus, the nature and elements characterising the implementation of state interventions in Malawi were shaped by internal conflicts, local resistance, global changes and ecological disasters encountered during the years considered in this study.

It should be noted at the outset that Malawi, a country located to the east of Southern Africa, pursues an agro-based economy comprising estate and smallholder agriculture.⁵ The estate sector predominantly produces cash crops, while the country obtains most of its

² For details on the ‘tensions of empire,’ see F. Cooper, ‘Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History,’ *American Historical Review*, 99, 5 (1994), 1516-1545; F. Cooper and A. Stoler (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

³ On contestations over resources among the white settlers in Zimbabwe, see for example, M. Musemwa, ‘Contestations over Resources: The Farmer-Miner Disputes in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1903-1939,’ *Environment and History*, 15, 1 (2009), 79-107.

⁴ See for example, A. Bashford, *Global Population: History, Geopolitics and Life on Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

⁵ For details, see for example, S. Thomas, ‘Economic Developments in Malawi Since Independence,’ *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 2, 1 (1975), 30-51; J. Kydd and R. Christiansen, ‘Structural Change in Malawi Since Independence: Consequences of a Development Strategy Based on Large-Scale Agriculture,’ *World Development*, 10, 5 (1982), 355-375.

foodstuffs from smallholder agriculture.⁶ The peasants, who constitute 95% of the smallholder farmers, are a significant asset for the country's food security.⁷ Over the years, Lake Chilwa basin of southern Malawi, where most of the peasants and the majority of estates are located, experienced rapid population increase, accelerating levels of poverty, extreme events of climate variability and shortages of arable land.⁸ The population grew over the years, with that of 1901 standing at 75 000, while in 1966 it stood at 904 302 and the 1998 population estimated at 916 447.⁹ By 2010, 80% of the peasants' population lived on less than one US dollar a day.¹⁰ These conditions exerted a great deal of pressure on the peasants whose livelihoods depended largely on agricultural production.¹¹

Since the early 1890s, the state, in its various forms, made agricultural interventions to improve the levels of the peasants' food production in the face of various ecological, economic and political challenges.¹² The interventions included market regulation, the introduction of new crops and conservation agricultural methods, provision of agricultural inputs and the development of smallholder irrigation schemes.¹³ However, the processes by which the state undertook these interventions, the underlying discourses, as well as the extent to which they affected the food security of the peasants of the Lake Chilwa basin is a subject

⁶ See for example, G. Mhone, 'Agricultural and Food Policy in Malawi: A Review,' in N. Bourenane and T. Mkandawire, (eds.), *The State and Agriculture in Africa*, (London: CODESRIA, 1987), 59-86; L. Vail, 'The State and the Creation of the Malawi's Economy,' in R. Rotberg, (ed.), *Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger* (Lexington: DC Heath and Company, 1983), 39-86.

⁷ See J. G. Liebenow, 'Food Self-Sufficiency in Malawi: Are Successes Transferable?' in M. H. Glantz (ed.), *Drought and Hunger in Africa: Denying Famine a Future* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 369-392.

⁸ See for example, Malawi Government, *National Irrigation Policy and Development Strategy*, (Lilongwe: Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation Development, 2001); B. Nkhoma and G. Kayira, 'Gender and Power Contestations over Water Use in Irrigation Schemes: Lessons for the Lake Chilwa Basin,' *Physics and Chemistry of the Earth*, 92 (2016), 79-84.

⁹ Nyasaland Protectorate, *1931 Population Census Report* (Zomba: Government Printer, 1932); Malawi Government, *1998 Population Census Report* (Zomba: National Statistical Office, 1998).

¹⁰ UNDP, *Human Development Report: Sustainability and Equity: a Better Future for All* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹¹ See Vail, 'The State and the Creation of the Malawi's Economy,' 39-86.

¹² For details, see Thomas, 'Economic Developments in Malawi since Independence,' 71-104.

¹³ See Vail, 'The State and the Creation of the Malawi's Economy,' 39-86.

that has not been adequately and systematically analysed in the Malawian historiography. The existing historiography predominantly placed peasants' everyday experiences at the forefront of food production and consumption in the face of droughts, hunger and famine, but paid little attention to the state interventions concerning pre-existing food security practices in Malawi.¹⁴ Not only does this historiography limit its analysis to cases from the Lower Shire valley, the Upper Shire valley and the Shire Highlands, but it also deals with food production and food security tangentially within the wider studies of agricultural and ecological changes. Therefore, this thesis addresses this lacuna in Malawi's historiography.

The thesis takes as a starting point the year 1891, when the British, who colonised the country, embarked on the process of restructuring age-old agricultural practices in an effort to integrate the producers into the world capitalist economy.¹⁵ I argue that, until the end of World War I, the state developed policies that exploited rather than maintained peasants' food security. That is, apart from regularising land alienation, the colonial state remained ambivalent towards peasant agriculture in the country between 1891 and 1907. Even the colonial government's establishment of an Agricultural Department in 1908 to spearhead agricultural development witnessed interventions that centred on food market regulations rather than food production. However, by limiting the peasants to food production while the settler farmers concentrated on cash cropping, the state paradoxically created an environment conducive for the expansion of food production among the peasants.

¹⁴ For details, see for example, M. Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine: Gender and Famine in the Twentieth Century Malawi* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); E. Mandala, *Work and Control in a Peasant Economy: A History of the Lower Tchiri Valley in Malawi, 1859-1960* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Mandala, *End of Chidyerano: A History of Food and Everyday Life in the Lower Tchiri Valley in Malawi, 1860-2004* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005).

¹⁵ See E. Mandala, *Work and Control in a Peasant Economy*; J. McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2012).

Only after the end of World War I did the state start to take sustained interest in improving peasants' agriculture. This shift in colonial policy arose from an interaction of both local and global circumstances. In particular, the thesis draws attention to growing demands for peasants' foodstuffs after the end of the war as well as the influence of discourses of 'Trusteeship' by the League of Nations, and the impact of both the Economic Depression and the American Dust Bowl on agricultural development in Malawi.¹⁶ However, until the late 1930s, the state confined the improvement of peasant agriculture to official debates. This was largely a consequence of inadequate financial resources and the prevalence of ideological and political tensions among colonial officials and white settlers. Even after the passing of the Colonial Development Act of 1929, through which the colonial state accessed financial support from the Colonial Office for its projects, the state continued to execute its projects half-heartedly.¹⁷ Hence, the colonial state in Malawi, as in other parts of southern Africa, limited its interventions into the food economy of the peasants to policy formulation that was biased towards marketing and soil conservation.¹⁸

However, this *laissez faire* approach changed with the outbreak of World War II in 1939 as the state began to actively encourage food production in the Chilwa basin. The thesis argues that this was done to facilitate the British war effort against Germany. Britain and other parts of Europe as well as Asia, South Africa, Argentina and Australia suffered food

¹⁶ For details on how these factors affected agricultural development in Africa, see for example, D. Anderson, 'Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography and Drought: The Colonial State and Soil Conservation in East Africa during the 1930s,' *African Affairs*, 83, 332 (1984), 321-343; C. Bisen, 'The Changing Moral Justification of Empire: From the Right to Colonize to the Obligation to Civilise,' *History of European Ideas*, 39 (2013), 335-353.

¹⁷ See E. Green, 'A Lasting Story: Conservation and Agricultural Extension Services in Colonial Malawi,' *The Journal of African History*, 50, 2 (2009), 247-267.

¹⁸ For details about the evolution of conservation in other parts of Africa, see for example J. McGregor, 'Conservation, Control and Ecological Change: The Politics and Control of Colonial Conservation in Shurugwi, Zimbabwe,' *Environment and History*, 1 (1995), 257-279; I. Phimister, 'Discourse and Discipline of Historical Context: Conservation and Ideas about Development in Southern Rhodesia, 1930-1950,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 12, 2 (1986), 263-275; K. B. Showers, *Imperial Gullies: Soil Erosion and Conservation in Lesotho* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005); R. Whitlaw, 'Soil Conservation History in Zimbabwe,' *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*, 43, 4 (1988), 299-303.

shortages due to the adverse impacts of World War II and recurrent droughts. This came to be called the World Food Crisis (1941-1952).¹⁹ Consequently, and as argued by Megan Vaughan, 'For the first time peasants in Malawi and elsewhere in African colonial territories were called upon directly to feed the starving of Europe.'²⁰ To deal with the crisis, Britain increased its financial support for colonial food production projects. In addition, the 1948/9 famine forced the colonial state in Malawi to make decisive interventions into the African peasantry. However, this changed after the end of the World Food Crisis in the early 1950s. Since then, the state began to discourage peasants' maize production in favour of cash crops. The state introduced a new policy that undermined maize production and at the same time encouraged the expansion of cash cropping among peasants. However, the more the state discouraged maize production, the more the peasants grew it.²¹ The thesis draws attention to the prevalence of a moral economy among the peasants of the Lake Chilwa basin in an effort to account for these resistant developments.²²

While achievement of independence in 1964 provided better prospects for the expansion of peasants' food economy, the state's inheritance of colonial structures of economic and political domination undermined the peasants' attempts at achieving food security. During the 1961-1964 run-up to independence period, the state developed programmes that promoted peasants' agriculture in the Chilwa basin. However, the post-colonial state abandoned the populist approach during the post-1964 period and adopted

¹⁹ For details of the World Food Crisis, see T. Zeleza, 'The Political Economy of British Colonial Development and Welfare in Africa,' *Transafrican Journal of History*, 14 (1985), 139-161; D. Shaw, *World Food Security: A History Since 1945* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

²⁰ Vaughan, *The Story of An African Famine*, 89.

²¹ For details on the British post-war economic problems, see T. Zeleza, 'The Political Economy of British Colonial Development and Welfare in Africa,' 139-161.

²² For details about the moral economy, see E. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,' *Past and Present*, 50, (1971), 76-136; J. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasants: Rebellion and Resistance in South East Asia* (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 1976); P. Brocheux, 'Moral Economy or Political Economy? The Peasants Are Always Rational,' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 42, 4 (1983), 791-803; T. Tsuruta, 'African Imaginations of Moral Economy: Notes on Indigenous Economic Concepts and Practices in Tanzania,' *African Studies Quarterly*, 9, 1-2 (2006), 103-121.

colonial-based policies that favoured land alienation, estate agriculture and progressive farmers at the expense of poor peasants.²³ The thesis argues that, while this appeared to have brought some degree of prosperity, the success was temporary, benefitted a few progressive farmers, and was tangential to climate and economic conditions rather than good governance. Similarly, the focus on multiple projects at the expense of the poor peasants meant that the early post-colonial prosperity was tantamount to ‘growth without development.’²⁴ The conditions became unfavourable in the mid-1980s such that the poor peasants from the Chilwa basin, just as those from other parts of the country, began to experience acute shortages of food. This decline in food security conditions and the shift in the international political economy after the end of the Cold War played a role in the collapse of Kamuzu Banda’s regime in 1994.

The thesis ends in the year 1994 when Kamuzu Banda lost power after governing the country for over 30 years. Banda lost the first multiparty elections held in April 1994. Despite his autocratic leadership, Banda was passionate about the expansion of the agricultural sector, which he viewed as the motor for driving the country’s development. Banda called himself *Mchikumbwe* or farmer Number One and as *Mchikumbwe* Number One, he opened irrigation schemes, established agricultural development divisions, and trained many extension workers in an effort to promote agricultural development in the country.²⁵ By ending soon after Banda’s political fall, the study presents a comparative and nuanced exploration of the history

²³ For further information about agrarian populism, see for example E. Green, ‘Agrarian Populism in Colonial and Post-Colonial Malawi,’ *African Studies Review*, 54, 3 (2011), 143-164.

²⁴ See R. Sandbrook and J. Barker, *The Politics of Africa’s Economic Stagnation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). See also F. Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); P. Nugent, *Africa since Independence: A Comparative History* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); M. Meredith, *The Fate of Africa: From Hopes of Freedom to the Heart of Despair: A History of Fifty years of Independence* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

²⁵ See Liebenow, ‘Food Self-Sufficiency in Malawi’ passim.

of state interventions in rural Malawi. It also identifies continuities and changes in the state interventions in Malawi's rural food economy and the peasants' corresponding responses.

In exploring peasant-state relations over food security in the Lake Chilwa basin during the period of study, the thesis draws on socio-environmental history and political economy approach. For one, the socio-environmental history approach assists in demonstrating how interactions between peasants, the state and the natural environment, shaped relations of production with serious implications for food security.²⁶ By doing this, the thesis meshes the social, environmental and oral history to examine peasant-state relations over food security in the Chilwa basin. Typical of a socio-environmental history, the thesis interrogates issues related to class, gender and ethnicity to illuminate further our understanding on human-environmental interaction in rural Africa.²⁷ By its very nature, a political economy approach involves analysis of the interaction between politics, policy and economics in the society. Such an analysis helps us to understand the underlying incentives, institutions and ideas that shape political actions and development outcomes.²⁸ From the 1960s onwards, scholars adopted the political economy approach as a framework for understanding 'the failure of technical interventions inspired by growth-based theories and

²⁶ For details on environmental history, its currents and debates, see for example, D. Worster (ed.), *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 211-229; W. Cronon, 'The Uses of Environmental History,' *Environmental History Review*, 17, 3 (1993), pp.1-22; A.W. Crosby, 'The Past and Present of Environmental History,' *The American Historical Review*, 100, 4 (1995), 1177-1189; W. Beinart and P. Coates, *Environment and History: The Taming of Nature in the USA and South Africa* (New York: Routledge, 1995); J. Carruthers, 'Africa; Histories, Ecology and Societies,' *Environment and History*, 10 (2004), 379-406; J. A. Pádua, 'The Theoretical Foundations of Environmental History,' *Estudos Avançados*, 24, 68 (2010), 81-101.

²⁷ For details about the intersection between social history and environmental history, see for example, A. Tylor, 'Unnatural Inequalities: Social and Environmental Histories,' *Environmental History*, 1, 4 (1996), 6-19; S. Mosley, 'Common Grounds: Integrating Social and Environmental History,' *The Journal of Social History*, 39, 3 (2006), 915-933.

²⁸ For details regarding the concept of political economy, see for example, DFID, *Political Economy Analysis: How to Note* (London: DFID, 2009); P. Tidemand, *Political Economy and Governance Analysis* (Denmark: Danish International Development Agency, 2009); B. Nkhoma, 'The Politics, Development and Problems of Small Irrigation Dams in Malawi: Experiences from Mzuzu ADD,' *Water Alternatives*, 4, 3 (2011), 383-398.

policies.²⁹ By using this political economy approach, the thesis seeks to understand the rationale, processes and effects of state interventions into the food economy of the peasants in the Lake Chilwa basin. By intertwining socio-environmental history with political economy, the thesis explores the dialectical relations that developed between the state and the peasants whose ecological perceptions were generally at variance. In executing its regulatory role over ecology and agriculture, the state generally wanted to fulfil capitalistic rather than developmental goals. Furthermore, the so-called modern methods of food security, which the state wanted to impress upon the peasants, were often in conflict with the pre-existing socio-economic structures and practices. This brought the state into clashes with most peasants, who fearing the erosion of food security, responded aggressively in defence of the status quo of their ecology and food security, thus underlining food security as a key agenda in Malawi's post-colonial politics.

The use of food security in the analysis of peasant-state-ecological relations is strategic for the study. Drawing from the FAO's definition, the thesis considers food security as a situation 'when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.'³⁰ As stipulated in the Malawi National Food Security Policy, people in a food secure society 'should not be at risk of losing access to food as a consequence of an economic or climatic or seasonal food variation.'³¹ Thus, food security is conceived to encompass food availability, food accessibility, food utilisation and food stability achievable through means

²⁹ Nkhoma, 'The Politics, Development and Problems of Small Irrigation Dams,' 385. The point was also raised by C. Adam and S. Dercon, 'The Political Economy of Development: An Assessment,' *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 25, 2 (2009), 173-189.

³⁰ FAO, World Food Summit Report, Rome, 1996.

³¹ Malawi Government, National Food Security Policy (Lilongwe: Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, 2006), 16.

such as agricultural production, food purchases and food reliefs.³² Nevertheless, this thesis focuses predominantly on state interventions on food production practices since it was the major means by which the peasants of the Chilwa basin maintained food security during the period of study. By examining how the peasants challenged conventional food security interventions, the thesis, however, draws attention to the need to consider food sovereignty in addition to food security. In this context, food sovereignty implies the right of the peasants to safe, nutritious, culturally appropriate, and ecologically sustainable food. As noted by some food security scholars, the study argues that issues of food (in)security and access to food were also issues of social and environmental justice.³³ Through resistance, negotiations and revolts, peasants sought the right to control their future and make their own decisions regarding food security.

Thus, as a concept, food security provides an appropriate avenue towards understanding the complex interactions that developed between the peasants and the state over ecological challenges in colonial and post-colonial Malawi. Czeslaw Mesjasz notes that the security nature of food depends on its existential value to humanity.³⁴ He maintains that ‘Security in the objective sense, means the absence of threats to acquired values, in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked.’³⁵ Thus, food security in Malawi was and is still essential to the state as well as the peasants as the country is an agro-based economy. The peasants, who dominate the food production sector, were and are still a determining factor for the country’s food security. The main threat of food security in

³² Malawi Government, Food Security Action Plan, Vol. 1 (Lilongwe: Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, 2008), 12-13.

³³ For details of the debates on food security and food sovereignty, see M. Edelman, et al, ‘Introduction: Critical Perspectives on Food Sovereignty’ *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41, 6 (2014), 911-931; T. Long, ‘Food Security and Food Sustainability: Reformulating the Debate,’ *The Geographical Journal*, 178, 4 (2012), 313-326.

³⁴ C. Mesjasz, ‘Security as an Analytical Concept,’ Paper Presented at the 5th Pan-European Conference on International Relations in Hague, 9-11 September 2004.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 12.

the Chilwa basin is hunger and famine, which, like war and genocide, has the potential to claim the lives of many people whenever they have failed to take prompt preventive and mitigating actions. Under these circumstances, the peasants and the states become the main culprits to food insecurity.

While the state in the Chilwa basin feared that food insecurity might cause strains to its development agenda and lead to the emergence of populist movements, the peasants feared for the erosion of religious, cultural, social and material beliefs from which food derived its significance. According to James Matuta, who has been engaged in food production in the Chilwa basin since the mid-1960s, ‘the value of food extended beyond subsistence, biological needs and material survival to more complex issues related to religion, culture, identity and social relations.’³⁶ Food is a key substance by which societal values were developed, sustained, reproduced and enhanced. It provides peasants with the lens to observe socio-cultural practices such as rainmaking, funerals and rites of passages ceremonies, wedding, unity and community life, and social discipline. As such, the peasants from the Chilwa basin committed themselves diligently to the production, preservation, distribution and careful consumption of food to ensure that they were food secure at all times. In the post-colonial era, the state recognised food as a human right. As such, it ensured that adequate food was accessible to all people through the provision of agricultural extension services, food market regulation, and that of food relief and input subsidies to the poor.³⁷

The term ‘peasant’ has been a subject of historical debate since the emergence of social history. There is abundant literature on the meaning of African peasantry, and its place

³⁶ Interview: Jamusi Matuta, Kasokwe Village, T/A Kuntumanje, Zomba, 13 December 2016.

³⁷ Malawi Government, National Food Security Policy, 5-6.

in capitalist economy since the onset of colonialism in Africa.³⁸ Without delving much into the scholarly debates on the peasantry, the thesis uses the concept to describe African rural producers who depend largely on agriculture on their own land to meet subsistence and material needs. As noted by Martin Klein and other scholars of the African peasantry, although peasants were under state control during the colonial period, they still enjoyed a relative degree of autonomy through the control of land and family labour that enabled them to meet their subsistence needs.³⁹ Allen Isaacman notes that this autonomy to land and family labour limited and mediated the extent to which the state and other appropriating agencies exploited the peasants in Africa.⁴⁰ By confining largely to subsistence farming and employment of family labour, the peasants became practitioners of the moral economy.⁴¹ In addition, peasants began at the advent of colonial capitalism to engage cautiously in the cash economy on what James Scott called a 'safety-first food principle.'⁴² Nevertheless, the state's attempts to exploit the peasants on behalf of capital became the root cause of the state-peasants conflicts in colonial rural Africa.⁴³

However, the peasants under study were not a homogenous entity. They were differentiated according to class, gender and social geography. These differentiations defined the extent to which peasants were affected by capitalist incursions and their responses to the

³⁸ For details, see for example A. Isaacman, 'Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa', in F. Cooper, F. Mallon, A. Isaacman, S. Stern, and W. Roseberry (eds.), *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labour and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 1-120.

³⁹ For details of the unique characteristic of African peasants, see for example, M. Klein, *Peasants in Africa: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980); A. Isaacman, 'Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa,' *African Studies Review*, 33, 2 (1990), 1-120.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 3.

⁴¹ For details of the peasants and moral economy, see J. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasants*, 10.

⁴² *Ibid*.

⁴³ For details of conflicts between the peasants and the state, see also Klein, *Peasants in Africa*; Isaacman, 'Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa'; S. G. Bunker, *Peasants against the State: The Politics of Market Control in Bugisu, Uganda, 1900-1983* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); M. L. Bowen, *The State against the Peasantry: Rural Struggles in Colonial and Post-Colonial Mozambique* (Harlotteville: University of Virginia Press, 2000); G. Hyden, *Beyond the Ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and An Uncaptured Peasantry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

development. In accounting for the growth of peasants' differentiations, the thesis draws attention to the pre-colonial commodity formations and the uneven penetration of the capitalist economy into rural Africa.⁴⁴ 'By specifying the process of rural class formation,' argued Ian Phimister, 'it is possible to reconcile evidence of immiseration with signs of prosperity.'⁴⁵ Specifically, peasants from the Chilwa basin differentiated into the 'poor' peasants who operated on the margin of the rural social ladder, the 'middle' peasants who produced sufficient food for themselves, and the 'rich' peasants who had relatively more land and wealth to engage fellow peasants as labourers and produce surplus for sale. Phimister further argued that 'it was those cultivators covering the spectrum of independent household producers stretching from middle peasants whose family labour and land just sufficed to reproduce themselves, through to rich peasants on the brink of transforming themselves into capitalist farmers, who began to constitute a class.'⁴⁶ Master Farmers, later rebranded as *achikumbe* in the post-colonial period, owned land in excess of ten acres in a pool of peasants that hardly owned three acres of land, and thus, constituted a distinctive class of relatively rich peasants. As noted by Robin Cohen, peasants also included those wage labourers who oscillated between work in estates and farming for their survival.⁴⁷ These well-to-do peasants sometimes extended patronage to those who struggled to produce sufficient food crops.⁴⁸ Therefore, this thesis argues, in concurrence with Ian Phimister and Nancy Jacobs that, these differentiations were dynamic, and changed over the times.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ For more details on the development of rural differentiations, see also L. Cliffe, 'Rural Class Formation in East Africa', *Journal of African Studies*, 4, 2(1977), 195-224; I. Phimister, 'Commodity Relations and Class Formation in the Zimbabwean Countryside, 1898-1920,' *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 13, 4 (1986), 240-257; R. Das, 'Introduction: Peasants, State and Class,' *Journal of peasant Studies*, 34, 3-4 (2007), 351-370.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 241.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 250.

⁴⁷ See R. Cohen, 'From Peasants to Workers in Africa,' in P. Gutkind and J. Wallerstein (eds.), *Political Economy of Contemporary Africa* (Beverly: Sage Publications, 1985), 181-197.

⁴⁸ J. Giblin, *The Politics of Environmental Control in North-eastern Tanzania, 1840-1940* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

⁴⁹ For details, see for example, I. Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe, 1890-1948: Capital Accumulation and Class Struggle*, (London: Longman, 1988); N. Jacobs, *Environment, Power and Injustice: A South African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

The thesis employs the concept of ‘ecology’ to describe the natural environment and the interaction of humans with this environment.⁵⁰ While Bruce Campbell and Ruth Morgan considered natural factors such as climate, drought and floods as historical agents that have shaped peasants food security over time, the study argues that this assertion subscribes to environmental determinism and reductionism which undermines the role of societal and historical factors in shaping human culture, history and food security.⁵¹ As a result, the thesis draws on James McCann in its consideration of the impact of the ecology on food security within the broader context of long-term effects of social and political changes on rural communities and societal long-term patterns of ecological changes and processes of adaptations.⁵² It argues that peasants from the Chilwa basin were not passive victims of ecological changes, but rational beings that were able to harness natural resources to maintain food security. In addition, the peasants used their long-time experiences of resilience, adaptation and survival to minimise the effects of ecological changes such as declining soil fertility, rainfall variability, floods and droughts, which threatened the sustainability of their livelihoods. Therefore, as in most parts of southern Africa, ecological changes interacted with political changes to influence subsistence agriculture in the Chilwa basin.⁵³

⁵⁰ See for example C. Merchant, ‘The Theoretical Structure of Ecological Revolutions,’ *Environmental Review: Special Issue of Theories of Environmental History*, 11, 4 (1987), 265-274; D. Worster, ‘Transformations of the Earth: Towards an Agro-ecological Perspective in History,’ *Journal of American History*, 76, 4 (1990), 1087-1106; R. White, ‘Environmental History, Ecology and Meaning,’ *Journal of American History*, 76, 4 (1990), 1111-1116; L. Nash, ‘The Agency of Nature or the Nature of Agency,’ *Environmental History*, 10 (2005), 67-69; B. Campbell, ‘Nature as a Historical Protagonist: Environment and Society in Pre-Industrial Europe,’ *The Economic Historical Review*, 63, 2 (2010), 281-314; R. Morgan, ‘Histories for Uncertain Future: Environmental History and Climate Change,’ *Australian Historical Studies*, 44, 3 (2013), 350-360.

⁵¹ See for example, J. McCann, ‘Climate and Causation in African History,’ *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 32(2/3) (1999), 261-279; M. Carey, ‘Climate and History: A Critical Review of Historical Climatology and Climate Change Historiography,’ *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 3, (2012), 233-249; M. Hannaford, ‘Climate, Causation and Society: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from the Past to the Present,’ in L. Asuelime, J. Yaro, and S. Francis, (eds.), *Selected Themes in African Development Studies*, (Switzerland: Springer, 2014).

⁵² McCann, ‘Climate and Causation in African History,’ 261-279.

⁵³ See Jacobs, *Environment, Power and Injustice*.

It would be simplistic to blame population increases and African agricultural practices for the deterioration of soil structures, rainfall patterns and climate variability which in turn generated agricultural failure and the subsequent food crisis as argued by environmental determinists.⁵⁴ I underscore in this thesis, drawing on arguments by political economists that, food insecurity in Malawi was a political and an economic phenomenon.⁵⁵ According to Amartya Sen, food insecurity among peasants was largely a function of lack of entitlements or assets with which to produce or procure foodstuffs rather than the general absence of food.⁵⁶ Starvation was, therefore, a problem of poor peasants whose entitlements were low. In colonial Malawi, capitalism disrupted rural economies through land alienation, emphasis on cash crop production, taxation, labour migration, and state control of food marketing and transportation which made most peasants vulnerable to famine and hunger.⁵⁷ However, this thesis goes further by arguing for an understanding of food security within a broader context of the interplay between ecological and anthropogenic factors, as suggested by Sara Berry, James Gibling, Gregory Maddox, Megan Vaughan and Elias Mandala.⁵⁸ For instance, Mandala draws attention to ‘peasant intellectual response’ in understanding the historical trajectories

⁵⁴ For discussions on environmental determinism, see for example J. Miller, ‘The Significance of Drought, Disease, and Famine in the Agriculturally Marginal Zones of West Central Africa,’ *Journal of African History*, 23, 1 (1982), 17-61; J. Dias, ‘Famine and Disease in the History of Angola, 1830-1930,’ *Journal of African History*, 22 (1988), 349-378; M. Newitt, ‘Drought in Mozambique, 1823-1831,’ *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 1 (1988), 15-35.

⁵⁵ For a political economy perspective of food insecurity, see for example, R. Bates, *Markets and the State in Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); A. Sen, *Poverty and Famine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); R. Rotberg, (ed.), *Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger: East and Central Africa* (Toronto: Lexington Books, 1982); M. Watts, *Silent Violence: Food, Famine and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); D. Wylie, ‘The Changing Face of Hunger in Southern African History, 1880-1980,’ *Past and Present*, 122 (1989), 159-199; J. Illife, *Famine in Zimbabwe, 1890-1899*, (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1990).

⁵⁶ See Sen, *Poverty and Famine*; *Ibid*, *Resources, Values and Development* (Cornwell: T. J. Press, 1984).

⁵⁷ For details, see Vaughan, *A Story of an African Famine*.

⁵⁸ For details, see S. Berry, ‘The Food Crisis and Agrarian Change in Africa: A Review Essay,’ *African Studies Review*, 27, 2 (1984), 59-112; J. Gibling, ‘Famine and Social Change during the Transition to Colonial Rule in North-Eastern Tanzania, 1880-1893,’ *African Economic History*, 15 (1986), 85-105; Gibling, ‘Famine, Authority and the Impact of Foreign Capital in Handeni District, Tanzanian, 1840-1940,’ (Ph. D Thesis, The University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1986); Vaughan, *The Story of An African Famine*; G. H. Maddox, ‘Leave Wagogo, You Have No Food: Famine and Survival in Ugogo, Tanzania, 1916-1961’ (Ph. D Thesis, North-western University, Evanston, Illinois, 1988); G. Maddox, ‘Mtunya: Famine in Central Tanzania, 1917-1920,’ *Journal of African History*, 31(2) (1990), 181-198; Mandala, *End of Chidyerano*.

of food insecurity in Africa. According to him, environmental determinism, inspired by a linear argument of historical processes, fails to capture practical every day experiences of the peasants as food producers, consumers and victims of hunger. This failure arises from the narrow focus of linear historical progression that treats famine as rare and irrevocable events of the past thereby undermining everyday food insecurity experiences of the peasants.⁵⁹ This understanding led the state in Malawi, like most states in the region, to treat food insecurity as an ‘Emergency’ issue rather than an everyday experience of the peasants. After the Emergency, the state developed little interest in strategies that would sustainably avert food insecurity. Subsequently, food insecurity became a recurrent event in Malawian history.

Various scholars’ studies on the relations that developed between human beings, the natural environment, and the impact these relations on food security have polarised around the narratives of the ‘African peril’/‘Primitive Africa,’ and that of the ‘Merrie Africa’/‘Golden Age.’⁶⁰ While the latter presents a romantic view of precolonial African societies as the land of plenty and food security that was disrupted by colonial capitalism, the former takes an opposite view. However, the thesis argues that the relationship between human beings and nature is a subsequence of changing political structures and processes in both the precolonial and colonial periods, which affected people’s abilities to control their ecologies and maintain food security.⁶¹ As noted by Nancy Jacobs, elements of injustice, rural differentiations, inequality and exploitation existed during the precolonial era such that

⁵⁹ For details, see Mandala, *End of Chidyerano*, 14-21.

⁶⁰ On the “black peril” thesis see for example, W. J. Barber, *The Economy of British Central Africa* (London: Longman, 1961). For the “merrie Africa” view see H. Kjekshus, *Ecology Control and Economic Development in East African History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977); L. Vail, ‘Ecology and History: The Example of Eastern Zambia,’ *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 3, 2 (1977), 129-155.

⁶¹ See for details J. Tosh, ‘The Cash-Crop Revolution in Tropical Africa: An Agricultural Reappraisal,’ *African Affairs*, 79, 314 (1980), 79-94; Phimister, ‘Commodity Relations and Class Formation,’ 240-257; Giblin, *The Politics of Environmental Control*; Isaacman, ‘Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa,’; G. Maddox, J. Giblin and I. Kimambo, (eds.), *Custodians of the Land: Ecology and Culture in the History of Tanzania* (London: James Currey, 1996).

colonialism only reinforced and deepened these elements.⁶² The ‘Merrie Africa-Primitive Africa’ assumptions are simplistic and inadequately nuanced to warrant broader generalisations of the historical relationship between people, the environment and food security. Thus, other than acting independently, colonial capitalism interacted with the peasantry to shape food security discourses in the Chilwa basin.

John McCracken outlines that, while colonialism contributed to ecological crises, its impact varied with time, place, class and gender, and that in some respects, it paradoxically created an environment for the sustenance of African ecologies and food security.⁶³ In addition, as noted above, different classes and genders of peasants were not affected by capitalism in the same way. As a result, this thesis maintains that colonial capitalist policies indirectly shaped and transformed rather than eliminated the long-time food security agricultural practices of the peasants. Thus, colonial capitalism created food insecurity on the one hand and on the other hand provided opportunities for some peasants to expand agricultural production. Similarly, the peasants were able to maintain food security despite the attempts by the colonial state to weaken their production through draconian policies and laws such as land alienation, labour migration and taxation. They took advantage of their exclusion from cash cropping to concentrate on food production. These peasants expanded food production in order to satisfy the growing demands of food by the growing urban population and settler farmers. This enabled them to generate cash with which to pay taxes and avoid selling their labour to the settler farmers as was intended by the colonial authorities.

⁶² See Jacobs, *Environment, Power and Injustice*.

⁶³ J. McCracken, ‘Colonialism, Capitalism and Ecological Crisis in Malawi: A Reassessment,’ in D. Anderson and R. Grove, (eds.), *Conservation in Africa: People, Policies and Practices* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 63-78.

The above-noted argument on peasant agency concurs with Henrietta Moore and Megan Vaughan who refute Audrey Richards' assertion that male labour migration led to food insecurity in colonial Zambia.⁶⁴ Richards argued that labour migration deprived women of the labour of men in cutting trees for new fields for the sustenance of the *chitemene* agricultural practices through which women traditionally produced millet for the dietary good of the Bembas in the province.⁶⁵ According to Moore and Vaughan, colonialism indirectly shaped and transformed long-time agricultural practices of the Bemba's such as *chitemene*. Using the existing local coping strategies, women were able to sustain these practices in the absence of their husbands. For instance, these women prepared beer to exchange for men's labour in their fields. Chewe Chabatama further demonstrates at length how peasants from the North-Western Province of colonial Zambia endured 'state neglect and suppression' and yet maintained food security through 'their resilience, initiative and industriousness.'⁶⁶ Although the state endeavoured tirelessly to reduce them into mineworkers, Chabatama argued that some peasants responded creatively to the development and were able to produce food surplus.

Thus, the major problem with colonial interventions has to do with the segregation characterising the manner in which the state implemented the interventions. The thesis contends that, while the colonial state might have been technically correct in its interventions during the post-World War II period, it conceived and implemented these projects coercively

⁶⁴ For details, see H. Moore and M. Vaughan *Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutrition and Agricultural Changes Northern Province of Zambia, 1890-1990* (Portsmouth, BH: Heinemann, 1994).

⁶⁵ A. Richards, *Land, Labour and Diet: An Economic Study of the Bemba Tribe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939).

⁶⁶ See C. M. Chabatama, 'Peasant Farming, the State and Food Security in the North-Western Province of Zambia, 1902-1964,' Ph. D Thesis, University of Chicago, 1999, iii – iv.

and presumptuously.⁶⁷ The colonial state directed interventions towards correcting what it perceived as imprudent African methods of agriculture without paying due respect to the many ways through which these practices maintained peasants' food security. This approach has led scholars to describe colonial development in the post-war era as the 'second colonial occupation.'⁶⁸ Modernisation scholars considered the British post-war policy as a mark of generosity and benevolence that remarkably transformed African economies in preparation for self-governance.⁶⁹ However, underdevelopment scholars dismiss the idea of British generosity, as they perceive the post-war colonial policy as a cynical attempt to appropriate African resources for its own economic recovery.⁷⁰ Unlike William Beinart, Ian Phimister argues that the implementation of the post-war colonial policy in Zimbabwe varied in accordance with context, and that colonial conservation was primarily meant to check African practices rather than those of settler farmers.⁷¹ As Tiyambe Zeleza noted, the British post-war policy should also be understood within the complex and precarious political and economic situation in which Britain found itself after World War II.⁷² Thus, although Britain imposed these policies for its economic recovery, local ecological and political circumstances also contributed to their adoption by the peasants in rural Africa.

Diana Wylie and Willard Morapidi further remind us that state interventions in peasant food security in most African countries were embedded in the politics of class and

⁶⁷ See for example, W. Beinart, 'Soil Erosion, Conservation and Ideas of Development: A Southern African Exploration, 1900-1960,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 11, 1 (1984), 52-83. I. Phimister, 'Discourse and the Discipline of Historical Context,' 263-275.

⁶⁸ For the idea of 'second colonial occupation', see footnote number 21.

⁶⁹ See M. Crowder, *West African Colonial Rule* (Hutchison, 1981); D. A. Low and J. M. Lonsdale 'Introduction: Towards the New Order 1945-1963,' in D. A. Low and A. Smith, (eds.), *History of East Africa* (Oxford, 1976); J. M. Lee, *Colonial Development and Good Governance* (Oxford: OUP, 1967).

⁷⁰ For details, see D. K. Fieldhouse, 'The Economic Exploitation of Africa: Some British and French Companies,' in P. Gifford and W. R. Louis, (eds.), *France and Britain in Africa*, (Yale University Press, 1973); G. Padmore, *Africa: Britain Third Empire* (Negro University Press, 1949); W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Bogle-l'Ouverture, 1972).

⁷¹ Phimister, 'Discourse and the Discipline of Historical Context,' 263-275.

⁷² For details, see Zeleza, 'The Political Economy,' 149.

racism.⁷³ The colonial state in Botswana and South Africa selectively supported peasants that were cooperative and had adopted new methods of farming. For instance, the state systematically constructed derogatory notions of African dietary life that made Africans inherently resistant, disdainful and unresponsive to the interventions that were meant to address famine and malnutrition among them.⁷⁴ In this context, the thesis argues that, despite the potential to improve food security, colonial interventions hardly addressed the issue of starvation among the poor peasants in colonial Malawi. Colonial authorities were unable to articulate the peasants' perceptions of what constituted hunger and its solution. This trajectory continued in the post-colonial period as the state, for capitalist and neo-colonialist interests, inherited colonial structures of economic and political domination such as land alienation, regulation of peasant food market and centralisation of development planning.⁷⁵ It is in this broader historical context that the thesis examines the impact of state agricultural interventions on peasant food security in the Lake Chilwa basin.

2. Geography, Ecology and People of the Lake Chilwa Basin

The Lake Chilwa basin, from which the thesis draws empirical evidence, is ecologically, economically, ideologically and historically significant in the study of the history of food security in Malawi. Geographically, the basin covers parts of the districts of Machinga to the north, Zomba to the southwest, and Phalombe to the southeast. The eastern part of the basin extends to as far as Lake Amaramba and the Lugenda River in the Mozambican territory. The Chilwa basin is generally surrounded by the mountains of Zomba, Mulanje and Chikala, as

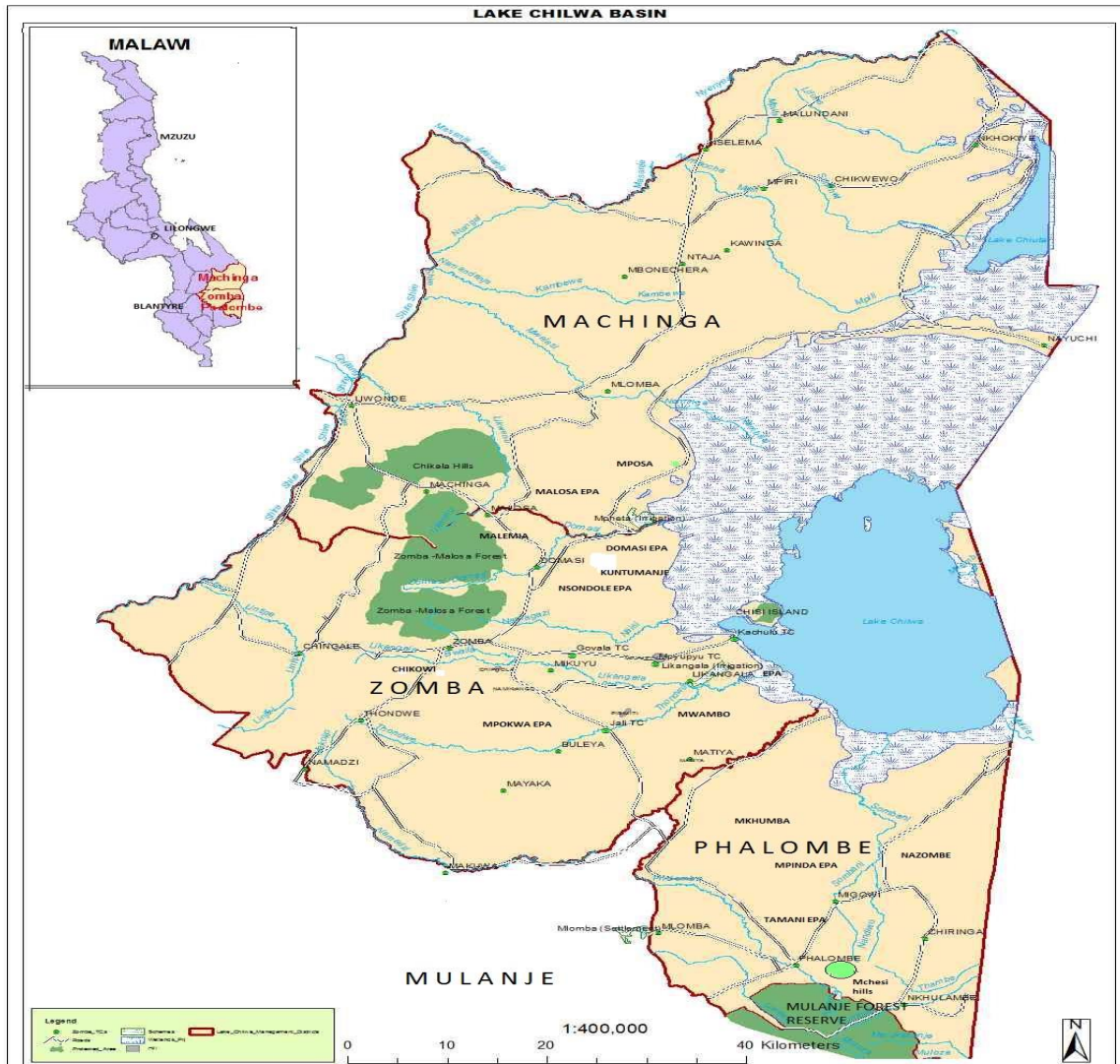
⁷³ D. Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach: Hunger and Triumph of Cultural Racism in Modern South African* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001); W. Morapedi, 'The State, Crop Production and Differentiation in Botswana, 1947-1966,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32, 2 (2006), 351-366.

⁷⁴ See for details, Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach*.

⁷⁵ For details on the colonial heritage and its effects on post-colonial development, see for example, Sandbrook and Barker, *The Politics of Africa's Economic Stagnation*; Meredith, *The Fate of Africa: From Hopes of Freedom to the Heart of Despair*.

well as Lake Chilwa and Lake Chiuta.⁷⁶ Covering an area of 8 349km², the basin is the largest in the country.⁷⁷ Map 1 and Photo 1 below show the location, physical and economic characteristics of the Lake Chilwa basin.

Map 1: Lake Chilwa basin



Source: F. Namoto, Geography Department, Chancellor College, Zomba, 18 December 2017

⁷⁶ Mulanje is the largest mountain in the country, and Zomba is the second largest.

⁷⁷ See Malawi Government, *Lake Chilwa Wetland Management Plan* (Lilongwe: Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs, 2001).

Photo 1: Part of Lake Chilwa Basin as viewed from Mt Zomba



Source: Author, 17 January 2018

The basin has two ecological zones: the dry upland zone and the lower wetland zone. The dry uplands are mountainous and enjoy heavy rainfall ranging from 1 000mm to 1 600mm and cool temperatures ranging 10⁰C to 30⁰C.⁷⁸ The cooler temperatures below the mountains give way to warmer temperatures, which get hotter as we approach the Lake Chilwa. In this lower zone, the temperatures go to as high as 37⁰ C during the months of October, November and December. Rainfall here is generally erratic, and ranges from 725mm to 1 000mm.⁷⁹ Thus, although the Chilwa basin falls within the subtropical climate, the area is largely hot, dry and experiences recurrent droughts. However, just as the temperatures are subject to the topography of the area, so too are the variations evident in the soil types found in the basin.

⁷⁸ For details, see J. Nagoli, W. Mulwafu, E. Green, P. Likongwe and L. Chiwona-Karlton, 'Conflicts over Natural Resources Scarcity in the Aquatic Ecosystem of the Lake Chilwa,' *Environment and Ecology Research*, 4, 4 (2016), 207-216.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

The slopes of the mountains are made of red alluvial soil, while the lakeshore area's soil varies between loam, sandy loam and sandy clay.⁸⁰

The geographical location, climate pattern and soil types, is largely favourable for the production of maize in the upper areas of the basin and rice in the hotter areas around Lake Chilwa. However, the high temperatures and wetness of the soils make the areas on the lake margins prone to numerous water related diseases such as malaria, cholera, typhoid and dysentery.⁸¹ The friability of the marshy soils in hot temperatures makes the areas along the shores of the lake particularly difficult to traverse at any time from August to November. During these months, the soils of the lakeshores are parched and full of cracks.

Nonetheless, the existence of savanna vegetation with a variety of wild game has been a recipe for the growth of hunting in the Chilwa basin during the period of study. Early explorers and travellers who visited the basin between 1859 and 1885 recorded the existence of wild game and thick vegetation. During the precolonial period, the basin formed part of the elephant and lucrative ivory trade belt.⁸² The Scottish Evangelist, Henry Drummond, who visited the basin in 1883, recorded the presence of a variety of game such as zebras, elephants, elands, sables, warthogs, buffalos, bucks, hartebeests, klipspringers, monkeys, leopards and lions.⁸³ In addition, the basin formed a rare homestead for birds and bees, and as of 2001, it boasted 160 species of birds of which 37 were migratory.⁸⁴ By hunting these birds and animals, the peasants were able to maintain food security.

⁸⁰ N. Lancaster, 'The Physical Environment of Lake Chilwa,' in M. Kalk, A. J. McLachlan and C. Howard-Williams, (eds.), *Lake Chilwa Monographiae Biologicae*, 35 (Dordrecht: Springer, 1979), 17-40.

⁸¹ See J. Nagoli, et al., 'Conflicts over Natural Resources Scarcity.'

⁸² For details about these observations, see for example, D. Livingstone and C. Livingstone, *Narratives of an Expedition to the Zambesi and Its Tributaries and the Discovery of the Lakes Shirwa and Nyassa, 1858-1864* (London: John Murray, 1865); Rev Duff MacDonal, *African: Mission Life in Blantyre* (London: Simpkin Marshal and Company, 1882); H. Drummond, *Tropical Africa* (New York: John B. Alben Publisher, 1890).

⁸³ See H. Drummond, *Tropical Africa*. This list of animals was recorded in *Handbook of Nyasaland*, 90.

⁸⁴ See Malawi Government, *Lake Chilwa Wetland Management Plan*.

Lake Chilwa is the key ecological feature of the basin. With a surface area of 2 300km², the lake is the second largest after Lake Malawi, but the largest inland lake without an outlet in the country.⁸⁵ The lake is located at a mean altitude of 622m above sea level. A sand bar of 25m separates Lake Chilwa and Lake Chiuta.⁸⁶ When David Livingstone, a Scottish explorer and missionary, first visited the lake on 18 April 1859, it stretched to as far as the foot of Mulanje Mountain, and had an average depth of nine metres.⁸⁷ In the middle of the lake lay a dry and mountainous island known as Chisi, which, in late precolonial period, acted as a favourite place of refuge from slave raiding and trading.⁸⁸

The lake is generally an important source of fish for the peasants of the Chilwa basin. In fact, since the 1930s, fishing became the most important means of livelihood among the peasants of the Chilwa basin. However, this fishing was affected by frequent drying up of the lake due to its shallowness, high temperatures and drought recurrences. Records show that the lake completely dried up in 1862, 1900, 1903, 1913-1916, 1922, 1934, 1943-1948, 1967, 1973, 1995, 2012, and 2015.⁸⁹ Similarly, the inland nature of the lake and the lack of outlets make the waters of the lake and its aquifers saline and salty.⁹⁰ However, availability of a network of rivers provides a complementary water supply into Lake Chilwa. These rivers include the Likangala, Songani and Domasi, which originate from the Zomba Mountain, and the Sombani and Phalombe rivers, which originate from Mulanje Mountain.⁹¹ Other rivers include the Namadzi, Thondwe, Namiwawa, Likweni, Lintipi and Namitembo.⁹² Since most of them source their waters from Mulanje and Zomba mountains, the rivers are often

⁸⁵ Lancaster, 'The Physical Environment of Lake Chilwa,' 17.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ See Livingstone and Livingstone, *Narratives of an Expedition*, 81-83.

⁸⁸ B. L. Sclater, 'Routes and Districts in Southern Nyasaland,' *The Geographical Journal*, 2, 5 (1893), 403-423.

⁸⁹ See Nagoli, et al 'Conflicts over Natural Resources Scarcity'; also Nkhoma, 'The State and Irrigation Farming,' 207.

⁹⁰ Lancaster, 'The Physical Environment of Lake Chilwa,' 17.

⁹¹ Malawi Government, *Zomba Socio-Economic Profile* (Lilongwe: Ministry of Local Government, 2000).

⁹² Ibid.

perennial in their water flow. This water flow has, over the years, been critical for the development of irrigation farming along the shores of Lake Chilwa. The saline and salty aquifers too led to the development of salt mining in the basin.

Within this basin is a dry plain that covers the foot of Mulanje Mountain, Chilwa-Phalombe plain, the foot of Zomba Mountain, the Chikala hills and Lake Chiuta. The plain creates a long stretch of wetland characterised by open water, typha swamps, marshes and alluvial clay soils.⁹³ The level plain of the Chilwa basin is almost unbroken except by isolated hills, which are most numerous on the southern side where they rise in clusters, and includes considerable peaks such as Mpyupyu, Machamba, Mause, Ntonya and Jenala.⁹⁴ Being at the lowest end, the wetland is usually waterlogged and experiences recurrences of floods during the rainy season. However, waterlogging and frequent floods make the lakeshores predominantly conducive for rice cultivation during the rainy season, while during the dry season the wetland is good for the cultivation of maize, vegetables and rice using irrigation and residual moisture.

In this geo-ecological setting settled the Nyanja, Yao and Lomwe people in the area in the 16th, 19th and 20th centuries respectively, to exploit the existing agriculture, trade and employment opportunities.⁹⁵ The Lomwe, who were the last to settle in the basin, constitutes the majority of the people, followed by the Yao. The Lomwe settlement concentrates in

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 89.

⁹⁵ See M. Vaughan, 'Social and Economic Changes in Southern Malawi: A Study of Rural Communities in the Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley from the Mid-19th Century to 1915,' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London, London, 1981); K. Phiri, 'Yao Intrusion into Southern Malawi, Nyanja Resistance and Colonial Conquest, 1830-1900,' *TransAfrican Journal of History*, 13 (1984), 157-176; McCracken, *A History of Malawi*; W. C. Chirwa, 'Alomwe and Mozambican Immigrant Labour in Colonial Malawi, 1890s – 1945,' *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 27, 7 (1994), 525-550.

Mulanje and Phalombe while that of the Yao is in Zomba and Machinga.⁹⁶ Although agriculture was a common means of livelihood during the colonial period, these people differed in their material orientation. For instance, the Nyanja predominantly formed a class of agriculturalists, while the Yaos acted as traders and the Lomwes as providers of labour services.⁹⁷ Notwithstanding, these Chilwa basin peasants had two things in common. First, they never formed any centralised political system. Instead, they operated along semi-autonomous chieftainships throughout the colonial period.⁹⁸ Second, they socially organised themselves along a matrilineal socio-cultural system. Under the matrilineal system, the peasants inherited land and wealth through their mothers whose elder brothers, as the custodians of their sisters' children, exercised the right of property redistribution among them.⁹⁹ In this traditional context, the husbands lived uxorilocally in the villages of their wives where their parent in-laws gave them a portion of agricultural land.¹⁰⁰ The system gave husbands less incentives to devote a great deal of their labour into agricultural production. Thus, to some extent, it streamlined food production as the domain of women.

The Chilwa basin was the host of the country's capital at Zomba from the 1890s to 1971. The post-colonial state maintained this status until 1971 when the then president, Kamuzu Banda, transferred the capital to Lilongwe.¹⁰¹ As the host of former capital, Zomba has, over the years, been a beneficiary of various government projects. During the colonial period, the Chilwa basin provided space for the experimentation of colonial agricultural

⁹⁶ Vaughan, 'Social and Economic Changes in Southern Malawi,' 140.

⁹⁷ See Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*.

⁹⁸ See for example Vaughan, 'Social and Economic Changes in Southern Malawi.'

⁹⁹ For details on the matrilineal system, see for example, K. Phiri, 'Some Changes in the Matrilineal Family System among the Chewa of Malawi Since the Nineteenth Century,' *Journal of African History*, 24, 2 (1983), 257-274.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Although the state meant this to ease government administration of the country by locating the capital at the centre, the move was criticised on grounds of ethnicity. Since Banda came from the central region, people argued that Dr Banda did this in order develop his home region at the expense of the other regions.

projects and these projects mostly centred on conservation and food security interventions.¹⁰² Some of the projects included the Domasi community development project, smallholder irrigation schemes and land resettlement projects.

The proximity of the basin to Lake Malawi, Liwonde and Blantyre was significant, too, for the maintenance of food security. Lying 100km from Lake Malawi and 60km from Blantyre and Liwonde, Chilwa basin became a cosmopolitan centre for the interface of urbanity and rurality. While Blantyre acted as the commercial capital of the country, Liwonde and Lake Chilwa became centres of tourism and the fishing industry. The urban areas of Zomba, Blantyre and Liwonde also formed the main business centres for the peasants residing in the basin. It was in these places that the peasants sold their agricultural products, and in times of famine, the peasants purchased maize from these markets.

Over the years, the Lake Chilwa basin has experienced shortages of arable land. This was largely a function of land alienation and rapid population increases. As noted above, the population of the basin grew from 75 000 in 1901 to 904 302 in 1966 and to 916 447 in 1998.¹⁰³ Yet the basin's land was the most highly alienated during the colonial period to accommodate this rapidly growing population.¹⁰⁴ For instance, the colonial period witnessed the alienation of 3 705 255 acres of customary land, with 20% of this land being from the Chilwa basin.¹⁰⁵ Between 1966 and 1994, the state further alienated over 54 145 hectares of

¹⁰² See M. Vaughan, 'Better, Happier and Healthier Citizens: The Domasi Community Development Project, 1949-1954,' (Seminar Paper, Department of History, Chancellor College, University of Malawi, Zomba, 1983).

¹⁰³ Nyasaland Protectorate, *1931 Population Census Report* (Zomba: Government Printer, 1932); Malawi Government, *1998 Population Census Report*.

¹⁰⁴ See Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 50.

¹⁰⁵ For details of land alienation, see Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Hand of Nyasaland*, (Zomba: Government Printer, 1922).

land for the establishment of 625 private estates and 10 irrigation schemes.¹⁰⁶ These developments resulted from the fact that both the colonial and post-colonial governments framed agricultural policies in favour of estate agriculture with regards to fertile lands, marketing and agricultural credits.¹⁰⁷ These conditions had serious implications on the food security of the peasants in the Chilwa basin. Land alienation and the associated rapid population growth also led to the loss of the dense fauna and flora within the Chilwa basin. It is in this ecological, political, demographic and social context that the thesis examines the ecology and politics of peasants' food security in the Lake Chilwa basin.

3. Food Security and Agricultural Development in Malawian Historiography

Given its dominance in the country's economy, agriculture has been a subject of scholarly attention in Malawi's historiography. Since the mid-1950s, scholars have attempted to reconstruct historical patterns of agricultural and agrarian changes, the emergence of the African peasantry and the challenges of food security in the country. Three perspectives have characterised the scholarly evolution of this historiography. Firstly, there has been a growth of literature approximate to a colonial historiography that attempted to demonstrate the so called 'benevolence' of colonial science and capitalism in transforming what it viewed as 'backward' indigenous agricultural practices in rural Malawi. This scholarship is characteristic of most studies prior to the 1970s. The second scholarly evolution appeared from the 1970s onward, and consisted of counter-narratives to the preceding colonial historiography. This scholarship underlined the disruptive nature of colonial science and

¹⁰⁶ Malawi Government, ADD Estates Files 1970-1989 (Zomba: Department of Lands and Evaluation, 1989). See also Malawi Government, *National Irrigation Policy and Development Strategy*.

¹⁰⁷ Liebenow, 'Food Self-sufficiency in Malawi,' 367-390; Kydd, and Christiansen, 'Structural Changes since Independence: Consequences of a Development Strategy Based on Large Scale Agriculture,' 355-385; Mhone, 'Agricultural and Food Policy in Malawi: A Review,' 59-86; F. Pryor, and C. Chipeta, 'Economic Development through Estate Agriculture: The Case of Malawi,' *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 24, 1 (1990), 50-74; Vail, 'The State and the Creation of the Malawi's Economy,' 39-86.

capitalist developments on African rural life and economies. However, this scholarship has been challenged again since the 1980s by a group of scholars who, subscribing to the emerging new social history approach of the time, drew attention to the dynamics of local agency, such as African adaptation, resilience and resistance, in the agricultural and agrarian changes associated with colonial and capitalist encounter. Social history has since the 1980s contributed greatly to the narratives on the emergency of African peasantry, food security and irrigation farming.

The earliest notable works in the Malawian historiography investigating the history of agriculture, food production and ecological changes are those of Richard Kettlewell and John Pike, senior colonial government officials attached to the Agriculture Department between 1930 and the early 1960.¹⁰⁸ Using archival sources, government documents and newspapers at their disposal, and more importantly their professional experiences, the works of these scholars outlines a generic view of the problems affecting agricultural production, the evolution of colonial agricultural policies, and the overall contribution agriculture made to the country's development.¹⁰⁹ The scholarship presented the critical issues requiring attention in any analysis of the country's agricultural change and peasant production as well as the requisite policies that guided state intervention into the peasant economy in the late colonial period. Coming from people with intimate colonial ideological backgrounds and obligations, the scholarship highlights the so-called backwardness of Africans in matters of culture, agriculture and ecology. It portrays the colonialists as agents of modernity and civilisation who worked hard to bring peasants into the so-called superior and modern ways of

¹⁰⁸ R. W. Kettlewell, *An Outline of Agrarian Problems and Policy in Nyasaland* (Zomba: Government Press, 1955); R. W. Kettlewell, 'Agrarian Change in Malawi, 1945-1960,' *Food Institute Studies*, 5 (1965), 235- 285; J. Pike, *Malawi: A Political and Economic History* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1968).

¹⁰⁹ Richard Kettlewell served as Director of Agriculture up to 1959 and then he was appointed as Minister of Lands, Natural Resources and Surveys in Malawi. He was a firm supporter of modernisation and conservation. John Pike once served as a senior hydrologist in the country between 1952 and 1962.

agriculture. Furthermore, the studies tended to be descriptive and deficient of the analytical vigour that is essential for the historical scholarship of this nature. Most importantly, these studies convey little about the historical indigenous agrarian initiatives in cash and food crop production. This thesis departs from this scholarship, firstly, by investigating the place of local agency in state interventions that followed the agricultural policies, which this earlier scholarship alleges were meant to modernise peasant production. Secondly, it takes a deliberate focus on food production as opposed to cash crop production, which the modernisation scholarship placed at its core.

The period beginning from the late 1960s was a turning point in Malawian agricultural historiography in particular and African history in general. Key to this development was the opening of the University of Malawi, and the establishment of the History Department at Chancellor College, the constituent college of the university. The members of the History Department, who at this embryonic stage consisted largely of professors from the west, embarked on a reconstruction of the history of the country paying attention to historical methodologies. Brigdal Pachai, Martin Chanock, Colin Baker, Leroy Vail and Kings Phiri, who were influenced by the nationalist historiography as well as the dependency and underdevelopment school of the time, set out to deconstruct the colonial historiography of Richard Kettlewell and John Pike. They made sharp criticism of the unscientific nature of the research methodologies employed by Kettlewell and Pike and the modernisation thesis lying at the centre of their analysis of the impact of colonialism and capitalism on rural economies.¹¹⁰ Far from modernising rural economies, this new

¹¹⁰ For details, see M. Chanock, 'The Political Economy of Independent Agriculture in Colonial Malawi: The Great War to the Great Depression,' *Journal of Social Science*, 1 (1972), 113-129; B. S. Krishnamurthy, 'Economic Policy: Land and Labour in Nyasaland, 1890-1914,' in B. Pachai (ed.), *The Early History of Malawi*, (Oxford: North-western University Press, 1972), 385-386; C. Baker, 'Depression and Development in Nyasaland, 1929-1974,' *Society of Malawi Journal*, 27, 1 (1974), 7-26; B. Pachai, 'The Issue of Thangata in the History of Malawi,' *Malawi Journal of Social Science*, 3 (1974), 1-25; K. Phiri, 'Precolonial Economic Change

scholarship demonstrated in detail how the colonial state applied policies on land, taxation and labour to disrupt the pre-existing rural economies in the country. The colonial state coercively appropriated land and labour resources. This increased the Africans' vulnerability to unprecedented drought-related famines and natural disasters. Another observation is that the colonial project seeking to establish a viable capitalist economy paid no respect to food production and instead worked towards forcing Africans to supply cheap labour to settler farmers in the country and abroad. From 1906, the colonial state forced Africans to participate in the production of cotton and tobacco at the expense of food production. The new scholarship argues that it would be simplistic to celebrate colonialism and capitalism as agents of modernisation in the face of glaring existing evidence of the failure of settler agriculture, which came to a climax during the economic crisis of the 1920s and 1930s. It also draws attention to the extent to which the inheritance of colonial economic structures, such as road and rail networks, estate agriculture and labour migration, were set to undermine the success of agricultural developments of the post-colonial period.

The strengths of these narratives lie in the fact that they provide a provocative and strategic entry into the study of food production and food security. Firstly, they stimulate scholarly interest in understanding the nature of pre-existing African food production practices, which colonial and capitalist incursion disrupted. Secondly, they offer an appropriate scholarly framework for future scholars who might be interested in understanding the anthropogenic basis of the food crises and food insecurity that affected peasants in

in Central Malawi: The Development and Expansion of trade Systems, 1750-1875, *Malawi Journal of Social Science*, 5 (1976), 1-22; M. Chanock, 'Agricultural Change and Continuity in Malawi,' in R. Palmer and N. Parsons (eds.), *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1977), 396-409; L. Vail, 'Railway Development and Colonial Underdevelopment: The Nyasaland Case,' in R. Palmer and N. Parsons (eds.), *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1977), 365-395; B. Pachai, *Land and Politics in Malawi, 1875-1975* (Kingston: Limestone Press, 1978); Vail, 'The State and Creation of Colonial Malawi's Agricultural Economy,' 39-88.

Malawi during the colonial and postcolonial period. However, this scholarship treats Africans as a homogeneous entity that uniformly, passively and irreparably succumbed to the disruptive effects of colonial and capitalist incursions. It ignores the heterogeneity of the peasantry based on age, class, gender and political status as well as the variations by which colonialism and capitalism affected such a dynamic composition of the peasantry. These weaknesses originate largely from the scholars' over-reliance on colonial archives, which represented the voices of the colonial administrators and the African elites rather than the voices of the ordinary rural population. This scholarship also fails to provide details on how colonialism affected food security at local levels. Hence, this thesis critically interrogates the varied manner by which colonialism and capitalism affected rural food economies by drawing on empirical evidence from existing archival and oral sources from the Lake Chilwa basin.

The emergence of social history in the early 1970s had far-reaching effects on Malawian historiography in general, and particularly, the historiography of agriculture, the peasantry and food security that dominates scholarship from the early 1980s.¹¹¹ Social historians moved towards analysing the agricultural history of the country from the perspective of marginalised groups in rural societies such as peasants, workers, women and children. Topics that affected the everyday life of rural societies, such as the tenancy system, forced labour, taxation and food security, were analysed through the extensive use of oral sources in an attempt to represent the voices of these people. The historiography predominantly revolved around three themes: the emergence of the peasantry, food production and irrigation farming.

¹¹¹ For further details on social history, its evolution, theories and methods, see for example, E. J. Hobsbawm, 'From Social History to the History of Society', *Daedalus*, 100, 1 (1971), 20-45; P. Joyce, 'What is the Social in Social History?' *Past and Present*, 206, (2010), 213-248; C. Lloyd, 'The Methodologies of Social History: A Critical Survey and Defence of Structuralism,' *History and Theory*, 30, 2 (1991), 180-219.

The first theme was initially pursued by John McCracken and Robin Palmer, and later Elias Mandala, Owen Kalinga, Wiseman Chirwa and Wapulumuka Mulwafu.¹¹² Contrary to the nationalist historiography of the 1970s, the scholarship of the 1980s acknowledged the adverse impact of colonialism and capitalism on the African peasantry. However, it puts a footnote below the disruptive nature of colonial capitalism by drawing attention to patterns of peasant rationalism and heterogeneity as well as variations through which they responded to colonial and capitalist incursions in rural Malawi. The major contention of this scholarship is that peasants in Malawi were not passive victims of colonial capitalism. Rather, the peasants acted creatively to minimise the effects of colonial capitalism through negotiation, resistance, adaptation and resilience. The 1980s scholarship outlined the complex ways used by peasants to resist and negotiate colonial manoeuvrings on the rural economies with some degree of success. The scholarship further shows that state interventions into the peasant economy through agricultural conservation, which characterised colonial agricultural development policies from the late 1930s to the 1940s, failed due to poor timing, ideological incompatibility and the coercive approach by which the colonial state implemented its programmes among the peasants.

¹¹² For details about this scholarship, see J. McCracken, 'Peasants, Planters and the Colonial State: The Case of Malawi, 1905-1940,' *Journal of Eastern African Research and Development*, 12 (1982), 21-35; J. McCracken, 'Peasants, Planters and the Colonial State: The Impact of the Native Tobacco Board in the Central Province of Malawi,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 9, 2 (1983), 172-192; R. Palmer, 'White Farmers in Malawi: Before and After Depression,' *African Affairs*, 84, 335 (1985), 211-245; McCracken, 'Colonialism, Capitalism and Ecological Crisis in Malawi: A Reassessment,' 63-78; Mandala, *Work and Control in a Peasant Economy*; O. Kalinga, 'The Master Farmers' Scheme in Nyasaland, 1950-1962: A Study of a Failed Attempt to Create a "Yeoman" Class,' *African Affairs*, 92, 368 (July, 1993), 367-387; W.C. Chirwa, ' "The Garden of Eden": Sharecropping on the Shire Highlands Estates, 1920-1945', in A. Jeeves and J. Crush (eds.), *White Farmers, Black Labour: The State and Agrarian Change in Southern Africa, 1910-1950* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1997), 265-280; W. Mulwafu, 'Soil Erosion and State Intervention in Estate Production in the Shire Highlands Economy of Colonial Malawi, 1891-1964,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 28, 1 (2002), 25-43; W. Mulwafu, 'The State, Conservation and Peasant Response in Colonial Malawi: Some Preliminary Findings,' in A. Jeeves and O. Kalinga (eds.), *Communities on the Margins: Studies in Rural Society and Migration in Southern Africa, 1890-1980* (Pretoria: University of South African, 2002), 201-215; W. Mulwafu, *Conservation Song: A History of State-Peasant Relations and the Environment in Malawi, 1860-2000* (Cambridge: The White Horse Press, 2010).

This scholarship laid the ground for historical analysis of the interaction between peasants and the state. It offers clues to understanding how capitalism shaped the African peasantry. It also demonstrates how the peasants creatively adapted to the forces that worked against them by negotiating the terms of their participation. Furthermore, it provides a strategic entry into understanding the manner in which state interventions shaped and transformed local agricultural technologies. The major weakness of this scholarship, however, is that it discusses the interaction of the peasants and the colonial state in a generic sense and concentrates on the confrontational relations that developed between the state and the peasants over conservation. This compromises the critical examination of the extent to which state interventions affected food production among the peasants.

This thesis builds on these narratives in order to establish the extent to which state interventions shaped the peasants' food economy in the Lake Chilwa basin. It disrupts the dominant narratives of cash crop production by putting food security at the core of the analysis as well as extends the debate to cover state interventions in the post-colonial period. It particularly draws from Mulwafu's study, which explored at length the interaction of the peasants with the state in matters of ecological conservation such as those about the soil and forests.¹¹³ The key point of departure from Mulwafu's scholarship is the particular focus this thesis puts on the manner in which the state interacted with the peasants vis-à-vis food production. In addition, this study does not focus on the country as a whole but makes an in depth examination of peasant-state relations within the Lake Chilwa basin.

The second theme that preoccupied the social historiography of agriculture from the 1980s onwards is that of food production and food security. This scholarship came as an

¹¹³ See Mulwafu, *Conservation Song*.

intervention into the early historiography of agriculture and peasantry, which centred on narratives of cash cropping at the expense of food production. The scholarship also responded to the global and regional concerns of the time over the growing food crisis in Africa because of drought recurrences, population increases and civil wars.¹¹⁴ The World Food Committee of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) conducted food surveys between 1986 and 1992 and found out that, of the 840 million people undernourished in the world, 26% of them were in Africa.¹¹⁵ Comparatively, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel region represented the most affected region with the 1984 Ethiopian famine rated as the worst. A regional conference of food security held by the Southern Africa Development Coordinating Committee (SADCC) in Maseru, Lesotho between 12 and 14 January 1987, revealed that Southern Africa was gradually drifting towards a food crisis with Mozambique rated as mostly affected followed by Lesotho, Botswana, Zambia, Angola, Tanzania, Madagascar, Malawi and Namibia.¹¹⁶ As noted by Elias Mandala, these concerns were catalytic to the emergence of food scholarship in Africa.¹¹⁷ The pioneers of this historiography were Amartya Sen and Michael Watts who studied the growth of famine and food insecurity in 1981 and 1983, respectively.¹¹⁸ Since then, food has been a subject of scholarly attention in Africa, and Malawian scholars wanted to be part of this intellectual revolution.

Two scholars, Megan Vaughan and Elias Mandala, distinguished themselves as specialists of food scholarship. Their scholarship explores the patterns of food production during the precolonial and early colonial period. It also demonstrates the manner in which the

¹¹⁴ See for example, Berry, 'The Food Crisis and Agrarian Change in Africa: A Review Essay,' 59-112; L. Timberlake, *Africa in Crisis: The Causes, the Cures of Environmental Bankruptcy* (London: Earthscan Publications Ltd, 1991).

¹¹⁵ FAO, *The State of Food Security in the World. Food Security: When People Must Live with Hunger and Fear Starvation* (Rome: FAO, 1996).

¹¹⁶ See Prah (ed.), *Food Security in Issues in Southern Africa*.

¹¹⁷ Mandala, *End of Chidyerano*, 9.

¹¹⁸ For details about these debates, see Sen, *Poverty and Famines*; Watts, *Silent Violence*.

peasants coped and adapted to ecological and political changes, which over the years threatened their food security in rural Malawi.¹¹⁹ Using the political economy perspective, the scholarship demonstrates how colonial capitalism disrupted rural economies through policies such as land alienation, cash crop production, taxation, labour migration, and state control of food marketing and transportation. It argues that these policies succeeded in worsening the vulnerability of peasants to famine and hunger in rural Malawi. It criticises scholars of environmental determinism for allowing racial prejudices to influence their understanding of food insecurity.¹²⁰ However, as noted by Megan Vaughan, food security in Malawi, as in other parts of Africa, should be understood within a broader context of the multiple factors in which both ecological and anthropogenic factors share responsibility.¹²¹ Mandala's work, as noted above, goes beyond the political economy argument by considering food insecurity as an everyday experience of the peasants of the Lower Tchiri valley of southern Malawi rather than an occasional occurrence.¹²² In doing this, Mandala's work draws attention to a visible co-existence of feasts and famine in the daily, seasonal and the annual routines of the peasant life.

Unlike the earlier historiography on agricultural change and the peasantry, Vaughan and Mandala's scholarship placed food production and food security at the core of its analysis. However, the historiography carries overtones of dependence and underdevelopment theories by presenting a somewhat romantic view of precolonial Africa as

¹¹⁹ See M. Vaughan, 'Food Production and Family Labour in Southern Malawi: The Shire Highlands and Upper Lower Shire Valley in the Early Colonial Period,' *Journal of African History*, 23, 3 (1982), 351-364; Vaughan, *A Story of an African Famine*; Mandala, *End of Chidyerano*; E. Mandala, 'Feeding and Fleecing the Native: How Nyasaland Transport System Distorted a New Food Market, 1890s-1920s,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32, 3 (2006), 505-524.

¹²⁰ For details regarding the environmental determinists' perspective, see for example, M. Thomas and G. Whittington (eds.), *Environment and Land Use in Africa* (London: Methuen, 1969).

¹²¹ See Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine*.

¹²² One scholar who has been criticised for making conclusions about African famines that are based on the linear progression thesis is Watts, *Silent Violence*.

the historical epoch of plenteous and surplus food, and colonial capitalism as the only factor that socially engineered famine and hunger in rural Africa. The scholarship is also limited in scope, space and time. As promising as Megan Vaughan's works were, their analysis was limited to the period before the outbreak of the First World War and the 1948/9 famine, and confined to the Shire Highlands and the Upper Lower Shire. No effort was made to explore how the state interacted with the peasants to maintain food security in these areas. Furthermore, Mandala's studies have managed to explore in detail how the peasants struggled to maintain food security in the face of droughts, floods and competing demands for food, but they made little effort to chronicle various ways used by the state to promote food production among the peasants. On another note, the studies focused largely on the peasants' everyday experiences towards achieving food security at household rather than communal level, and only drew evidence from the Mang'anja people in the Lower Shire. The above-noted limitations undermine the universal generalisability of the experiences of the peasants in the country. Important to note also is that the Lower Shire is a distinctive agro-ecological zone often characterised by erratic rainfall, drought and extreme high temperatures. The only ecological consolation of the area is the presence of the Shire River, which brought seasonal floods that provided the Mang'anja an alternative agricultural means of coping with famine and seasonal hunger. There is need, therefore, to understand how other Malawian communities with different ecologies, such as those from the Lake Chilwa basin, managed to maintain food security. Hence, the thesis interrogates how capitalism and colonialism shaped peasants' food production and food security practices. It focuses on the patterns of interactions that emerged between the state and the peasants in the colonial and post-colonial period.

Related to the above scholarship is the theme of irrigation farming which came to dominate the agricultural historiography from 2002.¹²³ This scholarship, which draws on evidence from oral sources, archival sources, government documents, field observations, focus group discussions and personal communication, explores the evolution of irrigation farming and the challenges that undermined its success. By focusing on smallholder irrigation schemes that the state constructed, the scholarship affords us a practical example of patterns of state interventions into the peasant economy and the possible factors that impinged on such interventions. The major problem of this scholarship is that it is limited to the study of formal irrigation schemes and represents only one form of state interventions into the peasant economy. In addition, the scholarship largely centres on post-colonial irrigation schemes with a focus on the progressive processes under which irrigation policies evolved over time. This thesis, however, expands on this scholarship by exploring further the complex relations that developed between the state and the peasants through the development of irrigation schemes in the Lake Chilwa basin in colonial and post-colonial Malawi. It pays particular attention to the effects of irrigation development on the peasants' food security.

What this literature review suggests is that the Malawian historiography has made tremendous effort to analyse the subjects of food production, African peasantry and agricultural and ecological change. Using the grand paradigms of modernisation, underdevelopment and social history, this historiography offers a feel of the growth of food insecurity in Malawi by drawing our attention to the interplay between ecological and

¹²³ For details, see W. Mulwafu and B. Nkhoma, 'The Use and Management of Water in the Likangala Irrigation Scheme Complex,' *Physics and Chemistry of the Earth*, 27 (2002), 839-844; B. Nkhoma, and W. Mulwafu, 'The Experience of Irrigation Management Transfer in Two Irrigation Schemes in Malawi, 1960s-2002,' *Physics and Chemistry of the Earth*, 29 (2004), 1327-1333; A. Ferguson and W. Mulwafu, 'If Government Failed, How are We Going to Succeed? The Importance of History and Context in Present Day Irrigation Reform in Malawi,' in B. van Koppen, M. Giordano, J. Butterworth (eds), *Community-Based Water Law and Water Resources Management Reforms in Developing Countries* (Wallingford, Oxford: CAB International, 2007), 211-227; Nkhoma, 'Irrigation Development and its Socio-economic Impact, 209-223; Nkhoma, 'The Politics, Development and Problems of Small Irrigation Dams,' 383-398; Nkhoma and Kayira, 'Gender and Power Contestations over Water Use,' 79-84.

political factors. Yet despite raising a strong case about the processes by which colonialism and capitalism disrupted peasants' food economies, the historiography makes little effort to explore the patterns of peasant food production that emerged through this process. Thus, the historiography seems to lean towards the reconstruction of the historical trajectories of food crisis with respect to hunger, malnutrition and famine. Most studies have treated food security tangentially in the analysis of such grand topics as agriculture, the peasantry, conservation, and climate change. Hence, this thesis seeks to provide a nuanced, systematic and continuous analysis of the various interventions made by the state in the peasants' food economy, the extent to which the interventions affected the peasants and their responses to the interventions in colonial and post-colonial Malawi.

4. Research Methodology and Sources

The thesis adopted a qualitative case study approach within the confines of a social historical methodology in order to establish the interactions between the peasants, the state and the ecology in relation to food security. The qualitative approach enabled the social history study to capture the voices, opinions, perceptions and ideologies of the peasants from the Chilwa basin using oral interviews based on open-ended questions. The intention was to establish an in-depth understanding of the incentives, interests and institutions that hindered or encouraged state interventions into the rural food economy.

The case study of Chilwa basin was chosen for its biodiversity and long history regarding state interventions into peasant agricultural practices. However, the use of a basin for this study presented a number of challenges such as the fluidity of geographical boundaries over the years, as the basin covers parts of the Machinga, Zomba and Phalombe

districts. For instance, upon the establishment of colonialism, the Chilwa basin was part of the southern province covering parts of Mulanje (Mulanje), Zomba and Chikala.¹²⁴ The largest part of Zomba and Chikala as well as Phalombe and Sombani in the Mulanje district were geographically located in the Chilwa basin. The passing of the Native Authority Ordinance in 1912 witnessed Chikala becoming part of the Upper Shire (Machinga-Mangoche) district. Between 1924 and 1955, the state declared Zomba as an independent province consisting of the districts of Zomba, Kasupe (Machinga) and Fort Johnston (Mangoche).¹²⁵ Domasi, a small town in northern Zomba was an independent district that acted as a pilot study of rural community development between 1949 and 1955. Phalombe, which had been part of Mulanje since 1891, became an independent district in 1998. Presently, while Zomba constitutes the largest section of the basin, only a portion of Machinga and Phalombe is in the basin. Thus, while the long stretch of time provided the benefit of understanding the influence of political changes on food production, it also presented a challenge regarding an accurate definition of the districts, their ethnic identity and political boundaries. This also affected accurate tabulation of the actual population of the basin. However, I had to rely on district reports on particular villages and traditional authorities from the Chilwa basin to obtain particular evidence for the study.

The primary evidentiary base for the study was oral and archival sources, both of which are essential to the study of social history.¹²⁶ As official documents, archives helped to construct an understanding of the process used by the state to formulate and implement policies and highlighted the everyday interactions between government officials and the local people during the colonial and early post-colonial period. The historical nature of the

¹²⁴ See Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland* (Zomba: Government Printer, 1922).

¹²⁵ See Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Southern Province of 1912.

¹²⁶ See P. Thompson, *Voices of the Past* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1993); D. Reimer, 'Oral History and Archives: The Case in Favour', *COJAH*, 5, 1 (1982-3), 30-33; J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, (London: Longman, 1984); J. R. Shafer, *A Guide to Historical Method* (London: Dorsey Press, 1974).

investigation compelled me to consult archival sources that included the following: Nyasaland Government Secretariat files, commission reports, district books, agricultural reports, district annual and quarterly reports, minutes and correspondences, government gazettes and newspapers. I consulted these archival sources, covering the period 1919 to the late 1980s, at the Malawi National Archives in Zomba. The absence of archives for the period before the end of the First World War was because the National Archives was gutted by fire in 1919 that destroyed most of the earlier colonial archives. The major weakness of these archives was that they represented the views of the government authorities and the elites. In addition, archives contained numerous silences, as some issues are subtracted in the process of their construction. Hence, my awareness of these shortcomings compelled me to approach the archives critically and as much as possible triangulate them with other sources to refill possible silences, fragmentary information and elitist official biases.¹²⁷

By reading these archives against the grain, I was also able to deal with the common biases of the colonial archives towards European perspectives of African history.¹²⁸ Through this process, I was, nonetheless, able to capture the voice of the peasants from the archives. The expressed state's concern over peasants' behaviour in colonial archives exposed valuable peasants' perspectives on state interventions in the Chilwa basin. The archives reflected, to a larger extent, the prevailing tension and differences among the colonial officials in colonial Malawi. What is striking is that the archives of officials who interacted closely with the

¹²⁷ For the strength and shortfalls of archives and how to deal with them see for example, M. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); P. Lalu, 'Grammar of Domination and the Subjection of Agency: Colonial Texts and Modes of Evidence,' *History and Theory* 39, 4 (2000), 45-68; C. Hamilton, V. Harris, J. Taylor, M. Pickover, M. Reid and R. Saleh (eds.), *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002); V. Harris, 'The Archival Silver: Power, Memory and Archives in South Africa,' *Archival Science*, 2 (2002), 63-86; A. Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,' *Archival Science*, 2 (2002), 87-109.

¹²⁸ For details on the techniques on reading against the grain, see for example, J. B. Kayes, 'Reading against the Grain: The Power and Limits of Feminist Criticism of the American Narratives,' *Journal of American Narratives*, 19, 1 (1989), 130-140; P. Lalu, *The Death of Hintsa: Post-Apartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts* (Cape Town: HRSC Press, 2009).

peasants at a local level, such as District Commissioners, reflect elements of sympathy towards Africans as opposed to the archives of the senior officials, such as Governors and Provincial Commissioners. It is from these district archives I was able to get a glimpse of the responses of the peasants to colonial general agricultural policies instituted during the period under study.

There were also challenges regarding archives for the period from the early 1990s, as they were mostly inaccessible. To deal with this problem, I made every effort to consult government policy documents. Some of the documents were obtainable from the relevant government departments, while some were obtained from online sources. The documents that I sourced include those from the Agriculture Development Divisions (ADDs) as well as those from the Departments of Meteorology and Climate Change, Irrigation, Environmental Affairs and Disaster Management in Lilongwe. Some of the consulted documents include the National Agricultural Policy, Food Security Policy, National Irrigation Development Policy and Strategy, National Agricultural Extension Policy, Policy Framework for Poverty Alleviation Programme, Malawi Vision 2020, Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy, Malawi Economic Growth Strategy, and the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy. I also consulted Hansards publications from which the state recorded proceedings of the National Assembly in Malawi during the period covered in this study.

I also consulted United Nations FAO documents on Malawi, which are available online. These documents included the ‘Integrated Food Security Phase Classification,’¹²⁹ ‘Famine Early Warning Systems Network,’¹³⁰ and ‘WFP Food Security Monitoring System

¹²⁹ See <http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-countries/ipcinfo-southern-africa/en/> Accessed on 20 July 2016.

¹³⁰ See <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/january-2013/what-went-wrong-lessons-malawi%E2%80%99s-food-crisis> (news article), Accessed on 20 July 2016.

(Reduced Coping Strategies Index).¹³¹ These United Nations documents provided comprehensive overviews on the country's food security from 1972 to 1994. In most cases, they reported on food insecurity, droughts, food trade, rainfall patterns, and food security initiatives for each of the districts in the country. The advantage of these documents is that they gave an independent view of the food security status from the official and local views. Nevertheless, the documents were developed by outsiders and as such, carried with them misinterpretations of peasants' culture of food security. As a result, I used these United Nations documents in relation with the other sources.

Other important sources of data were the colonial and post-colonial newspapers that reported on food security, drought, floods and agricultural marketing. Some of the colonial newspapers consulted are the *Nyasaland Times*, *British Central Africa Gazette*, and *Life and Work in British Central Africa*. The newspapers that were consulted for the post-colonial period include the *Daily Times*, *the Malawi News* and *The Nations*. The *Daily Times* and *Malawi News* (both of which are owned by Press Corporation, a government group of companies) were the only two newspapers in circulation at this time. The advantage of these newspapers is that they represented the views of government officials, the settlers and missionaries who used these papers to express their perceptions on state policy and African life and culture. But as noted by Elias Mandala, the papers represented the voices of the better-educated settlers and missionaries.¹³² Thus, I had to be critical of their reports and read them alongside other sources.

¹³¹ <https://www.wfp.org/food-security/assessments/food-security-monitoring-system>; (<https://www.wfp.org/content/malawi-mvam-monitoring>), Accessed on 20 July 2016. http://resources.vam.wfp.org/mVAM;https://www.um.edu.mt/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/215692/Briguglio_The_Vulnerability_Resilience_Framework_23_Mar_2014.pdf, Accessed on 20 July 2016.

¹³² See Mandala, 'Feeding and Fleecing,' 506-507.

As mentioned previously, oral sources formed an important evidentiary base for the study. The study engaged oral sources in an effort to present a history of the Chilwa basin that draws on the valuable peasants' oral histories. This involved conducting oral interviews with officials from the government and with the peasants from the basin. The information from the peasants formed part of oral historical narratives and local perceptions on colonial and post-colonial food security interventions and practices. The information gave the advantage of teasing out the voices of the peasants and their everyday experiences not captured in the official records and newspapers.¹³³ Officials interviewed from the Chilwa basin included agricultural extension workers, officers of existing NGOs in the basin and irrigation scheme managers. Effort was also made to interview officials from the departments of agriculture, irrigation, climate and meteorology, environmental affairs, food security and disaster management based in Lilongwe. The interviews were conducted in the five Extension Planning Areas (EPAs) of the Chilwa basin - Malosa, Domasi, Nsondole, Likangala, Mpokwa and Tamani. Domasi and Tamani fall in the Machinga and Phalombe districts, respectively. I managed to interview 93 people using open-ended questions to allow the respondents to give in-depth information of their experiences on food security. The interview sample consisted of 25 ordinary farmers, 18 women, 10 agricultural officers, 8 traditional leaders, 10 'progressive farmers' and 22 officers from other agricultural related institutions.

The respondents were identified using different sampling methods. I used purposive sampling to identify officials. The other respondents were identified through convenient and

¹³³ For details on the importance of oral sources in historical research, see for example, G. Sider and G. Smith (eds.), *Between History and Histories: The Making of Silences and Commemorations* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1997); R. Perks and A. Thompson, *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998); L. White, S. Mieschar and D. Cohen, *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2001).

snowballing sampling techniques.¹³⁴ Convenient sampling enabled me to obtain information by asking the peasants from the basin who were willing to take part in the study. I also asked respondents to identify other peasants who witnessed or participated in food security projects in the basin and thus triggering the snowball sampling method. The peasants identified through snowballing were largely ‘progressive farmers’ who were relatively richer than ordinary farmers were during the colonial and post-colonial period. Gender distribution formed an important consideration in the selection of these informants as both women and men participated in agricultural activities in the basin. Hence, the study sought the voices and narratives of government officials, and the different class and gender categories of peasants regarding agricultural production and food security. In general, the respondents reported on peasants’ food production practices, the effects of ecological changes and rainfall variability on food security, state interventions during the colonial and post-colonial period, and the relations that developed between the peasants and the state over food security.

In conducting the oral interviews, I faced the challenge of identifying eyewitnesses of the events in the period prior to the 1940s. While I was able to identify 10 elderly peasants who related their experiences with state interventions in the period between 1930s and 1950s, no one was traceable to personally recount the history of food security prior to this period. As such, I depended on existing oral histories, which had been passed on from generation to generation in the Chilwa society. Since the stories formed a greater part of the local history of the basin, the contemporary generation was able to narrate the stories with ease. I also used the oral histories that I collected in 2003 during my MA studies. Similarly, the oral evidence was used in relation with written evidence, as I was conscious of their imbedded silences, biases and the politicisation of the narratives.

¹³⁴ For details on sampling techniques, see A. Bhattacharjee, *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods and Practices* (Florida: Scholars Commons, 2012).

Similarly, my positionality as a graduate student from a South African University, a male researcher as well as someone from a different region and ethnic group induced the respondents to treat me as an outsider. While this position had the advantage of helping me to have an independent view on the history I intend to reconstruct, it may have resulted in respondents withholding some important information. I may have also failed to identify the silences often associated with oral narratives due to loss of memories and the personal biases of the respondents. However, the fact that most Malawians use Chichewa as a language of communication helped me to communicate effectively with the respondents. Coming from a similar matrilineal cultural setting enabled me to better understand the social context of the narratives they shared with me. I too grew up in a rural setting and thus had intimate knowledge on most of the food security practices that I investigated in the Chilwa basin. This experience helped me to easily understand the issues narrated by the respondents.

I also consulted published literature on peasants, ecology and food security in Africa in general and Malawi in particular. I used this evidence to establish the scholarly framework through which I analysed the effects of state intervention on the peasant food economy in rural Malawi. I obtained most of these sources from the libraries of Mzuzu University, Chancellor College of the University of Malawi, Malawi National Archives in Zomba, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Malawi National Library and the National Heritage Library. I also used primary data from the published works of travellers, missionaries, explorers, hunters, traders and administrators who visited the Chilwa basin between 1859 and 1922. The outstanding travellers' works were those of David Livingstone, John Buchanan, Harry Johnston, and Stanley Murray. The consulted primary narratives assisted in my exploration of the social and agricultural history of the Chilwa during the late

precolonial and early colonial period whose evidence is conspicuously absent from the conventional primary sources.

The study was approved by the Ethics Clearance Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Free State as it involved conducting oral interviews, accessing documents from private and public offices. Within Malawi, I obtained permission from the District Commissioner of Zomba to conduct the study in the Lake Chilwa basin, which falls largely within his area of jurisdiction. A similar permission was obtained from the Minister of Sports and Culture to access archival materials at the Malawi National Archives in Zomba. During interviews, the respondents were given the liberty to participate or not. They were also given the choice of whether their names should be disclosed or treated anonymously. Most of them agreed to be identified by their names in the write-up of the thesis. The respondents were also informed that the information was purely for academic purposes.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis comprises seven chapters. Chapter One introduces the study by defining ecology, peasants and food security in Malawi. It outlines the scholarly context from which to understand the peasants' responses to state interventions during the period of study. It therefore focuses on a historical overview of the research problem, describes the Chilwa basin as it is the case study area, and considers the historiography of agriculture, ecology and food security in Malawi. The chapter closes with an outline of the general approach and methodology the thesis adopted in data collection and analysis.

Chapter Two examines the effects of colonialism on the food security of the peasants in the Lake Chilwa basin from 1891 to 1907. It begins with an exploration of the precolonial food security practices developed by the Chilwa basin peasants before the country became a British colony. Thereafter, it explores how colonialism disrupted these practices and the way peasants responded to the changes. It argues that, despite attempts by the colonial state to disrupt the means by which peasants maintained food security, except in those times of prolonged droughts, most of the peasants were still able to maintain food security during this period. This was largely due to the fact that colonialism was not fully entrenched in the basin and that the state pursued a division of labour that designated Africans to food cropping and settlers to cash crops. Paradoxically, this division created a conducive environment for the peasants to continue maintaining food security in the Chilwa basin. Notwithstanding, the chapter observes that the degree to which peasants responded to colonialism varied with class, gender, ethnicity and geographical location. Chiefs, local elites, women and peasants located in the upper and lower parts of the basin were not affected by colonialism in the same way.

Chapter Three explores the extent to which the establishment of the Agriculture Department in 1908 pioneered the process of improving peasant agriculture and how peasants from the Chilwa basin responded to the associated interventions up to 1939. With the exception of the provision of new varieties of crops and regulation of food marketing, the chapter argues that, despite its merits, the state confined the idea of improving peasant agriculture to public debate. The chapter also explains the limitations to the success of improving peasant agriculture in this period. It draws attention to existing problems of funding and conflicting ideas on the subject among colonial officials and a clash of perspectives with some peasants over the suggested changes, some of which they had used

successfully over the years to maintain food security in the face of droughts and floods. However, the chapter argues that the responses of the peasants were not uniform during this period. While the majority of the peasants had problems with the interventions, some peasants such as migrants, estate workers, fishermen and food traders, took advantage of the changes to make economic gains.

Chapter Four examines the extent to which World War II shaped state interventions into peasants' food production in Malawi in general and the Lake Chilwa basin in particular. It explores various food production projects that the colonial state initiated in the Chilwa basin in support of British war efforts as well as the World Food Crisis that followed the war. It argues that, while World War II caused food shortages through the dislocation of labour and foodstuffs, it also altered the production of surplus foodstuffs in rural Malawi. The chapter also observes that the state directed its interventions towards food production to meet these food demands in Europe, and that the responses of the peasants from the Chilwa basin to the interventions were varied. The introduction of conservation agriculture resulted in the emergence of a class of peasants who, by adopting colonial agrarian practices, distinguished themselves as progressive farmers in the Chilwa basin. The state began to engage some of them as agricultural and conservation agents.

Chapter Five examines the growth of increased state interventions into the food economy of the peasants in the Chilwa basin in late colonial Malawi. It observes that from the 1948/49 famine onwards, the state initiated large-scale projects in the Chilwa basin in order to improve on peasants' productivity in food production. The chapter argues that, while the state might have been technically correct in implementing these projects, it conceived them presumptuously and used coercion, which made it difficult for most of the peasants

from the basin to appreciate the significance of the projects. The chapter, however, observes that the state was able to attract the emergence of Master Farmers from the progressive farmers as well as African settler and irrigation farmers, who began to consider agriculture as a business enterprise. It notes further that the objects of state interventions varied with time during this period. While prior to 1952 the state gave priority to food production, cash cropping dominated its agenda in the later period.

Chapter Six explores the interventions implemented by the post-colonial state in the Chilwa basin between 1961 and 1994. It argues that, although Kamuzu Banda, the first president of the Republic of Malawi, won elections in 1961 on peasants' grievances, he sustained his agricultural policies within the colonial frames and structures that favoured estate and progressive farmers. It also observes that the Banda interventions resulted in differentiated impacts on the African peasantry with the *achikumbe* or progressive farmers, irrigation plot holders, Youth Leaguers and the Young Pioneers, emerging as winners, while the majority of the peasants grappled with poverty and food insecurity. However, the chapter also observes that, while Banda might have been wrong in adopting colonial structures and exclusive agricultural interventions, factors such as economic crises, rapid population increases, droughts/floods recurrent and the changing international political economy of the times, undermined his agricultural projects in the basin, especially from the early 1980s.

Chapter Seven concludes the thesis. It summaries the study's key findings, highlights the emerging scholarly conclusions, underlines its contribution to Malawian historiography and beyond, and identifies areas for further research.

Chapter Two

Colonial Incursion and Peasants' Survival: Food Security in the Lake Chilwa Basin, 1891-1907

1. Introduction

Malawi became a British colony on 14 May 1891. The colonisation of the country was quite significant in history of country's peasantry in general, and that of the Lake Chilwa basin in particular. The peasants of the Chilwa basin, who operated independent of a centralised political system ever since the establishment of their settlement in the sixteenth century, had to learn to bear with state power in producing foodstuffs. The colonial state, obsessed with a desire to establish an export-oriented economy with the white farmers as the main drivers, embarked on appropriating the labour and land resources of the peasants. This intrusion brought the state into conflicts with the peasantry because land and labour were the basis of peasants' survival. These clashes had significant implications on food security, especially in the Lake Chilwa basin, which had a serious misfortune of limited fertile soils, and encountered erratic rainfall, frequent droughts and floods and incessant locust invasions.

This chapter examines how the introduction of colonial rule affected food production among the peasants of the Chilwa basin between 1891 and 1907. It argues that, despite the state's attempts to disrupt the means by which they maintained food security, the Lake Chilwa basin peasants did not degenerate into a class of food self-insufficient people. Contrary to earlier assertions of underdevelopment scholars, the chapter observes that colonial capitalist policies shaped and transformed long-term food security practices of the

peasants rather than erode them.¹ As John McCracken and other scholars noted, while colonialism disrupted African ecologies and food security, its impact varied with place, time, gender and class, and that in some respects, it created an environment conducive for the maintenance of food security.² The peasants from Malawi, like those from most parts of Africa and Asia, were not passive victims as they survived, negotiated, resisted and adapted rationally to the colonial incursions.³ While Megan Vaughan attributed peasants' ability to maintain food security under these circumstances to their ability to control family labour, the chapter draws attention to the contradictory roles of the state in dealing with the competing interests of the peasants and the settlers.⁴ The state's exclusive designation of food cropping to the peasants, paradoxically created an environment conducive for the expansion of the very peasant practices it sought to disrupt in its bid to establish a predominantly export-based economy in the country.

The chapter begins with an exploration of the pre-colonial food security practices that were developed by the peasants in the Chilwa basin. The contention here is that discourses on food security are not merely a result of colonialism; rural Africans had always been in the business of producing food. The second section analyses how the colonisation of the Chilwa basin disrupted patterns of peasants' production and livelihoods. The last section discusses the responses of the peasants to the colonisation of the basin. It argues that, despite all the disruptions colonialism made to rural resources, peasants from the basin continued to pursue precolonial agricultural practices by which they maintained food security. It was only after

¹ For details of how colonialism underdeveloped rural Africa see for example, Chanock, 'Agricultural Change and Continuity in Malawi,' 396-409; Kjekshus, *Ecology Control and Economic Development*; Vail, 'Ecology and History,' 129-155; C. Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of South African Peasantry* (London: James Currey, 1979); Vail, 'The State and Creation of the Colonial Malawi's Agricultural Economy,' 39-88.

² For details, see for example McCracken, 'Colonialism, Capitalism and Ecological Crisis in Malawi,' 63-78; Phimister, 'Commodity Relations and Class Formation,' 240-257; Giblin, *The Politics of Environmental Control in Northern-Eastern Tanzania*; Maddox, et al, *Custodians of the Land*.

³ For details, see J. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University, 1985); Mandala, *Work and Control*; Isaacman, 'Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa,' 1-120.

⁴ For details, see Vaughan, 'Food Production and Family Labour,' 351-364.

1908 that the state began to take serious interest into the methods used by the peasants to produce foodstuffs. Since then, the state, through an Agricultural Department, embarked on programmes meant to improve the productive capacity of the peasants in the country. The irony, however, is that the attempts did not improve the African peasantry and instead exposed the peasants from the Chilwa basin to the threat of food insecurity.

2. Peasants' Precolonial Food Security Systems and Practices, to 1891

The peasants of the Chilwa basin developed complex ways of maintaining food security during the pre-colonial era. Other than submitting to the ecological vagaries of the area, the peasants adopted practices that enabled them to cope with seasons of food insecurities. In developing patterns of food security practices, the peasants drew inspiration from the significance they attached to foodstuffs. According to Neffy Saini, one of the farmers from Mtende Village in Machinga, the peasants of the Chilwa basin considered foodstuffs as both a means to their subsistence and products for reproducing agricultural labour and observing the socio-cultural-religious values of the Chilwa society.⁵ They adopted food security practices after long historical processes of adaptation to the unique ecology and political economy of the basin.

Precolonial food security systems and practices in the Lake Chilwa basin evolved remarkably through two time-phases. I would describe the first phase, which started from the time the Nyanja settled in the basin to the early 1860s, as the Golden Age of food security among the peasants. The Nyanja, offshoots of the Maravi Empire, who settled in the Chilwa basin during the last phase of the empire in the 16th century AD, enjoyed a long period of

⁵ Interview: Neffy Saini, Mtenda Village, T/A Mposa, Machinga, 7 November 2016. Neffy is a local farmer in the Chilwa basin. Neffy's parents, who were born and lived in the Chilwa basin in the 1930s, told the 54 year old respondent that, food had always been a key variable for social and religious functions in the area.

food self-sufficiency.⁶ The Nyanja, who were located in area stretching from the foot of Zomba Mountain down to Lake Chilwa and Phalombe, developed a diversity of strategies for producing sufficient foodstuffs for their survival.⁷ Despite operating without a definite centralised political system, semi-autonomous chieftainships of Bimbi, Kuntumanje, Nyani, Chikanda, Mpheta, Mwambo, Kapichi, Machirika, Mkumbira, Mbando, Mkata, Mpoto, Chingo, Nambesa and Mbatata, provided them with the basic leadership necessary for the development of effective relations of production.⁸ The Nyanja's foodstuff productions used the matrilineal socio-cultural system in which land and wealth were inherited through their mothers. Elder brothers of the mother, acting as custodians of their sisters' children, exercised the right of property redistribution among the Nyanja.⁹ Under the matrilineal system, husbands, who lived uxorilocally, obtained land for food production through their wives for building houses and farming. The elder brothers of the wives only gave this land to the husbands after a successful fulfilment of marriage obligations known as *chikamwini*. Under *chikamwini*, newly married husbands provided agricultural services to parent in-laws during the first year of marriage as a token of appreciation for upbringing their wives.¹⁰ After this, the newly married couples were allowed to stay on their own, while their parent in-laws continued with their everyday routines of maintaining food security. However, from time to time, the couples were called upon to provide food and agricultural services to their parent in-laws.

European travellers, explorers and missionaries who visited the Chilwa basin during the period, reported of the existence of a dynamic culture of agricultural production that

⁶ For details about Nyanja food production during the precolonial era, see Vaughan, 'Social and Economic Changes'; Vaughan, 'Food Production and Family Labour'; McCracken, *A History of Malawi*.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Phiri, 'Some Changes in the Matrilineal Family System among the Chewa,' 257-274.

¹⁰ Ibid.

resulted in food security among the peasants of the basin. Gaspar Bocarro, the earliest explorer who passed the Chilwa basin in 1616, for instance, recorded how the Nyanja, who settled in the basin, engaged industriously in food production and iron making.¹¹ Francisco Lacerda made similar commentaries when he visited the area in 1798 while on his way to the Mozambican port of Tete.¹² However, David Livingstone who visited Lake Chilwa on 18 April 1859, produced the most intriguing account of the Nyanja production culture, as noted in his report that:

The Mang'anja (Nyanja) are an industrious race; and in addition to working on iron, cotton and basket making, they cultivate the soil extensively. All the people of a village turn out to labour in the fields. It is uncommon to see men, women and children hard at work, with baby lying closely beneath a shady bush. When a new piece of woodland is to be cleared, they proceed exactly as farmers do in America. The trees are cut down with the little axes of soft native iron; trunks and branches are piled up and burnt, the ashes spread on the soil. The corn is planted among the outstanding stumps which are left to rot. Its grassland is to be brought under cultivation as much tall as the labourer can convincingly lay hold of is collected together and tied into a knot. Then he strikes the roots, and leaving all standing, proceeds until the whole ground assumes the appearance of a field covered with little stocks of cord of harvest. A short time before rains began, these grass stocks are collected in small heaps, covered with earth and burnt the ashes, and burnt soil being used to fertilise the ground.¹³

As he traversed in the Lake Chilwa basin during his three exploratory years, David Livingstone was further impressed by the diversity of crops grown by the Nyanja. He noted that the Nyanja cultivated drought resistant crops such as millet and sorghum, which they used as their main staple food. The Nyanja grew other crops such as groundnuts, rice,

¹¹ For details, see A. Hamilton, 'The Routes of Gaspar Bocarro from Kilwa to Tete in 1616,' *Nyasaland Journal*, 7, 2 (1954), 7-14.

¹² For details, see F. de Lacerda, *Instructional Travel Diary of His Travel to the Centre of Africa, Going to the River Sena in the Year 1798*. www.wdl.org/en, retrieved on 7 July 2017.

¹³ Livingstone, *Narratives of an Expedition*, 110.

pumpkins, sweet potatoes, peas, beans, cucumbers, cotton and tobacco.¹⁴ The Nyanja applied a great deal of industry and hard work during their crop cultivations. While Livingstone's observations were relatively incidental, the accounts of Reverend Henry Rowley of the Universities' Missions to Central Africa (UMCA), who spent years in the area as a missionary, confirmed the constancy and efficiency with which the Nyanja produced crops in the basin. Rowley pointed out that:

Yet with regard to agriculture, we soon discovered that the native could teach us more than we could teach them, and that we could offer them little inducement to grow more of anything than they needed for themselves. So another part of our own programme, the encouragement of agriculture was virtually a dead letter.¹⁵

However, we have to rely on the existing oral histories that the Nyanja ancestors generationally handed down in the Chilwa basin in order to understand the patterns of agricultural production among the Nyanja during this period. These histories might have shortfalls regarding the provision of a frame for the evolution of agriculture over the period; however, they give us an idea of the varieties of practices engaged in by the Nyanja in order to maintain their food security during this period. In agreement with the travellers' narratives, the oral histories from the basin demonstrate that agriculture, fishing, hunting and salt mining, constituted the major means of maintaining food security in the Chilwa basin. However, the histories go beyond the outline of these practices by exposing the processes and patterns by which the Nyanja adaptively developed to maintain food security in the face of recurrent droughts, floods, water logging and locust invasions.

¹⁴ For the list of crops grown by Nyanja during this period, see Livingstone and Livingstone, *The Narratives of an Expedition*, 110-111.

¹⁵ H. Rowley, *The Story of Universities' Mission in Central Africa* (London, 1867), 65.

John Mbedza, a village headman in the basin, recalled what his grandfather, who was a chief in the basin during the 1880s, told him about how the Nyanja from the Chilwa basin used to alternate between dryland, streambank and wetland cultivations to produce food surpluses in the face of droughts and floods.¹⁶ He said that during normal years, the Nyanja grew millet and sorghum in the dry uplands through shifting cultivation. They shifted farming gardens at intervals of at least five years. As in Zambia, where peasants conducted a similar practice of *chitemene*, shifting cultivation enabled the Nyanja to allow soil fertility and vegetation cover to regenerate an effective and sustainable production of food crops.¹⁷ The Nyanja also practiced streambank and wetland cultivation in the lower parts of the basin and along the streams, deltas of rivers, lake shores and wetlands to grow pumpkins, cucumbers, beans, bananas, groundnuts, yams, rice, and sweet potatoes. Due to waterlogging, the Nyanja conducted streambank and wetland cultivation only in winter seasons between the months of April and July. They used produce from winter cultivation to complement what they would have produced from the upland gardens during rain seasons. Cultivating in the winter cushioned the Nyanja from starvation in years of drought and erratic rainfall.¹⁸ This was possible because most of the rivers drew water from the mountains, which often continue to supply water even in seasons of drought. In addition, the Nyanja used residual moisture from the river deltas and wetlands to grow crops. The cultivation of crops along the streambanks was, however, made possible with the help of some forms of irrigation. The Nyanja used pots and small drainages to water the crops through this system.¹⁹ Finally, the food produce was stored in *nkhokwes* or granaries for consumption throughout the year.

¹⁶ Interview: John Mbedza, Village Headman, Chilikho Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 16 November 2016. John Mbedza is aged 60. His grandfather died in 1970 at the age of 112. His grandfather told him this before he died.

¹⁷ For details about *chitemene* in Zambia, see Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees*.

¹⁸ Interview: John Mbedza, Village Headman, Chilikho Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 16 November 2016.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Furthermore, the Nyanja performed rainmaking rituals to cope with the common problems of droughts and erratic rainfall in the Chilwa basin. They believed that these rituals invoked powers that ensured that rains came regularly, timely and sustainably.²⁰ In fact, since their settlement in the 16th century, the Nyanja invoked these powers through their rain-god known as M'bona who was based at the sacred shrines established at Sakata hills, Mpheta *dambo* and Likangala delta in the Chilwa basin.²¹ In these places, the Nyanja offered sacrifices of flour (maize meal), beer and cooked food through the priests that managed the shrines as they pleaded with M'bona to give them good rains. The Nyanja also called upon M'bona's intervention in the event of rain delays or premature and abrupt stoppages. The Nyanja believed that M'bona could withhold rains if they failed to offer pre-rain sacrifices or observe traditional taboos related to funeral, sexuality and conservation.²² In fact, they considered variabilities of rainfall as manifestations of M'bona's displeasure against societal failure to offer sacrifices or observe traditional taboos. The Nyanja believed that M'bona would withhold rains from them after the violation of the societal rules and so they had to offer sacrifices largely constituting food, maize flour and beer to appease or avert M'bona's ecological wrath.²³ As a community, they also believed that better yields, soil fertility and food security were functions of M'bona. They held the belief that being in a good relationship with M'bona was the surest way of accessing these production results.²⁴

²⁰ For details, see J. M. Schoffeleers, (ed.), *Guardians of the Land* (Zomba: Kachere Series, 1979), 1-46, 147-235. See also by the same author, *River of Blood: The Genesis of a Martyr Cult in Southern Malawi, C. AD1600* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Such rules included sleeping with a bereaved wife soon after the burial of the husband, refraining from dressing in red and white shirts during rains, fishing in the lake during prohibited times, felling certain sacred trees and killing sacred animals. Interview: Chief Sumani, Sumani Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 15 November 2016. Chief Sumani is aged 72, and recalled that since he was born, the people in his area have been observing these rules. His parents, who died in the 1950s, also kept on narrating the same traditions related to rainfall.

²⁴ Mulwafu, *Conservation Song*, 21.

However, rainmaking practices were not particularly a preserve of the Nyanja of the Chilwa basin. Studies done elsewhere show that Africans used rainmaking powers to exercise hegemony over other people. Schoffellers discusses the roles of Makewana and M'bona centred at Nsinja in Dedza and Khuluvi in Nsanje respectively, and how these cults acted as pioneering rainmaking cults in Malawi.²⁵ Terence Ranger and David Lan recorded of similar Southern African region's rain making cults in present day Zimbabwe.²⁶

The Nyanja's rainmaking rituals were also linked with their ability to predict and forecast patterns of weather and rainfall in the Lake Chilwa basin. James Kabunga, a progressive farmer from Ramusi village, argued that his parents used to tell him that since rains were often erratic, the Nyanja developed ways of predicting whether rains would be good that year or not, reliable for cultivation or not and whether they would receive rains on that day or not.²⁷ The Nyanja often considered debilitating events such as plagues of locusts as harbingers of impending droughts and famine. For one, swarms of locusts commonly invaded gardens along the shores of Lake Chilwa, and although the Nyanja used them for relish, the locusts caused a lot of damage to crops, and subsequently caused famine.²⁸

Similarly, the Nyanja regarded the appearance of certain birds such as *kakowa* on the shores of Lake Chilwa as indicators of good rains. In their everyday life, they associated the appearance of late and new moons, cloud cover over Mulanje and Zomba mountains, and the

²⁵ Schoffeleers, (ed.), *Guardians of the Land*, 147-235.

²⁶ For details, see T. Ranger, 'Territorial Cults in the History of Central Africa,' *Journal of African History*, 14, 4 (1973), 581-597; D. Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Medium in Zimbabwe* (Oxford: James Currey, 1985); T. Ranger, *Voices from the Rock: Nature, Culture and History of Mapopo Hills of Zimbabwe* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999).

²⁷ Interview: James Kabunga, Ramusi Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 29 October 2003. He was 80 years old when I interviewed him in 2003, during a similar study I carried out in the basin.

²⁸ Vaughan, 'Food Production and Family Labour in Southern Malawi,' 358.

blowing of southeast winds with the coming of rainfall.²⁹ Whenever they observed trees re-growing leaves, the Nyanja believed that rains were about to come. However, the right rains for the cultivation of crops would come after two forms of rainfalls locally known as *chiomba lupsa* and *mkoka lupsa*.³⁰ *Chiomba lupsa* used to come mid-August to September while *mkoka lupsa* appeared anytime from the end of September to mid-October. No matter how heavy these rains would be, the Nyanja would only plant their crops after the two rains had come.³¹ This traditional weather forecasting regulated food security practices among the Nyanja of the Lake Chilwa basin.³²

As noted by Megan Vaughan, labour and not land was the major challenge to agricultural production among the Nyanja.³³ To deal with this problem, the Nyanja relied on communal labour and a gendered division of labour to maximise agricultural productivity in the Chilwa basin. James Kabunga maintained that communal labour was often strategic for those people with less family labour at their disposal such as widows, widowers, aged and sickly people.³⁴ Gendered labour applied to those that had the privilege of marriage. A major observation is that it was within the cultural norms of the Nyanja to provide communal labour to those who, because of their social and physical conditions, could not produce without the help of others. Thus, these people would prepare foodstuffs such as beer and meat with which to access *dima* or communal labour. John Mbedza described that,

It was difficult for them to refrain from these services because one was not sure what would happen the next day. They were not aware of who next might be in need of

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ *Chiomba lupsa* means rains that simply wet ashes of bush fires while *mkoka lupsa* means rains that take away the ashes. *Chiomba lupsa* was mainly of showers while *mkoka lupsa* are the heavy rains that wash away the ashes.

³¹ Vaughan, 'Food Production and Family Labour in Southern Malawi,' 354.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Interview: James Kabunga, Ramusi Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 29 October 2003.

other people's help. Those who used to dodge these services, when trouble struck them, people just looked at them without rendering them a helping hand.³⁵

Local leaders and those who were richer also took advantage of these arrangements to access the labour of the community. Such patronage relations, therefore, provided the Nyanja with a way of sourcing food crops in the Lake Chilwa basin in times of food insecurity.³⁶

Other oral narratives describe the nature and significance of a gendered division of labour. Lone Mdoka, village headperson for Mtambo village, maintained that while men cut down trees, tilled land and constructed granaries to assist women in preparing new gardens among the people of her village, it was the responsibility of women to plant, weed, harvest, keep and prepare food for eating.³⁷ The understanding here was that women took care of crops, while men focused on fishing, hunting and iron working to supplement the works of women. In cases of droughts, the Nyanja used the products obtained by men to acquire supplementary foodstuffs through barter with people from other ecological zones such as the Shire Highlands where rainfall was relatively stable.³⁸ The men's tasks were also critical in availing a variety of protein relish. Thus, while women produced food grains for the making of *msima* (thick porridge meal) and relish of the vegetarian form, men supplied the most craved protein relish through hunting and fishing to balance the diet. Protein relish was held in high esteem such that women also held in high esteem industrious men who frequently brought fish and game meat to the table.³⁹ Elias Mandala argued that the availability of these

³⁵ Interview: John Mbedza, Village Head, Chilikho Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 16 November 2016.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Interview: Lone Mdoka, Village Headperson, Mtambo Village, T/A Mposa, Machinga 10 November 2016. She was 40 years of age when I interviewed her.

³⁸ Vaughan, 'Food Production and Family Labour,' 355.

³⁹ Interview: John Mwasiyamphanji, Ramusi Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 18 November 2016. He was 48 years old when I interviewed him. He recalled that this was told him by his grandfather who died at the age of 115 in 1960.

protein foodstuffs socially differentiated the peasants into rich and poor.⁴⁰ Its inadequacy also transformed food insecurity into a gendered everyday experience of the peasants in the Lower Shire.⁴¹

Women, especially the elderly, were afforded entrance into some important economic activities within the Nyanja society. For instance, elderly women of the post-child bearing age were engaged in salt mining along the shores of the lake, which became the centre of salt mining in the whole territory.⁴² By confining salt mining to these elderly women, the Nyanja adhered to the belief that if people involved in salt making indulged in sexual intercourse in the course of making that salt, its consumers would contract a disease known as *tsempho* (ailment similar to kwashiorkor or marasmus). This salt mining was conducted between May and November on the flood lands where salt bearing soils were distilled through baskets or earthenware pots to produce small quantities of salt.⁴³ Salt mining, just as fishing and iron making, was an important activity whose produce helped the miners to acquire foodstuffs in times of inadequate rains.⁴⁴ The Nyanja used this salt within the Chilwa basin to improve the flavour and taste of *ndiwo* (or side dish) as well as preserve fish and meat from decay. Furthermore, they used salt as medicine that expedited the healing of open wounds.

The above discussion does not suggest that the peasants in the precolonial period were immune to food shortages and exploitation. The basin was prone to droughts and floods, and arable land was scarce. As in Zimbabwe, the inhabitants of the Chilwa basin adopted gender, social status, generation gaps and kinship as tools for gaining advantage over others in the

⁴⁰ Mandala, *End of Chidyerano*, 20.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² For further details, see McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 17-18.

⁴³ Vaughan, 'Social and Economic Change,' 80.

⁴⁴ Werner, *The Natives of British Central Africa*. 206-7.

matters of food.⁴⁵ There also existed structures of exploitation which affected the food security of the peasants in the basin, especially that of women and children. As uncles, the leaders of the matrilineage exercised control over women and children on matters of marriage choices, inheritance and land distribution.⁴⁶ Despite their uxilocality, husbands dominated intra-household decision-making processes related to agricultural production and food allocation.⁴⁷ Elderly women also exercised control over younger women. Through rites of passages such as *chinamwali*, these women advised young women to be subordinate to men at all cost.⁴⁸ Chiefs, who administered land related matters in trust to the communities, sometimes used their powers to gain monopoly over land redistribution. However, the level of exploitation was minimised through structures such as communal labour and communal food festivals which enabled those on the socio-economic margin of the Chilwa society, such as widows, orphans and single women, to access food during times of crises.⁴⁹

The arrival of the Mangoche Yao in the 1860s brought significant food security disruptions among the Nyanja of the Chilwa basin.⁵⁰ Although the largest Yao settlements in the basin appeared after the 1860s, small groups of them started to relocate among the Nyanja as early as the 1790s. These small groups settled among the Nyanja to find refuge from droughts and famine experienced in the Lolo-Lomwe in Mozambique.⁵¹ However, the largest number of the Yaos settled in the Chilwa basin in the early 1860s under the chieftainships of

⁴⁵ For details on similar differentiations in Zimbabwe, see for example A. Mseba, 'Land, Power and Social Relations in North-eastern Zimbabwe from Precolonial Times to the 1950s,' PhD Thesis, University of Iowa, 2015, 2.

⁴⁶ Vaughan, 'Social and Economic Changes,' 160.

⁴⁷ For details regarding intrahousehold family politics in the Chilwa basin, see for example Nkhoma and Kayira, 'Gender and Power contestations over Water Use,' 79-78; A. Djurfeldt, E. Hillbm, W. Mulwafu, P. Mvula and G. Djurfedt, ' "The Family Farms Together, the Decisions, However are Made by the Men": Matrilineal Land Tenure Systems, Welfare and Decision Making in Rural Malawi,' *Land Use Policy*, 70 (2018), 601-610.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Interview: John Mwasiyamphanji, Ramusi Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 18 November 2016. He was 48 years when I interviewed him and pointed out that he was told this by his grandfather who died at the age of 115 in 1960.

⁵⁰ For details, see Phiri, 'Yao Intrusion into Southern Malawi.'

⁵¹ Ibid.

Malemia, Mposa, Mlumbe and Chikowi.⁵² Malemia and Mposa settled around the Chikala hills while Mlumbe and Chikowe settled in Zomba. Later, the Mangoche Yao, under the leadership of Kawinga, also settled at Chikala hills and close to where the earlier Machinga Yaos settled. Unlike the Machinga Yaos, the Kawinga group was more militaristic and aggressive. The group resettled at Chikala after the defeat by the Maseko Ngonis at Kongwe in 1875.⁵³ Various conflicts with Kawinga forced Malemia to relocate to the territory of Nyani, a Nyanja chief based in Domasi. In the 1880s, Malemia invited the Ngonis to settle in his area to help him stage resistance military operations against Kawinga who frequently raided his territory.⁵⁴ Most of the Ngoni people settled in Malemia's area, Chikala and along the border of Zomba and Chiradzulu.⁵⁵

Between 1880 and 1895, Kawinga controlled a large part of the basin comprising Machinga and Chikala. The control of this area enabled him to control the ivory and slave trade routes from Lake Malawi through Lake Chilwa to Quelimane in Mozambique. He used to organise raids and engage in warfare with the aid of superior rifles. Kawinga sold the captives as slaves to the Arabs located along the East African coast. The slave raids caused a great deal of instability and insecurity for the Nyanja. Consequently, the Nyanja were unable to effectively undertake the practices that insured them from food insecurity in the face of erratic rainfalls and locusts' invasions. The fear of raids compelled most of the Nyanja to relocate into the stony and cooler mountainous areas of Zomba and Mulanje, which were not ecologically supportive of sustainable food crop cultivation.⁵⁶ Others sought refuge among the Yao chiefs of Malemia, Mlumbe and Chikowi who, since their arrival in the early 1860s,

⁵² See also B. Morris, 'The Rise and Fall of the Yao Chiefdoms,' *The Society of Malawi Journal*, 67, 1 (2014), 5-15.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 36.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Drummond, *Tropical Africa*, 25.

were relatively well disposed to the Nyanja.⁵⁷ The Nyanja under Mkumbira and Mwambo who were located around Lake Chilwa and Chisi Island were able to maintain some autonomy through intermarriage, sale of their fellow Nyanja as slaves to Kawinga, and power arising from rainmaking performances and fishing for which they were greatly revered by Kawinga.⁵⁸

However, the ensuing instability did not make the peasants of the Chilwa basin to degenerate into food insecure people as other scholars of Yao slave trade would make us believe.⁵⁹ As skilful agriculturalists, some of the Nyanja people continued to exploit the ecology of their hideouts to produce sufficient food for their survival. While the Yao were notorious for causing instability, they brought maize into the basin, which, despite its vulnerability to drought, comparatively granted the peasants the opportunity to harvest higher yields than those of millet and sorghum.⁶⁰ Nyanja women, whom the Yao captured as slaves became involved in the production of food within the new Yao communities.⁶¹ As noted above, the Nyanja who relocated to the Chisi Island and the western shores of Lake Chilwa such as Mkumbira and Mwambo used fishing and rainmaking powers to maintain food security and command respect among the Yaos. At this island and the lakeshores, the Nyanja continued to grow food crops. The only challenge they experienced was that of traveling out to exchange their food surplus with other products from peasants of other parts of the basin especially in the Shire Highlands.⁶²

⁵⁷ Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 36.

⁵⁸ Buchanan, *The Shire Highlands As A Colony and Mission*, 95.

⁵⁹ For details, see for example, J. Watson, 'Some Historical Notes on Zomba,' *Nyasaland Journal*, 8, 2 (1955), 58-71; Morris, 'The Rise and Fall of the Yao Chiefdoms.'

⁶⁰ For details, see for example, P. Terry, 'African Agriculture in Nyasaland, 1858 to 1894,' *Nyasaland Journal*, 14, 2 (1986), 26-35 and also A. Werner, *The Natives of British Central Africa*, 176-207.

⁶¹ Morris, 'The Rise and Falls of the Yao Chiefdom,' 10.

⁶² Vaughan, 'Social and Economic Change,' 258.

It should also be noted that the arrival and settlement of the Yao in the basin occurred at the same time with that of the European missionaries, planters and administrators, who were opposed to the slave trade.⁶³ The earliest white settlers were the Universities' Missions in Central Africa (UMCA) missionaries who built a mission station at Magomero on the border between Zomba and Chiradzulu in 1861. The UMCA missionaries' stay was short as they were forced to abandon the area due to famine and malaria. However, they had been instrumental in rescuing and protecting the Nyanja from slave traders in the area.⁶⁴ The second to settle in the Chilwa basin was John Buchanan, a lay missionary of the Church of Scotland based in Blantyre, who upon his resignation from missionary work, bought land from Malemia in 1881 to plant coffee on a farm which he named Mulunguzi.⁶⁵ The farm, which was later renamed the British and East African Company (B&EAC), witnessed Buchanan's tendency to give refuge to those people who were fleeing from slave raiding. In addition, Buchanan's desire to empower the indigenous people in the Shire Highlands made him train African farmers in the art of cash cropping on his Mulunguzi estate. He also taught some peasants to grow fruits and vegetables for sale to the white settlers in the region.⁶⁶ On completion of this training, these local farmers were encouraged to open farms on which to experiment their new agronomic skills. Buchanan's outstanding African trainees were Patson Somanje and Andrew Katepesya, who later owned farms on which they grew coffee and maize in the Chilwa basin.⁶⁷

While based in Zomba, Buchanan was also able to observe how the peasants continued to make in-roads in agricultural production despite the on-going slave trade. The

⁶³ For details of the settlement of missionaries, see for example, Nyasaland Protectorate, *The Handbook of Nyasaland*; McCracken, *A History of Malawi*.

⁶⁴ See Rev Rowley, *The Story of the Universities Mission in Central Africa*, 15.

⁶⁵ Buchanan, *The Shire Highlands as a Colony and Mission*, 65.

⁶⁶ Vaughan, 'Social and Economic Change,' 105

⁶⁷ For details, see M. Vaughan, 'Kinship and Class: Stratification in the Zomba-Chilwa Area of Southern Malawi, c. 1800-1984,' History Seminar Paper, Chancellor College, University of Malawi, 22 November 1978.

peasants continued to engage in their age-long agrarian traditions of shifting cultivation, communal farming, and hospitality as well as rain making ceremonies. They continued to use shifting cultivation and communal labour to effectively grow crops such as sorghum, millet, rice, pumpkins, maize, and cucumbers. The practice of offering sacrifices whenever they had committed grave offences or when calling for rains was still prevalent among the peasants in the Chilwa basin.⁶⁸ They continued to brew beer, which, apart from the entertainment and festivity, was used for accessing communal labour in the Chilwa basin. Buchanan reported:

The custom of helping each other to hoe the garden or giving a “darg” as the saying is in Scotland is very common and widespread. One man agrees to have a “darg” on a certain day, and his wife sets about brewing a quantity of beer. His neighbours know what is going on, and assemble with hoe or axe to do whatever is most needed. Work goes on steadily from early morning till mid-day, when they knock off, and would lap up the proceedings by drinking the beer. This is called “chijao” and is a good thing in this way, that it keeps up a friendly feeling among them, although they save little on part of labour or value of material—for if I hoe with you today, you are supposed to hoe with me the other day.⁶⁹

Based on these observations, he contended:

It has been said it is of no use for an English agriculturalist going to the Shire Highlands to teach the natives agriculture. This, in a certain sense, is true; in other sense it is not true. They grow their own crops very well in their own way; but their way would not suit an English agriculturalist, nor be adopted by any intelligent colonist. Their system as at present does comparatively little harm to the country; but were the country densely populated, then their style of agriculture would have to be changed, or the country would become ruined.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Buchanan, *The Shire Highlands*, 145-146.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 140-41.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 116-7.

The settlement of Scottish missionaries in the Chilwa basin also helped the peasants to maintain food security during these slave trade upheavals. With the influence of John Buchanan, the Church of Scotland opened a mission station at Domasi in 1887. The assumption here was that once evangelised, the Yaos would abandon their slave raiding in the Chikala region. The church also became the centre for slave refugees.⁷¹ The missionaries advocated for a peasant-based economy as one way of empowering the peasants.⁷² For them, improved agriculture would help Africans to produce crops with which to exchange for European goods. This process was also meant to provide an alternative trade that would undermine slave trade in the basin.⁷³ Throughout their stay, these missionaries endeavoured to teach the peasants some lessons on agricultural practices. They argued:

We have striven accordingly to the impress with which the mission started and in answer to Livingstone's appeal and prayer, to supply an ideal of Christian industry; to tangibly aid the colony; to give the native the place in the development of this land to which he is called; to prove he is fit for it; and to see him through.⁷⁴

Mr Hawes commissioned John Buchanan, within the same year that the Scottish missionaries opened a station at Domasi, to build a house for him in Zomba. Mr Hawes had taken over from Captain Foot who had established a consulate at Blantyre Township to protect the missionaries and British from the slave trade and Portuguese expansion into the territory in 1883.⁷⁵ At its completion, Mr Hawes moved the seat of the British authority from Blantyre to Zomba. When he was appointed as Acting Consul General in 1889, Buchanan declared the Shire Highlands a British Protectorate.⁷⁶ Buchanan, drew on this capacity, to try and dislodge

⁷¹ Drummond, *Tropical Africa*, 58.

⁷² Buchanan, *The Shire Highlands*, 116-146.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, June 1894.

⁷⁵ Buchanan, *The Shire Highlands*, 64.

⁷⁶ Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaand*, 20.

the slave traders in the Chilwa basin and create safe zones for the peasants to expand on food production.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, some Indians opened grocery shops where they sold imported salt, clothing and farm implements. According to James Matuta, village headman from Kasokwe village, ‘even though this undermined the Nyanja’ salt mining and cloth making economy, the opening of grocery shops provided alternative sources of salt and clothes in the face of slave trade incursions.’⁷⁸ The situation only changed when Britain officially declared the territory a British Protectorate in 1891.

3. Colonial Incursions and Peasants’ Food Self-Sufficiency, 1891-1907

The establishment of colonial rule in Malawi in general and in the Lake Chilwa basin in particular marked the beginning of state intrusions into the peasants’ food economy. Although Britain officially proclaimed the territory as its colony on 14 May 1891, it took nearly four years to subjugate the entire Lake Chilwa basin to British rule. As shown above, the Chilwa basin had fallen under varying Yao influences such as Malemia, Mlumbe and Chikowi, on one hand, and Kawinga on the other. The first three Yao chiefs were at the time positively disposed to the British through their interaction with Buchanan, the Scottish missionaries at Domasi, and the British consulate at Zomba.⁷⁹ These chiefs considered the establishment of British colonialism as a powerful force against Kawinga’s economic and political destabilisations in the basin. Consequently, they voluntarily and unconditionally surrendered to the British Protectorate government thereby bringing the whole territory in the northern and southern parts of Lake Chilwa basin from the foot of Zomba Mountain to Lake Chilwa and Phalombe under the British sphere of influence.

⁷⁷ See also H. H. Johnston, *British Central Africa* (London, 1897), 80-185.

⁷⁸ Interview: Jamus Matuta, Village Head, Kasokwe Village, T/A Kumtumanje, Zomba, 13 December 2016. He was aged 70 when interviewed in 2016. He got this from his grandparents who died in the 1950s.

⁷⁹ Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 30.

The most formidable task for Sir Harry Johnston, the first Consul General of the British Central Africa (BCA) as the Protectorate was known, was to bring Kawinga under his administration. Kawinga continued to raid the inhabitants of the Lake Chilwa basin and Phalombe plain, which fell under the British Protectorate. The failure of diplomacy to bring Kawinga under British rule forced Johnston to dislodge him militarily. The opportunity came when Kawinga attacked Malamia and the missionaries at Domasi in 1895.⁸⁰ Johnston rooted Kawinga out of Chikala hills with the help of Captain Fletcher, Sir Alfred Sharpe, some British planters in Songani as well as the Tonga and Sikh soldiers.⁸¹ The British carried out similar operations in Mulanje where Matipwiri and his brother Kuntiramenya had attacked a white patrol. Both Matipwiri and Kuntiramenya rendered support to Kawinga when he attacked Malemia, and upon return, they started destabilising white settlements on the Phalombe plain.⁸²

The colonisation of the Lake Chilwa basin had mixed results regarding matters on food security. The immediate result was the restoration of peace and stability in an area, which suffered from slave raiding, human abductions and warfare for two decades.⁸³ The Nyanja, who had been in the mountains of Zomba and Mulanje as well as the Chisi Island, took advantage of colonisation to return to the plains to reclaim their lands and retain their pre-Yao productivity and prosperity.⁸⁴ Those who were hiding up Zomba Mountain relocated to Chikowi and Malemia areas, while those at Chisi in the Mwambo area settled around the Lake Chilwa.⁸⁵ Malemia and his Yao colleagues, who were instrumental in bringing the area

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ See H. Johnston, *British Central Africa*, 52- 159.

⁸⁴ Vaughan, 'Social and Economic Changes,' 210-211.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

under British rule, accumulated great fortunes from the sale of land to the British administrators and planters.⁸⁶ Malemia sold land to Buchanan and the Scottish missionaries, while Chikowi sold land to the British administrators in Zomba proper.

Upon their return, however, the survivors of the slave trade found that the political and economic terrain of the Chilwa basin had drastically changed. In a space of only four years, the state had alienated large tracts of the uplands. Sir Harry Johnston had offered Certificates of Claims to settlers who arrived before the state was established. Johnston used the Native Land Settlement Policy of 1891 to categorise land into 'private' or 'crown' land.⁸⁷ While private land was designated to white settlers, missionaries and African elites, Crown Land was exclusively for colonial development projects.⁸⁸ The policy located peasants into the Crown Land for settlement and cultivation.⁸⁹ The peasants residing on the Crown Land could, however, be resettled elsewhere at any time the state wanted to use the land for its development.⁹⁰ Of the 1 802km² of arable land in Zomba, for example, Johnston reserved only 354km² for the settlement and cultivation by the peasants.⁹¹ Others were located within settlers' land where they had to exchange labour in lieu of the land on which they occupied and cultivated, a system that came to be known as *Thangata*.⁹² In addition, Johnston granted land permits within the Chilwa basin to eight settler farms belonging to the British and B&EA, British Central Africa Company (BCAC), A. L. Bruce, J. Sinclair, J. Hunter, A. Mac Bean, A.H. Maw, and G Cheston.⁹³ Of these, BCA, Bruce and B&EA, were the largest

⁸⁶ H. Duff, *Nyasaland Under Foreign Rule* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1906), 16-30.

⁸⁷ MNA S1/492/32 Sir Harry Johnston's Policy on Native Land Settlement in Nyasaland.

⁸⁸ B. Pachai, *Land and Politics in Malawi*, p. 694.

⁸⁹ For details regarding the evolution and nature of Thangata System, see J. McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, pp. 128-132.

⁹⁰ For further details, see R. Mkandawire, 'The Land Question and Agrarian Change in Malawi,' 176-192.

⁹¹ Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 98.

⁹² For details about the evolution and nature of Thangata System, see J. McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 128-132.

⁹³ For the list of these settler farmers in Zomba see MNA, S1/17F-1/38 Zomba Annual Report, 1937.

landholders with 120 000 acres, 108 000 acres and 90 000 acres respectively. Johnston also gave large tracts of land to the Scottish missionaries in Zomba and Domasi.

The problem here is that Johnston regularised land that the white settlers had acquired before the British declared the area a British protectorate in 1892. During this time, most of the peasants were still in hiding due to Kawinga's continued raiding into the Chilwa basin. The Yao chiefs together with other chiefs from other regions, who wanted to benefit materially from the white missionaries, hunters and traders, initiated the process of regularising this land in the absence of these peasants. Their argument was that they imprudently gave these tracts of lands to these settlers with little or no payment, as they were only interested in settlers' protection from Kawinga's threats.⁹⁴ With the support of Scottish missionaries in Blantyre, these Yao chiefs lodged a complaint to Sir Harry Johnston about the legality and payment of these earlier land transactions.⁹⁵ Upon further scrutiny, Johnston confirmed that there was no legal agreement regarding the land transactions between the settlers and the chiefs. The settlers also gave the chiefs no appropriate compensation for the transactions. In turn, Johnston formulated a Native Land Settlement Policy in 1891 to resolve the conflicts and regularise the allocation of land.⁹⁶ Under this policy, Johnston gave settlers Certificates of Claims to confirm their land tenure. Although the Certificates of Claims included a 'Non-Disturbance Clause', the clause did not cover most of the peasants. In doing this, the state argued that these peasants had been evacuated from the land at the time Johnston issued the Certificates of Claims. Furthermore, the settlers, who wanted the state to

⁹⁴ For the details about the complaints see A. C. Ross, 'The Blantyre Mission and Problems of Land and Labour,' in R. J. Macdonald (ed.), *From Nyasaland to Malawi: Studies in Colonial History* (Nairobi: The East African Publishing House, 1975), 86-107.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ MNA S1/492/32 Sir Harry Johnston's Policy on Native Land Settlement in Nyasaland.

either totally remove or maintain the Africans while they offer labour service in lieu of the land they occupied on the estates, fiercely contested this provision. The clause read:

No native village or plantation existing at the date of the certificate on the said estate shall be disturbed or removed without the consent in writing of Her Majesty's Commissioner and Consul-General, but when such consents shall have been given the sites of such villages or plantations shall revert the proprietor of the said estate. No native can make other and new villages or plantations on the said estate without prior consent of the proprietor.⁹⁷

Although Sir Harry Johnston dismissed these claims, the white farmers stood their grounds, and started exploiting the peasants on the estates. The farmers also started to demand their labour as payment for the land they occupied.⁹⁸ They took advantage of the fact that the state in the territory lacked sufficient funds and staff to effectively monitor their compliance with the non-disturbance clause. However, the missionaries, whose work allowed them to interact more closely with Africans, reported their observations of the grave exploitations of the Africans living on the estates to the administrators.⁹⁹ The state confirmed the matter and passed the Land Ordinance (Native Location) in 1904. The ordinance reaffirmed the right of African residency on estates, and legally compelled the estate owners avail part of their land, which was idle to Africans for occupation and cultivation.¹⁰⁰ The state was however afraid of antagonising relations with the white farmers such that it remained hesitant, until the 1930s, to implement the ordinance fully.¹⁰¹ The peasants living in the estates who were covered by the Non-Disturbance Clause were only allowed by the settlers to cultivate subsistence crops, collect firewood and build huts.¹⁰² By denying the peasants the opportunity to cultivate

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ FO 84/2197 Johnston to Colonial Office 10 March 1892.

⁹⁹ MNA FO 2/748 Land Commission to Pearce, 6 May 1903.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ See Baker, *Seeds of Trouble*, 57.

¹⁰² Ibid.

commercial crops, the estate owners craftily and constructively forced the peasants to survive by selling their labour to earn cash with which to buy European goods in the basin.

Meanwhile, the state introduced a currency in 1892 and 1893 as a medium of exchange for all transactions in the country.¹⁰³ Before the country came under British rule, the peasants conducted all trade transactions by barter where they exchanged goods for goods. Early explorers, missionaries and settlers had also conducted their transactions through a system where they paid labourers in kind, chiefly in *calico* (piece of cloth).¹⁰⁴ However, the state introduced, by the Order in Council of 1894, English silver in the form of shillings and pence for business transactions in the country.¹⁰⁵ By 1897, coins were in full use everywhere except in the extreme north of the Protectorate. It also became illegal to pay labourers in any other form except coins. The state also introduced hut and poll taxes within the same period. This introduction of taxes, as in other colonies in the region, raised revenue for the state and reinforced the use of coins among the peasants, who had previously been accustomed to barter. The state also used the money economy to induce the peasants to provide labour to the settler farmers who complained of the reluctance of the peasants to do so.¹⁰⁶

Similarly, more Indian traders opened shops at Zomba Township and trading centres at Jari, Songani and Mphyupyu where they sold imported items such as salt, clothes and other western products.¹⁰⁷ These imported items were more attractive than those that the peasants produced locally along the shores of the Chilwa basin. Thus, Indian traders began to undermine long-time local industries that accounted for the maintenance of the peasants' food

¹⁰³ Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook for Nyasaland*, 24.

¹⁰⁴ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 38-73.

¹⁰⁵ Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 185.

¹⁰⁶ McCrackens, *A History of Malawi*, 61.

¹⁰⁷ Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 99.

security during droughts and erratic rainfalls. In addition, the use of money as a medium of exchange resulted in a state assisted erosion of barter trading by which the peasants circulated goods, especially foodstuffs, from places of abundance to places of scarcity.¹⁰⁸

The peasants also found that wild game such as lions, leopards, buffaloes, hippopotamus, wild pigs, giraffes, and so on, had multiplied around the Lake Chilwa.¹⁰⁹ While this presented an opportunity to expand the hunting economy, the influx of game led to an influx of tsetse flies, which caused sleeping sickness among both humans and domestic animals.¹¹⁰ Outbreaks of tsetse flies adversely affected the Lake Chilwa basin between 1892 and 1897. The colonial policy on dealing with tsetse flies at the time was that of killing all the infected and affected animals, the implementation of which impoverished the peasants who were just re-starting life after some decades of a nomadic life, and engendered conflicts between the peasants and the state. The peasants found it difficult to understand the rationale behind the killing of their cattle in the basin.¹¹¹ The other controversial measure, which the state took to deal with the problem of tsetse flies in the basin, was the establishment of forest reserves in areas such as Chikala Hills, Zomba and Mulanje mountains, which provided the peasants with game meat and firewood.¹¹² While the forests helped to contain the spread of tsetse flies, they also resulted in the prohibition of hunting which was an old food security adaptive strategy for the peasants in the face of droughts and floods.

¹⁰⁸ Vaughan, 'Social and Economic Changes,' 184.

¹⁰⁹ Rev Duff Macdonald, *Africana*, 159.

¹¹⁰ Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 100.

¹¹¹ Vaughan, 'Social and Economic Changes,' 184.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 200.

4. Peasant Resilience, Adaptation and Resistance

The peasants were not passive victims of the political and economic changes that colonialism brought into the Lake Chilwa basin. They demonstrated the capacity to resist the political and economic forces to which the state subjected them, and adapted to the new socio-economic environment. As noted above, with the support of Scottish missionaries in Blantyre, some Zomba chiefs lodged a complaint with Sir Harry Johnston about the legality and payment of earlier land transactions with white settlers.¹¹³ It was through this complaint that the Non-Disturbance Clause was included in the Native Land Settlement Policy of 1891. Other forms of resistance included the withholding of their labour to the settler farmers. Although the state introduced taxation in 1893 to induce the peasants to supply cheap labour to the settler farmers, the state was, until 1904, hesitant to implement taxation due to fear of peasant resistance to the policy. Even when the state enforced taxation in 1904, the results were frustrating owing to inadequate staffing that prevented the state from effectively collecting taxes from the peasants. The peasants also developed various ways, such as migration and bribing of tax collectors, to avert the payment taxes.¹¹⁴ Another form of resistance was noted in the way the peasants sold other products such as fish, food crops, salt and animals in order to raise cash with which to pay taxes and thus not join the settler economy as cheap labour. In so doing, the peasants were able to confine their labour exclusively to food security practices.¹¹⁵ Similarly, the continued existence and strengthening of colonialism and its need for cash with which to pay taxes and buy other material goods gave the peasants a strong incentive to expand their foodstuffs production.

¹¹³ Interview: John Mbedza, Village Headman, Chilikho Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 16 November 2016.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 259.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

The peasants of the Chilwa basin also responded creatively to colonial incursions and land alienation through resilience and adaptation. The peasants took advantage of the salient opportunities that colonialism created in order to expand the production of foodstuffs. Four conditions enabled the peasants of Zomba to achieve this. First, the colonial state's alienation of land did not affect the wetlands around Lake Chilwa. Most of the settler estates were located to the southern parts of the basin because the state discounted the areas around Lake Chilwa for white settlements due to the area's waterlogging, high temperature and low rainfall as well as the history of malaria, locusts and water related diseases.¹¹⁶ Notwithstanding, it was through the utilisation of the basin's ecological conditions that the peasants were able to maintain food security in the face of drought and floods. The only problem that the peasants faced was the loss of the alternative upland areas, which in the past provided refuge resorts in the face of floods.

The second factor that promoted the expansion of food production during this period related to the colonial division of agricultural labour in which the state designated Africans as a source of cheap labour and foodstuffs while the white settlers concentrated on cash crop production. The understanding here was that the peasants, unlike the white settlers, did not have the requisite skills and training with which to produce cash crops. The state also viewed the peasants as reckless producers whose methods of cultivation were unsustainable, ecologically destructive and not sufficiently expansive due to low levels of technology.¹¹⁷ Since the state wanted quick financial returns to sustain its operations in the country at the time, it only considered white farmers as suitable partners that would fast track their economic interests. However, this arrangement provided mixed blessings to the peasants of the Lake Chilwa basin. The exclusive designation of food cropping to the peasants

¹¹⁶Bell, *Report of the Commission*.

¹¹⁷ Johnston, *British Central Africa*, 37.

paradoxically resulted in the state's creation of an environment that enabled the peasants to maintain food security. The arrangement was also ironically advantageous to the settlers and colonial officials who needed foodstuffs to feed their workers. The state and settlers advocated the feeding of workers to maximise their productivity as they contended that:

The whole secret of success in *Tenga Tenga* (porterage) is food; the whole secret of successful work on the plantation is food. The native will work for us, will slave for us. In fact, you can literally do anything with a man who is satisfied with food such as he gets from home. He should be better fed when he is at work than when he is leading an idle life, village life.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, the settlers considered producing food to feed their workers as less cost effective. The price of food crops was low, and given the high freight costs, settlers felt reluctant to expand into commercial food production.¹¹⁹ Moreover, they did not want to be distracted from cash cropping which was relatively profitable than food crop production.¹²⁰ Therefore, although the state denied the peasants the requisite training and support for agricultural production for the most part of the early colonial period, the responsibility of producing food fell on the African peasants.¹²¹

The third factor that helped the peasants to expand their food production is linked with the settlement of the Lomwe in the Lake Chilwa basin from the 1890s. Like the Yao, the Lomwe came from Mozambique, and entered the Chilwa basin through the eastern part of Lake Chilwa from the early 1890s just after the country became a British protectorate.¹²² The Lomwe formed large settlements in the northern parts of Mulanje, in Sombani and Phalombe

¹¹⁸ *Central African Times*, 23 May 1901. Also quoted in Mandala, 'Feeding and Fleecing,' 523.

¹¹⁹ *Nyasaland Times*, 25 July 1912.

¹²⁰ Mandala, 'Feeding and Fleecing,' 513.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 89.

areas within the Lake Chilwa basin.¹²³ Their primary purpose was to secure employment opportunities in the Shire Highlands. Furthermore, the Lomwe's late entrance into the basin saw them settle in the private estates, which white farmers and missionaries established from the 1870s.¹²⁴ Colin Baker and John McCracken observed that, until 1961, white farmers called upon the Lomwes to provide labour services in lieu of the land which they occupied and on which they cultivated subsistence crops.¹²⁵ As noted above, the payment of labour for the land occupied in the estates gave birth to the growth of *Thangata* system, which throughout the colonial period, was a bone of contention between the state, settlers and peasants.¹²⁶ The Lomwe also provided a big market for the earlier basin's inhabitants' foodstuffs. But most importantly, the Lomwes brought with them the idea of cultivating cassava which, though late maturing and less nutritious, was relatively drought resistant and less labour intensive.¹²⁷ On the efficiency of cassava, one informant noted, 'You know they could grow cassava especially in January, and once the rains stopped prematurely, they could rely on cassava. It hardly gets scotched with drought and dryness.'¹²⁸

The last factor is related to the growth of Zomba as an urban centre. Zomba became the centre of colonial administration in 1891. This resulted in the development of various colonial infrastructures such as a prison, airdrome, military barracks, a hospital, and white social clubs.¹²⁹ The growth of Zomba as an urban centre attracted a huge population of people who came to exploit employment and business opportunities in the town. In 1900, Zomba,

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ For details see Chirwa, 'Alomwe and Mozambican Immigrant Labour in Colonial Malawi,' 525-550.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Vaughan, 'Food Production and Family Labour,' 360.

¹²⁸ Interview: John Khope, Ramusi Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 18 November 2016. He is 57 years of age. He is an ordinary farmer in the Chilwa basin. He heard this from his parents used to grow cassava before he died in the 1960s.

¹²⁹ For details, see K. Phiri, 'The Making and Unmaking of a Colonial Capital: A Historical Profile of Urban Zomba to 1964,' (Unpublished History Seminar Paper, Chancellor College, University of Malawi, Zomba, 1987/88).

which boasted a population of nearly 15 000 but with 100 who were non-Africans, was declared a Township.¹³⁰ Soon Zomba provided the peasants with the biggest market for agricultural foodstuffs in the entire Lake Chilwa basin.¹³¹ Subsequently, the peasants began to expand on food production to meet the growing demands of the urban populace of the Zomba Township. Due to its increasing importance, beginning from 1900, maize began to replace millet and sorghum as the main staple food for the peasants in the Chilwa basin.¹³² The peasants too began to favour the high yielding and early maturing nature of maize in the face of increasing demands of foodstuffs in the Chilwa basin.¹³³ Furthermore, the increasing number of the white communities in this town also made the peasants to expand vegetable farming along the streambanks and wetlands of the Chilwa basin.¹³⁴

The peasants also coped with the droughts that ravaged the basin in 1898, 1900 and 1903.¹³⁵ The production of cassava on the sandy clay soils of the lakeshores, which had become popular in the Chilwa basin, and the continued production of millet and sorghum minimised the effects of these droughts. In addition, cash earned from fishing enabled the peasants to purchase foodstuffs from other regions of the territory.¹³⁶ When the lake dried up in 1903, the peasants from the lake embarked on quarrying limestones from the Chisi Island for sale to the construction industry that boomed in Zomba and Blantyre townships.¹³⁷ Other peasants sought temporary employment from the estates, but as soon as the famine was over, they returned into their business of food production. The Lomwe, who settled on the private estates, were the only people who became consistently vulnerable to these ecological

¹³⁰ Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 102; K. Stahl, 'Some Notes on the Development of Zomba,' *The Society of Malawi Journal*, 63, 2 (2010), 39-55.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Mulwafu, *Conservation Song*, 21.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ MNA A/5/1/1 Nyasaland Protectorate General Report, 1899-1909.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Vaughan, 'Social and Economic Change,' 184.

¹³⁷ Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 90.

changes. Although the settlers gave the Lomwes land on which to grow foodstuffs, the land was limited. Furthermore, the demands arising from their working on the estates undermined their ability to manage these plots effectively. Subsequently, the Lomwe relied on the market to acquire foodstuffs. This increased their vulnerability to price fluctuations, and in any case, the settlers did not remunerate the labourers well in the settler estates, as the wages never exceeded an average of four shillings per month.¹³⁸ This was in sharp contrast with the wages that Africans were receiving in other parts of Southern Africa.¹³⁹ According to John McCracken, the wage range of three to four shillings was more than ten times lower than 15-30 shillings and 45 shillings offered in Southern Rhodesia and South Africa respectively.¹⁴⁰ These wage differences were among the factors that induced most Africans to seek employment outside the country through regional labour migration.¹⁴¹

From 1906, the state began to engage the peasants in the production of cotton. The colonialists introduced cotton in 1903 to meet the increasing demand of cotton by the textile manufacturing industry in Britain.¹⁴² At first, the British Cotton Growers Association (BCGA), which promoted cotton production, wanted white farmers to be the key cotton producers. But when the settlers rejected the crop for its low prices and high labour demands, the state resolved to make cotton an African cash crop in 1906.¹⁴³ In fact, the state found the temperature in the Chilwa basin, which was relatively dry and hot, conducive for the

¹³⁸ J. Bolt and E. Green, 'Was the Wage Burden Too Heavy? Settler Farming, Profitability and Wage Shares of settler Agriculture in Nyasaland, c. 1900-1960,' *The Journal African History*, 56, 2 (2015), 230.

¹³⁹ For details about wages in the mines and farms in South Africa and southern Rhodesia see for example, J. Crush, A. H. Jeeves and D. Yudelman, *South Africa Labour Empire: A History of Black Migracy to the Gold Mines* (Boulder: Westview press, 1991); Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe*.

¹⁴⁰ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 98.

¹⁴¹ For details, see B. Nkhoma, 'Competition for Malawian Labour: "Wenela" and "Mthandizi" in Ntcheu District, 1935-1959,' *Malawi Journal of Social Sciences*, 21 (2013), 28- 46; Daimon, ' "Mabhurandaya": The Malawian Diaspora in Zimbabwe, 1895 to 2008,' PhD Thesis, Centre for Africa Studies, University of the Free State, South Africa, 2015, 33-84.

¹⁴² MNA, A/5/1/1 Nyasaland Protectorate General Report, 1899-1909.

¹⁴³ E. Green, 'Agrarian Populism in Colonial and Post-Colonial Malawi,' *African Studies Review*, 54, 3 (2011), 146-7.

production of cotton. The state gave the peasants cottonseeds through BCGA. It also dispatched instructors, known as travelling agents, to teach the peasants the cultural practices associated with cotton production.¹⁴⁴

However, as in the Lower Shire, the state tried cotton production with limited success in the Lake Chilwa basin. Until the 1940s, very few peasants adopted the crop as their cash crop. The point here is that, when the state declared cotton as an African cash crop, the peasants had already been oriented to think that cash cropping was the domain of the white farmers.¹⁴⁵ Besides, the low prices that the state set for cotton were not amusing to the peasants in the country. For instance, the state sold the cotton in Britain at £38 that was bought at as low as £8 per ton.¹⁴⁶ The other problem was that, while the buyers of cotton were willing to offer higher prices in order to motivate the peasants to produce more cotton, the directorate of agriculture advised against this. The directorate argued that, since the cotton markets were subject to fluctuations, higher prices were unsustainable, and should changes take place, it would be difficult to make the peasants understand these dynamics of market forces.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, the peasants failed to appreciate the wisdom of prohibiting the intercropping of cotton with food crops. According to James Matuta, intercropping cotton with food crops helped the peasants to maximise production and safeguard against food insecurity while practising cash cropping.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ For details, see C. Masangano and C. Mthinda, 'Pluralistic Extension System in Malawi,' IFPRI Discussion Paper 01171, April, 2012.

¹⁴⁵ For details, see Chanock, 'Agricultural Change and Continuity in Malawi,' 396-404.

¹⁴⁶ P. Terry, 'The Rise of the African Cotton Industry in Nyasaland, 1902 to 1918,' *The Nyasaland Journal*, 15, 1 (1962), 59.

¹⁴⁷ Nyasaland Protectorate, General Report, 1899-1908.

¹⁴⁸ Interview: Jemus Matuta, Kusokwe Village, T/A Kumtumanje, Zomba, 13 December 2016. He also grows cotton in the area. He said that this is an old practice in the basin. His parents used to do the same.

Consequently, peasants participated marginally in cotton production. Those that did so were largely African elites, especially chiefs, who had sufficient land and cash to combine the production of cash crops with food crops effectively. Among the chiefs that participated in cotton production were Chikowi, Malemia, Kuntumanji and Kawinga.¹⁴⁹ The African elites who participated in capitalist production were mostly graduates from mission schools who had worked as teachers, church elders and *capitaos*¹⁵⁰ on European estates in the Chilwa basin.¹⁵¹ For instance, as early as late-1890s, John Buchanan's *capitaos*, Patson Somanje and Andrew Katepesya, owned private farms in Ulumba and Jali in Zomba district respectively.¹⁵² Somanje's farm was 100 acres while Katepesya's farm was 150 acres. On these farms, Somanje and Katepesya employed full-time labourers and casual workers in the cultivation of coffee and maize. After the growth of Zomba, they supplied large quantities of maize and vegetables to its residents. When the state declared cotton as an African crop in 1906, these elites were among the first to adopt the crop. Privileged with hired labour and larger land holdings, the elites were able to sustain the production of both cotton and food crops. However, the majority continued to sell other products such as salt, fish and foodstuffs to raise cash with which to pay taxes.¹⁵³ The peasants who still needed to grow cash crops only did so at small scale and cultivated on part time bases. Most of them devoted the majority of their time to food production.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook for Nyasaland*, 99.

¹⁵⁰ Capitão was a Portuguese name given to Africans the colonial administrators and estate owners employed to act as foremen. Their role was to organise and lead African workers in the estates.

¹⁵¹ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 96.

¹⁵² Vaughan, 'Kinship and Class,' 18.

¹⁵³ Interview: John Khope, Ramusi Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 18 November 2016.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

These early experiences of the peasants with cotton production in the Chilwa basin had parallels with those in other parts of the region.¹⁵⁵ In both cases, the state adopted cotton in response to reports of early explorers such as David Livingstone.¹⁵⁶ The explorers reported of the existence of a vibrant indigenous cotton production that Britain could exploit for the expansion of its textile industry. In fact, Britain used these reports as basis for colonising the region. In Southern Rhodesia too, peasants discounted cotton for its interference with food crops, labour demands, and lack of market and price incentives.¹⁵⁷ While the settler community cherished the idea of cotton becoming an African crop, the settlers in Southern Rhodesia objected to peasant cotton participation.¹⁵⁸ The settlers rather wanted the peasants to supply cheap labour than participate in the production of cotton. Thus, the peasants' experiences in British Central Africa and Southern Rhodesia shared such similarities, while those in the Portuguese territories such as Portuguese East Africa (Now Mozambique) had markedly different experiences. In Mozambique, for instance, the Portuguese introduced cotton as late as 1938. Other than using persuasion, the Portuguese brutally forced the peasants to participate in cotton production.¹⁵⁹ As a result, in all cases, cotton became a bone of contention between the state and the peasants. Its impact too varied with location, people and class in colonial Africa.

It is in this context that we need to understand the varied impacts of colonial incursions in the Chilwa basin. By late 1907, the inhabitants of the Chilwa basin were divided

¹⁵⁵ For a detailed account of the growth of cotton in other parts of Africa see for example, A. Isaacman and R. Roberts, (eds.), *Cotton, Colonialism and Social History in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Portsmouth H. N: Heinemann, 1995).

¹⁵⁶ Duff, *Nyasaland under Foreign Rule*, 304.

¹⁵⁷ See P. Nyambara, 'Colonial Policy and Peasant Cotton Agriculture in Southern Rhodesia, 1904-1953,' *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 33, 1 (2000), 81-111.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ For details, see for example A. Isaacman, 'Chiefs, Rural Differentiation and Peasant Protest: The Mozambican Forced Cotton Regime, 1938-1961,' *African Economic History*, 14 (1985), 15-56; A. Isaacman, *Cotton the Mother Poverty: Peasants, Work and Rural Struggle in Colonial Mozambique, 1938-1939* (Portsmouth N.H: Heinemann, 1996).

into various classes based on geographical location, ethnicity and gender. As noted above, there also emerged a class of rich peasants comprising of chiefs and other local elites. Unlike the majority of the peasants, they owned larger agricultural gardens and recruited fellow Africans to work for them.¹⁶⁰ While women continued with their dominance in subsistence agriculture, men began to participate in cash cropping.¹⁶¹ As Leroy Vail noted, ethnicity also played a role in the evolution of these local class differentiations.¹⁶² The Nyanja continued to exercise command over agriculture, while the Lomwe and the Yao formed a class of workers. However, while the Lomwe provided cheap labour, the Yao, due to their ‘cleverness, ‘were engaged in security posts in the army and police.¹⁶³

5. Conclusion

The chapter examined the extent to which colonialism shaped the trajectory of food security in the first decade of its establishment in the Chilwa basin. It observes that, while colonialism might have disrupted African ecologies and agrarian practices, its impact on the food security of the peasants varied with time, class and gender. In some respects, colonialism created an environment for the expansion of food security in the Chilwa basin. For instance, although the state offered Certificates of Claims for the land alienated by early white settlers, it discounted the wetlands around Lake Chilwa for white settlements due to their propensity to waterlogging, high temperature and low rainfall as well as the history of malaria, locusts and water related diseases. Yet it was through an adaptive utilisation of these ecological conditions that the peasants were able to maintain food security in the face of drought and floods in the basin. Similarly, while the majority of the peasants from the upper regions

¹⁶⁰ Channock, ‘Agricultural Continuity and Change,’ 500.

¹⁶¹ Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine*, 119-146.

¹⁶² For details, see L. Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

¹⁶³ For details, see Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 40-57.

grappled with the plight of land alienation, some chiefs and local elites used the wealth accumulated from the sale of land to white settlers to expand on food production. Ethnically, while the Nyanja continued to dominate in agricultural production, the Yao and Lomwe took advantage of colonialism to provide security services and cheap labour in the estates, respectively. However, most women, who continued to dominate subsistence agriculture, were affected by the loss of male labour, which the state diverted towards estate agriculture and other white enterprises.

Since colonialism was not fully entrenched during the period covered in this chapter, the degree of its impact on the food security was generally moderate, and seems to have promoted rather than disrupted food security among the Chilwa peasants. The colonial structural division of labour in which the state designated Africans to food production and white settlers to cash crop production, paradoxically played a critical role in the peasants' maintenance of food security. The state's designation of food cropping to the peasants created an environment that enabled the peasants to maintain food security. Most peasants took advantage of this arrangement to produce food surplus that cushioned them from the food security threats presented by the colonial exploitative labour policies, taxation and cash cropping.

One of the factors that enabled the peasants to flourish was the fact that colonialism had many dilemmas and conducted itself in a contradictory manner in dealing with the peasants from the Lake Chilwa basin. While dislodging the peasants from their means of production, the settlers and the state were also in need of the peasants for tax revenue, labour and foodstuffs. In addition, the settler community population was still relatively small and could not antagonise the peasants effectively, as was the case in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Thus, the state had to be pragmatic in dealing with the peasants. This pragmatism brought the state into conflict with the settlers who wanted the state to deny the peasants of labour, land and cash cropping. Nonetheless, some peasants took advantage of these contradictions to expand on food production. They creatively and rationally utilised their exclusion from cash cropping to maintain and expand food production. The peasants were able to negotiate, resist and survive the vagaries of colonial capitalism and maintain food security in the basin.

The settlement of the Lomwe in the early 1890s also worked to the advantage of the Nyanja and Yao who, at the time, formed the indigenous inhabitants of the basin. The Lomwe provided the Chilwa basin peasants with an additional food market and diverted colonial source of cheap labour from the Yao and Nyanja. They also provided labour services in lieu of the land they occupied for settlement and subsistence farming.

Chapter Three

‘The Native is the Producer of the Future’: The Agriculture Department, Debates on Agricultural Improvement, State Interventions and Peasants’ Responses, 1908-1939

1. Introduction

From 1908 onwards, the state started to involve itself in the Chilwa basin’s peasants’ foodstuff production patterns and processes. Despite the significance this development had on the agricultural history of the country, there exist limited studies on how the state implemented the idea in the Chilwa basin. The studies by Martin Chanock, Colin Baker, Elias Mandala and Robin Palmer, which endeavoured to examine the evolution of the African peasantry during the period, limited their analyses to the growth of cash cropping among African producers.¹ Megan Vaughan and Elias Mandala works mainly focused on food production and made little effort to examine the interventions that the state made to improve peasants’ food production. In addition, Vaughan and Mandala’s analyses were limited to the period before the end of World War I.² Another key study is that of Leroy Vail which explores how the construction of a railway line from Nyasaland to Tete between 1918 and 1935 affected the state’s capacity to finance its agricultural projects. Yet Vail’s study does not evaluate the link between this construction project and others related to food production.³

¹ For details, see Chanock, ‘The Political Economy of independent Agriculture in Colonial Malawi’, 113-129; Baker, ‘Depression and Development in Nyasaland, 1929-1974’, 7-26; A. Lonje, ‘Cash Crop Production in Zomba District to 1930: A Historical Overview,’ *Journal of Social Science*, 9 (1982), 22-36; E. Mandala, ‘Peasant Cotton Agriculture, Gender and Inter-generational Relationships: The Lower Tchiri Valley of Malawi, 1906 -1940’, *African Studies Review*, 25, 2/3(1982), 22-44; Vail, ‘The State and the Creation Colonial Malawi’s Agriculture Economy’; J. McCracken, ‘Peasants, Planters and the State),’ 172-192; Palmer, ‘White Farmers in Malawi:,’ 211-245.

² For details, see Vaughan, ‘Food Production and Family Labour in Southern Malawi’, 351-364; Mandala, ‘Feeding and Fleecing the Native’, 505-524.

³ See R. Vail, ‘The Making of an Imperial Slum: Nyasaland and Its Railway, 1895-935,’ *Journal of African History*, 16, 1 (1975), 89-112; Vail, ‘Railway Development and Colonial Underdevelopment,’ 365-395.

This chapter, therefore, explores the evolution of the notion on how to improve food production and the extent to which this affected the food security of the peasants between 1908 and 1939. It pays particular attention to the underlying political, economic, ideological and ecological factors as well as the narratives, discourses and debates that dominated colonial thinking regarding the improvement of peasant agriculture. It contends that, the idea to improve peasants' food production had ecological and demographic merits, yet its success was limited owing to conflicting opinions among colonial officials and their low perception of the peasants' agricultural practices. As noted by Vail, the state was also heavily indebted, due to the railway construction project that was completed in 1922, for it to invest in improving peasant agriculture in the Chilwa basin.⁴ Consequently, until the outbreak of World War II, the Agricultural Department confined the idea of improving peasant agriculture to debates and policy formulation rather than action. However, the chapter observes that the responses of the peasants to the development were not uniform, for, while the majority of the peasants was sceptical of state interventions, a few of them from the class of migrants, estate workers, fishermen and female traders in alcohol, took advantage of the changes to accumulate economic fortunes.

The chapter begins with an analysis of the factors that encouraged the state to embrace the idea of improving peasants' food production in the Chilwa basin. Thereafter, it considers the link between the establishment of the Department of Agriculture and Forestry in 1908 and the pioneering of the process of improving peasants' agriculture. The second section explores how drought recurrences and increasing demand for maize exports influenced the state to pass legislation to regulate the production, consumption and marketing

⁴ Ibid.

of foodstuffs in the Chilwa basin between 1911 and 1920. The last two sections examine the debates on improving peasants' agriculture that unfolded during the interwar period. The chapter also draws attention to the extent to which global events and institutions such as World War I, Great Economic Depression, American Dust Bowl and the League of Nations, shaped discourses of food production and food security in the territory.

2. The Agriculture Department and Food Production in the Chilwa Basin, 1908-1910

The establishment of the Agriculture and Forestry Department in 1908 was epoch-making in the agricultural history of the Chilwa basin and the country at large. Although the territory became a British protectorate in 1891, it was only in 1908 that the state began to intervene in the area of peasant food production in the Chilwa basin. Harry Johnston, the first British Consul, believed that the future of the country lay in the hands of Africans, and yet he looked down upon peasants' capacity to participate effectively in the colonial development and did nothing to tap into this peasant potential until his retirement in 1896.⁵ He considered the peasants as reckless producers whose methods of cultivation were unsustainable, ecologically destructive and not sufficiently expansive due to the low levels of technology use.⁶ Instead, he considered white farmers as the only suitable partners for colonial development in the territory. He confined the role of the peasants of the Chilwa basin and others to that of the suppliers of cheap labour to the settler farmers.⁷

⁵ Krishnamurthy, 'Economic Policy, Land and Labour in Nyasaland, 1890-1914,' 384.

⁶ Johnston, *British Central Africa*, 37.

⁷ Johnston, *The British Central Africa*, 160.

It should also be noted that the state was equally underfunded and understaffed to embark on any meaningful projects that would transform the productive capacities of the peasants in the Chilwa basin.⁸ As in most of its colonies, Britain minimised colonial funding to ensure ‘that colonies should not become long-term financial burdens to the metropolis.’⁹ Under this policy, Britain considered British Central Africa as a financial liability. The territory had limited economic importance, and its colonisation was merely in response to missionary pressure.¹⁰ Until 1911, the territory survived largely on local revenues with a supplementary funding of £10 000 from the British South African Company (BSAC) to meet the administrative costs of police and military operations in the region.¹¹ Britain also provided an Imperial Grant-In-Aid for the construction of a railway line from Blantyre to Chiromo to Tete.¹² Consequently, the colonial state was perpetually in deficit to effectively finance its operations and development projects such as agriculture.¹³ Furthermore, Grant-in Aids were subject to strict scrutiny and auditing, and thus, the state could hardly divert its use to other pressing needs.¹⁴ Subsequently, British Central Africa had to rely on local revenues from taxes, customs and licences, and the revenues were, throughout the colonial period, not adequate to sustain state operations in the Chilwa basin.¹⁵ Hence, Megan Vaughan notes that the history of the state was one of struggle to sustain itself economically.¹⁶

However, since the introduction of cotton in 1903, the state began to realise that most of the producers operating in the Chilwa basin, black or white, lacked skills and resources to sustain agricultural production. The majority of the settlers were, on the one hand,

⁸ Ibid, 81.

⁹ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 76.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 183-184.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 76.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Vaughan, ‘Social and Economic Change,’ 111.

undercapitalised, while the peasants, on the other, used methods, which were considered by the state as unproductive.¹⁷ The situation worsened from 1906 when the state declared cotton as an African cash crop. Although the peasants had long experience in cotton production, they lacked expert knowledge on how to produce the crop extensively and to the quality that satisfied the British textile industries.¹⁸ There also existed a high demand for peasants' foodstuffs at the local and international market.¹⁹ It was, therefore, important for the state to involve itself in the affairs of these growers and improve agricultural productivity.

The British government's passing of the Nyasaland Order in Council of 1907 was watershed in the agricultural history of the country. Among other things, the Order changed the title of the country from British Central Africa (BCA) to Nyasaland and provided for the creation of Executive and Legislative Councils. In as far as agriculture was concerned, the Order compelled the colonial state in Nyasaland to work towards establishing the Agricultural Department and Forestry in order to advance and coordinate issues related to agricultural production and development in the country. The state established the Department in 1908 under the headship of a Director of Agriculture to act as a vehicle for executing and monitoring agricultural interventions in the country.²⁰ The first Director of Agriculture, James Stewart McCall, was assisted in discharging his duties by various officials such as E. W. Davy, an Agriculturalist, E. B. Gamlen, an Assistant Agriculturalist, J. M. Purvis, a Chief Forest Officer, G. Garden, a Veterinary Bacteriologist and M. D. Marshall, a European clerk.²¹ The Department also worked with and received support from District Resident

¹⁷ MNA A/5/1/1 Nyasaland Protectorate General Report, 1899-1909.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Agriculture and Forestry Department of the Year Ended 31 March 1911.

Officers, also known as District Commissioners, who would make periodic visits to peasants in their jurisdiction.²²

However, until 1911, the Department was less enthusiastic to promote peasants' food production in the Chilwa basin. It was obsessed with cash crop farming and reluctant to provide agricultural advice to the peasants who were predominantly engaged in food cropping.²³ The Department considered food production as a less lucrative enterprise to warrant huge state investments. Generally, food prices in the country were relatively low and the Department could not plunge into commercial food production projects due to the high freight costs.²⁴ The settler farmers who feared for the loss of cheap labour once peasants' agricultural practices were improved also supported the Department.²⁵ Furthermore, the settlers had pressed the state to establish the Department in order to provide them with quality extension services to enhance their crop and livestock production and thus exclusively considered themselves as the only bona fide beneficiaries of the Departments' activities.²⁶

Peasant foodstuffs were, nevertheless, in high demand in the town of Zomba, and ironically among the settler farmers and other employers. The Department, therefore, had to still make some efforts to expand peasants' food crop production. To achieve this, the Department adopted two related approaches. Firstly, it engaged Resident Officers from the basin to make periodic visits to assess peasants' performance and estimate crop yields.²⁷ During these visits, the Resident Officers organised meetings with local leaders and the peasants to encourage them to produce more food crops. Secondly, the Department gave the

²² Nyasaland Protectorate, General Report, 1899-1909.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *Nyasaland Times*, 25 July 1912.

²⁵ *Central African Times*, 23 May 1901.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Agriculture and Forestry Year Ending 31 March 1908.

peasants new crop varieties, produced from its experimental gardens established between 1891 and 1912.²⁸ These crops included cotton, maize, groundnuts, rice, millet and sorghum. The Department established the experimental gardens in Zomba. The list of these gardens and farms are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Agricultural Experimental Gardens in Chilwa Basin, 1891-1912

Farm	Year	Acreage	Crops
Mulunguzi	1891	35	Maize, Cotton, Tea
Bwaila	1906	12	Cotton, Tea, G/nuts
Naisi	1908	8	Cotton
Khanda	1909	7	Maize, Rice
Namiwawa	1912	150	Cotton, Tobacco, Maize

Source: Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Reports Agriculture Department, 1910-1912

However, these early undertakings by the Department of Agriculture were far from being successful in the Chilwa basin. Most of the peasants discounted the new crops on the grounds that they altered local tastes and demanded special skills, which the Department was unable to provide.²⁹ The basin's peasants also remained less committed to cotton production which undermined the time they wanted to devote to food crops' production.³⁰ The travelling agents discouraged them from intercropping cotton with food crops and this discouraged the peasants from continuing with the cultivation of the cash crop. Those who continued to cultivate the crop did so without paying attention to the regulations that the Department

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Interview: Mwasiyamphanji, Ramusi Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 18 November 2016.

³⁰ Ibid.

imposed on them.³¹ These responses of the Chilwa basin peasants were directly linked to the fact that the Department failed to appreciate the underlying factors that resulted in their (in)action. The peasants wanted the price of cotton to be improved and that the Department should allow them to intercrop cotton with food crops. As noted in chapter two, the proposed intercropping of cotton with food crops sought to achieve the peasants' intention to cultivate cash crops without undermining their commitment to food crops.³² Nonetheless, the Department viewed the peasants as rude and obstinate in adopting changes. Thus, the peasants' food production sector continued to suffer from neglect up to mid-1911 when the state began to get directly involved in the agricultural activities of the peasants through the regulation of the production, consumption and marketing of foodstuffs in the Chilwa basin.

3. Regulating Production and Marketing of Peasants' Foodstuffs, 1911-1920

From 1911, the Agriculture Department started to directly deal with the production and distribution of foodstuffs among the peasants of the Chilwa basin. Two factors accounted for this development. Firstly, the Chilwa basin experienced recurrences of droughts that affected the peasants' food production. As noted in chapter two above, the basin witnessed extreme episodes of droughts and floods between 1891 and 1904. Some of these droughts took place in 1897, 1900 and 1903 while the floods occurred in 1898, 1901 and 1906.³³ While these events were not unusual to the peasants, the recurrences of the late 1890s and early 1900s were indicative of the extent to which peasant production, upon which the supply of foodstuffs relied, was vulnerable to rainfall variability.³⁴ In particular, the 1910/11 drought

³¹ Interview: Dyton Sukali, Tsekamoyo Village, T/A Jenala, Phalombe, 17 October 2003. He was 84 when I interviewed him. He was an ordinary farmer. He was informed this by his parents who died in the 1950s at the age 80.

³² Interview: Jamusi Matuta, V/Head, Kusokwe Village, T/A Kumtumanje, Zomba, 13 December 2016.

³³ Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 155.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

affected the capacity of the peasants to produce sufficient foodstuffs for their subsistence as well as for sale to white employers in the basin.³⁵ The Department erroneously associated the famine to what it perceived as imprudent African practices such as shifting cultivation, deforestation, overstocking, tribal wars and excessive beer drinking.³⁶ Since then, the state decided to intervene decisively in the food production practices of the peasants of the Chilwa basin.

The second, and probably, the main reason was the increasing demand for maize export in Europe which began in 1910.³⁷ In response to this demand, for the first time, the Department began to export maize. However, the Department faced difficulties to procure large quantities of maize from the peasants in the Chilwa basin. It attributed this failure to the presence of the Indian traders and European settlers who unscrupulously bought maize from the peasants.³⁸ In the absence of regulatory policies, it became difficult for the Department to access these foodstuffs or control the exploitative activities of Indian traders. In his 1910 end of year report, the Director of Agriculture observed:

During the past year this commodity has appeared for the first time on our list of exports, and to the considerable extent of 2 000 tonnes, which is most encouraging considering the present scarcity on the home market. The crop is largely purchased by Indians who act as agents for the exporting firms, and a careful watch against famine must be kept until the natives are educated to cultivate expressly for export. A strong maize crop is one of the best indicators of soil fertility, and the heavy crops obtained for two or three years by natives with little cultivation and no manure on the same soil is a practical demonstration of the great fertility in Nyasaland. The possibilities of maize export are enormous and one of the strongest arguments in favour of railway extension through and to the Protectorate; granted such facilities the country could

³⁵ Nyasaland Protectorate, Native Foodstuffs Ordinance, 1912.

³⁶ MNA S1/170/11 Intoxicating Liquor Ordinance.

³⁷ Nyasaland protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1910.

³⁸ Ibid.

export hundreds of thousands of tonnes annually without affecting the food supply of its inhabitants.³⁹

When maize exports increased from 2 000 to 2 013 tonnes valued at £6 002 in 1911, the Director encouraged the Governor to invest further in maize production. He contended that the amount of maize the country exported was a small fraction of the quantity of maize it could have exported if it had improved maize production and enacted vibrant maize market legislation.⁴⁰ Since the prices of maize in the country, he argued further that the country would be making huge profits from the export of maize. He reported:

There are few countries where maize can be purchased so cheaply as in Nyasaland, and large quantities can be obtained from natives during harvest as from 15/-to20/- per ton. There is no question of developing this industry as it's here already, and only awaits extended transport facilities to place the crop on the European market. An increasing demand for maize throughout Europe has been experienced during the last few years; the British market alone requires about three million tonnes yearly, and on an average pay of 5 Pounds per ton; much of this money is paid to foreign powers, and there is no reason-other than imperfect transport-why Nyasaland should not add considerably to maize crop produced in the British Empire.⁴¹

The Department, therefore, took advantage of the rainfall failure in 1911 to develop laws with which to procure more export maize from the peasants of the Chilwa basin. However, due to inadequate funds and personnel, the Department limited its interventions to the regulation of the production, consumption and marketing of peasants' foodstuffs rather than improving their capacity to produce more food crops. For instance, in 1911, the Department passed an Intoxicating Liquor Ordinance which prohibited the brewing and selling of beer by the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Agricultural Department Year Ended 31 March 1911.

⁴¹ Ibid.

peasants from the Chilwa basin and those from other parts of the country.⁴² In the eyes of the Department, beer brewing and consumption accounted for waste of peasants' foods, deforestation, and undermined their agricultural productivity. Ecologically, the state argued that peasants used a lot of firewood in beer brewing. The state assumed that the prohibition of beer would compel the peasants to divert the time they spent drinking beer into their agricultural activities.⁴³ However, the ecological and food security argument was in sharp contrast with the reason why colonial states introduced beer ordinances in other parts of Africa. Largely, states passed the ordinances for moral, health and labour control reasons.⁴⁴ In South Africa, for instance, the state used beer ordinances to discriminate Africans from the consumption of alcohol, which was considered as a preserve of the whites.⁴⁵ However, the state in Nyasaland wanted to export to Europe the foodstuffs, which it thought the peasants wasted through beer brewing.

In addition, the Department passed a Native Foodstuffs Ordinance in 1912 to prohibit the sale of foodstuffs during the seasons of food scarcity.⁴⁶ With the assistance of a Food Production and Control Committee, the Department used this ordinance to regulate the production and marketing of foodstuffs. The Department fixed annual quotas of foodstuffs for the settlers and other employers to purchase from the peasants. Before making any purchases, the settlers were also expected to obtain permission from the Food Committee.

⁴² Nyasaland Protectorate, Intoxicating Liquor Ordinance of 1911.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ For details, see for example, J. Willis, 'Drinking Power: Alcohol and History in Africa,' *History Compass*, 3, 1 (2005), 1-13; R. Nyuur and P. Sobiesuo, 'The History and Development of Brewing and the Beer Industry in Africa,' in I. Cabras, D. Higgins and D. Preece, (eds.), *Brewing, Beer and Pubs: A Global Perspective*, (Springer, 2016); J. Willis, *Potent Brews: A social History of Alcohol in East Africa, 1550-1999*, (Boydell and Brewer, 2002), 145-161; D. Bryceson, (ed.), *Alcohol in Africa: Mixing Business, Pleasure and Politics* (Portsmouth, N.H: Heinemann, 2002).

⁴⁵ For details, see J. Crush and C. Ambler, (eds.), *Liquor and Labour in Southern Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992); P. Hausse, 'The Struggle for the City: Alcohol, the Ematsheni and Popular Culture in Durban, 1902-1936,' Ph. D Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1984.

⁴⁶ Nyasaland Protectorate, Native Foodstuffs (Ordinance) of 1912.

Although the Department argued that it wanted to protect the peasants from starvation, its underlying motive was to make maize available for export to Europe.⁴⁷

Unsurprisingly, the enactment of these food regulatory policies did not sit well with the peasants and settler farmers in the Chilwa basin. For the peasants, the ordinance affected the production of food surplus, which not only helped them to get cash to pay taxes and buy other luxuries, but was also essential for their religious and socio-cultural festivities. The peasants in the Lake Chilwa basin also found it extremely unpalatable to abide by the Liquor Ordinance since beer drinking was a favourite pastime and a means to social cohesion.⁴⁸ Similarly, the settlers were concerned with the discouragement of production of food surplus, which they needed to purchase from the peasants to feed their tenants and employees.⁴⁹ They also faulted the committee for frequently setting low maize quotas to feed their employees sufficiently.

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 increased demand for peasants' foodstuffs which were needed to feed the soldiers. It also accentuated the prevailing tensions between the state, settlers and peasants.⁵⁰ The state, through the Agricultural Department, reduced the quotas allocated to the settlers, and encouraged the peasants to increase acreage for maize production in order to make maize available to the military.⁵¹ This brought the Department into direct confrontation with the settlers who needed more foodstuffs to feed their employees. The Department also faced difficulties on how to encourage the peasants to

⁴⁷ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Agriculture and Forestry Department Year Ending 31 March 1912.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ *Nyasaland Times*, 2 July 1918.

⁵⁰ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Agriculture and Forestry Department Year Ending 31 March 1915.

⁵¹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Forestry of the Year Ending 31 March 1916.

increase the acreage of foodstuff production at a time when it had reduced maize prices and prohibited beer brewing.

The Department, which was in dire need of food, was forced to revisit its approach. Firstly, it raised the prices of maize. Secondly, it encouraged settlers to take advantage of the high prices to produce maize for the military. The Department asked settlers to devote 25% of their land holding to the production of maize for the military and their workers.⁵² Thirdly, it pledged to construct and improve markets and road networks to facilitate the production and marketing of foodstuffs. True to its pledge, the state constructed main road networks such as Zomba-Namadzi road, Zomba-Likweni road, Zomba-Namiwawa road, Phalombe-Mulanje road and the Phalombe-Migowe road, within the Lake Chilwa basin. It also constructed district roads such as the Zomba-Lake Chirwa road, Zomba-Namitembo road, Zomba-Chikala road, Likulezi-Zomba road and Phalombe-Jali-Zomba road. Foodstuff markets were also opened at Jali, Likangala, Mphyupyuu, Mtondie (Thondwe), Chikowe, Domasi, Songani, Nsondole and Phalombe.⁵³ Owing to the increase in maize prices and improved road networks and markets, settler farmers began to grow maize. By the end of 1918, the settler farmers produced over 5 795 tonnes of maize, 3 250 tonnes of which was purchased by the military.⁵⁴

However, the price increases were temporary. Immediately after the end of the war in 1918, the state again reduced the maize prices. In response, the settlers stopped participating in the production of maize. The peasants also failed to understand the reduction of maize prices at a time when the prices of other commodities were going up due to post-war

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ For details on road networks and markets, see Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 98-100.

⁵⁴ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Agricultural Department of the Year Ending 31 March 1918.

inflation.⁵⁵ As a result, the settlers and the peasants united in their protest against the reduction of the prices of maize. Through their newspaper, *Nyasaland Times*, the settlers contended that: ‘We are afraid that the native who is supposed by some note to be stimulated by high prices will prefer high prices rather than maize at low prices offered by the government.’⁵⁶ At the local level, Chief Kawinga and his people refused to sell the maize they promised to the Resident Officer of Zomba at the start of the growing season in October 1917. The Resident Officer reported:

When I spoke to the headman about the maize on my last trip to Chikala, they all made all sorts of excuses, such as that the crop was not good as they had thought when it was in the garden, and that they had not enough people to bring it into the Boma. But I think that they consider that the price was too low, and that they had plenty of money to turn any surplus into beer rather than sell at the price the government offers. Several headmen asked why, when the prices of all cloths have more than doubled, they should sell foodstuffs at prices ruling before the war.⁵⁷

Similarly, the reinforcement of the Liquor Ordinance among the peasants was not a simple task for the resident Officer of the Chilwa basin. Chiefs from the Chilwa basin often objected, in strong terms, to the idea of limiting maize production and the selling of beer, during monthly meetings. For them, the prohibition of beer brewing impoverished women who already had limited alternative sources of raising money in the Chilwa basin. As guardians of the society, they found it morally difficult to enforce this ordinance on such subjects. Furthermore, they observed that allowing people to brew and sell beer once in a month on the same day resulted in too much beer remaining unsold. Most importantly, the chiefs were not comfortable to enforce the ordinance that interfered with beer, which had significant religious

⁵⁵ MNA S1/21/19 Monthly Reports Zomba District, 1918-1919. This was presented in a memorandum dated July 1918.

⁵⁶ *Nyasaland Times*, 2 July 1918.

⁵⁷ MNA S1/21/19 Monthly Reports Zomba District, 1918-1919. See a memorandum dated July 1918.

and socio-cultural roles in the Chilwa basin. As noted in chapter two, beer drinking was part of their economy, culture, customs and religious rituals. As in most parts of Africa, the peasants used beer to access communal labour and other food items.⁵⁸ In addition, the beer was consumed communally and thus it enhanced unity and social cohesion among the peasants in the Chilwa society. By restricting the production of beer to the harvest seasons when the peasants had sufficient foodstuffs, the peasants felt that beer brewing was not necessarily a cause for food insecurity as colonial officials argued.⁵⁹ Since its production was restricted to women, they also felt that beer brewing enhanced women status and their control over men. It was also a mark of seniority as its consumption was preserved for the adults. Thus, the chiefs were not ready to lose the socio-cultural values that beer perpetuated in their society. In response, the Resident Officer proposed to the Governor to grant beer-brewing licenses to individuals rather than villages. He also advised that licenced women should prepare beer consecutively to avoid excessive beer leftovers.⁶⁰

While the peasants and settlers were engaged in the above-noted contestations, another drought occurred in the country between 1918/19. Since the production of foodstuffs was controlled and maize prices were low, the state did not have sufficient maize stocks to cushion the peasants from the famine.⁶¹ However, instead of attributing the famine to the pricing policy, the state blamed World War I. It argued that the war forced peasants to abandon farming in order to work as soldiers. The higher prices, which the military offered, also tempted the peasants to sell all their maize. The Resident Officer for Zomba reported:

⁵⁸ See for example R. Room, 'Socio-Cultural Aspects of Alcohol Consumption,' in P. Boyle, P. Boffetta, A. Lowerfells, H. Burms, O. Brewely, W. Zatonski and J. Rahm (eds.), *Alcohol: Science, Policy and Public Health*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 38-45.

⁵⁹ Interview: Witness Kalambula, Katanda Village, T/A Kuntumanje, Zomba. 9 November 2016. He was aged 72 when I interviewed him. He is one of the progressive farmers in the basin. He inherited his wealth from his father who used to be a progressive farmer in the area in the 1930s. His father died in the 1960s at the age of 85.

⁶⁰ MNA S1/21/19 Monthly Reports Zomba District, 1918-1919. This was presented in a memorandum dated July 1918.

⁶¹ Ibid.

The shortage was partly due to the failure of the early rains, which necessitated repeating planting of the gardens thereby reducing considerably and in many cases competing exhaustingly, the small stocks of grains which were being conserved for food until the next harvest, and also in large measure to the fact that gardens planted during the previous seasons were much smaller than usual owing to the numbers of the able bodied men having been called out from military service of various descriptions leaving only the older men, women and children to cultivate on the ground. The high prices which were also being paid by the military for all kinds of native foodstuffs also tempted the natives to dispose of grain, which they would under ordinary circumstances, have retained for their own use.⁶²

In a matrilineal society where agriculture was predominantly the affair of both men and women, attributing the famine to the absence of men can be contested. The point is that peasants did not devote much of their land to maize production because of the low prices offered after World War I.

The effects of the famine were also exacerbated by the colonial policy of not giving free food relief to the peasants in the Chilwa basin. To avoid perpetuating a dependency syndrome, the state only made foodstuffs available to peasants on sale and on a food-for-work basis.⁶³ However, the peasants from the basin did not have sufficient money to purchase relief maize whose prices were highly inflated by the state in seasons of famine.⁶⁴ In as far as food-for-work was concerned, it was those peasants who were strong that accessed the food. Furthermore, food-for-work impacted negatively on the peasants as the effort reduced the

⁶² MNA S1/21/19 Monthly Reports Zomba District, 1918-1919.

⁶³ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Agriculture and Forestry Department year Ending 31 March 1919.

⁶⁴ MNA S1/21/19 District Monthly Reports, Zomba, 1918-1919. This was captured from a memo by the Resident Officer to the Governor on 18 December 1918.

time set out for their own food production. Thus, food-for-work would result in the reproduction of famine in the Chilwa basin.⁶⁵

Before the drought, the Resident Officer from Zomba warned the Food Controller against the danger of reducing maize prices. He argued that, 'The system of only putting the minimum quantity absolutely necessary to avoid famine on the market means that anyone who has some maize for sale can always find some friend who has failed to obtain supply in the market and who is also willing to pay any price to get it.'⁶⁶ Furthermore, he argued that price reductions discouraged peasants from supplying foodstuffs on the local market thereby leading to food shortages. True to the Resident Officers fears, the peasants from the Chilwa basin stopped selling maize on the local market after the Food Controller had ignored the warning. As a result, the Resident Officer had to send his *capitao* out to Chikala to acquire maize where it was in abundance. The results were still disappointing. For example, after two months of food hunting, the *capitao* only managed to obtain one tonne of maize.⁶⁷ In addition, the advice for the *capitao* to open buying markets within the villages at Nyamba and Chikwewu, did not yield much peasant maize sales. Finally, the Resident Officer interviewed chiefs Malemia, Kumtumanje, Mwambo, Kimu and other smaller chiefs, and found out that the peasants were not happy with the low prices being offered by the state to purchase maize.⁶⁸

Soon after the drought, the state embarked on constructing a railway line connecting the country to the Mozambican port of Nacala between 1919 and 1922.⁶⁹ The state wanted

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ For details, see Vail, 'The Making of an Imperial Slum,' 89-112; Vail, 'Railway Development and Colonial Underdevelopment,' 365-395.

this railway line to facilitate the export of cash crops from the country as earlier suggested. Subsequently, the state needed more foodstuffs to feed thousands of its workers on the project. So the state reduced further the maize quotas set aside for settlers to buy from the peasants. In reaction, the settlers submitted a petition to the House of Commons in London to force the colonial authority in the country to reverse its decision.⁷⁰ Instead of reversing the decision, the state amended the foodstuffs ordinance into the Native Foodstuffs (Amendment) Ordinance in 1920. The amended ordinance prohibited the distribution of maize from one place to another, whether the basin had abundance of maize or not.⁷¹ The ordinance empowered the state to bar settlers completely from relying on the peasants for the supply of foodstuffs. The state was of the view that the settlers' demands for foodstuffs tempted the peasants from the Chilwa basin to sell the very foodstuffs they reserved for their subsistence. It also felt that it was unfair for the settlers, who had plenteous land, resources, employees and tenants, and had refused to participate in food production, to be buying maize from the peasants.⁷² However, as noted above, the state was not necessarily trying to protect the peasants through this legislation. Instead, it wanted to gain monopoly over the purchase of peasants' maize in the face of droughts and the growing number of employees it had to feed.

Sensing the danger in which they were, the settlers petitioned the Governor and the members of the Legislative Council to reverse the law. They argued that, 'the Bill constituted an unwarrantable interference with the right of the native producers to sell his produce on the best market and is therefore unjust to the native growers. Considering the high prices, he has to pay for all European goods and the probability of increased taxation, your petitioners are of the opinion that the native producer is entitled to reap the full benefit of a free and

⁷⁰ Nyasaland Times, 4 December 1919.

⁷¹ MNA S1/1474/19 Foodstuffs Production, 1919-1920.

⁷² Ibid.

unrestricted market of his produce.’⁷³ Instead of reversing the ordinance, the Governor admonished the settlers to desist from appropriating peasants’ foodstuffs. Rather, he encouraged the settlers to produce foodstuffs for their tenants and employees.⁷⁴ The peasants reacted to the state’s refusal to reverse the legislation by not selling their produce on the regular market. Instead, they sold them informally to traders, especially Indians, who used to visit the basin. Some of the Indians had relocated in the interior of the Chilwa basin. Since the state did not have sufficient staff to monitor compliance with the policy, it was easy for these traders to buy from the peasants.⁷⁵ The Indians also used to supply goods on credits for the peasants to pay in foodstuffs during the harvesting seasons.⁷⁶

Thus, up to the end of First World War, the state confined its interventions into peasants’ food production in the Chilwa basin to regulation of the production, consumption and marketing of foodstuffs. Despite the tension that were generated by the regulations among the peasants, the settlers and other employers, the state made no efforts to improve the capacity of the peasants to produce sufficient crops that would meet the increasing food demands of the time. This, however, changed soon after the end of the war in 1919.

4. Colonial Debates on Improving Peasants’ Food Production in the Chilwa Basin, 1919-1929

Colonial thinking on improving the capacity of the peasants to produce more foodstuffs in the Chilwa basin began to change from 1919. This change in attitude was subsequent to the growing conflict between state, settlers and peasants over the marketing and distribution of

⁷³ MNA S1/1479/19 Petition: From the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce to His Excellence, the Governor and Members of the Legislative Council.

⁷⁴ Foodstuffs Ordinance, 4-17 March 1920.

⁷⁵ Nyasaland Protectorate, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 103.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

foodstuffs. The state had confined its food security interventions to propaganda campaign in which peasants were encouraged to increase acreage of food crop gardens and adopt high yielding varieties of food crops. This propaganda campaign was, however, inadequate to help the peasants to produce sufficient foodstuffs that would meet the growing demands of the times, especially in the face of recurrent droughts. According to the state, the production of sufficient food crops under these circumstances required robust and dynamic methodologies, which, at the time, were not yet characteristic of peasant agriculture in the country.⁷⁷ As long as the peasants continued to use crude agricultural practices such as shifting cultivation and the non-use of manuring, the propaganda campaign would not help to increase food production. There was need for the state to take deliberate steps to reorient the peasants into new agricultural methods if they were to contribute significantly to the net supply of foodstuffs.

The idea to improve peasants' agriculture after World War I was also a product of global changes in perceptions over the role of Africans in the development of the colonies during the interwar period. Until the end of World War I, Britain, as other colonisers, interacted with the colonies on the principle of 'primitive accumulation' in which colonies acted as suppliers of raw materials and consumers of British manufactured goods.⁷⁸ Britain's policy changed, after the end of World War I, from 'primitive accumulation' to that of 'Trusteeship' and 'Mandate' colonialism.⁷⁹ According to Woodrow Wilson, the Architect behind mandate colonialism, the colonial masters had the obligation to empower their colonies towards self-reliance and government.⁸⁰ As part of preparing the colonies for self-government, Wilson compelled colonial authorities to embark on projects that would improve

⁷⁷ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Agriculture Department for the Year Ending 31 March 1920

⁷⁸ J. Hodge, G. Hodl, and M. Kopf, (eds.), *Developing Africa: Concepts and Practices in Twentieth-Century Colonialism* (London: Manchester University Press, 2014), 11.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ E. M. Bennet, 'Mandate and Trusteeship,' *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy*, (2002), 1.

the productive capacities of Africans through education, rural development and agricultural transformation.⁸¹ Since food was core to rural life, colonial projects had to focus also on peasants' food production in addition to cash crops.⁸²

Thus, from 1919, the state began to take steps towards improving peasant agriculture. Wallace Rose, a philanthropist and private agriculturalist, based in the southern province, coined the idea. Early in 1919, he wrote the Director of Agriculture, James McCall, to allow him to launch a scheme in which he would train peasants in modern agricultural methods. He argued that improving peasants' productivity was critical for the maintenance of the country's food security in the face of drought recurrences.⁸³ Embattled with conflicts over peasants' foodstuffs with settler farmers and other employers, the Director welcomed the idea. The Senior Agriculturalist in the Department, E. W. Davy, also supported the idea. Davy argued that the peasants from whom the state obtained foodstuffs and revenues needed state support to improve their productivity.⁸⁴ To increase its legitimacy, Davy urged the Director to take the project up, and only engage Rose, who was well disposed to the peasants, and had 'superabundant energy and a happy art of being able to carry the scheme with conviction,' as the scheme's coordinator. He reported:

The government extracts considerable revenue from the natives' populace, and its demands on this direction are more likely to increase than decrease in the future. What is required is a separate section of the agriculture department to devote all its energy year in and year out to the interests of native agriculture not only on tobacco, but cotton, rice, maize and other crops as well, to teach sound principles of agriculture including the production of the maximum amount of crops for the minimum area of land, conservation as establishment of firewood areas etc. This is no time to outline a

⁸¹ C. Bisen, C., "The Changing Moral Justification of Empire: From the Right to Colonize to the Obligation to Civilise," *History of European Ideas*, 39, (2013), 335-353.

⁸² Hodge, Hodl, and Kopf, (eds.), *Developing Africa*, 10-11.

⁸³ MNA A3/2/157 Miscellaneous Reports, 1919.

⁸⁴ MNA A3/2/157 Miscellaneous -Memo of the Director of Agriculture to the Governor dated 21 January 1919.

general scheme, but such a scheme as is eventually devised, should be broad based and far reaching and would probably involve a staff of itinerant European instructors, with subordination native instructors, and an agricultural school in which the later class would receive their training, together with a number of other natives who might reasonably be nominated by the principal headman of each district. There would require being a large number of model plots established throughout the Protectorate to demonstrate the truth of the teaching.⁸⁵

Like many other colonialists, however, Davy expressed reservations on the peasants' capacity to appreciate the efforts to improve their productivity. He contended that,

But I feel for sure that, assuming he connect his scheme of education and makes a success out of it, there will be an inrush of competitors to secure what may be termed the fruits of his voluntary labours. The native is by nature ungrateful and would never consider it his duty to even offer his crops for sale to the person to whom he was most indebted for them. It would be impossible to give the natives even the most indirect suggestion that he should offer his crop to Mr Wallace Rose, who would thereupon, I am convinced, be a disappointed man when he sees the results of several years of hard and deserving work being acquired by a number of unscrupulous outsiders.⁸⁶

But the idea was dismissed outright by the Land Officer in the Department, B. E. Lilley. He argued that: 'I think this will become the Whiteman's country and I also think the time has not yet arrived when the Native can be looked to as person who can be relied upon to raise produce to anything the extent that the Whiteman raise it.'⁸⁷ However, the Director dismissed Lilly's idea arguing that white farmers, who the Land Officer held with high esteem, were equally unreliable. He said, 'The Whiteman only stops here for a few years to make money and then clears it out. But the native is the producer of the future.'⁸⁸ Compared to the

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ MNA LAN 1/8/7, Letters Exchanged between the Land Officer and Director of Agriculture, 13 April to May 1920.

⁸⁸ MNA, the Director of Agriculture, Letter to the Land Officer, 30 April 1920.

peasants, the Director further argued that the settlers only succeeded in antagonising the colonial authorities with incessant demands for financial support and sabotaging its policies.⁸⁹ The state was, however, burdened by the debts incurred from the construction of a railway line to Tete and was thus not willing to meet the financial demands of these settlers.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, the colonial office transferred the Director from the country in 1922 before his dream of improving peasants' agriculture was fully realised.

Nevertheless, the colonial authorities took up the debate again two years later. The state, with the help of the Agricultural Chemist, A. Hornby, conducted a study on the overall performance of peasant agriculture in the country. The study revealed the prevalence of adverse soil erosion, especially in the Shire Highlands and the Lake Chilwa basin, where population was dense, and a great deal of land alienation had taken place. In conclusion, Hornby called for an immediate intervention into peasant production to arrest the problems in the affected areas.⁹¹ The results were confirmed in 1925 by the Commissioner for the Southern Province who argued that the crops that the peasants were planting in the basin and the methods used were unproductive.⁹² He blamed this so-called unproductivity on the *laissez faire* attitude of the Agriculture Department and urged the Department to immediately mount demonstration gardens and introduce new crop varieties in order to transform peasants' agriculture and ensure sustainable food security in the basin.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ See Vail, 'The Making of an Imperial Slum,' 89-112; Vail, *Railway Development and Colonial Underdevelopment*, 365-395.

⁹¹ A. J. Hornby, 'The Erosion of Arable Soil in Nyasaland and Methods of Prevention,' in F. Dixey, J.B. Clements and A.J. Hornby, *The Destruction of Vegetation and its Relation to Climate, Water, Water Supply and Soil Fertility* (Zomba: Government Printer, 1924), Bulletin No. 1. This was also mentioned in Mulwafu, 'Soil Erosion and State Intervention into Estate Production,' 28.

⁹² MNA S1/1042/25 Annual Report Southern Province 1924/25.

Blaming the Department of Agriculture for the failure of peasant agriculture in the basin did not sit well with E.G. Wortley, who was then the Director of Agriculture. Wortley wondered why the Commissioner suggested the introduction of new crops when the state already grew numerous exportable crops in the province. Furthermore, he drew the Commissioner to the fact that the state had tried the use of model gardens elsewhere, but with limited success.⁹³ For him, it was the responsibility of all departments to discourage the basin peasants from engaging in ecologically destructive practices. He argued further that the close relationship between the Administration Department, to which the Provincial Commissioner belonged, and the peasants, made this Department best positioned to check on peasants' agricultural behaviour in the Chilwa basin. He pointed out in conclusion that,

I am in fact in hearty agreement with the Provincial Commissioner that more assistance should be given to Native agriculture and it's the ambition of the Department to introduce new crops as well as improved varieties of those already established here; such work is at best be set with many difficulties. In the meantime, however, there are crops in the country well suited to local conditions. Increased expenditure on propaganda and experimental works, and the native cooperation with the Provincial Commissioner and district administration offices with the Department of Agriculture can confidently be expected to benefit the natives and to prevent the ruthless destruction of the natural resources of the country.⁹⁴

The results of the population censuses of 1926 added new impetus to the debate on improving peasant agriculture in the Chilwa basin. The census exposed the existence of serious cases of malnutrition, revealed that the population of the peasants in the Southern Province had more than trebled, and confirmed that the Lake Chilwa basin was the highest populated.⁹⁵ As of 1926, the population had grown from 75 000 in 1901 to 183 107, and 88 709 of them were

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ MNA S1/1042/25 Annual Report Southern Province 1924/25- Memorandum Ref Number 13 of Central Registry 1042/25.

⁹⁵ Nyasaland Protectorate, Population Census Report, 1926.

Lomwe immigrants. For details about the population growth of the basin between 1901 and 1926, see tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 2: Population Growth of the Lake Chilwa Basin, 1901-1926

Date	Mulanje	Zomba
1901	48 000	27 000
1911	63 308	64 347
1921	61 143	102 258
1926	91 721	91 386

Source: Nyasaland Protectorate, Population Census Report, 1931

Table 3: Population Growth of the Lomwe in the Lake Chilwa Basin, 1901-1931

District	1921	1926
Mulanje	26 473	60 403
Zomba	27 745	28 306

Source: Nyasaland Protectorate, Population Census Report, 1931

However, the presence of the Lomwe was beneficial for the settler farmers as this ensured a state of regular labour supply. The Lomwe were also new comers and thus, the non-disturbance clause did not cover them. As a result, they became a chief source of labour for settler farmers. The colonial officials also agreed, in a draft report of labour census taken in the Southern Province that, the presence of the Lomwe had improved labour supply to the settler farmers. They argued that:

It is no exaggeration to say at the present time were the supply of the Anguru labour cut off or seriously diminished, half the plantations in the Mulanje, Thyolo and Lower districts would have to be closed and the whole plantation industry in the shire highlands would be disorganised.⁹⁶

While the influx of the Lomwe immigrants is reputed for labour supply, it also caused food insecurity among the peasants in the Chilwa basin. Dyton Sukali of Tsekankhomo village, who at the time was a resident farmer in the basin, said that, 'it was extremely difficult, in the face of excessive land alienation, for the peasants to meet the food demands of new immigrants.'⁹⁷ Ecologically, the Lomwe settlement caused unsustainable deforestation, soil degradation and the dwindling of water resources within the Crown Land.⁹⁸ The Resident Officers from Mulanje, where most of the Lomwe relocated, also complained about the ecological impact of overcrowding in the Crown Land. He called upon the state to relocate the Lomwe to other provinces as noted in his comment:

Rapid exclusion from Crown Land of immigrants from Portuguese East Africa should be enforced in the Mulanje and Lower Shire districts, which are already overcrowded, and government action in regard of making dry area available for settlement by the sinking of wells and erection of dams should be undertaken at once.⁹⁹

Later, the state negotiated with the settler farmers to resettle the Lomwe people on their estates. Initially, the estate owners welcomed the development, but the increase of the immigrants caused deforestation and over cultivation, and this forced the estate owners to evict the Lomwe from their plantations.¹⁰⁰ The state did not have sufficient land to resettle the Lomwe in the basin, and so it passed the Natives on Private Estates Ordinance to resolve the

⁹⁶ MNA S1/428/27 Draft Labour Census Report.

⁹⁷ Interview: Dyton Sukali, Tsekakhomo Village, T/A Jenala, Phalombe, 16 December 2016.

⁹⁸ MNA S1/543/23 Southern Province report for the Year ending 31 March 1927.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

problem in 1928.¹⁰¹ The Ordinance compelled the estate owners in the Chilwa basin to set aside 10% of their land for the settlement of the landless peasants.¹⁰² However, the estate owners protested against the requirement to set aside 10% of their land for the peasants arguing that the provision could only work better in larger estates than the individual farms they had.¹⁰³

Meanwhile, the state passed the Export Maize Ordinance in April 1926 to regulate the exportation of maize in the country. The state framed the ordinance out of the necessity to vigilantly control the exportation of maize in the face of rapid population increase. The ordinance read, 'If there is any surplus of maize well above the food requirement of the natives in any particular district which can be ascertained from the DC, the surplus can be purchased for export.'¹⁰⁴ The ordinance bestowed the Governor with powers to regulate the grades of maize, places of inspection, kinds of packages, local and export markets for maize, fees for inspection, moisture contents of maize, and persons to undertake the exportation of maize.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, just as the Liquor and Native Foodstuff Ordinances, the Maize Export Ordinance failed to tackle peasants' food security problem in the rural parts of the country like the Chilwa basin.

The debate about improving peasant agriculture was restarted in 1927 by the Director of Agriculture, who, ever since taking over from McCall, was less enthusiastic about the project. For the first time, the Director conceded in his annual report of 1927 that the food crop yields of the peasants in the rural areas were unsatisfactory despite the propaganda to

¹⁰¹ Baker, *Seeds of Trouble*, 56.

¹⁰² Nyasaland Protectorate, Natives of Private Estates Ordinance of 1928.

¹⁰³ MNA S1/565/29 Letter of Protest against the Native of Private estates Ordinance by Nyasaland Planters Association 1 May 1928.

¹⁰⁴ Nyasaland Protectorate, The Export Maize Ordinance of April 1926.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

encourage the peasants to adopt new food crops and expand the acreage of their food crop gardens. He attributed this failure to poor agricultural methods, which the peasants adopted.

He observed that,

The production of native food crops was on the whole satisfactory. There was no serious shortage of food in the villages, but the surplus available was not sufficient for sale in the more settled areas to meet the requirements of Europeans employers of labour, and it is to be regretted that 600 tonnes of maize had to be purchased outside the territory. A considerable amount of effort has been paid by district officers of the Department and the Native Tobacco Board to the important question of native food crops. Propaganda has mainly been on the lines of encouraging the planting of adequate sized gardens and of impressing upon natives the necessity for proper care of their gardens. Observation and experiments show clearly that low yields of maize and mapira (sorghum) obtained by many natives are in large measure due to indifferent methods of cultivation, such as inadequate preparation of land, too wide spacing and neglect of weeding at critical periods.¹⁰⁶

However, the Director was optimistic that, given state support and training in modern methods of agriculture, the peasants would manage to produce more food crops. He suggested the introduction of high cultivation standards, an improvement of local strains and the introduction of new varieties of crops to improve food production among the peasants in the country. Since the basin was prone to recurrent droughts, the Director encouraged its peasants to adopt drought resistant crops such as cassava and yams from Malaysia, *mapira* (sorghum) from Portuguese East Africa, rice from Tanzania and soya from the United States of America. However, like his predecessors, the Director expressed fears that the peasants, who all along had shown disdain to new crops, might not adopt these measures. He pointed out:

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

No crop has the advantage of cassava for growth in areas subject to drought, but native conservatism and tribal preferences for certain classes of diet prove serious obstacles in the way of inducing the natives to make more general uses of the crop.¹⁰⁷

The Director, however, refuted the idea of introducing alternative crops such as coffee, cocoa, rubber, sugar, rice and fruits. He was of the view that the long dry spells that were frequently experienced in most parts of the country like the basin militated against profitable cultivation of such crops. He further argued that the existence of a small European population and the absence of manufacturing and mining companies denied the peasants of local markets for massive production of fruits, maize, wheat, cattle, dairy products and poultry.

Consequently, the Director circulated to District Resident Officers a list of suggestions on how to improve peasants' agriculture and deal with famine in the rural parts of the country.¹⁰⁸ These measures included encouraging peasants to plant large food gardens, organising the peasants to hold village food reserves, improving methods of food cultivation, growing drought resisting food crops, and the promotion of economic production of food crops. However, the enforcement of these strategies in the Chilwa basin was not easy. On 24 November 1928, the Assistant Conservation Officer from Mulanje, R. G. Ross Townsend, complained about the peasants' apathy to adopting the strategies. He observed:

Another hindrance to the work of reforestation for the natives is their own apathy. They will say they are willing to do it and that is as far as they will go, unless there is someone to keep probing. A case in point is the following- Mr Antill and I visited a village which is in the famine area. The village is bare of any kind of trees so it was suggested they plant fruit trees to keep themselves in time of famine and for change of diet. The chiefs reply was 'white ants,' then he said the goats would eat the young

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ MNA S1/333/27 Scheme to Securing Reasonable Research on Native Food Stuffs- Letter of the Director of Agriculture to all District Resident Officers on Safeguarding Food Shortages, 9 January 1928. This was enclosed in the file dated 20 January 1929.

trees, and when these objections had been disposed of he asked where he could get seed, and was quite pained when we suggested that the people could easily pick up mango stones when they went to Chonde and the markets; also that Mr Antill would supply guava, peach and paw-paw seedlings from the nursery near his home. It does not seem to be realised what these difficulties have to be contended with but cases such as the above are daily occurrence and make one's work extremely difficult.¹⁰⁹

In response, the state resolved to use the food-for-work conservation public works to force the peasants to adopt the strategies. But the peasants vowed to rather die of famine than participate in these public works. The Resident Officer responsible for Famine Relief in Mulanje reported:

They (natives) implied that they would buy the stock, and have refrained from doing so because they feel confident that they will get it free, and I think it would be an extremely bad thinking if they are allowed to succeed...All these people have been without maize for some months – in the majority of cases since last April and May. In the hope of defeating the government, they have been subsisting principally on leaves and wild fruits, even buying maize elsewhere at higher prices, and still complain bitterly of their consequently debilitated state other than public works. Additional public works Department was not sanctioned until late in the year, and the natives now flatly refuse to turn out for work, and in some cases they have been actively discouraged by their headmen.¹¹⁰

Although the peasants from the Chilwa basin refused to work on public works to save time to work in their food crop gardens, the colonial officials continued to attribute this behaviour to apathy, improvidence and conservatism. In his report of March 1929, the Provincial Commissioner contended:

¹⁰⁹ MNA S1/828/28 Southern Province report 24 November 1928-Extract from a Resident Report by Assistant Conservation Officer, Mr Ross Townshend.

¹¹⁰ MNA S1/545/28 Southern Province Report 1928, Famine relief, Mulanje District Report of 8 January 1929.

The question of food shortages and conservation is not purely an agricultural one but it is felt that it is the logical outcome of improved cultivation and better gardens. The native is by nature improvident, living happily enough from day to day, putting nothing by for the bad times ahead. He is easy prey for food speculations and until he is helped, often against his will, to look after his supplies he will yearly spend his cotton money in buying back his own food. Once he realises that he can each year produce and keep enough food for himself and fairly for that year and can buy other things with his money, it is believed that he will turn to agriculture as a money-making business, that he will eventually settle down to be a more or less steady, sober and industrious citizen.¹¹¹

However, I argue here that colonial characterisation of African behaviour as lazy, improvident and conservative was a social construction meant to justify or validate state interventions into peasant economy. By blaming Africans for despoiling the ecology, the state wanted to create a strong case for claiming African land at the pretext of 'restoring' it to its pristine conditions. It was this understanding that accounted for African resistance to participate in conservation and public works programmes. With the prevailing ideological differences among colonial authorities regarding African agriculture, it became extremely difficult for the state to influence behavioural change among the peasants. Thus, by the time the economic depression occurred in 1929, colonial officials had not clearly agreed on how to improve the productivity of the peasants in the Chilwa basin. The depression, which affected the economic muscle of the officials, made it extremely difficult for them to implement the ideas. Official debates rather than practice continued to characterise the drive to improve peasant agriculture in the Chilwa basin.

¹¹¹ MNA S1/565/29 Annual Report for the Southern Province, 31 March 1929.

5. The Economic Depression, British Politics and Food Security, 1929-1939

The Great Depression (1929-1933) significantly influenced state interventions into peasants' food production and food security practices in the Chilwa basin. Although the depression concerned western economies, it also affected the peasants from the Chilwa basin whose economies were integrated intimately into the world economy.¹¹² But as Sharon Stitche noted, the depression caused massive unemployment, reductions of wages and a subsequent decline of living standards among the peasants.¹¹³ For instance, the depression led to the collapse of estates, which employed a large portion of the peasants in the Lake Chilwa basin. The collapse led to the dismissal of large numbers of labourers and tenants. Since the peasants relied exclusively on earnings from the estates, their dismissal brought them into unprecedented state of food insecurity.¹¹⁴ Most critically, the closure of the estates affected the food market of the non-estate peasants. Since the establishment of colonialism, Private estates and the tenants located in them were the largest buyers of peasant foodstuffs. Robin Palmer noted that the number of white farmers in Nyasaland, the majority of whom were from the Shire Highlands, dropped from 229 in 1928 to 82 in 1935.¹¹⁵ While the few that remained survived on sharecropping with the peasants, earnings from these arrangements were equally too low to sustain the subsistence of the peasants in the Chilwa basin.¹¹⁶

¹¹² For details about the extent to which the economic depression affected the economy of Nyasaland, see Baker, 'Depression and Development in Nyasaland,' 7-26. For Southern Rhodesia, see Phimister, *An Economic and Social History*.

¹¹³ S. Stitche, 'The Impact of the Depression on Workers Movements in East and Central Africa, 1930-1936,' *Review (Fernand Braudel Centre)*, 8, 1 (1984), 117-131.

¹¹⁴ MNA S1/43/33 Southern Province Report of 1933.

¹¹⁵ Palmer, 'White Farmers Before and After the Depression in Malawi,' 221-222.

¹¹⁶ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Agriculture Department Year Ending 31 March 1930.

The depression also caused friction between peasants and colonial authorities over price fluctuations. Zomba Boma, which enjoyed the privilege of a vibrant historical market, registered a price depression of over 25%.¹¹⁷ Similarly, Mulanje recorded a large harvest of maize and yet the state could not find a market for the peasants' maize. The District Resident Officer reported that, 'Unfortunately the natives have been left with large stocks of surplus maize on their lands. I have tried without success to market this for them either with Government Tender Board or the Chief Transport Officer.'¹¹⁸ Ironically, the state had pledged earlier in 1929 to buy crops at higher prices, a pledge that forced the peasants to exert a great deal of pressure on the Governor, through their District Commissioners, to either subsidise the sale of the produce or raise the prices. However, the Governor, who was equally short of cash, dismissed these calls. He responded thus:

I said I saw no justification for subsidising a particular district in favour of others. The fact would quickly become known and we should have no real grounds for refusing to extend the relief. I said, too, that in my opinion any subsidy is unsound. We cannot contend with economic forces and any industry must stand on its own merits if it is to prosper.¹¹⁹

Regarding raising prices, the Governor later argued that,

The price, which is paid each year, is not settled by the government. It depends on whether a commodity is plentiful or scarce. You know that when there is famine, the price of food is high but when the crops are good, the price is low. The government has not deceived you in this matter. Think of ants when they start to build an anthill. Perhaps a cow walks on it and it breaks down. They do not give up in despair. And so

¹¹⁷ MNA NSZ 4/1/3 Zomba Annual District Report for 1932.

¹¹⁸ MNA S1/543/30 Mulanje DC Report, Agriculture and Marketing Conditions, 1929 – 1933.

¹¹⁹ MNA S1/956/30 Governor Letter to DC of Zomba, 1930.

I want you to go on steadily with your work We cannot contend with economic forces and any industry must stand on its own merits if it is to prosper.¹²⁰

The situation elicited competing reactions from the government and local traders. The state remained dismissive of bailing out the peasants, while local buyers came in to rescue the peasants in the Chilwa basin. The local traders were of the view that the depression was temporary and so they bought the peasants' foodstuffs at normal rates and hoarded the maize for future sale. This was worrisome for the DC for Mulanje. He pointed out in his report to the Food Committee on 8 January 1932 that:

Owing to the deflated prices for all agricultural produce, the past season has proved an extremely poor and unremunerative one in all commodities. But there has crept in a class of native middlemen in the past few years dealing principally with the buying and selling of maize. These natives have somewhat naturally not grasped the signification of market fluctuation, nor do they realise fully the question of transport rates. This has resulted in some cases of their being left with large stocks of maize on hand, which they neither are unable to sell at all or have sold at a figure, which has swallowed the profit.¹²¹

Despite the adversities caused, the economic depression was a 'blessing in disguise' in as far as food security in the Chilwa basin was concerned. The collapse of the white farmers also created space for the peasants to access both the market and land for production. Since its onset, the state shifted its interest from the settler farmers to the peasants.¹²² The state took over the abandoned estates for redistribution to landless peasants.¹²³ With few settler farmers in the basin, the state invigorated its drive towards improving peasant agriculture to empower them as an alternative to the settler farmers. The Colonial Development (CD) Act of 1929,

¹²⁰ MNA S1/956/30 Governor Letter for All District Officers, 1932.

¹²¹ MNA S1/159/38 Mulanje DC Report to the Food Committee – Correspondences.

¹²² Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Agriculture Department Year Ending 31 March 1930.

¹²³ Ibid.

which Britain passed, made funding available for agricultural development in the country. Through this Act, Britain pledged to give the country £1 million to annually finance colonial projects including peasant agriculture.¹²⁴ The Labour Party, which rose to power in 1929, was a firm believer of Fabian Socialism and wanted to allow indigenous communities in the colonies to take a lead in the development of their territories.¹²⁵ Soon after its rise to power, the Party sent Charles Bowring to investigate the performance of settlers and peasants in East and Southern Africa.¹²⁶ When he visited the country, Bowring observed that ‘the prosperity of the protectorate depends on the development of its tropical agricultural resources, partly a limited number of European planters, but principally by the natives themselves with European instructors.’¹²⁷ The state used some of this funding to undertake agricultural projects among the peasants of the Lake Chilwa basin.

However, the colonial authorities in Nyasaland were not enthusiastic about the improvement of peasant agriculture at this point. For instance, the Director of Agriculture, Small, sarcastically argued in 1931 that, ‘the native systems can and must be improved, but they are worthy of study which still show how best they can develop along their own lines and in accordance with their principles.’¹²⁸ The Governor, Thomas Shanton Thomas, also shared similar sentiments. Erik Green notes that it was only after excessive pressure from the Colonial Office that the state began to create structures that supported peasant agriculture in most rural parts of the country.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Green, ‘A Lasting Story,’ 254.

¹²⁵ See P. Keleman, ‘Planning for Africa: The British Labour Party’s Colonial Development Policy, 1920 – 1964,’ *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 7, 1(2007), 76-98.

¹²⁶ Green, ‘A Lasting Story,’ 255.

¹²⁷ MNA, Ormsby-Gore Commission, Report on East African Commission, 1929.

¹²⁸ NA CO 525/141/34072, Memorandum on Agriculture Development Scheme Prepared by the Director of Agriculture, Enclosed in a Dispatch from the Governor to Secretary of State, 21 July 1931. This was also quoted by Green, ‘A Lasting Story,’ 256.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

The earliest structure that the state formed was the Board of Agriculture. The Board was formed in December 1931 to guide, through the committees of Alternative Crops and Native Agriculture, agricultural developments in the country.¹³⁰ The Alternative Committee considered maize, edible beans, groundnuts, soya beans, coffee and citrus fruits produced from the Chilwa basin as alternative export crops to cotton and tobacco that was at the brink of collapse after the economic depression. In addition, the Native Agriculture Committee gave priority to ‘the destruction of forests and natural vegetation on steep slopes, the lack of measures in native systems of agriculture for retaining and maintaining fertility, the uneconomic use of land in the growing of certain crops such as finger millet, overcrowding due to immigration, and the control of bush burning.’¹³¹ Later on, the Native Welfare Committee in 1935 was formed and it aimed at ‘Native betterment through the attainment of increased material prosperity and comfort.’¹³²

The state also began to include nutrition in its food security interventions in the basin. Despite the fact that concerns about peasants’ diet and nutrition began to attract its attention after the 1926 census, it was only from 1936 that the state included nutrition into its policy and interventions. In doing this, the colonial authorities were also responding to global concerns about nutrition and health. The Health Department of the League of Nations in 1935, for instance, released a report of its survey on ‘Nutrition and Health,’ which showed the existence of hunger and malnutrition as major threats to most countries’ development.¹³³ Thus, the League urged nations to consider nutrition in their food security interventions. As a result, the Director of Agriculture pointed out in 1936 that, ‘It has been a matter of concern for many years that the diet of the native cultivators is very unbalanced. Far too much

¹³⁰ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Agriculture Department for the Year Ending 31 March 1932.

¹³¹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Agriculture Department for the Year Ending 31 March 1933.

¹³² Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Agriculture Department for the Year Ending 31 March 1935.

¹³³ For details, see for example, League of Nations, Nutrition and Health Report, Geneva, 1935. Also mentioned in J. Shaw, *World Food Security: A History Since 1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

reliance has been placed upon maize as the staple food. There is distinct lack of proteins, fats and certain vitamins in the food of the average native which are not conducive for various deficiency diseases.’¹³⁴ In view of this, the state was determined to encourage the expansion of production of groundnuts and soya beans and activities such as fishing and livestock farming to deal with problems of malnutrition in the Chilwa basin.

The years 1937 and 1938 witnessed the establishment of two other initiatives by the colonial authorities that had a greater significance on the peasants’ food security in the Chilwa basin. The first of these was the Agronomic Sub-Committee which was formed by the Native Welfare Committee in 1937 to facilitate a ‘better utilisation of agricultural lands, utilisation of poorer classes of soils, protection of hill slopes, wind breaks, alleviation of population contestations, evils of overstocking, and settlement of immigrants.’¹³⁵ By prioritising soil conservation, the state was also responding to the growing scientific concerns subsequent to the American Dust Bowl (1935-38) events, which, because of uncontrolled intensive cultivation, led to heavy erosion of the soil in America.¹³⁶ Since the state attributed the growth of soil erosion to the peasants, it set its interventions not so much as a strategy to improve the peasants’ welfare but as a means to curb the erosion of soil which appeared to threaten settler agriculture. Thus, the state framed its interventions into peasants’ agriculture in ways that would cripple practices, such as shifting cultivation, streambank cultivation, hill slope cultivation as well as animal stocking, which facilitated food production among the peasants.¹³⁷ To fast track soil conservation, the colonial authorities appointed Paul Tophan as

¹³⁴ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Agriculture Department for the Year Ending 31 March 1936.

¹³⁵ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Agriculture Department for the Year Ending 31 March 1937.

¹³⁶ The Dust Bowl, an extreme event of soil erosion that took place in North America between 1930 and 1936 because of over cultivation, motivated a global campaign against over cultivation to avoid the repeat of the American experience elsewhere. For details about the Dust Bowl see D. Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (Oxford: OUP, 1979); also Anderson, ‘Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography and Drought,’ 321-343.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

the first Soil Erosion Officer in 1937. Tophan finalised the formulation of a soil conservation policy in 1938, and then encouraged Resident Officers to start implementing the policy with speed.¹³⁸ However, the policy was not implemented until after the outbreak of World War II.

Later in 1938, the state enacted the Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance to regulate the marketing of peasants' foodstuffs in the Chilwa basin. The state enacted the ordinance in order 'to assure the natives of the best price that the market and huddling cost will allow to encourage them to produce for sale.'¹³⁹ Besides, the state wanted to control,

The sale and purchase of native produce in order to obtain better prices for the natives by means of more organised marketing and reducing the risk of food shortages which now not infrequently occurs as a result of rash selling by the natives soon after harvest. The Ordinance provides that the purchase of native produce grown in the Trust land may be controlled and regulated in any area the Governor may prescribe and for any specified crops. Purchases may only be made under licence and the Governor may make rules regarding the use of markets and market building, prescribe the grade or quality of any specified native produce, which may or may not be sold etc.¹⁴⁰

Nevertheless, like the Soil Conservation Policy, this ordinance was not implemented until the early 1940s.

6. Peasants' Perceptions, Agricultural Problems and Food Insecurity

While colonial officials were preoccupied with this debate, the peasants from the Lake Chilwa basin had different views regarding the improvement of their practices. For them, their cultivation methods were sufficiently responsive to the demographic and ecological

¹³⁸ MNA A3/2/227 Soil Erosion Prevention 1930 -1938.

¹³⁹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Agriculture Department for the Year Ending 31 March 1938.

¹⁴⁰ Nyasaland Protectorate, Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance, No 4 of 1938.

changes of the time. Wetu Mdala, an elderly woman in the basin aged 98, argued that ‘the peasants were able, in the precolonial times, to produce sufficient foodstuffs using the means, which the state criticised as ecologically destructive.’¹⁴¹ Food shortages in the Lake Chilwa basin were at the time a net output of land alienation as well as the restrictions of peasants’ production through market regulations rather than their farming methods.¹⁴² In fact, chiefs kept on reminding the state of the problem of land alienation as the cause for food insecurity in the Chilwa basin. The Provincial Commissioner for the South reported:

The alienation of land to Europeans is almost the only question, which is regularly brought forward by the headmen at every meeting. They have been told over and over again that Government has taken steps to protect their land but they will not credit this until the formation of the Native Trust Land Areas is an accomplished fact, and one cannot blame them as they see land being alienated to Europeans, except small plots under yearly Tenancy Agreement, have been in areas set aside provisionally as native Trust Land Areas. It is, I think, urgent that the proposed legislation should be enacted without further delay.¹⁴³

Similarly, peasants resented the prescriptions of curbing soil erosion and food shortages that were suggested by the colonial authorities in the Chilwa basin. Mostly, the ideas condemned the practices that the peasants had used over the years to produce food crops. These practices included streambank cultivation, shifting cultivation, hunting, fishing, and zero tillage.¹⁴⁴ The peasants discounted the idea of ridge making which they perceived would cause a long-term destruction to the natural fertility of the soils.¹⁴⁵ In addition, ridge making, terracing and contour ridging did not augur well with peasants’ beliefs in M’bona, who had powers over rainfall and the fertility of the land. As in the Lower Shire, the peasants felt that these

¹⁴¹ Interview: Wetu Mdala, Manyenga Village, T/A Kumtumanje, Zomba, 17 December 2003. In saying this, she was recalling what her parents used to tell her before they died in the 1930s.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ MNA S1/543/28 Southern Province Report, 31 December 1927.

¹⁴⁴ Nyasaland Protectorate, Soil Conservation Policy, 1938.

¹⁴⁵ Mulwafu, *Conservation Songs*, 95.

practices would disturb the movements of M'bona, who they believed move in the form of a python, in the basin.¹⁴⁶ In some respect, the peasants also considered recurrences of drought as well as locusts as indications of M'bona's displeasure with the colonial incursions taking place in the basin. Unlike in the precolonial period, invasions of locusts had become annual events along the shores of Lake Chilwa throughout this period.¹⁴⁷ For them, this was a visible manifestation of M'bona's unhappiness. Thus, peasants tapped into their cultural repertoires in order to come to terms with colonisation, recurring droughts and locust invasions.

However, as in most parts of Africa, state interventions did not affect the African peasantry uniformly.¹⁴⁸ The interventions accentuated the differentiations, which started to appear during the first decade of colonialism. As in Southern Rhodesia, the increasing commodification of the rural economy was a critical factor.¹⁴⁹ In the Chilwa basin, those who continued to depend exclusively on subsistence farming grappled most with the impact of colonialism. While the peasants in the lower part of the Chilwa basin, where minimal or no alienation took place, took advantage of the urban growth to produce surplus for sale, those from the upper areas suffered a great deal of poverty. Fishermen too, enjoyed the economic opportunities created by colonialism in the basin as the state encouraged the development of an African fishing industry owing the high demand for the product. Colonial officials were even advised against state-controlled fishing in the mid-1930s. For instance, Cuthbert Christie, the British Museum Expatriate visited the territory in 1925 and observed that, 'No interference, official or otherwise, could be of any benefit to the native, who makes his own string, his nets and canoes and his basket traps... (and who) puts out his nets when the lake

¹⁴⁶For details of M'bona's movements in the Lower Shire Valley, see also Mandala, *Work and Control*.

¹⁴⁷ See also MNA A3/2/4 Locusts, and Destruction of Locust Ordinance No. 30 of 1932.

¹⁴⁸ For details, see Cliffe, 'Rural Class Formation in East Africa,' 195-224.

¹⁴⁹ For details, see, Phimister 'Commodity Relations and Class Formation,' 239-57; Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe*; Nyambara, 'Colonial Policy and Peasant Cotton Agriculture in Southern Rhodesia, 1904-1953,' 81-111.

allows him to do so.’¹⁵⁰ According to Sabstoni Gomani Mapiri, one of the progressive farmers who started farming in the colonial period, the most outstanding farmers in the Chilwa basin during the interwar period were Fiddes Mbungulo and Joni Sakwedwa.¹⁵¹ The two managed to construct iron-roofed houses, and owned a great deal of cattle and ploughs. They were initially involved in fishing and used the wealth accumulated from fishing to expand into agricultural production. While others resisted the ideas of improving peasant agriculture, these farmers accepted them.

Furthermore, the peasants close to the urban places who oscillated between work in estates and farming were also able to complement their meagre wages with food production. These peasants had the advantage of using wages to purchase foodstuffs for survival in times of drought, unlike those who survived exclusively on subsistence farming.¹⁵² Some women also took advantage of the opportunities that colonialism created to accumulate wealth. These women expanded to beer selling which became a lucrative business in the urban areas.¹⁵³

However, the electoral loss of Labour Party and the outbreak of World War II in September 1939 made it extremely difficult for the state to implement the transformative policies it proposed in the Chilwa basin. The Conservative Party that took over from the Labour Party was more capitalistic in its policies and, thus gave priority to the exploitation of peasants for the expansion of plantation farming.¹⁵⁴ The state also directed its resources

¹⁵⁰ MNA S1/1470/25 Dr. Cuthbert Christie, British Museum Nyasa Expedition to Chief Secretary, Zomba, 10 November 1925.

¹⁵¹ Interview: Sabstoni Gomani Mapiri, Mkungwi Village, TA Mwambo, Zomba, 9 December 2017.

¹⁵² Chanock, ‘The Political Economy of Independent Agriculture,’ 114.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ For details about the policies of the labour Party and Conservative Party, see Hodge, ‘Development and the twentieth Century Colonialism in Africa,’ 1-100.

towards the sustenance of the war with the Germans.¹⁵⁵ From then on, the colonial interest centred largely on having more peasants to participate in the war.

7. Conclusion

This chapter discussed the extent to which the establishment of the Agricultural Department in 1908 influenced agricultural development and state interventions in the Chilwa basin up to 1939. The general observation is that, despite its significance in spearheading agricultural development, the Department was less effective in discharging its functions during this period, and that it had varied impacts on the Chilwa basin peasants. For instance, until 1911, the Department confined its interventions to distribution of what it regarded as high yielding food crops and that of propaganda to encourage peasants to expand food production rather than improving the productive capacity of the peasants. This was largely due to funding and staffing problems as well as the holding of prejudiced perceptions of the economic significance of peasant food production. However, even after 1911 when the Department began to be concerned with the agricultural productivity of the peasants, its interventions were, until 1919, limited to the regulation of the production, consumption and marketing of food crops. In addition, although the interwar period saw increased state interest seeking to decisively improve peasant food production, the rise of conflicting opinions among colonial officials limited the effective implementation of the idea. The state was also heavily indebted after the railway construction projects to finance any project that would improve peasant agriculture in Nyasaland. This was compounded by the state's tendency to blame poor peasants for all the agricultural problems the country faced. For, while the state considered the peasants as 'the producer of the future,' it also perceived them as inherently lazy and

¹⁵⁵ MNA NSZ 4/1/5 Annual Report, Zomba 1940.

conservative. This perception affected the acceptability of its policies among the peasants who considered the prevailing food insecurity as a function of colonial exploitative policies on land, labour and food marketing. Therefore, most peasants failed, throughout the period under study, to appreciate the significance of improving their practices, which over the years had helped them maintain food security.

However, the manner in which peasants from the Chilwa basin reacted to these developments varied with class, gender and geographical location. While the majority expressed reservations, there was an emergence of migrants, fish sellers and middlemen in the food trade who took advantage of the ensuing developments to make economic fortunes. Some women took advantage of the growing urbanisation to expand on alcohol brewing and selling to acquire an extra source of income to their agricultural production. Unlike those in the upper regions, peasants down the basin, where minimal or no land alienation took place, continued to take advantage of the urban growth and thus produced food surplus for sale. Similarly, in the upper regions, the peasants who oscillated between wage employment and farming were able to complement their incomes to expand the food production.

The above challenges meant that, by the time the Second World War broke out in 1939, the Agricultural Department had confined the idea of improving peasant agriculture to official debates in which colonial officials polarised into those who supported the idea and those who opposed it. In the late 1930s, the state only managed to restructure the apparatus of the Agricultural Department as well as formulate policies related to agriculture marketing, conservation and nutrition in its interventions. Thus, no decisive measures were taken to practically improve the peasants' capacity to produce more foodstuffs in the Lake Chilwa basin.

Chapter Four

Grow More Food Campaign: World War II and Food Production in Malawi, 1939-1948

1. Introduction

The outbreak of World War II in 1939 altered colonial thinking about food production. Prior to the war, the state attached primacy to cash crops rather than food production. However, the outbreak of the war created a serious need for foodstuffs to feed soldiers, support staff and the numerous refugees who were displaced by the war. The state relied on the peasants who used low-level agricultural technology for food supplies and as such had to take drastic measures to improve their productive capacity to meet the growing food demands of the time. Thus, from the outbreak of the war, the state undertook transformational interventions in peasants' food production in the Chilwa basin.

Although World War II marked the genesis of increased state intervention into the African peasantry, there is limited historical knowledge about how the state implemented these interventions in the production of foodstuffs in rural Nyasaland. Megan Vaughan analysed the extent to which international, national and local factors interacted to reproduce patterns of food supply in colonial Nyasaland in the 1940s but made little effort to demonstrate how these factors shaped food production practices.¹ In addition, Elias Mandala's study, which linked the post-war development policies with food security, focused

¹ M. Vaughan, 'The Politics of Food Supply: Colonial Malawi in the 1940s,' *Malawi: An Alternative Pattern of Developments- Seminar Proceedings* (Edinburgh: Centre for African Studies, 1985), 69-90.

on the problems of famine and cycles of hunger.² Like Vaughan, Mandala made little effort to demonstrate how colonial policies shaped food practices in the Chilwa basin. Similarly, the work of William Beinart, Wapulumuka Mulwafu and Erick Green focused on colonial conservation policy and not food production in their analysis of state-peasant-ecological relations.³ Thus, other than a note on its effects on labour supply, there has been minimal scholarly effort that examines the link between the agricultural changes during the period and the outbreak of World War II and its aftermath.⁴

Studies done elsewhere, however, suggest that the outbreak of World War II disrupted the agricultural economies of African territories. The military coercively appropriated peasants' foodstuffs and their agricultural labour.⁵ This, according to Tiyambe Zeleza, produced food shortages and 'spiralling inflation,' which partly created fertile ground for the growth of nationalism during the wartime and post-war period.⁶ The promise of a better economic rewards compelled states to direct funds meant to spearhead British economic recovery during the post-war era towards the production of cash crops.⁷ But as Vaughan noted, we need to understand the growth of food shortages during the wartime and post-war period within the broader context of ecological, economic and political changes of the times.⁸

² For details about Mandala's work on food production, see Mandala, *End of Chidyerano*.

³ For details, see Beinart, 'Soil Erosion, Conservation and Ideas of Development'; Beinart, 'Agricultural Planning and the Late Colonial Technical Imagination'; Mulwafu, *Conservation Song*; Green, 'A Lasting Story.'

⁴ McCracken, *A History of Malawi* and Daimon, "'Mabhurandaya'" explore the the effects of World War 1 & 2 on development in Malawi, but these studies do not offer a detailed study about the effects of both wars on the food security of the peasants in Malawi.

⁵ See Zeleza, 'The Political Economy of British Colonial Development,' 139-161; D. Johnston, 'Settler Farmers and Coerced African Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1939-46,' *Journal of African History*, 33, 1 (1992), 111-128; D. Johnston, *World War II and the Scramble for Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1939-1948*, (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 2000); N. Samasuwo, 'Food Production and War Supplies: Rhodesia's Beef Industry during the Second World War, 1939-1945,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, 2 (2003), 487 -502; A. Tembo, 'Coerced African Labour for Food Production in Zambia (Zambia) during the Second World War, 1942-1945,' *South African Historical Journal*, 68 (2016), 50-69.

⁶ Zeleza, 'The Political Economy of British Colonial Development and Welfare in Africa,' 140.

⁷ See also F. Cooper, 'Reconstructing Empire in British and French Africa,' *Past and Present*, 6 (2011), 196-210; Hodge, Holdl and Kopf (eds.), *Concepts and Practices*, 80.

⁸ For details, see Vaughan, 'The Politics of Food Supply.'

Expanding on Vaughan's thesis that international, national and local 'factors interacted to produce patterns of food supply,' this chapter examines how World War II shaped state interventions into peasant food production in Nyasaland in general and the Lake Chilwa basin in particular. It argues that, while World War II caused food shortages through the dislocation of labour and foodstuffs, it also altered the production of surplus foodstuffs in the Chilwa basin. Faced by food crisis, Britain availed financial and human resources to expand crop production in its colonies through the Colonial Development and Welfare (CD&W) Act of 1940.⁹ The colonial authorities, who were embattled with financial shortfalls, relied on these resources to undertake their agricultural activities. The chapter, however, argues that raising revenue to offset financial deficits, while at the same time expanding food production to address the prevailing world food crisis, undermined the success of British post-war development policy. The state also battled with peasants' incessant resistance to conservation that accompanied the food production projects. The chapter maintains, therefore, that Britain's shifting of priority from food to cash crops and to a wartime quest for the expansion of food production during the period of the Second World War was a mere 'marriage of convenience' adopted only to save Britain from the food crisis created by the war rather than improving peasant agriculture.

The chapter develops this argument in five sections. The first section demonstrates how World War II shaped the quest for the expansion of food production between 1939 and 1941. The section argues that World War II created the need for colonial foodstuffs and altered thoughts about state intervention into peasants' food production in the colonies. The second section demonstrates how the state bore and planned projects to expand food

⁹ This was amended in 1945.

production between 1939 and 1940. The third section examines the historical growth of food production and supply interventions and the challenges encountered during this wartime drive. The last two sections explore how the end of World War II and the rise of the Labour Party in 1945 invigorated state interventions into peasant agriculture in Nyasaland before the historical drought and famine of 1948/9. The sections demonstrate how attempts to generate revenue for post-war economic recovery undermined British quest to expand food production in its colonies and the varied responses of the peasants to these interventions.

2. World War II and the Quest for Expanded Food Production

The outbreak of World War II in 1939 increased colonial interests in foodstuffs from Nyasaland in general and the Lake Chilwa basin in particular. Drawing from its food production history, the colonial office was quick to single out Nyasaland as one of the countries that would best supply foodstuffs to the military. Unlike Southern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia, the country had no mineral resources, and thus, its revenue base was the supply of labour and agricultural raw materials.¹⁰ Prior to the outbreak of the war, Nyasaland had sustained an agreement to supply rice, peas and groundnuts to Southern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia.¹¹ Hence, the state wanted to expand on this gesture during the war. In addition, the state felt, as a British colony, that it was morally obliged to supply troops and foodstuffs in support of the British war efforts against Germany.¹² Britain formed a Committee of Ammunition and Food Supplies in 1939, which was tasked with coordinating the supply of beef, maize, and sugar from the colonies as their contribution to its war

¹⁰ McCracken, *The History of Malawi*, 83-7.

¹¹ MNA FS2/10/1-2, Supplies to Southern Rhodesia and Zambia.

¹² MNA S1/100/39, United Kingdom Food Control Plans in the Event of War, 12 March 1939.

efforts.¹³ Thus, the colonial state of Nyasaland supplied food grains as part of its response to this call for support.

However, as in many other British colonies, Nyasaland's production capacity was extremely fragile and the country struggled to meet both the local food requirements and the huge food demands of the military.¹⁴ The peasants from the Chilwa basin, whom the state trusted for the production of foodstuffs, depended on traditional agricultural technologies in producing foodstuffs. Their production was at a small-scale and they could not meet the growing world demands for foodstuffs.¹⁵ The drought of 1940/1 also affected the productive capacity of the peasants to meet the food demands of the military.¹⁶ Thus, the peasants needed external expertise and human resources if they were to effectively supply foodstuffs to the military. Drawing from the prevailing colonial narratives about the collapse of peasant agriculture, the state decided to execute its food production interventions together with conservation programmes.¹⁷ Thus, the implementation of the soil conservation policy, which, had been on the drawing board since its formulation in 1938, found a strong imperative.

Drawing from these colonial ecological and economic limitations, Britain passed the Colonial Development and Welfare Act in 1940, which replaced the Colonial Development Act of 1929.¹⁸ Through this Act, Britain shifted its colonial policy from 'trusteeship' to 'welfare development.' The Act empowered the Colonial Office to directly coordinate development projects in the British colonies. By adopting welfare colonialism, Britain was also responding to extensive criticisms against its exploitative colonialism, which the

¹³ MNA S11/13/1-3 Post-War Developments, United Kingdom Food Control Plans in the Event of War, 12 March 1939.

¹⁴ Kettlewell, 'Agricultural Change in Nyasaland,' 237.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ MNA NSZ 4/1/5 Zomba District Reports 1940-1947 – 1940/1 Report.

¹⁷ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1941.

¹⁸ United Kingdom, Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940.

International Labour Organisation (ILO) and nationalists from the West Indies and India, levelled against Britain.¹⁹ To this effect, the new Act increased the annual working capital for colonial development projects from £1 million to £5 million.²⁰ Agriculture, which formed the basis of most colonial economies, became the major target for the funding.²¹ By funding colonial agriculture, Britain wanted to expand peasants' food production that would supply foodstuffs in support of its war efforts. Britain also formed a Post-War Problems Committee in 1941 to facilitate welfare development projects in its colonies.²² It was in this context that the state in Nyasaland embarked on various projects to expand food production in the Lake Chilwa basin during the wartime.

3. The Beginnings of Expanded Food Production, 1939-1940

The state's engagement of peasants from the Lake Chilwa basin to contribute towards the British war effort started immediately after the war broke out in September 1939. The colonial authorities from Nyasaland recruited military troops and felt compelled to complement the recruitment with the supply of food.²³ The thousands of recruited Nyasaland military troops who were destined to work in war zones abroad would be encamped at Zomba barracks for training before being dispatched, and therefore, needed food for their sustenance.²⁴ Anusa Daimon argued that the Kings African Rifles (KAR) enlisted most Nyasaland men in the units of South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Tanzania to fight in the East Africa campaign against the Germans.²⁵ In addition, a large

¹⁹ Hodge, Hodl and Kopf, (eds.), *Developing Africa*, 40.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Keleman, 'Planning for Africa,' 81.

²² Mulwafu, *Conservation Song*, 88.

²³ MNA S11/1/13/1-3 Post-War Development.

²⁴ T. J. Lovering, 'Authority and Identity: Malawian Soldiers in Britain's Colonial Army, 1891-1964,' PhD Thesis, University of Sterling, London, 2002.

²⁵ Daimon, '*Mabhurandaya*,' 82.

contingent of civilians was also employed as support staff at the recruitment centres, family remittance offices and refugee camps within the country. The state established recruitment centres at Zomba Boma, Mulanje Boma, Thondwe, Mlomba, Nyambi and Phalombe in the Lake Chilwa basin.²⁶ It also located remittance offices at Skenner Garage in Zomba where it employed over 4 100 civilians as military support staff and labourers.²⁷ The huge number of military and civilian recruitments increased demands for the foodstuffs produced by the peasants in the Chilwa basin.

Until the early 1940s, the state relied on the appropriation of foodstuffs from the existing traditional markets in the basin.²⁸ The state ordered chiefs, through the Native Authority Ordinance, to compel their subjects to join the military and supply foodstuffs for the military.²⁹ The state also created tax incentives to facilitate this. It exempted those who joined the army from paying taxes and forced those remaining to pay taxes that it deliberately inflated from two to eight shillings.³⁰ In addition to inducing the peasants to join the military, the state hiked the taxes to force the peasants to expand the production of foodstuffs for sale to raise money with which to pay the taxes.³¹ For the first time, the state allowed the peasants to pay taxes in the form of foodstuffs such as maize, cassava, rice and potatoes.³²

After the CD&W Act of 1940, the state began to be more organised in the procurement of troops and foodstuffs for the military.³³ The Act provided the state with a rare

²⁶ MNA NSZ 4/1/5 Zomba District Reports 1940-1947 – 1941/2 Report.

²⁷ Ibid, 1944/45 Report.

²⁸ MNA NSZ 4/1/4 Zomba District Reports 1939/40.

²⁹ MNA NSZ 4/1/5 Zomba District Reports 1940-1947 – 1940/1 Report.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1940.

opportunity to undertake and finance its food projects in the country.³⁴ The enactment of the CD&W Act was followed by the Nyasaland colonial authorities' signing a contract with the British Ministry of Food whereby Britain pledged to finance Nyasaland's endeavours to supply troops and foodstuffs.³⁵ Conversely, Nyasaland was bound to give priority to the supply of foodstuffs to the military over Southern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia. As a result, Nyasaland embarked on various projects that expanded the production and supply of foodstuffs to the military.

After signing the agreement with the colonial office, the Nyasaland Governor, Sir Donald Mackenzie-Kennedy, called upon the Director of Agriculture to submit project proposals for funding through the CD&W fund.³⁶ Within three months, Provincial Commissioners and Agricultural Officers submitted project proposals to the Director of Agriculture. The proposal made by the Provincial Agricultural Officer of the Southern Province, which was prepared on 20 March 1940, became the model proposal. This proposal clearly highlighted the projects that the state would undertake in the Chilwa basin during the wartime and the time that followed. Provincial Agricultural Officer's proposal underscored, in its preamble, the significance of the fund to colonial undertakings. He remarked that:

It is hoped that the fund will be used to make it possible for every Native in Nyasaland to make a living from the land, to find health and happiness in his own home and in his own village. There is a small but increasing number of intelligent educated Africans ready and eager to learn, able to put into practice what they see and hear, but the majority are still ignorant, still badly nourished, still full of disease, still unable or unwilling to learn much or to put into practice the little they learn. We all know what

³⁴ MNA NSZ 4/1/5 Zomba District Reports 1940-1947 – 1940/1Report.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

we want to teach them to do. So far, we have been unable to do more than reach a few; the fund gives us the opportunity to reach them all.³⁷

The preamble was followed by a shop-list of suggested projects that the state would prioritise in the Lake Chilwa basin and the country as a whole. For him, the state had to give priority to training of local supervisors and *capitaos* as opposed to hiring of European supervisors from Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. He argued that, ‘The recruitment of Supervisors from Southern Rhodesia and the Union would be an extremely unwise procedure. Complete sympathy between Native and European Supervisors is essential for any development scheme and recruits from places in which Native Policy is so different from that of Nyasaland would never be satisfactory.’³⁸ He maintained that where it became inevitable, the state should engage a small number of European supervisors as liaison officers between the Africans and the local instructors on matters of hygiene, livestock and pasture husbandry, forestry, and every aspect of African life. The Officer gave currency to the production of nutritious foodstuffs in the reproduction of energetic producers and military personnel. He also highlighted the significance of food production over conservation. He contended:

It is of little use persuading Natives to contour ridge their land and make compost manure if their bodies are under nourished, their maize is parasitized by weeds and their groundnuts are dying with rosette. A badly nourished Native cannot look after his garden properly; such a garden suffers from erosion and quickly becomes exhausted; an exhausted eroded garden cannot supply food and the owner is badly fed and undernourished. Everything must be tackled at once and the preliminary work should begin now.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

The Agriculture Officer considered avoidance of coercion as paramount to the sustainability of the proposed agricultural projects as noted in his argument: 'I do not suggest any legislation or coercion at any rate for the first year or so. It may be necessary later when a community has accepted better ways and a few lazy people obstruct improvement but improvement to be permanent must be voluntary. Reforms that are forced upon a people tend to disappear once force is removed.'⁴⁰ He further argued that it would be counter-productive and unfair, in the context of the prevailing war and growing anti-colonial feelings, to force the Africans, whose participation in the war was crucial, into policy compliance.⁴¹ This would not only discourage Africans from enlisting into the military but also force them to withdraw the supply of their foodstuffs to the military.

Drawing from the ideas of the Provincial Officer, the Director of Agriculture adopted the expansion of food production in his agricultural policy. In his report of 1940, the Director stated:

The changing phase in the agricultural economy created by the war called for continued review of the agricultural policy. The declared policy of Government in connection with the general agricultural development of the Protectorate was ultimately defined in Circular No. 17 issued on the 25th October. The first duty was to produce an abundant and cheap supply of all nutritious foods to ensure that the requirements of both the military and civil population should be fully met, and to improve the general health of the native populations to increase their productive capacity and make more and more fit men available for continued effort in all direction. The second task was to maintain or increase the production of our economic crops in order to provide essential supplies for the UK and their Empire colonies. In giving effect to these measures the necessity for preserving and maintaining the fertility of the soil was kept in the forefront and our energies were directed to achieve the objectives, not by any increase in acreage or an increase in manpower employed,

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ J. Hodge, 'Development and Twentieth-Century Colonialism in Africa,' 41.

but by improved cultural methods, which necessitate an increased effort on the part on all individuals.⁴²

Since then, and until mid-1948, the views of this Provincial Agricultural Officer guided agricultural policies and interventions that the state undertook through the 1940 CD&W fund. For the first time, the state sought to expand the production of foodstuffs. The urgent military needs meant that the production of cash crops was for the first time considered secondary. The state embedded the idea of producing nutritious foodstuffs in its policy in order to meet the need for energetic and healthy military personnel. Although the Provincial Officer downplayed conservation, the Agriculture Department also planned to encourage food crop production in ways that would not expand acreage and labour nor adversely affect soil fertility in the Chilwa basin. The projects were centred on the intensification of food marketing and production as well as conservation of natural resources. While the state used the first two broad initiatives to address the immediate supply of foodstuffs, it deemed the latter as an essential variable to ensure long-term sustainability of food production in the Chilwa basin.

4. War-Time Food Production and Supply Initiatives, 1940-1945

The earliest state initiatives that were made in the Chilwa basin to increase production and meet the military needs centred on the free supply of improved varieties of nutritious crop seeds to peasants. The basin was experiencing a drought and as result, it was of necessity for the state to distribute seeds of drought resistant crops such as potatoes, millet and cassava.⁴³ To this effect, the state distributed over 141 tonnes of free issues of sweet potatoes in the

⁴² MNA Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Agriculture Department in the Year Ending 31 March 1940.

⁴³ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1941.

Lower River and the Chilwa basin in 1941.⁴⁴ Later on, the state distributed seeds for other crops including rice, millet, groundnuts, wheat, and pigeon peas, to the peasants throughout the country.⁴⁵ The state prepared and issued large numbers of budded orange, lemon and grape fruit trees to peasants through the Mulanje Experimental Station located to the southeast part of the Chilwa basin. It distributed vegetable seeds, mainly lettuce, spinach, tomatoes and peas. The state also started a scheme for the multiplication and distribution of European potato seeds obtainable from Mozambique through Dedza. The state planted seeds of a sweet potato variety known as ‘Up-to-Date’ imported from South Africa in five small seed increasing plots at Namwera, Chirimba, Mulanje and Kuntaja in 1941.⁴⁶

The state also drew on the Native Authority Ordinance to order chiefs from the Chilwa basin to direct the peasants’ agriculture and land husbandry. Between 1941 and 1942, the state ordered the peasants through chiefs to expand the acreage of food crop gardens, observe early land preparation and planting, and apply a sense of industry in agricultural work in the rural areas.⁴⁷ In 1942, for instance, ‘An important Order was promulgated under the Native Authority Ordinance which empowered the Native Authorities to require unemployed male natives to cultivate land for the production of food crops.’⁴⁸ Similarly, the DC for Zomba directed chiefs that ‘all able-bodied men in their area should hoe food crops, that everyone should adopt ridge cultivation and that garden should be prepared by June 30 in each year.’⁴⁹ Furthermore, the state drew from the spirit of conservation and ordered peasants from the Chilwa basin to adopt practices such ridge making, contour making, use of compost manure, and avoidance of cultivating on hill slopes and streambanks. It also dispatched

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1942.

⁴⁸ Nyasaland Government, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1943.

⁴⁹ MNA NSZ 4/1/5 Zomba District Reports 1940-1947 – 1941/2 Report.

conservation officers together with agricultural field staff into villages to inspect peasants' compliance with the orders.⁵⁰

Similarly, the state started training Africans to act as agricultural field staff, *capitaos* and conservation rangers. This started with the October 1939 opening of an agricultural school at Makwapala in the Domasi area of the Lake Chilwa basin.⁵¹ The state opened a farm at Makwapala on which to train students in practical aspects of food production and nutrition. Furthermore, the state ensured that the food given to the students at the school was nutritious. The state also allowed the wives of married students to reside at the school and undergo basic training in nutrition and cookery. In 1941 the Director of Agriculture reported that 'A balanced diet, following closely the recommendations published by the medical Department is supplied comprising maize meal, rice, sweet potatoes, beans, groundnuts, fresh and dried fish, fresh vegetables and salt. Simple instructions in diet, cooking, poultry and gardening, for the wives of students were given with the assistance of an enterprising African.'⁵² The first intake had 18 students with nine successfully graduating in 1942. The state employed all the graduates and posted them in various districts of the country. In addition to training at Makwapala, the state conducted *ad hoc* training for selected progressive farmers so that they could work as agricultural *capitaos* and game rangers in different agricultural offices. Thus, the state posted two of the six *capitaos* it trained through this arrangement in 1941/2 to Kawinga and four to the Zomba boma within the Lake Chilwa basin.⁵³

It is also important to note here that peasants from the Chilwa basin were from 1945 oriented towards the use of milled maize flour (*mgaiwa*) as opposed to grounded maize flour.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1941.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ MNA NSZ 4/1/5 Zomba District Reports 1940-1947 – 1941/2 Report.

The architect behind this was one Kayes who installed two maize mills at his Zomba farm in 1943.⁵⁴ Ides Mulongoti, an ordinary farmer who resided in Thoko village within the Chilwa basin during this time, argued that ‘until 1945, very few people patronised the maize mill contending that milled maize flour was causing stomach troubles to them.’⁵⁵ According to Dyson Sukali, an ordinary farmer from the basin, who was still a teenager in the basin during the war, it was only after the return of *Askari* that peasants began to appreciate the use of milled maize flour.⁵⁶ These *askaris*, accustomed to eating milled *mgaiwa* as their staple ration in the army, reoriented other peasants to start eating milled maize meal. According to the DC for Zomba, this development was progressive for women who were involved in food production. He argued that ‘It is a movement point if women, thus saved so much time with the mortar, will devote their time so saved to more efficient cultivation of gardens.’⁵⁷ The return of ex-migrants from South Africa and Southern Rhodesia also played a part in influencing the peasants from the Chilwa basin to embrace the idea of using milled maize in preparation for *msima*.⁵⁸

The state also directed its wartime food interventions towards the marketing of foodstuffs. The state decided to restructure food-marketing systems in the main food supply zones like the Chilwa basin in order to procure foodstuffs effectively. In doing this, the state was responding to the Provincial Officer’s recommendation for a robust, controlled and organised marketing system. Since the market for tobacco and cotton was already controlled, the state subsequently focused on the marketing of maize, beans, groundnuts, rice and wheat,

⁵⁴ Ibid, 1945/46 Report.

⁵⁵ Interview: Ides Mulongoti, Thiko Village, Malemia, Zomba, aged 85, 9 December 2016. She is an old woman aged 88. She was in the Chilwa basin in the 1940s.

⁵⁶ Interview: Dyson Sukali, Tsekanawo Village, T/A Nazombe, Phalombe, Aged 86, 16 December 2016.

⁵⁷ MNA NSZ 4/1/5 Zomba District Reports 1940-1947 – 1945/46 Report.

⁵⁸ Ibid

which was highly demanded by the military.⁵⁹ As a result, the Market Officer, C. B. Garnet, was compelled to make drastic campaigns in the Chilwa basin and other food production areas calling for a steady supply of foodstuffs to the military. Upon his arrival from holiday in June 1940, for instance, Garnet spent months visiting main food producing districts to explore various ways of improving the marketing of foodstuffs. After these visits, Garnet conceptualised a scheme for a controlled marketing of foodstuffs, which the state introduced officially in 1941.⁶⁰ To maximise productivity, the state advised Garnet to assume the affairs of the Kota Kota Rice Society. Owing to difficulties the state faced in obtaining sufficient quantities through contractors, Garnet organised a system of purchasing rice directly from producers in order to supply the military camps with requisite food supplies.⁶¹ Furthermore, the state began to establish controlled and organised markets from which to purchase peasants' foodstuffs. Previously, such produce markets operated only in Mulanje and Cholo.

The period 1941 to 1945 witnessed the state opening of additional markets for maize, beans and groundnuts in Blantyre, Chiradzulu, Zomba, Ntcheu, Dedza and Lilongwe. The state established markets at Zomba Boma, Mphyupy, Jali and Phalombe within the Chilwa basin.⁶² The state opened these markets during crop harvesting seasons, starting from June to October.⁶³ The peasants were charged a levy fee of 1d for every 100 pounds of foodstuffs sold at the markets and the state used this revenue for the maintenance of the markets.⁶⁴ After meeting operational expenses, the state used the accumulated amount to complement the CD&W funds for the construction of more markets.⁶⁵ As a result, the establishment of these markets between 1941 and 1945 enabled the state to purchase more foodstuffs for military

⁵⁹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1940.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² See Map 2 for the location of these markets.

⁶³ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1941.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

and local use. The foodstuffs that were mostly purchased by the military included maize, rice and groundnuts. Table 4 below shows the quantity of foodstuffs that were purchased through these new markets during wartime.

Table 4: Foodstuffs Purchases in Tonnes from Mulanje District in the Chilwa Basin, 1941-1945

Year	Maize	Rice	G/Nuts
1941	2002	20	5
1942	2175	5	3
1943	3172	210	10
1944	4300	230	100
1945	3022	240	176

Source: Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture, 1939-1945

As shown in the table above, there was a progressive supply of foodstuffs since the establishment of organised markets in the Chilwa basin. Of the foodstuffs purchased in 1940/1, the state supplied 388 tonnes of maize, 89 tonnes of groundnuts and 39 tonnes of rice to the military.⁶⁶ In 1941/2, the state supplied over 500 tonnes of maize to the military. Thus, the military was the largest beneficiary of the foodstuffs purchased from the organised market.

However, the monopoly of the military to the foodstuffs from the organised markets did not go down without challenge by other buyers of foodstuffs. For example, employers from the basin lodged complaints over shortages of foodstuffs. In response, the state established a Supply Board in 1941. The objective of this Board was to coordinate equitable

⁶⁶ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1941.

distribution of foodstuffs to all stakeholders in the country.⁶⁷ It appointed the Director of Agriculture to chair the Board as Food Controller and Controller of Essential Supplies. The Deputy Chairman of the Board was the Controller of Customs, Import and Exports. By forming this Board, the state wanted to deal with all local problems connected with the control and distribution of foodstuff supplies. The Board would also deal with supplying foodstuffs abroad.⁶⁸ The state had by then started to balance the supply of foodstuffs to the military and to other stakeholders. For instance, the state exported 198 tonnes of groundnuts to Southern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia after meeting military and local requirements in 1944.⁶⁹ Similarly, the state exported 1 276 tonnes of groundnuts to these countries in 1945.⁷⁰

It should be noted that the state faced a number of challenges during its efforts to increase food production and supply during the wartime period. Both conjunctural and structural factors constrained its efforts. As noted above, the state had to cope firstly with variabilities of climate in the form of drought and floods, which made food production difficult and unpredictable. Droughts were experienced in 1941/2 and 1943/4, while heavy rainfalls and floods took place in 1944/5 and 1945/46 in the Chilwa basin. These events affected both the production and marketing of food crops. The limited crop harvests meant that the state could not effectively supply foodstuffs to all the stakeholders in the country. In addition, the prices of food crops tended to go higher during times of scarcity, and peasants would prefer to sell foodstuffs directly, though in small quantities, at the military camps.⁷¹

The state applied some restrictive marketing orders in order to reserve food for local requirements. These orders aggravated state's relations with various food stakeholders in the

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1944.

⁷⁰ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1945.

⁷¹ MNA NSZ 4/1/5 Zomba District Reports 1940-1947 – 1940/1Report.

basin. For example, through the Native Liquor Ordinance, the state revoked Native Beer Licences from local brewers in the Chilwa basin in 1944.⁷² As in the period prior to World War I, alcohol regulation generated animosity between the state and the peasants.⁷³ Similarly, the state applied rules regulating the marketing of crops under the Native Food Ordinance in order to safeguard the succeeding harvest against thoughtless disposal to many non-producers anxious to buy foodstuffs.⁷⁴ The state compelled these unscrupulous buyers from the Chilwa basin to grow their own maize.⁷⁵ However, estate owners retaliated by opening markets to buy foodstuffs directly from the peasants and their tenants. In the same vein, some peasants from the Chilwa basin resorted to selling their foodstuffs in Mozambique.⁷⁶ Thus, state's regulation of food marketing affected further the sale of foodstuffs in the scheduled markets.⁷⁷

The second challenge arose from the growth of stiff competition for labour between the military and estate owners.⁷⁸ The state's support afforded the military an upper hand in recruiting able-bodied men from the rural communities. Some tenants also left estates to join the military due to the intense recruiting campaign and the relatively higher wages offered by the military. For example, the military offered a minimum wage of 12/- per month while the estates offered a maximum wage of 10/- per month.⁷⁹ As a result, the estates experienced acute labour shortages in the areas adjacent to Zomba Township where most of the recruiting campaigns took place.⁸⁰ Similarly, people who were not conscripted by the state into the military migrated to work in the mines and farms of South Africa, Southern Rhodesia and

⁷² Ibid, 1943/44 Report.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1944.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Interview: J. Nansenga, Mbaru Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 17 November 2016.

⁷⁷ MNA NSZ 4/1/5 Zomba District Reports 1940-1947 – 1941/2 Report.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 1940/1 Report.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Northern Rhodesia.⁸¹ By 1944, over 13 000 men from Zomba alone were abroad. Of these, 10 000 were in the military while 3 000 were working in the mines and farms in South Africa and Northern Rhodesia.⁸² According to the colonial officials, the problem with military recruitment was ‘that the better men on the whole went to the Army and that the material left behind was of poorer physique and probably imbued with less will to work.’⁸³ The absence of men did not only affect the supply of labour on the private estates and peasant farms, but also the country’s tax revenues. When queried about the fall of tax revenue in 1942, the DC for Zomba argued:

The fall of 1 058 taxes should not be regarded as indicating lack of energy on the part of the Native Authorities in collecting taxes but is due to the extension of KAR recruiting which has continued throughout 1942 in both districts and the large exodus from the Protectorate during the latter part of 1941.⁸⁴

As noted by Tembo and Samasuwo in Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia respectively, British demands for foodstuffs squeezed the little food, which the peasants produced for their subsistence and local requirements.⁸⁵ The low agricultural technology and rainfall variabilities undermined the Chilwa basin’ peasants’ potential of meeting the military food demands. The emergence of *Askaris* further impoverished and differentiated the peasant community in the basin. The war largely deprived women of the much-needed labour of the husbands who had joined the military as *Askaris*. Hence, from 1944, the state started to

⁸¹ For details about the development of labour migration from Nyasaland, see McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 83-7; Z. Groves, ‘Malawians in Colonial Salisbury: A Social History of Migration in Central Africa, c. 1920s to 1960s’, PhD Thesis, Keele University, 2011; Daimon, “‘*Mabhurandaya*”.

⁸² MNA NSZ 4/1/5 Zomba District Reports 1940-1947 – 1945/46 Report.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 1942/3 Report.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 1941/2 Report.

⁸⁵ For details, see Samasuwo, ‘Food Production and War Supplies,’ 487-502; Tembo, ‘Coerced African Labour,’ 50-69.

encourage *askaris*' wives to use remittances to employ labourers who would assist them in food production in the absence of their husbands.⁸⁶

There was also a general loss of morale for agricultural work throughout the basin during this period despite the efforts to improve the production and marketing of foodstuffs. The DC for Zomba observed: 'But unsatisfactory climatic conditions in most areas, disheartening response to all efforts to improve food production, the lack of interest shown in Zomba Agricultural show and the regrettable apathy shown by most chiefs in all matters relating to agriculture within their areas was a major concern.'⁸⁷ Peasants were exhausted by the state's incessant demands to produce more foodstuffs in the basin. Since the state gave priority to food crops, peasants who specialised in cotton and tobacco in the basin were also frustrated by lack of markets for these crops. To appease the peasants, the state decided to start buying all the cotton produced by the peasants in 1943. The Director of Agriculture reported,

The anxiety, which has been experienced annually since the outbreak of the war regarding the disposal of the cotton crop, was finally dispelled as a result of an undertaking by the Ministry of Supply to purchase the entire crop at guaranteed prices for the duration of the war and for one complete marketing season thereafter.⁸⁸

The problem was that the state ascribed greater importance to the marketing of foodstuffs at the expense of food production. The campaign to expand food production only centred on the mere propaganda about early land preparation and increasing acreage for food crops. The new varieties of crops that were introduced did not augur well with local tastes and the use of orders only succeeded to make chiefs unpopular in the Chilwa basin. Colonial encouragement

⁸⁶ MNA NSZ 4/1/5 Zomba District Reports 1940-1947 – 1943/44 Report.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 1945/46 Report.

⁸⁸ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1943.

for the peasants to produce food crops without causing any damage to natural resources worsened the situation.⁸⁹ While this had merits in long-term sustainability of soil fertility, the state advocated conservation with little respect to the practices that supported the peasants in the production of food crops in the basin. Consequently, peasants resented conservation highly. Ester Salima, who was a farmer in the basin during this time, argued that peasants grudgingly complied with conservation rules in the production of foodstuffs.⁹⁰ With the rapid increase of population, it became extremely difficult to enforce some of the conservation strategies such as crop rotation and bush fallowing. Most peasants also complained that the conservation programmes were time-consuming and labour intensive for them.

As a result, the state began to slow-down on conservation from 1943 onwards. In 1944, it passed a Native Development and Welfare (ND&W) Act to provide funds for the improvement of the welfare of the peasants and their production systems in the country.⁹¹ Despite the Act's emphasis on soil conservation, the state only discouraged cultivation in the forest reserves of the Chilwa basin. However, the state communicated this amicably to the peasants in order to avoid conflicts. For example in 1944, the Director of Agriculture reported,

An investigation was carried out regarding land utilisation in the Domasi Valley in Zomba district. It was found that considerable encroachment into the Forest reserves had occurred, and that inordinately steep slopes were under cultivation and that the pressure of population rendered it impossible to provide for restoration fallowing of the land. This state of affairs is largely attributable to the proximity of Zomba Township as the cultivators in question are profitably concerned in the daily supplies of perishable produce to the Township. Remedial measures have taken the form of re-

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Interview: Ester Salima, Ramusi Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 15 December 2016. She was an old woman at Ramusi village, aged 85, when I interviewed her. Together with her husband, she was an ordinary farmer in the area when this was happening.

⁹¹ Nyasaland Government, *The Native Development and Welfare Act No 14 of 1944*, Zomba, 14 October 1944.

aligning the boundaries of the Forest Reserves, thus permitting the use of more land for cultivation and forbidding cultivation on exhausted land or excessive slopes. Simple soil conservation rules are to be enforced and soil conservation instructors are now permanently stationed in the valley.⁹²

As long as the war was in progress, it was difficult for the state to pursue conservation in the basin to the letter. The state hoped to do so once the war was over. The Director of Agriculture argued that,

It has not yet been possible to persuade the bulk of the native population to appreciate the outcome of expecting its growing numbers to subsist and improve their lot and dwindling natural resources. There is no denying the fact, however, that despite these efforts soil deterioration is gaining over conservation and that satisfactory methods of arresting it must depend upon properly planned and coordinated effort with a greatly increased staff, which should be available after the war.⁹³

So, when the colonial office announced the cessation of the war in Europe on 8 May and against Japan on 15 August in 1945, colonial authorities celebrated. The end of the war did not only mark the end of the contradictory responsibility of supplying foodstuffs to the military in a country that was faced with food shortages, but also the dawn of a new season when colonial officials would be free to exercise authority over conservation.⁹⁴ For the chiefs who faithfully participated in the supply of military foodstuffs, the cessation was also a time of reckoning. The Governor, for example, awarded Chief Kawinga the Kings' Medal in Silver Gilt for supplying the largest numbers of *askaris* during the war.⁹⁵

⁹² Nyasaland Government, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1943.

⁹³ Nyasaland Government, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1943.

⁹⁴ MNA NSZ 4/1/5 Zomba District Reports 1940-1947 – 1944/45 Report.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 1945/46 Report.

5. Food Security and the Post-War Agricultural Policy, 1945-1946

The end of World War II in 1945 saw the intensification of state involvement in peasant agriculture in the Chilwa basin. Unlike the wartime period, the state increasingly became interested in the production of both food and cash crops. Several factors combined to create this situation. Firstly, there was need for the country, like other colonies, to contribute to the economic recovery of Britain. With a debt liability of £6 000 million, Britain was the most highly indebted country during the post-war period. It desperately needed the support of its colonies for economic recovery.⁹⁶ The importation of cash crops from the colonies as well as the exportation of manufactured goods was essential for a rapid restoration of the pound sterling, which suffered heavy devaluation due to the war.⁹⁷ According to Joseph Hodge,

Fearing the growth of another global depression, European metropolitan governments sought to intensify colonial primary production in the hope of meeting essential food and raw material shortages and securing protected markets for home industries and European investments, relieve acute balance of payments, etc. Colonial crops would act as ‘dollar earners’ providing much needed foreign exchange to purchase food and goods for metropolitan reconstruction, while simultaneously serving as ‘dollar savers’ by supplying raw materials and commodities directly to the home markets.⁹⁸

The second factor was the rise to power of the Labour Party in 1945. The Labour Party championed the policy of empowering colonial economies. Considering the adverse effects of the post-war problems, the Labour Party was at the time determined to implement its ideology of Fabian Socialism. The Party ‘rejected the idea of promoting development through the growth of foreign controlled large scale farmers in Africa. Instead, the state regarded

⁹⁶ For details on the British post-war colonial development policies see for example, Neumann, ‘The Post-war Conservation Boom in British Colonial Africa,’ 22-47; N. S. White, *Decolonization: The British Experience since 1945* (London: Longman, 1999).

⁹⁷ Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine*, 87.

⁹⁸ Hodge, et al, *Developing Africa*, 60.

African peasant farmers as adjustable and able to increase production for the market given state support. Increased state intervention must go hand in hand with a peasant-based development doctrine.⁹⁹ The Party also pursued this policy because it was sympathetic to the sacrifices that African colonies made in supplying foodstuffs and soldiers in solidarity with Britain as their coloniser. Frederick Cooper observed that ‘Both the British and French leaders felt, with some reason, that they had been saved by their empire: by the resources in men and material contributed by the dominions and colonies of Great Britain.’¹⁰⁰ Since the Conservative Party applied a great deal of coercion to appropriate African labour and foodstuffs, the Labour Party sought to compensate the colonies for this.¹⁰¹ The post-war problems also generated massive nationalist protests within the colonies.¹⁰² In 1944, Africans formed the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC) to agitate not only for the alleviation of these problems but also the achievement of self-government in Nyasaland.¹⁰³

By focusing on food production, Britain was also responding to the looming World Food Crisis that followed the end of the war. In fact, concerns over food shortages began to attract global attention a few years before the end of the war in 1945. At the conference, which President Franklin Delano Roosevelt convened at Hot Springs in the USA in 1943, countries agreed to establish the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO).¹⁰⁴ Later in 1945, they officially formed FAO as an organ of the United Nations Organisation (UNO) mandated to promote global food production. FAO called upon international powers to increase food production with the aim of ensuring the availability of sufficient foodstuffs for all people

⁹⁹ Green, ‘The Agrarian Populism in Malawi,’ 152.

¹⁰⁰ Cooper, ‘Reconstructing Empire,’ 196.

¹⁰¹ Zeleza, ‘The Political Economy of British Colonial Africa,’ 149.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ McCracken, *History of Malawi*, 313.

¹⁰⁴ Shaw, *World Food Security*, 3.

across the globe. Nevertheless, Britain, which had problems of dollar deficits and balance of payments, faced an acute food crisis. Zeleza notes that,

So serious was the situation that the Prime minister proposed the setting up of Ministerial Committee on World Food Supplies (WFS), under his chairmanship, to keep the situation under review, to coordinate action and to focus on the major issues calling for decision by the Cabinet or international bodies.¹⁰⁵

After a series of meetings, Britain resolved to support the production of food crops from its colonies to meet this food crisis.¹⁰⁶ In 1945, Britain passed the CD&W Act of 1945, which, unlike the CD&W Act of 1940, made available over £150 million for development in British colonies. Following on this, the colonial office asked its officials from the colonies to submit ten-year development plans for funding.¹⁰⁷ It also formed the Colonial Development Corporation (CDC) and Overseas Food Corporation (OFC) in 1947 to facilitate these developments. While the OFC supported large-scale plantations and food growing projects in the colonies, African states had to form public corporations to work with the CDC in all developmental spheres. However, Britain dissolved the OFC after the collapse of the East African Groundnuts Scheme in Kenya in 1954.¹⁰⁸

As in 1940, the passing of the CD &W Act of 1945 generated a great deal of excitement among colonial officials in Nyasaland. They were determined to take advantage of the CD &W Act to propose projects that would bring the problem of food insecurity to its end. The increased funding enabled the state to encourage the Agriculture Department to

¹⁰⁵ Zeleza, 'The Political Economy of British Colonial Africa,' 147.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 151.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 152-53.

undertake programmes that would transform the agricultural systems of the peasants in the country. The Director of Agriculture reported in 1945 that:

The food crop position gave rise to some anxiety in view of the excessive rain and lack of sun but there was sufficient maize to carry the country through. There can be no doubt that the halcyon days of plenty of cheap maize have disappeared for ever and it will need much work and propaganda to ensure sufficient maize and other food crops are available to meet the need of the Protectorate. The increasing population, the increasing demand for food for labour, and poor and dropping yields make the future position of the protectorate our first consideration. One of the Freedoms of the Atlantic Charter is Freedom from Want. It is not going to be easy to secure this freedom for the present and the future peoples of Nyasaland and it is realised that the most vital work, which the Department has to undertake, is to do everything possible to ensure plenty of the right kind of food for everyone in the country.¹⁰⁹

So immediately after the passing of the CD &W Act of 1945, the state formulated a new agricultural policy that would act as its blueprint for agricultural transformation throughout the late colonial period. Since its establishment in 1908, the Agriculture Department promoted agricultural production without systematic policy guidelines. Lack of guidelines resulted into the promotion of conservation at the expense of agricultural production. There was also low contribution of peasant agriculture to the country's economy. Despite its use of 95% of land, for example, the state observed that peasant agriculture only contributed 40% to the country's GDP.¹¹⁰ Through the new policy, the state in Nyasaland wanted to take full control of issues related to agriculture, and endeavour to strike a positive balance between conservation and food production, which at the time was a recipe for many social conflicts between the state and the peasants.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1945.

¹¹⁰ Kettlewell, 'Agricultural Change in Nyasaland,' 238.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 240.

The objectives of the new agricultural policy were to conserve soil, encourage the production of more and better food crops, develop an agricultural cash economy and modernise peasant agriculture.¹¹² The policy advocated for a centralised regulation of crop production and marketing, the reinforcement of modern agricultural methods among the peasants, and the introduction of agricultural and land use schemes. At the centre of the policy was the provision of extension services to help peasants acquire knowledge of conservation, early land preparation, early planting, early weeding, better spacing, improved processing and storage, and the marketing of crops. To convey the message effectively, the policy advocated for the use of publications of crop production, oral advices to peasants by agricultural officers, and the use of practical demonstration gardens. Sophisticated propaganda media such as pamphlets, posters, press articles, films and illustrative magazines would also be used to communicate the new farming methods to the peasants. The policy provided that extension be planned and implemented at district level through various Ecological Planning Zones connecting the state and the peasants in the Chilwa basin.¹¹³

Before it implemented the policy, however, the state conducted land use surveys with the aim of identifying land related agricultural problems facing the peasants in the basin. The Secretary of State, for example, appointed Sir Sydney Abrahams, a Former Colonial Chief Justice, on 22 July 1946 to investigate the congestion of peasants in the Native Trust Lands as well as on the private estates. Since the passing of the Land Settlement Ordinance in 1928, the problem of peasants on private estates generated a great deal of animosity among the settlers, peasants and the colonial authorities.¹¹⁴ Between 24 July and 4 October 1946,

¹¹² Ibid, 239.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Baker, *Seeds of Trouble*, 47.

Abrahams and his team reported of a great deal of grievances surrounding land issues in the basin. Mostly, the grievances revolved around existing ideological conflicts between local and colonial views related to land rights and obligations.¹¹⁵ The report, among other things, recommended the riddance of the status of Africans on private estates. Instead, it urged the state to acquire undeveloped lands from some large estates for the resettlement of peasants that were congested in the estates. Within these new settlements, the state should not only subject the peasants to organised settlement and conservation, but also give them a chance to acquire reasonable plots from which to produce food crops for their subsistence and economic use.¹¹⁶ The starting point for the state was to purchase A. L. Bruce Estates at Magomero, Jackson's Namikango Estates and Maxwell's Mingoli Estates, which the owners advertised for sale in 1944.¹¹⁷ These estates were in the district of Zomba, which, at the time, recorded acute land shortages and a high population density.

Furthermore, the state commissioned R. A. Leach, an Agricultural Assistant, to investigate possible places where the state would undertake development schemes in the basin. One of the appropriate undeveloped lands the state identified for these projects was the Chilwa/Phalombe Plain. In this plain, the state earmarked the low-lying areas near the lake in chiefs Kuntumanje and Mwambo's areas for irrigation projects. The other area identified were the large swamps in chief Mposa's areas. 'I have been informed by the Agricultural Assistant,' commented the DC for Zomba, 'that there are potentially large rice growing areas but an irrigation plan for the control of water was necessary before a scheme of this size can

¹¹⁵ For details, see, Nyasaland Protectorate, Report of the Land commission 1946 (Zomba: Government Printer, 1947) The report is also referred to as the Abrahams Report. Some of the details were captured by Baker, *Seeds of Trouble*, Chapter 3, The Abrahams Commission, 1946 and the Land Planning Committee, 1947, 47-64.

¹¹⁶ Baker, *Seeds of Trouble*, 48

¹¹⁷ MNA NSZ 4/1/5 Zomba District Annual Reports, 1940-1947- Report of 1945.

be put into effect. These areas were surveyed by Leach in 1947 and were I believe the subject of a long report.’¹¹⁸

However, the state considered customary land tenure, matrilineal system of marriage and inheritance as well as proclivity to subsistence farming, which peasants from the Chilwa basin as well as those from other parts of the Southern and Central Province practiced, as a serious impediment to agricultural transformation in the Chilwa basin. It observed that,

The principal feature of the customary land tenure of African Trust land, in so far as more than three quarters of African population are concerned, are matrilineal inheritance, uxorilocal marriage and land allocation by village headmen. Although these features, which are basic to social system, remain strongly entrenched, they give rise to internal stresses under modern conditions. Despite this, and the very high population densities to be found in the Southern and Central Province, they are only very limited signs of individual rights in land or negotiability evolving under customary system.¹¹⁹

According to the state, there was no land ownership among the peasants in the Chilwa basin except the right to cultivate land. It argued that ‘On the death of the cultivator, the right pass through the female and often result in fragmentation between several women. In populated areas where land is scarce, a man can only acquire a garden by marriage to a woman of the village.’¹²⁰ Richard Kettlewell called for a revolutionary transformation of the customary land tenure if the state was to achieve meaningful agricultural development in the basin. He argued that,

¹¹⁸ MNA NSZ 1/2/4 Southern Province Reports by Provincial Commissioner, 1945-1949. Extract of the Zomba DC Report, 1948.

¹¹⁹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Nyasaland Colonial Report of 1952. Also published by Her Majesty’s Stationery Office in 1958.

¹²⁰ Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Report on an Economic Survey of Nyasaland, 1958-1959.

The African concept of land was that all belongs to the people and all have a right to the use of it. Like air and water, it is not owned by anyone and is held in trust for the dead by the living for the unborn. There was no ownership of land in the western sense and land could not be bought or sold. Certain traditional authorities had rights and responsibilities of allocating usufruct and of adjudicating disputes. These traditional concepts differed sharply from the western concept of land tenure, whose fundamental feature of legal security and rights of disposal were held to be necessary to provide the incentives required for the real improvement of land. A revolution in tenure was though unavoidable if the necessary security and incentives to invest in farm improvement were to become effective before subdivisions and fragmentation reduced individual plots to uneconomic parcels.¹²¹

The state argued that peasants had little incentives to make productive and responsible use of the land under the prevailing customary law. Often, this resulted into what Garreth Hardin called, 'The Tragedy of the Commons.'¹²² As a result, the thinking was that the peasants needed individual land tenure, which would grant them sufficient security and incentives with which to responsibly manage and profitably invest in the land. In addition, the peasants would then use their titled land as collateral for accessing financial credits.

Similarly, the state expressed concerns over the matrilineal marriage and inheritance systems. It argued that the prevailing socio-cultural system in the basin, where men moved into their wives' villages, gave men little incentives to invest in and make proper use of land. In wives' villages, matrilineage leaders exercised control over family property inheritance including children. Rights to inherit land were through female lines. Men had no control over succession, and that upon death; the matrilineage leaders subdivided land amongst the women. This, according to the state, gave men no interest in improving land by either erecting buildings or raising its fertility. They argued that 'a man had little incentive to invest

¹²¹ Kettlewell, 'Agricultural Change in Nyasaland, 1945-1960', 250.

¹²² For details, see G. Hardin, 'The Tragedy of the Commons', *Science*, 162, 3859 (1968), 1243-1248.

effort and money in a holding, over which he had tenuous and transitory tenure and no prospect of handing it on to his son.'¹²³ According to them, land belonged to women, and men could only secure a garden by marrying one of the local women.

On matters of production, the state argued that peasants from the basin were too conservative to transform from subsistence to cash crop producers. For them, addressing hunger and food security were more important than acquisition of cash. In their view, this conservatism accounted for the low agricultural production among the peasants in the Chilwa basin. 'The native of Nyasaland is still basically a subsistence cultivator,' they argued, 'and as such, his incentive is hunger; as long as his hunger can be assuaged, there is at present little further interests in the production of crops. It would not be possible, even if it were feasible, to move the cultivator away from subsistence farming merely by requiring him to grow cash crops.'¹²⁴ They further argued that, 'he will persist in growing his subsistence crops and because of the methods of cultivation, little land or energy will be available for the cash crops.'¹²⁵

The state made similar attempts to eradicate customary land tenure in favour of individual title land tenure in Southern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia. As in Nyasaland, the states here discounted communal ownership of land in the reserves for accelerating soil erosion through over cultivation and over grazing.¹²⁶ In Southern Rhodesia, for instance, the state formulated the Land Utilisation and Good Husbandry Bill of 1948 and the Native Land

¹²³ Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Report on an Economic Survey of Nyasaland, 1958-1959.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 41.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 42.

¹²⁶ For details, see Phimister, *An Economic and Social History*; I. Phimister, 'Rethinking the Reserves: Southern Rhodesia's Land Husbandry Act Reviewed,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 2 (1993), 225-239; S. M. 'Agricultural Change in Northern Rhodesia/Zambia, 1945-1965,' *Food Research Institute Studies*, 2 (1966), 195-247; M. S. Muntimba, 'Regional and Social Differentiation in Broken Hill Rural District, Northern Rhodesia,' in M. Klein, (ed.), *Peasants in Africa: Historical and contemporary Perspective* (California: Beverly, 1980), 243-269.

Husbandry Act of 1951 to provide land titles to individual African producers. But since the benefits accrued to a few Master Farmers, the policies became a bone for contention.¹²⁷

However, I argue here that the colonial ideas of African land use practices and social relations regarding the customary land tenure and the social and production relations among the peasants of the Chilwa basin were erroneously conceived. While chiefs and matrilineage leaders communally controlled land, individual peasants exercised rights of its usage independent of the chiefs.¹²⁸ Individuals from the Chilwa basin claimed their land tenure from their specific ancestral parents from whom they inherited land portions rather than chiefs or matrilineal family leaders. Moreover, power over land and other social matters in the matrilineal social context was the preserve of the brothers and uncles on behalf of the women whom the colonialist assumed had exclusive control over land matters. While men under uxorilocal system moved to their wives' homes, they still exercised power over land and other family matters. Faison Ramusi, a farmer who resided in the Chilwa basin during this time argued that, 'it was also a common practice for elder brothers to seek a waiver to be allowed to take wives to stay in their home villages through the tradition known as '*Chitengwa*' where they would continue looking after their matrilineage.'¹²⁹

Similarly, men were not as landless as the colonial officials contended. While operating from uxorilocality, men retained an inheritance of land in their home villages. Witiness Kalambula contended that 'rather than seeking marriage relations to access land, men would go back and regain their homelands in the event of divorce or death of wife.'¹³⁰ Men exercised decision-making powers over land and property as family heads within

¹²⁷ See Phimister, 'Rethinking the Reserves,' 225-239.

¹²⁸ See Mseba, 'Land, Power and Social Relations in Northeastern Zimbabwe,' 166-213.

¹²⁹ Interview: Faison Ramusi, Ramusi Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 18 November 2016. He was aged 85 when I interviewed him in 2016.

¹³⁰ Interview: Witiness Kalambula, Katanda Village, T/A Kuntumanje, Zomba, 9 November 2016.

households. In case of divorce, children had the right to choose whether to stay with their fathers or mothers. According to Dyton Sukali, ‘even the children who chose to stay with their mothers maintained contacts with their fathers in making some important decision.’¹³¹ As a moral obligation, most married men invested in the land they cultivated for the future inheritance of their children. Thus, within this context, Kings Phiri and Hendrina Kachapila argued, patrilineal and matrilineal social structures coexisted.¹³²

However, Admire Mseba has argued that we need to understand the contexts under which the colonial state debated customary land tenure.¹³³ He maintains that the state’s ideas about African land tenure in Southern Rhodesia varied with time and social geography. The state constructed the ideas to fulfil particular purposes at different times. In early colonial Southern Rhodesia, for instance, the state, which needed the support of chiefs and local leaders, propagated ideas of communal land tenure as given and productive. In the 1940s and 1950s, the state shifted the debate to grant tenure to individuals whom it considered progressive. But like in the Chilwa basin, Mseba argues that in Southern Rhodesia ‘realities of life under colonial rule more than ties to primordial ideas of kinship specially informed people’s decisions about where to live and farm.’¹³⁴

As Martin Chanock observed, colonial officials, who came from patrilineal societies, were obsessed with the desire to restructure the Chilwa society within patriarchal structures of relations of production.¹³⁵ For them, men with land titles in their names rather than women were to be the key players in the country’s economy. ‘In short, the colonial government was

¹³¹ Interview: Dyton Sukali, Tsekakhomo Village, T/A Nazombe, Phalombe, 16 December 2016.

¹³² Phiri, ‘Some Changes in the Matrilineal Family System’; H. Kachapila, ‘The Revival of “Nyau” and Changing Gender Relations in Early Colonial Central Malawi,’ *Journal of Religion*, 36, 3/4 (2006), 319-345.

¹³³ Mseba, ‘Land, Power and Social Relations,’ 166.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Chanock, ‘Agricultural Change and Continuity in Malawi,’ 404.

unable to take proper cognizance of the agricultural role of women because there was no way of fitting its stereotyped model,' argued Chanock. 'The Nyasaland government thus made sporadic attempts to bring about a social and economic revolution for which no conditions existed, and which they neither had resources nor political will to carry out.'¹³⁶

Similarly, colonial officials failed to understand the strength of the moral economy under which peasants from the Chilwa basin organised their relations of production.¹³⁷ As noted by Neffy Saini, the peasants organised their production relations solely for subsistence purposes and consolidation of their social relations.¹³⁸ As a result, the peasants from the basin privileged household security and social networks as opposed to individual accumulation of profits, as the colonial officials wanted them to. Rather than investing in creating more wealth, the peasants invested in social networks through communal and religious feasts as well as social support of the needy. W. Adger calls these social networks the 'social capital' of the peasants, which they would call upon in times of need.¹³⁹ Even after the colonial and capitalist incursions, peasants only engaged in cash economy on a 'safety- first food principle.'¹⁴⁰ Food production enabled them to meet not only their subsistence requirements but also the collective reproduction of their social, cultural and religious values. They measured wealth not in terms of accumulation of money as the colonial officials wanted, but in terms of foodstuffs such as maize, chickens, cattle, pigs and others. Given the significance of food to religion and culture, the possession of these foodstuffs formed the basis for their

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ See footnote 11 on page 5.

¹³⁸ Interview: Neffy Saini, Mtenda Village, T/A Mposa, Machinga, 7 November 2016.

¹³⁹ W. N. Adger, 'Social Capital, Collective Action and Adaptation to Climate Change,' *Economic Geography*, 79, 4 (2003), 387-404.

¹⁴⁰ The 'safety-first food principle' is the tendency by peasants to give priority to food production vis-à-vis cash crop production. By applying this principle, the peasants wanted to avoid cash cropping to undermine food cropping. For details, see Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasants*.

social integration and recognition into the larger Chilwa society.¹⁴¹ The peasants who demonstrated a rare capacity of accumulating food surplus and conversely sharing this food to the larger community through communal feasts and celebrations commanded greater respect and honour in the Chilwa basin. For them, land was only a form of social security that provided shelter and food production, and not an asset, with which to produce wealth over and above their subsistence needs. While the colonial officials and other scholars have attributed the underdevelopment of rural Africa to the pursuit of these ‘economies of affection,’ it was by investing in subsistence and social networks that peasants were able to maintain social, economic and food security in seasons of scarcity.¹⁴²

The above-noted colonial misconceptions of the relations of production made it extremely difficult for the state to convince most of the peasants from the Chilwa basin to adopt the concept of individual land registration. Isaac Mphepo, whose father was at the time a farmer in Mtenda village, told him that the peasants resisted the idea of land titles, which they felt deprived chiefs’ power over land, further differentiated peasants into rich and poor peasants, impoverished women and endangered the very progressive farmers the state wanted to uplift.¹⁴³ Kettlewell argued that,

The majority felt no necessity and no subject could more quickly arouse suspicion and fearful opposition than the suggest of interference with traditional control of land. Nevertheless, the government was anxious to establish the principle of title to land to have the means available whereby those who wanted it could have it, believing that the evident benefit would generate demand. But this wish never became active policy: public opinion was too strongly entrenched. The Traditional Land Authorities were opposed to derogation of their power, and cultivators as a whole would have resented

¹⁴¹ Interview: Neffy Saini, Mtenda Village, T/A Mposa, Machinga, 7 November 2016.

¹⁴² On how ‘economies of affection’ resulted in the underdevelopment of Africa see Hyden, *Beyond the Ujamaa in Tanzania*.

¹⁴³ Interview: Isaac Mphepo, Kaphunga Village, T/A Mposa, Machinga, 14 December 2016. He was 51 when I interviewed.

advantages for a favoured few and the latter were themselves anxious to avoid becoming objects of jealousy and suspicion. There was widespread feeling, easily aggravated in the later 1950s, that any reformation of land tenure was merely a planned prelude to the transfer of land to Europeans.¹⁴⁴

Consequently, the state in Nyasaland abandoned the idea of individual titles. In the two years that followed the passing of the agricultural policy, the state only concentrated on the promotion of conservation and 'modern' methods of agriculture as well as controlling the marketing of peasant food crops.

6. Food Production and Peasants' Responses in the Post-War Period, 1946-1948

The state devoted the earliest part of the post-war period to soil conservation and regulation of the marketing of peasants' food crops in the Chilwa basin. Although land settlement, irrigation and the Master Farmers, were paramount in the policy, inadequate funding and lack of political will resulted in the state's non-prioritisation of these projects until the early 1950s. What particularly concerned the state was regulation of the marketing of foodstuffs and enforcement of soil conservation. Immediately after it passed the agricultural policy in 1946, the state instituted a Maize Control Board (MCB) and Natural Resources Board (NRB) for this purpose.¹⁴⁵ In pursuing these projects, the state wanted to ensure that the peasants from the Chilwa basin conducted agricultural production in ways that not only ensured 'sufficiency of food and an adequate supply of cash crops for a growing population, but also that the natural resources, on which the country so vitally depends, were not destroyed in the process of increasing production of crops.'¹⁴⁶ There were alarmist ecological fears that,

¹⁴⁴ Kettlewell, 'Agricultural Change in Nyasaland,' 251.

¹⁴⁵ On Southern Africa see, I Phimister, 'Discourse and the Discipline of Historical Context,' 263-275.

¹⁴⁶ Nyasaland Protectorate, Colonial Reports, 1953. This was also cited in Mulwafu, *Conservation Songs*, 83.

If things are allowed to go on as they are, if people continue to ill-treat their soils which gives them everything they have, if soil is allowed to go on pouring down on rivers, if crops continue to be grown year after year on the same soil, if cattle are allowed to graze grassland, bare-then there is no future for Nyasaland. There will be less and less to eat and there will be lower and lower yields for cash crops. The people will come when Nyasaland is bare desert capable of supporting neither human beings nor animals and once this happens nothing on earth could bring it back again.¹⁴⁷

While Mulwafu extensively noted the role of the NRB in enforcing conservation in the Native Trust Lands and private estates, he gave minimal attention to the functionality of the MCB.¹⁴⁸ Formed under the Maize Control Ordinance of 1946, the MCB replaced the Production and Marketing Committee of the Native Foodstuffs Ordinance. Its mandate was to control the production, marketing and distribution of maize in the Chilwa basin. Although the state sold maize at organised and controlled markets in the basin, there was no regulatory body for the sales. Consequently, the market for maize and other peasant crops was unstable and unpredictable. Maize was the basin's staple and as such, an unstable marketing of the product rendered the basin more vulnerable to food insecurity. The increasing demand for export maize also raised the risk of vulnerability during the post-war period. The prices of maize were equally fluid every harvest season and this gave Chilwa basin peasants little incentives to produce surplus. In theory, the MCB's mandate was to assure the peasants of the availability of a stable market for their produce at uniform prices as recommended by the state.¹⁴⁹ In practice, the state created the MCB to appropriate Chilwa basin peasants' food crops in order to save the Europeans, who at the time were undergoing a food crisis.¹⁵⁰ The

¹⁴⁷ MNA PAM 650 Soil Conservation in Nyasaland, 1947. This was also cited in Mulwafu, *Conservation Song*, 83.

¹⁴⁸ For details about the NRB, see Mulwafu, *Conservation Songs*, 82-84.

¹⁴⁹ PCS 1/2/18 Maize Policy June 1952 and September 1959: Secretary of African Affairs letter to the chief Secretary on the Maize Policy dated 19 September 1952. The Secretary referred to this policy in explaining the abundance of maize in the country which the state wanted to reverse between 1952 and 1961.

¹⁵⁰ Vaughan, *The Story of An African Famine*, 86.

state sold the maize, which it bought at low prices in basin, at extremely higher prices in Europe.

While the state used the MCB to appropriate maize from the peasants, the state in Southern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia formed MCBs in the early 1930s to save settler producers from the price fluctuations of the Economic Depression and to stifle market competition with African producers.¹⁵¹ Through the MCBs, the states restricted maize markets for African farmers in favour of white settlers. White settlers, who dominated the maize export market prior to the depression, suffered adversely from the depression. But as in Nyasaland, MCBs had the monopsony for the marketing of maize, and set the producer and consumer prices of maize in Southern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia. By centralising the marketing of maize, the MCBs wanted to provide guaranteed markets and higher prices to white settlers. African producers, who had to sale through traders, became vulnerable to commercial exploitation. In 1950, the state in Southern Rhodesia replaced the MCB with the Grain Marketing Board, which in addition to maize, assumed the responsibility of purchasing other grains such as beans, sorghum, millet and groundnuts.¹⁵²

Meanwhile, the state in Nyasaland continued to influence agricultural production with propaganda on land husbandry, expansion of crop acreage, and early land preparation and planting. It dispatched Agricultural officers into the fields to update the peasants about these agricultural practices. As in the wartime, the state made orders to enforce compliance with

¹⁵¹ For details, see for example, K. Vickery, 'Saving Settlers: Maize Control in Northern Rhodesia,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 11, 2 (1985), 212-234; C. Keyter, 'Maize Control in Southern Rhodesia, 1931-1939: The African Contribution to White Survival,' *Central African Historical Association Pamphlet (Local Series), No. 34*; Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe*; E. Kramer, 'The Evolution of Policy: Trade and Production in the Reserve Economy of Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890-1952,' Ph. D Thesis, University of Zimbabwe, 2003.

¹⁵² For details, see N. Breslin, 'USAID, the State and Food Insecurity in Rural Zimbabwe: The Case of Gokwe,' African Studies Seminar paper, University of Witwatersrand, 15 March 1993.

these regulations. In 1947, for example, the Provincial Commissioner for the Southern Province ordered that,

Every opportunity should be taken to impress upon the NAs, Headmen and cultivators the following primary methods by which agricultural production can be improved: early preparation of gardens, early planting and box ridging, manure and compost, seed selection, planting distance and sowing of maize (3ft), groundnuts (9inches), inter-planting, weeding and cultivation, food reserve gardens.¹⁵³

However, these attempts were less successful. The expectations of the CD &W 1940 and ND &W Act of 1944 did not yield any success, as the colonial office did not give adequate funds with which to carry out most of these projects. The peasants from the Chilwa basin found the use of tractors and chemical fertilisers too expensive especially at the time when the prices of foodstuffs were low. Similarly, the acreage of most peasants was too small for the use of tractors. Witness Kalambula equally discounted the productive results of demonstration gardens as products of resources beyond their reach.¹⁵⁴ Most importantly, Richard Kettlewell who was at the helm of the policy was merely a senior agriculture officer. His superior, Garnet, did not believe in either the engagement or modernisation of the peasantry in Nyasaland.¹⁵⁵ In addition, FAO, by whose urge Britain was compelled to take food production seriously, confined its functions to data gathering, publication of documents and the promotion of research rather than practically dealing directly with the problems of malnutrition and food insecurity, as it championed at the Hot Springs conference in 1945.¹⁵⁶

The MCB faced many challenges too. It focused on marketing both the peasants' maize and cash crops, and thus operated in ways that favoured cash crops rather than maize.

¹⁵³ MNA NSZ 1/2/4 Southern Province reports, 1945 – 1948, Circular 1947.

¹⁵⁴ Interview: Witness Kalambula, Katanda Village, TA Kumtumanje, Zomba, 9 November 2016.

¹⁵⁵ MNA NSZ 1/2/4 Southern Province reports, 1945-1948.

¹⁵⁶ Bashford, *Global Population*, 272.

For instance, MCB advocated the reduction of maize production at the pretext of ensuring ecological balance. The underlying assumption for this was that the overproduction of maize in one area erodes the natural fertility of soils. Consequently, the MCB pegged the maize prices at relative low levels than those of cash crops.¹⁵⁷ In doing this, the state wanted the peasants to concentrate their time, labour, resources and land to the production of cash crops rather than food crops. This did not go down well with most peasants who, as noted above, operated within the framework of the moral economy. As a result, the peasants of the Chilwa basin responded by reducing production and withholding their maize surplus from sale with MCB.¹⁵⁸

The enforcement of compliance with the principles of the new policy, especially in relation to early land preparation, streambank cultivation, selling of maize to the MCB and patronising state demonstration gardens established at various agricultural offices among the peasants of the Chilwa basin, was not a simple task for agricultural officers. Soon after the 1946 launch of this propaganda, the District Commissioner for Zomba complained that up to the time the early rains came, the peasants from the Chilwa basin had not prepared gardens. He observed that,

In spite of every effort on the part of both Administrative and Agricultural Officers to foster the food production drive for 1947 the results have been most disappointing. In spite of everything that was done, the early preparation of gardens was in most areas sadly neglected and the early planting rains for November found a few gardens ready for planting. In Mwambo's area in particular, many, taking advantage of the rain, planted up their old gardens without even attempting to cultivate them.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ MNA MS 2/5/1 Maize Control Board, 1946-1951.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ MNA NSZ 4/1.5 Reports 1941-1946.

However, the DC consulted the chiefs and other local farmers in the area on why the people ignored all instructions to prepare their gardens early and noted the peasants' complaint that the October and November months had received very high temperatures which left the ground in the basin at its hardest. Despite this plausible explanation, the DC attributed late preparation as an expression of laziness. He reported that, 'Many therefore prefer to wait for first rains when the work can be done in half the time and soil dug to a greater depth, as the African cultivator is naturally lazy.'¹⁶⁰

In addition, the Chilwa peasants exhibited non-compliance with the policy of prohibiting cultivation along streambanks, hill slopes and forest reserves. They persistently encroached into the forest reserves of Malosa, Zomba, Mulanje and Chikala hills, and continued to cultivate along the riverbanks and hill slopes. They regarded fines charged against them for contravening the regulations as licences to continue cultivating in the protected areas. The Provincial Commissioner for the Southern Province reported that:

I am given to understand that complaints are continually being made by the Field Staff of the Agricultural and Forestry Departments regarding the persistent cultivation of natives of gardens on streambanks and in forest reserves in contravention of the provisions of the Forest Ordinance No. 2 of 1942. In particular, it is alleged, and I suggest with reason, that fines imposed by the Native Courts in respect of offences of the natives have to be regarded commonly as being rentals and thus fail to be effective in their objective of prevention.¹⁶¹

Subsequently, the Commissioner directed Agricultural Officers to invoke Section 16 (g) of the Forest Ordinance which provided for the '...destruction, uprooting or removal of any

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ MNA NSZ 1/2/4 Southern Province reports, 1945--1948, 28 January 1946.

crops standing or being in any area where cultivation was wrongfully undertaken',¹⁶² However, as noted above, this directive contradicted adversely with the prevailing post-war thinking of distancing from coercion. Furthermore, it was subject to abuse by agricultural officers, and thus gave a strong case for nationalists to agitate further for self-government. Consequently, the Commissioner revisited the directive and provided guidelines for its execution within the principles of natural justice. He advised that,

I have to refer to the subject of prosecution for breeches of the law governing soil and water conservation measures such as the proper preparation of gardens and the protection of steam banks. Where prosecution of this nature is unavoidable, I have to request that the following procedures be adopted. The agricultural Instructors or Forest Guards concerned with particular breeches of the law should not themselves initiate action before the courts of the NAs nor appear there in the role of police or prosecutor. But they should report the breaches of the law to you and you should bring them to notice of the NAs who investigate and as appropriately prosecute. The Agricultural Instructor and the Forest Guards then would appear in the courts of the Native Authorities only in the role of witness if required.¹⁶³

The peasants also resisted against the campaign that encouraged the production of surplus foodstuffs. For instance, although the state gazetted Zomba under the Market of Native Produce Ordinance, it only opened the markets of Mpyupyu (for rice) and Chikowi (for groundnuts). The turn up of peasants to sell their foodstuffs in these markets was also not satisfactory.¹⁶⁴ However, the Provincial Commissioner attributed this to the peasants' lack of understanding of the prevailing World Food Crisis. 'It might be added in fairness to those people' argued the Provincial Commissioner, 'that the average Nyasaland Native can have no conception, as we have, of the meaning of the present world food shortages.'¹⁶⁵ Although the

¹⁶² Ibid, 7 December 1945.

¹⁶³ MNA NSZ 1/2/4 Southern Province reports, 1945-1948. Report dated 28 January 1946.

¹⁶⁴ MNA NSZ 4/1.5 Reports 1941-1946.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

problem had to do with the low prices offered to maize in relation to tobacco and cotton, the Commissioner maintained that the peasants operated with the feeling ‘That he has always had enough or nearly enough to live on in the past. That if there was famine the Boma would always provide rather than let the people die.’¹⁶⁶ This, however, did not mean that the peasants did not produce sufficient foodstuffs. Instead, peasants deliberately withheld maize surplus for sale at these markets. Most of them preferred to sale their maize informally at higher prices from house to house, while others took their maize for sale in Mozambique, a few kilometres away from their villages in the basin.¹⁶⁷

From 1947, the state, with instructions from the African Protectorate Council, resolved to stop seeking food relief from abroad. In view of the prevailing World Food Crisis, the Council agreed upon this idea on 6 October 1947 to reserve foodstuffs for Europe.¹⁶⁸ However, the Provincial Commissioner for Zomba took advantage of the agreement to punish the peasants whom he had always described as lazy and conservative to agricultural production. To stress his point, he communicated the issue for execution by chiefs in the vernacular. He contended, ‘*Palibe phindu kuti anthu azibwela ndi kulira ku Boma ndi kunena za njala pamene safuna kumvela chifunilo cha Boma, koma kungokhala pansi osapanga ntchito, kapena ntchito kungomwa mowa mlungu ndi mlungu.*’¹⁶⁹ (It is no use for people to come to Boma to complain about hunger when they are not ready to follow government’s advice and instructions, but instead are just idling, and busy drinking beer week after week instead of working).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ MNA NSZ 1/2/4 Southern Province reports, 1945-1948, Letter from DC Zomba to all his chiefs dated 11 November 1946.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

When this too failed, the state began to blame the chiefs for failing to influence their people to comply with the agricultural policy. The general understanding was that the success of the policy was dependent on the good leadership and personal initiatives of the chiefs. However, according to the Zomba District Commissioner, this was not common except for chiefs Chikowi and Mlumbe. He noted that, 'Unfortunately, there are few whose lethargic attitude towards life appears to be an incurable disease. They can only be described as incompetent nonentities and their very existence is a handicap to the administration and advancement of their people.'¹⁷⁰ However, Ester Salima argued that this did not go well with the peasants of the basin who had greater respect to the chiefs.¹⁷¹ Similarly, the chiefs began to avoid attending meetings at DC's office because of such remarks. James Matuta, whose father was at the time a village headman of Kusokwe village in T/A Kumtumanje area, recalled that according to his father such sentiments were among the reasons why chiefs in the Chilwa basin avoided attending the meetings that were organised by the DC in the 1940s.¹⁷²

The state eventually resolved to amend the Maize Control Ordinance at the end of 1947 with the view of allowing the MCB to open its own maize farms, adopt the use of hybrid maize and construct food reserves in the rural communities. In amending the ordinance, the state was not only interested in increasing maize production but also responding to the trend of incessant resistance from the peasants, which increasingly made the basin vulnerable to food insecurity. The Maize Control (Amendment) Ordinance, which the state passed in December 1947, also subjected decisions of the MCB to the Governor's

¹⁷⁰ MNA NSZ 4/1/6, Zomba District Annual Reports, 1947-1961 - Annual Report for Zomba for the Year 1947.

¹⁷¹ Interview: Ester Salima, Ramusi Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, Aged 85, 15 December 2016.

¹⁷² Interview: James Matuta, Village Head, Kusokwe Village, T/A Kumtumanje, Zomba, Aged 48, 13 December 2016. He was 60 when I interviewed him. His father was 30 when this event was happening.

approval on the supply of foodstuffs to large maize applicants.¹⁷³ The state established MCB Farms at Kakoma in Chikwawa, Rivi Rivi and Toleza in Balaka and Kalombi in Salima. From these farms, the state produced hybrid maize using mechanised agricultural equipment. It supplied the maize produced from the farms to ‘employers of labour and the MCB may find it necessary to give preference to industries which are not in position to grow their own foodstuffs.’¹⁷⁴

In 1948, the Director of Agriculture admitted to the inefficacy of compulsion in enforcing compliance as stipulated in the new agricultural policy. With reference to demonstration plots established around their offices, he observed that,

Demonstration plots have proved of doubtful value and in many areas have been abandoned in favour of demonstration in the gardens of African cultivators themselves. It is apparent that when gardens are maintained by any form of pressure, whether Departmental or Administrative, and such maintenance is known to depend upon government funds which are believed to be limitless and with which Government may call labour in any number at any time, they are regarded with suspicion and consequently fail to impress.¹⁷⁵

Thus, by 1948, the state found it extremely difficult to enforce peasants’ compliance with what it perceived as progressive agricultural methods in the Chilwa basin. The amendment of the MCB ordinance registered the state’s resistance to the temptation of using compulsion to achieve this. However, the rise of Geoffrey Colby as governor and the 1948/9 drought made this temptation practically irresistible.

¹⁷³ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1947.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year Ending 31 March 1948.

7. Conclusion

This chapter explored the extent to which the outbreak of World War II shaped discourses on food security in the Chilwa basin between 1939 and 1948. It observes that the need for foodstuffs from African colonies for the military and for countering the prevailing world food crisis in the post-war era stimulated colonial interest in supporting peasants' food production in the basin. With funding from the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 and 1945, the state introduced programmes to train local agricultural and conservation officers, construct permanent agricultural markets, intensify the supply of high yielding varieties of crops, formulate progressive agricultural policies and establish the MCB and NRB in order to improve peasant agriculture. For the first time in colonial history, the state prioritised food production and marketing in its interventions in the Chilwa basin.

However, the contradictory role of encouraging food production and conservation together with British pressure for more foodstuffs accounted for the limited impact of the campaign to grow more food during and after the war. When the state shifted its priority from food to cash crops, it reduced the prices for maize while keeping those of cash crops high. This development forced most peasants to reduce maize production and resist the adoption of tractors and chemical fertilisers to facilitate the expansion of food crop production in the basin. The peasants, who inherently considered land as an ancestral property and agriculture as a means to subsistence and reinforcement of social networks rather than economic good, resisted attempts by the state to transform customary land tenure through land registration. Most peasants from the basin ignored the instruction regarding conservation and early land preparation arguing that land was at its hardest in the months of October and November when the state wanted them to undertake the task. Similarly, they regarded the fines levelled against

them for encroaching into protected areas such as forest reserves and streambanks as licences to continue cultivating in the areas.

Notwithstanding, the chapter observes that not all peasants reacted negatively to the attempts by the state to improve their productivity during this period. Food traders, *Askaris* and progressive farmers took advantage of the developments to earn living and class distinctions. While the *askaris* enjoyed the benefit of lucrative, though, risky military employment, food traders took advantage of the campaign to procure more foodstuffs for sale from the permanent markets established by the state in the basin. Although women were somehow affected by the loss of male labour through military recruitment and labour migration, they benefited from the introduction of maize mills that eased the pressure of pounding maize into flour. Similarly, the introduction of conservation agriculture resulted in the emergence of some peasants who, for reasons of prompt adoption to new colonial agrarian practices, were identified by the state as progressive farmers. The state trained some of these peasants from the Chilwa basin as agricultural and conservation agents at Makwapala agricultural school. In its bid to achieve sustainable development, the state refrained from the use of coercion to enforce compliance with agricultural rules among the peasants. However, the advent of the historical drought of 1948/9 left the state with fewer options regarding the avoidance of force in the pursuit of peasants' compliance with the production of maize surpluses.

Chapter Five

‘A Method of Mass Attack Must be Found’: State Interventions into Peasants’ Food Economy in Late Colonial Malawi, 1948-1961

1. Introduction

In 1948, the state undertook decisive, coercive and large-scale agricultural interventions among the peasants of the Lake Chilwa basin. The state’s adoption of large-scale interventions was a direct response to the 1948/49 drought, which affected the food security of the country.¹ Some of the projects the state undertook in the Chilwa basin included the Domasi community development scheme, Master Farmers’ scheme, resettlement schemes and irrigation schemes. The undertaking of these large-scale interventions was aimed at increasing the production of food and cash crops for local and international use. This chapter examines the extent to which these projects affected the food security of the peasants in the Chilwa basin between 1948 and 1961. It builds on Megan Vaughan’s study, which explored the conjunctural and structural factors that led to the occurrence of the 1948/9 famine by comprehensively examining the projects that the state undertook in response to this famine.² The chapter argues that, while it might have been technically correct in its interventions during the post-war period, the state conceived the projects presumptuously. In addition, the use of coercive means made it difficult for most peasants from the Chilwa basin to accept the interventions.

¹ Kettlewell, ‘Agricultural Change in Malawi.’ 240-1.

² For details, see Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine*.

In making this argument, the chapter is responding to a host of scholarship devoted to an analysis of the patterns and processes of colonial development in rural Africa during the last phase of colonialism.³ Scholars describe this process as the ‘second colonial occupation’ in which Britain financed colonial economic projects to raise revenue for its economic recovery after World War II.⁴ As in most parts of Africa, the Malawian historiography on the ‘second colonial occupation’ was dominated by narratives of conservation and betterment schemes.⁵ William Beinart examined the ‘way in which fears about soil erosion, and official conservationist ideology contributed to shape successive intervention into both the settler and peasant agriculture in Nyasaland.’⁶ Elias Mandala accounted for the growth of ‘ecological wars’ in the Lower Shire valley where the state implemented conservation projects such as ridging, land resettlement and the Shire Valley Project at the expense of pre-existing local economies and social structures.⁷ Wapulumuka Mulwafu and Erik Green explored at length how the state implemented conservation programmes in the private estates and Trust Land in Nyasaland.⁸ However, this historiography has paid little attention to how these developments affected peasants’ food economy in the Chilwa basin. Furthermore, Elias Mandala’s work, which analyses food history, is limited to the impacts of these interventions on the everyday struggles of the peasants as they sought to maintain food self-sufficiency in the Lower Shire

³ For details, see Zeleza, ‘The Political Economy of British Colonial Development’; Cooper, *African Since 1940*; Cooper, ‘Reconstructing Empire,’ 50-60.

⁴ For detailed references on the ‘second colonial occupation,’ see footnote 21 of Chapter One.

⁵ For details, see D. Anderson and R. Grove, (eds.), *Conservation in Africa: People, Policies and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Beinart, ‘Soil Erosion, Conservationism and Ideas about Development;’ P. Delius and S. Schirmer, ‘Soil Conservation in a Racially Ordered Society: South Africa 1930-1970,’ *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, 4 (2000), 719-742; R. Grove, ‘Colonial Conservation, Ecological Hegemony and Popular Resistance: Towards a Global Synthesis,’ in J. Mackenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and the Natural World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); J. McGregor, ‘Conservation, Control and ecological Change: The Politics and Ecology of colonial Conservation in Shurugwi, Zimbabwe,’ *Environment and History*, 1 (1995), 257-279; Phimister, ‘Discourse and the Discipline of Historical Context;’ S. Speek, ‘Ecological Concepts of Development: The Case of Colonial Zambia,’ in J. Hodge, G. Hodl and M. Kopf (eds.), *Concepts and Practices in Twentieth Century Colonialism* (London: Manchester University Press, 2017).

⁶ Beinart, ‘Agricultural Planning,’ 96.

⁷ For details, see Mandala, *Work and Control in Peasant Economy*.

⁸ For details, see Mulwafu, ‘Soil Erosion and State Intervention,’ 25-43; Mulwafu, ‘The State, Conservation and Peasant Response in Colonial Malawi,’ 201-215; Mulwafu, ‘Transformations in Malawi’s Agricultural Economy;,’ 34-49; *Conservation Song*; and Green, ‘A Lasting Story,’ 247-267.

valley.⁹ Furthermore, while these projects led to the appropriation of resources, as has been alleged by underdevelopment scholars, its effects were moderated by the nationalist struggles of the time, and varied with class. Some classes of peasants, such as Master Farmers, irrigation plotters and Africans located in settlement schemes, benefitted from the projects.¹⁰ Furthermore, the peasants and the state were not always rigid in their resistance and interventions, respectively.

The chapter begins with an examination of how the 1948/9 drought led to the intensification of state interventions into peasant agriculture. Thereafter, it explores the large-scale projects the state undertook in the Chilwa basin during this period. It concludes with an analysis of the moderate approach that was readopted by the state in the face of increased peasants and nationalist resistance to its use of coercion. The chapter focuses particularly on the discourses and narratives as well as social differentiations that emerged in the process of implementing large-scale interventions in the Chilwa basin.

2. Drought and the Evolution of Large-Scale State Interventions into Peasant Agriculture, 1948-1951

As in most parts of Southern Africa, the Chilwa basin experienced a drought in the 1948/49 growing season. The causes and the consequences of the drought have been comprehensively analysed by Megan Vaughan.¹¹ What is important to note here is that the peasants of the Chilwa basin remember the famine that resulted from this drought as a time of death and

⁹ For details, see Mandala, *The End of Chidyerano*.

¹⁰ For details, see D. K. Fieldhouse, 'The Economic Exploitation of Africa: Some British and French Companies,' in P. Gifford and W. R. Louis, (eds.), *France and Britain in Africa* (Yale University Press, 1973); G. Padmore, *Africa: Britain Third Empire* (Negro University Press, 1949); Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

¹¹ For details, see Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine*.

misery. Ester Salima, who resided in Ramusi village in the Chilwa basin at the time, maintained that, although the peasants of the basin had experienced several famines, they regarded this particular famine as the worst.¹² The famine started with a delay in rainfall in 1948 followed by a prolonged drought up to April 1949.¹³ Between November 1948 and April 1949, average rainfall in Mulanje and Zomba dropped from the normal 63.37 inches and 51.03 inches per day to 31.07 inches and 25.43 inches respectively.¹⁴ The effects of the drought were accentuated by the locust invasion and poor harvest of 1947. Consequently, there was widespread famine that claimed the lives of over 200 people. Most of the people who died were from the Southern Province to which the Chilwa basin is located.¹⁵ Megan Vaughan argues that divorce and male migration, which increased during the famine, made women from the Chilwa basin to be the most affected.¹⁶ Wives of migrants bore the most pains as the state only gave food relief through their husbands. In their absence, the state was reluctant to provide these women with food relief.

While the peasants attributed the famine to the restrictive conservation policies on streambank and shifting cultivation and the absence of market incentives for food crops, the state considered the famine as a by-product of the peasants' unsustainable population growth and poor agricultural methods.¹⁷ The population of the country doubled from 1.2 million in 1921 to 2.5 million in 1948.¹⁸ As of 1945, the population of the Chilwa basin was 469 495 of which 138 421 people resided in Kasupe (now Machinga), 142 696 in Zomba and 188 378 in Mulanje.¹⁹ The state argued that this population increase undermined the ability of the

¹² Interviews: Ester Salima, Ramusi Village, T/A Mwambo, Likangal, Zomba, 9 December 2016.

¹³ MNA AFC 7/3/1 African Food Commission, 1948-1950.

¹⁴ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Agricultural Department for the Year Ending 1950.

¹⁵ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 253.

¹⁶ M. Vaughan, *The Story of An African Famine*, last chapter.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Nyasaland Protectorate, Reports of Population Census in Nyasaland, 1921-1948.

¹⁹ Malawi Government, *Malawi Population Census 1966* (Zomba: Department of Census and Statistics, 1967).

peasants in the Chilwa basin to produce sufficient food to cushion them from the crop failure caused by the drought.²⁰ Richard Kettlewell, the Senior Agricultural Officer, and the architect behind the 1946 agricultural policy observed, from neo-Malthusian perspective that, the problem in Nyasaland was ‘... that of too many people multiplying too fast and attempting by traditional and insufficient methods to derive an ever rising level of living from limited amount of land.’²¹ Such low-level technology of peasant agriculture needed transformation if the country was to avert similar recurrent famines.

Similarly, the state attributed the famine to what it perceived as the irresponsible behaviour of the Chilwa peasants to adopt the more seemingly progressive strategies outlined in the 1946 agricultural policy. The state argued that the presence of chiefs in decision-making structures made it extremely difficult to intervene radically into the African peasantry.²² As Mulwafu argued, very often chiefs from the basin sabotaged and resisted any suggested projects that involved excessive use of coercion in the Chilwa basin.²³ Some of the chiefs that resisted state projects included Kumtumanje and Mkumbira in Zomba. As also noted in the preceding chapters, the state considered the peasants as inherently lazy and conservative with regards to adopting new agricultural reforms in the basin.

Thus, the state took advantage of the famine to begin its implementation of coercive measures in the name of checking a recurrence of the famine. In addition, the state moved with force to implement agricultural practices it thought would make the peasants to intensify the production of food crops. Richard Kettlewell observed that ‘measures of compulsion were

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Kettlewell, ‘Agricultural Change in Nyasaland, 1945-1960,’ 239.

²² Nyasaland Protectorate, Native Authority Ordinance of 1932.

²³ Mulwafu, ‘Transformations in Malawi’s Agricultural Economy,’ 44.

considered justified to overcome the lethargy induced by famine and to minimize the risk of recurrence.²⁴ In his report on the drought and famine, the Director of Agriculture argued,

It is becoming increasingly obvious that this country must make a complete change in its agricultural policy within the very near future unless it is to meet disaster. The population continues to increase and there is yet no sign that the African cultivator is willing or able to change his ways. A few of the more intelligent were willing, and a few of them are able, to carry out better methods of farming and to adopt simple soil conservation methods, but they are quickly submerged and lost in sea of inertia and suspicion. The need is urgent and cannot afford to wait. A method of mass attack must be found and put into operation quickly. There is no time to start with the intelligent and work slowly outwards. A new system, possibly of group farming, must be found and tried out and put into practice. The inherent difficulties by an overcrowded and generally illiterate population, attempting to apply their ageless methods of shifting cultivation with fragmentations of land on a now enforced static existence make this second problem a formidable one. It is apparent that the problem cannot be solved by the technician alone. The political and sociological aspects are equally fundamental and complex. Practical policy at the moment is doing little more than attempting a physical retention of the soil. Maintenance and improvement of fertility are not being achieved and unless a solution is found in and applied quickly, the future is not bright. There is no doubt that the solution cannot be found in, nor based on, present African customs and land usage. Wide and sweeping changes of fundamental political and sociological importance will have to take place whatever may be the administrative difficulties.²⁵

The Director's sentiments resonated greatly with the thinking of the Governor, Sir Geoffrey Colby. Since his appointment in 1948, Colby expressed fears about the precariousness of over-relying on the peasantry for food supply in the country.²⁶ He felt that the peasants were highly undercapitalised and technologically backward to produce sufficient food crops that would meet the rapidly growing population of the country. Under these circumstances, he

²⁴ Kettlewell, 'Agricultural Change in Nyasaland,' 241.

²⁵ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1949.

²⁶ C. Baker, *Development Governor: A Biography of Sir Geoffrey Colby* (London: British Academy Press, 1994), 180.

contended that any rainfall failure would have disastrous effects on the country's food security. This would have the knock-on effect of derailing his development agenda. Thus, the occurrence of the drought and famine in 1948/9 only confirmed his earlier fears.²⁷ Colby was determined to take serious action not only to address the immediate impact of the famine, but also to ensure that such an event never occurred again in the country.²⁸ From then onwards, the state abandoned its passive approaches, and implemented decisive agricultural interventions among the peasants including those of the Chilwa basin.

To begin with, Colby took decisive measures to deal with the famine that followed the 1948/9 drought. Unlike in the past, whereby District Commissioners and the officials from the Agriculture Department were engaged in famine management, Colby appointed a Foodstuff Commission composed of businesspersons and chaired by a successful businessman from Limbe called Burrow, to coordinate famine alleviation programmes. Colby engaged these businesspersons and non-civil servants in an effort to elicit quick decisions and apply business skills in addressing the famine.²⁹ At the end of its contract, the Commission had to prepare a comprehensive report on the causes of the famine and suggest possible ways to be adopted in order to arrest the problem of famine for the last time.³⁰

Following the Commission's appointment, Colby committed himself to sourcing food relief for the country. Colby defied the African Protectorate Council's directive of 1941, which prohibited states from seeking external food relief and successfully acquired 26 000 tonnes of maize from Britain and Southern Rhodesia.³¹ At the same time, he advised the Director of Agriculture to launch a food production campaign, which, the state colloquially

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ For the cost of the famine see, Nyasaland Protectorate, Famine Commission Report, 1950.

²⁹ Baker, *Development Governor*, 190.

³⁰ Nyasaland Protectorate, Food Commission of 1949.

³¹ Baker, *Development Governor*, 190.

called the 'Planting Drive.'³² The primary aim of the Drive was to replace the scotched dead maize with drought resistant crops such as sweet potatoes, millet and cassava. The Director also temporarily waived the rules against cultivating along stream-banks and hill slopes in order to give weight to the Drive, as noted in his directive: 'Certain breaches of rules on streambank cultivation had to be ignored temporarily, in the urgent need to produce more crops.'³³ He further advocated for the establishment of a national grain reserve in Limbe where the state would store not less than 25 000 tonnes of maize annually.³⁴

The Planting Drive initiative enabled the peasants from the Chilwa basin to plant a large acreage of drought resistant crops, which sustained them in the immediate terms. The District Commissioner for Zomba reported that,

On the whole, the African population saw the need and made it; though in some areas, especially in the Chilwa plain and on Chisi Island where the population subsist by trading in fish, the response was sluggish. There is no doubt that the phase of the PD enabled the District as a whole to subsist without Famine Relief a great deal longer than it otherwise would have done.³⁵

Similarly, the state passed New Native Authority Agricultural Orders on 1 July 1949 in readiness for the 1949/50 growing season. The new order gave chiefs powers seeking to enforce early land preparation and planting rules among the peasants in rural areas like the Chilwa basin. The orders required that peasants who failed to comply pay a fine of £5 or face three months' imprisonment with hard labour. Since the growing season was just starting, the state asked chiefs to communicate and enforce the orders forthwith. The orders were as follows:

³² Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1949.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ MNA NSZ 4/1/6 Zomba District Reports, 1947-1953; Report of 1949.

- Every household to cultivate a field that shall supply sufficient food for his family
- Every household to cultivate ½ acre of cassava
- Cultivation should be on straight ridges of 1 ½ft high, boxed in 4 yards
- Banding of gardens as measured by instructors and *capitaos* within 2 weeks, and ridging done within 2 months
- Land preparation should be completed before 1st December. The garden should be well managed.³⁶

Meanwhile, the state opened food relief distribution centres in the rural parts of the country and the expectation was that the recipients of food relief would be engaged in conservation and public road construction works. Within Zomba alone, the state opened 15 relief centres. The recipients participated in the construction of roads such as Namitembo road, the road from Nanyumba to Mpiri Mission, from 6 miles on Zomba/Blantyre road to Chichinda and Nachima.³⁷ The state launched a second Planting Drive phase from September to November to encourage peasants to prepare their gardens fully before the first rains.³⁸ Within the same year, the state established a maize farm of 910 acres at Nkhumbé in the Blantyre district for the cultivation of emergency maize that would be stored in the national grain reserve.³⁹ After the famine, the state used the farm for a seed multiplication programme.⁴⁰ However, the conservation relaxation was removed in 1950 on the understanding that ‘these efforts to

³⁶ Ibid, Native Authorities Agricultural Orders 1949.

³⁷ MNA NSZ 4/1/6 Zomba District Reports, 1947-1953, Zomba Special report 1949/1950.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1950.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

improve the output of more and better food for a growing population will be of no avail if soil fertility is not preserved.⁴¹

The initial response from the peasants of the Lake Chilwa basin to the 1949/50 state campaign for early land preparation, planting and weeding was extremely encouraging. Memories of the devastation of the famine were still at the forefront of their minds and they could thus not be casual about their agricultural activities. Others feared that if they became less diligent, the state might deny them food relief.⁴² Consequently, the peasants from the Chilwa basin, like others in the country, gave themselves to uncommon industry in the cultivation of food crops. The timely and good rains that came afforded the peasants a compensatory bumper harvest. The state permitted the MCB to buy maize unrestrictedly from all the areas that produced surplus in the basin in order to avoid food deficits. The acquired maize was supplied to employers and state officials who had not cultivated food crops. The state also discouraged peasants from over selling their produce by offering to buy maize at a low price to the tune of 1d per lb.⁴³ In the same spirit, most private estates, who constituted the major buyers of peasants' foodstuffs from the Chilwa basin, ventured into food production in 1949/50. These estates 'made a very commendable contribution towards their own needs and were less dependent than formerly on African Trust Land production.'⁴⁴

However, these achievements were not without challenges. For example, peasants from the Chilwa basin took advantage of the temporary relief on conservation to over cultivate hill slopes and streambanks. According to Dyson Sukali, who witnessed the events

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Interview: Ester Salima, Ramusi Village, T/A Mtambo, Zomba, 15 december 2016.

⁴³ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1950.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

in Phalombe, the peasants did this because they had insufficient cultivation land.⁴⁵ Yet the state forced them to observe conservation discipline. The DC for Zomba reported,

As regards conservation, the year 1950 was a depressing one. In order to secure the largest possible production of food in 1950, rules controlling the cultivation of steep hill slopes and the 'protected strips' or streambanks were relaxed in 1949. It is, therefore, necessary in 1950 to re-impose these restrictions, if considerable damage to the country through soil-erosion was to be avoided. In carrying out this policy, it was necessary to overcome an attitude of passive resistance on the part of the population and apathy on that of the NA.⁴⁶

In addition, the Planting Drive campaign forced the peasants to concentrate on food crops at the expense of cash crops. The DC of Zomba observed,

There is no doubt that the 'Planting Drive' while resulting in a first-rate harvest as regards food crops had somewhat adverse effect on the recovery of cash crop production in the district, as cultivators, in expanding their holdings to the largest possible acreage of food crops had little time for the planting and care of other crops.⁴⁷

The DC for Zomba also attempted at maintaining higher yields in the 1950/51 agricultural season by ordering the peasants, as per the instructions from the Director of Agriculture, to prepare gardens before October. In the interim, the DC prohibited the peasants from brewing and drinking beer in the district. The idea was to force the peasants to concentrate on agricultural work and not social activities such as drinking beer.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, the compliance rate to these orders was extremely low. For instance, by the time the first rains came, most of the gardens in Zomba were unprepared.⁴⁹ When the DC called for the law to

⁴⁵ Interview: Dyson Sukali, Tsekakhomo Village, T/A Nazombe, Phalombe, 16 December 2016.

⁴⁶ MNA NSZ 4/1/6 Zomba District Reports, 1947-1953, Report 1950.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ MNA NSZ 4/1/6 Zomba District Reports, 1947-1953, 1951 Report.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 1950 Report.

be enforced, 'The Council of Chiefs refused to pass a draft order laying down a date by which all gardens were to be prepared to planting and the DC, with the approval of the Provincial Commissioner was compelled to use his reserve powers to make this order.'⁵⁰ Instead of referring the failure of the peasants to prepare their gardens to earlier concerns regarding excessive temperature and the corresponding hardness of the soil in September and October, the Director of Agriculture attributed the failure to peasants' love for beer drinking. He reported,

The awful speed with which the lessons of the former were forgotten is not only disappointing but is indicative of the primitive stage of development of the average peasant cultivator. The harvest was followed, not unnaturally perhaps, by so much beer drinking that the early preparation of food gardens for the next season – the greatest single security available- was seriously and widely neglected.⁵¹

According to the Director of Agriculture, the state could only deal with what they felt was peasants' disposition to laziness and conservatism with 'pressure other than spontaneous improvement.'⁵² Consequently, Colby began to put up formal structures for large-scale interventions into the peasantry beginning from 1951. In the first place, he promoted Richard Kettlewell to the position of Director of Agriculture. Kettlewell took over from Garnet, who, despite advocating for coercive intervention during the famine times, was reluctant to take the requisite steps.⁵³ Colby accused Garnet of influencing the MCB to over-regulate the production and marketing of food crops, which resulted in the famine. By contrast, Kettlewell went down in history as the mastermind of decisive agricultural and conservation policies in the country. Through Kettlewell's leadership, the state implemented large-scale development schemes such as the Domasi community development scheme, the Master Farmers Scheme

⁵⁰ Ibid, 1951 Report.

⁵¹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1950.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

and irrigation and land use resettlement schemes in the Lake Chilwa basin. Coercion and militarism was the tenor characteristic of agricultural development during Kettlewell's tenure.

3. Colonial Large-Scale Food Security Schemes in the Chilwa Basin, 1949-1958

In 1949, the state embarked on large-scale projects to fundamentally transform the peasants' food economy in the Chilwa basin. As noted above, the state thought that small-scale and individualised interventions were slow in making a lasting impact on peasant agriculture in Nyasaland. The state resolved to reorganise the whole system of agricultural production through wider community development projects. It targeted, on the one hand, individualised agricultural extension to a handful of peasants who adopted agricultural reforms in the basin, while, on the other, the majority of the peasants from the basin were to be reorganised through the wider community projects.⁵⁴

The earliest large-scale scheme was the Domasi Community Development. This project, which started with the declaration of Domasi as an independent district from Zomba in 1949,⁵⁵ was undertaken in North-Western Zomba between 1949 and 1955.⁵⁶ A total funding of £78 760 was sourced from the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund and the Native Development and Welfare fund to initiate the Domasi scheme. The scheme was meant to provide an intensive study of rural development with particular attention to local government, taxation and land use. As per state policy, conservation was the primary focus of the scheme. E. Thompson, who coordinated the project as DC, argued that,

⁵⁴ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1949.

⁵⁵ See Map 1 for the location of Domasi.

⁵⁶ For details, see E. Thompson, *Domasi Community Development Scheme, 1949-1955* (Zomba: Nyasaland Government Printer, 1955).

There is no point in teaching people better methods of using their land if its goodness continues to go down the drain. In Nyasaland conditions, it is too late to depend on education, and persuasion and compulsion, accompanied by full explanation, must be applied.⁵⁷

Although simple soil conservation measures of ridging, banding and contouring were undertaken, the main characteristic of the Domasi scheme was its stature as an experimental land resettlement project. The state first launched a land resettlement project at Malosa and later extended the scheme to an adjacent village called Chitenjere in 1951. The state purchased an old estate in the area, which formerly belonged to the Scottish Mission, for the project's resettlement of peasants from Malosa in the Chilwa basin. Before the state resettled the peasants, it demarcated the land into properly laid out economic sized plots of approximately six acres each. Settlement into the scheme was on condition that settlers make economic use of the land in relation to proper husbandry, conservation and intensive food production.⁵⁸ In these new settlements, 'houses were rebuilt, in better style, on contours in a frying-pan formation.'⁵⁹ Thompson reported that, although the holdings and dwellings were scattered, the 'social cohesion was fair, its population was about average for local villages, and it was in the truly "rural" zone of the development.'⁶⁰

The state hoped that the intensification of the provision of agricultural extension services would enhance the food security of the peasants in the Domasi scheme. On this, Domasi had a good start. For example, the average yields of maize in Chitenjere village, which were only 300lbs to an acre in 1950, rose to average yields of 800lbs per acre in

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

1951.⁶¹ However, the greatest food security achievement was in rice production, which the original inhabitants had been cultivating in the area. Rice was in high demand due to the growth of Zomba and Blantyre Townships. However, rice was being cultivated without water control systems and thus, production only succeeded at the mercy of rains and floods with less rice being produced to meet this growing demand. Before 1955, peasants from Domasi could hardly produce 7 500 tonnes of rice.⁶² The state wanted the expansion of the rice production to assist peasants take advantage of the price of 60 pounds per tonne of clean first grade rice, which the Federal Government guaranteed for sale in Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia.⁶³ In addition, rice production had recovered globally and prices correspondingly declined, and this made the Federal pledge a reliable alternative export market for the peasants' rice from the Chilwa basin.⁶⁴

The state promoted rice cultivation at Domasi through the organisation of demonstration plots. It established the earliest small demonstration plots in the Domasi valley area in 1949. These demonstration plots were used by the state to reorient the peasants from the surrounding villages on how to effectively cultivate rice. It showed them the advantages of first growing rice in small nursery gardens before transplanting them in the main garden.⁶⁵ The only challenge was that the peasants associated the productivity of the demonstration plots with the use of fertilisers, which was beyond their financial muscle.⁶⁶ Eventually, not many peasants patronised the demonstration plots nor adopted the new methods of growing rice. In response, the state started to distribute high yielding rice seeds to the farmers. The

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Kettlewell, 'Agricultural Change in Nyasaland,' 261.

⁶³ For details about the Central African Federation and its economic implications, see A. P. Cohen, *The Politics and Economics of Decolonisation: The Failed Experiment of the Central African Federation*, 1st Ed. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017).

⁶⁴ MNA: NSG 1/6/3 Domasi Valley Area, 1943 -1952.

⁶⁵ Kettlewell, 'Agricultural Change in Nyasaland,' 262.

⁶⁶ MNA: NSG 1/6/3 Domasi Valley Area, 1943 -1952.

⁶⁷ Kettlewell, 'Agricultural Change in Nyasaland.'

varieties that were popularly distributed were Faya and Kotakota. Later in 1954, the state introduced rice cooperatives for the rice growers located in the Chilwa basin.⁶⁷ Ides Mulongoti, however, contended that the new varieties of rice introduced were not of the taste the peasants would easily adopt in the basin. She argued that the rice introduced lacked the flavour of the local varieties of rice they were growing.⁶⁸

Similarly, the state faced challenges in promoting conservation and settlement in the Domasi scheme. There was a high peasant resistance to contour banding. The peasants were of the impression that the project was initiated to capture and domesticate them under state hegemony. Thompson reported that,

Banding is unpopular. It means a departure from the traditional casual attitude to the future of the land. To a suspicion –ridden people it is obviously a preparation, at their expenses, for their land to be taken over by foreigners. Where pressure on the land is heavy, bands reduce the planting area by anything from five to fifteen per cent, and the compensating improvement in the soil is not seen for some years. Bands across paths annoy travellers especially cyclist. On some soil, banding can cause water logging.⁶⁹

The peasants also thought that conservation prohibited practices that maintained their food security. They argued that conservation reduced the acreage for cultivation and exposed soil to waterlogging and termite attack. It was also difficult for the peasants to engage in practices such as crop rotation and fallowing, as they did not have adequate land. Furthermore, the state sent peasants who did not comply with the regulations to prison and thus, deprived their families of labour for effective agricultural production. In some instances, crops that were planted late or on poorly prepared land were uprooted leaving the peasants with no alternative

⁶⁷ MNA: NSZ 4/1/7 Annual Report, Zomba District, 1954.

⁶⁸ Interview: Ides Mulongoti, Thiko Village, T/A Malemia, Zomba, 9 December 2016.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 43.

crops for their subsistence. Most importantly, conservation projects took a lot of the time the peasants needed to devote to food production.⁷⁰

The rumours that the state was pursuing conservation to prepare the land for federal Europeans to take over resulted in peasants resorting to deliberate violations of conservation regulations. The state found itself in a quandary, as it did not want to disrupt conservation labour and at the same time was hesitant to imprison peasants who breached the regulations. Consequently, the Domasi scheme was fraught with numerous cases of conservation offenses. Thompson reported,

In 1951, there were 1,018 reports of breaches of conservation regulations, all of which were investigated on the spot; 213 convictions resulted. There were 213 involving 4500 acres and in 1954 there were 80 convictions in relation to 32600 acres. If a man is fined for some breaches of conservation legislation, he regards the penalty as payment for a licence to continue the breach; if he is imprisoned for not doing what he should have done, the job remains undone.⁷¹

Consequently, the existing land shortage in Domasi, did not lead to an immediate rush for settlement into Malosa and Chitengere schemes. By 1951, the state had only succeeded to allocate peasants into eight plots. Seven of these were in the hands of people whose origin was outside the communities surrounding Domasi scheme. These settlers consisted of Master Farmers and retired government officers. Most of them had a reliable alternative income with which to sustain production under the conditions stipulated in the settlement agreement.⁷² The other peasants found it extremely difficult to meet the scheme's requirements. When the state asked one settler to put his land holding to rotational agriculture, his response was 'Yes,

⁷⁰ Interview: Ides Mulongoti, Thiko Village, T/A Malemia, Zomba, 9 December 2016.

⁷¹ Ibid, 43.

⁷² Thompson, *Domasi Community Development Scheme*, 44.

this idea seems good and may improve my land, but if I have got to rest half of it for a few years to get these results what do I eat in the meantime.⁷³ Similarly, Mulwafu recorded an outbreak of peasant riots in 1953 after the state detained Chief Malemia on allegations that he was secretly supporting peasants to sabotage conservation programmes in the Domasi area.⁷⁴ Thus, the Domasi scheme had limited impact on the food security of the peasants in the Chilwa basin.

As noted above, the Domasi scheme went hand in hand with the Master Farmers scheme. This Scheme involved the empowerment of selected 'progressive farmers' who would act as models to the other villagers. Owen Kalinga has provided an extensive analysis of the objects and procedures of the Master Farmers scheme in Nyasaland.⁷⁵ What is important to note here is that, although the state wanted the Master Farmers' scheme to promote the production of cash crops, the requirement for Master Farmers to demonstrate ability to produce foodstuffs enhanced their food security.⁷⁶ Master Farmers were encouraged to do livestock farming, plant fruit trees and own granaries for food reserves.⁷⁷ The state adopted this scheme to give the African peasantry a new face and direction that departed drastically from the traditional methods of farming practiced in the Chilwa basin.⁷⁸

Like the Domasi scheme, the Master Farmer scheme was fraught with failures than successes. Right from the beginning, the scheme failed to attract the majority of the peasants in the basin. The challenge was that Master Farmers had to assume a great deal of work like manuring, ploughing and fencing with only a Master Farmers Badge, Certificate and

⁷³ Ibid, 46.

⁷⁴ For details about the Domasi revolts, see Mulwafu, *Conservation Song*, 201-210.

⁷⁵ For details, see Kalinga, 'The Master Farmers in Nyasaland.'

⁷⁶ Kettlewell, 'Agricultural Change in Nyasaland,' 243-245.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Agricultural pamphlet, as their reward. The activities were labour intensive, and thus, required huge capital, which most peasants did not have. It was reported that,

The standard aimed at is high, and apathy is still the limiting factor to progress. The general attitude to people is also that the award of a medal and a certificate is not sufficient reward for hard work, and it may be necessary to consider providing some more concrete inducement.⁷⁹

Since the state had confidence in the programme, it responded to these early challenges by introducing bonuses as a motivation to Master Farmers who cultivated more acres of land. The state allocated a sum of £10 000 per annum from the Native Development and Welfare Fund to finance the reward of bonuses to Master Farmers in 1952. The state also agreed to give credits for inputs, offer bonuses, and channelled extension services to the Master Farmers.⁸⁰

Nevertheless, as in Southern Rhodesia and Kenya, the scheme's selective approach created more hostilities and conflict between ordinary peasants and Master Farmers.⁸¹ Most of the Master Farmers were accused of cooperating with the state in promoting conservation through which the state prohibited peasants from cultivating along the streams and hilltops. Furthermore, very few peasants from the Lake Chilwa basin qualified to cultivate eight acres of land as the state required. As a result, when the state abolished the programme in 1962, there were only 15 farmers who had become Master Farmers, with ten being local chiefs from the Chilwa basin.⁸² Among the chiefs were, GVH Njala, Samikwa, Sikamu, Chingondo, Namondwe, Kamoto, and Tawakali. The most outstanding ordinary Master Farmers were

⁷⁹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1951.

⁸⁰ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1952.

⁸¹ For details of Master Farmers in Southern Rhodesia, see for example, Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe*.

⁸² MNA 1 DCZA 3/3/4 Agricultural Reports for Zomba, 1950-1961.

Stepheson Kumakanda, Leonard Makhumula, Dominiko Mataika, Moses Mwenya, and Richard Ngwede. However, Stepheson Kumakanga was the most successful. He owned 24 acres of land, cattle and four ploughs, and constructed a dam for irrigation and fish farming in Malosa area.⁸³ Most of these Master Farmers were ex-migrants and retired civil servants, and members of the Malosa and Likangala settlement schemes. Thus, the Master Farmers scheme tended to assist those people who already had money while the majority remained excluded from its benefits.⁸⁴ The programme was also not as lucrative among the Master Farmers themselves as presented by the colonialists. Kalinga argued that most of the Master Farmers sustained production through retirement payments, government bonuses and off-farm work rather than agricultural production.⁸⁵

The third project that the state undertook in the Chilwa basin during this period was the construction of irrigation schemes. The state embarked on this project to increase food crop production in the face of recurrent droughts and floods, rapid population growth and land scarcity.⁸⁶ By the early 1940s, rice was becoming the second staple food in the country. White settlers, who were not used to *msima*, wanted the supply of rice from these irrigation schemes for their daily meal.⁸⁷ The existence of littoral floodplains and hydromorphic soil singled out the Chilwa basin for the cultivation of rice.⁸⁸ Thus, the state developed irrigation schemes in the basin to maximise the utility value of these seemingly underutilised ecologies.⁸⁹

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Interview: Ester Salima, Ramusi Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 15 December 2016.

⁸⁵ Kalinga, 'The Master Farmers,' 372.

⁸⁶ Nyasaland Protectorate, Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year 1950.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

The earliest irrigation project was the Phalombe/Chilwa development project.⁹⁰ Unlike in the Domasi area, the state initially wanted to divert water for irrigation from the Phalombe River.⁹¹ As noted in chapter four, this project followed the results of the surveys conducted by R. A. Leach in 1947, which identified possible irrigation development areas in the country.⁹² Based on these results, the state determined to establish a large-scale project of not less than 10 000 acres for rice cultivation in Phalombe.⁹³ The project was also to be used to draw from the finances provided by the Overseas Food Corporation (OFC) fund from Britain, which targeted such large-scale food projects.⁹⁴ Before the project was undertaken, the state conducted a feasibility study of the acreage, water resources, soil fertility and appropriate varieties of food crops to be grown in the area. In 1951/2, the state undertook experimental irrigation cultivation of a variety of crops including all common food crops and rice. Unfortunately, owing to excessive rains, the Phalombe River flooded its banks and washed away many of these trials.⁹⁵

The state made further investigations on the Sombani River, which was located to the east of Phalombe and offered more prospects for agricultural development in the Chilwa basin.⁹⁶ With funding from the Colonial Development and Welfare Grant, the state diverted water from the Sombani River for the pilot irrigation project.⁹⁷ This project, which kick-started in 1952/3, was designed to run for three years. Six hundred acres of land were cleared and levelled for the pilot scheme and 100 acres were cultivated.⁹⁸ Also installed on the pilot scheme was the system of automatically controlled gates, which regulated the flow of water

⁹⁰ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1952.

⁹¹ See Map 2 for the location of Phalombe and Songani rivers.

⁹² MNA NSZ 1/2/4 Southern Province reports, 1945-1949. Extract from the Zomba DC Report of 1948.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ See Zeleza, 'The Political Economy,' 153.

⁹⁵ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1952.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report, Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1953.

⁹⁸ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1954.

into the scheme. However, the dry conditions experienced that year in Mulanje resulted in low water levels in the Sombani River and low flows for the scheme. Consequently, the scheme produced low yields ranging from 1 600 to 6 000 lbs paddy to an acre.⁹⁹

The uncertainty of water from the Sombani River forced the state to test the possibility of using water from the Lake Chilwa for the project. The results, however, showed that water from the lake contained high concentrations of injurious salt for rice irrigation.¹⁰⁰ While the harnessing of waters from both the Phalombe and Sombani Rivers provided prospects for the project, the amount of land between the two rivers was not sufficient for the large scheme the state wanted to undertake in the area.¹⁰¹ Eventually, the state resolved to discontinue with the project in 1956. The growing uncertainty of the world rice market and the dissolution of the Overseas Food Corporation after the failure of the Groundnuts scheme in Kenya in 1954 also contributed to the discontinuity of the project.¹⁰²

Meanwhile, the Commissioner for Cooperative Development, in conjunction with the Zomba District Administration, investigated the possibility of increasing rice production through a cooperative marketing organisation in the swamps between Lake Chilwa and Lake Chiuta in 1954.¹⁰³ In embarking on this project, the state wanted to empower existing rice growers who successfully evolved a simple water flow control for the irrigation of rice. The state sent sub-chief Mlomba, to whom the area belonged, to visit Kilupula Rice Cooperative Union in Karonga so that he could see for himself the operations and benefits of rice

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1955.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1956.

For the failure of The Groundnut scheme in Kenya see Zeleza, 'The Political Economy,' 153.

¹⁰³ NSZ 4/1/7 Zomba District Annual Reports, 1954-1961, Report of 1954.

cooperatives.¹⁰⁴ However, fearing for the loss of tribute that he was abstracting from rice producers in the area, Chief Kawinga rejected the project. This rejection discouraged the state from continuing with the project. Consequently, the experimental scheme yielded lower rice tonnage and the state resolved to abandon the scheme in 1955.¹⁰⁵

The state undertook similar investigations on the southwestern swamps of Lake Chilwa.¹⁰⁶ As in the Kawinga area, the state wanted to use dams and diverted stream water to expand the production of some peasants who grew the Faya rice variety.¹⁰⁷ The construction of the Njala and Khanda schemes after these investigations, as well as the political and ecological challenges that limited their success between 1956 and 1959, have been analysed in my MA thesis.¹⁰⁸ What is noteworthy here is that, although the idea of irrigation schemes was necessary for food production in the Chilwa basin, the dominance of rice, which was not the main staple for the peasants in the area, limited its success.¹⁰⁹ The peasants realised later that the state developed the schemes to produce rice for the urban population and white settlers in Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia.¹¹⁰ This realisation made it extremely difficult for the peasants to commit fully to rice production in the schemes.¹¹¹

Similarly, the state rolled out a land use and settlement scheme in the basin in 1955. The results from the Domasi scheme, which was phased out in 1955, inspired this project. As noted above, the state was of the view that dealing with individual farmers was counter-productive to its attempts at transforming the peasantry in the basin. The state actually

¹⁰⁴ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1955.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ MNA, NSZ 4/1/7 Annual Report, Zomba District, 1954.

¹⁰⁷ Kettlewell, 'Agricultural Change in Nyasaland,' 262.

¹⁰⁸ For details, See Nkhoma, 'The State and Irrigation Farming in Malawi.'

¹⁰⁹ MNA, NSZ 4/3/7, Zomba District, Monthly Report, August 1960.

¹¹⁰ Interview: Ester Salima, Ramusi Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 15 December 2016.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

thought that it could only transform the African peasantry through community-wide agricultural reforms. It also wanted to use land resettlement schemes to address the question of land tenure among the peasants. It was reported in 1954 that,

The number of progressive individuals prepared to make farming a permanent livelihood is still pathetically small, and to speed the adoption of good land use on a wide basis a policy of intermediate between the general treatment of the masses and the speed treatment of individual had been introduced. It has the aim of reorganising village lands, the allocation of suitable areas to timber and grazing and the consolidation of gardens on a permanent conservation pattern. A few successful examples hold out promise of progress, but both here and the programme of individual farmers there is in need of a simple form of title to land to consolidate the gains. As a result, a Village Land Improvement and Settlement Project was initiated to convert large population units than individual to better standards of land utilisation that are beyond the present capabilities of the masses as a whole. In the past a number of such projects have been started, but have met with restricted success, due to African inherent distrust of interference with his land and the general apathy of the masses with regard to agricultural advancement.¹¹²

Unlike in the Lower Shire and Lilongwe where the state used Trust Land to resettle peasants, the land resettlement schemes in the Chilwa basin involved the purchase of undeveloped land from private estates for peasant resettlement.¹¹³ The earliest land that the state purchased was the Chemhembe–Mpindi block of the BCA Company in Chingale, south-west of Zomba. The state also acquired over 70 000 acres of land from the former A. L. Bruce estates to resettle peasants from Mikuyu, Makoka, B&E. A. Estates and those from overcrowded Trust Land areas near Zomba.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1954.

¹¹³ For details, see Mandala, *Work and Control*, 207-220.

¹¹⁴ MNA NSZ 4/1/6 Zomba District Reports, 1947-1954.

The state also launched a Likangala Soil Conservation Project in April 1957 along the upper Likangala catchment area.¹¹⁵ Unlike in the other resettlement areas, the state wanted to give titles to secure the land tenure of the settlers in this project. After banding 800 acres of land for peasants' resettlement, the state carried out a factual analysis of the area.¹¹⁶ The analysis involved the preparation of maps, measurement of gardens, examination of family relationship and existing rights to land, and a population census. The state constructed a ring road and fixed beacons in the boundaries of all gardens later. Trial plots of banana, coffee and paw-paw were established. Although the state completed consideration of holdings and allocation of new gardens in 1957, it delayed the settlement of villagers until the harvest in 1958.¹¹⁷ After settlement, the state compiled a permanent register of garden holders in the scheme.¹¹⁸ In addition, the settlers had the opportunity to own plots on which to grow food crops. However, the state subjected them to strict land husbandry and conservation.¹¹⁹

4. State Campaign Against Excessive Maize Production, 1952-1960

Meanwhile, the state embarked on an anti-maize production campaign among the peasants of the Chilwa basin and other localities. The campaign began with the formulation of a Maize Production Policy in 1952 that restricted the production of maize by denying peasants ready markets for their produce. Several factors contributed to this development. Firstly, the state wanted to deal with ecological effects of excessive production of maize in the basin. The Director of Agriculture expressed concerns, before the state announced the new policy, over the effects of excessive maize cultivation in agricultural acreage and soil fertility in the country. In 1950, the Director of Agriculture argued that,

¹¹⁵ NSZ 4/1/7 Zomba District Annual Reports, 1954-1961, Report 1957.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, Report 1958.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

The Protectorate's complete dependence on maize gives cause for some anxiety. Much of it is produced on land, which is unsuitable and yields little more than two to three bags per acre, emphasising the needs for other and more productive crops. The need for increased efficiency in the production of foodstuffs per acre, and particularly alternative to maize, make trials of this nature of some significance.¹²⁰

The state made similar sentiments in 1951. It argued that while,

It may be comforting to have so much more food, but its production is putting a great strain on the agricultural stability of the more densely settled areas where resting land is already alarmingly short. Moreover, any increase in the area under maize – already disproportionately large - makes the introduction of proper crop rotation still more remote. The object of the field service is to show the African peasant farmers how, by adopting a system of balanced farming, he can produce sufficient food for everyone and the necessary cash crops to provide essential amenities of life, and at the same time how, by adopting the basic principles of good husbandry, he can build up the fertility of his land.¹²¹

Secondly, the state was responding to the end of the World Food Crisis in the early 1950s. As noted in chapter four, in 1947, the UN through the FAO, urged European powers to intensify food production with the view to produce food surpluses for use as food aid to countries suffering from endemic food shortages.¹²² This call followed the results of the earliest two World Food Surveys conducted by the FAO between 1946 and 1947 to ascertain world food availability.¹²³ The results showed that one third of the world population suffered from food shortages. Besides, the surveys underscored the significance of food overproduction to the

¹²⁰ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1950.

¹²¹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1951.

¹²² See Shaw, *World Food Security*, 37.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

creation of a world food basket for countries in need of food aid.¹²⁴ Subsequently, the USA availed \$3 billion to European states through the Marshall Plan to intensify food production between 1948 and 1953.¹²⁵ However, the excessive food production in Europe, except for groundnuts, affected European food importation from colonies like Nyasaland became irrelevant.¹²⁶

Thirdly, the state began to discourage excessive production of maize in an attempt to generate more revenue for Britain to recover from the losses incurred during World War II.¹²⁷ By discouraging excessive maize production, the state wanted peasants to devote much of their time and land to the production of cash crops. In addition, cash crops generated more income than food crops for the state. Thus, the state wanted the peasants to produce maize that was sufficient only for their subsistence use and not export trade.¹²⁸

The new Maize Production Policy, which the state released on 10 June 1952, was a consequence of these local and global developments. However, the new policy's restriction of maize production reversed the post-1948/9 policy, which aimed at stimulating greater production of food crops through propaganda, increased prices and expanded maize markets.¹²⁹ According to the Director of Agriculture, the former policy resulted in the production of excess maize and caused soil erosion.¹³⁰ The thinking here was that soil erosion took place at a greater rate in areas under maize than of any other crop. Nonetheless, the fact that maize was the country's staple meant that its surplus cultivation rendered a balanced crop

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ See Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine*, 87.

¹²⁷ For details, Zeleza, 'The Political Economy of British Colonial Development.'

¹²⁸ PCS 1/2/18 Maize Policy June 1952 and September 1959.

¹²⁹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report of the Agriculture Department for the Year Ending 31 March 1949.

¹³⁰ PCS 1/2/18 Maize Policy June 1952 and September 1959: Policy circular by R. W. Kettlewell dated 10 June 1952.

rotation impossible.¹³¹ The Director also accused the MCB, which engaged in unrestricted buying of maize, of encouraging peasants to produce more maize. The Director contended in the new policy that,

In recent years, maize marketing under the MCB has taken no account of agronomic considerations; it has not been its function to do so. Its object has been to squeeze the rest available grain of maize out of African Trust Land whereas its operational policy should properly be coordinated with production policy determined by Government.¹³²

Through the policy, the state limited maize production and demanded that it be produced from the most appropriate areas with a small surplus reserve properly stored. It pegged the annual amount of maize for reserve at 26 000 tonnes. In addition, the state set the following conditions for the purchase of maize:

- Maize should be bought (and thus encouraged as a cash crop) only in the more fertile and suitable areas in which high yields per acre of the grain are expected.
- In the areas referred to in (a) above, excessive sales (sales in excess of Nyasaland's internal requirements) should be discouraged.
- The MCB should not buy in any area normally suitable for maize production in which a series of widespread shortages existed in a particular year.
- The MCB should not buy in any area in which, for special economic reasons Government was anxious to stimulate the production of a particular crop if necessary at the expense of other crops (e.g. cotton in the Lower River).
- The MCB should never operate in areas in which chronic maize shortages occurred or in which natural conditions were unsuitable for its production.

¹³¹ Kettlewell, 'Agricultural Change in Nyasaland,' 260.

¹³² PCS 1/2/18 Maize Policy June 1952 and September 1959: Policy circular by R. W. Kettlewell dated 10 June 1952.

- The MCB should not operate in areas in which it was desirable to discourage maize where pests and diseases bred upon it might jeopardise other more important susceptible crops.
- In all cases in which the MCB operated, it should do so unrestricted as far as quantity and duration of markets was concerned. In the areas in which maize should of necessity to be grown as a cash crop, the producers were to know that they had an assured market and it was the responsibility of the DC to determine when markets should be closed.
- It was axiomatic that alternative and more suitable cash crops were to be encouraged in the areas in which maize sales were discouraged in order that African receipts and purchasing power were maintained.¹³³

Thus, since maize was discouraged as a cash crop, the state could not provide markets in areas, which, for reasons of unsuitable soil or topography, were incapable of producing maize efficiently.¹³⁴ The state could also not provide markets in areas where it earmarked for cash crop production. The state encouraged peasants from these areas to grow alternative crops such as groundnuts and cotton, which were in high demand on the global market.¹³⁵ Even in places where it provided markets, the state planned to buy maize in quotas as stipulated in the Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance of 1952.¹³⁶ However, the state scheduled maize purchase at these markets on the same footing as other cash crops.

The production of maize was restricted in a number of areas within the Lake Chilwa basin. The state discouraged maize production in South Mulanje, South Zomba, Kawinga and

¹³³ Ibid, Policy circular by R. W. Kettlewell dated 10 June 1952.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid, Memo on Maize Policy by R. W. Kettlewell dated 16 September 1952.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Domasi. The state argued that the South Mulanje area was unsuitable for maize production because it was hilly. It also alleged that people in South Mulanje could work on the existing tea estates to earn a living rather than produce surplus maize. In addition, the state prohibited maize in Zomba South due to high population density and availability of alternative local markets in times of shortages. In Domasi too, the state encouraged maize production based on its population and maize market availability. While prohibiting peasants in Kawinga's area from producing maize in order to give way to the production of groundnuts, the state allowed peasants in Northern Mulanje to grow a maximum of 1 300 tonnes.¹³⁷

However, the formulation of this policy attracted criticism. Surprisingly, the earliest criticisms came from other colonial officials such as the District Commissioners from Mulanje and Zomba as well as the Secretary for African Affairs. While agreeing with the idea to restrict the production of maize, for example, the Provincial Commissioner for the Southern Province advised the Director of Agriculture on 16 June 1952 to postpone the implementation of the policy to 1953. The state had promised to buy all the maize from peasants in 1948, hence, the commissioner found it unfair to cancel the promise at the time when the peasants were about to harvest their crops.¹³⁸ Like the commissioner, V. Fox-Strangways, the Secretary for African Affairs, wondered why the Director formulated the policy when the same office previously encouraged peasants to grow more food crops and promised to purchase the entire maize surplus through the MCB. He contended:

The first promise was made, I think in 1946, when a Special Committee was appointed to enquire into the whole question of the supply of maize to industry. I have however

¹³⁷ PCS 1/2/18 Maize Policy June 1952 and September 1959: PCS 1/2/18 Maize Policy June 1952 and September 1959: Letter of the Provincial Agriculture Office to all DCs and Division Officers dated 27 September 1952.

¹³⁸ PCS 1/2/18 Maize Policy June 1952 and September 1959: Provincial Commissioner Letter to the Chief Secretary dated 16 June 1952.

been unable to trace any correspondence on the matters but Rangeley has drawn my attention to the proceedings of Legislative Council for December 1951, pages 3 and 43 when both his Excellency and Barrow referred to this policy. As you know, the present surplus of maize in Province results from large acreages put under that crop which again is direct result of continued urgings by the Administrative and Agricultural Staffs to the Africans to grow more foodstuffs at the price being paid. We know Africans are upset and we have tried to calm them down by explaining the position telling them to sell whatever they find on a market.¹³⁹

Instead of discouraging maize production, Fox-Strangways suggested that the state export the surplus maize to countries like Mozambique rather than restrict its production. Fox-Strangways advised the state to engage reliable independent buyers for the maize since the new policy was still binding. He argued,

It is possible certain markets are available in PEA and enquires should be made by the MCB to find out if they do. If there are, then, I think as a face saving measure, independent buyers such as Abegg, Gunsons and one or two reputable Indians should be encouraged to buy and export.¹⁴⁰

Similarly, the DC for Mulanje contended that the state's reduction of maize production would affect the economy of the district. He argued that the absence of men, due to labour migration, meant that women and their children who largely depended on the sale of maize would be denied an important livelihood.¹⁴¹ He reminded the Director that such restrictions were among the causes of the 1948/9 famine. He also expressed that maize production was part of the peasants' culture and thus, the peasants would continue to grow surplus maize despite the policy and that the denial of markets would make them use the maize surplus for beer brewing in the district. He said:

¹³⁹ Ibid. Secretary of African Affairs letter to the Chief Secretary on the Maize Policy dated 19 September 1952.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, DC of Mulanje's Letter to Provincial Commissioner dated 23 September 1952.

These people have been unable to sell their maize. The large stocks held by them will not unnaturally discourage over production of maize this coming year. It will also probably result in beer brewing, absenteeism and crime once beer passes are issued again. I would therefore submit that no undue effort should be made to discourage maize production, particularly as in recent years the slogan has been “grow more food”. Such frequent and contradictory changes of policy can only tend to make the average Africans lose more faith in Government and its officers.¹⁴²

However, in response to the Mulanje DC on 29 September 1952, the Provincial Commissioner for the Southern Province argued that even though the state wanted the peasants to grow sufficient food crops, there was need to do this in manners that were ecologically sustainable and economically sound.¹⁴³ Concentration on maize cultivation throughout the Province was an ecologically unbalanced form of agriculture. He argued that the peasants should be encouraged to grow other crops such as beans or groundnuts than maize. Furthermore, he maintained that the state’s attempts at controlling the production of maize would make sufficient land available for future use or for fallowing. He concluded by saying,

Maize is one of the worst crops for exhausting the soil and should be grown as an economic crop only where it is more suitable for that purpose than any other crop. For that reason, no buying of maize will be undertaken in 1953 except in areas where it is agreed that maize should be the economic crop. Furthermore, the buying of maize will not be carried out as at present wherever maize is grown, but will be carried out only at gazetted produce markets gazetted under the Native Produce Ordinance. All buying will be done by the MCB.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid, Letter of the Provincial Commissioner to the DC of Mulanje dated 29 September 1952.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Similarly, when the DC for Zomba complained about the restriction of maize production in the NA Kawingas area, the Provincial commissioner argued that the area's light soils were unsuitable for maize production. He suggested that it was not necessary for people to cultivate maize, as cassava was the main staple in this area. Unlike in the area of NA Liwonde, groundnuts rather than maize were more suitable in Kawingas area. He therefore urged NA Kawinga to persuade his people to start growing groundnuts as an economic crop. Groundnuts would, according to the Provincial Commissioner, 'certainly provide a very much better cash return per acre than does maize.'¹⁴⁵

However, these responses did not sit well with the DC for Mulanje. In his letter dated 8 October 1952, he contended that, 'I do however feel that our task is being made no easier by what appears to be rapid and not inconsiderable change of policy.'¹⁴⁶ He argued further that an estate economy was not reliable for the survival of the peasants as the Provincial Commissioner alleged, for the estates pay the peasants low wages and employed them temporarily or seasonally. He contended that since peasants in the area had a tendency of frequently migrating for maize trade to Mozambique, it was unlikely that the withdrawal of markets would reduce maize production.¹⁴⁷

The DC even wrote a supplementary letter to the Provincial Commissioner on 18 October 1952. In this letter, he argued that cassava rather than maize was the crop that was taking the largest acreage in South Mulanje where the state prohibited maize production. Based on these observations, he maintained, 'I am therefore not particularly impressed with the theory that the area is unsuitable to maize though I do appreciate that repeated cropping of

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

maize will do soil no good.’¹⁴⁸ He expressed fears that the prohibition of maize was rather a function of economic rather than ecological reasons. He suspected that the state prohibited maize production to induce the peasants into a wage economy in the estate. He also felt that the state was using the policy to serve the MCB’s inefficiency to handle more than large quantities of maize.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, the DC observed that the population in Mulanje was still sufficient to meet both the demands of the estates and maize production. He also expressed his fear that the peasants, who relied more on maize production for their economic survival, might resort to emigration to other districts or countries such as Mozambique and Southern Rhodesia. Such migrations would create serious labour shortages in the country. What was needed was for the state and the estate owners to build a wage earner class. The state had to leave the tea industry alone to attract labour through payment of wages sufficient to permit people to maintain reasonable standards of living. He said that,

If the government acts now in the manner, which is apparent to reduce the earning capacity of the population by withdrawing market facilities, I believe very increased emigration will result. The position appears to one to be anomalous in that maize as a cash crop is to be discouraged to ensure that labour potential works for economic enterprises and yet encouragement is to be given to the increased production of wheat and pulses as cash crops in the same area.¹⁵⁰

Probably because of these arguments, the Chief Secretary gave a temporary waiver on the prohibition of maize markets in South Mulanje and Cholo in 1953. On 2 July 1953, he wrote the following to the DC for Cholo and Mulanje:

It is understood that in the South Mulanje and Cholo areas in the Southern Province, surpluses of maize exist from which, in pursuance of this policy, no buying facilities

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. Letter of DC Mulanje to the PC dated 18 October 1952.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

are being provided. In view of the likelihood that unless this maize is purchased there will be serious misunderstanding on the part of the growers as to the position, it is proposed that for 1953 only in the first instances, the Produce Market Board (PMB) should purchase maize in S. Mulanje and Cholo. I am to emphasise that the present decision to buy maize in marginal areas should be regarded as an expedient and that it represents a postponement and not a reversal of declared policy.¹⁵¹

However, the Department of Agriculture was persistent in justifying the policy in its annual reports following this waiver. In 1954, the Department reported of the introduction of a new variety of maize known as Namalenga as a strategy to encourage increased production of maize without affecting acreage. The Department first tried the crop among selected growers in the Mulanje district whose district commissioner was dismissive to the new policy.¹⁵² Once it reaffirmed the results of the new variety, the Department was to step up mass propaganda for all the peasants in the country to adopt the growing of Namalenga maize.

Similarly, the state made more contradictory statements reflective of the mischievous capitalist motive underlying the urgency and implementation of the new policy. It was clearly observed that the larger object of these policies was to free the land upon which maize was under cultivation to cater for the production of cash crops.¹⁵³ In his report of 1955, the Director contented that the policy was relevant to save the country from price fluctuations on the global market. He reported that, 'Over production in neighbouring countries in Africa and elsewhere in the world resulted in

¹⁵¹ Ibid, Letter of the Chief Secretary to the DCs of Mulanje and Cholo dated 2 July 1952.

¹⁵² Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1954.

¹⁵³ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1956.

a slump on the world market, and the world price is now below the cost at which Nyasaland maize can be sold on it.’¹⁵⁴

Nonetheless, the Zomba DC’s 1955 report was somewhat apologetic about the Maize Production policy. He argued that the policy did not legislatively prohibit peasants from maize production. Rather, it only withdrew marketing facilities in areas that were not ecologically and economically conducive for the production of maize. Thus, the policy was presumably intended to protect the maize market from the vagaries of world price fluctuations and transport costs.¹⁵⁵

The peasants from the Chilwa basin responded to these restrictions in two ways. Firstly, some peasants, especially men, resorted to the withdrawal of participation in maize production and began to concentrate on wage employment in some parts of the district or abroad. This confirmed the earlier fears of the Mulanje DC, and became a major concern for the state in the late 1950s. The Director of Agriculture reported that:

The tantalizing thing is that the rate of progress could be so vastly greater than it is if only the African farmers would work a little harder than he does. There are doubtless many good reasons why he does not do so. Of which lack of compelling incentives is probably the greatest. There is also the general attitude that if one really wishes to work and accumulate the money one earns, the best place to do it is away from home and the insatiable demands of family responsibilities.¹⁵⁶

Secondly, the peasants began to avoid selling maize in the formal markets organised by the state through its maize marketing board. This was acute in the 1956/57 season when the state,

¹⁵⁴ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1955.

¹⁵⁵ MNA Repositories: 78658/1M/8.83 4C The District Crop Policy, Zomba District, 21 September 1955.

¹⁵⁶ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1955.

after incurring huge losses from maize sales at the global market, reduced the price of maize to 2/3 of a penny per pound.¹⁵⁷ Consequently, the peasants, and surprisingly, the private estates too, resorted to selling their maize to African traders who bought the maize at the former price of 1d per lb.¹⁵⁸ Other peasants sold the maize at nearby markets at Chilinga and Muloza on the border with Mozambique.¹⁵⁹

Consequently, the peasants continued to devote large areas of land virtually to the monoculture of maize despite state's de-campaign efforts. They ignored every state strategy to increase higher yields without expanding maize acreage such as the adoption of the Namalenga maize variety and use of fertilisers.¹⁶⁰ The peasants completely ruled out the idea of rotating maize production with groundnuts on the grounds that there was a lack of sufficient land. The understanding of the peasants, especially after the imposition of the Federation, was that the state wanted to free arable land, which they devoted to maize, for relocation to white farmers from Southern Rhodesia.¹⁶¹ It was these sentiments that made some of the prominent chiefs in the Chilwa basin, such as Mlumbe, Kumtumanje and Msamala, to resign from their offices as Native Authorities on 9 June 1953.¹⁶² Consequently, the Agricultural Department found this policy the most difficult to implement in the country. This difficulty is indeed captured in the report, 'The problems of breaking this practice or even making an impression on it is one of the most difficult thing facing the Department and one which becomes more intractable year by year as the population increases.'¹⁶³

¹⁵⁷ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1957.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 1957.

¹⁵⁹ Interview: Dyson Sukali, Tsekakhomo Village, T/A Jenala, Tamani, Phalombe, 16 December 2016.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ MNA NSZ 4/1/6 Zomba District Reports, 1947 – 1953, Report of 1952.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1957

Thus, despite state regulation, Chilwa basin peasants continued to produce surplus maize in Nyasaland. Table 5 below shows the trend of peasants' maize surplus, which the state purchased from the Mulanje and Zomba districts of the Lake Chilwa basin in relation to national maize purchases through its marketing board between 1951 and 1957.

Table 5: Maize Purchases in Mulanje and Zomba (in Metric Tonnes) 1951-1957

Year	National	Mulanje	Zomba
1951	28 981	2 735	2 232
1952	47 148	2 398	3 171
1953	40 944	3 738	1 865
1954	52 926	1 049	98
1955	43 264	1 733	1 086
1956	32 121	2 002	1 456
1957	5 424	13	45

Source: Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Reports of Agricultural Department, 1951-57

Since the state limited the production of maize from Mulanje and Zomba, the table does not represent the total amount of maize produced in the basin. In addition, the table only represents the amount of maize purchased by the state from the regular markets. However, it is clear from the table that there was increased maize production by the peasants of the Chilwa basin. The downturn from 1957 reflected peasants' resistance rather than production collapse. As noted above, the state reduced maize price from 1d per lb to 2/3d per lb.¹⁶⁴ The state did this both to discourage excessive maize and cope with price fluctuations at the world maize market. In 1956, the state replaced the MCB with Agricultural Produce and Marketing Board (APMB), an institution, which unlike the MCB, was stringent with the pricing of

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

peasants produce. As result, peasants resorted to selling their maize to African traders who offered relatively good prices.

5. Limits of Coercion and the End of Colonial Hegemony, 1956-1960

In 1956, the state changed its approach from coercion to persuasion in the Chilwa basin. The state realised the limits of compulsion in spearheading rural transformation in the basin. It argued that,

Compulsion can only get one so far; it cannot create good farmers and if carried too far long is apt to generate able atmosphere which is not conducive for further progress. Recognition of this fact was responsible for a major change of policy in 1956 towards a much more liberal application of agricultural legislation.¹⁶⁵

The state was also responding to nationalist agitations that increased after the imposition of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1953.¹⁶⁶ The nationalist leaders used peasant grievances in demanding self-government.¹⁶⁷ As a result, there were widespread revolts against the colonial state's conservation projects. With the independence of India and Pakistan, nationalist riots in Ghana and the increasing influence of Pan-Africanism, there was a global shift in thinking about colonialism and its hegemony on Africans.¹⁶⁸ Thus, the state was compelled to slow-down its urge for radical interference in local economies and practices.

¹⁶⁵ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1956.

¹⁶⁶ See J. McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 336-363.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ For details, see Cooper, *African since 1940*; N. J. White, *Decolonization: The British Experience Since 1945*, (London: Longman, 1999).

The change in attitude involved the relaxation of the conservation drive that guided state agricultural intervention throughout the period. This led to peasants' sudden abandonment of the principles of the new agricultural policy, as confirmed in the report that, 'This attitude was noticeable in some areas in regard to early preparation of gardens and was particularly disappointing to the keen agriculturalist anxious to see his progress and prosper.'¹⁶⁹ However, the state acknowledged the peaceful coexistence between the agricultural officers working in the field and the Nyasaland peasants that was created by the new approach. The Director of Agriculture reported in 1957 that, 'The approach modified to improve relationships between field staff and African cultivators, thus creating atmosphere for progress in the field.'¹⁷⁰ However, the state consoled itself by claiming that it managed to bring $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million acres of arable land under protection from serious soil erosion during the past eight years. It was reported that,

Posterity will appreciate that results which could not have been achieved by any other means. Neither should the achievements be measured in statistical terms alone, for many have grown to appreciate the wisdom of what they were made to do and others have acquired a good habit, although not always understanding the full significance of it. But as in the parable of the sower, there are not only the problems of stony ground to cope with, but of tares too.¹⁷¹

The state hoped that, although the policies were relaxed, the peasants were going to continue applying the principles unconsciously. For instance, the Department of Agriculture reported that, 'It's still not possible to foresee the ultimate effects of the new procedure, but

¹⁶⁹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1956.

¹⁷⁰ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1957.

¹⁷¹ Nyasaland Protectorate, Annual Report for the Department of Agriculture for Year Ending 31 March 1956.

experience so far has encouraged the thought that much of the agricultural discipline of the past will be carried forward into the future largely by virtue of unconscious habit.¹⁷²

Thus, the state implemented, with minimal success, its interventions to improve the food security of the peasants in the Lake Chilwa basin in the late colonial period. The major problem was that the projects were attempted without due respect to the pre-existing ecological, economic, political and social structures. The projects involved an insensitive overhaul that disrupted the socio-political status of the area. The excessive use of power and state interference in local economies compelled the peasants from the Chilwa basin to give massive support to the nationalist leaders.¹⁷³ Most of the peasants looked forward to a time when they would be 'relieved of the necessity of tax paying and obeying irksome legislations.'¹⁷⁴ Hence, in 1961, the peasants voted in large numbers for nationalist leaders to form an African majority in the colonial government, a vote which ended the seven decades of colonial hegemony in Nyasaland.

6. Conclusion

The chapter has discussed the growth of intensive state interventions in the rural food economy in the late colonial period in Nyasaland. It located the origins of this to the 1948/49 drought and the appointment of Geoffrey Colby and Richard Kettlewell as Governor and Agriculture Director, respectively. The interventions included the establishment of the Domasi community settlement and development programme, Master Farmers' schemes, land husbandry and settlement schemes and that of irrigation schemes. While transforming the

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ NSZ 4/1/7 Zomba District Annual Reports, 1954-1961, Report 1959.

peasantry was imperative for the maintenance of food security owing to the rapidly growing population and recurrent droughts, the chapter argued that the excessive use of force limited the success of the programmes. The use of coercion to enforce compliance with conservation was bound to be misunderstood by the peasants, as the Chilwa basin was undergoing rapid population increase, the nationalist temperature was constantly rising among the peasants and land was becoming a scarce commodity. In addition, the peasants complained that conservation works, such as banding, ridging and contour making, were time consuming and created conditions for the spread of termites that destroyed crops in the Chilwa basin. Similarly, fallowing and crop rotation were a non-starter in the face of land scarcity in the Chilwa basin.

Despite the existing conflict, the state was not too rigid in implementing its policy nor were the peasants obstinately conservative. In the face of the 1948/9 drought, the state was willing to breach its conservation policy, albeit temporarily, to allow the peasants to cultivate along the streambanks and hill slopes. Furthermore, the wake of intense nationalism made the state flexible enough to change its policy from compulsion to persuasion. Conversely, the peasants who were spurred on by the memory of the famine responded enthusiastically to the early preparation, planting and weeding campaign in 1948/9. The only problem was that the compromise was temporary, and thus, caused misunderstandings among the peasants when the state resumed the regulations in the post-famine crisis. The peasants also had problems to understand why the state, which, since the 1948/9 drought, had been encouraging the production of maize, began to discourage peasants from doing so in the 1950s. These inconsistencies, the chapter has argued, limited the success of the state's implementation of its agricultural policy in the Chilwa basin. The latter also caused tension with the peasants and other government officials.

Similarly, while the state might appear to have made no success, at least, it managed to transform the peasantry by differentiating the ecology of the Lake Chilwa basin into settlement and irrigation schemes where it subjected peasants to conservation, 'proper' land husbandry and 'modern' methods of crop production. Furthermore, the state successfully differentiated the peasants of the basin into those located in settlement schemes, irrigation plot holders and Master Farmers. It considered the peasants who adapted positively to its 'modernisation' agenda as bona-fide recipients of input credits and extension service. However, this represented a tiny minority in the Chilwa basin as the state left the rest of the peasants, single women whose husbands relocated to South Africa and Southern Rhodesia as migrant labourers, to grapple with poverty and food insecurity. Most of these peasants hoped that the attainment of self-government would bring to an end these disparities and usher in a season of better life.

Chapter Six

Walking in the Footprints of the Colonial Masters: Agricultural Development and Peasants' Food Security in Malawi, 1961-1994

1. Introduction

Much of the literature in the historiography of post-colonial Malawi considers Banda's regime as a period of either remarkable economic prosperity or economic stagnation and brutality.¹ This binary obscures the complexity of the economic and food security landscape of Hastings Kamuzu Banda's regime, and downplays the various ways in which Banda's agricultural policies affected the peasants in the rural parts of the country. This chapter examines the extent to which Banda's regime transformed peasants' food security in Chilwa basin. It begins from 1961, when Africans formed a majority in the colonial state, and ends in 1994, when Hastings Kamuzu Banda, who has gone down in history as the father of the Malawi nation, lost elections giving way to the introduction of a multi-party system of government. This period is particularly significant in the history of food security in the Chilwa basin. Unlike the other subsequent presidents, Banda was renowned for his passion for agricultural development. He called himself *Mchikumbe* Number One.² The chapter, therefore, explores how Banda, as *Mchikumbe* Number One, maintained food security among the peasants of the Chilwa basin. It argues that, while independence provided better prospects

¹ For further details, see Thomas, 'Economic Developments in Malawi Since Independence,' 30-51; Liebenow, 'Food Self-Sufficiency in Malawi,' 369-392; H. Kayuni, 'Malawi's Economic and Development Policy Choices from 1964 to 1980: An Epitome of "Pragmatic Unilateral Capitalism",' *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 20, 2 (2011), 112-131. This has been disputed by Humphrey, 'Malawi's Economic Progress and Prospects,' 71-104; Kydd and Christiansen, 'Structural Change in Malawi since Independence,' 355-375; M. Vaughan, 'Exploitation and Neglect: Rural Producers and the State in Malawi and Zambia,' in D. Birmingham and P. Martin (eds.), *History of Central Africa: The Contemporary Years Since 1960* (London: Longman, 1998), 167-202; Mandala, *End of Chidyerano*.

² *Mchikumbe* means an industrious farmer. By naming himself *Mchikumbe* Number One, Banda claimed primacy in agriculture.

for the expansion of the food economy, Banda's inheritance of colonial structures of economic and political domination limited this prospect among the poor peasants of the basin. Like the colonial masters, Banda pursued policies that favoured estate owners and progressive farmers at the expense of the poor peasants in the Chilwa basin. As noted by Richard Sandbrook and Judith Barker, Banda's proclivity to colonial heritage overshadowed the success of his agricultural and food security initiatives in the Chilwa basin during the period under study.³

The chapter further argues that, like during the colonial era, food security in the Chilwa basin during Banda's era was contingent on climatic conditions, economic circumstances and the political will of the western powers rather than mere policy prescriptions. Its achievement also varied largely with time, gender, class and social geography. Thus, the 'economic miracle' for which Banda was known for prior to the late 1970s was transient, and represented 'growth without development' especially among the poor peasants.⁴ Development, which in essence entails improvement of the living standards of the majority ordinary citizens, seemed to have benefited a tiny minority while the majority of the peasants in the Chilwa basin grappled with poverty and food insecurity.⁵ However, economic crisis, demographic changes, droughts/floods recurrences and a decline of Cold War politics also shaped the trajectory of food security in the Chilwa basin from the mid-1980s.

³ See Sandbrook and Barker, *The Politics of Africa's Economic Stagnation*. See also Cooper, *Africa Since 1940*; Nugent, *Africa since Independence*; Meredith, *The Fate of Africa*.

⁴ For details about the concept of 'growth without development' see for example, J. Stalon, 'We Must Address Political Economy of growth Without Development in Africa,' in UNDP, *Our Perspectives*, UNDP, October 2015; Milo Vandemoortele, 'Growth Without Development: Looking beyond Inequality,' Briefing Paper, Overseas Development Institute, 2009.

⁵ See F. Obeng-Odoom, 'Africa's Failed Economic Development Trajectory: A Critique,' *African Review of Economics and Finance*, 4, 2 (June 2013), 151-176.

The chapter begins with an exploration of the agrarian populist approach that Banda adopted to meet the aspirations of the peasants in the Chilwa basin in the run-up to independence in 1964. The second section demonstrates the paradox of the much-appraised 1964 and 1978 food security achievements that are attributed to Banda. Section four and five explore the growth of food shortages in the Chilwa basin and the extent to which Banda's regime dealt with the shortages. In the final analysis, the chapter considers how food shortages in the Chilwa basin and the decline of the Cold War politics combined to bring down Banda as president of the country in 1994.

2. Agrarian Populism: Banda's Food Security Approach, 1961-1964

The establishment of an African majority in Nyasaland after the 1961 general elections marked a new beginning in the history of food security in the Lake Chilwa basin.⁶ Generally, self-government meant the end of massive land alienation, coercive conservation agriculture and that of adverse regulation of maize production and marketing, which over the colonial period, affected peasants' food security in the basin.⁷ In a bid to meet these aspirations, Banda adopted an agrarian populist tradition, which largely centred on the promotion of peasant agriculture in the country.⁸ During his political rallies in the Chilwa basin, Banda pledged to prioritise peasant agriculture by restoring the land that the colonialists took from

⁶ Note that Malawi officially achieved independence on 6 July 1964, and became a Republic on 6 July 1966. However, following the state of emergency, the colonial state organized general elections in 1961 to allow Africans to participate in the government of the country. Unofficially, this marked the beginning of self-government.

⁷ Interview: James Mbedza, Village Head, Chilikho Village, T/A Mwambo, 9 November 2016.

⁸ Agrarian populism refers to a political movement dedicated to defending and promoting the agricultural interests of the common people such as the peasants. For details about the concept of agrarian populism see for example, Green, 'Agrarian Populism in Colonial and Post-Colonial Malawi,' 143-164; T. Brass, 'The Agrarian Myth, the 'New' Populism and the 'New' Right,' *Economic and Political Review*, 32, 4 (1997), 27-42; J. Fox, 'Agrarian Reform and Populist Politics: A Discussion of Stephen Sanderson's Agrarian Populism and the Mexican State,' *Latin American Perspectives*, 12, 3 (1985), 29-41; A. Chayanov, *The Theory of the Peasant Economy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); T. Brass, *Peasants, Populism and Postmodernism: The Return of the Agrarian Myth* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

the peasants, providing the peasants with farm input subsidies, and restoring power to those chiefs who fell out of grace with the colonial administrators during nationalist struggles.⁹ Banda elaborated on this freedom in his New Year's celebratory message, in which he noted, 'The year, which has just passed, 1961, saw the beginning of the realisation of our dreams and desires for freedom and independence. For all practical purposes, we, the Africans of this country, now control the government of the country.'¹⁰

After the elections, as Minister of Natural Resources and Local Government, Banda sought to reverse the colonial policies that affected the poor peasants of the Chilwa basin.¹¹ For instance, Banda restored power to chief Kumtumanje and Mlumbe who were dismissed by the colonial state for openly resisting the imposition of the Federation and conservation interventions in the Chilwa basin.¹² In addition, Banda abolished the Sakata and Namitembo councils that were once under the two chiefs and had been created by the colonial state to partly take care of peasants' agricultural affairs.¹³

In May 1962, Banda formulated bills that repealed the controversial legislations that restricted the peasants in the Chilwa basin. The bills included, the Land Use and Protection Bill, African on Private Estates Bill and the Farmers Marketing Ordinance. The Land Use and Protection Bill replaced the Natural Resources Ordinance of 1952. Unlike the former, the bill ended Malimidwe (conservation) and Master Farmers' schemes and championed the use of persuasion and education in enforcing agricultural extension in the basin.¹⁴ The Africans on Private Estates Bill ended the notorious Thangata System and called for rapid redistribution

⁹ Malawi Congress Party, *1961 Manifesto* (Zomba: Government Printer, 1960), 2.

¹⁰ Kamuzu's New Year Message, *Malawi News*, Thursday, 4 January 1962.

¹¹ MNA, 78093/2M/8.834C, Agricultural in Nyasaland General Policy – Memo from the Minister to all Officials in the Ministry, 15 December 1961.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ MNA, NSZ 4/1/7 Zomba District Annual Reports, 1954-1961, Report 1961.

¹⁴ Nyasaland Protectorate, Opening Speech by Banda, Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 31 May 1962.

of estate land to peasants affected by land shortages in the nation's places such as the Lake Chilwa basin. Through the bill, Banda advised estate owners from the Chilwa basin to 'either sell the land to the government or to farm it through the employment of wage labourers.'¹⁵ The Farmers Marketing Ordinance replaced the Agricultural Produce and Marketing Ordinance of 1952 and formed the Farmers Marketing Board (FMB). The ordinance delinked the Board from the Agriculture Department and increased African representation from three to eleven.¹⁶

The new bills generated a great deal of excitement among the peasants from the Lake Chilwa basin who had lost large tracts of land to the settlers with a large proportion of them restricted to forced labour through the Thangata System on the settler estates.¹⁷ One of the peasants in the basin, Rodrick Mulaudzi, said that, 'We celebrated the news. For us, this was the truest fruit of self-government. Our struggles were really not in vain.'¹⁸ Similarly, peasants from the basin celebrated Banda's offer of £400 000 from which the state acquired over 60 000 hectares from the BCA and Bruce Estates for redistribution.¹⁹ With regard to the formation of the FMB, Alfred Nansenga, who was a farmer in the basin in the 1960s, pointed out that, 'with a larger African representation, peasants assumed that the Board would offer better prices for their produce.'²⁰

In the Development Plan passed after these legislative changes, Banda promised to increase the productivity of the peasants by constructing irrigation schemes and providing agriculture credits of fertilisers and equipment for the production of maize, groundnuts and

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Nyasaland Protectorate, Farmers Marketing Ordinance, May 1962.

¹⁷ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 393.

¹⁸ Interview: Rhodrick Mulauzi, Mkotima Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 17 November 2016.

¹⁹ Malawi Government, *Development Plan, 1965-1968* (Zomba: Government Printer, 1965).

²⁰ Interview: Alfred Nansenga, Mbaru Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 17 November 2016.

rice in the Chilwa basin.²¹ Banda also pledged to revamp the old colonial schemes at Khanda and Njala, and construct new ones at Domasi and Bimbi in the northern part of the basin.²² In 1963, Banda introduced the Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP) movement which sought to train the peasants of the Chilwa basin and those from other parts of the country in agriculture and community development.²³ The movement expected young primary school graduates to undergo 10 months training in discipline, agriculture and community development from the bases established at Nasawa in Zomba, Makhanga in Nsanje, Amalika in Thyolo, Mapanga in Blantyre, Neno in Mwanza, Ngapani in Mangochi, Lipinda in Mangochi, Mwalawoyera in Dedza, Kaporo in Karonga, and Ngerenge in Rumphu.²⁴ Banda also promised to locate enterprising MYP graduates in the irrigation schemes that he wished to establish in the Chilwa basin.²⁵

However, I argue here that Banda's agrarian populism did not represent a complete break from colonial structures of economic domination. Old agricultural structures and operations still existed in post-colonial Malawi. For instance, while he abolished Thangata in the Chilwa basin and other estates in the Southern Region, Banda maintained the visiting tenant system in the Central Region where he owned tobacco estates.²⁶ Similarly, while he abolished Malimidwe programmes, Banda ironically maintained soil conservation practices, which, during the colonial era, were the bone of contention among the peasants of the Chilwa

²¹ Nyasaland Protectorate, *Development Plan, 1957-1962* (Zomba: Government Printer, 1957).

²² Ibid.

²³ Malawi Government, Act No. 23 of 1965, The Young Pioneers Act, Malawi Gazette Supplement, No 4C, 11 May 1965.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ MNA, GRS 14/20/2/31 Vol. I Settlement Branch, 1970-71.

²⁶ The visiting tenant system involved the estate owners' engagement of peasants from other districts to grow tobacco in their estates. The owners gave them plots, inputs *and* sometimes food on the agreement that they buy the tobacco. The estate owners deducted from source credits of food and inputs, which they would have given out. For details, see McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 396.

basin.²⁷ Furthermore, through the FMB, Banda continued to control the pricing of African produce. In fact, Banda reintroduced the colonial system of setting lower prices for peasants relative to world markets. ‘The Board,’ Dunduza Chisiza, the Secretary to Finance argued, ‘cannot perform only the function of stabilising prices; it must also help the government in siphoning off money from the growers for further development.’ ‘This,’ he contended, ‘would be facilitated by a provision in the bill that allowed the Board to invest or lend the money it accumulated perhaps to the Ministry of Finance if it found itself in difficulties.’²⁸ Although Banda was unable to implement most of the policies in the interim to independence, McCracken argued that they laid down structures of peasant marginalisation that came to characterise his entire political regime.²⁹

3. Growth without Development: The Paradox of Banda’s Food Security Achievements in the Chilwa basin, 1964-1978

Soon after the country achieved political independence in 1964, Banda began to shift his development approach from agrarian populism to elitism. Banda had initially implemented policies that favoured estate agriculture and a few progressive farmers also known as *achikumbe* in the Chilwa basin. For the first time, Banda began to question openly the productivity and contribution of the poor peasants from the Chilwa basin and other parts to national development.³⁰ He argued that, despite using 90% of land holding and being allocated second largest share of budgets, the peasants only contributed 10% to the country’s

²⁷ Nankumba, ‘Evolution of Agricultural Policy in Malawi,’ 40.

²⁸ Nyasaland Protectorate, Speech by Dunduzu Chisiza, Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 7 March 1962

²⁹ McCracken, *A History of Malawi*, 398.

³⁰ Cisanet, ‘Rethinking Agricultural Extension in Malawi,’ Cisanet Policy Paper, Lilongwe, 2006.

GDP as opposed to the estates whose contribution was 25%.³¹ Like the colonial officials, Banda criticised the poor peasants' land husbandry practices in the basin as ecologically destructive. He argued that customary land tenure made it difficult to hold the peasants responsible for sustainable use and management of land in the Chilwa basin. In his speeches, Banda persistently compared development to what was happening on the estates rather than in the peasantry.³² The *achikumbe*, who distinguished themselves from the other peasants through steady and high standards of farming in the basin, were Banda's favourites in agricultural extension. He awarded them with the prestigious *achikumbe* Certificate.³³ As in most parts of the country, the *achikumbe* consisted of former Masters Farmers in the Chilwa Basin. Even the crop inspection tours that were often conducted by Banda to appreciate the agricultural performance of the peasants witnessed him solely visiting farms belonging to *achikumbe* that agricultural officers identified as model farmers in the Lake Chilwa basin.³⁴

Subsequently, Banda formulated the Registered Land Act and Local Land Board Act in 1965 to consolidate the land tenure of *achikumbe*. While the Registered Land Act provided for the establishment of settlement schemes and allowed peasants to register their land, the Local Land Board gave powers to local politicians and agricultural officers to redistribute land in the rural areas.³⁵ The new legislation did not mark the beginning of a free market of customary land; instead, they reduced further the traditional powers of chiefs as sole

³¹ See for example, R. M. Mkandawire, 'Markets, Peasants and Agrarian Change in Post-Independence Malawi,' *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 4, 1-2 (1984), 89-102; A. Sofranko and F. Fleigel, 'Malawi's Agricultural Development: A Success Story?' *Agricultural Economics*, 3 (1989), 99-113.

³² See, Vaughan, 'Exploitation and Neglect,' 180.

³³ Malawi Government, Guide to Agricultural Extension in Malawi, 1980-1981 (Lilongwe: Extension Aids Branch, 1980).

³⁴ Interview: Alfred Nansenga, Mbaru Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 17 November 2016.

³⁵ MNA, GRS 13/105/65 Malawi Land Act, 1965.

distributors of land, and created an environment for the expansion of *achikumbe* in the Chilwa basin.³⁶

Soon after the country became a Republic in 1966 (since then known as Malawi), Banda formulated the Customary Land (Development) Act of 1967, which empowered the state to declare any customary land as a development area.³⁷ As in the colonial period, Banda used this legislation to alienate customary land for the development of estates, irrigation schemes and other government projects. The state used this Act to grant land to 80 estates in the Chilwa basin in 1970, and the number of estates rose to 200 in 1979 and 625 in the late 1980s covering an area of 53 100 hectares.³⁸ Table 6 below presents the growth of estates in the region between 1970 and 1989.

Table 6: Estates in the Chilwa Basin, 1989

District	No of Estates	Estates' Area	Total District Area
Machinga	365	40 200	596 400
Mulanje	27	2 000	171 500
Zomba	233	10 900	258 000

Source: Malawi Government, ADD Estates Files, 1970-1989

The post-colonial state also alienated 1 048 hectares of customary land for the construction of irrigation schemes in the areas of T/As Mposa and Mwambo in the Chilwa basin.³⁹ The

³⁶ See, Vaughan, 'Exploitation and Neglect,' 183.

³⁷ Malawi Government, Customary Land (Development) Act of 1967.

³⁸ Malawi Government, ADD Estates Files, 1970-1989 (Zomba: Department of Lands and Evaluation, 1989).

³⁹ The schemes constructed by the government in the Lake Chilwa basin were among the sixteen irrigation schemes it constructed across the country between 1967 and 1984. For more details, see Malawi Government, National Irrigation Policy and Development Strategy.

constructed schemes were Likangala, Khanda, Njala, Segula, Chilikho, Bimbi, Chibwana, Mikoko and Domasi.⁴⁰ Njala and Chilikho were upgrades of the schemes the colonial state abandoned in the Chilwa basin on political, ecological and economic grounds. The state constructed the irrigation schemes with funding from the World Bank, British Aid and Taiwanese Technical Aid.⁴¹ The state established infrastructure that included local markets, health centres and primary schools at each scheme. Table 7 and Map 2 below shows a list of state-constructed irrigation schemes in Malawi and the acreage of the schemes in the Chilwa basin between 1968 and 1982.

Table 7: Acreage of Irrigation Schemes in the Chilwa Basin, 1968-1972

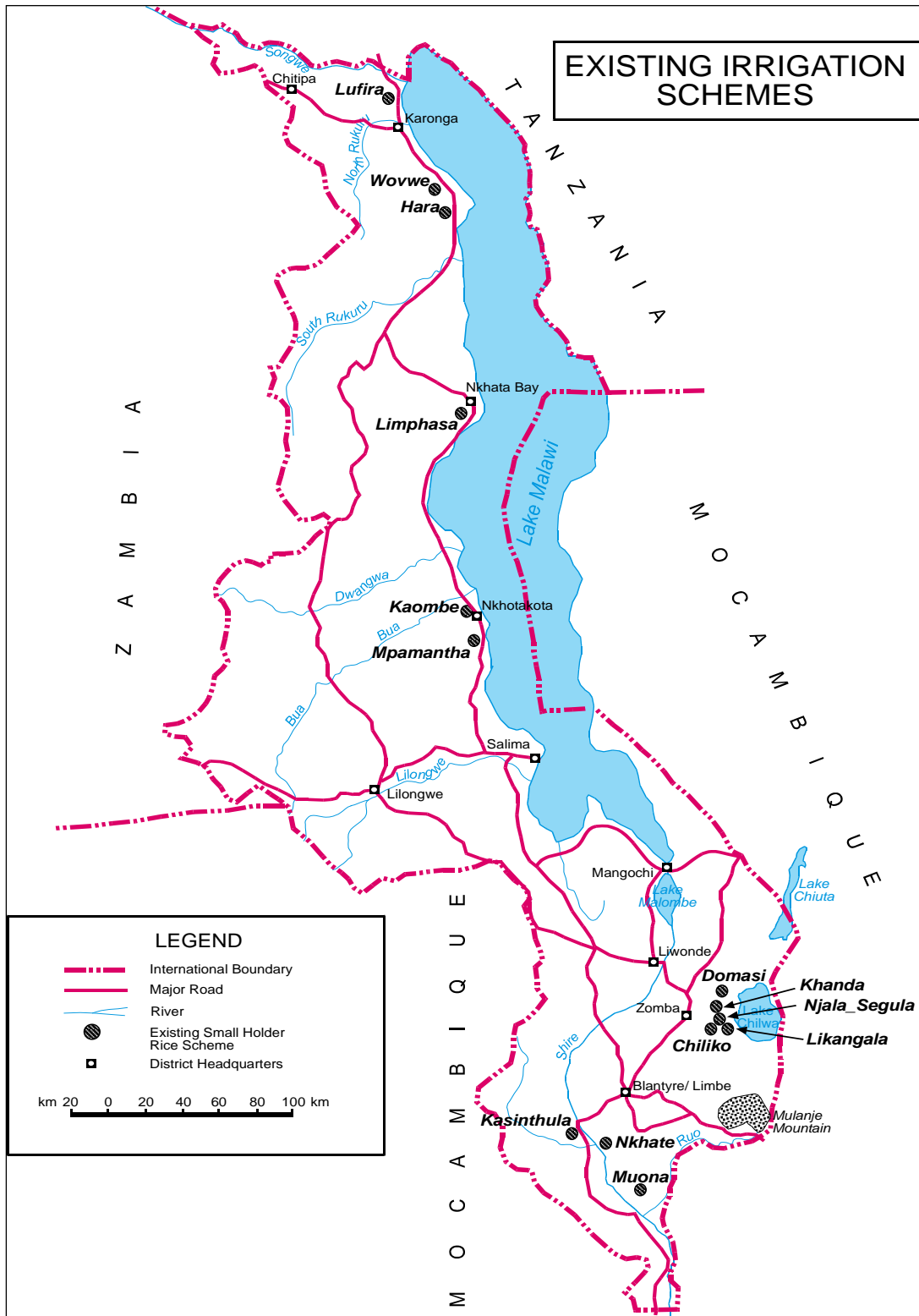
Scheme	Has	T/A	District
Likangala	400	Mwambo	Zomba
Domasi	475	Mposa	Machinga
Khanda	70	Mwambo	Zomba
Njala	53	Mwambo	Zomba
Segula	30	Mwambo	Zomba
Chilikho	20	Mwambo	Zomba

Source: Malawi Government, National Irrigation Policy and Development Strategy, 2000; B, Nkhoma, 'The State and Irrigation Farming in Malawi,' 48.

⁴⁰ For details about the development of these irrigation schemes see, Nkhoma, 'The State and Irrigation Farming in Malawi;' Nkhoma, and Mulwafu, 'The Experience of Irrigation Management Transfer;' Nkhoma, 'Irrigation Development and its Socio-economic Impact;' Nkhoma and Kayira, 'Gender and Power Contestations.'

⁴¹ Malawi Government, Developing Malawi (Zomba: Government Printer, 1971).

Map 2: Map of Malawi Showing 16 Irrigation Schemes Banda Constructed by 1982



Source: B. Nkhoma, 'The State and Irrigation Farming,' 8.

Outside the irrigation schemes, the state organised the *achikumbe* into farmers' clubs. The state used these clubs to provide the *achikumbe* credits for agricultural inputs such as fertilisers, seeds, insecticides, work-oxen, and farm implements. As noted above, the state delivered extension services through the irrigation schemes and farmers clubs in the Lake Chilwa basin. The table below shows a list of farmers' clubs that existed in Zomba between 1970 and 1978.

Table 8: Farmers' Clubs in Zomba West, 1970-1978

Place	Club Name	Membership
Nkupu	Bwaila	10
Chipini	Chipini	20
Namadidi	Namilongo	32
Maele	Maele	20
Chinkwezule	Chinkwezule	20

Source: MNA GRS 2/9/5 Zomba Farmers Clubs, 1970-1980.

In 1971, Banda formed the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) to replace the Farmers Marketing Board, which had facilitated the marketing of peasants' produce in the country since 1962.⁴² ADMARC opened 110 depots within the Lake Chilwa basin, with one located in each of the irrigation schemes and the Ecological Planning Areas (EPAs) and their function included the selling of foodstuffs at subsidised prices during food shortages to all Malawians.⁴³ As in most parts of Africa, the state used ADMARC to gain monopoly over the marketing of peasants' crops and to stabilise produce prices in the

⁴² Malawi Government, Agricultural Development and Marketing Act of 1971.

⁴³ Interview: Wyson Alabi, Agricultural Extension and Development Officer (AEDO), Nsondole EPA, Zomba, 13 December 2016.

Lake Chilwa basin.⁴⁴ Most states in the region argued that gaining this monopoly was economically strategic in stabilising produce prices by ‘maintaining buffer stocks and increasing those stocks through imports.’⁴⁵ Thus, ADMARC used to buy peasants’ produce at low prices for sale at higher prices. Unfortunately, the state used the profits raised from ADMARC to expand estate agriculture by giving loans to estate owners.⁴⁶ Photo 2 below shows one of the oldest ADMARC market depot located in Phalombe section of the Chilwa basin.

Photo 2: An Old ADMARC Market Depot at Tamani EPA in Phalombe



Source: Author, 16 November 2016.

⁴⁴ For details on how governments in Africa used marketing boards to gain monopoly over the peasants’ produce, see for example, N Breslin, ‘USAID, the State and Food Insecurity in Rural Zimbabwe: The Case of Gokwe,’ African Studies Seminar Series, University of the Witwatersrand, 15 March 1993; T. S. Jayne, ‘Consumer Response to Market Liberalisation in Urban Kenya,’ *Food Policy*, 22, 5 (1997), 447-458; J. R. Pletcher, ‘The Political Uses of Agricultural Markets in Zambia,’ *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 24, 4 (1986), 603-617; N. Nyairo, ‘Impact of Agricultural Market Liberalisation on Food Security in Developing Countries: A Comparative Study of Zambia and Kenya,’ MSC Thesis, University of Helsinki, 2011). See also M. Hubbard (ed.), *Developing Agricultural Trade: New Roles of Government in Poor Countries* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁴⁵ N. Nyairo, ‘Impact of Agricultural Market Liberalisation on Food Security in Developing Countries: A Comparative Study of Zambia and Kenya,’ MSC Thesis, University of Helsinki, 2011). See also M. Hubbard, (ed.), *Developing Agricultural Trade: New Roles of Government in Poor Countries* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁴⁶ Vaughan, ‘Exploitation and Neglect,’ 190.

By the late 1970s, Banda's agricultural policy seemed to have stimulated economic growth and maintained food security in the Chilwa basin. During this period, the production of rice rose from 129 tonnes in 1969 to 2 555 tonnes in 1977. The total number of irrigation farmers in the basin grew from 279 in 1969 to 2 241 in 1977.⁴⁷ The adoption of fertiliser usage also increased through credits offered by ADMARC throughout the rural areas. For example, the farmers whose use of fertilisers in the late 1950s hardly exceeded 183 tonnes, registered use of 10 834 tonnes of fertilisers in 1967 and it grew to 43 939 tonnes in 1977.⁴⁸ At Domasi and Likangala irrigation schemes, the input credits given to farmers rose from Mk 8 316.5 in 1972 to Mk 44 399 in 1977.⁴⁹

While these figures suggest remarkable growth, evidence from the Chilwa basin indicates that the benefits to the peasants were varied. Although the country seemed to register remarkable growth, the majority of the rural population grappled with adverse levels of poverty, hunger and starvation. Isaac Mphepo contended that the state achieved this growth at the expense of the human rights, personal liberty and freedom of the Chilwa basin.⁵⁰ In general, Banda's agricultural development policy accentuated social inequality and differentiations among the peasants of the Chilwa basin. The programmes benefitted a tiny majority of *achikumbe* who were relatively richer while the majority had no access to extension and credits of inputs. As of 1978, only 300 *achikumbe* existed in the Chilwa basin.⁵¹ While the *achikumbe* enjoyed food security, the majority of the peasants survived on

⁴⁷ MNA, 13/105/4 Monthly Reports, Settlement Schemes, 1969-1977; MNA GRS 600/1/13 Settlement Aspects, August 1979.

⁴⁸ Malawi Government, Statistical Yearbook, 1977.

⁴⁹ MNA, GRS 631 Settlement Aspects, 1969-1978.

⁵⁰ Interview: Isaac Mphepo, Kuphunga Village, T/A Mposa, Machinga, 14 December 2016.

⁵¹ MNA GRS 2/9/5 Zomba Farmers Clubs, 1970-1980.

patronage and casual labour.⁵² Patronage and casual labour meant that they hardly had sufficient time to work effectively in their gardens. The net result was that these peasants perpetually became vulnerable to hunger on a yearly basis in the Chilwa basin.

As noted by Wycliffe Chilowa, *achikumbe* were the ones who benefitted more from the sale of produce at the ADMARC markets in the Lake Chilwa basin.⁵³ The *achikumbe* owned relatively larger land holdings, either from irrigation schemes or outside the schemes, and were able to produce surplus food crops for sale at ADMARC markets. While they sold produce at these markets, the majority of poor peasants, who largely comprised of female-headed households, acted as buyers of foodstuffs from ADMARC markets. According to the agricultural surveys of 1978, most of these peasants owned gardens of less than half of a hectare and could not afford fertilisers.⁵⁴ Even in years of normal weather, the harvests of these peasants hardly lasted to the sixth month of a year. Consequently, they survived through off-farm casual work in the farms or irrigation plots of *achikumbe* and estate owners. For most women, the sale of local beer and commercial sex became an alternative source of income.⁵⁵

Similarly, irrigation schemes had negative socio-ecological effects on some of the peasants from the Lake Chilwa basin. First, it led to loss of wetlands, which, as noted in Chapter Two, safeguarded some peasants from food insecurity. Although the state gave priority to those who lost their land in the allocation of plots, poor peasants had to meet additional ambivalent conditions such as Malawian citizenship, agricultural industry, good

⁵² Interview: Ganizani Kachinagwa, Lead Farmer, Thiko Village, TA Malemia, Zomba, 9 December 2016.

⁵³ W. Chilowa, 'The Impact of Agricultural Liberalization on Food Security in Malawi,' *Food Policy*, 23, 6 (1999), 553-569.

⁵⁴ Malawi Government, Annual Survey of Agriculture, 1980-1981 (Zomba: National Statistical office, 1982).

⁵⁵ Interview: Mercy Misonkho, Tawanga Village, T/A Jenala, Tamani, Phalombe, 16 December 2016.

social behaviour, community relations, and freedom from debts.⁵⁶ These conditions disqualified most of the resource poor peasants from accessing plots from the schemes. As such, irrigation schemes were mostly accessible to *achikumbe* and the graduates of the MYP who settled on the schemes. Second and related to the above, the schemes led to the disruption of the socio-cultural structures and institutions of the Chilwa basin especially those related to chiefly powers and matrilineage. The Customary Land (Development) Act of 1967 prevented chiefs from exercising their traditional powers of land distribution in the areas where the schemes were established. Although the chiefs attended the plot allocation committees, their presence on these committees had a nominal impact as the presence of political officials and state officers undermined their authority in these committees. In addition, matrilineage leaders lost control over the alienated land.⁵⁷

However, peasants from the Chilwa basin were not passive to these developments. Some poor peasants were reluctant to join the schemes. These peasants also resented the Taiwanese whom the state used in the construction of the schemes. They believed that Taiwanese ate human beings, dogs and snakes, things commonly regarded as taboos in the basin.⁵⁸ The peasants further looked down upon the Taiwanese as relatively second-class ‘whites’ due to their inability to speak English. One peasant noted that, ‘We expected white people to speak English and live a relatively higher life, but these Taiwanese did not. They were shabbily dressed, and lived like local poor Malawians. We feared that after eating our dogs and snakes, they would begin to eat us. We could not work with such people.’⁵⁹ Another peasant argued that, ‘We were told by a friend that these Taiwanese belonged to Taiwanese outcasts. Some of them were prisoners. Taiwan was using its diplomatic agreement to dump

⁵⁶ MNA, GRS 600/1/13, Settlement Aspects, 1979.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Interview: A. Chapita, Chair of WUA at Domasi scheme, T/A Mposa, Machinga, 14 December 2016.

⁵⁹ Interview: Fred Kachepe, Chabwera Village, TA Mposa, Domasi, Machinga, 14 December 2016.

these outcasts that congested their country.’⁶⁰ Despite being unfounded, the stereotypes significantly affected production relations between the Taiwanese and poor peasants in the Lake Chilwa basin. Most peasants were unwilling to participate in the irrigation schemes between 1967 and 1974. By 1972, local farmers cultivated only 20% of the land earmarked for the Likangala irrigation scheme. This was also true at the Domasi scheme where only 14 rich peasants registered for irrigation plots in 1973.⁶¹

Some chiefs from the basin lost their land and resorted to opening their own irrigation schemes where they could continue to exercise control over access to land and water. They charged rentals that were paid mostly in kind to peasants whom they allocated plots in the schemes. Popular chiefly schemes were located at Chanyumu and Lingoni in TA Mposa, Domasi in GVH Mpheta, Naisi in GVH Khanda and Likapa in GVH Mbalu.⁶² At Likangala, GVH Mbalu allocated Likapa wetland down of Likangala scheme to his subject chiefs, Chidothi, Ramusi and Mbalu.⁶³ In Domasi area, GVH Mpheta owned the largest chiefly scheme in the Chilwa basin. Although the scheme had been in existence since the colonial times, it became more organised after the establishment of the Domasi irrigation scheme in 1972.⁶⁴ The chief granted land for the establishment of Domasi scheme after pressure from E. Mussa, a MCP Member of Parliament of the area.⁶⁵ However, the GVH offered the valley closer to Domasi River, which was flood prone, less fertile and populated. He reserved absolute control over the most fertile *dambos* to the eastern part of the area connected to Lake Chilwa where he operated his scheme.⁶⁶ Unlike with the Domasi scheme, peasants in the

⁶⁰ Interview: Isaac Mphopo, Kuphunga Village TA Mposa, Domasi, Machinga, 14 December 2016.

⁶¹ MNA, GRS 600/1/13, Settlement Aspects, 1979.

⁶² For details, see D. Kambewa, ‘Patterns of Access and Use in Wetlands: The Chilwa Basin,’ BASISI CRSP Report, Madison - University of Wisconsin, October 2004.

⁶³ Interview: Chrispin Pensulo, Ordinary Farmer, Khasu Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 15 December 2016.

⁶⁴ MNA, GRS 600/1/13, Settlement Aspects, 1979.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Interview: Leonald Tayimu, Ramusi Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 15 December 2016.

Mpheta scheme were at first cultivating using residual moisture but later began constructing canals to divert water from the rivers for irrigation. However, the existence of public and chiefly schemes created competition over water for irrigation during times of water shortages.⁶⁷

However, it was not easy for the poor peasants to show resistance to state policies during the MCP era. Banda subjected any person who dared to challenge his policies to political torture. In most rural areas, the state located members of the MYP, Youth League and Women League to act as the MCP's political watchdogs. For instance, the MYP dealt with anybody that behaved contrary to the ideologies of MCP within the irrigation schemes.⁶⁸ The state did not allow peasants who failed to purchase party affiliation cards to cultivate in irrigation schemes, sell their crops at ADMARC markets nor to get medical services from the health centres in the schemes. Furthermore, the state used its political affiliates to lead development and agricultural committees and to silence any peasants who wanted to revolt against its policies in the basin.⁶⁹ One of the groups of people who suffered terribly was that of the Jehovah's Witnesses or the Watch Tower, a religious movement that renounced the purchase of party cards and participation in political affairs of the country. Their renunciation of party cards did not sit well with the MCP regime and, as a result, the state banned the movement from the country in 1972. This resulted in the arrest of its members. There were over 30 members cultivating in irrigation schemes in the Chilwa basin and these were affected as the state relocated all the plots that once belonged to them to other farmers.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ For details, see Mulwafu and Nkhoma, 'The Use and Management of Water'; W. Mulwafu, 'Water Use and Conflicts in Some Rivers in Lake Chilwa Basin,' in P. Mvula, et al, *Towards Defragmenting Management Systems of Lake Chilwa Basin* (Western Cape: PLASS, 2014); Nkhoma and Kayira, 'Gender and Power Contestations over Water Use in Irrigation Schemes,' 79-84.

⁶⁸ Interview: Witness Kalambula, Katanda Village, T/A Kuntumanje, Zomba, 9 November 2016.

⁶⁹ MNA GRS 600/1/13, Settlement Aspects, Likangala Scheme, 1979.

⁷⁰ Interview: GVH Mpheta, Mpheta Village, Machinga, 14 December 2016.

4. End of Honeymoon: The Growth of Food Shortages in the Chilwa Basin, 1978-1992

From 1978 onwards, peasants, especially those who were poor, began to experience acute food shortages. Three factors accounted for this development. The first factor had to do with the economic crisis the country underwent between 1978 and 1983. What triggered the crisis were the falling world prices of tobacco exports, rising oil prices and the disruption of traditional transport routes through Mozambique due to the civil war that broke out in the mid-1970s.⁷¹ These factors caused a drop in the country's growth rate from 8.3% in 1978 to 3.9% in 1979 and -1.1% in 1980, and -4.7% in 1981.⁷² Faced with inadequate funds, the state began to compromise most of its agricultural operations and food security interventions such as irrigation development and provision of credits for inputs to farmers in the Lake Chilwa basin.⁷³ The Taiwanese withdrawal of financial support for the operations of irrigation schemes in the Chilwa basin in the late 1970s exacerbated the situation. As per contract, the state gave the Taiwanese a contract to operate the schemes for one year after completion of their construction.⁷⁴ Hence, the economic crisis made it extremely difficult for the state to effectively sustain the operations of the schemes.

The second factor leading to food shortages was rapid population growth. According to the 1987 census, the population of Malawi had grown from 4 039 583 in 1966 to 5 547 460

⁷¹ For details about the causes of the economic crisis, see for example J. Kydd, 'Malawi in the 1970s: Development Policies and Economic Change,' in Centre for African Studies, *Malawi - An Alternative Pattern for Development*, Conference Proceedings, (Edinburgh: University of the Edinburgh, 1984); G. Mhone, *Malawi at the Crossroads: Post-Independence Political Economy* (Harare: SAPES Books, 1992); T. Mkandawire, 'Agriculture, Employment and Poverty in Malawi,' E. Chirwa, I. Kumwenda, C. Jumbe, P. Chilonda and I Minde, 'Agricultural Growth and Poverty Reduction in Malawi: Past Performance and Recent Trends,' ReSAKSS Working Paper No 8, Southern Africa, October 2008.

⁷² E. Chirwa, I. Kumwenda, C. Jumbe, P. Chilonda and I Minde, 'Agricultural Growth and Poverty Reduction in Malawi: Past Performance and Recent Trends,' ReSAKSS Working Paper No 8, Southern Africa, October 2008.

⁷³ L. A. Msukwa, 'Food Policy and Production: Towards Increased Household Food Security,' Research Report, Centre for Social Research, Zomba, Malawi, 1994.

⁷⁴ Nkhoma, 'The State and Irrigation Farming in Malawi,' 59, 75.

in 1977 and to 7 988 507 in 1987.⁷⁵ The Lake Chilwa basin boasted a population of 1 381 526 in 1987. This represented 18% of the country's population. With an average density of 150 against the national density of 100, the basin was one of the highest populated areas in Malawi. The highest populated district was Mulanje, followed by Zomba and Phalombe. Table 9 below shows the population distribution in the Chilwa basin between 1966 and 1987.

Table 9: Population Growth and Density in the Lake Chilwa Basin, 1966-1987

District	1966	1977	1987	Area/87	Density/87
Machinga	226 103	195 249	301 849	3 771	80
Zomba	280 299	352 334	441 615	2 580	157
Mulanje	397 900	307 804	419 928	2 056	204
Phalombe		169 742	218 134	1 394	156

Source: Malawi Population Census, 1987.

The settlement of refugees from Mozambique, as did the migrants from the country during the colonial period, contributed to the rapid increase of the population in the Chilwa basin. The basin recorded the earliest appearance of the refugees in 1981 when 825 refugees settled in Mandawala and Muotcha villages in TA Nazombe area in Mulanje. Some of the refugees settled in the villages of Chisoni, Chinguma and Nampheta across the Lake Chilwa in Zomba.⁷⁶ As of 1990, the population of refugees in Mulanje was 21 839, and in Machinga 40 745.⁷⁷ Due to these increased numbers of refugees, the state established a refugee camp at Phalombe Boma. However, this camp was only for receiving relief.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Malawi Government, *Population Census Report* (Zomba: National Statistical Office, 1987). Note that Malawi conduct census every 10 years beginning from 1966.

⁷⁶ MNA GRS IK/2/VCL Refugees.

⁷⁷ Malawi Government, *Food Security and Nutrition Bulletin*, Vol 1, No. 1, 3 April 1989.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 541.

The rapid population increase exerted huge pressure for land, water, forest and food resources. Unlike during the colonial period, the state alienated the wetlands, which shielded the peasants from food insecurity that resulted from drought and floods. The remaining wetlands became the jurisdiction of the chiefs where they operated their own schemes. The peasants could only access them through payment of tributes or cash. Ides Mulongoti observed,

For me, I had four good gardens from which I was able to realise maize for my family survival. When my two daughters got married, I had no choice but to share the two gardens with them. I could not imagine what would happen once my daughter's children grew up and got married. Where would we find land for them to grow maize? It means she had to share the very same small garden with them. The problem was that the amount of land for us was the same yet our families were increasing.⁷⁹

Mulongoti's experience demonstrates the extent to which some poor peasants of the Chilwa basin were affected by rapid population increase. In the context of limited available land, population increase affected peasants' food production. These peasants had to share the limited land with their grown-up children, and thus, could not produce sufficient food crops to take them all year around.

The last factor accounting for the growth of food shortages in the Chilwa basin were recurrences of floods and droughts. Droughts and floods have been historically recurrent problems in the Chilwa basin. However, there was an intensification of these events from the late 1970s, with droughts occurring in 1978, 1980, 1984, 1987, and 1992 and floods in 1982, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991. The worst witnessed droughts and floods were between 1988 and 1992, which all caused hunger and starvation in most parts of the basin. For instance, the

⁷⁹ Interview: Ides Mulongoti, Thiko Village, T/A Malemia, Zomba, 9 December 2016.

drought of 1987 was followed by unusually heavy rains in the Lake Chilwa basin, which raised the levels of the lake and caused floods.⁸⁰ The floods affected 10 653 families in Mulanje alone, 8 287 in Machinga, and 815 in Zomba.⁸¹ The most affected areas were those of TA Kawinga and TA Mposa.⁸² The trend of droughts and floods forced a World Bank Disaster Assessment Mission consisting of Edward Echeverria and Roberto Chavez to visit Malawi between 31 May and 10 June 1989.⁸³ In addition to providing relief, the Mission advised the state to introduce a National Early Warning System that would provide advanced information and statistics on crop production and food supply in general and alert the state of impending food shortages for its timely remedial actions.⁸⁴ It was actually as a result of the visit by the World Bank Mission that the country immediately introduced a National Early Warning System and food security bulletin in 1989.⁸⁵

However, the Chilwa basin saw an intensification of floods in the 1990/1 growing season. On 25 February 1990, Assistant DC for Phalombe reported of the floods on Phalombe River, which affected the villages of Mambwe, Kholowe and Nankhalamba.⁸⁶ He attributed the main cause for the floods in Phalombe to the peasants' agricultural practices of cultivating along the riverbanks of Phalombe River. While the DC's office advised peasants from the Phalombe side at Chitekesa and Chigumukire to avoid cultivating along the riverbank, the peasants on the Zomba side of the river continued to cultivate along them. As a result, it became difficult for the office of the DC in Phalombe to enforce compliance and encourage

⁸⁰ MNA GRS 15/14/4/II National Disasters and Operations, 1987-1990. Report on the World Bank Disaster Assessment Mission in Malawi, 31 May – 10 June 1989.

⁸¹ Malawi Government, Food Security and Nutrition Bulletin, 1, 1(1989).

⁸² MNA GRS 650/1/4 Crop Damages Due to Floods 1989 – 1991.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ MNA GRS 16/01/11 (II) National Early Warning System and Food Security, 1989-1991.

⁸⁵ For details, see Malawi Government, Food Security and Nutrition Bulletin, 1, 1, (1989).

⁸⁶ MNA GRS 650/1/4 Crop Damages Due to Floods 1989-1991.

the peasants to plant both riverbanks with *Senjere* and *Sangwi* grasses to control the overflow of Phalombe River on the Zomba settlement and garden areas.⁸⁷

On 12 December 1990, floods damaged crops in the T/A Kawinga's area and affected the Nlungu, Chimombo and Chindi villages. The floods damaged 300 hectares covered by crops, houses and domestic animals. Floods also occurred on 6 February in 1991 in the Chinkwezule Catchment area at Malosa EPA affecting 2 500 hectare of farmlands. Here, the floods affected a Communal Conservation Program, which the state had been undertaking since 1989. The floods damaged contour ridges constructed in the area through the program. These flood damages resulted mostly from deforestation, footpaths, lack of channels to regulate water flow and an absence of road maintenance especially that of unblocking side drains.⁸⁸

However, the worst floods were the Phalombe Rock Avalanche/Flush Flood Disaster, which took place on 10 March 1991.⁸⁹ The incessant heavy rains, which took place in Phalombe from 8 to 9 March 1991, triggered a rock avalanche from the western hill slopes of the Mchesi Mountain near Phalombe town. In 10 to 15 minutes, rocks and boulder debris, originating from Mchesi Mountains, fell off and swept away houses, humans, livestock as well as crops and vegetation in the nearby village of Bokosi and Phalombe town.⁹⁰ The floods also affected over 19 320 households with a total population of 85 000 from 18 villages in nearby T/A Nkhumba and Nazombe areas. Of these, 472 died, 80 were seriously injured and 1 400 people sustained small injuries. In addition, 5 000 became homeless and 30 000

⁸⁷ MNA GRS 650/1/4 Crop Damages Due to Floods 1989-1991-Memo by S. F. E. Simbeye, Assistant DC, Phalombe District.

⁸⁸ MNA GRS 650/1/4 Crop Damages Due to Floods 1989-1991.

⁸⁹ MNA 15/14/4/V National Disasters and Relief Operations 1991-1995: Geological Survey Report, May 1991. A rock avalanche is a process of instantaneous erosion and movement of large masses of rock debris under the force of gravity.

⁹⁰ MNA 15/14/4/V National Disasters and Relief Operations 1991-1995: Geological Survey Report.

hectares, out of which 23 000 hectares were under maize and rice cultivation, were affected by floods. The floods also washed away the livestock and food items that people had stored in their houses and *nkhokwes* or granaries.⁹¹

Although the cause of the floods was heavy rainfalls, most peasants from the basin explained them within the framework of their beliefs. The communities attributed the floods to the anger of their ancestors. Mary Sungani, a farmer in Phalombe, argued that their ancestors were not amused with the destruction of forest in Mchesi Mountain and the growth of Phalombe as an urban centre.⁹² As was the case with the Zomba floods of 1946, most peasants believed that the spirit of the ancestors of the Phalombe people had decided to move away from Mulanje Mountains into the Lake Chilwa basin through the Phalombe River.⁹³ Mercy Msonkho from Phalombe argued,

For me the floods were God's response to the increasing abuses of human rights by Banda. It was not good for Banda to force pregnant women to buy party cards for unborn children. This was a taboo. Those who failed were subjected to all sorts of abuse and punishment. Others could not access medical services from public hospitals. That's why the floods took place. It destroyed mostly government offices at Phalombe boma. You can see that two years later, Banda was overthrown. The Phalombe floods were prophetic to the downfall of Banda.⁹⁴

Malawi, as in most parts of Southern Africa, experienced one of the most serious droughts in living memory after the floods. The drought began with a dry spell in December 1991, which continued up to the end of the growing season and causing the wilting of crops in the field. The worst hit areas in the country were Chikwawa, Nsanje, Mangoche, Salima, Nkhotakota

⁹¹ MNA 15/14/4/V National Disasters and Relief Operations 1991-1995: Malawi Government, Phalombe Plains Flood Disaster 10 March 1992: An Appeal for Emergency Aid.

⁹² Interview: Mary Sungani, Tawanga Village, T/A Nazombe, Phalombe, 16 December 2016.

⁹³ Interview: Dyson Sukali, Tsekakhomo Village, T/A Nazombe, Phalombe, 16 December 2016.

⁹⁴ Interview: Mercy Msonkho, Tawonga Village, T/A Jenala, Phalombe, 16 December 2016.

and the Lake Chilwa basin.⁹⁵ In a Press Statement, the Minister of State, John Tembo, announced, on behalf of the President, the effects of drought on the country's food security. He reported that,

Malawi is self-sufficient in food in years of normal climate condition. But all of you are already aware that the impact of the 1991/2 drought has been worse in the country. The impact has caused national wide shortages of food, portable water and increase in health related problems. The national food production is estimated at 58% of last year's output drought victims are estimated at 6.1 million. The country needed 595 608 tonnes of free maize, 138 393 tonnes of general maize, 4 898 tonnes of pulses, 27 100 tonnes, 40 680 litres of edible oils was needed.⁹⁶

According to the Inter-Ministerial Food and Nutrition Advisory Committee, the drought lowered down maize production estimates from 1 589 810 tonnes of 1990/91 to 657 000 tonnes.⁹⁷ This reduction resulted in the country experiencing one of the worst food shortages at both household and national levels. With a population of nearly 9 029 000, the country needed 1 620 000 tonnes of maize to meet its requirement for the 1992/3 year. The Lake Chilwa basin was one of the areas that were adversely affected by the drought owing to its high population density. The drought resulted in the drying up of all the rivers that supplied water to Lake Chilwa. Consequently, all the irrigation schemes, wetland farms, boreholes and water taps dried up.

As with the floods, most peasants in the Chilwa basin attributed the drought to negligence of indigenous practices regarding the rain season and harvesting. As noted in chapter two, peasants from the Chilwa basin used to offer rainmaking sacrifices before and

⁹⁵ Malawi Government, Food Security and Nutrition Bulletin, 3, 3 (Sept. 1992), 1-2.

⁹⁶ MNA 15/14/4/V National Disasters and Relief Operations 1991-1995, Press Statement by John Tembo, Minister of State, 17 August 1992.

⁹⁷ Malawi Government, Food Security and Nutrition Bulletin, 3, 3 (Sept. 1992), 1-2.

after every rainy season. Dyson Sukala lamented, ‘How could we expect rains to be frequent and reliable when we had abandoned our ancestors? Our chiefs, who used to be leading us in the offering of sacrifices, were just busy doing politics and chasing after women.’⁹⁸ Some peasants believed that people, mostly brick makers and those whose gardens were often not ready for cultivation at the start of the rainy season, were withholding the rain through magic in order to buy time to complete their activities. Thus, most peasants from the basin attributed climatic disasters of the times to globalisation and capitalist expansion.

These economic, demographic and climatic conditions resulted in the growth of food shortages in Malawi in general and the Chilwa basin in particular. From 1985, maize production began to go below the food requirements of the country’s population. This was worse in the 1991/2 growing season when the available maize was three times below what the country required. Table 10 below shows the annual trend of maize production and the country’s requirements from 1980 and 1992.

⁹⁸ Interview: Dyson Sukali, Tsekakhomo Village, T/A Jenala, Phalombe, 16 December 2016.

Table 10: Annual Trend in National Maize Production, 1980-1992

Year	Maize (Metric tonnes)	Total Requirement ⁹⁹
1980/1	1 237 000	1 143 000
1981/2	1 244 000	1 211 000
1982/3	1 369 000	1 251 000
1983/4	1 398 000	1 292 000
1984/5	1 355 202	1 334 000
1985/6	1 294 560	1 378 000
1986/7	1 218 480	1 436 000
1987/8	1 426 890	1 467 000
1988/9	1 508 820	1 516 000
1989/90	1 342 810	1 582 000
1990/91	1 589 810	1 617 000
1991/92	656 650	1 620 000

Source: Malawi Government, Food Security and Nutrition Bulletin, 3, 3 (Sept. 1992), 3; L. Msukwa, 'Food Security and Production: Towards Increased Household Food Security', Research Report, Centre for Social Research, Zomba, 1994.

The growth of food shortages from the mid-1980s, however, was not unique to the Lake Chilwa basin and Malawi in general. There had been growing global and regional concerns over the growing food crisis in Africa.¹⁰⁰ However, scholars of political economy note that, while population increases and ecological disasters, such as droughts and floods, had the potential to cause food shortages in the Chilwa basin, their impact was accentuated by long-term processes of political, social and economic changes rather than the ecological disasters.¹⁰¹ The state took away arable land from most of the poor peasants and left them with no access to credits for agriculture inputs, which made it difficult for the peasants to

⁹⁹ The total maize requirement is calculated by multiplying the estimated number of households by 945, the estimated amount of maize required by a five-member household. See Christiansen and South Worth, *National Early Warning System for Food Security Quarterly Bulletin* (January 1991). Also Msukwa, *Food Security and Production*.

¹⁰⁰ See for example, Berry, 'The Food Crisis and Agrarian Change in Africa.'

¹⁰¹ See Rotberg, (ed.), *Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger*; Watts, *Silent Violence*; S. Berry, 'The Food Crisis'; Giblin, 'Famine and Social Change'; Eldredge, 'Drought, Famine and Disease'; Wyle, 'The Changing Face of Hunger in Southern African History'; Maddox, 'Mtunya: Famine in Central Tanzania.'

cope with the recurrent droughts and floods.¹⁰² This practice often left the peasants from the basin with little or no food reserves to cushion them in times of crop failure, as was the case here. The closure of the ADMARC markets in 1987 and the failure of private traders to supply rural peasants with maize worsened the food security status of the peasants from the Chilwa basin.¹⁰³ Thus, the peasants had to rely on food relief provided by the state with the support of donors and the World Food Programme.¹⁰⁴ The poor peasants' inability to reform their agricultural practices in such a fragile ecology also contributed to the growth of food shortages. Unfortunately, most of the poor peasants continued to use old ways of agricultural production such as shifting cultivation and the production of local varieties of maize. These peasants were reluctant to adopt hybrid maize varieties, rice consumption, use of fertilisers and conservation agriculture, which had potential to boost food production in the face of droughts and declining soil fertility. Thus, although the droughts and floods had potential to generate food insecurity, their impacts were compounded by prevailing economic, political and social circumstances.

5. Coping with Food Insecurity in the Late Banda Era, 1978-1994

In a bid to cope with food shortages in the Chilwa basin, the state started to restructure its extension delivery system, promote the growing of hybrid maize and adopt structural adjustment programmes (SAP). The funding from the World Bank assisted the state to launch a National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) to improve agricultural infrastructure and extension delivery systems in the country.¹⁰⁵ In principle, the state intended to undertake

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ The state closed Admarc markets as part of structural adjustment programmes in 1987.

¹⁰⁴ MNA 15/14/4/V National Disasters and Relief Operations 1991-1995.

¹⁰⁵ Malawi Government, National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) in Malawi (Lilongwe: Ministry of Agriculture and Natural resources, 1978).

projects that were smaller and less intensive than those of the 1960s in order to reach out to more smallholder farmers in the basin. The objectives of the NRDP were as follows:

- Increase smallholder production for export and the feeding of the urban population,
- Provision of inputs and services to enhance smallholder production on productivity per unit area,
- Preserve natural resources by encouraging high standards of crop husbandry and soil conservation, conservation of the key watersheds, and maintenance of forests through replanting trees in reserves and on customary and estate lands.¹⁰⁶

Through the NRDP, the state divided the country into eight Agricultural Development Divisions (ADDs) that acted as centres for extension planning and rural development.¹⁰⁷ The NRDP placed the Lake Chilwa Basin under Machinga and Blantyre ADD. The Machinga and Zomba side was under Machinga ADD while the Phalombe side was under Blantyre ADD. At the time of its formation, Phalombe had two EPAs at Tamani and Mpinda, which fell within the Lake Chilwa basin. The EPAs from the Zomba RDPs within the Lake Chilwa basin were Malosa and Mpokwa. The total number of the sections was 45 with 16 in Phalombe side only.¹⁰⁸ Later in the mid-1980s, the state established another EPA at Nsondole in TA Malemia's area in Zomba. In creating these zones, the state considered factors such as

¹⁰⁶ See Malawi Government, National Rural Development Programme.

¹⁰⁷ The regions were termed Agricultural Development Divisions (ADDs), and they included Karonga, Lilongwe, Salima, Machinga, Blantyre and the Lower Shire. Within the ADDs were Rural Development Projects (RDPs) centres, followed by Extension Planning Areas (EPAs) and Sections. Ecological Planning Areas were remained Extension Planning Areas. The peasants interacted with the agricultural extension workers in all matters related to agriculture, food security, nutrition and conservation in the sections. The Chief Agricultural Officer (CAO) who headed the NRDP was responsible for extension, training, land husbandry, crop production, marketing, nutrition and conservation. While Programme Managers headed the ADDs, Regional Agricultural Officers managed RDPs. In total, there were 30 RDPs and 180 EPAs in the country.

¹⁰⁸ Interview: Anold Chikaonda, Agricultural Extension Development Coordinator, Mpokwa EPA, Zomba, 16 December 2016.

ecological uniformity (soils, temperature and rainfall), political and administrative boundaries, physical limitations of the areas, and population density.¹⁰⁹ Whereas in the past it used to send agricultural officers to visit farmers in their clubs, the state this time adopted a group approach known as a Block Extension System. Under this system, the state grouped peasants from the Lake Chilwa Basin into geographical units that formed the blocks in the EPAs. As a result, extension officers now visited the peasants through these blocks and not individually for training in agricultural production and food security every fortnight. Each block had a demonstration garden from which the peasants would learn new agricultural technologies. Together with the graduates of the MYPs, *achikumbe* farmers acted as contact farmers in the Chilwa basin.¹¹⁰

However, by the early 1990s, the system did little to improve the food security of most of the peasants in the Chilwa basin. The majority of the peasants, except for committee members and *achikumbe*, were reluctant to participate in the extension programmes introduced by the state in the basin. As during the colonial period, these peasants viewed the results from the demonstration gardens as products of scarce and expensive inputs far beyond their reach. The state, too, adopted top-down approaches in its interventions.¹¹¹ It hardly consulted the poor peasants on the development of the policies it implemented in the basin. It treated the peasants as recipients of new agricultural technologies rather than development partners. While the new technologies were good, selective consultation and the use of coercion affected their acceptability among the poor peasants of the basin.

¹⁰⁹ MNA GRS 13/30/1 Agricultural Organization and Objectives Southern Region, 1974-77. Mr P. G. Green Memo dated 1 May 1974.

¹¹⁰ Interview: Wyson Alabi, Agricultural Extension Development Officer, Nsondole EPA, Zomba, 13 December 2016.

¹¹¹ Interview: William Shaibu, Gertrude Kambona and Manuel Fulaye, Agricultural Extension Development Officers, Likangala EPA, Zomba, 15 December 2016.

Within the same period, the state established the National Seed Company of Malawi (NSCM). The company, which was formed in 1978, was used by the state to develop, multiply and distribute appropriate hybrid varieties of maize in the country. The company developed Malawi Hybrid 12 (MH12), MH 13 and MH 14 as its earliest varieties.¹¹² However, until 1992, the problem of peasants' adoption of the maize variety remained a huge challenge in the Lake Chilwa basin. Most of the peasants discounted these varieties on the grounds of taste, input demands and storage. They felt that hybrid maize was not as sweet as the local maize they were growing in the basin. Besides, the varieties required extensive use of fertilisers, which most of the peasants could not afford. Furthermore, most peasants found the texture of the new varieties not of their liking. It was too soft and this posed a great challenge in as far as storage was concerned. For MH12, some peasants noted that the variety was extremely vulnerable to weevils.¹¹³ Idesi Mulongoti observed:

We just saw state officers announcing about the new types of maize of MH11, MH 12 and MH13, which we were to start growing. Vans with public addresses systems moved around the village making the announcement too. We didn't know why the state wanted us to abandon the local maize which we had been growing since time immemorial. Really, we had no problems with local maize. But they said it was destroying the soils and that its yields were too little. Then, how did they expect us to abandon local maize for the type of maize we had never planted before?¹¹⁴

Ganizani Kamanga argued further that,

We said no to these new varieties. We were not given fertilisers with which to cultivate them. Only the few so called '*achikumbi*' (progressive farmers) had access to inputs. Why then did they want us to grow this new maize? We said they should give

¹¹² For details about the development of hybrid maize in Malawi see for example, M. Smale, "'Maize is Life': Malawi's Delayed Green Revolution,' *World Development*, 23, 5 (1995), 819-831.

¹¹³ Interview: Hamid Mtambo, Village Head, Chilambe Village, T/A Kumtumanje, Zomba, 13 December 2016.

¹¹⁴ Interview: Idesi Mulongoti, Thiko Village, T/A Malemia, Zomba, 9 December 2016.

it to their farmers and not us. Local maize was still good for us, sweeter than the new varieties, and its maize meal was plenteous. The new breeds produced too much *madeya* (Maize husks) and thus, a little maize meal.¹¹⁵

It was only from the early 1990s that most peasants from the Chilwa basin began to adopt the hybrid maize. The change in attitude was a consequence of demographic challenges and recurrent droughts and floods, which convinced the peasants of the productivity of hybrid maize. The introduction of semi-flint varieties of maize of MH17 and MH18 in 1991 also made it possible for the peasants from the Chilwa basin to start using hybrid maize. According to Melinda Smale, the adoption rate of hybrid maize rose from 7% to 24% in 1991 and 40% in 1992.¹¹⁶ At 50%, the Lake Chilwa basin registered the highest adoption rates largely due to its vulnerability to drought. Peasants from the basin found the MH18 maize appropriate for wetland cultivation. As noted by Christopher Eldridge, the distribution of food relief coupled with free hybrid and fertilisers enabled the state to cushion most peasants from famine during the 1991/2 drought in the basin.¹¹⁷ With the good rains that followed, the adoption of hybrid maize resulted in a record harvest of over 2 million tonnes of maize in 1992/3.¹¹⁸ Over 300 000 tonnes of the over 2 million were from the Lake Chilwa basin.¹¹⁹

To cope with the economic crisis, in 1981, the state adopted a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) as dictated by the World Bank and IMF.¹²⁰ The SAP's impact in the agricultural sector involved the liberalisation of agriculture marketing services and prices of some agricultural produce, removal of preferential treatment of the agricultural section and

¹¹⁵ Interview: Ganizani Kamanga, Thiko Village, T/A Malemia, 9 December 2016.

¹¹⁶ Mwale, 'Maize is Life,' 826.

¹¹⁷ C. Eldridge, 'Why was there no Famine Following the 1992 Southern African Drought?' *IDS Bulletin*, 33, 4(2002), 79-87.

¹¹⁸ Malawi Government, *Food Security and Nutrition Bulletin*, (Lilongwe: Department of Economic Planning, 1993).

¹¹⁹ Malawi Government, *Annual Agricultural Survey of 1992/3* (Zomba: National Statistical Office, 1994).

¹²⁰ For details, see E. Green, *Kudziteteza Ku Njala: Liberalization of the Agricultural Markets and Its Impact on the Smallholder Farmers – The Case of Malawi* (Lund: Lund University Press, 2000).

that of fertiliser subsidy, and the privatisation of state owned agricultural enterprises.¹²¹ The state used the SAP to reduce funding to most of its agricultural projects such as extension services and irrigation schemes in the Chilwa basin.¹²² In the same vein, the World Bank and IMF demanded the restructuring of ADMARC to remove its monopsony over the marketing of peasants' crops. In response, the state passed the Agricultural (General Purpose) Act of 1987, which resulted in the closure of most of the ADMARC markets in the rural areas.¹²³ Within the Lake Chilwa basin, the state closed 80 of its 110 depots.¹²⁴ In Phalombe, the state only maintained seven of the 24 depots.¹²⁵

As part of SAP, the state began, from the mid-1980s, to engage the peasants in the operations of the irrigation schemes and rural development projects. The state introduced scheme management committees (SMC) within the irrigation schemes to enhance their operation and management.¹²⁶ Unlike the earlier Land Allocation Committees, the SMC assumed, in addition to plot allocation, management functions such as dispute settlements, loan repayment, training of farmers and maintenance of schemes, and ensured that extension workers visit farmers regularly. As a result, the SMC helped to ease the growing pressure of work on the state officials in the absence of groundsmen, and owing to inadequate staffing and funding. The SMC also had subcommittees responsible for irrigation, livestock, credit, blocks and clubs.¹²⁷

¹²¹ E. Chirwa, I. Kumwenda, C. Jumbe, P. Chilonda and I. Minde, 'Agricultural Growth and Poverty Alleviation: Past Performance and Recent Trends,' Re SAKSS-SA Working Paper No. 8, (2008), 7-8.

¹²² See J. Chilowa and E. Chirwa, 'Impact of SAPs in Social and Human Development in Malawi,' in J. Chilowa (ed.), *Bwalo: A Forum for Social Development* (Zomba: Centre for Social Research, 1997), 49-68.

¹²³ Malawi Government, *Agricultural (General Purpose) Act of 1987*.

¹²⁴ Interview: Estere Salima, Ramsey Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 15 December 2016.

¹²⁵ See Malawi Government, *Food Security and Nutrition Bulletin*, 1, 1 (1989).

¹²⁶ For details about the functions of SMC see Nkhoma, 'The State and Irrigation Farming,' (chapter four); and Nkhoma and Mulwafu, 'The Experience of Irrigation Management Transfer.' 3.

¹²⁷ Interview: A. Chapita, Chair of Domasi Water User Association, dated 17 July 2003.

Nevertheless, SAP resulted in aggravating the food security of the peasants in the Chilwa basin as it did in other parts of Southern Africa.¹²⁸ Generally, the reduction of funding compromised the efficiency of the existing agricultural institutions in the basin. For example, the state reduced the number of its extension officers such that instead of the required 750 households, each extension worker began to take care of more than 3 000 peasants.¹²⁹ Instead of visiting the peasants from the blocks every fortnight, extension workers started taking two months to make these periodic visits. In addition, the state reduced the level of funding, froze fuel allowances that extension workers used during field visits and laid off most groundsmen who maintained agricultural offices in EPAs and irrigation schemes.¹³⁰ Eventually, the EPAs and scheme offices became dilapidated, and there was no commitment towards the maintenance of irrigation canals. Ganizani Kamanga argued that,

We did not know what was happening. We had no idea whether there was an economic crisis or not. What we saw was that the state transferred some of the *alangizi* but it made no replacement. In the past, the coming of a new *mulangizi* followed every transfer. But this time no immediate replacement was made.¹³¹

Within the schemes, members of SMC took advantage of their positions to exploit other farmers and accumulate plots through corruption and nepotism. This undermined the effectiveness of their functions.¹³² Davis Madula, a peasant from the schemes complained that:

¹²⁸ For regional scholarly assessments of the SAPs see for example, R. Chattopadhyay, 'Zimbabwe: Structural Adjustment, Destitution and Food Security,' *Review of African Political Economy*, 27, 84 (2000), 307-316; S. Kapunda, 'Structural Adjustment and Food Security in Tanzania,' *Utafiti*, 2, 1 (1994), 43-58; S. Kawewe and R. Dibie, 'The Impact of Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAP) on Women and Children: Implications for Social Welfare in Zimbabwe,' *The Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 27, 4 (2000), 79-107.

¹²⁹ Interview: Alex Dizinga, AEDC, Domasi EPA, Machinga, 14 December 2016.

¹³⁰ Interview: A. Jangiya, AEDC, Malosa EPA, Zomba, 9 December 2016.

¹³¹ Interview: Ganizani Kamanga, Thiko Village, T/A Malemia, Zomba, 9 December 2016.

¹³² Interview: K. Banda, ex-MYP, Domasi Irrigation Scheme, 14 December 2016.

Yes, the SMC was formed. But it was no better than the old committee which was highly political in its activities. It acted as an agent of Banda that forced the peasants into scheme work. Those that dogged from scheme work were subjected to harsh punishment. In most cases, the culprit would be asked to pay heavy fines or was evicted from the scheme. The plots taken from them instead of being redistributed to other farmers, were shared among the committee members. Some of them were being sold to other rich farmers in the area.¹³³

The closure of ADMARC depots denied most peasants of the Chilwa basin reliable markets from which to sell their produce or buy foodstuffs at subsidised prices in times of food scarcity. For, while ADMARC used its profits to finance estate agriculture, it also sold maize at low prices to the peasants in the Chilwa basin. In times of food shortages, ADMARC was the only reliable market from which the peasants accessed cheaper maize. Although the WB and IMF assumed that private traders would take over this responsibility, not many traders came forth to buy peasants' produce especially from those who were located deep in rural areas due to transportation and logistical challenges.¹³⁴ Most of them operated from Zomba and Blantyre, and as such, it became difficult for them to visit the interior of the Chilwa basin to sell food grains to the peasants. Those who dared to visit the rural areas sold the grains on local periodic markets at prohibitive prices.¹³⁵ In 1988, for example, traders were selling a 90 kg bag of maize at K32 instead of the official price of K22. Each bag could feed an average of 4-5 persons a month.¹³⁶ Since most of the peasants were poor, the rise in food prices created serious concerns for household food security.¹³⁷ 'We were not happy with the closure of ADMARC,' said Elizabeth Phiri, a peasant who resided in the basin during this time.

¹³³ Interview: Davies Madula, Bakali Village, T.A. Mwambo, Zomba, 15 December 2016.

¹³⁴ Interview: Ides Mulongoti, Thiko Village, T/A Malemia, Zomba, 9 December 2016.

¹³⁵ Interview: Phuliwa, Watchman, Likangala Scheme, 16 December 2016.

¹³⁶ Malawi Government, Food Security and Nutrition Bulletin, 1, 1 (1989).

¹³⁷ Ibid.

‘ADMARC used to sell maize and farm inputs to us at cheaper prices compared to the prices at the open market. Its closure was like condemning us to hunger and starvation.’¹³⁸

As noted above, the World Bank and IMF began to relax its SAP agricultural conditions after the 1991/2 drought. They allowed the state to reopen ADMARC markets in the remotest parts of the country like Lake Chilwa basin and provided poor peasants with 10% input subsidies. However, the World Bank and IMF urged Banda, for the first time, to observe human rights in order to access funding towards these projects.¹³⁹ The call for Banda to adhere to good human rights records, which the western powers endeavoured to ignore since the country’s attainment of independence, had more to do with changes in international politics than mere concerns about peasants’ ecological, political and economic plight. The fall of communism in 1989, the 1992 end of the civil war in Mozambique and the on-going negotiations for the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa, resulted in the western support of Banda becoming strategically irrelevant.¹⁴⁰ Banda’s failure to meet the criteria resulted in the withdrawal of western support and change of the west to finance pressure groups that agitated for Banda’s removal from political power. This materialised in 1994.

6. Food Security and Banda’s Political Fall, 1992-1994

Banda’s fall began with a Pastoral letter that was circulated on 8 March 1992 by Catholic Bishops to challenge his leadership. The letter broke the silence under which the peasants from the Chilwa basin, like many others in Malawi, suffered under Banda’s autocracy as well

¹³⁸ Interview: Elizabeth Phiri, Napyanga Village, T/A Malemia, Zomba, 9 December 2016.

¹³⁹ Vaughan, ‘Exploitation and Neglect,’ 199.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

as selective and coercively implemented policies.¹⁴¹ It publicly exposed the manner in which state suppressed smallholder farming through land grabbing to pave way for the establishment of estates and irrigation schemes.¹⁴² According to Dyton Sukali, these pronouncements resonated with most of the poor peasants from the Lake Chilwa basin who lost their land through the establishment of private estates and irrigation schemes.¹⁴³ So when Banda arrested the bishops for authoring and circulating the letter, these peasants from the Chilwa basin joined students from Chancellor College in Zomba who were demanding for the release of the bishops and adoption of a multiparty system of government. The protests spread in all the country's cities claiming the lives of over 50 people as the police and army resorted to firing live bullets on the protesters. With pressure from the international community, Banda called for a referendum, scheduled for April 1993, in which Malawians had to choose between one party and multiparty system of government.¹⁴⁴

Bakili Muluzi, who took over from Banda in 1994, led the opposition during the referendum. Like during nationalist struggle, opposition leaders framed their agenda largely from peasants' grievances. As a majority, the peasants provided the leaders with significant electoral power with which to challenge Banda. Muluzi, who had strong ability to articulate eloquently local interests, attracted most of the peasants in the Chilwa basin. Being from Machinga himself, Muluzi promised to close all the estates and irrigation schemes for redistribution to all the peasants in the Chilwa basin during his campaign. Furthermore, he promised to end the MYP movement and condemned the irrigation schemes for having benefitted the MYPs at the expense of the peasants. In his manifesto, Muluzi argued that

¹⁴¹ People in Malawi were unable to speak evil about Banda due to the presence of numerous secret informers. You would find people speaking in low tones in their own houses for fear that such stories would be reported to Banda. Once found talking about Banda, one was prosecuted without trial.

¹⁴² J. Chiona, F. Mikhori, M. Chimole, A. Assolari, A. Chagwera, G. Chisendera, J. Roche and F. Gamba, *Living Our Faith: Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishop of Malawi* (Blantyre: Episcopal Conference of Malawi, 1992).

¹⁴³ Interview: Dyson Sukali, Tsekakhomo Village, T/A Jenala, Phalombe, 16 December 2016.

¹⁴⁴ UDF, 1994 UDF Manifesto.

‘most of the benefits and gains of the MCP government’s agricultural policies had gone to the larger farmers leaving the subsistence farmers in abject poverty. Large farmers received better treatment in terms of pricing, access to inputs, credits and marketing and extension services.’¹⁴⁵ Thus, Muluzi created a counter-narrative to the political rhetoric of a prosperous and food secure Malawi that dominated Banda’s regime by fore-fronting poverty alleviation.

Muluzi also argued that Banda’s policies only worked to alleviate the poverty of his political compatriots while the majority of the peasants grappled with abject poverty. He outlined that,

Determined to respond to the high legitimate expectations of the people and in line with our 1994 campaign pledges, we decided to make poverty alleviation priority number one in all our development policies. We defined poverty alleviation as the equitable provision of the necessities of everyday life, such as water, food, health services, education and infrastructure.¹⁴⁶

These promises attracted most of the peasants from the Chilwa basin. James Matuta, a peasant from Kasokwe Village who attended some of Muluzi’s rallies pointed out that,

The promises of Bakili Muluzi were very attractive to most of us. We could not imagine an ordinary Malawian challenging Banda publicly without being arrested as it were in the past. He said Banda only supported the rich farmers and estate owners and had nothing to do with the poor peasants. This made sense to us because all along it was the *achikumbi* who were given best fertile lands and fertilisers. We liked him so much. Being a fellow Yao, we thought that he was the right person to alleviate our poverty and challenges.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ UDF, 1994 UDF Manifesto.

¹⁴⁶ UDF, 1999 UDF Manifesto.

¹⁴⁷ Interview: James Matuta, Kasokwe Village, T/A Kumtumanje, Zomba, 13 December 2016.

Consequently, most peasants from the Chilwa basin, like those from many parts of the country, voted for the adoption of multiparty democracy during the referendum. Even in the general elections that followed in April 1994, the peasants from the Chilwa basin voted for Muluzi. Consequently, in May 1994, Bakili Muluzi under the United Democratic Front (UDF) won the elections ending the three decades of Banda's regime.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the experiences of Lake Chilwa basin peasants in maintaining food security in the face of political, ecological and demographic changes in Malawi during the first three decades of independence. It has drawn attention to the extent to which political change, economic crises and international political economy affected peasants' efforts to be food secure. The chapter argued that, for all his flaws, Banda introduced agricultural policies with significant potential for the maintenance of food security among the peasants of the Chilwa basin. However, the success of these policies varied with time and class, and was mostly limited by Banda's adoption of colonial structures of political and economic domination as well as prevailing economic conditions, climate and the political will of western metropolitan powers.

In the run-up to independence (1961-1964), for instance, Banda pursued a development pattern defined by agrarian populism that placed peasant agriculture at the centre of food production in the Chilwa basin. Similarly, while the majority of the peasants suffered a great deal of poverty and food insecurity, some peasants such as *achikumbe*, irrigation plot holders, members of the Malawi Youth League and the Young Pioneers flourished. Unlike most poor peasants from the basin, these peasants complied with Banda's

agricultural policies and thus were given input credits and vibrant agricultural extension which enabled them to produce sufficient food and cash crops. As a result, these peasants were able, except during the years of prolonged droughts and floods, to maintain food security. Thus, despite the skewed impacts, Banda's policies up to the late 1970s seemed to have stimulated a significant degree of food security in the Chilwa basin. However, this changed from 1978, when the economic crisis, rapid population increases, intensification of droughts and floods, and changes in the international political economy affected Banda's efforts to improve peasants' food security. This was made worse by the fact that, with the collapse of communism in the late 1980s as well as the end of apartheid and the civil war in Mozambique in the early 1990s, forced western metropolitan powers to stop their support of Banda's food security policies and projects in the Chilwa basin.

The chapter has argued that apart from Banda's adoption of exclusive agricultural policies and colonial structures of economic domination, other factors such as economic challenges, climatic disasters and international politics, also shaped the trajectory of food security among the peasants. Since agriculture was the mainstay of rural livelihood and the country faced unprecedented levels of poverty and social differentiation, transforming food from a social good into an economic good as the neo-liberal reforms of the Bristol powers suggested, was extremely detrimental to poor peasants' food security. Nevertheless, the recurrent droughts and rapid population increases, and the inability of the poor peasants to reform their agricultural practices was also a recipe for food insecurity. As noted in the chapter, all these factors combined to bring Banda down from political power in May 1994. This ended a century of peasants' forbearance with state power in the production of foodstuffs in the Chilwa basin.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

By end of the Banda's presidency in May 1994, peasants in Malawi had experienced just over a century of interaction with the state in relation to agriculture, ecology and food security. As early as 1890, the state started to intervene in peasant agricultural practices in order to improve their productivity in the face of political, economic and ecological changes. Yet despite its implications for rural food security, the earlier historiography of Malawi paid little attention to the state interventions concerning pre-existing food security practices in the country.¹ In addition to limiting its analysis to the Lower Shire valley, the Upper Shire valley and the Shire Highlands, this historiography dealt with food production and food security tangentially within the wider studies of agricultural and ecological changes. Studies that specifically dealt with food security focused on peasants' everyday experiences of food production and food consumption in the face of periodic droughts and famines.² These studies only discussed state interventions and food security in relation to these periodic droughts and famines. By contrast, this thesis has gone beyond this scholarship by providing a systematic and nuanced exploration of food production and food security among the peasants of the Chilwa basin. Using the case of the Lake Chilwa basin of southern Malawi, it explored the history of the peasants' experiences in relation to state agricultural interventions in Malawi from 1891 to 1994. It investigated attempts by the state (colonial and post-colonial) to improve peasants' productivity and peasants' responses to these endeavours. It paid particular attention to the underlying political, economic, ideological and ecological factors as well as the narratives, discourses and debates that dominated colonial and post-

¹ Mandala, *Work and Control in a Peasant Economy*; Mulwafu, *Conservation Songs*, passim.

² See Vaughan, *The Story of An African Famine*; Mandala, *End of Chidyerano*, passim.

colonial thinking regarding the improvement of peasant agriculture in the Chilwa basin. These issues have rarely been systematically analysed in the studies of everyday peasants' experiences in rural Malawi.

The thesis exposed, by examining this history, the influence of global changes on state intervention, the limits of both state power and African agency, the varied ways by which capitalism affected the rural food economy, and the extent to which ecological disasters contributed to the growth of food shortages in rural Africa. This study argued that the state did not execute its interventions among the peasants in isolation from global changes. The Chilwa basin, as with other rural parts of the country, was the terrain on which the state played out global ideas related to agriculture, conservation and food security. Nevertheless, global changes interacted with local circumstances to shape the trajectory of food security interventions in the Chilwa basin. As shown in Chapter Three, for instance, metropolitan ideas about mandate colonialism, the American Dust Bowl and the rise of the Labour Party in Britain influenced the colonial state in Malawi to embark on projects aimed at promoting soil conservation and improving the productivity of the peasants in the Chilwa basin. This is also true of the Great Economic Depression (1929-1933), the Second World War (1939-1945), the World Food Crisis (1941-1952), and the Cold War politics (1945-1980s), which remarkably altered the state-peasant relations over food security in the Chilwa basin as shown in Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six. Finally, from the mid-1980s onwards, global ideas about market liberalisation forced Banda to adopt Structural Adjustment Programmes to deal with the economic crisis that affected peasants' food security in the Chilwa basin.

Furthermore, the study contended that the state was not always all-powerful or monolithic in undertaking its interventions in the Chilwa basin. As shown in Chapter Three, the state faced challenges from the peasants and some colonial officials who, sympathising with the peasants, expressed reservations on the various policies and interventions that the state implemented in the Chilwa basin. These challenges compelled the state to vary and compromise its interventions at given times in the Chilwa basin. While prior to 1939 the state confined its interventions to the implementation of regulatory policies on the production, consumption, marketing and conservation of food crops, the post-1939 era witnessed the state's attempts to expand peasant food production in the Chilwa basin as shown in Chapters Three and Four. Similarly, the state, as shown in Chapter Five, suspended its conservation policies and allowed peasants to cultivate along hill slopes and streambanks in response to the 1948/9 famine (185, 188). The state, however, abandoned its coercive approach and began to persuade peasants to adopt new agricultural practices in 1956 (Chapter Five, 215-218).

The study noted that the objects and processes of state interventions ostensibly changed over time during Banda's era. Banda pursued a populist approach to agricultural development from 1961 and to 1964, as shown in Chapter Six (223-227). He adopted this approach in order to meet the agricultural aspirations of the peasants who rendered him support during the 1961 elections. However, from 1964 to his downfall in May 1994, Banda maintained the colonial agricultural policies that exclusively favoured estate agriculture and a few progressive farmers in the Chilwa basin. Since then, and until the early 1990s, Banda subjected those that dared to challenge his leadership and policies to political torture and assassination. By drawing attention to these variations in the manner by which the state implemented its interventions over the period of study, the thesis corroborates with Malawian scholars who portrayed the relations between the peasants and the state in Malawi as cyclic

other than static and linear. The state was not always on the intervening side and peasants being on the receiving or resisting side.³

The thesis also argued that the peasants did not always exercise their agency in isolation from the state. Nor was their agency against state interventions homogenous. Rather, peasants' responses to the food security interventions in the Chilwa basin varied with time, class, gender and social geography. While colonialism and capitalism disrupted rural economies to a significant degree, a minority of peasants prospered, while others managed to survive and the majority suffered. As shown in Chapter Two, soon after the establishment of colonialism, for instance, some chiefs and local elites used wealth, such as land and cattle accumulated in the precolonial times and later on through the sale of land to early white settlers, to expand food production (83, 85). Chapter Three showed that the development of a labour economy generated a class of peasants who, as migrants, fishermen and estate workers, reinvested their earnings into food production (126-127). Similarly, Chapters Four and Five demonstrated how the colonial state, between the 1940s and early 1960s, distinguished peasants who adopted colonial conservation agriculture as progressive farmers and agricultural agents in the Chilwa basin. These included Master Farmers, irrigation plot holders and Africans who lived on settlement schemes.

The emergence of these progressive farmers began to differentiate the peasantry into 'poor' peasants, 'middle' peasants and 'rich' peasants in the Chilwa basin.⁴ While the poor peasants often and largely experienced annual cycles of food insecurities, the 'middle' and 'rich' peasants were capable of producing sufficient food to take them all year round except in times of prolonged drought and floods. By owning over 10 acres of land at the time when

³ See for example, Mulwafu, *Conservation Song: Mandala, Work and Control in a Peasant Economy*, passim.

⁴ For the debates on the emergence of 'poor', 'middle' and 'rich' peasants, see Chapter One, 12-13.

the agricultural land of most poor and middle peasants' hardly exceeded four acres, Master Farmers, though not qualifying yet as capitalist farmers, formed a class of notable and enviable peasants in the Chilwa basin. The Master Farmers were able to employ other peasants on their farms and produce surplus foodstuffs to cushion them in times of food crises. Sometimes, they provided patronage to the poor peasants who struggled to produce sufficient food crops. In times of crises, the 'poor' and 'middle' peasants accessed food crops in exchange for labour and money from the rich peasants in the Chilwa basin. As shown in Chapter Six, Banda rebranded Master Farmers as *achikumbe*. Together with some Young Pioneers and irrigation plot holders, they became a class of rich peasants in the Chilwa basin. Over the years, these rich peasants became favourites of the state, and acted as model farmers and agricultural agents. They benefitted more from state credits and resources, acquired farms and employed fellow peasants to work for them. Some of the Chilwa basin women took advantage of political and economic changes to make gains through the selling of beer, foodstuffs and sex. However, most poor peasants, who largely consisted of single women and widows and constituted the majority of the peasants, became annual victims of food shortages.

Contrary to what many scholars of state-peasant relations have implied, the thesis also argued that peasants were not conservative and irrational in their reaction to state interventions.⁵ As shown above, some peasants from the Chilwa basin adopted changes that improved their food security, but rejected those interventions that threatened them. In some cases, they negotiated for the modification of state interventions to accommodate their needs.

⁵ For details regarding the political relations between the state and the peasants, see for example, Isaacman, 'Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa, 1-120; Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasants: Rebellion and Resistance in South East Asia*; Cohen, 'From Peasants to Workers in Africa;' Mulwafu, *Conservation Songs*, passim; M. L. Bowen, *The State against the Peasantry: Rural Struggles in Colonial and Post Colonial Mozambique* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000); S. G. Bunker, *Peasants against the State: The Politics of Market Control in Bugisu, Uganda, 1900-1983* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Food security was their prime goal. As such, between 1891 and 1906, most peasants cherished the colonial structural division of labour in which the state designated cash crops to the settlers and food crops to them. The study has also shown in Chapter Five that, while most peasants enthusiastically adopted early land preparation, planting and weeding in the season that followed the 1948/9 famine, some expressed reservations to state prohibition of streambank and hill-slope cultivation, fallowing and crop rotation as well as contour and ridge making in the sandy areas of the basin. These peasants discounted contour and ridge making for encouraging the spread of termites in their maize gardens. With limited availability of arable land, they found fallowing and crop rotation as unfeasible (Chapter Five, 193-195). The peasants, who conceived land as belonging to their ancestors, also rejected the idea of individual land registration as Chapter Four has shown. Thus, it was only in those circumstances that the state threatened the social fibre of the rural food economy that the peasants staged opposition. As in Vietnam, peasants from the Chilwa basin did not act outside their instinctive logic.⁶ They responded rationally and creatively to state interventions into their food security.

While droughts/floods were critical for peasants' food security, the thesis contended that their impact on the Chilwa basin was accentuated by the prevailing social, economic and political conditions of the times. As shown in Chapters Three and Five, the state agreed with the socio-economic cause of drought-related famine, yet both the state and the peasants played a blame game regarding the question of agency to these causes. The state, on the one hand, constantly attributed famines to peasant practices such as shifting cultivation, deforestation, overstocking, beer drinking, overpopulation and their inability to adopt what it perceived as 'modern' methods of farming (Chapters Three and Five). This was refuted by

⁶ See details in S. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Societies in Vietnam* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1972).

poor peasants who blamed colonial policies of land alienation, prohibition of streambank and hill slopes cultivation, regulation of excessive maize production as well as conservation projects which took a great deal of their time to concentrate in food gardens for the growth of these famines (Chapters Three and Five). As noted by Amartya Sen, the study argued that loss of entitlements through land alienation, state policies that favour *achikumbe* and structural adjustment programmes, made it extremely difficult for most of the poor peasants from the Chilwa basin to maintain food security in the face of these economic and ecological disasters.⁷ The absence of these entitlements crippled most peasants' attempts at producing sufficient foodstuffs to cover them all year round and undermined their ability to reserve food sufficient for use in times of ecological disasters such as drought, floods and hailstorms. Eventually, most of these peasants lived in a trajectory of perpetual food shortages whether in normal or abnormal times. As shown in Chapter Six, the minority estate owners and *achikumbe* enjoyed exclusive state support and concentrated largely on the lucrative cash cropping, such that they could not produce sufficient food to meet the growing food demands of the Chilwa basin.

The study also considered the context of a fragile ecology and rapid population increases and thus argued in Chapter Six that the failure of the poor peasants to reform their agricultural ways, especially from the late 1970s, equally accounted for their inability to maintain food security in times of periodic climate related disasters. Furthermore, the precarious situation that the post-colonial state found itself in between 1984 and 1992 also contributed to the growth of food shortages. During this period, the country underwent an economic crisis, rapid population increases, and felt the effects of changes in the international political economy, which undermined the ability of the state and the peasants to withstand the

⁷ See Sen, *Poverty and Famine*, *passim*.

shocks of recurrent droughts and floods of the times (Chapter Six, 239-256). Thus, in addition to local circumstances, a shifting global political climate was part of the food security problem in the Chilwa basin.

The thesis's findings have wider implications on the African historiography of agriculture, food security and ecological changes. They show that the experiences of the Malawian peasantry were part of a larger history of peasants' marginalisation in East and Southern Africa. Land alienation, structural biases towards cash cropping, promotion of Master and Progressive Farmers, establishment of marketing boards and conservationism, were among the various factors that accounted for rural impoverishment and social differentiation in these regions.⁸ As in Malawi, nationalists in Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, drew their agenda from the grievances of the peasants.⁹ The peasants in these post-colonial countries sometimes became the objects of political assassination at worst, or at best, were ignored by leaders who took over power from the colonialists.¹⁰ Thus, the observed varied manner by which the peasants responded to state interventions in this thesis buttressed the findings of Lionel Cliffe, Ian Phimister and Allen Isaacman who explored how pre-existing relations of production and uneven penetrations of capitalism resulted in the accentuation of rural differentiation.¹¹ However, the study argued that the differentiations were dynamic and progressively evolved over time.

⁸ See for example, Palmer and Parsons (eds.), *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa*; Phimister, 'Commodity Relations and Class Formations in Zimbabwean Countryside'; Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe*.

⁹ See for example, Cooper, *African Since 1940*, passim.

¹⁰ See for example, Sandbrook and Barker, *The Politics of Africa's Economic Stagnation*; Cooper, *Africa Since 1940*; Nugent, *Africa since Independence*; Meredith, *The Fate of Africa*.

¹¹ For details, see Cliffe, 'Rural Class Formation in East Africa,' 195-224; Phimister, 'Commodity Relations and Class Formation in the Zimbabwean Countryside,' 240-257; Isaacman, 'Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa,' 26-48.

Similarly, African historiography has treated food security incidentally to drought/famine analysis, and at most, tangentially along the grand paradigms of agrarian and ecological changes in the regional studies.¹² While Deborah Bryceson and Chewa Chabatama explored, in their respective studies, how peasants from Tanganyika and the North-Western Province of Zambia maintained food security in the face of capitalist penetration and suppression, this study focused on the interventions that the state attempted to improve the peasants' food security in colonial and post-colonial Malawi.¹³ It argued that, while the state suppressed the peasantry, it also attempted to improve the productivity of the peasants, though with varied and ambivalent results. However, by exonerating ecological over socio-political factors, the study concurred with the scholarship that refuted environmental determinism in accounting for the growth of climate related famines in Africa.¹⁴ While these studies attributed famine to socio-economic factors, this thesis argued that the question of who, between the state and the peasants, was responsible for them was contentious. Hence, as shown in Chapter Six, the poor peasants' failure to reform their agricultural techniques from the late 1970s in the face of declining economies, rapid population increases and intensified drought recurrence was precarious and suicidal.

While many international studies have emphasised on the impact of global influences on the local, with the local acting as a passive recipient of global ideas, this thesis underscored the relevance of the local to global discourses on food security.¹⁵ It has shown

¹² See for example, Rotberg, (ed.), *Imperialism, Colonialism and Hunger*; Watts, *Silent Violence*; S. Berry, 'The Food Crisis'; Giblin, 'Famine and Social Change'; Eldredge, 'Drought, Famine and Disease'; Wyle, 'The Changing Face of Hunger in Southern African History'; Maddox, 'Mtunya: Famine in Central Tanzania.'

¹³ For details, see D. F. Bryceson, 'Changes in Peasant Food Production and Food Supply to the Historical Development of Commodity Production in Pre-colonial and Colonial Tanganyika,' *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 7, 3 (1980), 281-311; Chabatama, 'Peasant Farming, the State and Food Security in the North-Western Province of Zambia,' *passim*.

¹⁴ See footnote Number 54 and 55, Chapter One.

¹⁵ On the details about the interrelations between the global and the local, see for example A. Bashford, *Global Population: History, Geopolitics and Life on Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); F. Cooper, 'Africa and the World Economy,' *African Studies Review*, 24, 2/3 (1981), 1-86; Beinart, 'Soil Erosion,

that the peasant-state relations over food production were not simply responsive to international forces. Local circumstances such as peasants' responses, climatic and economic conditions and ideological differences among state officials equally shaped the manner in which the state implemented globally driven agricultural interventions in the Lake Chilwa basin. As Zoe Laidlaw and Alan Lester argued, the state did not simply impose its ideas of agricultural change on the peasants; the peasants sought, 'not only to claim but also to cultivate space'¹⁶ within state hegemony. Hence, this study noted that neither the peasants nor some officials were passive recipients of global ideas of food security.

By foregrounding the prevailing conflicts between the settlers, colonial officials and the peasants, the thesis corroborated the findings of Frederick Cooper, Ann Stoler and Robin Palmer who pointed out the prevalence of 'tension of empire' when arguing that the masters of the British Empire never spoke with one voice on matters related to colonial development and governance.¹⁷ It has been argued there was 'tension of empire' in the relations that developed between missionaries, colonial officials and the colonial office. This was also true among the settlers, colonial officials and the peasants, as shown in chapters two and three. There were incessant conflicts between settlers and colonial officials on one hand, and colonial officials, senior officers and district officers, on the other.¹⁸ While scholars of 'tension of empire' limited themselves to conflicts among state officials in the colonial period, the study pointed to the persistence of conflicts during the post-colonial era. It noted that, while colonial officials co-existed despite ideological differences, the state subjected

Conservationism and Ideas about Development'; Shaw, *World Food Security: A History*, passim; J. F. Munro, *Africa and the International Economy, 1800-1960: An Introduction to the Modern Economic History of Africa South of the Sahara* (Totowa, N. J: Rowman and Littlefield, 1976).

¹⁶ Z. Laidlaw and A. Lester (eds.) *Indigenous Communities and Settler Colonialism: Land Holding, Loss and Survival in an Interconnected World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 3.

¹⁷ See for example Cooper, 'Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History'; Cooper and Stoler (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*; Palmer, 'White Farmers in Malawi.'

¹⁸ MNA A3/2/157 Miscellaneous, 1919.

post-colonial officials who contradicted its agrarian policies to political torture and elimination as shown in Chapter Six. Thus, the study observed that while colonialism eroded African dignity and freedom, it also created space for divergent opinions, generally lost after independence.

The thesis also raises a number of methodological challenges in the study of African social history. While social history derives its strength from the voices of the marginalised, its practicality is limited to the recent rather than the remote past.¹⁹ Yet the contemporary is a product of the remote past.²⁰ As a study of social history, the thesis grappled with the absence of oral histories from which to tease out the voices of the peasants regarding their interaction with the state in the years before the 1940s. Given the challenge, and for all their flaws, it had to rely on anthropological and narrative accounts of early travellers, missionaries, hunters, traders and administrators to obtain a glimpse of peasants' histories of this past. Reading against the grain of these narratives as well as the archives of the time was an important tool for capturing peasants' voices that oral sources failed to produce in the study.²¹ By reading the archives on the Lake Chilwa basin, this thesis has reflected a great deal of colonial complaints about peasants' behaviour. It is from these complaints that the thesis derived an idea of African agency. Given the existing conflicts of opinion over the peasants, therefore, it is easy to identify points representative of peasants' perceptions on state interventions. Similarly, the oral traditions of the people, though secondarily preserved, after being subjected to criticism and carefully used, are a valuable asset too. Receding and preceding the

¹⁹ See footnote 111, Chapter One.

²⁰ For details, see, E. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Collins, 1964); A. Marwick, *The Nature of History* (New York: Delta Books, 1970); B. Southgate, *History: What and Why? Ancient, Modern and Post-Modern Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2004); J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (London: Longman, 1984).

²¹ For details on the techniques on reading against the grain, see for example, J. B. Kayes, 'Reading against the Grain: The Power and Limits of Feminist Criticism of the American Narratives,' *Journal of American Narratives*, 19, 1 (1989), 130-140; P. Lalu, *The Death of Hints: Post-Apartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts* (Cape Town: HRSC Press, 2009).

oral histories with brief bio-data, in text or footnotes, are skills historians require when addressing the many technical criticisms levelled against social history methodology.

Furthermore, a socio-environmental history approach combined with political economy offers a significant tool for the analysis of the interaction between the state, peasants and ecology over food security matters in rural Africa. Through a socio-environmental history, the thesis assessed the extent to which the state and the peasants interacted to maintain food security in the face of a changing ecology. As noted above, while the ecology resists and complicates human events, its influence depends on the interplay of extraneous factors in which the state and its institutions as well as the peasants' perception and local knowledge are critical. Arguably, it was an attempt to deal with the ecological threats that led the state to intervene in the food economy of the Chilwa basin peasants. Through political economy, the thesis examined why such well-intended interventions have minimal results by exploring the incentives, institutions and ideologies that underlay their implementation. As noted by James Scott, the authoritarian approach adopted by states and failure to take into context local practices and wisdom cripples the success of these interventions.²² The situation in the Chilwa basin was compounded by the dialectical relations that developed between the state and the poor peasants throughout the period of study. Thus, the fragile ecology of the late 1980s and the inability of some peasants to adopt new agricultural methods had implications on their food security. To this end, food security is proven strategic and appropriate for the analysis of the complex interactions between the state and the peasants.

²² See J. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the human Conditions Have Failed* (New haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

While history does not necessarily aim at influencing policy,²³ these findings offer significant lessons for modern debates on state interventions, food security, ecological change and sustainable development.²⁴ Generally, they demonstrate the limits of state power as the main driver for change, and science as a blueprint for rural development. Although the state and science are pivotal, their efficacy is shaped by local context and history. While the local might have flaws, its age-tested history of resilience, adaptation and survival is arguably a critical complement rather than a rival in development planning and implementation. Otherwise, as noted from the Chilwa basin, well-intended scientific projects are bound to achieve less in the event of the providers' failure to take into equation the beneficiary communities, including their competitive class diversities and interests. Therefore, the study observed that effective intervention is a function of interaction between the state, peasants and other implementing agencies.

Finally, as a pioneering study of the overall history of state interventions into rural Malawi's food economy, the thesis provides a broad chronological and narrative account of a complex subject that is thematically multi-layered. Even so, the results of this thesis are not exhaustive. They only provide a window for identifying broader food security themes that still require in-depth analysis. For an aspiring political eco-food historian, such themes include, but are not limited to, food and gender, food marketing, nutrition, and food and globalisation. Ending the study in 1994, in itself, gives room for further historical inquiry of food politics in the post-Kamuzu Banda era where the state attempted to implement various

²³ For details on the debates on the role of history to policy, see for example, F. J. Gavin, 'History and Policy,' *International Journal*, 63, 1 (2007), 162-177; R. Rennie, 'History and Policy-Making,' *International Social Science Journal*, 50, 156 (1998), 289-301.

²⁴ For details regarding modern debates on sustainable development, see for example: K. Amanor and S. Moyo, (eds.), *Land and Sustainable Development in Africa* (London: Zed Publications, 2008); O. Ukanga and A.G. Afoaku (eds.), *Sustainable Development in Africa: A Multifaceted Challenge* (Trenton, N. J: Africa World Press, 2005); S. Lele, 'Sustainable Development: A Critical Review,' *World Development*, 19, 6 (1991), 607-621; T. O. O'Riordan, 'The Politics of Sustainability,' in R. K. Turner (ed.), *Sustainable Environmental Economics and Management: Principles and Practices* (London: Belhaven Press, 1993), 37-69; M. A. Tomas, 'The Difficult of Defining Sustainability' *Resource*, 106 (1992), 3-6.

agrarian reforms related to food security, climate change, irrigation, agricultural extension, subsidised agriculture, conservation agriculture and market liberalisation.

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Davis Madula, Bakali Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 15 December 2016.

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Edward Mnenula, Ex-Young Pioneer, Domasi Scheme, 7 November 2016.

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Faison Ramusi, Chair, SMC, Likangala Irrigation Scheme, 18 November 2016.

Fiddes Mbungulo Jr, Ramusi Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 9 December 2017.

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Henderson Green, Makwapala Village, T/A Mposa, Domasi, Machinga, 14 December 2016.

Henry Chawawa, V/Head, Matundu Village, TA Mposa, Machinga, 10 November 2016.

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Mary Nyundo, Ramusi Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 9 December 2017.

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Phuliwa, Watchman, Likangala Irrigation Scheme, 17 November 2016.

Rhodrick Mulauzi, Mkotima Village, T/A Mwambo, Zomba, 17 November 2016.
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Simbi, EX-MYP, Likangala Irrigation Scheme, 21 November 2016.
Wetu Mdala, Manyenga Village, T/A Kumtumanje, Zomba, 8 December 2017. Witness
Kalambula, Katanda Village, T/A Kumtumanje, Zomba, 9 November 2016.
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Alex Jangiya, AEDC, Malosa EPA, Zomba, 9 December 2016.
Alice Dokowe, AEDC, Nsondole EPA, Zomba, 13 December 2016.
Allan Kaliwo, Chief Agricultural Extension Officer, Machinga, ADD, 8 December 2016.
Anold Chikaonda, AEDC, Mpokwa EPA, Zomba, 16 December 2016.
Douglas Kasenjere, Statistical Officer, Machinga ADD, 8 December 2017.
Drive Kachitsa, AEDC, Tamani EPA, Phalombe, 16 December 2016.
Getrude Kambona, AEDO, Likangala EPA, Zomba, 15 December 2016.
Gevala Phiri, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Tamani EPA, Phalombe, 16 December 2016.
Isaac Petro, Assistant AEDO, Nsondole EPA, Zomba, 13 December 2016.
Jeffrey Maloni, Principal Agricultural Officer, Machinga ADD, 8 December 2017.
John Mkombezi, DADO, Phalombe District Agricultural Office, 11 December 2017.
Kingsley Duwa, AEDO, Tamani EPA, Phalombe, 16 December 2016.
Manuel Fulaye, AEDO, Likangala EPA, Zomba, 15 December 2016.
Martin Dupu, Chief Crop Officer, Zomba ADO, 8 December 2016.
Matison Thewe, HSA, Mpokwa EPA, Zomba, 16 December 2016.
Matthews Mambo, Food and Nutrition Officer, Zomba ADO, 8 December 2016.
Matthews Namaona, AEDO, Malosa EPA, Zomba, 9 December 2016.
Paul Nyongani, AEDO, Nsondole EPA, Zomba, 13 December 2016.
Petro Muyange, Officer, Hunger Project, Msodole EPA, Zomba, 8 December 2017.
Steven Gomani, AEDO, Domasi EPA, Machinga, 14 December 2016.
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